



Little  
Women  
BIG  
GOD

IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF YOUR PROBLEMS, BUT THE SIZE OF YOUR GOD.

Debbie W. Wilson

Praise for

*Little Women, Big God*

“In her new Bible study, Debbie brings new perspective on how to see ourselves in the lives of these unlikely women. Some were abused and broken, some crushed under the weight of despair, and even one young unqualified girl was chosen for a big purpose. These pages filled with truth helped me to realize the wonder and matchless love that a Big God has for this little woman. May all my days be spent boldly living out that love and truth.”

—**Amy Richissin**, development officer, Turning Point

“Women in the Church today are hungry for excellent Bible study material, and this book will be a blessing to those who use it. I have spent my retirement years teaching a women’s Bible study at my church. Guess which book will be the focus of the next study? It will be such an encouragement for women to relearn the lesson that God has tried to impress upon our hearts since the birth, life, and resurrection of our Savior: we all have a role in God’s divine plan, and we should never underestimate what our mighty God can do with lives that are surrendered to him.”

—**Diane Passno**, Bible teacher (retired), senior vice president,  
Focus on the Family

“Are your problems threatening to crush you? Debbie Wilson’s outstanding book, *Little Women, Big God*, shows you where to take them. *Our help comes from our big God*. Take a deep breath, settle down, pull yourself together. Help and hope are here.”

—**Nancy Cobb**, national and international speaker, author of multiple books,  
including *The Best Thing I Ever Did for My Marriage*

“Today’s challenges are not new to God. Using the stories of the women of old, *Little Women, Big God* shows you how to overcome your trials.”

—**DiAnn Mills**, author of *Deadlock* and *Deadly Encounter*

“We all have a story to tell, a story worth telling, a story that is an intricate part of God’s great story of hope. But deep down we wonder if God can really use us. In these ten in-depth studies of women in the Bible, Debbie Wilson opens the door to how God worked in their lives . . . and how he works in yours. The insights you gain will enable you to face your struggles, look deeply into the eyes of the gracious Jesus, find hope and healing, and discover the empowering and equipping you need to tell your story.”

—**Rich Miller**, president, Freedom in Christ Ministries-USA; author; speaker

“Debbie Wilson makes each woman in this study so real and timely—the challenges each woman faced ARE relevant to us today. Debbie skillfully opens our eyes to this connection. *Little Women, Big God* is refreshing, thought-provoking, and encouraging while showing us that nothing is too big for God. This is one Bible study you don’t want to miss! I truly didn’t want it to end.”

—**Lisa Grimes**, president and CEO, PurThread Technologies, chair,  
Lighthouse Ministries

“With the timeless power of God’s Word, Debbie Wilson fearlessly addresses issues that crush modern women and make them feel small. From familiar problems like fertility to forgiveness, Debbie gently leads us to follow the examples of women in Scripture who have wrestled and found God’s healing solutions.”

—**Amy Carroll**, Proverbs 31 Ministries speaker and writer, author of *Breaking Up with Perfect*

“Debbie Wilson has the gift of bringing God’s Word to light and doesn’t disappoint in her latest book, *Little Women, Big God*. Her wisdom and insight are sure to enrich the spiritual life of any reader. I highly recommend *Little Women, Big God*.”

—**Diane Rumley**, co-founder, Support Military Spouses

“What an incredible study on this precious tapestry of little women with a BIG GOD! Each week you will have the joy of looking at life from a different woman’s example of truly experiencing God in the midst of life’s joys and challenges. Thank you, Debbie, for drawing us to our BIG GOD, who loves each of his little women with such an intimate eye on our lives. May each of you who choose to go on this journey learn that our God is a creative Father, who has a very personal plan and purpose for each of his daughters!”

—**Nancy M. Wilson**, Global Ambassador/Cru, author, speaker,  
StoryWave director

“I love Debbie Wilson’s Bible studies. She always brings a fresh perspective from Scripture and shows me another view of Truth. When I read her material I am always empowered to make wiser, stronger choices and I am freer to be who God created me to be. She is a perfect blend of Grace and Truth, and *Little Women, Big God* is no exception.”

—**Jane S. Wolfe**, founder and executive director, Dew4Him Ministries, Inc.

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LEAFWOOD  
P U B L I S H E R S  
*an imprint of Abilene Christian University Press*

## LITTLE WOMEN, BIG GOD

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# Introduction

## Jesus' Surprising Family Tree

DO YOU FIND YOURSELF PRAYING FOR AN UNDEMANDING LIFE? I do. Green lights, good health, cooperative clerks, computers that work—bring it on. I choose easy.

Yet movies and books without obstacles or danger don't hold our attention. And aren't simple games or effortless contests usually *boring*? Challenges not only add spice to entertainment, but they help us grow.

