



THE
GRANDMOTHERS
OF
JESUS



G R E G L A U R I E

THE GRANDMOTHERS OF JESUS

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A GRANDMOTHER'S LEGACY

When I think about my grandmother, I remember I called her “Mama Stella.” I lived with my grandparents for many years, and I remember that she was a wonderful, godly woman. She, along with my grandfather “Daddy Charles,” took me to church every Sunday. I remember daydreaming and drawing cartoons on the church bulletin and not being all that interested. But it was from Mama Stella that I first heard about Jesus.

Mama Stella was also an amazing cook. She never reheated anything, and I don't think she had ever seen a TV dinner (if she had, she wouldn't be interested in it). She made everything from scratch, including the best fried chicken I've ever tasted. But the crowning achievement of my grandmother's cooking was her biscuits. Once you started eating them, you couldn't stop. As I watched my grandmother make them, it appeared to be such a simple process. With expert hands, she lovingly mixed them and—voilà! —the perfect biscuit.

What awesome memories I have of Mama Stella. Her biscuits, her love, and her devotion to God and her family are all a part of who I am—my heritage.

Sadly, you may have thoughts of a grandmother who was not so amazing—things that you would rather forget because she was cold, too busy, sickly, mean, or distant. Maybe she didn't go to church or believe in the God of Heaven, but she is a part of who you are, your family—your heritage.

Or maybe you never knew your grandmothers. You wonder about your roots and what it may have been like to have her around. Maybe you wish you had a relationship with a grandmother you never knew, so you go out searching for some family history to discover, something wonderful you hope you can cling to, some information to pass on to your children. These days it has become very popular to look into your genealogy, to find out where you came from.

In fact, I have a friend who is really into this, and for a while, every time I saw him he had a new discovery about his heritage. Of course, most of us would like to think we are related to someone important, like a member of a royal family, a celebrity, some great intellect, or a hero from American history. But what if in researching your family tree you discovered you had some unsavory characters in it? Would you want to let others know?

Let's say that you found out you had a number of prostitutes in your family tree. Is that something you would tell people? Imagine hanging around with some friends, and one person says, "I'm a distant relative of George Washington." Another says, "Well, I have royal blood flowing in my family." And you say, "Well, there are several prostitutes in my family." Is that something you would be proud to admit?

You may be surprised to know that the most famous family tree in all of human history actually did have some unsavory characters, including liars, cheats, adulterers, and prostitutes. I'm talking, of course, about the family tree of Jesus Christ. He knows all about having relatives who might be embarrassing. Yet in His family tree, we can see the amazing grace of God clearly on display.

For the Jewish people in Jesus' day, genealogies were a big deal for a number of reasons. A genealogy would determine whether someone was related to the priesthood. It would also determine if a person was in the royal line. And, it would influence how the family inheritance would be passed on. Therefore, the Jews were sticklers for genealogies.

If you look at Jewish genealogies, normally they did not include women. For instance, in Luke's genealogy of Jesus, there are no females listed (see Luke 3:23–38). So it is very interesting that Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (His legal bloodline through Joseph) lists five women (see Matthew 1:1–17). Who are these women? Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and, of course, Jesus' mother, Mary. Tamar and Rahab were both prostitutes, Bathsheba an adulteress, and Ruth a pagan woman. How remarkable that these women of the Old Testament all found their way into the most exclusive genealogy in all of human history.

Why?

Well, I have found that the people God seems to go out of His way to use are the ones who don't think they are good enough to be used. It's not the man or woman who says, "Lord, use me because I am so attractive and eloquent and, best of all, humble." God says, "Nah. That's OK. I am going to go use this person over here who thinks they are a loser, who never amounted to much in life, who doesn't think they could ever do anything for Me. Because you know what? I like to work with people

like this. That way, I get the glory.”

And if you take an honest look at the people God used in the Bible, you quickly realize that they were some seriously flawed people. Some were too old and some were too young. He used some who lied, others that were abused. He used rebels, failures, and scaredy-cats. He used a bug eater, a divorcee, and a murderer. He used those who were sickly, small, poor, and tired—and one who was already dead! God uses whom He chooses.

Let’s focus on four women who probably wouldn’t have considered themselves worthy to be included in the royal lineage of Jesus, but they were—because of God’s grace. Despite their shortcomings and flaws, God used them in a significant way: as the grandmothers of Jesus.

