

WOMEN OF GOD IN ADVERSITY:

Intro:

If we live on this planet long enough, each one of us will experience adversity; the dictionary defines it as “an event or condition marked by unhappiness, misfortune or distress”. We humans tend to long for peace and comfort, but until Jesus makes a new Heavens and a New Earth, those things will never be permanent in our lives. So, what shall we do to prepare for when adversity shows it’s ugly face in our lives? We must prepare for it spiritually, mentally and physically.

Adversity has a way of either drawing out the best or the worst in us. Those times can either devastate us or strengthen us. We’ve all heard of people who have faced adversity well - such as Joni Erickson Tada - and the testimonies and ministries that resulted. We’ve also heard of those who did not handle adversity well - such as a couple who loses a child, gets divorced and never recover. What made the difference? Why does one person come out of adversity well and another not?

It’s never easy when we are over our heads in the waters of adversity and none of us are ever going to respond perfectly to it. So then, how do we prepare for when adversity shows up? We learn from the Word of God and from others who have been there, done that and lived to tell about it!

I heard someone on the radio say, awhile back, “Adversity is the fire under our seat that forces us to stand up and take action - to put our faith into practice”.

John Piper says in his book, “When I Don’t Desire God; How to Fight for Joy”:

“...This book was written by a fellow believer for your help in the fight for joy, so God means for you to fight the fight of faith with fellow combatants at your side. The fight for joy means being part of the Christian militia:” *Hebrews 3:12-13 says; “Take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart...But exhort one another every day...that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”*. . . and Proverbs 17:17 says “*A Friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*”

Many of us have our stories we can tell about difficulties and crazy situations we have endured. But, for the glory of God, some stories have been preserved in the Bible, in history and some of us in this room must tell our stories; all so that the rest of us can learn to glorify God in the adversity this broken World produces for humanity daily. So that (*as in Romans chapter 8*) we can be more than conquerors through Jesus Christ our Lord, who does not intend for us to go through adversity without His power - strengthening our soul and mind, nor without others alongside us to physically help in our efforts.

It is easy to be happy in God and Church when things are going well, it becomes exceedingly more difficult when our life situation backs us into a corner crying on our knees. As Ambassadors for Christ we must be different, react differently, choose and think differently. What makes Christ real to everyone watching us, (children, friends, relatives, spouses) is how we press into our faith and relationship with Christ during a time of difficulty. When we press in, Christ empowers us and imparts his wisdom, love and care. In a dark world, that speaks to those observing us like a megaphone!

The Bible and History has many examples of women who had faith in God and did extraordinary things that impacted history in a good way. You don't know what your place is in the fabric of History God is weaving. Neither did those women. God sees the big picture, and even if your contributions are small, they are significant and designed by God for you to do in this World. Let's examine some...

In the Bible we read about Rahab in the book of *Joshua chapter 2 verses 1 through 21*, who was a citizen of Jericho when Israel had finished their wandering and were commanded by God to take the promised land. We read that she had heard people talking about Israel and fear had fallen on everyone because the God of Israel fought for His people in many ways, producing many miracles. She likely had this connection on the news-feed because she was a prostitute, putting her into circles of influence that are unique. When Joshua sent his spies to evaluate the conditions inside the city, she somehow recognized them and knew the city was in danger. Israel was about to attack Jericho and their God would make sure they win. She invited them into her house, hid them under bundles of flax drying on the roof and lied to protect these Israeli's when her city officials tracked them to her home to arrest them as spies.

She arranged for her family to be spared and Joshua's spies came back during the battle and escorted them out of Jericho. The Bible says she and her family lived among Israel afterward. Rahab is considered by Jewish historians as a convert to Judaism because she confessed that Israel's God was the only God who ruled Heaven and Earth. She married an Israelite man named Salmon, a descendant of Judah. Why is this in the Bible? Because Rahab is one of King David's great great grandmothers! Which means Christ's earthly father Joseph was also of her lineage.

A descendant of Rahab and Salmon is a man named Boaz, Who married a Moabite named Ruth. There's a whole book in the Bible about Ruth. Why? Because she became a believer in the God of Israel, obeyed the law of Moses and God blessed her for it by becoming King David's actual Great-Grandmother.

We read about a woman named Jael in Judges chapter 4 and 5. She was a member of the descendants of Moses' father-in-law called the Kenites who had travelled with Israel from Sinai to Jericho. They are known as Bedouins today. They were metal smiths then, and still are today, who migrated around the area as needed for their skills. Jael was given Israel's Canaanite oppressor's army general, Sisera, by the will God. The Judge, Deborah, prophesied to the commander of Israel's army that his opponent would be slain by a woman. Scripture does not say what thought process brought Jael to act as she did, but she became a heroine of the Bible for her dangerous deeds.