Sometimes when life is hard, I take it personally. Is God disappointed in me? Has he forgotten me? Maybe that is why the women in Jesus' genealogy speak to me. They lived hard lives. Some faced humanly impossible circumstances. Yet they

grew closer to God in their trials and experienced his incredible strength and comfort.

Their stories made me realize I'd been praying the wrong prayer. Instead of asking God to make my life easy, I should be asking for his grace to be strong. What a difference that small switch made in my attitude! Jesus' words—"Take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33)—were spoken for trials, not for days of ease.

Do you fall apart when life gets tough? Does stress make you act ugly? I have. But our failures don't nullify God's grace. The women in our study show us how to experience his presence, power, and peace in our weaknesses.

### Real Women—Just Like Us

"Wow, you sound like Abraham," I said to a man who'd told me about the adventure of a new career. He flinched and assured me he'd never presume to be in the same category as a biblical personality.

I wonder if that's how you feel. Have you ever put Bible characters on a level so far above that you can't relate to them? If so, I think you'll be surprised and delighted to meet the women in Jesus' family tree. They are like us.

This isn't an elite group of celebrities who enjoyed the pampered lives of the rich and the famous. Some were poor and destitute; only one lived in a palace. Neither are they a bunch of super-saints. Some made bad choices and doubted God's good intentions. Some of the women in Jesus' genealogy are familiar, such as Jesus' mother, Mary. Others, such as Tamar, are less known. As you read their stories, identify with them as real women.

- How would you have felt?
- How would you have responded?



From their stories, you'll learn the value a big God brings to an ordinary life. You'll also see how God has chosen you for a significant role in his eternal story.

### Open Your Heart—Not Just Your Book

This ten-week study is divided into nine weeks of looking at the women in Jesus' genealogy and one week of fashioning your own story of faith. Each week is divided into five daily lessons. Questions will stimulate your thinking about the passage and its application to your own life. Allow them to guide you, and feel free to ask your own questions. Take the thoughts I offer that work for you and discard those that don't. My desire is to help you to be a thinker and an able listener to our great God. He desires a close relationship with you!

Some questions are personal. If you are studying this with a group, contribute only what you are comfortable sharing. But remember, we enrich one another when we open up with each other. Day five includes a wrap-up of the week's thoughts.

### I Want to Remember . . .

At the end of each day's lesson, write down any statements that will help you recall what God is teaching you. Don't feel pressured to be clever. You are capturing the insights the Holy Spirit revealed to you. They can be bits of Scripture, thoughts you underlined, or personal applications. I think it would be fun if we encouraged each other by sharing them on Twitter with the following hashtag: #LittleWomenBigGod

### Tips

We're all busy, but we make time for what we value. I make time to brush my teeth, bathe, and eat. Why? Because I know the personal and social benefits of these habits.

God created us and knows what our day will hold before it begins. If Jesus needed to meet with his heavenly Father each day, I need to also. Many call this meeting a quiet time or personal devotions. When we show up for our quiet time, we have God's full attention. He will speak to us through his Word, the Bible. What could be more valuable than hearing from God each day?

Plan for your time alone with God by answering these three questions.

**When?** Pencil in on your calendar the times in the upcoming weeks when you will meet with him. Guard that time as strictly as you would a doctor's appointment. Keep your rendezvous with God. A woman shared with me, "It's amazing—when I schedule my quiet time, I have the time. I feel so much more peaceful."

Do you want the strength that comes from unshakable faith? "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Rom. 10:17). I need God's perspective each day. Between visits, my problems seemingly grow. When I renew my mind, I remember how big God is. Problems shrink to proper proportion.

If you haven't begun this daily discipline, make this small commitment and schedule your time. The benefits are eternal.

**Where?** Select a special place to have your quiet time with God. When you keep your tools—Bible, workbook, pen, and whatever else you use—where you study, you associate that place with meeting the Lord, and your heart begins to look forward to this treat.

**How?** Start by inviting the Creator of the Universe to speak to you today. Exercise your faith muscles and thank him for meeting with you. Open your heart and believe God wants to speak to you from his Word.

Some people read Scripture with a harsh tone in their minds. Jesus calls himself gentle and humble. He does not speak unkindly to his children. His warnings and corrections are spoken in love to protect us. Satan misused Scripture when he tempted Jesus. He twisted God's warning when he spoke to Eve. Learn to separate God's voice from the critical voices that may play in your thoughts.

God won't be angry with you if you miss your special appointment with him. These are just suggestions to help you live strong. He enjoys meeting with his children, and we need time alone with him. Plan for success.

The Bible provides timeless principles for life. As you will see in the lives of the women we will study, these principles work even in challenging situations. If quality of life is determined by the size of our challenges, the women in Jesus' genealogy would have missed out. They had little strength, clout, or worldly resources to face their giants, but they had a great God. They prove the size of our God—not the size of our problems—brings fulfillment. How big is your God? Open your heart to him today.