TAMAR THE DECEIVING WIDOW

Let me start by saying that it’s really shocking Tamar is named in this famous genealogy. There is no redeeming value or silver lining to her story. She is pretty much a corrupt character. We see her prostitution and deception of Judah in the pages of Genesis. Yet amazingly, by the grace of God, Tamar makes it into the messianic line.

Going back to Genesis 37, we remember that Judah is one of the twelve sons of Jacob, and one of the brothers of Joseph. Judah was the one who came up with the idea to sell Joseph instead of killing him. “So Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit will we get if we kill our brother and hide his death? We will profit more if we sell him to these traders. Then we will not be guilty of killing our own brother.’ The other brothers agreed. When the Midianite traders came by, the brothers took Joseph out of the well and sold him to the traders for 20 pieces of silver” (Genesis 37:26–28 ERV). Later, Judah left his brothers to stay in Adullam, where he met and married a Canaanite girl named Shua. Together they had three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah.

We are introduced to Tamar in Genesis 38.

“In the course of time, Judah arranged for his firstborn son, Er, to marry a young woman named Tamar. But Er was a wicked man in the LORD’s sight, so the LORD took his life. Then Judah said to Er’s brother Onan, ‘Go and marry Tamar, as our law

requires of the brother of a man who has died. You must produce an heir for your brother.’ But Onan was not willing to have a child who would not be his own heir. So... [He] prevented her from having a child who would belong to his brother. But the LORD considered it evil for Onan to deny a child to his dead brother. So the LORD took Onan’s life, too.” (Genesis 38:6–10 NLT)

Judah then instructed Tamar “Go back to your parents’ home and remain a widow until my son Shelah is old enough to marry you.’ (But Judah didn’t really intend to do this because he was afraid Shelah would also die, like his two brothers.) So Tamar went back to live in her father’s home” (Genesis 38:11 NLT). She returns home a childless widow.

Time goes by and Judah’s wife Shua dies. How much time? We don’t know. One Bible translation says, “After a long time” (Genesis 38:12 NIV). And we find Judah going up to Timnah to shear his sheep, literally going about his business.

The Bible doesn’t give us a lot of information about Tamar while she is living at home, but can we assume that up to this point she is not free to marry another, she has no children, and that she’s still adorned in mourning clothes? She has no property and no legal guardian (who according to law should have been Shelah). And she knows that she is never going to marry Shelah. She’s an outcast.

So, she puts a plan of deception into action. In Genesis 38:14–19 Tamar is told that Judah is in Timnah, so she changes out of her widow’s clothes and covers her face with a veil to disguise herself. She then sits at the entrance of Enaim, on the road to Timnah in order to trick Judah. Believing that she is a prostitute, He propositions her, offering to send her a young goat from his flock, but giving her his staff, cord, and seal as a pledge. After their sexual encounter, she put her widow’s clothes back on again. Months later when Judah hears that his daughter-in-law is pregnant, he orders her to be burned to death. But, when she sends him his cord, seal, and staff, he acknowledges that he wronged her, and twin sons are born from their encounter.

It’s a pathetic situation. Yet Tamar makes it into the genealogy of Jesus Christ. But why does her story make it into the Bible? Do you think she would want this part of her life kept alive in the pages of Scripture?

What if this was your story?

As sad as this all sounds, God still allowed Tamar to play a role in the most important part of all of humanity, despite her failures and regardless of how people looked at her. And even though she took matters into her own hands to achieve her goal of having a child, her story lives on in the pages of Scripture as a reminder that God's grace goes far beyond our mess-ups and indiscretions. He gives us second chances and can redeem the mess we make of our lives because His plans for us are bigger than our failures.

RAHAB THE PROSTITUTE

Next we have Rahab. She too was guilty of prostitution. But unlike Tamar, she did it for a profession. We know her as Rahab the harlot. She was a Gentile and an inhabitant of Jericho.

At this time in history, Moses is dead and Joshua is leading Israel. They are preparing to conquer Jericho. So Joshua sent two spies into the city to see what the reaction of the inhabitants would be. What is their attitude toward Israel? They knew Israel was out there, so what were they thinking about them?

The king of Jericho discovered that the spies were in the city and he demanded that Rahab show him where the spies were. To paraphrase Rahab, she said, "They went that-a-way. If you go now, you might just catch them." She was lying because, in fact, she had hid them up on her rooftop. After the king sent his soldiers out to search for these spies, she went and spoke to them.

