

Are You Sarah's Daughter?

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Last time I talked about how many of us are living overloaded lives, despite all our modern conveniences designed to save us time. In this article, I want to take a little peek into the lives of some of the people, particularly women, mentioned in the Bible, and look at the way they lived.

In 1 Peter 3:5-6 we are told:

"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."

Sarah is held up to us as an example of the kind of woman who did what was right. What did she do? She obeyed her husband. She went with him wherever he went - remember that Abraham lived a fairly nomadic life for a long time. God called him to leave his family's home region and go to an unknown place. Sarah obeyed Abraham even when he did foolish things - like instruct her to tell Pharaoh that she was Abram's sister, not wife. Her great calling in life was to be the wife of Abraham and the mother of Isaac. For 90 years she had no children, and so she was "only" Abraham's wife. Then she gave birth to Isaac. What kind of mother do you think she was? We are not told much about her mothering style - just three brief glimpses. When Isaac was born, Sarah said "God has brought me laughter, and every one who hears about this will laugh with me." (Gen 21:6). So she was full of joy at the birth of her son. Then, when Isaac was weaned, Sarah wanted Abraham to get rid of Hagar and Isamael, saying that Isamael would never share in the inheritance of Isaac. So, she was a mother who watched over the affairs of her son, and was concerned for his future. Thirdly, we are told that when Isaac married Rebekah, "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." At that time, Sarah had been dead for 3 years, and Isaac was 40 years old; a grown man - not a little boy missing his mommy. Obviously, his love for his mother was

deep, as he was still grieving and missing her three years after her death. To me, that gives a picture of a mother who was close to her son, even after he grew up. I believe Sarah was a loving, caring wife and mother, whose whole focus was on the men in her life - her husband and son.

Just think for a minute about what Sarah did NOT do. Abraham and Sarah lived in tents. Just how much housework do you think was needed? No windows to wash. If they had carpets, they would have been rugs that could be shaken outside. Yes, there would have been plenty of work to do in the daily rounds of feeding, clothing and caring for her family, but Sarah also had at least one maidservant to help her care of her household. There is no indication that Sarah spent time away from home (except against her will when she was taken into Pharaoh's household), or that she ran a business of any kind. I'm sure that Sarah worked hard, but I believe that she would have worked at an unhurried pace, going about the tasks associated with her calling in life - to be a wife to Abraham, and the mother to Isaac, through whom all mankind would one day be blessed. She was not perfect; she sometimes made mistakes. But she was a woman who was doing exactly what God created her to do. No more, no less. And we are told that we are her daughters if we "do what is right and do not give way to fear."

Evidently, Sarah's example of a simple, focused life is one worth imitating.

Esther is another example of a woman who was right where God wanted her. An orphan, she had been raised by her father's cousin. When the king was looking for another wife, she was taken into the palace along with many other beautiful virgins, given a year of beauty treatments, and then presented to the king. He found her more attractive than any of the others, and so proclaimed Esther queen. From then on, Esther's main role was to live in the palace, be cared for by maids and eunuchs, and go to the king whenever he called for her, which appears not to have been terribly frequently. And yet, she was right where God wanted her. God used her to save all the Jews which lived in that kingdom - a terrible plot had been hatched to kill every Jew in the kingdom, but Esther's appeal to the king on the instructions of Mordecai turned things around and saved them all. Today, Jewish people still celebrate Purim and what God did through Esther and Mordecai. Again, a woman who had a straight-forward role in life, and who didn't try to do more than God had called her to do.

Have you ever thought much about the day-to-day life of Jesus himself? Of course, he is our ultimate example, because he came to earth, not only to die for our sins, but also to set us an example. Jesus, in the years of his public ministry, lived with incredible demands upon him. People were constantly following him around, clamoring for his help and attention, or heckling him. There were often Pharisees around to sling verbal mud at him, and often crowds of many thousands wanting to listen to him. People everywhere wanted him to perform miracles.

And yet, he was never hurried or harried. Why? Because he knew exactly what God sent him to earth to do, and he concentrated on doing just that. But, let's put the ministry of Jesus in the context of the rest of his life:

Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his public ministry. He carried it out for 3 years, and then was crucified. What did he do before he was 30? We are told very little - just a few glimpses of his growing up years. We know that he "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" - in other words, he grew up, learned a lot, and turned out to be an excellent young man who was respected, and with whom God was pleased. Why didn't he begin public ministry earlier?? Surely, he could have done a lot more good if he'd got started sooner?? But no, that was not God's plan. Presumably he worked with Joseph, and probably stayed close to his family. Those years were God's time of preparation for him. Jesus never married or had children - though in that time and culture, it was usual to marry at about 14 years of age. Again, that was not God's plan for him. Jesus did not own a home of his own. Throughout his public ministry, he laid his head wherever he found himself, whether in the home of friends, in a boat on a lake, or on a hillside. When the season came for him to begin ministry, he gave himself fully to it, though he still took time aside to rest, to spend alone with his disciples, to draw aside and seek God, to attend a wedding, or visit friends. He did not, however, have to maintain a house, or meet the needs of a family. He knew God's purpose, and stuck to it.

And then there's Mary, Jesus' mother. Her great calling in life was motherhood - first to Jesus, the son of God, over whom she marvelled, and stored up in her heart all the things she saw and heard surrounding him. She also had other children with Joseph; at least 6 of them, for 4 brothers of Jesus are named, and his sisters are referred to in the plural. Mary was married, maintained a home, and raised children. She was called "blessed

among women" because she was chosen as the mother of Jesus.

Lydia is sometimes held up as an example of a woman who runs a business. She was a dealer in purple cloth (Acts 16:15). But it is interesting to note what is NOT said about her - there is no mention of Lydia being married or having any children. In fact, it would seem likely that the opposite was true. After becoming converted, she invited Paul and his companions to stay at her house, on her own authority. Can you imagine how that would have gone down with a husband? "Hi honey - I just got saved, and here are all my new friends come to live with us for a while". :-) So, we know she was hospitable, and she made some money. But the Bible doesn't say she was a wife, mother, business woman, and had lots of people to stay, all at once!

You see, whenever you look at the lives recorded in the Bible, both men and women, you will find that all the ones that are spoken of with approval by God were people who were focused, and got on with whatever it was God wanted them to do, without a bunch of extra stuff. Of course, I fully realize we are not told every detail of the lives of every person in the Bible. But I do believe we are told the important things, and that there is plenty of evidence to support the conclusion that they each lived fairly simply in their own way.

For everyone, there are seasons in life, times when we focus on different things. And that's just how it should be. But how many of us try to cram a lifetime's worth of activities into each and every month and year of our lives?? We need to slow down, simplify, and focus!

Next time, let's take a look at the paragon of womanhood - the Proverbs 31 woman. I think you might be in for some surprises!

Love
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