

## **Praise for Messy People: Life Lessons from Imperfect Biblical Heroes**

*Jennifer has a unique gift of making the Bible applicable to living a victorious life in everyday situations! This Bible study encourages, convicts, and equips us as we seek Jesus in all that we do.*

— **Judy C. Graham**, President and Co-Founder, Celebration Women's Ministry, Inc.

*If you've ever felt like your life is a mess, this study is for you. Jen is a down-to-earth, in-the-trenches, authentic follower of Christ who guides with humor and practical insights as to how we can allow God to turn our messes into His masterpieces. You will love the life application this study brings, freeing us up from the "chains" culture pushes us into.*

— **Steve Gladen**, Pastor of Small Groups, Saddleback Church and author of *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*

*I have seen Jen's life and ministry up close and can say with confidence that her heart is for seeing messy lives get whole and healthy. Messy People is about finding hope, balance, peace, and wisdom by being immersed in the lessons of Scripture. Thanks, Jen, for pointing us back to the source of peace in the midst of a messy world.*

— **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*

*Using the Bible, humor, probing questions, and her own life experiences, Jennifer helps you break through the clutter and confusion of life to uncover your destiny and identity in Christ. You will discover the God who delights in making a masterpiece out of your mess.*

— **Jorge Acevedo**, Lead Pastor of Grace Church, a multi-site United Methodist congregation in Southwest Florida

*By the power of story you will be escorted through the messy lives of biblical people, and in the process you'll discover something of yourself. Fueled by insightful commentary, real life experience, and "I get it" humor, you will be delightfully reminded that God "did, does, and will" use messy people.*

— **Shane Bishop**, Senior Pastor of Christ Church in Fairview Heights, Illinois, and recipient of The Foundation for Evangelism's Distinguished Evangelist Award



# Messy PEOPLE

LIFE LESSONS *from* IMPERFECT  
BIBLICAL HEROES



*a Bible Study by*  
JENNIFER COWART

Abingdon Women  
Nashville

**Messy People**  
**Life Lessons from Imperfect Biblical Heroes**

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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. Today, Harvest serves about 2,500 people in seven worship services weekly. With degrees in Christian education, counseling, and business, Jen oversees a wide variety of ministries and enjoys doing life and ministry with others. As a gifted Bible teacher and speaker, Jen brings biblical truth to life through humor, authenticity, and everyday application. She and Jim have co-written several small group studies together, including *Hand Me Downs* and *Living the Five*. They are the proud parents of two children, Alyssa and Josh.

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# Introduction

Hi, friend! Welcome to *Messy People*! Every life gets messy at times. Mine does, and surely yours does as well. Sometimes these messes are literal, like a house that would be easier to condemn than to clean or a child who needs a firehose instead of a tub. But sometimes our messes are harder to see. These intangible messes often have labels such as illness, conflict, depression, abuse, bankruptcy, divorce, and job loss. And often these messes are painful.

During this six-week study, we are going to dig into the lives of biblical heroes who were messy people too. Throughout the Scriptures we find wonderful but messy people God used in powerful ways. Together over these six weeks we will learn from the lives of Rahab, the prodigal son, Josiah, Mary, David, and Daniel. From their stories we will learn how God chooses to use broken people and how He restores damaged relationships. Through their examples we will see how God gives us power to handle our critics and deal with the hard moments of life.

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, “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 heroes and heroines have so much to teach us. The lessons, triumphs, and tragedies of their lives are relevant to us today. As you consider these stories, which 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 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. So at times I will encourage you to try some new things in the Settle and Prayer 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 subtracts from 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.

As we begin this journey together, you may be going into, living in the midst of, or coming out of a messy moment; or you may have a loved one who is. If so, hang on—you're not alone. The Bible is filled with examples for us to follow of people who not only endured messy lives but actually thrived with God's guidance, and you can too. So get ready, because God is holding out His big, strong hands to you right in this moment and offering to take your messes and replace them with a masterpiece!

*Enjoy your journey,*

**Jen**



Week 1

# *Rahab*

*Changing Your Messy Story*

Joshua 2; 6

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# DAY 1: GOD CHOOSES MESSY PEOPLE

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## Settle

Take a deep breath and release it slowly. You may want to do this a few times. As you breathe, allow the stresses of your day, the messes of the moment, to disappear. If only for these few minutes of your day, leave behind your struggles and give God your whole self.