"Now before they lay down, [Rahab] came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: 'I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other

side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.” (Joshua 2:8–13)

Here in this wicked city of Jericho was a woman of faith. God always has His people in the most unusual places. That is what I have discovered. They are everywhere.

You meet His people in the highest levels of influence. They are in government. They are in the military. I remember when I had the opportunity to give a Bible study at the White House. I met so many staffers who were committed Christians. I also went to the Pentagon and met so many military people who were Christians. And you find them in other areas of influence and affluence. God has raised them up. You even see them in the entertainment world.

Then He has His people who are in obscure places. Not positions of great power but still influencing powerful people. We think about Daniel influencing kings like Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar, and Darius. We remember a young girl that lived in the house of the great Syrian leader Naaman. She was just a maid, but she told Naaman that there was a prophet in Israel that could help him be free from his leprosy.

There are people in high office. There are people in low down places. God has His people everywhere—influencing, doing the work of the kingdom.

And here was Rahab in this wicked city. You wonder where she got her faith. No one had ever proclaimed much to her about the God of Israel. Look at what she says in Joshua 2:10–11, “For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt. . . . And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

This sinful woman came to have faith in the reality of a living God because of the supernatural evidence she saw in the lives of God's people. Effectively, she is saying, "We have heard the stories. It's incredible what God has done for you everywhere you go. You have an incredible reputation." She believed because of the evidence that she saw in the lives of God's people.

It is interesting to note here that Rahab, along with Sarah, are the only two women mentioned in the "hall of faith" of Hebrews 11. This chapter is like a museum for the great men and women that God has used through history. As you walk down the corridors, you see their pictures on the wall and a brief description of what they did for the Lord—the distinctive feature being their faith. Two women make it into the hall: Sarah and Rahab, whom the Bible calls a person of faith (Hebrews 11:31) and good works (James 2:25). That is interesting to me. Of course, if I were in charge of it, I would have added some other women. I might have put Mary the mother of Jesus in there. God put Sarah and Rahab.

Humanly speaking, Sarah and Rahab had absolutely nothing in common. Sarah was a godly woman who was the wife of the founder of the Jewish people. God used her body to bring Isaac into this world. Rahab was an ungodly Gentile who worshipped pagan gods and sold her body for money. But from the divine viewpoint, Rahab and Sarah shared the most important thing in life: they both exercised saving faith in the true and living God.

Sometimes we romanticize Rahab. But don't forget she is "Rahab the harlot." In modern vernacular she would be *Rahab the hooker*. Because that is what she was. And God tells us that for a good reason: to show us that God can reach anyone. He can take a woman who was a prostitute, a woman of ill repute, an immoral woman, and place her into the hall of faith, and into the messianic bloodline. It is an amazing thing that God did in her life. She went from being a pagan prostitute to being a great grandmother of the Messiah of Israel, the Savior of the world.

Now, what about the fact that Rahab lied about the spies? You might think, "That wasn't a good thing. Is God putting this in here because it is OK to lie?" No. She is never commended for lying. It just tells us she lied. At best, she was a young believer who didn't really know the Word of God yet. You can't hold her accountable to something she didn't necessarily know. But, it's not the point that she lied. The point is that she was bold,

courageous, and put her life on the line to protect her family by faith.

Effectively, the spies said to her, “We will spare your family, but this is what you need to do. We need to know where you live when we come in. You are to take a scarlet rope and hang it from your window. When we come and attack, we will see that red rope and we won’t attack you or whoever is in your house” (see Joshua 2:14, 17–18).

Of course, that reminds us of when the angel of death came upon the land of Egypt to kill the firstborn. God told the Israelites to take the lamb, slay it, and apply the blood to the doorposts. When God saw it, the angel would pass over it (see Exodus 12:21–23). In a similar manner, we have Rahab with a scarlet rope hanging from her window, reminding us of the blood of Jesus that was shed for the sin of the world.

Sure enough, when the Israelites came in to conquer Jericho, that scarlet rope was there. And Rahab and those in her house were spared, as the spies said they would be, and God brought her into the messianic line.

This whole story is about the grace of God plucking a figure out of obscurity and using her in a glorious way. This lost soul named Rahab was a prostitute, but she had faith. Not a strong faith, not a perfect faith, but a faith nonetheless—and she was rewarded by God for it.

