

Women, Worship, & the Word
Beloved: The Women in Jesus' Life



Week 6

Woman with the Flow of Blood

The Risk of REAL Faith

INTRODUCTION

In early 2000, I was working my “dream job” in the health field. I got to travel, meet lots of people and train them on how to use this new, advanced medical equipment. After being part of a church planting team for several years and helping others find Jesus, *this was the best job I’d ever had*. I JUST LOVED IT! Then almost overnight, my life completely changed.

While out of town at a conference, I began to experience excruciating back pain. Eventually, I had to be flown home to see a specialist. This began a long, difficult journey for me, of seeing one specialist after another, going through one surgery after another, followed by months and months of rehab. After all I went through, I still didn’t know if I would ever walk again without assistance. The lowest point came for me when my physical pain and limitations forced me to stop working and go on disability. I was a single woman! I *had* to make it and survive on my own! “*What am I going to do now?*” I kept asking myself (and God) over and over.

I knew I had a choice to make. I could keep feeling sorry for myself, remaining depressed and isolated and bitter that I had lost the job I loved so much. Or, *I could trust God!* I could acknowledge that He had seen this coming in my life, that He is ultimately in control of what happens to me and that He has all the answers I will ever need. My desperation led me to seek the Lord and a more intimate relationship with Him. I chose to trust Jesus and walk by faith, and I don’t regret it! I’ve experienced His love for me in ways I might never have if I hadn’t! It hasn’t been easy though! I still have a tremendous amount of pain and I am still hoping to be healed. But in the meantime, *my heart’s desire is to help others know and experience Jesus the way I do!* My hours and days are at His disposal, to use me as He will, to encourage those who are suffering and burdened and without hope like I was!

My desperation made me do something—it made me take action. That is because real faith always results in action. And real faith often takes risks. Like the woman with the flow of blood, her faith made her take action. She went after Jesus on a crowded street where she risked being seen by others. In hopes of getting healed, she risked touching His clothing when it could have resulted in public shame and humiliation. In my situation, faith made me step outside of the security of my isolation and depression, and risk finding out if Jesus would actually use me again to help others know Him and experience His love. In today’s passage, we will consider what James tells us about the characteristics of *real faith*.

Close your eyes, lay aside any distractions and quiet your heart before God.

READ: James 2:14-18

STUDY

1. What does James say makes faith real or complete (v.14)? Paul says our salvation is by faith and “not as a result of works” (Eph.2:8-9). Explain how what James says doesn’t contradict Paul.
2. What example does James give as “proof” that faith is real (v.15-16)? How do you demonstrate your faith through actions? What do you think it means that “faith without actions is dead”?
3. Where do you feel the Lord is presently calling you to *risk* and *put your faith into action*? Spend some time in prayer, asking God to give you what you need to take this risk and begin to act.

Actively Growing FAITH

INTRODUCTION

We've all heard it said regarding physical fitness, "Use it or lose it." It simply means that if you *use your muscles they will build up strength (hypertrophy) but if you don't use your muscles they will lose strength (atrophy)*. Faith can be a lot like muscles because you have to use it. It is either actively growing or actively shrinking. And how we respond to difficult circumstances says a lot about our faith! An actively growing faith responds with open hands and a posture that trusts God and believes what He says. An actively growing faith knows that God's plan for our lives is the best plan.

Many of us Christian women will say we have faith. We will say we believe in Jesus, that He died on a cross for our sins and that we have eternal life. We will describe our faith as a rock, the foundation on which our lives are built. We have faith in God when it comes to all the "spiritual stuff" of life but not when it comes to the hard stuff—where the rubber meets the road. For example, when "until death do us part" comes 40 years *before* death; or when that job you were going to retire from lays you off; or when that long-awaited pregnancy ends in miscarriage.

Actively growing faith doesn't see difficult circumstances just as something that happens *to us*, but something that happens *for us*. We should see difficult circumstances as opportunities to *use faith*—to press into God, believe His Word and find Him faithful. Actively growing faith knows we will be okay because *nothing can separate us from the love of God!* Actively growing faith moves forward even when it seems risky because in the long run, pleasing God is worth more than momentary, immediate pleasure.

