



PART 5: CHAPTER 14

Story Time, Past and Present

*Let your roots grow down into him,
and let your lives be built on him. Then your
faith will grow strong in the truth you were
taught... (Colossians 2:7, NLT)*

LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH

Biblical Vignettes of Bearing Holy Spirit Fruit

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd. (Hebrews 11:1-2, MSG)

LOVING, FAITHFUL RUTH (RUTH 1:6-18)

Excerpt from Less Than a Widow by Kathleen Evenhouse

As Ruth attaches water skins to their donkey's pack, Naomi talks quietly to Orpah.

"...stay here with your family."

"I can't...I love you." Orpah chokes the words out through tears.

"And I love you. That's why I want you to stay in Moab."

"But Killion..."

Naomi almost shouts as she interrupts Orpah. "Is dead! Killion is dead. Both my sons and my husband are dead. We are nothing—widows without power or protection—how can I love you and want that kind of a life for you?"

Naomi calms herself with a deep breath and touches Orpah's cheeks with her worn hand. "Look at me. I'm too old for any man

to want me. I won't bear another son, and even if I did, you'd be too old for childbearing by the time he grew up. I have nothing to give you."

"But it wouldn't be right to leave you."

"Orpah, dear darling Orpah, you have a future here in Moab—your family is here. There is nothing for you in Bethlehem. Yahweh has emptied my life of all that is good. Stay here, marry again, have babies, be happy. Do this for me, because I love you."

Orpah looks back toward the city gates where her mother and sisters are still waving good-bye. The war inside between loyalty to Naomi and common sense are tearing her apart.

Ruth put her arms around Orpah and whispers in her ear, "Don't worry about Naomi. I'll look after her."

"No, Ruth! What's true for Orpah is true for you, too." Naomi's voice is hard and angry again.

"I'm sorry, Mother, but it's not. Orpah's home is here with her family, her people, and her gods. My heart left Moab and her gods a long time ago, and now my body will follow it. Your people are my people; your God is my God. I swear in Yahweh's name that where you die, I will die, and that's where I will be buried."

Naomi points to the crying women at the city gates. "Your mother and sisters are waiting for you, Orpah, my child."

Orpah takes a bag of figs from her shoulder and gives it to Ruth, kisses her on both cheeks, then kisses Naomi. Her first few steps toward her family are tentative, but soon she's running, and they move to surround her.

Naomi grabs Ruth's arm—hard. "Ruth..."

"I am just as stubborn as Naomi," Ruth thinks. Drawing her thumb across her throat as if cutting it with a knife, she tells her mother-in-law firmly, "May Yahweh do this to me if I break my vow."

WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH (LUKE 2:25-38)

Anna and Simeon: Prayers Fulfilled

Luke introduced Anna as a prophetess—a woman who was uniquely devoted to declaring the word of God. Everything we know about her we learn in three short verses. She was a faithful servant of God, exhibited steadfast devotion to the Lord, and was constantly involved in a ministry of prayer and fasting. She had been married for seven years, but that was a lifetime ago as she had been a widow for 84 years. This elderly woman could always be found on the temple grounds. Perhaps she had a modest chamber in the outer courts, as did the priests who traveled to Jerusalem to do their two-week annual service. Perhaps she had been a caretaker in the temple, but by now she was too old for any such work.

Those who knew Anna considered her to be a most extraordinary woman. She was consumed with prayer, and so eager to receive God's blessing that she simply took no interest in eating—she fasted to focus on God. What did Anna pray about? We aren't told specifics, but surely one of her main subjects was an earnest plea for the coming of the Messiah, which was a prayer of all faithful believers in Israel at that time.

Luke also tells us about Simeon, a good man who lived in the prayerful expectancy of help for Israel. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died and led him to the temple steps as Joseph and Mary arrived with baby Jesus. He gathered the tiny one in his arms and declared a blessing.

"... With my own eyes I've seen your salvation; it's now out in the open for everyone to see: A God-revealing light to the non-Jewish nations, and of glory for your people Israel. (Luke 2:30-32)

Simeon then gave Mary a glimmer of what was to come: *failure and recovery, pain and rejection, and many brought to new faith.* And Anna was there to witness this interchange, which brought an anthem of praise pouring from her lips.

“He’s here!” she cried out to everyone she met. “The Messiah has come—the one who we have been waiting for. I saw him today, right here in the temple.”

Anna’s life was simple, but not simplistic. She lived in God’s truth.

LOVING KINDNESS (LUKE 10:3-36)

Jesus Responds to the Question, “Who Is My Neighbor?”

A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, and on the way he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and disappeared, leaving him at death’s door. Soon after, a priest came upon the scene, but he moved to the side to avoid the blood contamination and continued on his way. Another man, a Levite temple assistant, showed up. He heard the injured man’s groans, but also hurried past.

The next traveler walking this road was a Samaritan, a despised outsider. He heard the man’s moans, and his heart went out to him. He pulled his pack from his donkey and tore a shift into strips. After cleaning the wounds, he wrapped them with his former shift, and gave the man a drink of wine. With great effort, he helped the wounded man onto his donkey, and led him down the road to an inn. There he made him as comfortable as possible and cared for him throughout the night.

The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins. “Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I’ll pay you on my way back.”

CHANGE YOUR LIFE (ACTS 2:36-47)

Peter’s Sermon on Pentecost

Excerpt from The Message, by Eugene Peterson

“All Israel, then, know this: There’s no longer room for doubt—God made him Master and Messiah, this Jesus whom you killed on a cross.”

³⁷ *Cut to the quick, those who were there listening asked Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers! Brothers! So now what do we do?”*

³⁸⁻³⁹ Peter said, “Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away—whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.”