RUTH THE PAGAN DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

Someone once said that the book of Ruth is the most perfect work of literature in a small package. In this book, there are no miraculous signs. There are no visions. There are no angels. There are no dreams. There are no voices from Heaven. It is just an ordinary story about an ordinary woman in ordinary times doing extraordinary things.

Ruth is a fascinating figure. Like Rahab and Tamar, Ruth was also a Gentile—a Moabite descended from Lot. The Moabites were among the worst enemies of Israel; yet Ruth is placed in the genealogy of Jesus and becomes the grandmother of Israel’s great king David.

First, let’s begin with the devastation of Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law.

Naomi and her husband left Israel when there was a famine in the land. They decided to move to Moab with their two sons. When they came to Moab, the two sons married two Moabite women. Out of the blue, without warning, disaster struck. First, Naomi lost her husband. Then she lost both of her sons (see Ruth 1:1–5). So Naomi was not only a widow, but she was in the worst situation because she was an older widow without parents, without immediate family, and with no adult children to bring her any hope of getting back into society. You need to realize, in those days widows were probably the most socially and economically vulnerable members of society. There really wasn't much hope out there for a widow.

We read of the loss in Naomi's life and may not fully understand how hard it would have been for her. Honestly, it's hard for us in the twenty first century to imagine just how difficult her situation was. It's hard for us to get a grip on how challenging life would be for a woman like Naomi. Every culture and civilization has a way of telling you that you are a nobody. As far as her culture was concerned, Naomi was the most insignificant of the insignificant. She had no name. She had no future. She had no one. It was basically a dead-end street for her.

As she is getting ready to leave Moab, hearing that there is bread back in her country, we read in Ruth 1:8, "Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband'" (NIV).

She could have said to them, "Stay with me," but instead she put their needs above her needs. She was being selfless. How much she would have loved to have them on a journey with her. To be her companions. To be her comfort. Instead, she says, "I want you to go back because in your own culture with your own people you would have a chance to remarry. What kind of a life will you have with me? A worse one, no doubt."

Naomi was also saying there would be a risk in coming back to Israel. In Moab, they were part of a culture where they were loved, accepted, and embraced, but in Israel, they would be considered enemies because they were Moabites. There really wasn't much in Israel for them. They would be subjected to discrimination. They would be subjected to violence, perhaps. Racially, they would be outsiders. They would be marginalized. It wasn't a good prospect for these girls. So Naomi is encouraging them

selflessly, “I can’t promise you anything. You need to go back.”

Initially, both Orpah and Ruth said they would return with Naomi, but after more urging, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

“‘Look,’ said Naomi, ‘your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.’ But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.’ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.” (Ruth 1:15–18 NIV)

So Ruth returned with her mother-in-law Naomi. The question is, why? It is so astonishing. Why would she leave her country, her family, her parents, her gods, her future, and go with Naomi back to Bethlehem? We read those beautiful words, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go.” Then she says, “May the LORD . . .” (This is the covenant name for God which is only used by the Israelites. This wasn’t a generic term for God.) “May the LORD, the sovereign LORD Jehovah, deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything separates you and me.”

Though Ruth and Orpah, prior to this, had both admired Naomi and had seen things in her life that were a testimony to her faith, only Ruth makes that final decision to follow. What I believe happens right there—what we are witnessing in those verses—is a conversion.

So they returned to Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest, which we know is spring. It was about to be springtime in their lives again. Things were about to change because of Ruth’s amazing choice. Ruth comes back to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law and she becomes the breadwinner of the family—this a very nontraditional family of two women. She goes out to glean in the fields. Gleaning in the fields was not easy work. The poor were given the opportunity to go into the fields after the harvesters. They were allowed to pick up whatever was left over.

We read in Ruth 2:3 that she “happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.” I love that word, *happened*. It just so *happened* that she ends up in the field of Boaz. So she comes to this field. She works there from morning until night. And when Boaz sees her, he asks about her and he hears who she is. No doubt, the town already knew that this Moabite girl was in Bethlehem with her widowed mother-in-law. That might have raised eyebrows and some questions as to why she would do this.