## May I Introduce You . . .

TO INTRODUCE THE WOMEN WE’LL BE STUDYING IN THE FOLLOWING weeks, I thought it would be fun to find the woman that best matches your personality. Beside each trait, put the number that best describes you.

- 1 — never
- 2 — sometimes
- 3 — often
- 4 — always

Tally your score under each character. The one with the highest score is your soul mate. Have fun!

## Personality Test

### Tamar

- I take calculated risks. \_\_\_\_\_
- I expect you to keep your promises. \_\_\_\_\_
- I love children. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm patient to a limit. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm a careful planner. \_\_\_\_\_
- I have clear goals. \_\_\_\_\_
- I can read others. \_\_\_\_\_
- Total \_\_\_\_\_

### Rahab

- I'm daring and bold. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm decisive. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm a natural leader. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm a negotiator. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm resourceful. \_\_\_\_\_
- I take care of my family. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm unconventional. \_\_\_\_\_
- Total \_\_\_\_\_

### Ruth

- I respect authority, but I stand up for my convictions. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm loyal to those who've been good to me. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm closer to my family of faith than my family of origin. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm compassionate. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm not afraid of hard work. \_\_\_\_\_
- People say I'm quiet but courageous. \_\_\_\_\_
- I remain steady through the highs and lows of life. \_\_\_\_\_
- Total \_\_\_\_\_

**Naomi**

- I'm outspoken. \_\_\_\_\_
- I see things as black or white. \_\_\_\_\_
- My emotions color my thinking. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm expressive. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm persuasive. \_\_\_\_\_
- I break rules that don't make sense. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm a nurturer. \_\_\_\_\_
- Total \_\_\_\_\_

**Bathsheba**

- I forgive easily. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm compliant. \_\_\_\_\_
- I ignore gossip. \_\_\_\_\_
- I use life's experiences to instruct others. \_\_\_\_\_
- I may not speak up for myself, but I will for others. \_\_\_\_\_
- I give second chances. \_\_\_\_\_
- People say I'm poised. \_\_\_\_\_
- Total \_\_\_\_\_

**Mary**

- I'm reflective. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm a worshipper. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm flexible. \_\_\_\_\_
- I believe God for the impossible. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm not easily shaken. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm peaceful. \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm steady. \_\_\_\_\_
- Total \_\_\_\_\_

Are you ready to meet these women? Good! Let's jump into Tamar's story and see what we can learn from her walk with God.

## When You Need Grace

Tamar means “palm tree.”

*Tamar's small hands trembled when she placed the veil upon her head. The men of this family had used her to get what they wanted. Her jaw tightened. No more waiting for a so-called follower of Yahweh to keep his word. This time she would take what she wanted.*

TAMAR'S STORY SOUNDS MORE LIKE A TABLOID FROM TODAY'S headlines than a Bible story. Her drama usually isn't found in children's Sunday school lessons.

The Bible doesn't gloss over its characters' sins. Jesus' own lineage shows humankind's need for a Savior. In many ways, Tamar represents us. She couldn't save herself. As we'll see, God had to step in to rescue her from wicked husbands and redeem her from her own wrong choices. Tamar will show us God's grace in action.

### Family Background

Before we look at Tamar, let's set the stage. God called Abraham

to leave his family and go to the land that he would show him. He promised to bless Abraham and multiply his descendants, and he chose Abraham's family to represent him to the world. In fact, God promised to bless the whole world through Abraham's seed.

Jesus is the promised Seed that would bless the world. He is the Lion of Judah, the long-awaited descendant of Abraham's great-grandson Judah.

Abraham and Isaac lived among the Canaanites and were well aware of their shameful habits. They begged their sons not to not marry Canaanite women (Gen. 24:3, 37; 28:1). God later banned intermarriage to protect Israel from joining their sinful practices. But Judah married a Canaanite named Bathshua and chose another Canaanite, Tamar, to be the wife of his firstborn son (Gen. 38:2, 6).

What expectations do you think a young bride from this background might have marrying into a family of spiritual blue-bloods? Tamar, no doubt, shared the hopes and dreams of any bride. She stepped from her culture of serving pagan gods into a family that was supposed to serve Yahweh, the one true God. But Tamar's husbands did not live up to their high calling. This family, set apart to bless the world, caused her much pain.

An evil husband is a liability in any culture. But Tamar lived in a society where women were virtually powerless. With no property or reputable means to support themselves, women were dependent on their male family members for shelter and food.

## *Day One*

---

### Wedding Bells and Death Knells

Every bride wants to be cherished and secure. What happens when she feels trapped and used? Have you ever felt powerless,



alone, unimportant, invisible, or used by those in positions of power? Does God care when we are abused or stuck? Does he rescue only the blameless?

Tamar will show us that no life is so obscure, so insignificant, or so dark that God's grace can't reach in and rescue it. Draw hope from God's care for Tamar.

