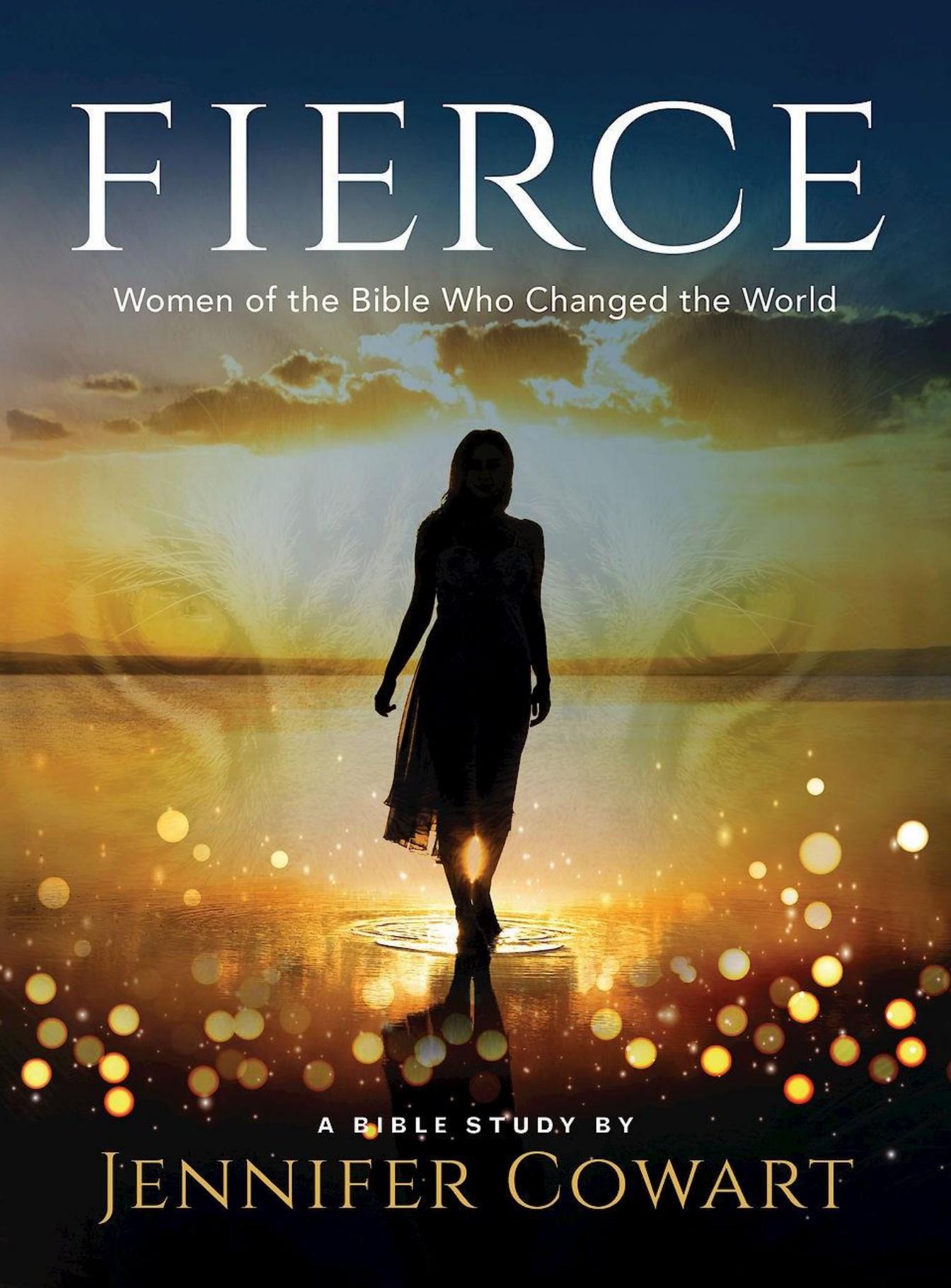


FIERCE

A woman in a dark, sleeveless dress stands on a beach at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with clouds. The water reflects the sunset. In the foreground, there are many out-of-focus, glowing circles of light in shades of yellow and orange, creating a bokeh effect.

Women of the Bible Who Changed the World

A BIBLE STUDY BY

JENNIFER COWART

Praise for Fierce

Jen highlights lesser-known but highly courageous women with character and guts enough to enter into Kingdom-building conversations and actions. She challenges us to explore not only the biblical narrative but our own stories as well so that we can influence our world as our spiritual sisters in the faith influenced theirs. A worthy study.

—**Carolyn Moore**, Founding and Lead Pastor of Mosaic United Methodist Church in Evans, Georgia, and author of *The 19: Questions to Kindle a Wesleyan Spirit*

If you dream of blazing trails in Jesus' name, this study provides the biblical backbone to strengthen your faith and build Christ-confidence along the way. I love Jen's boldness in calling women to God-honoring discipleship as well as her authenticity in sharing the highs and lows in her own journey. I highly recommend it!

—**Barb Roose**, speaker and author of *I'm Waiting, God: Finding Blessing in God's Delays*, *Joshua: Winning the Worry Battle*, and other Bible studies and books

The bold message behind Jen Cowart's new study, *Fierce*, is that the faithfulness of ordinary women can change the world. This study is a much-needed and beautifully written breath of fresh air for women who want to know that our lives matter. The deep biblical truths in this study are a welcome and enriching guide for those who long to live fierce lives for Jesus.