## Focus

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.*

(1 Peter 2:9 NIV)

*Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, "Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho." So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night.*

(Joshua 2:1)

Read all of Rahab's story in Joshua 2 and 6.

## Reflect

God chooses messy people!

I used to believe that if God needed something significant done, then He would choose someone who had it all together. Do you know those women? They have well-behaved children, dress beautifully, and never lose their cool. They plan their meals in advance and come to Bible study with the homework done and the key verse memorized. They order a salad at lunch and then pick off the croutons. If God wants to do something important, then that gal is the one for the job. Right?

Maybe. But then along comes a Bible hero like Rahab, and the perfect image is shattered. Rahab gives me hope that God can use messy people—maybe even me. In fact, her story teaches me that sometimes God chooses women with rough résumés and imperfect pasts to get His tough tasks



done. Our heroine this week fits this description well. In fact, the idea that she is considered a heroine at all probably would have been a joke to those who knew her personally. You see, Rahab was a prostitute.

As we explore her story this week we will see how God chooses to use messy people. Isn't that amazing! The God of the universe chooses to use people with damaged reputations, broken hearts, and sinful pasts. That is good news for us. He knows us, redeems us, and longs to bring us into His family, just as He did for Rahab.

**Think back to when you were a little girl. Who was your favorite princess: Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, the Little Mermaid, or another?**

Mine was always Cinderella. Still is. I like the singing, sewing mice, “Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo,” the carriage, the glass slipper—all of that stuff. But what I really love is that she was the princess who was chosen. Many of the other princesses of my childhood were great and beautiful, but they had been born into the right household; their parents were royalty. Cinderella, though, was ordinary. That I can relate to.

At the heart of most women is the deep desire to be chosen. As middle schoolers in the lunchroom, we worry that we won't be chosen to sit with the other kids. In high school we want to be chosen to go to prom. As adults we want to be chosen for the promotion, the team, the club—we just want to be chosen! Great news: you are! No matter how messy your life has been, no matter what you've done or how your story has unfolded so far—God loves you, and you are chosen. Rahab's story is a great example of how God chooses to love and use messy people.

**When have you felt chosen in life? How did it make you feel?**

So let's get to our Bible story. Rahab lives within the walls of the world's oldest continually inhabited city, Jericho.<sup>1</sup> She makes a living at the world's oldest occupation, prostitution. Jericho is the first city that Joshua comes to as God leads the Israelites across the Jordan River to conquer the land



promised to the Israelites. The people who live in Jericho have heard of God and the miracles He has done for His people, but they worship pagan gods—not at all honoring the one true God.

Joshua, who has taken over leadership from his mentor, Moses, sends spies into Jericho on a reconnaissance mission. We read:

*Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, “Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho.” So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab.*

(Joshua 2:1)

Now let’s stop here for a moment. “A prostitute named Rahab.” That’s quite a title. Wouldn’t you hate to live with a label like that? It would be like being known as “Sarah the liar” or “Rachel the drunk.” Ouch! It would sting to be known by your worst quality.

**What labels have you been given in life, and how have they affected you?**

**Have you ever felt disqualified from being used by God? Explain your response.**

The men stay at Rahab’s for the night. Not a bad place for men from out of town to blend in. But the king gets word that there may be spies in his kingdom, so he sends out soldiers to find them. Rahab agrees to cover for them in exchange for protection when the Israelites invade the city.

After the soldiers leave Rahab’s home, she says to the Israelite spies:

*“I know the LORD has given you this land. . . . We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. For we have heard how the LORD made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. . . . For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.*



*“Now swear to me by the LORD that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you.”*

*(Joshua 2:9-12a)*

The spies agree, and when the Israelites conquer the city, Rahab and everyone in her household are spared (Joshua 6:22-23).

Was this a divine appointment that the spies would end up at Rahab's brothel? Maybe. Truthfully, we don't know. But we do know that God chose to use Rahab in a very difficult situation; she was an unlikely accomplice to God's plan.

This pagan woman, a prostitute living in a Canaanite town, recognizes and has faith in the God of Israel. She believes in a God she does not personally know but respects because of His amazing miracles. She even goes so far as to declare “the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below” (Joshua 2:11).

