

LEADER GUIDE

FIERCE

Women of the Bible Who Changed the World



A BIBLE STUDY BY

JENNIFER COWART

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Leader Guide

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JENNY YOUNGMAN, CONTRIBUTOR

Abingdon Women/Nashville

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About the Author

Jennifer Cowart is the executive pastor at Harvest Church, a United Methodist congregation in Warner Robins, Georgia, that she and her husband, Jim, began in 2001. With degrees in Christian education, counseling, and business, she has been integral to the development of the Emerging and Discipleship Ministries at Harvest, including more than three hundred small groups that meet in homes and workplaces. As a gifted Bible teacher and speaker, Jen brings biblical truth to life through humor, authenticity, and everyday application. She is the author of the Bible study *Messy People: Life Lessons from Imperfect Biblical Heroes* and coauthor with her husband, Jim, of several small group studies, including *Hand Me Downs* and *Living the Five*. They are the proud parents of two children, Alyssa and Joshua, and have a son-in-law, Andrew.

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Introduction

The word *fierce* is trendy. It's used to describe women who are extreme athletes, high-level executives, and supermodels. It describes women who are at the top of their game and making a difference in the world. In fact, if you look up the word *fierce* in the dictionary, you'll see adjectives such as "strong," "powerful," "aggressive," and even "savage." That definition makes me think of the wild cats of Africa and India—untamed, dangerous, beautiful, and so powerful. When we hear this description of *fierce*, it may not fit our image of what a beautiful woman of God should be. It may sound too intense or even masculine. But under God's control, a fierce woman of God is a beautiful warrior—not savage or violent but powerful and dangerous in the best sense of the word.

During this six-week study, we are going to dig into fierce women of God in the Bible who lived courageously, obediently, and faithfully in order to fulfill God's plan. Their stories show us the power that comes from resting in God's love and forgiveness—and how this power can lead to amazing things as we lean into His plans for each of us. When we think of fierce women in the Bible, we tend to think of well-known women such as Sarah, Rachel, Ruth, Esther, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus. But in these lessons we will be looking at some lesser-known women such as the midwives of Egypt, Shiphrah and Puah, and Lois and Eunice. Why? Because these women were heroines too. They show us that the faithfulness of ordinary women can change the world. In fact, fierce women such as these have been changing the world for thousands of years. Many have received little recognition, but they lived fiercely anyway. And we can too!

About the Participant Workbook

Before the first session, distribute copies of the participant workbook to the members of your group. Be sure to communicate that they are to complete the first

week of readings *before* your first group session. For each week there are five devotional lessons that include both Scripture study as well as reflection and prayer. The lessons are designed to lead women through a quiet time with God where they savor His Word and allow Him to speak to them. Encourage the women in your group to find a quiet place—maybe a favorite chair or a spot on the porch, weather permitting—where they can spend their devotional study time.

Each day the lesson follows the same format: Settle, Focus, Reflect, and Pray. On average the lessons can be completed in about twenty to thirty minutes—depending on how much time is spent in prayer. Completing these readings each week will prepare the women for the discussion and activities of the group session.

About This Leader Guide

As you gather each week with the members of your group, you will have the opportunity to watch video content, discuss and respond to what you're learning, and pray together. You will need access to a television and DVD player with working remotes.

Creating a warm and inviting atmosphere will help to make the women feel welcome. Although optional, you might consider providing snacks for your first meeting and inviting group members to rotate in bringing refreshments each week.

This leader guide and the DVD will be your primary tools for leading each group session. In this book you will find outlines for six group sessions, each formatted for either a 60-minute or 90-minute session:

60-Minute Format

Leader Prep	(Before the session)
Welcome and Opening Prayer	5 minutes
Icebreaker	5 minutes
Video(s)	15–20 minutes
Group Discussion	25 minutes
Closing Prayer	5 minutes

90-Minute Format

Leader Prep	(Before the session)
Welcome and Opening Prayer	5–10 minutes
Icebreaker	5 minutes
Video(s)	15–20 minutes

Group Discussion	30–35 minutes
Deeper Conversation	15 minutes
Closing Prayer	5 minutes

As you can see, the 90-minute format is identical to the 60-minute format but has more time for welcoming/fellowship and group discussion, plus a deeper conversation exercise for small groups. Or your group might prefer to limit the welcoming time and extend the closing prayer time. Feel free to adapt or modify either format, as well as the individual segments and activities, in any way to meet the specific needs and preferences of your group.