—**Jessica LaGrone**, Dean of Chapel, Asbury Seminary

Once again Jennifer boldly yet gently leads women to wrestle with Scripture and real life. Using stories of strong, vibrant women of the Bible, she has created a "space" for the Holy Spirit to shape the life and character of women.

—**Jorge Acevedo**, Lead Pastor, Grace Church, a multisite United Methodist Congregation

Jim and Jennifer Cowart are highly respected pastors and church leaders who lead model purpose-driven churches. I have full confidence in Jim and Jen.

—**Rick Warren**, Founder and Senior Pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Life* and numerous other books

FIERCE

Women of the Bible Who Changed the World

A BIBLE STUDY BY

Jennifer Cowart

Abingdon Women/Nashville

Fierce
Women of the Bible Who Changed the World

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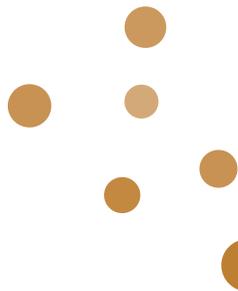
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**To my mom, Linda, and my daughter, Alyssa—
two of the fiercest women I have ever known**





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.

Follow Jen:

Website: jennifercowart.org or jimandjennifercowart.org
(check here for event dates and booking information)



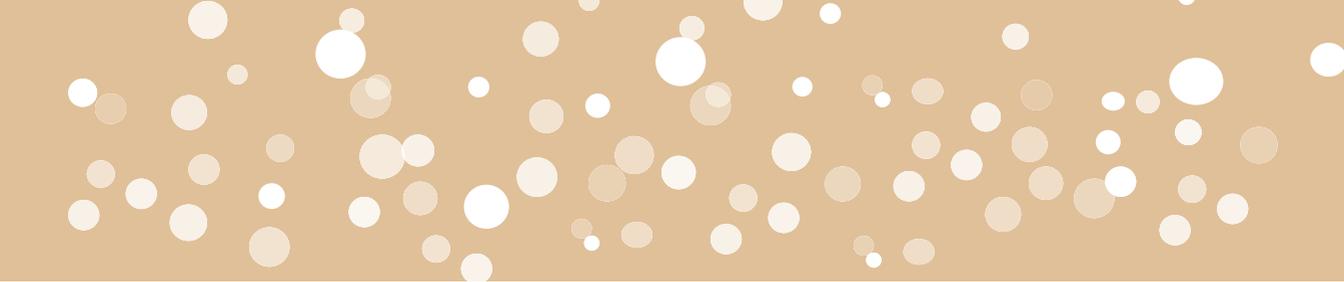
Jim-Jennifer Cowart



[jimandjennifercowart](https://www.instagram.com/jimandjennifercowart)

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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 female characters of the Bible, 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!

This workbook contains six weeks' worth of devotional Bible lessons, with five lessons for each week. I call them devotional lessons because they include both Scripture study as well as reflection and prayer. I hope you'll give yourself the gift of time alone with God to savor His Word and allow Him to speak to you. You

may want to find a quiet place—maybe your favorite chair or a spot on the porch, weather permitting—where you can spend your devotional study time.

Each day the lesson follows the same format:

Settle: As you begin each lesson, I encourage you to just be still for a few moments and allow your heart and mind to settle. In Psalm 46:10 we are told to “be still, and know that I am God!” In the fast-paced world in which most of us operate, being still, breathing deeply, and resting in God’s presence can be challenging. So, I encourage you as you begin each day’s lesson to give yourself the sweet treasure of settling your heart, mind, and soul into your heavenly Father’s presence. This alone can be a life changer as you go through the study!

Focus: Next, focus your mind on God’s Word, reading a thematic verse and a Scripture from the main story for the day. Isaiah 55:10-11 (TLB) has a promise for those who dwell on God’s Word:

As the rain and snow come down from heaven and stay upon the ground to water the earth, and cause the grain to grow and to produce seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry, so also is my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It shall accomplish all I want it to and prosper everywhere I send it.

Reflect: Now it’s time to get to the story and think about how it speaks into your life. God’s Word is so rich, and the stories of biblical heroines have so much to teach us. The lessons, triumphs, and tragedies of their lives are relevant to us today. As you consider their stories, some may be familiar to you. Try to look at them with new eyes. Invite God to give you fresh insights to enrich your life. Space is provided for recording your responses and completing exercises.

Pray: Finally, be still once again and enter into a time of prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to speak new truths of peace and wisdom into your life. I will offer a few prayer suggestions each day—and

occasionally a written prayer that you may pray word for word or adapt as your own—to help your time with God be fresh and interesting.