**Read the verses below, and write your name in the blanks:**

*Even before he made the world, God loved \_\_\_\_\_ and chose \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.*

*(Ephesians 1:4)*

*You did not choose \_\_\_\_\_, but I chose \_\_\_\_\_ and appointed \_\_\_\_\_ so that \_\_\_\_\_ might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever \_\_\_\_\_ ask[s] in my name the Father will give \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(John 15:16 NIV)*

**What do these Scriptures teach you about God's view of you?**

**Do you have a mirror handy? Take a look into it. (Really, go ahead and take a look!) Describe what you see:**

When I look into the mirror, I see the flaws, the zits, the imperfections, and most recently, the wrinkles! But God doesn't. When God looks at each of us, He sees a masterpiece! Is it because the imperfections aren't really there? No, it's because He looks at things differently than we do.

**Read 1 Samuel 16:7 in the margin. What does this verse tell us about how God sees us?**

God looks beyond the flaws and sees who He created each of us to be. He sees someone He has chosen.

As a new mom, I looked at my tiny daughter, and all I saw was perfection. Still today, that's all I see. She may look in the mirror and want to lose a few pounds or wish she were taller or had longer hair, but I see who she was created to be. And she is beautiful! I see her potential and her beauty in ways that she may never be able to grasp. She is God's masterpiece. She is a gift in my life.

**Are you able to look deeper than the outward appearance and see yourself as God does? Why or why not?**

**What do you think God sees when He looks at you? Explain your response.**

**What does it mean for your life to know that God chooses you?**

*But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."*

*(1 Samuel 16:7 NRSV)*

**God looks beyond the flaws and sees who He created each of us to be. He sees someone He has chosen.**



As you look in the mirror today, reflect on 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV): “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession.” God loves you! You are beautiful in His sight, and He wants to use you in great and wonderful ways!

## **Pray**

- Take a deep breath and focus your thoughts on God.
- Thank God for seeing beyond your past and focusing on your potential.
- Take time to praise God for making you in His image—which is beautiful, by the way!
- Song suggestion: “Broken Things,” recorded by Matthew West.



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# DAY 2: GOD USES MESSY PEOPLE

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## Settle

As you slow down, listen to Kari Jobe's recording of "Be Still My Soul" or another song of your choice, and allow the melody to calm you and center your heart on Christ.

## Focus

*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

(Ephesians 2:10)

<sup>2</sup>But someone told the king of Jericho, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." <sup>3</sup>So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: "Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land."

<sup>4</sup>Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, "Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn't know where they were from." <sup>5</sup>They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don't know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them." <sup>6</sup>(Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.) . . .

<sup>8</sup>Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. <sup>9</sup>"I know the LORD has given you this land," she told them. "We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. <sup>10</sup>For we have heard how the LORD made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. <sup>11</sup> . . . For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below."

(Joshua 2:2-11)

## Reflect

I grew up in church. I attended Sunday school, went on youth retreats, and dated Christian guys. By most people's standards I was a pretty good kid. So it's not surprising that my testimony is not that dramatic. In fact, it's a little boring. Now, I've come to appreciate boring, because it often leaves



you with fewer messes; but again, it doesn't make for a very remarkable faith story.

But take someone like Rahab—now, there's a story! It reads like a major motion picture: a prostitute on the rough streets of Jericho who shelters spies and then engineers a daring escape. Later she is rescued along with her whole household when the city is attacked. Where is Emma Stone or Sandra Bullock? We need to make this film!

She is an unlikely heroine. Some may even wonder how God could use someone like Rahab, who had made so many mistakes and had such a messy past. But for me, I've often wondered the opposite. How could God use someone who has an ordinary story? As a teenager I had heard testimonies of how people far from God had dramatic conversion experiences and used their transformation to reach others who were like their former selves. If only I had a dramatic story too!

The truth is that messy people come in all shapes and sizes. Our churches are full of them, because when we get right down to it, messy people are simply people with sin in their lives.

**Read Romans 3:23 in the margin. Who are the messy people who sin?**

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.  
(Romans 3:23)*

Sin is a condition that affects us all, yet God chooses each of us and wants to use us if we will let Him. God uses sinners. Of course God uses sinners; it's all He's got to work with, right?

**Reread Ephesians 2:10 (page 17). According to this verse, why does God make us new creations in Jesus?**

This verse teaches us that we have been created to be used by God to do amazing things, and Jesus makes this possible! It tells us that, in Christ, we are masterpieces in God's eyes, and He wants to use everyone for His purposes.