Here is a brief overview of the elements included in both formats:

Leader Prep (Before the session)

For your preparation prior to the group session, this section provides an overview of the week's Bible story and theme, the main point of the session, key Scriptures, and a list of materials and equipment needed. Be sure to review this section, as well as the session outline, to plan and prepare before the group meets. If you choose, you also may find it helpful to watch the DVD segment in advance.

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5–10 minutes, depending on session length)

To create a warm, welcoming environment as the women are gathering before the session begins, consider lighting one or more candles, providing coffee or other refreshments, playing worship music, or all of these. (Bring an iPod, smartphone, or tablet and a portable speaker if desired.) Be sure to provide name tags if the women do not know one another or you have new participants in your group. Then, when you are ready to begin, pray the opening prayer that is provided or offer your own.

Icebreaker (5 minutes)

Use the icebreaker to briefly engage the women in the topic while helping them feel comfortable with one another.

Video (15–20 minutes)

Play the “Getting Started: A Devotional Reflection” video (optional), taking a couple of minutes to focus your hearts and minds on God's Word. Then watch the week's teaching video segment together. Be sure to direct participants to the Video Viewer Guide in the participant workbook, which they may complete as they watch the video. (Answers are provided on page 61.)

Group Discussion (25–35 minutes, depending on session length)

After watching the video, choose from the questions provided to facilitate group discussion (questions are provided for both the video and the participant workbook). For the workbook portion, you may choose to read aloud the talking points—*which are excerpts from the participant workbook*—or express them in your own words; then use one or more of the questions that follow to guide your conversation.

Note that more material is provided than you will have time to include. Before the session, select what you want to cover, putting a check mark beside it in your book. Reflect on each question and make some notes in the margins to share during your discussion time. Page references are provided for those questions that relate to specific questions or activities in the participant workbook. For these questions, invite group members to turn in their workbooks to the pages indicated. Participants will need Bibles in order to look up various supplementary Scriptures.

Depending on the number of women in your group and the level of their participation, you may not have time to cover everything you have selected, and that is OK. Rather than attempting to bulldoze through, follow the Spirit's lead and be open to where the Spirit takes the conversation. Remember that your role is not to have all the answers but to encourage discussion and sharing.

Deeper Conversation (15 minutes)

If your group is meeting for 90 minutes, move next to this exercise for deeper sharing in small groups, dividing into groups of two or three. This is a time for women to share more intimately and build connections with one another. (Encourage the women to break into different groups each week.) Before the session, write the question or questions you want to discuss on a marker board or chart paper for all to see. Give a two-minute warning before time is up so that the groups may wrap up their discussion.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Close by leading the group in prayer. Invite the women to briefly name prayer requests. To get things started you might share a personal request of your own. As women share their requests, model for the group by writing each request in your participant workbook, indicating that you will remember to pray for them during the week.

As the study progresses, you might encourage members to participate in the closing prayer by praying out loud for one another and the requests given. Ask

the women to volunteer to pray for specific requests, or have each woman pray for the woman on her right or left. Make sure name tags are visible so that group members do not feel awkward if they do not remember someone's name.

After the prayer, remind the women to pray for one another throughout the week.

Before You Begin

As we begin this journey, let's remember that we are meant to be fierce women of God. As we live with the strong sense of knowing who we are in Christ, we will have the courage to live obediently and faithfully into His great, big plans—just like the women we will be studying together. And like them, we can change the world. Let's be fierce!

Jennifer



Basic Leader Helps

Preparing for the Sessions

- Check out your meeting space before each group session. Make sure the room is ready. Do you have enough chairs? Do you have the equipment and supplies you need? (See the list of materials needed in each session outline.)
- Pray for your group and each group member by name. Ask God to work in the life of every woman in your group.
- Read and complete the week's readings in the participant workbook and review the session outline in the leader guide. Put a check mark beside the discussion questions you want to cover and make any notes in the margins that you want to share in your discussion time. If you want, you may also choose to view the video segment.