**Scripture Reading**.....

**GENESIS 38**

**Study and Reflection**

1. We know God cut Er's life short because of his wickedness, but Tamar may not have known why he died so young (Gen. 38:6-7). His wickedness is not explained. Remembering a time you felt abused may help you identify with what Tamar felt.
  - a. What do you think it was like for Tamar to be married to an evil man?
  - b. Do you think Tamar knew why he died? What kind of emotions do you think Tamar felt after he died?
2. How would you feel if someone who shared your name (in family or business) carried a disreputable reputation? Has this happened to you?

3. Also referred to throughout the book of Ruth and in Matthew 22:24, the law of the levirate (from the Latin meaning “husband’s brother”) was widely practiced and later became part of the Mosaic Law. This custom sounds distasteful to our modern ears, but it served a practical purpose. From Deuteronomy 25:5–10, explain why a childless widow was given to her deceased husband’s brother.
  
4. What made Onan’s actions so wicked to God (Gen. 38:8–10)?
  
5. Some religious groups have used Genesis 38:8–10 to support the view that God is opposed to birth control. Do you think *this passage* teaches that God is against birth control and that is why God killed Onan? Why or why not?
  
6. Judah and his two sons wronged Tamar. The custom of keeping the widow in the family prevented the extinction of the family member’s name and provided the widow a means of support. Instead of fulfilling his duty and giving Tamar a child, Onan used Tamar for sexual pleasure and robbed her of an heir. Put yourself in Tamar’s bed.
  - a. In her culture, could Tamar save herself from these terrible marriages? How?
  
  - b. How might this affect her?

7. How did God rescue her from these marriages, and what does that tell you about God's involvement in the secret sorrows of our lives?
  
8. What hope does this offer you when you feel trapped or used?



When have you lacked the resources to free yourself from a bad marriage, loneliness, debt, illness, addiction, anger, fear, gluttony, or a bad mood? In such times, did you long for grace? Being helpless is a perfect way to experience the Almighty.

### **I Want to Remember . . .**

Write down any statements from today's lesson that will help you recall what God is teaching you. Let's encourage each other by sharing them on Twitter with the following hashtag: #LittleWomenBigGod

Today's takeaways from #LittleWomenBigGod are:

## *Day Two*

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### Scandal

"Two wrongs don't make a right." Mama's words remind me that we feel justified in wrong actions if we think we're evening up the score. The abused becomes the abuser. Hurt people hurt

people. Tamar followed this pattern and turned from victim to avenger. Have you ever created a mess you couldn't fix? In times like that, we need grace.

***Scripture Reading*.....**

**GENESIS 38:8-26**

**Study and Reflection**

1. Judah told Tamar to “live as a widow” in her father’s house after Onan’s death (Gen. 38:11).
  - a. How did Judah view Tamar after his sons’ deaths?
  - b. How was sending her away treating her like an outcast?
  - c. What challenges might Tamar experience returning to live under her father’s roof?
2. Judah saw Tamar as the common denominator in his sons’ deaths.
  - a. When have you been unjustly blamed for something because the accuser wanted to protect himself or herself or the real culprit?
  - b. Have you faulted others to protect yourself or someone else from just allegations?

3. A “long time” has passed since Onan’s death. The son Judah had promised Tamar is grown. Judah has ended his time of mourning for his wife who had died after Onan. Yet Tamar still wears widow’s garments (Gen. 38:12, 14, 19). Desperate people do desperate things. When Tamar realized Judah didn’t intend to have her marry his youngest son, she disguised herself as a prostitute and sat at the gate through which Judah had to pass. How do Tamar’s actions show insight into her father-in-law’s character (Gen. 38:12–23)?
  
4. How did Judah react when he heard his daughter-in-law was pregnant (Gen. 38:24)?
  
5. What does Christ call those who practice double standards in the following verses? “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. . . . You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:2, 5).
  
6. What did Judah do when he recognized his signet ring, cord, and staff?

### Two Wrongs: A Case for Grace

Tamar and Judah were both wrong to use illicit sex to meet their needs. Judah added hypocrisy to his sexual sin.

Our society still practices double standards. For example, pornographic venues are called adult entertainment, as if reaching a certain age makes it okay to violate God's moral standards. We too exhibit hypocrisy. Have you ever yelled at your child, "Don't raise your voice at me"? God graciously helps us with our blind spots.

After Judah's guilt and hypocrisy were unmasked before the world, he confessed, "She is more righteous than I." Being exposed was the grace he needed to repent. His change becomes evident later in Genesis when he pleads to become a slave in place of his brother Benjamin (Gen. 44:33). Admitting failure is the first step to healing change. Ask God to reveal your double standards and free you from your blind spots.

