Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.
- Proverbs 31:10

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Ages 10-13

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

The VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Vacation Bible School Lessons for Ages 10-13
Written by Sister Megan Carter

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In Memory of Clifford Hayes

When I was young, I remember my Dad serving as clerk for ordinations and church organizations and later for the Siloam Association. Even at that time, as young as I was, I remember being amazed at how he could manage to take so many notes and then give back an account of the proceedings with such clarity and detail. But the fact is that Dad loved the written word and loved putting words down on paper. I believe that the abilities that I and many others observed flowed from those loves. As Mom has gone through his things since his passing, she has found numerous papers where he had written. The subjects are many as were his interests, but the clear pattern shown is that he loved to write.

As he lay in the hospital, he told us of the reasons that he had for wanting to live. Of course, he wanted to be with us. He wanted to enjoy the life and family with which God had blessed him, but he also still had things that he wanted to do, to finish. Now Dad wasn't strong anymore and his hands had developed a tremor from his medicine, so he wasn't able to do much physical work, but he could still write. Among the things that he wanted to live for was to finish his memoirs and to put his old Sunday School lessons – handwritten – onto his computer.

Above writing, Dad loved the Lord and His Church and was well studied in The Word, from the Law to Grace and Church Doctrine and this expressed itself in the bulk of his writing. He wrote Sunday School lessons for several years and during that time he became involved with writing Bible School lessons, writing one of five lessons. As time went on, he wrote the entire set of Adult lessons and has been doing so for several years now. This year's lessons are the last set that he wrote. He did them all, finishing them before he became ill.

We who participate in the Literature Committee will be hamstrung by losing him, his wisdom, knowledge, and love for God's cause. His ability to work with other people to produce something of value was a treasure that will now leave a void. Among the multitude of things that I will miss are trading rides to committee meetings, getting his insight on our committee proceedings, and the competition between us to see who could produce the most verbiage in a set of lessons (he holds the record, though I believe that I beat him this year).

I can't overestimate Dad's influence on me. I owe a great deal of who I am to him. He helped teach me how to love the Lord and is my first inspiration to write. Every boy with a good father wants to emulate him and to have his approval. Even now, I can still feel the pleasure that I would get when Dad admired something that I had done or when he simply stated that he was proud of me. It encouraged me to continue, to improve and truly that drive continues even now.

I hope that these lessons are profitable to you and that you enjoy them. I hope you agree that they are among the best that my Dad has produced.

Danny Hayes

THE VIRTUOUS MOMAN

LESSON ONE

FAITH

LESSON TEXT
1Samuel 1:1-28

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Ye are the light of the world. This is just one of the comparisons Jesus used in His sermon on the mount in Matthew 5 to describe His children. The world is a dark place, so we have a big job to do. A couple of verses later, Jesus instructs each of us to "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).*" How are we to accomplish these things? In what way did Jesus intend for us, His followers, to let our lights shine? The verse itself gives us a big hint: *that they may see your* ***good works***. Jesus said in John 7:38 that those who believe on Him have "rivers of living water" flowing from their bellies (this is similar to saying "flowing from their hearts"). That living water makes it possible for us to take simply doing nice things and turn it into the work of God. Seeing our willingness to be unselfish in any situation and act lovingly toward everyone with whom we come into contact helps others to see that we're different and that we have the love of a sinless Savior.

Those "good works" and our good intentions do not equate salvation, but they are part of living a virtuous life. What does it mean to be virtuous or to have good virtues? One definition of *virtue* is "moral excellence; goodness; righteousness." Now, we know that Jesus said, "there is none good but one, that is, God (Mark 10:18)," and that we can never hope to be as good or as righteous as God, but we can certainly do our very best to model our lives after that of His Son. We can strive each day to be morally excellent, which simply means doing the best we're able to do and asking God to help us do better. In this series of lessons we're going to discuss five good virtues – five ways in which we can be morally excellent and let our lights shine – faith, wisdom, compassion, courage, and purity.