Boaz knew it would have been a sacrifice for Ruth to leave her family and come back with an older widow with no prospects for helping her. He sees her and is somewhat amazed. He speaks about her with kindness. He speaks about her decision and willingness to face a somewhat hopeless future with her mother-in-law, Naomi. And she is amazed when he tells her, “Don’t go anywhere else. Stay in my field.” Then he loads her down with all of the barley grain that she is able to take back to her mother-in-law (see Ruth 2:8–17).

We see this first “chance” meeting where they are both amazed at each other—taken aback by some quality in each other’s life. That an Israelite would show such compassion to a Moabite was pretty amazing. And when she goes home and tells her mother-in-law all that happened, Naomi’s eyebrows go up. This ever-so-small light begins to flicker in the dark life of Naomi and Ruth. She basically says to Ruth, “Do you realize what just happened? Do you realize who this man Boaz is?” She says, “He is one of the few people in the world that has the potential for changing everything for us. He could be of great help to us because he could be our kinsman redeemer” (see Ruth 2:20–22).

On this statement, the whole story begins to turn around. Ten years they had been in Moab. Ten years of suffering. Ten years of grief and sadness. One thing after another. And now providence has changed, taken a turn—led them in a new direction.

What exactly is a kinsman redeemer? In Israelite law, a kinsman redeemer had the legal right to buy back the ancestral land for a family that might have lost it under circumstances of poverty, whether it was sold or forfeited or just simply abandoned. When Israel came into the Promised Land, each of the tribes were given a portion of land that would stay in the family. It was a guarantee of their inheritance. But if the land was forfeited or lost for some reason, that land could be bought back by a close relative—the kinsman redeemer. If he had the money and the will to

do it, he could do this for a relative.

Though the land might have seemed appealing to Boaz or another person, because it could become their possession, the problem in this story is Ruth. Along with this land, the kinsman redeemer had to take the responsibility of this Moabite girl. Why would anybody want to do that? Why would anybody, in those days, want to spend that kind of money and take on the responsibility of an interracial marriage?

Boaz decides to do it. But not before Ruth makes her bold move. In the middle of the night, under Naomi's instruction, she goes to Boaz after the big harvest celebration and she essentially proposes marriage to him. Basically she says to Boaz, "I want you to be my kinsman redeemer" (see Ruth 3:1-8).

What a bold and strange story. What an unusual thing. We can hardly imagine how in a patriarchal culture, where men were completely in charge, this all fits together. All of a sudden, you have this story of these women, Naomi and Ruth. There are only two books in the Bible named after women, and one of them is Ruth, a Moabite girl. How amazing is that? How nontraditional, in the context of genealogy, to include a person like Ruth. That is one of the reasons why I do believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Nobody could think up stories like this. And yet it is not just a story. It is true.

Boaz accepts the challenge. He acts the part. He makes the decision. Why do you think he would do this? I think because he saw something very special in Ruth. He saw her courageous sacrifice and hard work for her mother-in-law. And that captured his heart. It won him. And he uses his power in a most gracious way, making the decision to be their kinsman redeemer (see Ruth 3:11).

Then we come to the results and rewards of such a decision. Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth are all included in the line of David, in the line of the great kings of Israel, and ultimately (and most significantly), in the line of the Messiah Himself.

Ruth 4:13 gives us the end of the story:

"So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made

love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: ‘Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.’ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son!’ And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.” (NIV)

Little Ruth. The outsider. The one with no prospects and no future. Look what God has done. Look at the fullness of Naomi now in this story. All the women surround her and say, “Ruth is better to you than seven sons.”

That is pretty amazing—to say she is better than seven sons. It sounds amazing to us today. It is even more amazing when you think about it in light of the culture of the time. Having sons is what mattered. Sons were significant. Sons were the ones who could preserve you, protect you, and provide for you in your old age. And seven is the number of perfection. Seven is the number of totality and completion. The women are saying that this little girl is more significant to Naomi—more important, more precious, and more valuable—than the perfect number of the most desired offspring.

First, I want to point out Naomi’s choice. Naomi made a choice to live in such a way that glorified God in her home. There was something in the way she lived and practiced her faith in Moab that would lead these girls to want what she had. She displayed her testimony in the darkest of times, in the hardest of times.

We can all talk about God. We can all witness for the Lord outside of our home. Meet strangers or people that know us maybe just casually. But I will tell you where it matters. Where it really matters is in your home. Those who live with you know you best.

In her home, Naomi lived her testimony in such a way that these girls were attracted to her and to her God. And she loved these girls who were not her own—girls who were not part of her clan or heritage. She reached out to the outsider, to these two women who were outsiders.