### **I Want to Remember . . .**

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Today's takeaways from #LittleWomenBigGod are:

### *Day Three*

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#### Sex—Special or Spoiled

A young woman phoned me, confused. Her longtime boyfriend was pressuring her to have sex. "He says he'll leave me if I don't. Is it wrong to have sex with him? We plan to marry one day."

What should the caller do? Does her choice matter? How do we know what's right? Are right and wrong determined by our culture or family's values? Thankfully, God has recorded timeless principles to guide and protect us.

Sexual immorality, in the New Testament, comes from the Greek word *porneia*. It is defined as adultery, fornication (sexual intercourse between people who are not married to each other),

homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, and sexual intercourse with close relatives.<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *porneuō* is also translated as sexual immorality in the New Testament. It means to prostitute one's body.<sup>2</sup>

Avoiding sexual temptation begins before an encounter. It starts with moral convictions that affect our motivations, dress, and conversations. First Timothy 2:9 tells women to “dress modestly, with decency and propriety.” Tamar wore a veil. That sounds modest. But she was dressed in temple prostitute attire. Temple prostitutes wore veils to create the illusion that the sexual act was taking place with the goddess being worshipped. Just as red lights have been used to signify areas of prostitution, Tamar's veil identified her as a temple prostitute.

To avoid sending the wrong message, Christ's followers must dress not only with appropriate modesty but also with suitable awareness of our culture's interpretation of symbols. Let's see why God values sexual purity.

### Study and Scripture Readings

1. Our culture glamorizes illicit sex and calls moral standards outdated. What does God say and why?
  - a. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body. (1 Cor. 6:18)
  - b. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. . . . For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy

person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. (Eph. 5:3, 5–8)

- c. It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit. (1 Thess. 4:3–8)
2. Based on God’s principles, how would you answer the young woman in today’s opening?

## Safe Sex

“Why is God ruining my whole life? I mess up one time, and I have to pay for it the rest of my life?”



How many times do we blame God when the consequences of our bad choices catch up with us? We jump over the guardrails God has put in place to protect us and then accuse him of ruining our lives when we suffer the inevitable crash.

Marriage is a guardrail for sex, and sex is God's sacred gift to marriage. God wants married couples to enjoy one another sexually (1 Cor. 7:5). Sexual intimacy depicts the holy union Jesus has with his bride, the church. Perhaps that is why it has been attacked and misused so much by the world.

The woman in today's opening paragraph refused to have sex with her boyfriend, and he broke up with her. She joined a Bible study and realized she wanted to marry a different kind of man—a man who would cherish her instead of use her to satisfy his own lusts.

If she'd given in to her boyfriend's demands, she might have married him. But she knows she would have regretted it. Years later, when she married her husband, she thanked God that he had saved her for a godly man who loves and esteems her.

Onan's selfishness turned the marriage bed into a place of misery for Tamar. But sorrow isn't the only indicator that sex is being abused. Consider couples where both enjoy the sex they share outside of marriage. Even if no one feels hurt during the relationship, from God's viewpoint, a lot is wrong. Our enemy knows its destructiveness, too. "Poland's Communist government even encouraged young people to have premarital sex, specifically to cause them to break from the church."<sup>3</sup>

Sex serves as mysterious glue between partners. Consider what happens when you separate two sheets of paper that have been glued together. One or both will rip. God's guideposts on keeping sex within marriage protect our hearts from being torn apart or becoming callused. They shield us from senseless heartbreak and regret.

God's Word is a *grace note* to those who receive it. His grace notes warn us of travel hazards on the road of life much like my Waze phone app alerts me to problems that affect my driving route.

God's wisdom shields us from regret, from unnecessary harm, and from having to perform to be accepted. His grace notes teach healthy self-respect and protect the joy of sex in marriage. Let God's grace notes guard you from false intimacy, imitation love, and counterfeit security.

### Study and Reflection

3. Do you think Tamar wanted to have sex with her father-in-law? What motives could have been at work in Tamar to cause her to do this?
4. Tamar seized an opportunity to grab what she wanted. Her motives are not clear. Was she seeking a child, vengeance, justice, or security? Whatever her goal, she did not seek God or practice his wisdom. In what ways have you been tempted to meet your needs outside of God's will?
5. Women today willingly endure many ordeals in the hope of conceiving a child. From the following, how do we know which ones are acceptable to God and which ones are not? "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2).

## Whose Wisdom?

I'm sure Tamar loathed the idea of being with Judah. Her husband had treated her like a prostitute. She must have decided she could endure one more humiliating encounter.

Desperation causes us to do things that go against who God wants us to be. Unlike an aggressive street prostitute, Tamar let Judah approach her. She used his weakness for her own purpose.

God had already liberated Tamar twice. Did she know God instigated her rescues? I wonder how many times he's intervened on your behalf and mine and we've not realized it.