Leading the Sessions

- Greet each woman personally as she arrives. If desired, take attendance. (This will assist you in identifying members who have missed several sessions so that you may contact them and let them know they were missed.)
- At the start of each session, ask the women to turn off or silence their cell phones.
- Always start on time. Honor the efforts of those who are on time.
- Encourage everyone to participate fully, but don't put anyone on the spot. Invite the women to share as they are comfortable. Be prepared to offer a personal example or answer if no one else responds at first.
- Facilitate but don't dominate. Remember that if you talk most of the time, group members may tend to listen passively rather than engage personally.
- Try not to interrupt, judge, or minimize anyone's comments or input.

- Remember that you are not expected to be the expert or have all the answers. Acknowledge that all of you are on this journey together, with the Holy Spirit as your leader and guide. If issues or questions arise that you don't feel equipped to answer or handle, talk with the pastor or a staff member at your church.
- Encourage good discussion, but don't be timid about calling time on a particular question and moving ahead. Part of your responsibility is to keep the group on track. If you decide to spend extra time on a given question or activity, consider skipping or spending less time on another question or activity in order to stay on schedule.
- Try to end on time. If you are running over, give members the opportunity to leave if they need to. Then wrap up as quickly as you can.
- Be prepared for some women to want to hang out and talk at the end. If you need everyone to leave by a certain time, communicate this at the beginning of the session. If you are meeting in a church during regularly scheduled activities or have arranged for childcare, be sensitive to the agreed-upon ending time.
- Thank the women for coming, and let them know you're looking forward to seeing them next time.

Introductory Session

Note: This session is designed to be 60 minutes in length.

Leader Prep

Overview of the Session

This session is an opportunity to give an overview of the study; get to know one another and share hopes for the study; and handle some housekeeping details such as collecting information for a group roster (name, email address, primary phone number, and, if desired, mailing address), making decisions regarding childcare and refreshments, and distributing books or providing instructions for purchasing. You also will watch a short video and pray together.

Note: Participants need to complete the devotional lessons for Week 1 prior to the session for Week 1.

Main Point of the Study

When we examine the lives of fierce women in the Bible, we see that they were ordinary women who changed the world by being faithful and obedient. In fact, fierce women such as these have been changing the world for thousands of years. Many have received little recognition, but they lived fiercely anyway. And we can too!

Key Scripture

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

What You Will Need

- Fierce DVD and a DVD player
- marker board or chart paper and markers
- stick-on name tags and markers (optional)
- iPod, smartphone, or tablet and portable speaker (optional)

Session Outline

Welcome and Opening Prayer (15 minutes)

To create a warm, welcoming environment as the women are gathering before the session begins, consider lighting one or more candles, providing coffee or other refreshments, playing worship music, or all of these. (Bring an iPod, smart-phone, or tablet and a portable speaker if desired.) Be sure to provide name tags if the women do not know one another or you have new participants in your group. Take time to introduce yourselves and fellowship for a while. Then, when you are ready to begin, pray the following prayer or offer your own:

Dear God, thank You for using Your Word to guide, instruct, correct, and shape us so that we are prepared and equipped to be the powerful women You need us to be. Help us to learn to be faithful and obedient women who honor You, Lord. We love You. Amen.

Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Go around the circle two times, inviting the women to share short, “popcorn” responses to one of the following questions each time:

- What do you think of when you hear the word *fierce*?
- How would you describe a fierce woman of God?

Video (5 minutes)

Play the Introductory Session video segment on the DVD.

Group Discussion (25 minutes)

- Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. When we apply these verses to our study of fierce women in the Bible, what can we hope to gain from digging into their stories?
- Review the list of fierce women we will be exploring in this study. Who are least familiar to you? How are you encouraged to know that even lesser-known women of the Bible were heroines who changed the world?
- What are your hopes for this study? What do you want to gain from it?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Close the session by taking personal prayer requests from group members and leading the group in prayer. As you progress to later weeks in the study, you might encourage members to participate in the closing prayer by praying out loud for one another and the requests given.



Week 1

Shiphrah and Puah

Exodus 1

Leader Prep

Bible Story and Theme Overview

This week we explored the story of Shiphrah and Puah. Shiphrah and Puah were ordinary midwives who were ordered to kill the Hebrew boys they helped to deliver. What sets Puah and Shiphrah apart is that in a dangerous and difficult situation they were courageously faithful. They quietly chose to honor God first in their lives, and in return God blessed them. They were human, which means that they were afraid; but they chose to honor God in the midst of their fear. Their fear of God was greater than their fear of an earthly ruler. And as we saw in our readings this week, God rewarded their faithfulness.

