

Five Courageous Women in Scripture

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Welcome and overview of the Morning — *Retreat leader*

- Five women, courageous women, tell their stories, wear their shawls
- Who's here from which churches
- Prayer

Introduction to women at your table — *Table facilitators*

- Name, church, why chose this table/woman

Who and why? 5 courageous women — *Retreat leader*

- Matthew 1 especially verses 3-6, 16 (volunteer reader)
- Who are they? Why are they listed? (question of the day!)
- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, wife of Uriah (Bathsheba), Mary
- What risks did they take to trust God in their stories?

A creative way to remember
all five women: Rainbows
Rise to Make Beauty

Rainbows	Rahab
Rise	Ruth
To	Tamar
Make	Mary
Beauty	Bathsheba

Role of the Shawls — *Retreat leader*

- Shawls as ancient clothing, comforting, hand made for someone
- How might each of these women use her shawl or scarf in her story?
- How is it a symbol for this woman?

Small Group sharing time — *Table facilitators*

- Read the stories on the handouts (for the sake of time use the Bible as a reference but you do not have to read the whole story from scripture). Please read the woman's story yourself before the retreat
- Discuss the story, answering any questions that arise. After your group discussion, your group will do a short synopsis of the story for the other groups
- Quiet time to reflect on the story and questions
- Decide how your woman might have used her shawl as a symbol of her story ie: Ruth might have carried her belongings in her shawl and put it over her shoulder.
- Wear your shawls that way to empathize with your woman's story
- Discuss the questions on your handouts within your small group

Large group summarizing

- Summarize your woman's story for the other groups using the shawl as a prop. Tell the other groups why she was important and what she did to keep the genealogy of Jesus going.
- Discuss the reasons that these five women were included and chosen by God to be crucial links in the genealogy of Jesus.
- Make it clear that each of these 5 women took big risks, sometimes life-threatening, to keep the genealogy of Jesus going.

Closing Prayer of thanksgiving for these women, our ancestors



Uriah's wife, Bathsheba *The unnamed woman*

The woman who found her name, her voice, her future

Scripture reference: II Samuel 11,12 and I Kings 1, 2

SYNOPSIS:

1. Bathsheba has no name in the genealogy of Jesus except Uriah's wife. She was married to an army general, Uriah, who was well respected. Things were going well. She took one of her usual baths in the privacy of her rooftop and had no idea what was about to happen to her. She becomes a pawn of power.
2. King David walked out on his roof, which was higher than hers and saw her bathing. He was struck with her beauty and told his men to bring her to him. He took her sexually. Since women were property in her culture and he was king, she had no choice but to obey. And to make matters worse, she got pregnant by David.
3. Then King David planned a military attack and put her husband in front of the troops deliberately so that he would be killed. He was killed. David took Bathsheba as his wife.
4. The prophet, Nathan, confronts David with what he was done and predicts their baby will die as a result of David's acts. The baby dies. So Bathsheba has lost her husband and child as a result of the king's behavior. She is powerless but she trusts God to lead her. She is in her darkest moment but she listens.
5. Bathsheba starts over. She finds a way to claim her name and her voice. She has another baby boy, Solomon (remember him?). She claims her power and earns her name again with David by making him promise to make her son, Solomon, king when David's reign ends. She stands her ground in her old age and when there is a fight over the kingship she makes David keep his promise to make Solomon the next king.
6. Solomon is made king and Bathsheba has a special role as his mother. He was a great and wise king. He keeps the David line alive and is an important figure in Jesus' lineage. Bathsheba found her name and her identity. She was a pivotal figure in keeping Jesus' genealogy going by not letting the terrible circumstances of her life silence her.

Quiet time reflecting on the story with the following questions

How would you imagine Bathsheba using her shawl in her story?

When have you felt like a pawn of people with power over you? How did it affect you?

When have you faced a crisis or tragedy and felt you had no voice, not even a name?
How did you react?

When have you started over or taken a stand to find your name, your voice, your identity—
to become visible?

What identity or special gift has God given you? How has this gift or identity strengthened your faith?

What did Bathsheba do, in summary, to keep the genealogy of Jesus going? You will share this with other groups.