She loved them enough to say, “Don’t follow me, this is a long and dangerous journey I am going to be taking. You go back. There are better prospects for you.” And they saw that.

The second thing we see is Ruth’s choice. When she made Jehovah her God, she turned her back on her family and friends. There is a great passage in Mark where Jesus says, “I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life” (Mark 10:29–30 NLT).

Ruth never looked back. She never second-guessed herself. She forsook everything because of what Naomi’s God represented to her. Her hopes lay in Him and in Him alone.

It just so happened that Ruth ended up in the field of Boaz that way. God works in the mundane things even when we don’t see it. Don’t look out on your life and think that God has almost abandoned you. Naomi had said, “Don’t call me ‘Naomi’! Call me ‘Mara.’ . . . I have left here full, but the LORD has caused me to return empty-handed” (Ruth 1:20–21 NET). But she wasn’t empty-handed. Standing right at her side was little Ruth. There was hope that Naomi couldn’t see at that moment. Clinging to her side was Ruth and all the possibilities of her salvation.

What made Ruth great? Did she just wake up one morning and say, “I am going to be a better person, I am going to try harder, and I am going to work harder. I am going to be more selfless. I am going to do the right thing here”? I don’t think so. I don’t think she came back with Naomi because she thought it was going to be better for her. I think she came back because she said, “I would rather have this Lord, this God, as my God than any other god.” And God rewarded her for her commitment to Naomi and to Him.

BATHSHEBA THE ADULTERESS

When you hear the name Bathsheba, several things probably come to

mind: that she was on the roof taking a bath, that she committed adultery with King David, that she was married to Uriah, and that she was the mother of King Solomon, one of Israel's greatest kings.

It is interesting that in Matthew's genealogy, Bathsheba is not mentioned specifically by name. She is only mentioned as "the wife of Uriah" (see Matthew 1:6), but she makes it in Christ's family tree nonetheless.

We find Bathsheba's story beginning in 2 Samuel 11. King David is taking a little R&R and Bathsheba is taking a bath.

"In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites . . . However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem. Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, 'She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. . . . Then she returned home. Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, 'I'm pregnant.'" (2 Samuel 11:1–5 NLT)

It is not surprising that sermons, books, and various articles usually focus completely on David and his fall. How he was idle—just kicking back. How he was in bed napping when he should have been leading his troops into battle. How he was at the palace being lazy and setting himself up for this. Then he sees the beautiful Bathsheba bathing herself. . . and you know the rest.

On the other hand, we don't usually hear much about Bathsheba, do we? The Bible doesn't tell us about her thoughts or intentions, her history before or during her marriage to Uriah, or even where she was spiritually. The Bible only tells us about her actions—what she did. She was bathing, she was summoned, she committed adultery, and she became pregnant as a result.

The question is, did she share in any of the responsibility here? I think so. We don't read anywhere that she resisted the king's advances, or that she

said a word in protest, or even that she tried to make a dramatic exit like Joseph did from Potiphar's wife (see Genesis 39:12). Nothing says that Bathsheba tried to resist! We might conclude by this absence of information that in saying nothing, she made her choice.

You might say, "Greg, come on, if the king summoned her, maybe she was afraid for her life." Maybe. But could it be that Bathsheba knew exactly where David would be walking around on his terrace? Did she know that he would be within eyeshot of her? Could it be that she intentionally positioned herself to be seen by the king so he would lust after her? It is entirely possible. Certainly, a modest Jewish woman would not bathe herself publicly like this. She was not being careful.

It is not enough to avoid sin ourselves. We don't want to provide a stumbling block for someone else. Did Bathsheba intentionally provide a stumbling block for David? If she had given more thought to her actions, would she have put temptation in his path? If lustful looking is a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with the desire to be looked at and lusted after are also guilty of sin. Are they not?

As a side note, ladies, would you give a little thought to what you wear? Don't dress in such a way that would encourage a man to lust after you. You say, "Greg, that is really hard to do. I want to be in fashion and cool." I am not saying dress in sackcloth and ashes. I am saying don't dress to get some man to look at you in a lustful way.

I know what some of you are thinking: that some guys would lust after a tree. This is true. But that doesn't excuse you from being careful and applying a little modesty in the way you dress and in your life. Do you know that modesty is still a biblical principle that should be practiced in the twenty-first century?