We know this at one level; but when He chooses to use someone with a notorious past, it usually gets our attention. The spies didn't show up on



the doorstep of a priest or a “good person” in Jericho. They chose a brothel. They ended up at the home of Rahab, a sinner. But she was much more than that. She was clever and worldly, and she handled stress well. Under pressure, she had the presence of mind to keep cool and devise a way to save not only the spies but also her entire family in the process. The lessons that a hard-lived life had taught her were not wasted when God called upon her to help His people. God uses messy people. God also uses those who respond in faith.

**We have been created to be used by God to do amazing things, and Jesus makes this possible!**

**When and how have you noticed that God often uses unlikely people to accomplish His will?**

Consider the disciples. Peter, James, John, and Andrew were fishermen. They were tough and calloused men who worked demanding jobs. Not being candidates for priestly training, they probably had received little formal education and, instead, had taken to the family business of fishing. When Jesus called them, everything changed. They were no longer rejected; they were chosen. Matthew, another disciple, was a tax collector. He was perhaps educated but surely not well liked as a tax official in the Galilean region. These are some of the men Jesus personally chose as His closest companions. Their lives are recorded for us to see thousands of years later, but how were they qualified?

Let's look at a few of their stories and see what stands out.

**Read the following verses and underline the descriptions of how the disciples responded to Jesus.**

***<sup>18</sup>One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living.***

***<sup>19</sup>Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” <sup>20</sup>And they left their nets at once and followed him.***

***<sup>21</sup>A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their***



*nets. And he called them to come, too. <sup>22</sup>They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.*

**(Matthew 4:18-22)**

*As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.*

**(Matthew 9:9 NIV)**

**What does this reveal to us about their one qualification?**

We don't see any perfect pedigrees here. There are no qualifications that seem to set them apart from others. What we see are messy people with a willingness to respond to the call of God. They were willing to alter their plans for God. In fact, the words at once and immediately almost jump off the page. These men responded *at once, immediately*, in faith! Just like Rahab.

**When God taps you on the heart, how quickly do you tend to respond?**

**When you consider how God might want to use you, what obstacles do you feel are holding you back?**

**How do you feel when you think of God using Rahab the prostitute?**



## How do you feel when you think of God using you?

Now, let's get back to our heroine, Rahab. When presented with the opportunity to help God's people, she is quick to respond in spite of her fears. In fact, she says her people are not only afraid but are living in terror. When you have the opportunity to serve God, there will be times when it is simple and sweet; but at other times, it will be terrifying. It will be messy, scary, and uncertain. That, my friend, is when the opportunity for faith comes, and that is when heroines emerge.

### Pray

- Consider your faith story, and thank God for how He has shown up despite your imperfections.
- Focus on what God would have you move past in order to live your best life now.
- Ask God to help you be ready to respond immediately as He calls your name this week.



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# DAY 3: GOD SEES MESSY PEOPLE

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## Settle

Set a timer for two minutes, and just be still. That's it: just be quiet and let the troubles of today fall away for at least two minutes, enjoying the quiet of the moment.

## Focus

*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater . . .*

(Mark 12:31 NKJV)

*<sup>12</sup>"Now swear to me by the LORD that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that <sup>13</sup>when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live." . . .*

*<sup>14</sup>"We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety," the men agreed.*

(Joshua 2:12-14)

## Reflect

My husband, Jim, and I have two children, Alyssa and Josh—two amazing, wonderful, completely different kids. When they were little, Alyssa was shy. She would hide her face in my knees when we went into new settings. Josh, on the other hand, would go to the play area at a fast-food restaurant, stand on the slide, and yell, "Hey, I'm Josh! Who wants to be my friend?" He never met a stranger, which is kind of scary for a mom of a toddler.

To this day, he surprises me at his boldness in some situations. Recently while shopping, Josh waited outside the store for me. (Don't panic. He's a seventeen-year-old weight lifter. All is well!) He came and found me after about twenty minutes and said, "Hey, Mom, meet Melvin. I told him we'd fix him up with a few things." My first question: "Fix him up with what?" Second question: "Who in the world is Melvin?"

Turns out that Josh had seen a homeless man and approached him to find out his story and see what he needed. Melvin was messy. He was sick and hadn't bathed in quite a while. Truthfully, he was a tough-looking guy. We were able to help him out a little bit, and a sweet friendship developed.

