



Twelve Extraordinary Women: How God Shaped Women of the Bible, and What He Wants to Do with You

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They were ordinary, common, and in some cases shockingly low-caste, yet each was made extraordinary by her life-changing encounter with God.

Readers will be challenged and motivated by *Twelve Extraordinary Women*, a poignant and personal look into the lives of some of the Bible's most faithful women. Their struggles and temptations are the same trials faced by all believers at all ages. Inside this book, best-selling author and Bible teacher John MacArthur shows that the God to whom they were so committed is the same God who continues to mold and use ordinary people today.

Twelve Extraordinary Women: How God Shaped Women of the Bible, and What He Wants to Do with You Details

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From Reader Review Twelve Extraordinary Women: How God Shaped Women of the Bible, and What He Wants to Do with You for online ebook

Rebekah says

Before the rest of my review, I would like to defend motherhood as the highest calling. Raising another person and guiding their early steps are the most important thing that anyone could do whether man or woman. It's a universal truth that if there's anything you screw up, you do NOT want parenting to be on the list. ON THE OTHER HAND, I think MACARTHUR's meaning is that it's the ultimate job that a woman should aspire to and THAT is incorrect. And in that sense, I agree with the other ladies who have a bone to pick with MacArthur.

I have concluded that MacArthur rushed this book to the press. A lot of it seems to be fluff, and several parts seem to be... MacArthur's personal pet theories, which isn't exactly a sign of great writing (<http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2...>). MacArthur kinda clubs you over the head with his favorite points.

MacArthur also has a very funny habit of talking more about the men in the women's lives than about the women themselves. I get the feeling that MacArthur wants his readers to think that he thinks that these are very important women, historically speaking, and set a precedent for Christian women today, but he comes across as saying, "I know that I'm supposed to think that these women are important but I'm not ACTUALLY sure why BUT I have a deadline so I'm just going to say whatever I can think of for now."

He does make good points but only on women that are easy to make good points of. Let's face it. Eve was gullible, Sarah was fickle, and Anna didn't have a lot of lines. Rahab and the Samaritan woman fall somewhere in between because they're like the Jacobs of the group in that they make bad choices but ultimately pick the right team. Ruth is a dear, as are Hannah and no-longer-a-virgin Mary but Mary kinda becomes an excuse for MacArthur to rip on Catholicism instead of a real discussion of her character.

I'm inferring that Twelve Ordinary Men had so many thumbs up that they didn't think he could go wrong and didn't really make him sit in a corner and think long and hard about how he could produce a better piece of writing before publishing this book. I mean, this book is to writing what an MRE is to food. It's something and it works but people shouldn't eat it if they don't have to.

[The following is from my initial review after finishing the Eve chapter.]

- Every time I see the word "exalt" or "extraordinary", I get a strong urge to smash something. For the most part, women are not all that different from men. There are differences in physical strength, hormone levels, and sociology/modes of communication, but it's not so significant such that his pedestal-ization of all women is justified.

- He rips on pagan religions and middle Eastern cultures. While it's true that many of their practices are wrong (such as temple prostitution, human sacrifice, etc.), he crosses the line. If you compare the original intent of, for example, the burqa, it's not all that different from the Christian rules for women in modesty/propriety. How that plays out is not how anybody should judge the culture itself. People claiming to represent the interests of Christianity have also suppressed women. To be consistent, he should also

acknowledge this but he doesn't.

- He says that women are "subjected to grueling physical labor once reserved for men." I understand that a mother's duty is to her children but when she doesn't have children or when her children don't need as much attention, what is she supposed to do, twiddle her thumbs? If she administers to her home, that involves physical work, even with the help of modern appliances. If she HELPS her husband in the fields (the author himself points out the helper-companion role while talking about Eve, and helper-companions do not spend most of their waking hours in separate spheres), she must do physical labor. The only case in which she would not have to do physical labor is if she is in a society where there is employment that does not involve physical labor. Sojourner Truth addresses this all too well in her Ain't I A Woman speech. Also, women are pretty much just as prone to obesity as men, so they're designed, on average, to engage in physical work, if insignificantly less than men.

- That one paragraph. Chronology of Satan's fall. I just... I can't. It's neither relevant nor important, with the exception of the last sentence, but honestly, you could cross out the entire paragraph except the last sentence, and it would make more sense.

- I do like his point that even if people complain that it's unfair to be labeled sinners from birth, the fact that people sin is enough to condemn us, anyway.

Working conclusion: He does have his insights, but he doesn't really get around to them until after the reader has waded through reams of muck, ranging from biased portrayal to unfounded statements.