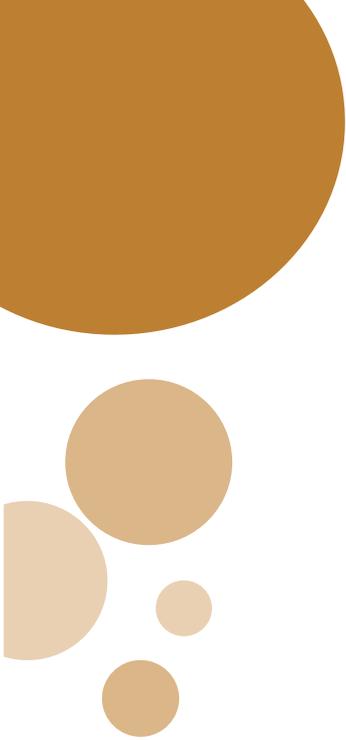
As you begin and end each day's lesson, I encourage you to be creative in your approach to connecting with God. He is a creative genius; just look at the giraffe, butterfly, and anteater! Obviously, God likes variety and creativity. At times I will encourage you to try some new things in the "Settle" and "Pray" segments of the lessons. For instance, if you're musical, you may want to begin by singing or playing an instrument. If you're artistic, you may want to end each day by sketching or painting. Perhaps your gift is the written word; then journal what God is speaking to you. You also may want to incorporate praise and worship music (I have included a few song suggestions, but feel free to choose your own) as well as dance or stretching and other physical activity into your devotional study time. Be creative! Think outside your usual practices and try something new.

Before you get started, gather all the supplies you'll need: your Bible, this workbook, a pen or pencil, and any items you need for creative expression—such as a journal, a sketch pad, an instrument, or a device and playlist. Have your tools easily accessible so that nothing deters your time. Another trick I've found helpful is to have a notepad handy so that if your thoughts begin to drift to things you need to do later, you can just jot them down so they do not steal your time with God.

Now, let me tell you in advance, I want to be a fierce woman of God. And I want you to be one also! When we live with this strong sense of knowing who we are in Christ, we have the courage to live obediently and faithfully into His great, big plans! And women like that change the world.

Let's be fierce!

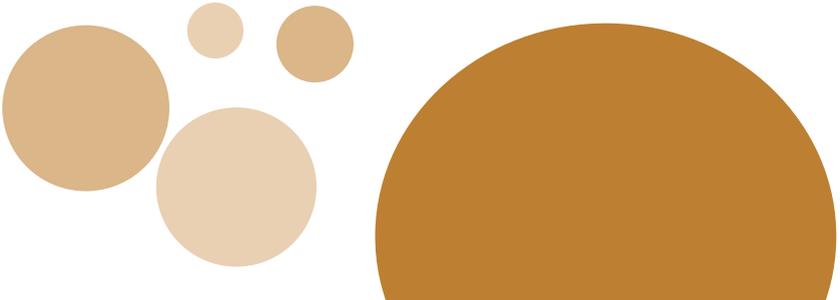
Jen



Week 1

Shiphrah and Puah

Exodus 1



DAY 1

Settle

Find your favorite spot. As you settle in, take a deep breath and lift your hands over your head, holding the breath a few seconds. Then slowly exhale, lowering your hands. Do this a few times, allowing your heart and mind to calm as you focus your thoughts on God.

Focus

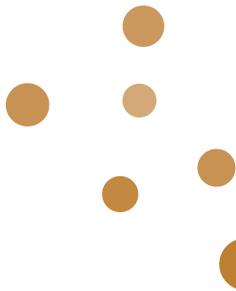
¹These are the names of the sons of Israel (that is, Jacob) who moved to Egypt with their father, each with his family: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, ⁴Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. ⁵In all, Jacob had seventy descendants in Egypt, including Joseph, who was already there.

⁶In time, Joseph and all of his brothers died, ending that entire generation. ⁷But their descendants, the Israelites, had many children and grandchildren. In fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and filled the land.

⁸Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. ⁹He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. ¹⁰We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country."

¹¹So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king. ¹²But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became. ¹³So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.

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 1:1-17)

Reflect

Sarah, Mary, Anna, and Rachel are familiar biblical names. In fact, you probably know someone with each of these names. But what about Shiphrah and Puah? These are not well-known women of the Bible. We don’t name our babies after these heroines. Perhaps that’s because theirs is a tough story. Or maybe it is because they have only a brief mention in the beginning of Exodus. But their story is one worth knowing. It is powerful. It is fierce.

During the time of the famine in Israel, Joseph, who had risen to become a prince of Egypt, invited the Hebrews to come and settle in the area of Egypt known as Goshen. During their time in Egypt, the Israelites multiplied and flourished. In fact, they flourished so much that the new pharaoh was threatened by their numbers and ordered the women who assisted with the birthing process, the midwives, to kill all the male infants immediately at birth.

Do you know anyone who works as a midwife—or perhaps as an OB/GYN or labor and delivery nurse? I do, and these women love people—children in particular. It’s part of why they chose the profession. They know that to be part of the birthing process is to see God’s work at its finest. It’s the opportunity to see miracles on a daily basis. Their jobs are to bring health and healing to those they serve.

Now imagine these women you know being ordered to kill the very miracles they have just witnessed being born. It’s a disgusting image. Truly evil! Surely, any good midwife, nurse, or doctor would cringe at this type of command. Shiphrah and Puah did!

Reread Exodus 1:15-17 (pages 13–14). What did Shiphrah and Puah do in response to the king’s command?

They 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.