Tamar took things into her own hands. If Judah wouldn't give her Shelah, she'd get a child, security, or payback another way. It's not wrong to want children or justice. Trouble comes when, instead of bringing our longings to God, we rely on our own understanding. God's wisdom agrees with his Word. His ways don't violate his moral standards.

Fertility clinics have helped many, but some of their advice opens a Pandora's box of trouble and reminds me of the problems Sarah and Abraham faced when they tried the culturally accepted—but not God-directed—practice of using Sarah's maid, Hagar, to fulfill their longing for a child.

When friends or professionals speak, especially when they promise what we want, we may be too quick to jump on their advice. I wonder if the person who told Tamar that Judah was coming helped plan her scheme. When a dentist said if I'd replace my filling with a crown, I'd never have to touch my tooth again, I was thrilled. Now I know crowns aren't permanent and bring other issues. In other words, even with nonmoral issues, don't be afraid to ask questions or take the time to seek God. The wisdom of the day, regarding morals or solutions to our longings, can't compare with the wisdom of the ages.

## I Want to Remember . . .

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Today's takeaways from #LittleWomenBigGod are:

### Day Four

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#### Tamar, a Look in the Mirror

How did you react to Tamar's story? Did you feel compassion for her? Or were you disgusted with her? What about Judah?

Some stories make me scratch my head and wonder why God recorded them. At first glance, this is such a story. Yet, isn't Tamar's story so much like ours?

Maybe you don't identify with Tamar. Let me draw some parallels.

#### *Scripture Reading*.....

##### **ROMANS 5:8**

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

##### **ROMANS 6:14**

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

##### **ROMANS 7:1-6**

<sup>1</sup>Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? <sup>2</sup>For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. <sup>3</sup>So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her

husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

<sup>4</sup>So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. <sup>5</sup>For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. <sup>6</sup>But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

### Study and Reflection

1. God showed mercy to Tamar *before* she knew him. How did he show mercy to us before we knew him (Rom. 5:8)?
2. Tamar could not save herself from her terrible marriages. From Romans 7:1–3, why did God have to take the lives of her wicked husbands to free her (Gen. 38:7, 10)?
3. We were born wedded to our sinful nature. What is the only route to freedom from bondage to sin and the condemnation of the law (Rom. 7:4–6)?
4. According to Romans 7:4 and the following verse, who died? “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by

faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

5. According to Romans 7:5, what happens to the person bound to sin?
  
6. Judah viewed Tamar as the problem. He tossed her out of his household and told her to remain a widow (Gen. 38:11). How is her experience a picture of us before we knew Christ? See the following verses. “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:11–12).
  
7. Judah wanted to burn Tamar alive when he learned she was pregnant. When he recognized his cord, staff, and signet ring, he confessed, “She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah.” God exposed Judah’s intentions and other sin against Tamar. He had not given her to Shelah. It is easy to point out someone else’s mess and ignore our own. What do you learn from the following?
  - a. “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things” (Rom. 2:1).

- b. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:12–13).
  
8. Judah’s transformation began with awareness of his need for cleansing. Why is it healthy to welcome the Holy Spirit’s correction in our lives?
  
9. Now that we have been identified with Christ’s death, we are no longer bound to sin or under the law. How does that change how we live and what we produce (Rom. 7:4, 6 and the following verse)? “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).
  
10. By dying to sin and the law, we are now free to be joined to our new husband (Rom. 7:4). The church is called the bride of Christ. From the following, what does that mean for you?
  - c. “For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth” (Isa. 54:5).

- d. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

### What Am I Reflecting?

Do you struggle more with receiving grace or with giving it? If we see ourselves as self-made, earn-your-way type of people, we may not appreciate grace. But we should. The Pharisees in Jesus’ day didn’t value grace. But those who recognize their helpless state without Christ embrace it.

Tamar couldn’t save herself from two bad marriages. Under the law, the only way out was death. God intervened and rescued her.

You and I were like Tamar. We were married to evil men who used us for their own lusts. Our husbands were our old natures. We were their slaves. Because we were one flesh, we couldn’t get away from them. They owned us. This union brought pain, shame, and disgrace. Under the law, only death could set us free.

To dissolve our union with sin, Jesus died in our place. Our faith in Christ identifies us with his death, burial, and resurrection. God now sees us as crucified with Christ. We have been raised with him and given a brand-new identity that is no longer bound to sin. We no longer live under the law. We now live under grace (Rom. 6:14). We have been set free to flourish in our new union with Christ (Rom. 7:1–6).

Tamar no longer had to climb into bed with Onan and be used like a sex slave. His death freed her. We no longer have to participate with sin’s degrading passions. Christ’s death has freed us.

Tamar lived as an outcast, separated from life with Judah’s family. We were hopeless outcasts, excluded from life in God. But Christ made us family.



Judah and Tamar had their sin exposed. This caused Judah to acknowledge his unrighteousness. When the motives of our hearts are revealed under the light of God's Word, we are able to freely confess, "I've fallen short of God's glory."