How awesome that God would take two simple midwives and use them in such an incredible way! This is God's specialty—taking ordinary people and using them in extraordinary ways. How does God use ordinary people? It's through fierce obedience and faithfulness. May we, like Puah and Shiphrah, be fiercely courageous and live into the extraordinary callings that God has for us; and then may we enjoy the blessings that He will shower upon us!

Main Point

Shiphrah and Puah were women of quiet strength, fearless determination, and faithful resolve who received great blessings from God for their obedience. With the power of God at work in us, we can follow their lead and be fiercely courageous.

Key Scripture

¹⁵Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah:

¹⁶“When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver. If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.” ¹⁷But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king’s orders. They allowed the boys to live, too. (Exodus 1:15-17)

What You Will Need

- Fierce DVD and a DVD player
- marker board or chart paper and markers
- stick-on name tags and markers (optional)
- iPod, smartphone, or tablet and portable speaker (optional)

Session Outline

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5–10 minutes, depending on session length)

To create a warm, welcoming environment as the women are gathering before the session begins, consider lighting one or more candles, providing coffee or other refreshments, playing worship music, or all of these. (Bring an iPod, smartphone, or tablet and a portable speaker if desired.) Be sure to provide name tags if the women do not know one another or you have new participants in your group. Then, when you are ready to begin, pray the following prayer or offer your own:

Dear God, thank You for the witness of faithful women like Shiphrah and Puah who teach us to be fierce in our obedience to You and in our care for others. Thank You for this time that we can come together with fierce sisters to study the Scriptures and learn from one another. Thank You for Your presence within and among us. Amen.

Icebreaker (5 minutes)

Invite the women to share short, “popcorn” responses to the following question:

- Who are some women in the world today whom you would describe as “fierce”? What about them makes them fierce?

Video (15–20 minutes)

Play the “Getting Started: A Devotional Reflection” video for Week 1 (optional), taking a couple of minutes to focus your hearts and minds on God’s Word. Then play the teaching video segment for Week 1. Invite participants to complete the Video Viewer Guide for Week 1 in the participant workbook as they watch (page 40).

Group Discussion (25–35 minutes, depending on session length)

Note: More material is provided than you will have time to include. Before the session, select what you want to cover, putting a check mark beside it in your book. Page references are provided for questions related to questions or activities in the participant workbook. For these questions, invite participants to share the answers they wrote in their books.

Video Discussion Questions

- What did you hear about the recurring instruction in Scripture, “Do not be afraid”? Why do you think we see that instruction over and over again throughout the Bible?
- Do you consider yourself “fierce”? Why or why not?
- In what area of your life might you need to find a fierceness in your spirit?

Participant Workbook Discussion Questions

1. [Shiphrah and Puah were ordered to kill all Hebrew babies but] allowed the boys to live! What an act of courage; what fierce faithfulness to the God they served. Their fear of the Lord and His laws took precedence over what an earthly ruler commanded them to do. Surely, they must have imagined what a king who ordered genocide could have done to them if he came to know his orders had been defied. Surely, they were afraid. But even in their fear, they were faithful. (Day 1, pages 14–15)
 - What fears do you face on a reoccurring basis? How have these fears affected your relationship with God? (page 15)
 - Read Romans 8:31. What does this verse teach us about facing our fears? (page 16)
2. In my life, the fear of failure and criticism has at times paralyzed me. It’s like a snake (which I hate) slithering in front of me, keeping me from taking the next step. These fears of human rejection have, at times, kept me from following Jesus closely, stealing the joy and peace that come from doing life in God’s will. (Day 1, page 16)
 - What fear has paralyzed you in the past? (page 16)
 - What fear has been most destructive in your life? (page 16)
 - What does Romans 8:31 teach us about facing our fears? (page 16)

3. There is something ironically beautiful about a feminine warrior—someone who can be soft and strong, gentle and ferocious. (Day 2, page 21)
 - Read Proverbs 29:25. How has human opinion influenced you recently? (page 21)
 - How does trusting God protect you from the impact of other people's opinions? (page 21)
 - Who are some women in your life who could be described as soft and strong, gentle and ferocious?