Please keep in mind that even though the title of this series is *The Virtuous Woman*, the virtues we will study aren't just for girls and women. The examples given in these lessons are female, but the lessons are less about the women and more about the virtues, which should apply to every person – male or female, young or old.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Perhaps the best definition we have for *faith* is found in Hebrews 11:1, which says that *…faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* But what does that mean? First of all, let's look at the word *hope*. Nowadays, we use this word to express our anticipation of something we want to happen, whether we really expect it to or not. For example, "I really **hope** I get a new car for Christmas," or "I didn't really study, but I **hope** I get a good grade on this test." It would be more correct to use the word *hope* in reference to something we really believe will happen or that we actively look forward to and expect to happen. A better example would be saying, "I hope you will feel better very soon," to a sick friend or "I hope tomorrow will be a better day." We can see that hope deals with future events. So, the first part of the definition of *faith* given in the verse above – "the substance of things hoped for" – means that our faith is what assures us that things we expect to happen will actually happen. The rest of the definition – "the evidence of things not seen" – is a little easier to explain. That part means that faith is what convinces us that some of the things we can't see are real. The most obvious example is God. We can see proof of God's existence all around us if we'll just look for it and those of us who are saved can feel His presence, but it's only through faith that we're really able to believe He exists since we can't see Him with our physical eyes.

It's very important to remember as we're considering these definitions that we are unable to manufacture faith on our own. Faith is something that God gives to us when we need it and ask Him for it with a right heart. So, it's only with God's help that we're able to be sure that what we expect to happen will actually happen; and it's only through His help that we're able to be convinced that things we can't see actually exist.

Another way of looking at faith is *being faithful*. You might hear someone use this word to describe a person: a faithful friend or a faithful husband or wife, for example. This might or might not have any reference to a person's spiritual faith, but it does refer to their good character. One definition of *faithful* is "reliable, trusted, or believed." Another one is "loyal; constant." So, if you were considering how to describe a person who is faithful, you might say that they are always the same and that you can count on that.

Of course, the best example of faithfulness is our great God. We know that God is always the same and always will be. If God is faithful (and He is) and if Jesus is faithful (and He is), then we should follow that example and strive to be faithful ourselves.

For I am the LORD, ***I change not****… (Malachi 3:6)*
Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, ***with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning****. (James 1:17)*

WHO HAD FAITH?

There are many examples of people who exhibited faith throughout the Bible. In this lesson we're going to consider the faith of Hannah.

We can draw a few conclusions based on our reading. Hannah's husband, Elkanah, was a good man who followed the sacrificial laws of his day and who took good care of his family. He loved Hannah, especially. So, we can draw from that information that Hannah most likely had a good life except for one problem that plagued her. She desperately wanted a child, but she couldn't have one. She was so upset, in fact, that verse 7 of our lesson text says that she cried and wouldn't eat; she wasn't able to find comfort even in the love of her good husband. Hannah was wise enough to take her problem to the Lord. In verse 15, Hannah tells Eli, the priest at the temple, that she had "poured out [her]

soul before the Lord" and she promised in her prayer that, if He would just allow to her to have a son, she would give him back to the Lord. At the end of her prayer, she was comforted. Verse 18 says she "went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." In other words, she was no longer troubled. She was, by all outward evidence, all better.

Now, why was she no longer troubled? Had God already answered her prayer? Did He give her the son she asked for right then and there? Did He tell her that He would? If He did, we have no record of it. All we know is that Hannah poured out her soul to the Lord and was no longer tormented by her desperate desire for a son after she had prayed. Hannah didn't *know* that her prayer would be answered. She didn't *know* that God would remember her and bless her with a son named Samuel. All Hannah knew was that her God had heard her prayer and seen her distress and that He was able to care for her in the best way possible. She had laid her burden down at the feet of her Lord and that was all that mattered then.