But as I have reflected on the initial scenario, I have wondered what gave Josh the courage to approach this guy and ask him about his life.

Would I have done that?

I, and so many others like me that day, had not really noticed Melvin. We had walked by without seeing him. But Josh saw him, really saw him. He took the time to get to know Melvin and learn his story.

**Reread Mark 12:31 (page 22). What did Jesus command us to do? Why do you think there is no greater commandment?**

This verse makes me think of Rahab. If I had been a resident of Jericho, would I have associated with Rahab? Would I have asked her about her life? Would we have been friends? Maybe, but probably not. Surely we would have hung out with different crowds. I mean, she would have been a messy person, right?

But here's the problem. I'm messy too. I am just a different kind of messy.

**Have you ever had a time when you wanted someone to *really* see you—to notice the pain you're in and offer to intervene? If so, briefly describe that time.**

**What kinds of messy people make you uncomfortable? How do you respond to them?**

Rahab is not the only noteworthy resident of Jericho. More than one thousand years after Rahab saved the Israelite spies, Jesus visits this same town and encounters another messy person.

*<sup>1</sup>Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup>A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. <sup>3</sup>He wanted to see who*



*Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. "So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.*

*<sup>5</sup>When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup>So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.*

*<sup>7</sup>All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."*

(Luke 19:1-7 NIV)

The crowds have assembled as Jesus enters town. At this point in His ministry, wherever He goes, the crowds come. His teachings and healings are well known by the time we get to the nineteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. The crowd is so thick that Zacchaeus can't get a glimpse of Jesus, so he climbs a tree.

As the teacher passes by, He sees Zacchaeus. This shocks the crowd because Zacchaeus is not a popular guy. (Tax collectors of this time were notorious for overtaxing and cheating people.) When Jesus looks up, calls this man by name, and then goes to his home, the crowd is not pleased. Why would Jesus choose Zacchaeus?

What must Zacchaeus be thinking? Surely he hears the crowd as they begin to mutter against him. But he also hears Jesus as He calls him by name!

This "wee little man," as the children's song describes him, has been small in stature and short on respect his whole life. But as Jesus looks at him, He calls Zacchaeus by name. He is saying, "I see you, Zacchaeus. I know you, and I care about you. Come on down, and let's spend time together."

Jesus knows your name too! He sees you. Don't miss that. Jesus knows you. He knows your name—and what you weigh, no matter what your driver's license says! He knows about the dust bunnies under the stove and the bills you owe. And He cares.

In Africa, "I see you" is an ancient greeting. It is simple but also deep—more than a statement of being able to visually comprehend someone's presence. It is a sign that I acknowledge you—I see your worth and give you honor. While visiting in Uganda last year, I had a Maasai tribesman approach me and give this greeting after a few days together: "I see you, Jennifer." It was a warm greeting of honor.

Jesus looks at you fresh each day and whispers, "I see you."

**As you consider that Jesus truly sees you and all that you are dealing with today, how does that make you feel?**

**God calls us to love messy people.**

**Is there someone you need to slow down and notice today? Whom might it be?**

**What can you offer to help this person feel valued?**

**How can you help to meet her or his needs?**

Let's go back to Josh and Melvin. When Josh came into the store to find me, he brought Melvin with him. This caused a bit of a commotion. In fact, the commotion is what first got my attention.

As I heard the store clerk telling Melvin that he needed to leave, Josh touched the clerk's hand and said, "No, ma'am, he's with me." It was the Great Commandment in action: "Love one another" (John 13:34 NIV). God calls us to love messy people.

**Who has taken the time to really see you?**

God sees you, but He also sees those around you. Once you discover God's love personally, He wants you to share that with others. We are to love even the messy people living in the tough parts of town, or that family member who has gone astray, or the friend who is making poor choices. These people are Zacchaeus. They are Rahab. And, at times, they are you and me.



## Pray

- For an energized time of prayer, listen and even dance along with Hollyn's recording of "Love with Your Life." (I bet you'll move at least a little bit as you listen!)
- Thank God for seeing you and caring about every detail of your life.
- Ask God who He would have you reach out to in love today. Then do it!



