

MARY: WOMAN OF FAITH

NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH

One of my favorite biblical role models is Mary of Nazareth. In her life I have found a wealth of wisdom for my own walk with God. Her story illustrates many of the characteristics of the kind of woman God uses to fulfill His redemptive purposes in our world.

An ordinary woman

There was nothing particularly unusual about Mary. She was not from a wealthy or illustrious family. When the angel appeared to this young teenage girl, she was engaged to be married and was undoubtedly doing what engaged girls do—dreaming of being married to Joseph, of the home they would live in, of the family they would have. I don't believe she was expecting her life to be used in any extraordinary way.

The significance of Mary's life was not based on any of the things our world values so highly—background, physical beauty, intelligence, education, natural gifts and abilities. It was Mary's relationship to Jesus that gave her life significance. "The Lord is with you," the angel told her. That is what made all the difference in this young woman's life. And it is what makes all the difference in our lives.

An undeserving woman

God did not choose this young woman because she was worthy of the honor of being the mother of the Savior. The angel said to Mary, "Greetings, you who are *highly favored!*" (v. 28, emphasis added). That phrase could be translated, "you who are graciously accepted." If any of us is to be accepted by God, it will be because of grace—not because of anything we have done.

It's all because of grace. Over and over again in Scripture, we see that God chooses people who are undeserving. God didn't look down from heaven and say, "I see a woman who has something to offer Me; I think I'll use her." Mary did not deserve to be used by God; to the contrary, she marveled at God's grace in choosing her.

The moment we cease to see ourselves as undeserving instruments, chances are we will cease to be useful in the hand of God.

A Spirit-filled woman

We, too, must be filled with the Spirit if we are to fulfill the purpose for which God has chosen us. When the angel said to Mary, "You're going to have a child," Mary responded, "How can this be? I've never been intimate with a man!" God had chosen her for a task that was humanly impossible.

The task for which God has chosen you and me is no less impossible. We can share the Gospel of Christ with our lost friends, but we cannot give them repentance and faith. You can provide a climate that is conducive to the spiritual growth of your children, but you can't make them have a heart for God. We are totally dependent on Him to produce any fruit of eternal value.

In response to Mary's expression of weakness and inadequacy, the angel promised her God's strength and adequacy: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (v. 35).

Don't ever forget that *you* cannot do what God has called you to do. You cannot parent that child, love that husband, care for that elderly parent, submit to that boss, teach that Sunday school class, or lead that small-group Bible study.

God specializes in the impossible, so that when the victory is won and the task is complete, we cannot take any credit. Others know we didn't do it, and we know we didn't do it. We must always remember that we can only live the Christian life and serve God through the power of His Holy Spirit. As soon as we think we can handle it on our own, we become useless to Him. We have to be willing to get out of the way, let God take over, and let Him overshadow us.

An available woman

Equipped with the promises of God, Mary's response was simply, "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it be to me as you have said" (v. 38). In other words, "Lord, I'm available. You are my master; I am Your servant. I'm willing to be used however You choose. My body is Yours; my womb is Yours; my life is Yours."

In that act of surrender, Mary offered herself to God as a living sacrifice. She was willing to be used by God for His purposes—willing to endure the loss of reputation that was certain to follow when people realized she was with child, willing to endure the ridicule and even the possible stoning permitted by the Mosaic law, willing to go through nine months of increasing discomfort and sleeplessness, willing to endure the labor pains of giving birth to the Child. Mary was willing to give up her own plans and agenda so that she might link arms with God in fulfilling His agenda.

A praising woman

When God puts challenging circumstances in our lives, we either *worship* or we *whine*. I'm ashamed to say I've done more than my share of whining—even about ministry. "Oh, Lord, I'm tired of traveling. Do I have to go there? This is so hard! Why do I have to deal with that person?" I am reminded of the children of Israel in the wilderness who murmured incessantly. "If only God had just let us die in the wilderness," they whined. One day God finally said, in essence, "You want to die in the wilderness? Okay, you'll die in the wilderness!" (see [Num. 14:2, 28–30](#)). Be careful what you say when you murmur—God may take you up on it.

But when Mary's world was turned topsy-turvy, when she was faced with a drastic change in plans, she responded in worship and praise. "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in

God my Savior” (vv. 46–47). So begins her Magnificat—one of the greatest hymns of praise ever lifted up to heaven. She worshiped God for His wonderful acts, for His mercy, and for choosing her to be a part of His great redemptive plan.

A woman of the Word

Her prayer in [Luke 1:46–55](#) includes at least a dozen quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures. In those days women did not have a formal education; Mary was probably illiterate. But she had listened to the reading of the Word and had hidden it in her heart. Her life and her prayers were filled with Scripture.

One of our greatest needs as women is to become women of the Word, so that our prayers, our responses, and our words are saturated with God’s way of thinking. The world does not need to hear our opinions. When friends approach us for advice about dealing with their children, their boss, their finances, their fears, their depression, or other issues, they don’t need to hear what we think. We should be able to take them to the Word and say, “I don’t have the answers you need, but I know Someone who does. Here’s what God’s Word has to say about this situation.”

A wounded woman

Eight days after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph took the infant to the temple ([Luke 2:21–35](#)). Simeon, who had been waiting for the appearance of the Messiah, took the Christ-Child in his arms and blessed Him. Simeon spoke of how the Child would be a sign that would be spoken against—foreshadowing the cross and the suffering He would undergo. Then Simeon looked at Mary and spoke words that she would not fully understand until she stood beneath the cross of her Son 33 years later. On that day she surely remembered Simeon’s words, “A sword will pierce your own soul too” (v. 35).

There at Calvary I believe that sword pierced Mary’s soul in more than one sense. First, as a mother she was losing her Son. She was giving up His life. Even as He laid down His life, she gave up her Son for the salvation and the redemption of the world.

Mothers, have you laid down your children for the sake of Christ and His kingdom? How sad it is on occasion to see Christian parents stand in the way of their children laying down their lives for the sake of Christ. And what a joy to see parents who gladly release their children to the will of God.

Another wound pierced Mary’s heart—this one even more deeply than the first. You see, she understood that her Son was dying not only for the sins of the world, but for *her* sins. Even before He was born, she had recognized Him as “God *my* Savior” ([Luke 1:47](#), emphasis added). As good as she was, Mary was not good enough to get to heaven on her own. As is true with each of us, she had to place her faith in the crucified Son of God, who died in her place. As she stood beneath that cross, perhaps she recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah: “He was pierced for [my] transgressions, he was crushed for [my] iniquities . . . and by his wounds [I am] healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all ([Isa. 53:5–6](#)).

Mary was a wounded woman—wounded not only by her suffering, but by her sin. As she gazed upon her crucified Son, she realized that He was taking her wounds upon Himself. And as she believed, she was healed—cleansed of her sin. Three days later when she learned that He had conquered death and was alive, knowing she had been made whole by His death, she joined the other disciples in taking the Good News of His atonement to a wounded, sinful world, that they, too, might know His healing salvation.

For more than 2,000 years her life has provided a portrait of godliness for women who, like Mary, long to be used of God.

1. What are your faith challenges? Make a list and spend some time bringing them before the Lord.
2. How can you relate to Mary?
3. How does Mary inspire you to hope in God?

© *Revive Our Hearts*. Used with permission. Excerpted from [*Portrait of a Woman Used by God*](#) by Nancy Leigh DeMoss. www.ReviveOurHearts.com