Hannah had faith that God would take care of her. Hannah was a godly woman and, based on her husband's commitment to worshipping God in the customary ways of that time, she was part of a family who was determined to serve God. She knew God's power, His love for her, and His control over her situation and every other situation. Hannah believed that God, who she couldn't see with her physical eyes, was able to make her hope a reality. And she believed that He *would*. And that was all the comfort she needed.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

In the reading of I Samuel 1, we see that part of Hannah's earnest prayer was "vowing a vow" or making a promise to God. She promised that if He would bless her with a son, she would give that son back to God and do her part

in preparing him to serve the priesthood and to serve God throughout his life. Later, after God gave her Samuel, we see that Hannah kept her promise, taking her son back to the temple and leaving him there in the care of Eli the priest. This account of Hannah's life is not only a beautiful picture of her faith *IN* God, but also a fantastic example of a godly woman's faithfulness *TO* God. God was faithful to her and she was faithful to him in return.

LIVING A FAITHFUL LIFE

As mentioned earlier, faith isn't something that we can come up with on our own. God gives us faith. The first time God gives us the faith we need is when we're saved. After that, we must still seek after Him and ask Him to help us grow in faith. Seeking faith from God should become a constant in our lives. There will never be a time when anyone can say, "I have finally achieved enough faith, so now I can stop seeking it." Because of the weakness of our flesh, it's likely necessary for many of us to ask for faith each time we pray.

We spoke earlier of the good character trait of being faithful. Many times our faith and a close relationship with God are part of maintaining good character traits like this one. Asking God to help us be a faithful friend or, someday, a faithful spouse is always appropriate, but this is something we can work toward within ourselves and at all times. You'll remember from earlier in the lesson that part of being faithful is being constant or always the same. Remaining faithful and constant can be difficult for us since we have varying levels of emotion to deal with, but with some self-discipline and assistance from God, we can do it to the best of our ability.

Faith is a powerful tool. In Matthew 19:26, Jesus tells the apostles that "with God all things are possible." Through the faith that God gives us, we are able to believe that and know that it's true. Hannah took comfort in her faith that God was in control of her situation and would work things out for the best. When we ask God for faith, we can take comfort in knowing that whatever our situation in life is, even if it seems impossibly difficult, God is able to handle

it and give us the strength to handle it, too.

...If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Matthew 17:20).

LESSON TWO

WISDOM

LESSON TEXT
1 Samuel 25:1-42

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

WHAT IS WISDOM?

For some people, the word *wisdom* likely brings to mind someone who knows many things. Too many times, wisdom is equated with intelligence. Wisdom is actually much more than just "book smarts." Job 28:28 says that "the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." So we see that true wisdom has to do with fearing God. Let's consider that kind of fear. You may have heard it said that fearing God has more to do with a healthy respectful attitude than actually being afraid. This is partially true. We should not only respect God, but we should also reverence Him. Respecting God means that we hold Him in a place of great importance, but reverencing Him means that we stand in awe of Him. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that we *bow* in awe of Him. Respect may describe where we place God on our list of priorities, but we *show* Him our reverence.

Why do we respect and reverence Him? And what does that really have to do with fear? In Luke 12, Jesus said, "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." In other words, Jesus was advising that we should fear God since He is the one who has the power to cast a soul into hell.

We are not to fear God because He is dangerous; we are to fear God because He is just. We are to fear God because He will act righteously and punish all wrongdoing. We are to fear God because He is offended by sin and we are sinful. We are to fear God because we are so miserably inadequate to stand under His judgment. And our fear of Him is made complete by the fact that it's only through the application of the blood of His

Son that we are rendered able to face Him. We are totally at His mercy.

This is why real fear – respectful, reverential fear – is the beginning of wisdom. It is through this fear that we're first brought to a place of repentance to be saved. And it is through that same fear that we are continually humbled and brought to our knees, seeking God's guidance and mercy throughout our lives. We are totally at His mercy, but thankfully, He is perfectly merciful.

WHO HAD WISDOM?

There are a few great examples of wise women in the scripture. One such woman was Abigail. In our lesson text, we see that David had a problem with Abigail's husband Nabal. Nabal is described as being "churlish and evil in his doings." In other words, he was harsh and badly behaved. Later, when Abigail is pleading with David, she implies that the very definition of the name "Nabal" describes his folly or foolishness.