Mary, Mother of Jesus of sacrament for Jesus

Sacrament; an outward visible sign of God's invisible grace

Scripture reference: the four Gospels, Acts

SYNOPSIS: Mary's story told from a mother's perspective

1. Mary was an unmarried woman whose fiance had to have an angel instruct him not to abandon her. She experienced enormous suffering and lived through a time of political unrest in which a ruler tried to kill her son, but they escaped with him to another country. Her son got himself murdered in the biggest scandal of the century and everything she believed in was gone. Then thankfully it came together in the end.
2. Mary had an unusual conception and birth with angels, shepherds, wise men and cattle attending her, in an inn in a town she was not familiar with. She and her husband fled when Jesus was a baby to avoid his murder. She now *knew* there was something unusual about this baby. She knew her role was to understand and support him. She became a visible means of invisible grace.
3. At age 12 her son was lost from the family on their trip home from Jerusalem. She was frantic with worry and finally found him in the temple where he rebuffed her. She then saw his greater role in the world and she watched him grow in wisdom and knowledge. (But she probably kept a closer eye on him now!)
4. At a wedding in Cana, the wine had run out and she, knowing what he was capable of, told him the wine was gone. He rebuffed her but she knew she could stand firm and support him here. She gave him *that look!* Then she told the staff to do exactly what he said. The result: his first miracle. Turning water into wine. "Thanks Mom," he may have said!
5. At a public gathering she asked to see him and he said no. She realized this was a time of separation for them and that he had greater teaching to do now. It was a difficult time but she did pull back since she truly understood his work. She was invisible grace; a sacrament.
6. At the cross Mary was there at Jesus' feet when most had abandoned him. She was in agony with grief. Her son was killed in a horrible death. She stood with John, the beloved disciple. Jesus recognized her and told John to take care of her. She was still his mother. She was still there for him.
7. After the resurrection she was there to see him again in the upper room with the disciples. She was present for the founding of the church. She stood by her son through birth, growing, learning, separation, death, and resurrection. She was a sacrament for him; a visible sign of invisible grace.

Quiet time reflecting on the story with the following questions

How would you imagine Mary using her shawl in her story?

How have you felt like you've played a humble but important role in someone else's life? What was your role?

What experiences do you hold onto, that you do not understand but ponder in order to find deeper meaning?

Who has been a sacrament in your life, a visible sign of invisible grace? Jesus with skin on!

How has God called you to be a sacrament for others?

What did Mary do, in summary, to insure the genealogy of Jesus?
You will share this with the other groups.



Rahab

The woman behind the wall who got free

She took down her own “prison” walls and found freedom

Scripture reference: Joshua 2-6 (especially chapters 2 and 6)

SYNOPSIS:

1. Rahab lived in Jericho, which was heavily fortified with big walls. Hers is a tough story, dangerous, and personally degrading. She ran an inn, probably a brothel and was a prostitute. In a patriarchal culture this may have been her lot because she was childless and tossed away with a divorce that was easily attainable. She would have been powerless and this may have been her only way to survive. She was demeaned by the culture yet crucial to God's plan for all of history.
2. Rahab received spies from Israel in her inn. Israel was a mighty culture about to take over Jericho. She hid the spies from the authorities and protected them, thus risking her life for the spies' safety. God could have chosen someone else for this important task but Rahab was selected.
3. She lowered the famous scarlet cord (shawl??) to let the spies out of the city wall where she lived. Thus she risked the lives of her family too, to let the spies stay with her.
4. Rahab made a deal with the spies that when Israel invaded Jericho she and her family would be saved. The plan was to lower the scarlet cord from her window so the army would know which house was hers.
5. When Joshua circled 7 times around the city and blew the trumpets (*Joshua fit the battle of Jericho*) the walls fell and fire destroyed the city. Rahab and her family were taken out of the city before it was destroyed because of her faithfulness in housing the spies.
6. Rahab married one of the spies, Salman, and had a son named Boaz who later married Ruth, who was the great grandmother of David. Rahab befriended God's people and became part of the great plan of the history of God's people. She took big risks to listen to God's leading and thus freed herself from her own walls and the culture's “prison” walls.

Quiet time reflecting on the story with the following questions

How would you imagine Rahab using her shawl in her story?