Schuyler says

Some people might question the legitimacy of a women's Bible study written by a man. Can he make it relatable to women? I don't know about every case, but this book certainly was. As I read MacArthur's thoughts, I found it to be a very healing and refreshing experience. It's one thing for a female author to say that women are important to God. But it's an incredibly more powerful thing for a male author to say that women are precious and beloved. Women are built with the need of affirmation from men, not just other women. And one of the key problems of the feminist movement is that we've held at arm's-length the male support and cherishing that God designed us to need. So yes, a man can write a women's Bible study and do a fantastic job at it.

There were twelve women in this study, but two in particular stood out to me: Rahab and Hannah.

Rahab was a prostitute (porne in Hebrew) who became part of the Hall of Faith and was commended in James for her faith in the Lord. MacArthur did an excellent job unpacking historical and biblical fact, and debunking extra details that we simply don't know. He explained why the spies went to Rahab in the first place, as well as the fact that her lie does not justify deceit in a Christian's life. (MacArthur does not condemn Rahab harshly for using the lie; he just points out that God does not need sin to save people.)

Hannah was extraordinary for the way she loved her husband, her family, and her Lord. The wife of a Levite, Hannah had a lot of sorrows to deal with, including infertility and her husband's bigamy. MacArthur's explanation of Hannah's prayer showcases her grateful, humble trust in the Lord. She prayed before God and went her way, trusting him to answer in accordance with what was best. Last week I had several causes to pray often, and the chapter on Hannah encouraged me to lay down my wants in thanksgiving and humility

like Hannah did.

All the women were excellent choices: Martha and Mary, Ruth, and The Samaritan Women were favorite chapters which for lack of space I cannot go into detail about. You'll simply have to discover them for yourself. I will only say that MacArthur's dealing with them is not stereotypical. He looks at them in a fresh way which I thought was absolutely biblical and spot-on.

The only woman I wished he would have taken a different angle with was Mary, the mother of Jesus. Highlighting her need to humbly submit to Jesus as God, MacArthur took the angle of defending her from Roman Catholic doctrine and undue veneration. Since I am not Catholic, and have never considered Mary as extraordinary other than the fact that she bore God's Son, I would have enjoyed a different angle. But that's a personal complaint, and the chapter was certainly true and accurate according to Scripture.

MacArthur puts an incredible amount of Scripture references in parentheses that would greatly add to a week-by-week study of this book, but were too many for me to read in the time I could allow. I was familiar with the gist of the verses based on the context around them, but I wish I could have spent more time going through the references. I'll have to revisit it in future, along with the study guide questions in the back.

I know this shouldn't be the judge of whether or not a book is correct, but time and again attitudes towards the various women that I've always thought were myth were things that MacArthur pointed out as well. Some of the 'flaws' foisted on these women aren't actually there in Scripture, and have always rubbed me raw when they're mentioned. I've read through the Bible many times, and found renewed confidence in the way MacArthur cleared away a lot of extra-biblical commentary from these stories.

This book is gentle. It is true. It showcases the loving-kindness that God felt towards these women, and the great worship they showed towards him. All these women are sinful, all are beloved by God; all point to the beautiful centerpiece of Christ's work and redemption. After a multiplicity of studies and sermons into the flaws of these women, MacArthur's honorable dealing towards these weaker vessels, without disguising their flaws, is a healing experience to read. I hope that the women who read this review will find a similar experience in these pages.

Maura says

I didn't love this book. It took too much license for me. It made many assumptions to make points. I don't like that, especially with Biblical issues. On the other hand, it offered good context for some of the "characters" lives and "stories." I also recognize that I don't give the author enough credit for perhaps being really in-tune with God when writing; perhaps these assumptions are inspired.....I'm not an easily trusting person. A wise, dear friend tells me I may want to pray for a more teachable spirit. :) She's right, so take my review with a grain of not always salty enough salt.

Oh, I should add that my Bible Study did the companion workbook. This I enjoyed. I get much from anything that has me delving into the scriptures, even if it's to prove that "it doesn't say that!" I could recommend the workbook, just not crazy about the book.

Lydia says

MacArthur spends the first chapter using the story of Eve to formulate his theological ideals for women, many of which I do not agree with. Throughout the books it was evident that he saw quietness, submission, and motherhood the highest traits for women to aspire to (all good, biblical traits, but not necessarily the ONLY, or even most important ones), and wove these ideals in and out of his storytelling.

His personal voice was evident. For instance, in the chapter about Anna, he describes her as a "quiet" and "prayerful" woman. That she was prayerful is not in doubt. The Bible says she prayed and fasted all the time. However, "quiet" is not how I would describe her. First of all, she was a prophetess (a fact that MacArthur barely alludes to), and once she saw the Messiah, she continually spoke of the experience to every one she met. This hardly describes a "quiet" woman, in my book.

However, the stories were told in a compelling way, reminding me of these great characters. Furthermore, his treatment of Hannah, describing her deep longing and pain, was very moving.