Let's talk about our fears. They are real, and we all have them. In fact, psychologists have discovered hundreds of known fears that plague us. Some fears even grow to the point of becoming phobias, such as:

- Ablutophobia** the fear of bathing (My son had that one for a while as a little kid!)
- Ergophobia** the fear of work (Have you ever had a coworker with this? I have!)
- Nomophobia** the fear of being without a mobile phone (Can you relate?)
- Ophidiophobia** the fear of snakes (That's just good sense in my opinion!)
- Omphalophobia** the fear of belly buttons (One-piece bathing suits only for these folks.)
- Phobophobia** the fear of fear (Check it out; it's a real thing.)

Now, here's the thing about fear: it may seem silly to you, unless it's your particular issue. Because when it's your deal, it's real. No matter whether the fear is substantiated or not, there is good news: you don't have to be afraid; God is on your side!

What fears do you face on a recurring basis?

How do these fears affect your daily life?

How have these fears affected your relationship with God?

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?

(Romans 8:31)

Read Romans 8:31 in the margin. What does this verse teach us about facing our fears?

Fear is not of God but of the enemy of our souls, whose game plan is to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10)—to rob us of joy and keep us from being faithful to God. Giving in to our fears keeps us from living our best lives and becoming the beautiful warriors of God that we are designed to be.

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, occasionally, kept me from following Jesus closely, stealing the joy and peace that come from doing life in God's will.

What fear has paralyzed you in the past?

What fear has been most destructive in your life?

Shiphrah and Puah were human, which means that they too had fears; but they chose to honor God even when they were afraid. Their fear of God was greater than their fear of an earthly ruler. And as we will see throughout this week, God rewarded their faithfulness.

It's important to note that a healthy fear of God is different from phobic fear. Theologian Robert B. Strimple says that as we fear God, "There is the convergence of awe, reverence, adoration, honor, worship, confidence, thankfulness, love, and, yes, fear."¹ When we read about the fear of God in the Bible, it is appropriate in most cases to replace *fear* with *honor* or *reverence*. Consider Psalm 145:19, for example:

He grants the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cries for help and rescues them.
He grants the desires of those who **honor/reverence** him;
he hears their cries for help and rescues them.

**A healthy fear
of God helps
to direct our
paths.**

However, there also is fear of the judgment of God. The midwives most likely feared God in both of these aspects.

Look up these verses on the fear of God, and write your thoughts about each in the space provided:

Psalms 33:18

Psalms 34:7

Proverbs 15:16

Luke 1:50

A healthy fear of God helps to direct our paths, and when we are faced with difficult choices, it can help to guide us. Every day we are faced with challenges. Every day is an opportunity to live for Christ. But in order to do that, we must settle in advance who will be in control of our lives—even when that means making a difficult choice. Romans 6:12-13 reminds us, “Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. . . . Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.”

Through the rest of the week we will dig into the story of Shiphrah

and Puah and the fierce way they lived out their faith during national genocide. We will see that they were women of quiet strength, fearless determination, and faithful resolve who received great blessings from God for their obedience. May we seek to be women who live in this fierce manner!

Pray

- Spend a few minutes in worship, thanking God for who He is.
- Ask God to reveal to you the earthly fears that keep you from living into His will for your life.
- Surrender your agenda to His today.

DAY 2

Settle

Take time to count your blessings as you begin your intentional time with God today. Think back to when you were a little girl, and write a list of ten to twenty ways that God has showered His goodness upon you throughout your lifetime. As you write these, make them a prayer of thanksgiving.

Focus

But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too.

(Exodus 1:17)

Who are those who fear the LORD?

He will show them the path they should choose.

(Psalm 25:12)

The fear of human opinion disables;

trusting in God protects you from that.

(Proverbs 29:25 MSG)

Reflect

When I was seventeen years old, I went on a mission trip and heard God call me into ministry. I didn't hear an audible voice, but it was very clear to me that God was calling me to be in ministry. It was a sweet and precious moment. God's favor and love were present in a powerful way, though I had no idea at the time what that meant. Having grown up in church, I observed that most of the women I had seen in ministry were children's leaders or women who had remained single and dedicated their whole lives to serving the church. They were wonderful people with wonderful ministries, but their particular roles didn't seem to be what God was calling me to. I felt a calling to teach adults by sharing God's truths through speaking and writing. Yet I thought that wouldn't work because, if I'm honest, I had heard a good bit of criticism about women

**Fierce women
have a strength
that comes
from beyond
themselves.**

in ministry; and frankly, I didn't want that coming at me. So, I did nothing.

Fast-forward two years. I was sitting in a business law class when God spoke to me again. But this time it wasn't as sweet and precious. It was more of a spanking. I'm speaking figuratively here to make a point. It was a spanking in the sense of conviction. This time God said, "Jen, what are you doing? Why aren't you leaning into my will?" Have you ever had a loving God-whipping like that? They sting a little!

I needed God to understand—I had my reasons. You see, Jim and I were dating seriously, and he was going into the ministry. *Both people in a marriage can't be ministry leaders*, I thought. Now, from time to time I would mention the ministry idea to others, but most people told me that it just wouldn't work. "Let him do the ministry," they would say. They told me I should pursue teaching or business or really anything else. After all, I was a woman.