When have you felt demeaned by the culture or other people because of who you are or the work you do? What is that like for you?

When have you taken a risk to save or protect another person who you believed in?
What was it like for you?

When have you had to count on someone else to keep his/her word in a threatening situation?
How did it work out?

How does God work through trials and risky situations in your life to bring about miraculous results or to bring down your walls?

What did Rahab do, in summary, to keep the genealogy of Jesus going?
You will share this with the other groups.



Ruth

The woman who followed her heart

She and Naomi journeyed together, starting over in a new land

Scripture reference: The book of Ruth in the Hebrew Scriptures (OT). Only 3 other women have books named for them, Esther (OT), Judith, Susanna (Apocrypha)

SYNOPSIS:

1. Ruth was happily married living with her husband and in-laws. Her husband, brother-in-law and father-in-law died. She was a widow and childless. In her culture women's identity was primarily through male heirs. She had none; no identity.
2. Naomi, her mother-in-law, who she loved and trusted, decided to go back to her home. Ruth's people were an enemy of Naomi's people. So Ruth's decision to leave her own people to follow Naomi was difficult.
3. Courage was necessary to take this journey to a foreign land, a land of her people's enemies. The famous wedding verse comes from her words to Naomi, "Wherever you go I will go. Your people will be my people and your God my God."
4. Ruth had deep faith in God and listened to God. Against the odds she followed her heart, trusted Naomi, and went to Israel with her.
5. Risk and danger accompanied her. It was risky getting food, risky gleaning in the fields because she could be attacked. She had to faithfully follow Naomi's advice and God's guiding for where to hunt for food, in which field. She gleaned in the field of Boaz, Naomi's kinsman (Ruth 2:8-10, 2:22).
6. Big risk! Ruth's kindness and faithfulness to Naomi helped soften Boaz's heart towards her. But she still had to take a big risk. She had to become assertive with Boaz, the owner of the field in which she gathered grain. She had to get his attention. Naomi instructed her to sleep near him and to remind him of how he could help them for he was a relative (Ruth 2:11, 3:2-4, 3:7-10).
7. Ruth eventually married Boaz and brought Naomi a new grandson, Obed, the father of King David, the greatest king in Israel. Ruth's identity was restored and she became part of the genealogy of Jesus.

Quiet time reflecting on the story with the following questions

How would Ruth have used a shawl in her story?

Have you ever lost people you love and felt really alone?
What was the hardest thing about those losses for you?

Have you ever left your home and moved to an unfamiliar place?
What was the most frightening thing about it?

Did anyone befriend you or journey with you? What did they do? How did it feel?

When you make good, but risky transitions, how has God been available to you?

What did Ruth do to keep the genealogy of Jesus going (in a brief summary)?
You will share this with the other groups.



Tamar

The courage to risk it all

*In a powerless situation she went to the core of her being to regain her identity,
her self worth and her life*

Scripture reference: Genesis 38

SYNOPSIS:

1. In Tamar's patriarchal culture, women were property. Their only identity came from producing male heirs.
2. Tamar was a widow with no sons. She was trapped and powerless. Her first husband died. Her father-in-law, Judah, the king of Jericho gave her to her brother-in-law to conceive, which was the law of the land. Her brother-in-law hated her so he humiliated and demeaned her and the Lord struck him down and killed him. She now legally deserved to have the third son to help her conceive but when he was of age Judah would not give him to her. He feared this son would die too, thus blaming Tamar for the other deaths.
3. In the meantime Tamar was living in her father-in-law's home perhaps in a slave-like situation. Her only hope for her identity in her culture was in her legal right to the third son of Judah and time was running out.
4. As a last resort she dug deep, went to the core of who she was and put everything on the line. She deliberately attracted her father-in-law by dressing beautifully, covering her face, and standing by the side of the road where he was herding cattle. He invited her into his tent and used her as a prostitute saying he would give her a gift in return for her favors. She asked for a pledge from him and he gave her his ring and staff. She got pregnant by him and when the household found out they threatened her with death by burning—because they found out she had acted as a prostitute. When they took her to her father-in-law who was the magistrate, to accuse her, she showed him his ring and staff.
5. Judah was dumbstruck. He realized at once what she had done to secure her legal heir in his family. He praised her for her courage and told her he should have given her his third son. He said, "She has been more righteous than I." She had gained her identity and self worth back and even taught Judah an ethical lesson.
6. They forgave each other—perhaps because she had shown her power within her powerlessness. She became the mother of twins and she and Judah became the great, great, great, great grandparents of Boaz who was Ruth's husband. Ruth and Boaz were the grandparents of King David.