David's men were inhabiting the same land that Nabal's shepherds were in with their flocks. They had dwelt together peacefully and David expected Nabal to share his goods with them because of that. He was an important man of Israel with a large and very capable group of fighting men, after all, and could rightfully expect whatever he chose from whomever he chose. Nabal did not agree and basically made fun of David, refusing to give him anything. This, of course, did not sit well with David and he gave his men orders to attack and kill every one of Nabal's men. This is where Abigail enters the picture.

We know what Abigail did next, based on our reading, but what was so wise about it? Certainly approaching the man who has just deemed your husband his enemy *does not* seem terribly wise. But Abigail had an inspired-by-God plan. First of all, she didn't go empty handed. She likely knew what David had asked for in the first place and had good sense enough to know how to approach a powerful person: with gifts! She loaded down donkeys with food and wine and sent servants ahead of her to let David know that she was coming. Sending good

things ahead of her this was the first sign of her wisdom.

Next, Abigail approached David humbly. As quickly as she could, she got down from her donkey and bowed on the ground. This showed David that, even though she came to ask him to change his mind, she recognized her position of servitude before him. Both of these things likely softened David's attitude toward her and made him more willing to listen to whatever she had to say.

When Abigail began to speak, we start to see how great her wisdom truly was, as well as the source of that great wisdom. After further expressing her humility and regret for her husband's action, she begins to talk about David's Lord and the Lord that she obviously knew and feared. Abigail's words show us that she understood and had no doubt that God was on David's side and helped him to be victorious in his battles. Obviously, Abigail knew that Nabal had done wrong. She understood that he deserved punishment; her plea with David was that he spare Nabal's men. She reminded David to let God do the punishing, saying that "the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling." She also advised him that leaving it in God's hands would leave him no regrets concerning the shedding of innocent blood.

The most important basis of all of Abigail's wisdom was that she knew God, feared Him, and drew her wisdom from Him. Because she followed God, she was able to approach David in just the right way to help him see that he should change his mind. In verses 32 and 33 of our reading, David says, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which has kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." We can see that David immediately recognized that Abigail was acting upon God's leadership. So, Abigail approached David in a wise manner and had great advice to give him, but in the end, David's recognition of God's hand in the whole situation is likely what had the most profound effect on him.

Abigail's wisdom is showcased by her willingness to follow God's instructions.

WISDOM IN YOUR LIFE

James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Another way of saying this is that God gives more than enough wisdom to all who ask for it without making them feel bad about for asking for it. So the very simple answer to the question "how do I have wisdom?" is this: Just ask God for it!

Now, as with any other prayer, our request for wisdom must be sincere. Another godly example of wisdom comes to mind: Solomon. God was pleased with him and gave him the opportunity to ask for anything he desired. Solomon could have asked for great riches, but he asked for wisdom. And God gave him both!

It's true that godly wisdom is something with which God blesses us when we ask for it, but we can also try to the best of our ability to live wisely. Another verse in James describes the characteristics that go along with godly wisdom: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." These characteristics could be further broken down, but in a broad sense, we can say that a wise person lives a good life and does what's right. A big part of wisdom is slowing down enough to consider each situation, each decision, and each action before making any moves. Most of the time, discerning what's right and what's wrong isn't the difficult part; actually doing what's right is what proves to be difficult sometimes.

This is why it's so important for us to seek God's will and ask Him to give us wisdom. Being close to God makes the difficult times much easier. Think of the fearful situation Abigail was in. Approaching your husband's newest enemy sounds pretty scary, but she didn't seem to give it a second thought.

Our goal should be to have such a close relationship with God and being so full of the wisdom He gives us that when we approach a difficult situation we, like Abigail, don't give a second thought to doing what's right. Doing what's right will always prove to work out better in the end and make us a lot happier, too!

For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it (Proverbs 8:11). For whoso findeth [wisdom] findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD (Proverbs 8:35).

