



*A Devotional
Companion for*
Slender Reeds

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Dear reader,

Some biblical stories have become so familiar that as we journey from “Once upon a time. . .” to “. . .and they lived happily ever after” it is easy to overlook their sacred truths. As I reflected upon writing *Slender Reeds: Jochebed’s Hope*, I felt led to create a devotional that would highlight Jochebed’s spiritual insights, offer practical applications for today’s culture, and renew your awareness of God’s tender mercies.

I pray that as you read these thoughts and prayers, you will recognize your own pharaohs and realize they are not invincible, that you will see God’s designs woven throughout your life, and that you will trust both yourself and your child to His plan.

The fifteen devotionals are designed for use as you are reading the book or as you meet with your book group.

Blessings,

Texie Susan Gregory

Breadbasket or Doormat: What's Your Plan?

Before a designer undertakes a new endeavor—whether it's a basket or a pyramid or a water jug—there is a vision, a basic idea or purpose for the finished project.

Parenting is a project, too. Most of us enter parenthood with a dream of cherubic infants who become responsible young adults, and yet we have vague plans of how to make this vision a reality.

When my children were very young, I noticed that the teenagers of a woman in our church seemed different from the other teens. Hers were confident, courteous, and focused. Determined to learn all I could about mothering, I cornered her at a potluck and asked for her parenting recipe.

"I envisioned them as adults and created a list of qualities I wanted them to have. Then I posted the list on the refrigerator where I saw it every day. It reminded me of my parenting priorities."

She knew the values she wanted to teach her children, initiated a plan, and embraced her influence as a mom.

Dear reader, thank you for choosing to read *Slender Reeds*. I pray that you will become more aware of your incredible influence. What you choose to teach your children places your thumbprint on their lives.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6 NIV

Broken Reeds

Her heart is tender. Her faith is strong. She is a healer. We have been friends for years, and I've often wished I could parent with as much wisdom and kindness as she does.

Years ago, her son began serving a fifteen-year prison sentence. Her heart is broken. Her faith is strong.

Sometimes, no matter how much we plan or how hard we try or how "good" a parent we are, our children choose a difficult path and it appears our efforts have been fruitless. What a test of faith as we trust them to our God who loves them even more than we do.

As mothers, we are not accountable for the decisions our young adult children make. We are responsible for teaching them their choices will have consequences. We are responsible to role model mercy and grace, second chances, and when necessary, show tough love.

I believe we are to live out the high call of motherhood: to communicate an unfailing love even when they fail, to see beyond our disappointment to God's redemptive plan, to pray for them when everyone else gives up.

Dear one, if your heart is broken over the choices your child has made, remember that our God is the great redeemer.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

PSALM 147:3 NIV

A Distinctive Design

Jochebed refers to her loneliness as the “chill of being different.” While we may delight in our uniqueness, we yearn for the assurance we are not alone. We long to know someone else walks beside us and understands or at least accepts our path.

Like Jochebed, I grew up as the child of a single mother—the only one in my elementary school of over six hundred students. I, too, felt the isolation of “different.”

Child or adult, there are multiple circumstances that contribute to the belief of journeying alone. Perhaps you are an undercover agent or a high profile mom, or you see yourself as physically different from the other moms. Perhaps you didn’t plan to be a mom and you wonder at life’s unexpected twists.

When we are disconnected from others, we can spiral into isolation—the feeling we are on our own with no support or understanding. Mothering is a demanding career with eternal implications. We need assurance from each other as we navigate the ups and downs of parenting. We need someone who has walked this path before or who is willing to walk it alongside us.

Dear reader, when someone risks sharing their “chill of being different,” let us respond with acceptance, not with denial and not to enlighten or shame.

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected.

1 TIMOTHY 4:4 NIV

Interwoven Is Inescapable

Whose life is interwoven with yours? Family, of course. Friends, yes. Coworkers, teachers, care providers, people you laugh with and people who stretch your patience, those who care for you and those who tolerate you. You touch lives knowingly.

There are other lives that brush against yours. Medical personnel whose names you don't remember or never knew. Neighbors you'd not recognize if they stood next to you in line. That person who heard you respond with patience to the confused barista, or saw you let the mom with the toddler go before you in the restroom, or followed you as you drove on the highway. . .

Whether we like it or not, whether we choose it or not, our lives intersect. Do you touch lives with kindness or criticism? Do your actions heal or hurt? As your life crosses another, is it abrasive or a blessing?

Dear woman of influence, you touch lives unaware. And your children watch.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27 NIV

Mind Twister

It's simple. You compare, you despair.

Whether you perceive yourself as “better” or “worse,” “more” or “less,” comparison is a lose-lose. Forfeit. Epic fail. Do not pass Go. Foul play. Wipeout.