Jael and her people were staying in the the area near Bethlehem. Sisera fled the battlefield when it was obvious his army was defeated. He stopped at the encampment of Jael's people who had a peace agreement with his king and Israel; likely for business reasons. Somehow Jael was the one who greeted him and invited him into her tent to hide. This is a serious break with the protocol of a husband welcoming a male guest (we don't know where her husband was) AND she took him into HER tent, wives had separate tents from their husbands. This was an action of dangerous consequences for her. She could have been accused of adultery, Sisera also was known to be a rapist and murderer which put her at personal risk. Sisera then asked for a drink of water, she generously gave him milk, which was probably

warm and he fell asleep from exhaustion. She then broke another tradition; the Middle Eastern rule of safety for guests. She took hold of her home maintenance tools - a mallet and a tent peg and drove the peg through his temples.

Apparently, Israel's army tracked Sisera to Jael's home. The Bible says Jael went out to meet them and told them to come see the dead Sisera in her tent. Israel proclaimed her as a righteous woman and heroine for her deeds. What! Breaking with tradition and a woman killing the Bad Man is okay? Some theologians say that her actions were justified in the culture of the day. Reasons include; there were no local police, no way of contacting anyone quickly, justice was administered differently in these circumstances. So, somehow based on cultural norms of the day, Jael's actions were justified and noteworthy. She was not considered a "renegade" or "vigilante". Jael chose to side with God's People and she is remembered for it.

Jael, Ruth and Rahab are examples of women doing courageous deeds when they were in fearful circumstances. I've heard someone say: "Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is action in the face of fear."

Many other righteous women are mentioned in the Bible: Mary Magdalene is in all 4 Gospel accounts and the first living person to see Jesus resurrected. Some theologians say that She is an example of Jesus showing that God considers women and men of equal value, which was an extraordinary leap in the world at the time. Most cultures considered Men of utmost importance and women a lesser species. Jesus treated women with appropriate honor, and the same generosity was given to them as with males. In many cultures today, this is still a message that is needed.

These women, because of their trust in the only living God - Their God has mentioned them in Scripture for all time. If you want to look at more women of the Bible, there is a book called "All the Women of The Bible" by Mary Hallet

Now lets look at two Historical ladies:

Susanna Wesley. She lived in England in the late 1600's to early 1700's, the youngest of 25 children. Her father was a protestant pastor and scholar of Oxford until the Conformity act of 1662 which required all church leaders to obey and agree with a government prayer book. He refused to comply, like many other pastors, and lost his pulpit and teaching position as a "non-conformist". Susanna's parents homeschooled their children. Many of her father's scholarly friends tutored his children in various academics. One of which was Samuel Wesley, who chose to conform with the Church of England so he could go to Oxford. After he graduated he married Susanna who was 20 and he was 28. He became the pastor of an unruly rural church. Samuel had many arguments with parishioners over the years. Some of the locals tried to burn down their house on 2 occasions. They had 19 children 10 of which survived to adulthood.

Susanna homeschooled her own children, taught them rules of courtesy, the Bible and broke with traditions of the time by not disciplining her children harshly. She and Samuel separated for 5 months over allegiances to the new King William. During this time she began a schedule of meeting alone with each child during the week to make sure they were cared for. When the king died Samuel returned and the birth of their son John Wesley followed.

Samuel went to London for a long pastors' conference in 1711, leaving an itinerant pastor to care for his church. This pastor preached a lesson on money and debts EVERY Sunday! Susanna became irritated and told her husband about it. She began having a family devotional time every Sunday evening after dinner for her children and servants because she wanted them to hear more from scripture than simply about money and debt. She would lead them in singing a Psalm, then read an archived sermon from her father or Samuel, then close with a song. The servants began telling the townsfolk. People began to request that they attend the evening Family devotions. Soon, the house was filled with nearly 200 people on Sunday nights, and the church had only a handful of people Sunday mornings. The itinerant pastor was offended and wrote to Samuel requesting Susanna cease her activities. Samuel and Susanna had discussed the matter through letters. The evening meetings continued even after Samuel returned.

Samuel passed away in April 1735, John Wesley paid his father's debts and Susanna relied on her children to support her from that time on. John and Charles Wesley joined a group of colonists bound for Georgia colony in the Americas. While there, they experienced God in a new way and came back to England empowered for ministry a few years later.