LESSON THREE

COMPASSION

LESSON TEXT
Exodus 2:1-6

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

WHAT IS COMPASSION?

The formal definition of *compassion* is "a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering." Some other attributes that are closely related to compassion are helpfulness, kindness, and mercy. Love is related to compassion as well, but in a different way; compassion (and the other attributes just listed) flow *from* love. When we love someone, whether it's someone with whom we have a close relationship or just a general love for mankind, we will feel their joy and pain and seek to help them when they're hurting.

WHY SHOULD WE HAVE COMPASSION?

In the previous lessons, we have looked to a specific scripture to help us define the virtues we've been studying. Since compassion comes naturally to most people and is a bit easier to understand, we'll look more at *why* we should be compassionate. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." So, our primary example of compassion is none other but God Himself. He is always near, always merciful, and always ready to comfort those who are troubled. And, according to these verses, we are able to comfort others because He first comforts us.

In other places, God is said to be "full of compassion" (Psalm 86:15, 78:38). Likewise, there are many instances of Jesus' compassion toward the people with whom He came into contact. A few examples include His weeping at the time of Lazarus' death (John 11:35), His sympathy for the woman whose son He raised from the dead (Luke 7:13), and the many times He healed someone.

Based on all of this, we can see that the foremost reasons for us to strive to be more compassionate with others is that God is compassionate with us and Jesus was compassionate with others while He walked on Earth. If we make it our goals to live a godly life and to be Christ like, as we rightly should, then we will strive to be as compassionate as possible.

WHO HAD COMPASSION?

A biblical example of a woman who showed compassion is Pharaoh's daughter. This example is somewhat different from the examples given in previous lessons since we don't really know if her actions were based upon a godly character or merely upon human emotions. Regardless, we do know that God used her to accomplish His purpose.

The story of Pharaoh's daughter finding the baby Moses floating along the river in his little basket is very familiar. Perhaps something that is little considered, however, are the feelings that moved Pharaoh's daughter to rescue Moses, rather than leaving him there to die as her father's orders would have dictated. When she opened the basket, she saw that the baby was crying and verse 6 of our lesson text specifically says that "she had compassion on him." Now, it is certainly appropriate to imagine that her feelings of compassion sprang from the natural feelings most anyone, perhaps especially a woman, would have toward a distressed baby. Not only was he distressed, but he was alone – abandoned, as far as she could tell – and floating down a river in a basket. All of these facts might have multiplied the sympathy she felt for him, but she also noted that he was "one of the Hebrews' children." Perhaps Pharaoh's daughter didn't completely agree with her father's harshness toward the Hebrews. Perhaps her compassion wasn't for the child alone, but for his mother, his family, and all of his people. Pharaoh's daughter may or may not have been saved. This is something the scriptures do not reveal to us. All we can know about her is that she

was kind toward an infant. One example that we can take from her, however, is to always be willing to help, no matter who you are and no matter who it is that needs help. Pharaoh's daughter was Egyptian royalty. Her family "owned" the Hebrews as slaves, but because of the compassion she felt she chose to rescue this one little slave baby who was so much lower than her as far as worldly rank was concerned. We should never consider ourselves "too good" to help those less fortunate than us.

COMPASSION IN YOUR LIFE

Each of us has so many things going on in our own lives that it's easy to overlook those around us. We may sometimes become selfish or self-absorbed without ever really meaning to or realizing that it has happened. And, unfortunately, sometimes when we do stop to notice others around us, it's in too much of a negative light. It seems much easier to recognize others' faults or to let the differences we may have with others stand in the way of our acting in a godly manner.

Feeling compassion for others in bad circumstances may come naturally to us, but we have to remember that, sadly, we're plagued with sin and those compassionate feelings are sometimes covered up with more negative feelings that seem to come naturally to us as well. Pharaoh's daughter was no different. She had, no doubt, been raised to believe that the Hebrews were beneath her and her family. She could have easily sneered down at the baby Moses and considered herself much too important to deal with a baby who was nothing more than a slave. She could have chosen to overlook her feelings of compassion, but fortunately she chose instead to act on those feelings and use her position to help instead of harm.