Comparison—that mix of pride and envy (two of the seven deadly sins)—is expensive. It costs dignity, appreciation of uniqueness, time, and energy. Even when you think you are “winning,” the relentless pressure for continued success turns your focus away from God.

When the focus shifts, it's easy to venture into even more dangerous territory. We compare God's work in our lives with His work in another's life. We judge. We assume: *He loves them more. He's abandoned me. My prayers don't matter.*

Compare = Despair.

Dear soul, wait patiently for God to finish His work. He promises to take the broken pieces and the missing puzzle parts of your life and transform them into something beautiful.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

JEREMIAH 29:11 NIV

Curves (Not the Life I Ordered)

Warranties delight me. Stores with easy return policies have my loyalty. *Insured* is one of my favorite words.

However, there is one guarantee I'd like to decline: "When you face trials. . ." (James 1:2). *When* not *if*? Mmmm. . . No, thank you.

Elisheba never thought she'd be a single mom and sole provider for her young daughter. *Shiphrah* didn't expect to abandon all that was familiar for the strangeness of a foreigner's village. *Ramses*, trained to believe he was a god, could not imagine he'd ever experience doubt or fear.

When that undesirable guarantee comes true and your life takes an unwanted and unexpected curve—unspeakable loss, relentless pain, or even the unrelenting drip of mediocrity—what do you do?

Remember that the Bible guarantees you are never alone. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" (Isaiah 43:2 ESV).

Rely on His promises. "Peace I leave with you" (John 14:27 ESV).

Talk to Him: "Let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6 ESV).

Dear reader, when bad things happen and the answers are not what we want to hear, God meets us with His comfort and strength. Expect great things from God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. . .
EPHESIANS 3:20 ESV

Spiritual Spokes

When Jochebed began weaving, her mother explained how the spokes provided strength and structure to the basket. Spokes determine a basket's size, pattern, and purpose.

We have spokes, too. They are the core values, the deeply held beliefs, and the perceptions that we cherish. Our spokes are the framework giving shape, support, and meaning to us. They are what we build on and cling to as we experience the events of this life.

Basket makers call the material that is twisted and twined around the spokes "weavers" or "strands." Sometimes life consists of lovely and desirable weavers. Sometimes the weavers are stark and splintered.

Most of my "spokes" came from observing my mother's deep faith in God during difficult situations and uncertain times. When harsh times wove in and out of my life, her personal relationship with God served as a guiding light.

Dear reader, when we wrap the strands of each day around God's truth, the basket of our life develops into something beautiful and useful, strong and priceless.

As for God, his way is perfect: The LORD's word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him.

PSALM 18:30 NIV

Choices (Door #-1 or Door #2)

Choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life.

DEUTERONOMY 30:19–20 NIV

Choice: a super power placed in human hands

The experienced weaver knows the materials used to form the basket will determine its strength and quality. She considers the length, the thickness, the color, and the pliability of a strand before making a selection. Even the side of the reed is important since the smoother side should be on the outside of the basket.

Some life determinants are beyond our control, but not all. We choose habits to shape our fate. We choose words that destroy or restore. We choose friends who will encourage us or devalue us. We fight wars to protect our choices and the right to have a choice.

Choice: a terrifying privilege

Throughout *Slender Reeds*, the characters make choices to trust, risk, or act based on their understanding of the situation. Each time, the decision changes the course not only of their future, but the lives of countless other people.

Dear reader, the Bible is very clear that our children are affected by our choices. Scary stuff. None of us cross the finish line without regrets or life chapters we'd like to erase. I'm thankful that I don't have to depend solely on my own limited understanding as I mother.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

PSALM 32:8 NIV

The Shape of Godliness

My mother's faith walk impacted me more than anyone or anything else. Her words continue to ripple through my life and into her grandchildren's lives. Although she died in 2004, I daily thank God for the privilege of being her daughter.

There were other women who also shaped the young me. With few exceptions—Rachel, Betsy, Inez—these other women, too many to list, had no idea of their influence over me.

Their touch on my life was gentle: a smile on Father's Day when I sat alone, a note of encouragement tucked in my Bible, the trust offered to babysit their special-needs child.

And then there were those long-suffering souls—women who volunteered every Wednesday evening to teach a group of restless teenage girls. Honestly, I don't remember all their names or what they taught, only that they showed up every week.

Maybe that is how we shape most lives. We notice. We listen. We role-model. We show up.

We share our stories. We open our home.

We display compassion and faithfulness.

We model determination and dedication.

We teach His faithfulness.

We shape eternity.

Dear friend, today you shape eternity!