Today's society says that modesty is old-fashioned, outdated, and a wet blanket to the hottest trends. We see images coming into our homes on a daily basis and we don't even blush anymore. Immodesty is something that we have actually become accustomed to seeing. We know it's wrong but yet, somehow, we have accepted the fact that this is just part of normal media advertising. And, unfortunately, we have learned to live with it.

Certainly, Bathsheba was not being a modest woman. She was setting

herself up in many ways. And David brought Bathsheba in and they had their night together. They had their one-night stand. They probably had a little fun that night. Sin can be fun. We wouldn't do it if it wasn't fun. The Bible even says that there is pleasure in sin, for a time (see Hebrews 11:25). But with that pleasure comes a hefty price tag. Those few moments of pleasure can result in a lifetime of regret. That is what we need to think about. Unfortunately, many people don't.

So, David and Bathsheba had their little fling, but they probably didn't think about all that was going to happen next. A lot of bad things were going to happen. They probably thought no one would ever know. Then she sent a message that said, "Tell the king that I am pregnant." And what happens next? David summons Uriah home to cover things up, but that plan fails. So Uriah is intentionally placed on the front lines of battle and he is killed.

The Bible tells us in 2 Samuel 11:26–27, "When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (ESV). Next, God sent Nathan the prophet to expose their sin, and the Lord struck the baby and he became very ill and died (see 2 Samuel 12).

If we skip ahead in 2 Samuel 12, we see Bathsheba (no longer mentioned as the wife of Uriah), as David's wife, being comforted by him. God blessed Bathsheba to become pregnant again, and this time she gave birth to Solomon, one of Israel's greatest leaders. Verse 24 says, "The LORD loved the child" (NLT). Wow! This is God's grace and forgiveness on display. Although God did not reverse the consequences of their sin, in His tenderness and love, He forgave and redeemed them. The good news for us is that God still forgives, and He still redeems those who are truly repentant and whose hearts are turned toward Him.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Without a doubt, the family tree of our Lord is gnarled and crooked. What is fascinating about these unlikely women, in the most exclusive

genealogy in human history, is that they remind us that the whole message of Jesus coming to this earth is not about making good people better. It's about God reaching out to people who have made a mess of their lives. That is why Jesus came to this earth—to heal broken lives and to restore shattered hopes.

In the genealogy of Christ, we see God, in His mercy, doing for sinners what they can't do for themselves: mending their broken lives. It speaks volumes about the grace of God. His grace in including flawed women like Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba in the messianic line despite their shortcomings. The family tree of Jesus gives hope to those who have failed in life.

How did these women get up in that tree? God redeemed their lives and even redeemed their pasts. Did you know that God can do that for you? Maybe you have made mistakes and you think it is too late. It is never too late. If you come and say, "Lord, I have made a mess of my life but I need Your help. I need your forgiveness. I have made wrong choices. Now those choices have made me. Is there any hope?"

The answer is, "Yes, there is."

My own mom rebelled against the Lord. She was raised in a Christian home. She went to church on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. She didn't want to go. As soon as she could, she ran off with some guy and married him. That was the first of many marriages to follow. In between her marriages, she was in Long Beach and had a fling with some guy and it resulted in her becoming pregnant. Thankfully, she made a good choice after a bad choice: she didn't abort that child. He was carried to term. And I am glad because that child is me.

As a young man, I chose to follow Christ because He chose me first. And I chose to walk with the Lord. I married a godly woman. We have raised our children in the way of the Lord. One of my sons is in Heaven. One is still on earth. We have five wonderful grandchildren. Good choices were made. I was able to go back to my mom who chose not to follow Christ and she recommitted her life to the Lord.

We are reminded that even when we fail, there is still hope. Even if we have a sordid and immoral past like Tamar, Rahab, or Bathsheba, there

is forgiveness and a future. God still has a plan for you because He gives second, third, and fourth chances. And even if you think you are nothing, God thinks about you and He can make something out of what you think is nothing.

Through no merit of our own but completely by grace, we have been brought into the family of God. The Bible teaches, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9 NIV).

Jesus came from one of the most messed-up family trees ever. But He knows how to bring good out of bad and how to put broken things back together again.

LESSONS FROM CHRIST’S FAMILY TREE

So, what have we learned?

First, we see the grace of God richly displayed.