4. Fierce women have a strength that comes from beyond themselves. They are bathed in the forgiveness and love of Jesus. He holds their hearts so firmly that they are able to find joy and peace in the midst of their battles. These women find their identity in Christ, which provides them with a courage and fortitude that outweighs the fears they face. Fierce women of God are warriors at heart—not savage or violent but tempered with loving-kindness. They are beautiful servants with backbones made of steel. They are wise, gentle, and dangerous—in the best sense of those words. (Day 2, page 21)
 - Read Exodus 1:17. According to this verse, why did Shiphrah and Puah refuse to obey the king? (page 22)
 - What do you think the king would have done if their plot had been uncovered?
 - Review the six steps to help face fears with courage on pages 22–23. How could these steps help you find fierceness when you need it?

5. We truly love others when we put aside our own needs and fears and stand for those who cannot stand for themselves. (Day 3, page 29)
 - Read Matthew 22:37-39; John 13:34; and 1 John 3:18. What are the common threads in these verses?
 - What does it mean to say that love is a decision?
 - Who are the women in your life who put aside their own needs and fears on your behalf (or have done this in the past)?

6. There is evil in our world. But as God's girls we have the opportunity to bring light into the darkness. (Day 3, page 29)

- What are some modern-day evils in our world today?
 - What are some ways you can bring light into that darkness?
 - What is our responsibility as Christ followers to respond to the injustices in our world? How has God prompted you to take action? (page 28)
7. There is a time to submit, and there is a time to stand. When God's law is clearly violated, as is the case here with a command to murder infants, we cannot pretend we have no responsibility. (Day 4, page 32)
- Read Hebrews 13:17 and Romans 13:1. How do you react to these verses? Would you say you are more of a rule follower or a rule breaker?
 - Read Exodus 1:17. How does this verse illustrate Puah's and Shiphrah's respect for God's law? How does our respect or disrespect for God influence our daily decisions? (page 32)
 - What are some circumstances when God's law might overrule civic law?
8. It would be naive to think that there may not be consequences when we take a stand. Peter faced hardships, just as Paul, James, and even Jesus did. But they chose to stand anyway. When faced with difficulties, it is good to remember who is our true enemy. (Day 4, page 33)
- Read Acts 5:12-42. What lessons do you extract from this confrontation between the apostles and the Jewish leaders? How might history be different if Peter and the other apostles had complied with the Sanhedrin's order to never again teach in Jesus' name? (pages 32–33)
 - How might history be different if Shiphrah and Puah had complied with Pharaoh's edict? (page 33)
 - Read Ephesians 6:11. Who is our true enemy? Now read Ephesians 6:10-18. How does the armor of God fit us for battle? (pages 33–34)
9. Heroines in the form of midwives are unexpected. But isn't that just like God? He masters in turning what may seem ordinary to us into the extraordinary when under His control. (Day 5, page 36)
- What about Shiphrah and Puah make them unexpected heroines?
 - Who are some other unexpected heroines in the Bible?
 - Read Exodus 1:20-21. As you look at your life story, what have been the times when you could say, ". . . so God was good to me"? In other words, when have you experienced God's favor?

10. What sets Puah and Shiphrah apart is that in a dangerous and difficult situation they were courageously faithful. They quietly chose to honor God first in their lives, and in return God blessed them. (Day 5, page 38)
- What temptations to compromise do we face as Christians today? When have you experienced a conflict of your values, and how did you respond? (page 37)
 - Read 1 Peter 3:13-17. What practical steps can you take to live above reproach in order to keep your conscience clear? (page 37)
 - Read Galatians 6:9. How does this verse encourage you to follow in Shiphrah and Puah's fierce footsteps?
11. Isn't it awesome that God would take two simple midwives and use them in such an incredible way? This is God's specialty—taking ordinary people and using them in extraordinary ways. (Day 5, page 38)
- What thoughts or discoveries are sticking with you from this week's study?

Deeper Conversation (15 minutes)

Divide into smaller groups of two or three for deeper conversation. (Encourage the women to break into different groups each week.) Before the session, write on a marker board or chart paper the question or questions you want the groups to discuss:

- Reflecting on the story of Shiphrah and Puah, what would you say is the relationship between our obedience and God's faithfulness? What are some other stories in the Scriptures that help us understand obedience and faithfulness?
- In what ways are you experiencing some fierceness rising up in your spirit after studying Shiphrah and Puah?

Give a two-minute warning before time is up so that the groups may wrap up their discussion.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Close the session by taking personal prayer requests from group members and leading the group in prayer. As you progress to later weeks in the study, you might encourage members to participate in the closing prayer by praying out loud for one another and the requests given.