In contrast, shrinking faith is one that relies not on God, but on self and only what self can do! Shrinking faith attempts to control for every worst-case scenario. It must make lots of plans—plan A, B, and C followed by more contingency plans if those fail! It chooses to satisfy desires immediately, rather than trust God to fulfill desires in His perfect timing. You know you have an actively shrinking faith if you find yourself always trying to fix your God-sized problems with your own "good ideas." In today's passages we will be considering this subject of faith, the kind that "*the ancients were commended for!*"

Close your eyes, lay aside any distractions and quiet your heart before God.

READ: Hebrews 11:1-6

STUDY

1. What does v.1 say about faith? What does it mean to you to be "sure of" something? What is faith "sure of?" What is our hope as Christians? What are you hoping for right now? What does it mean to you to be "certain of" something? What specifically is faith "certain of?" Where do you need faith the most in your life right now and why?
2. What are examples of faith the writer of Hebrews cites? In what ways are these examples of trusting God and not *self*? What are some examples of faith from your own life?
3. Why do you think it is "impossible to please God without faith?" What basic things must faith believe? Reflect honestly on where you are with faith right now. What do you struggle the most *believing*? What do you think will help you become more sure and confident of God's *faithfulness* to you? Spend time telling the Lord where you struggle and invite His help.

A Father's Desire for His Children

INTRODUCTION

I made a significant career change about 3 years ago. It was risky, but I had been pushed to my breaking point in the job I was doing at the time. The stress of the job was starting to result in health issues, which brought upon more stress. I needed to do something, but was stalling because I didn't want to disappoint anyone. I'm almost 40 years old and I still care what my parents think of my decisions. I want to make them proud!

I was presented with an opportunity to leave my secure corporate role to join a start-up company in the arts industry. After much analysis and careful consideration, I decided to take a risk and give this a try. I was SO excited for this opportunity! But I was also nervous to tell my parents.

I knew I had to tell them but was dreading the conversation. There's no way they would understand the risk I was taking. To make sure I didn't chicken out, I called them a week in advance and told them I had something to discuss with them when I visited them the following weekend. I spent the week mentally preparing and making my list of reasons why the risk was worth it and listing all of my back-up plans. I had outlined all of the "worst-case" scenarios and had a justification for each one.

As I shared the news with them, I started justifying my decision and telling them why this was going to be ok. Then I took a minute to look at their faces. They were both smiling uncontrollably. They weren't asking any questions. They were just happy. I assumed maybe I hadn't explained things correctly or had downplayed the risk. But no, they were so happy I found something that sounded like such a perfect fit! They were relieved I was finally leaving the high stress job that was affecting my health. They said they trusted my judgment and thought this opportunity sounded perfect for me.

I had no idea they would react like this. It was such a wonderful surprise. As it turns out, they just wanted what was best for me. Letting that soak in was such a joy. If my parents could be that excited for me, how much more does God delight in me? And how much more does He want the best in every way for me? Sometimes we get so caught up in the small details and the prayers that haven't been answered yet, we forget just how much God really does want the best in every way for us. Today's passage reminds us of all of the profound ways God cares for us and sincerely wants the best for us.

Close your eyes, lay aside any distraction and quiet your heart before God.

READ: Psalm 103: 1-6, 13

STUDY

1. What does David tell us not to forget? Make a list of the benefits he outlines. Are any of these surprising to you? Do any of these frustrate you because you feel like they haven't happened for you yet? When was the last time you praised God for the ways he cares for you rather than focusing on the "not yet" of unanswered prayers? Take a moment to celebrate the ways God has completely and totally restored the broken areas of your life!
2. What are your desires? Where has God satisfied them with good things? How has He done this in perhaps a *different way* than the way you were asking for in prayer?
3. What does God's compassion look like to you? Is this something you allow yourself to feel? Reflect on areas you could use more of the Lord's compassion. Lift this up in prayer.

The Value of Humility

INTRODUCTION

British author C.S. Lewis believed that *“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.”* Today’s culture believes the opposite and rewards those who think of themselves the most. Leadership and success are defined by getting ahead, being first and on top. The one with the most power, the most stuff, and their face and name in lights *wins!* Humility is equated with weakness—lack of confidence, lack of intelligence, indecisiveness and cowardice. The meek do not inherit the earth; the meek are left behind!