In many instances it is our feelings of indifference that stop us from acting out of compassion. Maybe we feel badly for someone who's having a hard time, but choose to remain uninvolved since it's none of our business or doesn't directly affect us. The most important thing to remember in these instances is the scripture we discussed early in this lesson, which says that God comforts us in our times of need so that we may be able to, in turn, comfort those around us who are in times of need.

When we consider that we are all sinners who experience various kinds of hurts throughout our lives and that Jesus died for each and every person with whom we come into contact just the same as He died for us, it makes it feel a bit more personal. Furthermore, when we know God and experience His love and comforting presence, we will become more apt and more able to "recycle" that love and comfort to show it to other people. Then the people around us will not only experience our love and friendship, but the love of a sinless Savior as well.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you (John 15:12).

LESSON FOUR

COURAGE

LESSON TEXT
Esther 4:6-16

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

WHAT IS COURAGE?

When we consider the word courage, we often picture people such as fire fighters, soldiers, police officers, and the like. What makes these people courageous? What motivates them to risk their lives for others? How could I ever do something like that?

But, what is courage? According to Webster's 1828 Dictionary, courage is "bravery; that quality of mind which enables men to encounter danger and difficulties with firmness, or without fear or depression of spirits." Simply put, courage is the strength to face danger without being overcome by fear. Jesus displayed the ultimate act of courage when he, though having no sin of his own, took upon him the sin of the world and paid the penalty for that sin – death. Even in the darkest of hours, when his closest followers had denied him, Jesus chose the will of God the Father – "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done (Luke 22:42)."

WHO HAD COURAGE?

Many people in the Bible showed great courage at many times. Joshua and Caleb advised Israel to go into the land of promise and fight in the face of great enemies (Numbers 14:6-12). Gideon led an army of 300 men against the Midianite army of 135,000 (Judges 7). David defeated the champion of the Philistines with only a sling (1 Samuel 17). Deborah led the Israelites out of captivity from the Canaanites (Judges 4). But the story we want to focus on is found in the book of Esther.

About 475 years before Jesus was born, the Jews were under control of the Persian Empire and King Ahasuerus. During this time Ahasuerus called together all his princes and top advisors for a great feast. When Queen Vashti was summoned to come before the feast, she refused. This made Ahasuerus so angry that he deposed the queen which meant he would need a new one. Many women were brought before the king, and Esther, a Jewess, was chosen. During all this time, her uncle and caretaker Mordecai convinced her not to reveal that she was a Jew.

After Esther became queen, Ahasuerus appointed a man named Haman to be his chief advisor. Haman hated Mordecai because Mordecai refused to reverence him as a deity. This made Haman so angry that he tricked the king into signing a decree to have all the Jews put to death. When Mordecai heard about this, he asked Esther to go before the king, reveal that she was a Jew, and ask for a pardon for her people. The Persians, though, had a law that stated nobody could go before the king without his invitation. If they did, and the king did not approve, they would be put to death. Esther was afraid Ahasuerus would not receive her, and she told this to Mordecai.

Mordecai reminded her that she was already under a death sentence – "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews (Esther 4:13)." Mordecai also knew that the Jews would be delivered somehow – "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed…" Moreover, Mordecai believed that it was God himself who had placed Esther in a position to save her people – "and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this (Esther 4:14)?"

This advice encouraged Esther to go into the King's chamber. She showed courage that few have ever shown – "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish (Esther 4:16)." In her desire to see her people rescued, she rose above the fear

of losing her own life.

Esther did go in before the king, and he held out the golden scepter – the sign that he would receive her. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet. At the banquet the king asked what Esther's request was; she asked them to come to another banquet the next day. Then she would ask her petition of the king. During the evening, Haman had a gallows built for Mordecai. The next day at the banquet, Ahasuerus asked Esther what her request was. She explained how her people had been sentenced to death. He asked who could have possibly done this. Esther told how Haman had tricked the king into doing this. Ahasuerus was very angry and had Haman hanged on the very same gallows that Haman had built to hang Mordecai. Mordecai was then placed in the position of chief advisor to the king.