I liked it for what it was - an entertaining reminder of biblical stories and characters. Anything beyond that, and it doesn't hold up.

Amanda says

An interesting idea... MacArthur seems to esteem meekness, humility, and submission above all other traits. He glossed over the sins of the women he covered, making their mistakes appear to be hicks-up and tried to show that even when someone did not trust God, what she really was doing was showing her ultimate faithfulness to Him by being patient.

It didn't work in a lot of ways, and I found myself wanting to reach for Bad Girls of The Bible (a very excellent read p.s.) and I don't think that Sarah's attempts to take life into her own hands, or Rahab being a prostitute, or Eve eating the apple are situations that should be ignored or sugar covered. Sometimes people defy God, and you have to call it that - and then use the consequences of their decisions to show how they came back to him.

The glitch comes in because the values MacArthur (and our grandparent's generation) chooses to uphold are not the ones that my generation would select. And I think my generation is much better at not idolizing, or trivializing the aspects of these women's lives that are somehow less than ideal.

Ultimately I don't agree with the attributes MacArthur chose to esteem, I don't agree with his list, and I don't agree with his interpretation of events. I do however think this would be an interesting Bible study book because it definitely will lead to discussion.

So who would my 12 be?

Um, let's see - Eve, The 5 women of the genealogy, Hagar, Deborah, Mary (mother of Jesus), Martha, Hannah, and Miriam. But that's just today, tomorrow that list might change :-)

Stephanie Downey says

This book highlights seemingly ordinary women who became extraordinary through their faithfulness to God. I read this book slowly, taking in each chapter at a time, in hopes of understanding what role each woman played and how the story of their lives and faith could help shape mine. This book gave me a deeper understanding of the role women played in shaping our faith and how prophecy and lineage led the way to Jesus in the most interesting way. Nonbelievers seem to rebuke Christianity over the idea that it expresses and encourages the suppression and inequality of women. This couldn't be further from the truth and within the first chapter anyone can see the equal love God has for women and the vital role they've played in the Bible. First person Jesus revealed Himself to as Messiah? A woman. First person to see Jesus after His resurrection? A woman as well. I think this book is a great read for both men and women, but women are the ones who will truly benefit. Though there were a few moments when I felt he was a little condescending in some aspects, overall I found myself both relating to and being inspired by these 12 women and will keep this book on hand for reference.

Terrie says

Chapter one was about Eve. This had me view the fall of mankind and why the blame was placed on Adam as his sin and the consequences for generations to come.....Chapter two was about Sarah, Would I have been as faithful, waiting all those years for a promise of a son? She had to be a strong woman of faith and had to love her husband to give up a home and spend the rest of her days moving and living in a tent. Chapter 3-Rehab if you had asked me about her before I read the chapter, I could not have told you. So learned much in this chapter. Chapter 4 Ruth. Chapter 5 Hannah. I know much more about her now. It had to be hard to take Samuel to the temple and leave him. Chapter 6 Mary mother of Jesus. I like how this chapter points out that Mary was humble and never let being chosen to give birth to the Son of God go to her head. Many pray to her as if she has the power of God, but Mary gave God all the credit, admitted she was so blessed considering the sinful person she was. Chapter 8 the Samaritan woman, this chapter really speaks to me. We are all sinners and can not hide anything we have done from God, but Jesus loves and died so that we have forgiveness and salvation. I am almost finished and have greatly enjoyed the book. I have Twelve Ordinary Men ordered and look forward to reading it.

Lois says

Using this book as a guide for our Wednesday morning Bible study has blessed my soul. To think that God used women who were living in sin, women who previously rejected Him as well as women of prayer and women who sought his Holy Name as vessels to glorify the name of Jesus! To any woman who is downtrodden or pondering their faith, I recommend this book. To any woman who wants to know more about how God used women in a positive way, I recommend this book. I learned that Eve was a counterweight, not subservient to Adam, that Anna waited/prayed over 80 years to see the Promised Son of God appear, that Rehab claimed His Name and helped save her family, that Hannah was passionate persistent and patient waiting to become pregnant with Samuel, that Mary Magdalene was possessed by 7 demons until she was saved through the grace of Jesus, that Mary the Mother of Jesus never was boastful or prideful about giving birth to Jesus, and so much more.

Jacquelyn says

I read this book as research on how general Protestantism views certain women in the Bible. In some places it is insightful, and in others it is a bit shallow. Unfortunately, every now and then his bias against women shows through despite his effort to demonstrate "how God shaped women in the Bible and what He wants to do with you", especially during his two and a half page tangent trying to justify his own view that women never realized the gift of prophecy despite numerous women named as prophetesses and the Bible clearly saying that "your sons and daughters will prophesy" in Joel 2. In fact, though he goes through the life of various Biblical women, he rarely provides guidance on how learning about these women's lives can help your own life today. Overall, though an easy, quick read, I would take this as simply one man's opinion, an opinion that does not always line up with the clear reading of Scripture.