I continued to hear God speak to my heart, and I found ways to serve behind the scenes. Children's and youth ministries, missions, and administration all seemed acceptable. My fears of what others would think or say about me if I stepped into the role of teacher or speaker paralyzed me. So again, I did nothing.

Then God took me to the woodshed again, asking again why I hadn't pursued the calling He had given me. After that a new thought occurred to me—*What if I miss out on what God has planned for me?* And this thought far outweighed whatever gossip or criticism could come my way.

Now, I should tell you that I'm not a feminist in the sense that some interpret the word. I have no ax to grind. Some of my favorite people are men—just ask my husband, dad, and son! Men play a powerful and extraordinary role in God's grand scheme. So do women. I'm also not a doormat. Women with strong personalities and leadership roles are changing the world. So, what am I? Just a woman wanting to be obedient to God and fulfill His plans for me.

That's when I began to lean in—lean in to how God created me, lean in to my gifts and strengths. And there I found new joy and purpose. I've also faced criticism, and in those moments I've experienced hurt and discouragement; but there have been no more trips to the woodshed related to this issue, and for that I am thankful.

At some point, my fear of missing out on all that God has for me became greater than the earthly consequences I would face if I was

obedient to God. This released a powerful freedom in my life. A fierceness to live into God's plan developed within me.

There is something ironically beautiful about a feminine warrior—someone who can be soft and strong, gentle and ferocious.

Reread Proverbs 29:25 (page 19). How has human opinion influenced you recently?

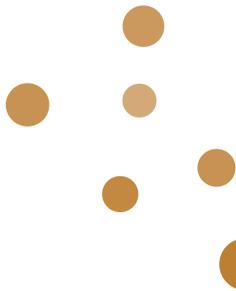
Whose opinions of you do you fear?

How does this fear impact your life?

How does trusting in God protect you from the impact of other people's opinions?

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.

I love to see God's fierce women in action. God wants all of His girls to live with a fierce faithfulness, as we see in Scripture. Deborah led the



army of God (Judges 4–5). Esther stood up to a potential annihilation of her people (Esther 4–7). Priscilla and Lydia led and served in a time when women held little value (1 Corinthians 16:19 and Acts 16:12-15). All are fierce examples of how God uses those who are available to Him.

Our heroines this week are just as noble. Shiphrah and Puah, the two midwives mentioned by name in Exodus 1, had a choice to make. Would they live out Pharaoh’s evil command to kill all the male children, or would they disobey, risking their lives?

Reread Exodus 1:17, which we also read yesterday (page 19). According to this verse, why did Shiphrah and Puah refuse to obey the king?

Though this Egyptian king was willing to commit genocide to secure his power, the women were willing to risk their lives in order to honor God by valuing human life. What would he have done to the midwives had their plot been uncovered? They chose well in spite of the danger.

You too will face difficult decisions—though I hope not as evil as those the midwives faced. May these six steps from Proverbs help you face them with courage and fierce faithfulness:

1. **Pray.** First, and above all else, seek God’s will.

*Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool,
but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.*

(Proverbs 28:26 ESV)

2. **Gather the facts.** Be sure you have accurate information before making a decision.

Get the facts at any price, and hold on tightly to all the good sense you can get.

(Proverbs 23:23 TLB)

3. **Seek godly advice.** There is great wisdom in consulting with mature believers.

*Don't go to war without wise guidance;
victory depends on having many advisers.*
(Proverbs 24:6)

4. **Consider the consequences.** Every decision has repercussions. What will it gain and cost?

It is foolish and rash to make a promise to the Lord before counting the cost.

(Proverbs 20:25 TLB)

5. **Prepare for difficulties.** Anticipate problems that may arise.

*A prudent person foresees dangers and takes precautions.
The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.*

(Proverbs 22:3)

6. **Face your fears.** Fierce warriors aren't unafraid; they are just willing to face their fears and move anyway.

*Fearing people is a dangerous trap,
but trusting the LORD means safety.*

(Proverbs 29:25)

Which of these six steps do you do well?

Where do you stumble?

How can you prepare so that you won't stumble there in the future?

**God calls on
you to be fierce
and faithful in
standing up for
His Word and
His values.**

God wants to use you just as He used Shiphrah, Puah, Deborah, Lydia, and so many others throughout history. God calls on you to be fierce and faithful in standing up for His Word and His values. Jesus invites you to rest in His love as a gentle warrior. Face whatever has held you back in the past in order to be fully usable for His purposes today.

Pray

- Pray the following prayer, or craft your own prayer thanking God for His patience and tenacity in using people like us for His purposes:

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me so passionately. Help me to understand that depth of love and to be filled with it so that I can extend it back to You and splash it onto those around me. As I face difficult decisions, give me wisdom and courage to live in a way that pleases You. May I be used for Your purposes today. In the name and power of Jesus. Amen.

DAY 3

Settle

Psalm 46:10 reads, “Be still, and know that I am God!” Allow this verse to guide you as you calm your thoughts and focus on God. If there are things troubling you, write them down and put them aside for the next few minutes in order to give God your full attention.

Focus

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)

⁶In time, Joseph and all of his brothers died, ending that entire generation. ⁷But their descendants, the Israelites, had many children and grandchildren. In fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and filled the land.