God granted Tamar twins. Perez, the older, grew into a fine man whose name became a blessing (Ruth 4:12). God made Tamar a blessing to the world. God's grace creates a 180-degree change for us, too:

- Death to life.
- Barrenness to fruitfulness.
- Bondage to freedom.
- Despair to joy.

When we base our acceptance on our performance, we pressure others to meet our standards. We condemn ourselves or blame others when we fail. When we accept the grace God has provided, we joyfully pass it on to others. Grace allows us to give up working for the acceptance we already have in Christ.

Is there a Tamar in your life who needs your grace? Maybe it's you.

### **I Want to Remember . . .**

Today's takeaways from #LittleWomenBigGod are:

*Day Five*

Redemptive Grace

Onan used Tamar for sex. Tamar used sex to entrap her father-in-law. If God chose people based on how good they are, God would not have picked Tamar or Judah for their astonishing roles in his story.

Tamar’s ignoble actions did not squash God’s grace. Scripture remembers her as the mother of the great man Perez and an ancestor of Jesus. Perhaps King David named his daughter Tamar after her.

Isaiah 62:4 reminds me of God’s grace to Tamar—and to us. “No longer will they call you Deserted. . . . But you will be called Hephzibah [my delight] . . . for the LORD will take delight in you.” No matter how badly we’ve blown it, God’s grace is greater still.

***Scripture Reading*.....**

**RUTH 4:12**

Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.

**RUTH 4:18–22**

This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

**MATTHEW 1:1–3**

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram.

**Application and Reflection**

1. Tamar played the role of a prostitute with Judah. When have you blamed your wrong behavior on your extenuating

circumstances? What do you learn from the following? “For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person” (Mark 7:21–23).

2. According to the following, how did God show grace to Tamar and to us?

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:4–9)

3. We aren’t told if Judah was involved in the raising of his twins. Considering how Tamar and her son Perez are remembered in the book of Ruth 4:18–22 (today’s reading), what might this reveal about this single mother?
4. In what ways can you identify with Tamar?

5. Recall a time when God showed you favor when you clearly didn't deserve it.
  
6. Tamar is the first woman Matthew mentioned in Jesus' family tree. Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah, also in Jesus' lineage, aren't even named. Now that you've studied Tamar, why do you think the Holy Spirit included her?
  
7. What thoughts do you have from Tamar's story?

### When You Need Grace . . . Lessons from Tamar

Have you ever wondered how God could choose scoundrels like Judah to have significant roles in his story? The New Testament explains: "He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9).

Grace is shocking. Sometimes it even seems unfair.

When we understand God's holiness and our sin, we'll no longer approach God on the basis of our own merit. Who can go through a day, let alone a life, without a wrong thought or careless word (Matt. 5:21–22, 12:36; James 2:10)? Understanding our need for grace makes us revel in Judah and Tamar's story.

Mercy may be described as *not* getting the punishment we deserve. Grace is receiving a pony when we deserve a time-out. God's ultimate grace came when Jesus took the hell I deserved and gave me his heaven.

Grace is a stumbling block to the self-righteous. It doesn't seem right to offer heaven to sinners. But God looks at our hearts, where we've all fallen short of his glory.

God's grace affects more than our afterlife; it encompasses all of life. Ironically, it takes grace to recognize we need God in the first place. We all need his favor in a variety of ways. Tamar needed grace to endure her lonely marriages and grace to redeem her moral failing. Perhaps God used these needs to create a thirst for him.

Apparently, Tamar came from a family that did not know the God of Abraham. Judah was Abraham's great-grandson, yet he and his sons seemed to have no more compassion than the godless men of her pagan society. How would a woman from such circumstances ever come to know the one true God?

We aren't told how she came to faith, but in 1 Samuel 2:30, the Lord says: "Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained." The fact that Scripture repeatedly names Tamar in genealogy lists and holds up her son Perez as an example to follow leads me to believe her life was transformed. Perhaps this happened when the Hebrews moved into Egypt under Joseph's protection.

### Grace for the Trapped

God saw Tamar's private pain, apparently before she even knew him. Twice he rescued her from wicked husbands. Did she recognize his intervention? Had she prayed for help?

What agony do you suffer in secret? Do you believe our Lord sees and cares? Have you invited him into your suffering?

### Grace for Unfulfilled Longings

The drive to escape pain makes us more vulnerable to options we would shun in better times. After her husband Er's early death,

Onan's wickedness, and Judah's superstitions blocked her hope, Tamar schemed to get what she wanted—what was rightfully hers.

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov. 13:12). Have you ever felt heartsick over unfulfilled desires? Tamar longed to throw off her widow's garments. Her arms ached to cradle a child. Besides raising her status in society and offering financial security in old age, a child promised Tamar the companionship her marriages lacked.