Quiet time reflecting on the story with the following questions.

How would you imagine Tamar using her shawl in her story?

When have you felt trapped in a scary situation in which you feared you had no options?
How did it feel to you?

When have you taken a risk for yourself that you felt was overwhelming but you knew you had to do it?
How did you manage your emotions?

Has anyone ever apologized or acted in an apologetic way to you after finding out you took a stand for the right reasons? What was it like for you to receive this from another?

How has God turned your life story around and helped you through a dark time into more light?

What did Tamar do, in summary, to keep the genealogy of Jesus going?
You will share this with the other groups.

Courageous Women Retreat

Guidelines for the Retreat Leader

4-6 months before the retreat

Download the Courageous Women retreat from the website www.janethagberg.com

Read through the material to familiarize yourself with it and read the stories of the women in scripture so you know how to talk about the retreat with potential participants and table facilitators. Be in prayer about the retreat and the women who will attend.

Decide on the place, methods of PR for the retreat, the food options if you are planning a meal, and whether you will invite other churches to join you. Make contacts that are necessary.

2-3 months before the retreat

Choose the table facilitators and have them read through the guidelines so they are comfortable leading the table discussions.

Choose centerpieces (shawls or something soft and inviting) and get people to help you with set up, name tags, food, copying of handouts, PR etc. Start the PR process in print and one-on-one.

Recruit extra shawls in case some women do not have them or forget to bring them.

1 month before the retreat

Plan for your welcome, your introduction to the women and the shawls and your prayer. Do not tell the group why these 5 women are listed in the genealogy of Jesus but let it be suspenseful until they are in their small groups. (The reason represented by these women's stories is that they all risked their lives to keep the genealogy of Jesus going). Be in prayer about the retreat and the women who will attend.

Meet with table facilitators to make sure they are comfortable with their roles in leading table discussion.

Make sure all supplies and helpers are on board.

The day of the retreat

Relax and pray. You're done your job well and now you can enjoy the opening of hearts as you help tell these women's stories.

Information about Shawls

The shawl is an ancient article of clothing, one of the simplest and most widely used for warmth and comfort, for prestige and for fashion. The word shawl derives from the Persian “shal” denoting a class of woven fabric rather than an article of dress. The word has come to mean a flat woven or knit piece of fabric large enough to drape softly over one’s shoulders.

Shawls have a practical and symbolic use. In many religious traditions, a shawl is integral to the practice of prayer. To put on a shawl signals an attitude of reverence and humility. In prayer the shawl becomes a representation of divine love and a source of comfort for its wearer. Similarly, a shawl can provide deep solace and enhance healing in times of grief. To wear a handmade shawl is to feel the love and care of its maker, communicated without need for words

Courageous Women Retreat

Guidelines for the Table Facilitators

Your role is very important in this retreat. The atmosphere at your table will help determine how women will relate the stories of the 5 courageous women to their own lives.

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind while facilitating your group:

- Read your courageous woman's story and the discussion questions ahead of time so you are familiar with your woman's story. Also read the plan for the day's activities including the large group sharing that you will be part of.
- Think of ways in which your courageous woman's story relates to your own so you can start the discussion question section with a personal example. This will set the tone as one of sharing personal information and not just a discussion.
- Try to invite each woman to speak but do not pressure anyone to speak. If one woman dominates the conversation and she has had ample time to relate her story, gently thank her and ask someone else to share her story.
- If questions come up in your group that you can't answer, check with the retreat leader to see if she knows. Or get back to the questioner later.
- Think of one idea of how your courageous woman would wear her shawl so you can help the group get started on this task.
- Think of ways in which your group could tell your courageous woman's story to the others groups but let the group do the creative work of telling it. Try to include everyone unless you use a spokeswoman to tell the story. All the women in your group can wear their shawls like your courageous woman would have worn hers.