⁸Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. ⁹He said to his people, “Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. ¹⁰We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don’t, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country.”

¹¹So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king. ¹²But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became. ¹³So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.

(Exodus 1:6-14)

Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

(Romans 12:21)

Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

(1 John 3:18)

Reflect

Do you know the name Irena Sendlerowa (also known as Irena Sendler)? During World War II this young woman found herself in a unique position. She was a social worker in Poland when almost four hundred thousand Jews were herded into a small ghetto camp and forced to live in cramped, unhygienic conditions. It was reported that as many as four thousand people a month perished from starvation and disease there. Irena, along with other Polish caregivers, brought aid to those suffering in the ghetto through food and medical care. But as the conditions deteriorated and the Nazis began to deport Jews to concentration camps, Irena and about two dozen colleagues knew they must do more. So they took action. At great personal risk, they began to find ways to smuggle infants and children out of the ghetto and place them in non-Jewish families to give them a chance at life.

Through means such as ambulances, sewer systems, coffins, and even toolboxes, over twenty-five hundred children were brought to freedom. Her love for God moved her to become involved—to courageously and faithfully do what she could to protect those who could not protect themselves. She shared about what led her to action:

When the war started, all of Poland was drowning in a sea of blood. But most of all, it affected the Jewish nation. And within that nation, it was the children who suffered most. That's why we needed to give our hearts to them. . . .

We did these things as completely normal things, on the principle that when a person is drowning, we should reach out a hand to them, or at least a pinky finger.²

Just like Puah and Shiphrah, Irena could not sit idly by and comply with evil. From the time that Joseph first made a home for the Israelites

in Egypt, God had blessed them; and their numbers had grown into the millions. The strength of the Hebrew nation threatened the Egyptian pharaoh, so he set out to commit genocide against them.

Reread Exodus 1:10 (page 25). What were Pharaoh's specific fears?

History is littered with evil leaders who sought to annihilate those who might oppose their power. What examples come to your mind?

Irena Sendlerowa and the Egyptian midwives were uniquely placed in history to courageously take action in desperate times. Now, we know the story of Moses, and we've have heard of Oskar Schindler, made famous by Steven Spielberg's award-winning film *Schindler's List*. But these three women—Irena, Shiphrah, and Puah—received little fanfare in their time. Even so, their stories are fierce. Their bravery in the face of great evil saved the lives of many—and they did this knowing that their very lives were at risk.

In fact, in 1943 Irena was arrested and tortured at Gestapo headquarters in Warsaw. She never revealed any information, though her legs and feet were broken during interrogation. She was sentenced to death, but on the way to her execution the driver, who had been bribed by Jewish underground aid workers, beat her and left her on the side of the road. After recovering from her injuries, Irena returned to her efforts to help as many children as possible. She never considered herself a hero—just a follower of God doing what she could to help all she could.³

Irena Sendlerowa died in Poland in 2008 at the age of ninety-eight.⁴ Though she may not have considered herself a hero, the twenty-five hundred children she saved surely must believe otherwise.

We truly love others when we put aside our own needs and fears and stand for those who cannot stand for themselves.

**As God's girls
we have the
opportunity to
bring light into
the darkness.**

What situations in our world seem unjust to you?

How can you speak up for and protect those who can't speak for themselves?

Edmund Burke is famously quoted as saying, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."⁵ Of course, this goes for women too. Our heroines this week, Shiprah and Puah, took a stand. Like Irena Sendlerowa, they had to work carefully and with God's guidance in order to make a difference in a time of crisis. Our planet faces crises of similar proportions today as well.

What is our responsibility as Christ followers to respond to the injustices in our world?

*Dear children, let's
not merely say that
we love each other;
let us show the truth
by our actions.*

(1 John 3:18)

Read 1 John 3:18 and Romans 13:1 in the margin. How do we reconcile these two verses?

*Everyone must
submit to governing
authorities. For all
authority comes
from God, and
those in positions of
authority have been
placed there by God.*

(Romans 13:1)

How has God prompted you to take action in the past? What did you do?

As Christ followers, we know that the greatest commands of Jesus are to love God and to love one another (Matthew 22:37-39). This kind of love is more than a feeling. It is not just hoping and praying for the best. We don't practice love only when we feel goosebumps. Love is a decision and action, as we read in 1 John 3:18. And this love is commanded of us, as we read in the Gospels: "So now I am giving you a new commandment:

Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other” (John 13:34).

We truly love others when, with courage, we put aside our own needs and fears and stand for those who cannot stand for themselves. As I think of modern-day women who are doing this, I think of those who work in missions, those who are foster parents, and those who deliver Bibles in places where Christianity is not welcome.

As we read Exodus 1, Pharaoh’s edict seems barbaric, but similar laws have existed in our time. In China, where there was a one-child-per-family law for many years (outlawed in 2016), it was the baby girls who often were victims of infanticide or abandonment. And in many countries there are still barbaric practices related to women and children. Such realities are abhorrent to those of us who value God’s law and the preciousness of human life. What will we do? How can we respond? Can we make a difference? These are the same questions that Shiphrah and Puah surely must have asked themselves. The consequences of disobedience were death, but they chose to love God and love others faithfully, and to put that faith into action.