They used their mother's format for evening worship as a platform for their ministry. This format came to be called "Methodism". John and Charles became so successful that they were able to buy an old Cannon Factory in London. They named it "the Foundry" and started a Christian school, a clinic and had several chapel services during the week. The Foundry even had enough room to house their families, Susanna and a few of the workers. This is where Susanna spent her remaining days. Her final words to her family were, "As soon as I am released, sing a Psalm of praise to God!" She died July 1742.

Another notable woman is Mary Ball Washington who is considered the "Mother of the United States of America". She was not an unusual woman. But, God used her adversities to form a man who would lead a nation. Her first born son was to become President George Washington.

Mary was born November 30th, 1708 into a family of moderate prestige in the Virginia colony with ties to the Courts of England. Both her parents died when she was young so, at age 8, she became the ward of British Colonel George Eskridge while living with her sister who was the Colonel's daughter-in-law. Mary was a beautiful blond, smart, educated in academics and social courtesies, an accomplished horsewoman and housekeeper. She also knew how to shoot guns, had inherited her parents' 1000 acres of land, a few dozen slaves and all the animals there. Her only quality that was considered a "draw-back" in those days was that she was "head-strong". Most men did not consider that a good quality in a wife back then.

Mary did not get married until she was 22 years old. Colonel Eskridge introduced her to his 36 year old Mining manager and brother-in-law, Augustine Washington, who was a widower with 2 sons in finishing school in England.

Mary and Gus became the parents of a large baby boy with blond hair and blue eyes they named George after the Colonel. Mary had 4 other children and managed her household and lands while Gus managed the mining for the Colonel. They sent their children to a private school nearby run by a protestant Pastor. When George was 12yrs old, a family friend rushed into the school yard to get him and his siblings, saying, "your father is severely ill. You must

come home immediately". Augustine Washington had been rushed home from the mines and died soon after. Nothing more was recorded. It would seem Mary wasn't much of a diary keeper either.

Mary never re-married and continued to run her farms and household. She arranged for George to live with his oldest step-brother Lawrence who had been a favorite of George since they met for the first time when George was 8 years old. Lawrence Washington was a Captain in the Kings Navy, and was able to provide further schooling in literature, Algebra, Trigonometry, Geography and other sciences; as well as proper protocols of high society. George would return home on weekends.

When George was 15, Lawrence suggested to Him and His mother that he get a commission in the Navy as there were several openings available. Mary wrote to several friends and family for advice on this. Most responses were encouraging. She received her final response from Augustine's brother who was a court Magistrate in London. He said that most Navy men did not make a profitable living and that if she wanted George to prosper, the navy was not the answer.

George recorded in his own diary that he and his mother argued on this quite passionately while his bags were already packed. He finally agreed with her and became an apprentice land surveyor. Because of this decision, George fell in love with America and it's people during his survey trips. He also became widely known as excellent in his skills and conduct. Through his travels and dealings with many people he received and offer to become an assistant to the Governor of Virginia - the stepping off point of his launch into the story all we Americans know. He and we would likely have a different history if he had joined the British King's Navy!

Mary Ball Washington lived to the age of 81. In her later years, she was known to regularly seclude herself after dinner and pray. She called it her "commune with God" time. Sadly, She contracted cancer. George stopped in to see her on her deathbed between the Continental Congress in Philadelphia and taking the oath of office in New York City as the First President of the New, The United States of America, in April 1789. Mary's last words to George that he recorded in his a letter to a friend were that she encouraged him that he had the joy and pleasure of his mother and of God.

Are you beginning to see a pattern in these stories? As I did my research and have reflected on my own historical challenges, it is plain to me that **God honors the faith of those who trust HIM with their times of adversity.** He breathes into their story His purposes, His intentions and His blessings.

You can read more about history's women of faith at this website: [Www.historyswomen.com](http://www.historyswomen.com)

Now, We will hear from 3 ladies who have agreed to tell us some of their stories.

Closing words: When you are faced with adversity, keep in mind,** God has allowed it** Which means, if you turn your attention to God in your difficulties, He will provide the direction, the power, and the tools to accomplish what He has intended for you. Use what you have at your disposal and he will make up the difference in what ever is missing or lacking. You may never know what God will make of your story, but, someone here may set a course for a group of people, start a line of leaders, change history, save the day, save a nation or birth a great leader.

You don't get to see the end of your story today, but God has already seen it from beginning to end and it already fits in with what He has planned!

James 1: 2-4 says, *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

Hebrews 12:2-3, *[2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

****Prayer?****