However, Esther was not done just yet. The Persians had another law: once the king had decreed something it could not be undone. So the law to have all the Jews put to death still stood. Esther asked Ahasuerus if something could be done about this – "For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred (Esther 8:6)?" Since the former decree could not be undone, the king made a new decree that allowed the Jews to stand for their lives and defend against their attackers. When the day came for the attack to take place, not a single Jew died. This deliverance from annihilation is still celebrated by the Jews today during the feast of Purim. This allowed the Jews to eventually return to Israel, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and rediscover their love of God. Esther's God-given courage saved the nation of Israel, making possible the birth of another courageous young Jewess – Mary, the mother of our Lord.

All of this was made possible by the God-given courage of one young girl. She overcame her fear, and stood strong for God's people. Perhaps Mordecai brought to her remembrance the words of Moses – "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth

go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Deuteronomy 31:6)."

LIVING A COURAGEOUS LIFE

If you have been saved, then you are called to live a courageous life – "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7)." Jesus commanded us that we should carry His truth to the entire world. He even told us how to accomplish this – "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16)." However, this lifestyle does come at a great cost.

Jesus warned us, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me (John 15:18-21)."

If we truly follow after Jesus, the world will not like the choices we make. We will choose not to follow the crowd. We will avoid things like alcohol, drugs, cursing, gossip, hate, bullying, etc. Others will most likely laugh at you, call you names, and possibly even threaten you. This should only embolden us to follow Jesus more closely; because, unlike everyone else, he will never leave us or forsake us. In fact, he promises us victory over all our enemies. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33)."

We need to have the courage to stand up, even in the face of certain persecution. We must take forth the gospel of the grace of Jesus to the world. How else will they escape such certain destruction? If we are timid and weak, and refuse to speak, where will they hear of the great salvation offered by God? Even if we are put to

death, we still have victory!

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1Corinthians 15:54-58)."

LESSON FIVE

PURITY

LESSON TEXT
Luke 1:28-38

WRITTEN BY
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WHAT IS PURITY?

Many times the word *pure* is used to describe a solution of some type. Bottled water, for instance, is often described somewhere on its labeling as being pure. One of the formal definitions of *purity* is "freedom from any admixture or modifying addition." In other words, the thing being described as *pure* is in its truest form. It has not been modified in any way. Another formal definition which actually sounds totally different from the first one mentioned is "freedom from guilt or evil; innocence." Another way we might word this definition is "freedom from sin."

These two definitions are actually quite similar since sin in a person's life would alter their purity in the same way that some foreign substance, motor oil or rubbing alcohol perhaps, would alter the pure state of a bottle of water. Motor oil is thick and dark colored after it has been drained from a vehicle. Adding some of this to a bottle of water would certainly alter its purity and it would be immediately obvious that no one should drink from that bottle. One look at that bottle of water would show you that it was obviously ruined. Rubbing alcohol, on the contrary, is clear and wouldn't change the appearance of the bottled water at all, although a large amount would make it taste bad and would render it unsafe to drink. You might be able to faintly smell it, but otherwise you would never know that bottle held anything other than water until you took a drink. And even then, if a small enough amount was mixed in, the rubbing alcohol might be totally undetectable.

The sin that alters our lives can be described similarly. Some people make poor choices that not only affect them profoundly, but also others they come into contact with along the way. Addicts, rapists, and liars are a

few examples. These are people who show up on the news and in the middle of public controversies. These are people who you don't have to know too well to recognize the sin in their lives. Their actions and the consequences of their sin make it readily obvious. Others seem to move through life just fine, doing a pretty good job of keeping their lives in tact, all the while harboring secret sins in their lives. Maybe no one around them has any idea that they are anything other than a good, moral person. Maybe they've been living with their seemingly "little" sins for so long that they don't even recognize them as sins anymore. A few examples of these less noticeable sins might be gossiping, hating someone, or taking part in inappropriate things (such as some movies, books, music, etc.).