Like the midwives of Egypt, modern-day heroines continue to serve God. Often their work goes on quietly, and they may receive little recognition on this side of heaven. But, oh, what mansions there must be awaiting them in heaven!

Friends, it’s difficult to write this devotional lesson because it touches on unlovely things—concentration camps, families ripped apart, and genocide. There is evil in our world. But as God’s girls we have the opportunity to bring light into the darkness. May we live fiercely determined to shine love where there is hate and bring hope where there is injustice, just as the midwives of Egypt did.

Pray

- As you come into God’s presence through prayer, take a few moments just to worship. Thank Him for His majesty and righteousness.
- Ask God to give you a heart that breaks for what breaks His.
- Ask God for wisdom and practical steps in how He would have you respond to the injustices in our world.

DAY 4

Settle

Begin your time with God in a creative way today. Draw, sing, write, take a short walk—whatever you choose, do it with God. Spend this creative energy focused on God's goodness, and let your activity be a form of worshiping Him.

Focus

But the midwives had far too much respect for God and didn't do what the king of Egypt ordered; they let the boy babies live.

(Exodus 1:17 MSG)

Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross. Then God put Him in the place of honor at His right hand. . . ." The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.

(Acts 5:29-31, 41)

(Read the full account of Peter before the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:12-41.)

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground.

(Ephesians 6:12-14a)

Reflect

In general, I'm a rule follower. Detention after school, writing sentences, and being grounded were not part of my story when I was growing up. So when I was called to the principal's office my freshman year of high school, it was newsworthy among my friends. They were shocked. But it was not a surprise to me—I knew what I had done.

There is a time to submit, and there is a time to stand.

Here's what happened. I had a government class first thing every day. For some odd reason, in this class I ended up being the only girl in a group of about twenty-five. It was a crass group of guys, and the teacher (a male coach) thought their teasing and coarse humor was funny. Today we would call it harassment; back then it was just thought of as "guys being guys." But without sharing too many details, it was wrong. For months I endured a really inappropriate situation. On the day of our final, I—with the help of my mother, I might add—brought the guys a treat: chocolate chip cookies made with chocolate Ex-Lax. It brought me great joy to watch them, coach included, gobble those tasty treats down.

At the end of the test I got up, stood in the front of the room, and said, "Guys, those treats are exactly what you deserve. You have been horrible to me. I'm pleased to let you know there is no real chocolate in those cookies; it's Ex-Lax. Enjoy your day." And then it got awesome, friends!

One by one they began to check out of school, and by lunch time I found myself in the vice principal's office. He was a really wise man; his wife was actually my Sunday school teacher, which helped me that day for sure. He talked sternly to me in the hallway and then had me come into his office where he burst out laughing and gave me a high five.

I should probably regret serving those cookies, but I don't.

Rules are meant to be followed. In fact, there are Scriptures to guide us in this regard:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

(Hebrews 13:17 ESV)

Everyone must submit to governing authorities.

(Romans 13:1)

However, when we read accounts such as that of the midwives Puah and Shiphrah, we are met with a conundrum. How do we make sense of this? Is there a contradiction here? This is where wisdom must prevail. In the first chapter of Exodus we are reminded that God's law always comes before human law. We are not taught to be blindly submissive.

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.

Reread Exodus 1:17 in *The Message* (page 30). 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?

The midwives valued God's favor more than they did Pharaoh's. They feared God's wrath more than they did the wrath of Egyptian rule. Their motivation came from a deep and abiding love for God's standards and for the value of God's created life. They refused to obey evil. And as we will see tomorrow, they were rewarded for their courageous obedience.

This passage from Exodus does not teach us to reject ethical authority. It is not an excuse for children to rebel against their parents or for us to overturn governments. But it does make one point clear: submission to civil authorities has limits. Centuries later when Peter is arrested and stands before the Jewish authorities, they order him to no longer preach the good news of Christ. Upon hearing these orders he boldly proclaims, "We must obey God rather than human authority" (Acts 5:29).

Turn again to 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?

As we learn to walk in God's strength we will be empowered to do great things.

How might history be different if Shiphrah and Puah had complied with Pharaoh's edict?

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.

*Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.
(Ephesians 6:11)*

Read Ephesians 6:11 in the margin. Who is our true enemy?

To me, Ephesians 6 is one of the most powerful passages in the Bible. This chapter outlines beautifully what we are up against and how we are to defend ourselves and our faith. It instructs us to put on the whole armor of God and promises that then we will be able to stand in our struggles.

Read Ephesians 6:10-18 and describe in your own words how we are fitted for battle:

Belt =

Breastplate =

Shoes =

Shield =

Helmet =

Sword =

With which of these do you need to dress yourself more carefully? How can you accomplish that?

It has been thousands of years since Shiphrah and Puah walked the earth and made the decision to quietly stand against evil. A lot has changed in these years, but a lot is very much the same. Evil is alive and well, and that is cause for us to rise daily and dress ourselves in God's armor so that we may stand—fierce, strong, and effective as God's daughters. Friends, as we learn to walk in God's strength—not ahead of His will and not lagging behind it—we will be empowered to do great things in our lifetime. May we unleash the influence and power of the Holy Spirit as we follow Him fiercely!