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# DAY 4: GOD REDEEMS MESSY PEOPLE

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## Settle

As you quiet your heart today, sing or hum a simple song that brings you peace—perhaps one you learned as a child or new Christian. It could be something as simple as “Jesus Loves Me” or “Amazing Grace.” For me, a song that brings peace is Sandi Patty’s “O Calvary’s Lamb.” I sang it over my children’s cribs to put them to sleep. Whatever you choose, allow that familiar, simple tune to center your thoughts on God.

## Focus

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

(2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV)

<sup>15</sup>Then, since Rahab’s house was built into the town wall, she let them down by a rope through the window. <sup>16</sup>“Escape to the hill country,” she told them. . . .

<sup>17</sup>Before they left, the men told her, “We will be bound by the oath we have taken only if you follow these instructions. <sup>18</sup>When we come into the land, you must leave this scarlet rope hanging from the window through which you let us down. And all your family members—your father, mother, brothers, and all your relatives—must be here inside the house. <sup>19</sup>If they go out into the street and are killed, it will not be our fault. But if anyone lays a hand on people inside this house, we will accept the responsibility for their death. <sup>20</sup>If you betray us, however, we are not bound by this oath in any way.”

<sup>21</sup>“I accept your terms,” she replied. And she sent them on their way, leaving the scarlet rope hanging from the window.

(Joshua 2:15-21)

## Reflect

When my kids were little, keeping the house clean was an ongoing battle. In fact, the only time I really cleaned and straightened was when my husband took the kids and left for a while. I would go into speed mode,



picking up toys, cleaning, vacuuming, doing laundry; and then, every time, it happened. They returned. And with them came the mess—the mess of crumbs and toys and diapers and spit-up. The mess was back.

I came to love a peculiar verse during that stage of life: “An empty stable stays clean—but there is no income from an empty stable” (Proverbs 14:4 TLB). This verse took on so many meanings for me.

First, a house without children certainly is easier to keep clean, but what a joy to experience that messy time of life with my crusty kiddos. I can still remember the pungent odor that assaulted me when opening a car door with a three-day-old sippy cup inside. And I remember the frustration of spending an hour getting dressed up for my first time out of the house in a week only to have one of the kids throw up on me as I walked out the door. Where the stable is clean, it is also empty.

Second, I began to look at this verse through the lens of ministry. When a church is full, it’s messy. Once people get involved, there will be messes. That’s a guarantee. And those messes are much worse than spit-up and half-eaten crackers. They leave scars. Instead of requiring buckets of bleach, these messes require massive amounts of faith and forgiveness. But messy people are who Jesus came for, and it’s our privilege as Christ-followers to do life with one another.

You and I are messy people. So was Rahab.

Mess in the sense of scattered toys and spilled milk is one thing, but the kind of messes we are dealing with in this study are more accurately called sin. Rahab was caught in the mess of prostitution, a public sexual sin. Sometimes the messes we are caught in are apparent, just as Rahab’s sin was, but sometimes they are more subtle—easier to cover up and disguise. Yet that in no way lessens the damage that sin does in the lives of those who are trapped, as well as the lives of those who love them.

I spend a great deal of my week talking with people who are hurting because of sin. After years in ministry, it still saddens me to hear about the secret sins that are destroying families. Affairs, pornography, abuse, addictions, lies, and gambling are a few examples of sins that are wreaking havoc not only in our society but also in our churches. On a less dramatic but equally devastating level, there are sins such as selfishness, gossip, and mean-spirited interactions that are drawing people, including Christians, away from what God would have for their lives.

I’ve realized that in order for me to really love people deeply and help them work through the messes of their lives, I must first work on the messes



in my life. On an airplane we are instructed to put on the oxygen mask first before trying to help someone else. If we're not breathing, we won't be able to help anyone else. So, before becoming concerned with others' sins, we must take a look at our own.

The first step in cleaning up our lives is to acknowledge our own sins.

**Read 1 John 1:8 in the margin. What does this in-your-face verse say we're doing if we claim to be without sin?**

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

*(1 John 1:8 NIV)*

Being able to move forward in faith involves acknowledging our sin, repenting, and living in a way that honors God. So get honest with yourself right now—really honest. You may not even have the courage to write it down, but at least think about this next question seriously.

**What messes are you caught in right now?**

**Before becoming concerned with others' sins, we must take a look at our own.**

Rahab shelters the spies, but her story does not end there.