When you look at the stories of these four women included in the messianic line of Jesus, you can’t help but focus on the grace of God. Despite their shortcomings, God intervened and redeemed them. And even when you have made mistakes in life, when you have made wrong decisions in life, when you have sinned in life, God can still turn your life around.

That doesn’t mean you will not face repercussions for the wrong you do. Going back to Bathsheba, though she made it into the messianic line, there were consequences for her adultery. She lost both her husband Uriah and the child she was pregnant with. Penalty was there. Yet grace was extended.

Secondly, we focus on Jesus and not on His family.

Many times people have a problem relating to Jesus. He seems too good

to be true. He is in stained glass or He looks down upon us with disapproval. But that is not the Jesus of the Bible. The real flesh-and-blood Jesus of the Bible lived in the real world. Though He was sinless, He loved sinners. In fact, He was called “a friend of sinners” (see Matthew 11:19). He was also tested in all points as we are, yet without sin. The Bible says in Hebrews 7:25, “He is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf” (NLT). Jesus has walked in your shoes and then some.

Lastly, we have hope for the future of our own families.

Do you have a perfect family? Do you have a dysfunctional family? Listen, I come from a dysfunctional family and I am the head of a dysfunctional family. We all have a lot of dysfunction and a lot of problems in our families. Even so, most of us don't have any murderers or prostitutes in our family tree. We probably have some adulterers, liars, and cheats. But Jesus can intervene.

Let me say this: instead of making a mess out of your life, how about making some good decisions with your life? How are you doing as a parent? As a grandparent? Are you setting an example for your children to follow? What about your grandchildren?

It is so tragic when we see the sins of parents visited on their children, and the bad behavior the parents practiced being practiced by their children and then even by their grandchildren. It's sad to see godlessness being passed on. That happens. But the Lord can intervene and change things.

I don't know if you are estranged from your kids right now, but let your kids know you love them. Even if they don't always do everything you want them to, let them know that you love them unconditionally.

Maybe you have a prodigal son or daughter. You know, my son Christopher, who is with the Lord now, did not always walk with Christ, even though he was raised in a Christian home, was taught the Word of God, and went to a Christian school. There was a time for a number of years that Christopher went astray. He never stopped believing in God. He never was disrespectful toward his mother and myself. But he just went his own way. Then, he recommitted his life to the Lord. And later, he said to a friend of mine, “One of the reasons I came back again was because

I knew that my parents loved me unconditionally.” Maybe you have a child that has gone astray. Don’t just let them know you love them—keep the door open.

Maybe your marriage is unraveling right now. You are not a happy family. Maybe you are pushing the limits. Maybe you are engaged in activities that could potentially undermine your marriage. Don’t do that. Live a godly life. Strengthen your marriage. Keep it strong and healthy.

And if you are a single person, remain pure morally until the day you find that right person. Mary and Joseph did it. Even after Mary conceived Jesus, until the day of His birth, they had no relations whatsoever. She was faithful to the Lord until her task was completed (see Matthew 1:25). We need to be faithful to the Lord no matter where we are in life.

You might say, “Greg, I have been on the wrong road for a while. I have made some bad choices. You talk about good choices, but I have made bad choices. You know what? I married that nonbeliever. I got pregnant outside of wedlock. I got an abortion. I have done things I should have never done. I have wasted years of my life. What would you say to a person like me?” I would say to you that Jesus gives us second chances. Stop and think about the fact that God made the choice to send Jesus to be born and Jesus made the choice to come to earth. Don’t forget that a decision was made in the counsels of eternity that Jesus would come down and die on the cross for the sin of the world. The Bible says, He was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). What that means is, way before we sinned Jesus already began the process—He made preparation. He already decided He was going to do what needed to be done so that we could be made right with God.

Just because you have made bad choices up to this point, it doesn’t mean you have to keep making them. You can make the right choice right now. You can say, “God I have failed. Would You redeem me? Redeem my life. Bring something good out of me despite the wrong that I have done.” If the family tree of Jesus shows us nothing else, it shows us that God can do that.

Jesus came to clean up messes. He came to untangle things. He came to sort things out. And if you will commit your life to Him, He will forgive you and transform you, no matter what you have done up to this point.

But you must come, confess, and say, “God help me.” He will do it.

To learn more about what it means to follow Jesus Christ, visit KnowGod.org.