Pray

- Listen to Jasmine Murray's recording of the song "Fearless" (or another relevant song of your choice).
- Ask God to give you courage to stand for His laws with strength and gentleness.
- Lift up the concerns of your heart to God and trust Him to care for you.

DAY 5

Settle

Take a deep breath or two and allow your mind to slow and your thoughts to center on Christ. Repeat the name of Jesus several times, and allow His presence to invade your space as you begin your time with Him today.

Focus

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.

¹⁸So the king of Egypt called for the midwives. “Why have you done this?” he demanded. “Why have you allowed the boys to live?”

¹⁹“The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women,” the midwives replied. “They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time.”

²⁰So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

(Exodus 1:15-21)

¹Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
²but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
³That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers.

(Psalm 1:1-3 NIV)

**God masters
in turning
what may
seem ordinary
to us into the
extraordinary
when under His
control.**

Reflect

As we look back on history, those who jump out at us are often inventors, rulers, explorers, and military leaders. These are the people most often credited with changing the course of history. Their contributions are often heroic for they discovered unknown worlds, created new technologies, and paved the way for peace in times of war. Heroes in the form of midwives, on the other hand, 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. The Bible is filled with unexpected heroes: a shepherd boy turned king, David; a young minority girl turned queen, Esther; a fisherman turned evangelical preacher, Peter. These are ordinary lives that changed the world through the power of God at work in them.

This week our study has been on two unlikely heroes, Shiphrah and Puah. As we've seen, they are the midwives mentioned by name at the beginning of Exodus who would not obey Pharaoh's wicked order to kill all of the newborn boys. Their courage to obey God's law above human law honored God and, as we read in today's passage, they were rewarded for that faithfulness:

²⁰So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

(Exodus 1:20-21)

Reread the verses above and consider the spiritual and emotional rewards you have received from walking in God's favor.

In the King James Version of the Bible we read verse 21 slightly differently: "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses." Although there is some disagreement as to whether the blessing of family means that they personally had many children or whether they established a long and rich legacy in their family trees through their influence, the implication is the same. They were

rewarded for their fierce faithfulness. God honored these two women and blessed them for their faithful actions during a time of crisis for His people.

We, too, are faced with opportunities to compromise our values. In business, ethical standards are often disregarded to pad the bottom line. Sex outside of the marriage relationship is common. And the love of success in the world's eyes often outweighs the love of success in God's eyes. How will we respond when these issues present themselves in our lives?

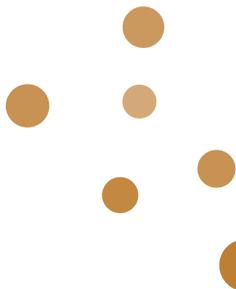
What temptations to compromise do we face as Christians today?

When have you experienced a conflict of your values? How did you respond?

Toward the end of the apostle Peter's life, he wrote a beautiful letter of encouragement to the followers of Christ. At this time many of them were suffering for their faith. In order to live out their faith they had to make difficult choices.

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17. How have you personally suffered from doing good?

Verse 16 instructs us to keep our conscience clear so that others will be ashamed when they speak against us. What practical steps can you take to live above reproach in order to keep your conscience clear?



The blessings we receive from following God do not always come in the forms we may expect.

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. Galatians 6:9 reads, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (ESV). This is a promise from God that as we continue to serve Him we will reap a blessing. Similarly, Proverbs 28:20 tells us that “the trustworthy person will get a rich reward.” The blessings we receive from following God do not always come in the forms we may expect. Sometimes they are tangible; at other times they come in the form of spiritual or emotional maturity. God’s blessings sometimes come in exactly the way we had hoped, but often we have to trust that God is at work even when we don’t see it—even when we do not immediately recognize how He may choose to reward us when we are faithful.

Scripture tells us that Shiphrah and Puah were rewarded richly for honoring Him. God saw their faithfulness, and He blessed them with many children and a rich legacy—a legacy so rich, in fact, that here we are spending a week of devotionals studying about them thousands of years later.

When have you obeyed God’s law in a difficult situation and later experienced His blessings in your life—spiritual/emotional or tangible?

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. I don’t know about you, but I consider myself a pretty ordinary person, and it’s exciting to think that God could use me, too, in extraordinary ways. How does that happen? 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!

Pray

- Thank God for the blessings in your life. Name them and praise Him for His goodness.
- Lift up to God issues of injustice in our world.
- Ask God to give you courage to stand for His principles even in challenging circumstances.

Video Viewer Guide: Week 1

Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah: “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.’ But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king’s orders. They allowed the boys to live, too.” (Exodus 1:15-17)

When I am afraid,
I will put my trust in You.
In God, whose word I praise.
(Psalm 56:3-4a NASB)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28 ESV)

We have to be sure that our leadership is under God’s _____.

The fear of human opinion disables;
trusting in GOD protects you from that.
(Proverbs 29:25 MSG)

It’s important that we become _____ of our fears so that we can _____ them through prayer and practical steps as the Lord directs.

Fierce women of God will face _____.

God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. (Exodus 1:20-21 NIV)

God dealt well with the midwives . . . And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses. (Exodus 1:20-21 KJV)

God rewards _____—sometimes tangibly but always spiritually.

“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21 ESV)