Some people believe that these types of things are harmless since they don't do out-and-out harm to anyone else. It's important to remember that our sins may be secret to everyone around us, but they are never secret to God. And even if our actions do no harm to any other person, they do harm to our relationship with God. Jesus died a terrible death on the cross for every sin committed by mankind, whether that might be murdering another person or just hating him. Sin, regardless of its magnitude, dirties up our hearts and our lives. Sin makes us impure.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)

WHO HAD PURITY?

The first person who comes to mind when we think of purity must surely be Mary, the mother of Christ. Really, we know very little about her, but what little we do know demonstrates her positive characteristics.

Many people consider Mary to be pure since she had never been married or had children before the birth of our Lord. This is certainly part of the reason for her purity, but there must have been more to it than that. Surely there were many other young women who also had never been married or had children at the time she lived. In our lesson text, we see that the angel who visited Mary called her "highly favoured" and blessed among

women and later tells her that she had "found favour with God." After Mary understood what was happening to her, she was immediately willing to serve God in the manner He had chosen for her: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." It is as if she was saying, "Here I am, Lord. Do with me what you will."

It's true that there isn't too much information we can draw from Mary's life to use as an example in our own, but this simple fact is really the only example we need. Some people have a lot of wisdom to share. Some people do things throughout their lives that help us see how we should live. But Mary's great wisdom and example can be seen in this one simple act: she submitted to God's will. Although Mary wasn't perfect, she was obviously a special young woman and she most likely lived a good, moral, pure life. It's likely that all of these good characteristics sprang from her willingness to seek God's will and to follow it. Mary's example can help us not only to live with a pure heart, but to have all the other virtues we've discussed through this series of lessons. When we submit ourselves to God's will, He will assist us in all of these things. Mary was surely faithful, compassionate, wise, and courageous, *and* pure in heart. Seeking God's will in our lives helps us to become all these things as well.

PURITY IN YOUR LIFE

Now that we've considered the definition of purity and looked at a good biblical example of someone who tried to live with a pure heart, let's think about how we should apply these things to our own lives. In the first section of this lesson, we compared sin in our lives to impurities in a bottle of water. Some sins are outwardly obvious, like motor oil in a water bottle, and some people truly struggle with those very apparent sins. Most of us probably feel like it's easy to avoid stealing something, but there are those who are honestly tempted by stealing.

Other sins, the ones that happen in our hearts and minds, are perhaps more difficult to overcome. We'll use the example of hating someone. It's possible to hate someone and have bad

thoughts about them without ever actually doing anything to them; the hated person would probably never even know they were hated! There are other "quiet" sins like this one that might never affect anyone other than the person committing them.

An important first step in living a pure life is knowing what sins tempt you. Satan certainly knows what tempts us most and will use those things against us, so it's very important for us to be able to recognize our temptations. The less obvious sins – the ones that hide themselves like rubbing alcohol in water – can be nearly unrecognizable since they are disguised as our own thoughts. The world would tell us that some things come more naturally to us based on our personality type – that it's not wrong, it's just part of our individual make up. Sin *is* a part of our make up, unfortunately, and we may struggle in our effort to untangle our thoughts from that sin.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." In these verses, the Apostle Paul compares our spiritual struggle against sin to a physical battle in which a soldier fights against specific enemies and those he defeats, he takes prisoner. In the same way, he says we are to take every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Paul's advice to us is to carefully consider not just our actions, but *every single thought* and make sure it is Christ like.

That sounds a whole lot like submitting our lives to the will of God, like Mary did. It also sounds like a very big job since we are constantly producing new thoughts. Obviously, this isn't something we can do on our own. A couple chapters after Paul's comparison we just discussed, we find where the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." This is a comfort to us in many instances, including in our struggle to control our thoughts. God's grace is sufficient. We only have to ask for His help.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1Peter 5:7)