**Read Joshua 6:22-25. What happens to Rahab and her family?**

**What reason is given in verse 25?**

At the end of Joshua 6, Rahab and her entire household are rescued. Because of her bold faithfulness, she and her family are redeemed. God has seen her faith, chosen her, used her, and redeemed her. Now her story is changed forever. She overcomes the sins of her past and is used in new and powerful ways.

God wants to do the same for you! "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV).



**How might God be wanting to change your story the way He changed Rahab's?**

**What steps of faith do you need to take for that to happen?**

**Who in your life may need your help to change their story?**

You and I are messy people, and so are the people in our lives. Just as our own messes can paralyze us, sometimes the messes in the lives of others can seem so overwhelming that we simply want to walk away. But let's not do that. As we see in Rahab's story, God's spies needed her in order to escape, but she needed them too. The same is true of us. We need one another.

### **Pray**

- Just be still.
- Thank God for turning your messes into a masterpiece—even if you can't see it yet.
- Seek God's forgiveness for the sins that have made a mess of your life.
- Ask God how you might partner with someone who is trapped in a mess.
- Song suggestion: "Chain Breaker," recorded by Zach Williams.



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# DAY 5: GOD GIVES MESSY PEOPLE A ROYAL LINEAGE

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## Settle

If you play an instrument, begin today by playing to the Lord. If you're artistic, draw a sketch of some part of God's creation that brings you peace. If neither applies to you, just take out pencil and paper and list the things of God's creation that bring you peace and joy.

## Focus

*God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.*

(Ephesians 1:5)

<sup>22</sup>*Joshua said to the two spies, "Keep your promise. Go to the prostitute's house and bring her out, along with all her family."*

<sup>23</sup>*The men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, mother, brothers, and all the other relatives who were with her. They moved her whole family to a safe place near the camp of Israel.*

<sup>24</sup>*Then the Israelites burned the town and everything in it. Only the things made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron were kept for the treasury of the LORD's house.*

<sup>25</sup>*So Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute and her relatives who were with her in the house, because she had hidden the spies Joshua sent to Jericho. And she lives among the Israelites to this day.*

(Joshua 6:22-25)

## Reflect

Recently my husband was asked about his ancestry, to which he replied, "Um, I'm just regular, I guess." We all chuckled at that, but as his greatest admirer, I thought, No, *you're not regular*. You're awesome! What nationality does awesome come from?



**No matter what kind of family you are born into . . . you have the option to be adopted into a royal lineage. . . . You have the choice to be in Jesus' family!**

*<sup>49</sup>Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "Look, these are my mother and brothers. <sup>50</sup>Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!"*  
(Matthew 12:49-50)

As I thought about that conversation later, I wondered why it troubled me to hear him say, "I'm regular." It was because I know different—not that I know he is Italian or Scottish, but that I know he is part of a royal family. He has been adopted into a kingly family!

**Read the following verses, underlining the words that describe our identity in Christ:**

*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

(1 Peter 2:9 NIV)

*God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.*

(Ephesians 1:5)

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.*

(Galatians 3:26 NIV)

I love that! No matter what kind of family you are born into—wealthy or poor, healthy or dysfunctional—you have the option to be adopted into a royal lineage. You can be a daughter—no, a princess—to the King of kings. You have the choice to be in Jesus' family! And that is not just "regular"!

But how does it happen? How do we move from ordinary citizen to a member of the royal household? It's all through faith. By placing our faith in Christ, God becomes our Father, we become His children, other believers become our brothers and sisters, and the church becomes our spiritual family.

God's unchanging plan always has been "to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him *great pleasure*" (Ephesians 1:5, emphasis added).

**Read Matthew 12:49-50 in the margin. What does Jesus say about those who follow Him?**

We have all been created in the image of God, but to become His child—a princess—requires a response. The invitation to be part of God's family is universal, but there is one condition: faith in Jesus. This is our RSVP to God's invitation. Faith is what makes adoption into God's family possible. By accepting Jesus as Lord of our lives and seeking forgiveness of our sins, we move from creation of God to child of the King!

This week we have looked at an unlikely heroine, Rahab. She shelters the spies, and in turn she and her whole family are saved when the Israelites invade Jericho.

**Look again at Joshua 6:25. How is Rahab named or described here?**

She's rescued, but there's that label again: Rahab the prostitute. We would think she was just a messy woman who helped God's people out once upon a time if we didn't see her mentioned again in a very unexpected place.