⁴⁰ He went on in this vein for a long time, urging them over and over, “Get out while you can; get out of this sick and stupid culture!”

⁴¹⁻⁴² That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

⁴³⁻⁴⁵ Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met.

⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

MIRACLE OF LIFE (ACTS 9:36-42)

Dorcas Is Returned to Life

They had done all they could: washed her body, combed and dressed her hair, and covered her with a linen cloth. But the widows couldn’t bear to leave the house in which the body of their beloved benefactor lay. Her name was Tabitha (which in Greek is Dorcas).

“Dorcas didn’t talk much. I think she was a shy person at heart.”

“She was a good listener, though; she never forgot anything I told her.”

“I think Dorcas said everything she needed to say with her needle and thread.”

“Yes, and with food. I never left her house without a gift of bread or figs.”

“I helped wash her body, but I still can’t believe she’s really dead! What will we do without her?”

Peter stood in the entry to the upstairs room with the two men who had fetched him from Lydda. He watched as the women alternately wailed with sorrow and comforted each other. Dorcas had not only been their benefactor, she had been their dear friend.

“Who is that?” One woman nodded toward the men stepping onto the rooftop.

“Where? Oh, look! The apostle Peter has come!”

The women pulled him to the doorway, all taking at once: “Look at this coat Dorcas made for me!” “We had nothing, and sister Dorcas never let us go hungry.” “I wanted to pay, so she asked me fetch water in exchange for this robe.” “Just a few days ago she was laughing with us, and now she’s gone.” “She was always so kind, I can’t believe she’s dead.” And the wailing began again.

Peter held up his hand for silence. “Please leave me alone with your beloved friend.” Reluctantly, with backward glances and stifled sobs, the women slowly left the room. One positioned herself so that she could see into the room without being seen.

Peter knelt and prayed. The observer mimed praying to the others. The women waited anxiously, and some knelt and mouthed silent prayers. And they waited. And waited. “Ssst,” the watcher got their attention and mimed walking with two fingers, stopping beside the bed. The women held their breath and strained their ears.

“Tabitha, get up.”

Some shook their heads at the absurdity of Peter’s words. Some gasped, and other shushed them, straining to listen for a response. Some raised their eyes and hands to heaven in supplication.

The bed creaked, and the observer clapped her hand to her mouth, tears flowing down her cheeks. “What?!” hissed the others. “Tell us!” She pointed to the doorway, and there stood Dorcas, leaning on Peter’s arm.

“The Lord has returned her to you,” Peter told them.

This good news became known all over Joppa, and many put their trust in the Lord.

AT HOME IN THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD

A Modern-Day Story of Praise and Prayer

Weeks after the funeral, Randy and I got together in a coffee shop and told “Kathy stories:” how they met, how she drew him to Christ, and the ups and downs of life. He told me about their tough times and how they were followed by periods of growing faith. The stories gradually became filled with signs and wonders—miracles of physical and spiritual healing—a sign of God’s Kingdom of God here on earth.

Kathy’s life is an example for us of the progression of praise: As we praise God in all circumstances, our faith is activated and it grows, enabling us to pray powerful prayers to overcome evil, so that we may reign and rule with Christ in this world and in eternity to come.

~ ~ ~

At first, the only thing that made this weekend remarkable was changing the clocks to Daylight Savings Time. Routine blood tests on Friday had told Kathy that she was still in control of her sixteen-year fight with diabetes, and on a Saturday drive, Randy and Kathy laughed about the joys and pains of growing old together.

Saturday night was a special time: a Solomon’s Porch gathering with others to worship and soak in the presence of a Holy God. Their friend and fellow worshiper, Linda, tells us, “As we wor-

shipped, Randy sat in a chair with Kathy on the floor in front of him, her head resting on his lap. The two of them, fully surrendered to God and to each other, resting in His presence together, painted a picture of a Holy Moment that I will always treasure.”

Sunday began early. Randy and Kathy prayed for blessings and God’s strong presence throughout their church building. Active prayer warriors, the couple then met in the Prayer Room with a number of people seeking God’s help and guidance. Later, a young woman they had prayed with earlier in the morning returned requesting that Kathy and Randy join her in meeting meet with church elders, so they did. They then invited this young woman to join them for lunch at a local restaurant, where they talked into the afternoon. Heading home for a quick nap. The couple returned to church for a monthly evening service focused on praise and prayer.

Home once more, bedtime was delayed by a family phone call, and it wasn’t until 11:30 p.m. that Kathy finally turned out the lights. At 2 a.m., Randy turned them back on to investigate what it was that had woken him up.

He discovered that Kathy’s life on earth had ended; just like that. Without warning, Kathy transitioned from life on earth to eternity.

At the funeral, the pastor smiled broadly and said, “Kathy is now present in the throne room of God. It is a room she knows very well because she spent so much of her earthly life in that very room in deep conversation with God.”

Months later, Randy found a letter addressed to him hidden among Kathy’s journals. Written more than ten years earlier, Kathy listed the scriptures that made up the foundation of her faith-filled life. She also listed songs and requests for individuals to act as readers at her funeral. She had addressed the envelope to Randy, but never mailed or delivered it. The requested Scripture passages were the foundation for Kathy in both her life and her death:

(Lamentations 3:22-24) *God's compassions never fail; they are new every morning.*

(Deuteronomy 7:9) *Know that the Lord your God the faithful God and keeps His covenant of love.*

(Psalm 27; 1 & 14) *The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?*

(Psalm 103) *Praise the Lord, my soul.*

(Isaiah 40:29-31) *We will soar on wings like eagles; run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint.*

(Matthew 11:28-30) *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

(Romans 6:23) *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

(Colossians 2:6-7) *Continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

(James 1:5) *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

(John 3:16-18) *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*