SarahO says

I guess it's really more like 1.5. This book was lent to me by a girl at church so I kinda feel bad for not liking it but I just couldn't get behind this man's interpretation of these amazing women. For some of the women he focused more on their bad qualities (Rahab) and just barely mentioned the good. Or he tries to lower the position of some of them to make their position in life seem lesser than they really were. He twists their stories to fit his own agenda and that irked me. I will probably not be reading this again or recommending it to anyone else.

Mary says

Some of this book is well written and I enjoyed the Biblical accounts of most of the women the author speaks about.

Sadly he is very anti Catholic and the chapter on the Blessed Mother made me very sad. Mr. MacArthur has obvious deep seated misunderstandings that he can't leave off the pages when He speaks of the Church and Mary.

He "knows" that Catholics "worship" Mary (we don't).

He "knows" that Catholics put Mary on the same level as Christ (we don't).

He has so many things wrong in here that he thinks are actual Church teachings that it is obvious He has not spoken to many Catholics or done real research into our faith.

Very sad because he was pretty good at bringing the virtues of the other women he writes about to life.

I couldn't finish the chapter on Mary but I did finish the book.

Not on my "recommend" list. Very disappointing.

Sally Andrews says

We engaged in this Bible study this semester. Oh, girls! You really need to read about these women who were not known because of their husbands, but because of their extreme faith and commitment to God! What a crazy concept back then, when women were second class citizens without a voice! Read about Hannah, Ruth, Rahab, Lydia, and even some you may not know. The book alone is a good read, but the workbook adds other dimensions. And, of course, group discussions add even more. The ladies of FUMC Vidor feel like we've had a fabulous experience!

Christy says

I think the author chose some great women for this book. Maybe not the ones I would have chosen, but I was really surprised by some of the chapters. I know to take Bible opinion-as-truth with a grain of salt, but I feel the author did a fantastic job of telling these women's stories. It made me dig into the Bible more than I normally would for info on Eve or Sarah, which are ones most people feel they know a lot about. I appreciate that.

I enjoyed how the author made no attempt to cover up any of their flaws. The epilogue firmly states that their imperfection paved a way for God's perfection. It just reminds us that no one is perfect, but we can still be used for great things. Striving to be perfect was not their strong point, but striving to have a relationship with the Living God was. Each of these women came to God through faith. Whether prostitute or life-long priestess, their ultimate faith in the promise of a Messiah made the difference.

Also, MacArthur says on more than one occasion that the women he chose were in no way extraordinary because of who they married or who their family was. He does a great job of showing the many facets of a woman's virtue and how they can act independently of husband and children. These women were chosen by God because of their person, not their gender-specific roles. Even, Sarah or Hannah, who were desperately pleading for children, were noted for their imperfections that turned to devout faith and devotion. He also praises these women for their roles as wives, mothers and leaders and how their values of hospitality or humility played a part. Roles that no man could fill in these specific instances. I enjoyed the balance of the two.

This book was a quick read, but I chose to take it slowly and really study each section. I'm so glad I did. I will be keeping this around to pick up again and again.

Adrienne says

FANTASTIC! Everything about this book is amazing. The writing was well done, the choice of subjects was appropriate, and overall the content was just mindblowingly incredible. I especially liked the Introduction and the chapters in Eve and Hannah. Highly recommended for all women of all ages!

Joy says

Great book we used in Sunday school. It was a close look at Eve, Sarah, Rahab, Ruth, Hannah, Mary, Anne, The Samaritan Woman, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, and Lydia. You gotta watch MacArthur on Lordship salvation, but he's a very good story-teller. There was quite a bit of new information for me about women I thought I knew well. Here are some 'new' facts: Abraham and Sarah came from an urban environment, so life on the road was something Sarah had to learn to embrace; Rahab is not a lesson in how to better ourselves through self-improvement, but a reminder that God by His grace can redeem even the most horrible life; The 'scandal motif' in Christ's lineage was no accident; Mary had to learn to submit to Jesus as her Lord rather than trying to control Him as His mother; Anna immediately understood what was going on and who Christ was; Jesus chose the Samaritan woman to be the one to whom he first explicitly told that He was the Messiah; Mary and Martha show that God uses all kinds of people; Mary Magdalene was not the Mary from Bethany, but had probably been set free from demons, so she was not merely reformed, but transformed; In order to start a synagogue in any community, Jewish custom required a quorum of at least ten Jewish men. But Jewish women could pray together in groups. A favorite observation from the book was the dedication of MacArthur to his nine granddaughters.