**Read Matthew 1:5-6 (NIV) and fill in the blanks below:**

***Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was \_\_\_\_\_,***

***Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,***

***Obed was the father of Jesse,***

***and Jesse the father of \_\_\_\_\_.***

Here at the beginning of the New Testament in the first chapter of Matthew, we have a family tree—Jesus' family tree. And it's in this distinguished lineage that Rahab appears. She is King David's great-great-grandmother. This is a family tree that eventually leads us to Jesus Himself! How does this happen? How does Rahab the prostitute turn into Rahab the great-great-grandmother of the great King David?

For that matter, how does anyone caught in a difficult life situation move from messy to masterpiece?

I have a dear friend who had a difficult upbringing—not much money, not much consistency from the adults in her life. It's not a great story,



honestly. That is, not until she decided to change the outcome of her story. She simply made a choice to lovingly distance herself from the unhealthy things of her past and seek new patterns. This was a tough decision, and for years she did it through sheer willpower. Then she met Jesus. Through His power in her life and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she has turned what could have been a tragic outcome into a beautiful life of serving Christ and others.

My friend, like Rahab, changed her story through faith and obedience to God.

When Rahab first encounters the Israelite spies, she expresses faith in the power of their God. But when she moves into action for their God, He becomes her God. We don't know the details of what happens after Rahab is rescued in Jericho, but we do know that she becomes part of the Hebrew community. She marries and raises a family. She is changed. And as we've seen, the very lineage of Jesus is impacted through the faithfulness of this messy woman.

### **At what point did God become your God?**

*In the same way,  
was not even Rahab  
the prostitute  
considered  
righteous for what  
she did when she  
gave lodging to the  
spies and sent them  
off in a different  
direction?*

*(James 2:25 NIV)*

We see Rahab yet again in Scripture. She is mentioned in the books of James and Hebrews.

### **Look up Hebrews 11, noting the many heroes commended for their faith in this chapter. Write some of their names below:**

### **According to verse 31, what saved Rahab?**

### **Now read James 2:25 in the margin. How was Rahab viewed after she helped the spies?**

Hebrews 11 is known as the Hall of Faith chapter. In this passage the writer lists some of the very greatest heroes of Scripture such as Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. And mentioned by name in this prestigious company is our heroine, Rahab! If you're going to be mentioned anywhere in the Bible, this is a great place to be! But consider the messy lives and the excuses these heroes could have hidden behind:

- Abraham was elderly.
- Joseph was mistreated.
- Moses was a stutterer.
- Gideon was penniless.
- David was an adulterer.
- Jonah was a coward.
- Naomi was a widow.
- Peter was a hothead.
- Rahab was immoral.

What a group! Yet through their faith, God was able to use them in mighty ways! Like Rahab, they all changed their stories. They did not let their failures define them. Though their lives were messy, just like ours, they moved past their old reputations into their roles in God's family.

God has a place in His family for you too. As we close this week, I hope that you will choose either to join or renew your commitment to God's family. Remember, God chooses to use messy people like me and you!

## **Pray**

- If you have not received Jesus as your Savior, pray for forgiveness of your sins and ask God to be the center of your life—the author of your story!
- If you already are a Christ-follower, take time to recommit yourself to Jesus today.
- Thank God for adopting you into His royal family.
- Song suggestion: "Good Good Father," recorded by Chris Tomlin.



# VIDEO VIEWER GUIDE: WEEK 1

*Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove.*

(Joshua 2:1)

*“I know the LORD has given you this land . . . we have heard how the LORD made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt.”*

(Joshua 2:9-10)

*And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father’s household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.*

(Joshua 6:25 KJV)

Simple (but not always easy) steps for moving from mess to best:

1. Recognize our \_\_\_\_\_ for God.

*You will seek the LORD your God . . . and you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your being.*

(Deuteronomy 4:29 CEB)

2. Resolve to lead a life that is \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ.

*Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.*

(Romans 12:2 CEB)

# VIDEO VIEWER GUIDE: WEEK 1

3. Request help from \_\_\_\_\_.

*Without guidance, a people will fall,  
but there is victory with many counselors.*

(Proverbs 11:14 CEB)

4. Remember Who holds your \_\_\_\_\_.

*“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”*

(Jeremiah 29:11 NASB)