Insisting on our desires may exclude God's best for us. If he seems to be ignoring your request, trust his wisdom and love. Waiting is sometimes necessary to prepare us for his best. Remember: “No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11b ESV).

Anything we want more than God is an idol. Fully surrender your idols to him.

Tamar was wrong to play a prostitute, even for one day. Gaining the desired result did not justify her method. God granted grace to Tamar in spite of her sin. He gave her not only a baby but twin sons.

## Grace in Loneliness

Tamar was lonely in her marriage. Perhaps her deepest longing was to be loved. She still had no husband at the end of our story. Neither of her two husbands had loved her. Many today believe marriage, or marrying a different person, will satisfy their emptiness.

The church is called the bride of Christ. *Church* refers to those who have been called out of the world to belong to Christ. Jesus chose you to be his bride. Whether you're married or single, you have the perfect husband in Jesus. (See Eph. 5:25–27, 29, 30.) He wants to nurture and love you completely. We can be as close to him as we choose to be.

Shortly after I married, an event reminded me how much I still needed my divine husband. I'd dropped Larry off at the airport and briefly left my car at the curb to help him with his briefcase. I returned to the empty terminal to find a big cop, by my lone car, writing a ticket. I told him I had only seen my husband inside the door and was back. "Too late," he said. "I've already put the date on the ticket. I have to fill it out."

On top of sending my new husband off for two weeks and getting a parking ticket, I'd just moved to Oklahoma City. I have no sense of direction, and I got turned around leaving the airport. Larry was barely out of town, and I was already lost. How would I find my way home in this unfamiliar place? Frustration stung my eyes. At that moment, I sensed God's Spirit nudging my thoughts.

*What did you do before you married Larry when you got lost?*

Ah, I'd relied on the Lord. Why did I think he'd left when I married? Tuning in to his presence calmed my emotions. I made it safely home.

As a single woman, I'd often leaned on God for help. After I married, I'd unconsciously transferred my reliance to Larry. It only took a couple of months for me to forget God's ever-present help (Heb. 13:5).

Wicked Er and Onan showed no concern for Tamar. Human husbands, even great husbands, may leave on trips or through illness and death. The worst in human husbands can't undermine the best in our divine husband.

Tamar reminds us that God's unmerited favor, not our worthiness or scheming, turns ugly situations into beautiful stories of redemption. She also shows us that we don't have to hide our ugly parts from God. As a perfect lover, Jesus sees all and still loves us unconditionally. What a big God!

Miserable beginnings can have happy endings for ordinary people who trust an extraordinary God. What mess have you

fallen into or created? Will you acknowledge you can't fix it? Will you turn to God and trust him for what you cannot see today?

**I Want to Remember . . .**

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Today's takeaways from #LittleWomenBigGod are:

*Prayer Requests*

Record your small group's prayer requests here.

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# Notes

## Week One

<sup>1</sup>“Lexicon :: Strong’s G4202 - *porneia*,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed December 24, 2015, [www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4202&t=NASB](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4202&t=NASB).

<sup>2</sup>“Lexicon :: Strong’s G4203 - *porneuō*,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed December 24, 2015, [www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4203&t=NASB](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4203&t=NASB).

<sup>3</sup>Eric Metaxas, *Seven Men and the Secret of Their Greatness* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 149.

## Week Two

<sup>1</sup>John F. MacArthur, *Hebrews*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1983), 364.

<sup>2</sup>“Lexicon :: Strong’s G544 - *apeitheō*,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed January 1, 2016, [www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongsg=G544&t=NASB](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongsg=G544&t=NASB).

<sup>3</sup>Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*, (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2009), 4.

<sup>4</sup>Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 439.

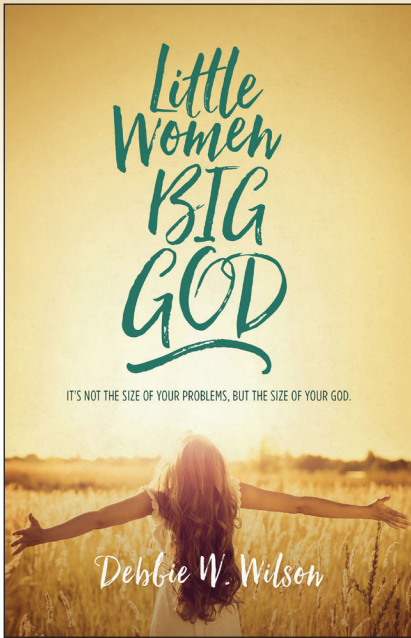
<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>9</sup>“Lexicon :: Strong’s G5287 - *hypostasis*,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed January 1, 2016, [www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G5287&t=NASB](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G5287&t=NASB).

<sup>10</sup>“How Firm a Foundation,” lyrics attributed to John Keith, published 1787, public domain.



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by Debbie W. Wilson

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