I recently participated in a “meal packing” event for a local charity. The goal was to pack 20,000 meals and donate them to an organization that feeds children. The two hours of packing was set up as a fun and friendly competition. As a table leader, my job was make sure our team packed the most meals and packed them correctly. I decided to immediately train two other team members to do my job and asked them to also train two people for the same thing. Then I asked one member to oversee packing at the top half of the table, and the second member to oversee packing at the bottom half of the table. I took a position packing meals.

Our table ended up being the most efficient and we packed-up the most meals. I stepped aside from my position only once or twice to check our progress. But our team felt confident and empowered enough to let me know they had modified the process to improve efficiency. I happily stepped back to my position and continued packing. I have learned through work experience that when leaders don’t need to be the center, they nurture better and more productive team members. Humble leaders build teamwork and strong teamwork produces results.

I have also learned, through Sunday school lessons and Salvation Army summer camp, the value of humility. Songs like “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red or yellow, black or white, and they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the children of the world” and bible verses like Matthew 18:4, *“Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”* have helped me value being humble and encouraged me to think of myself less! Let’s consider what James says about the importance of humility.

Close your eyes, lay aside any distractions and quiet you heart before God.

READ: James 4:6-10

STUDY

1. Who is God *for* and who is He *against*? Why do you think, “God opposes the proud?” How would you describe being humble? What are some characteristics of humility? How does grace build humility? How does pride contradict humility?
2. What does verse 7 have to do with humility and pride? What can you do to “resist the devil?” What does it look like for you to “submit yourself to God?”
3. According to verses 8-9, how should we approach God? How is this attitude different from how the world tells us to think about ourselves? What are we promised if we are humble (v.10)?
4. Reflect on your own attitudes. Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any prideful thoughts in your heart? Spend time in repentance, seeking forgiveness and cleansing.

When We Feel All Alone

INTRODUCTION

We all heard as kids the saying, *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me*. Most of us come to realize once we are adults that the *opposite* of this is true! *Words can and do hurt!* The pain caused by words can last a lifetime! Ask anyone, and they can barely remember all the scratches, scrapes and bruises they suffered as children. What they cannot forget, however, are the stinging words of a parent or a teacher or a coach or the kids at school. Words can hurt, and the kind of words that hurt the most are *lies!*

One of the hardest things for anyone at any age to experience is *slander*. Slander is legally defined as “*oral defamation*”—*when someone tells one or more persons an untruth about another that then damages the reputation of the person defamed*. Studies have found that it is extremely traumatic to be lied about. For example, to be *falsely accused of a crime* is way more traumatic than to be truly guilty *and arrested!* Slander and its cousin gossip cause great destruction, tearing apart families, friends, churches and communities. It’s been said that gossip spreads the fire, *but slander is the spark that starts it!* People who are slandered often feel isolated and hopeless—powerless to stop the lies from spreading, and completely alone with no one they can trust.

I personally know how devastating slander can be because of a situation I went through several years ago. Someone who I believed was my friend suddenly tried to destroy me through slander. This was a woman I had trusted, who I had spent time with, who I had shared personal experiences and life secrets with and who I had tried to be of help to during her hard times. Then one day she turned on me, attacking my character, my faith, my reputation and saying things about me that were just not true. At the time I was so confused—I couldn’t figure out *how* we had gotten to this place! I felt like my entire world was caving in! There was nothing I could do to stop it and no one I could go to for help. I felt completely alone except for God. In desperation and fear I cried out to Him and He met me! I felt His peace, and He took care of the situation for me! In today’s passage we will consider what David did at a desperate time in his life when he felt all alone, with no one *except for God!*

Close your eyes, lay aside any distractions and quiet your heart before God.

READ: Psalm 142

STUDY

1. Where does David turn in his time of trouble (v.1-2)? Where do you usually turn? How desperate do you think he is? How loud and passionate do you imagine his prayer? How comfortable are you being loud and emotional when praying?
2. What do you think the phrase “my spirit grows faint within me” means (v.3)? When have you felt like this and why? What makes David’s troubles seem even worse (v.4)?
3. Where do you see evidence of faith (trust) and hope in David’s words (v.3,5-7). What are you desperate about right now in your life? In what ways do you feel alone, no one to help you except for God? Identify the truths David found most helpful to him and reflect on how they can give you the strength you need.