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4 NIV

Tangled Truth

In *Slender Reeds*, Shiphrah fears rejection. Jochebed fears inadequacy. Ramses fears failure.

Fear—one of our common denominators. We fear for our children’s safety; we wonder if we are effective moms; we question what they are learning from the world.

Fear can be a raging firestorm, but often it sneaks in on kitten paws and curls up for a long stay. Perhaps that is why there are over three hundred verses in the Bible that tell us to not be afraid.

Many verses are commands. “Fear not, for I am with you” (Isaiah 41:10 ESV).

Some verses appeal to our intellect. “The Lord is my shepherd, I have nothing to fear” (Psalm 23:1, author paraphrase).

Other verses are personal testimonies. “I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears” (Psalm 34:4 NLT).

My favorite is Psalm 91:1 (NIV) because it tells me *how* to deal with fear. “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

Dwell: live, linger, remain. Where I dwell becomes a place of familiarity. It becomes a part of who I am, how I perceive and interact with others. When I *dwell in the shelter of the Most High*, I can fill my mind with His comfort and promises.

The uncertainties of mothering do not disappear, but I become assured of the certainty He is with me through life and into eternity.

Dear seeker, I pray you will experience the joy of living without constant fear. You and your child are precious to God.

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

ISAIAH 41:10 ESV

Misshapen

Mothers make mistakes. All of us. No exceptions. None. There are things we wish we had done. Words we spoke that make us wince. Situations we'd give anything to have a redo option available.

The people of the Bible made mistakes with their families and friends, too. David's involvement with Bathsheba cost him the life of their son. Joseph's prideful attitude toward his brothers resulted in years in a prison. The disciples' abandonment of Jesus when He asked them to pray and keep watch with Him caused them humiliation. Paul's persecution of believers must have filled him with regret and shame.

Jesus gives specific direction when we have messed up. "Rise, let us be going" (Matthew 26:46; Mark 14:42 ESV). Once we have repented and asked for forgiveness, it's over. Rise. Take action. Leave the guilt. Let us. In spite of our failure, He remains with us. We're not alone. Be going. Live in the present, move into the future.

Dear sojourner, walk with me. God is our guide as we enter a future of hope.

"But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love."

NEHEMIAH 9:17 NIV

Frayed or Prayed

When life hit hard, Jochebed, Shiphrah, Ramses, Lili, and Elisheba, each turned in a different direction to fight, flight, frenzy, freeze, or faith.

The list of what stresses us is never ending, but most of it would fit under being unable to control what we want to control. That includes everything from sensory overload to social injustice to feeling insignificant. The result is that we feel frayed.

We know what causes us to unravel and we know the traditional ways to deal with stress:

Breathe
Take a walk
Focus on one thing at a time
Think positive thoughts

A good list but not helpful when I've just moved cross-country and have the flu and a deadline and a sluggish toilet. It doesn't work when the insurance won't cover the cost of a totaled car or my child is sick. It doesn't touch me when my husband is deployed and the school calls. . .again.

I'd like to say I always turn in the direction of faith. Since you don't know me, you might even believe me. But that's not being honest. Far too often I turn to frenzy or flight, and at just the wrong time I'll freeze or fight.

What helps? Friends coming alongside—a phone call, a hug, someone showing up to help (with an iced mocha). When I'm too worn to pray, it's knowing someone else is praying for me. That knowledge eventually turns me back to a faith response.

Dear reader, I pray that if today you are frazzled and frightened, God will grant you what you need to respond with faith.

Two are better than one. . . . If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 NIV

Master Weaver

Arguably the best \$2.00 I spent as a child was to learn the basic elements of basket weaving in an after-school program. Each afternoon, eight of us gathered around a narrow table and, with varying levels of speed and success, twined reeds in and out of the spokes.

Determined to have a perfect basket, whenever I discovered a mistake I undid the reeds (much to my teacher's dismay) and rewove them. In spite of my painstaking efforts, my basket was not the "best" on the day we displayed them.

Before the reveal, the teacher had taken those forlorn creations—the lopsided baskets, the unfinished, halfhearted attempts—and with careful hands, had reinforced broken strands, tucked wayward ends inside, and trimmed frayed edges. She then arranged every piece to emphasize its unique character. With a master's touch she enhanced the hidden beauty in each basket.

I believe God is like that. He sets before us His perfect plan, and we in our little humanness follow only part of the plan or weave a large portion without His "spokes." Often we give up halfway through.

And Master Weaver that He is, He gathers us in His hands to smooth away our fraying ends, mend our brokenness, and heal our splintered souls.

He shapes our lives into beauty.

Dear one, I pray that you will be aware of His touch on your life.

"I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go."

ISAIAH 48:17 NIV

Warp/Weft

The promise inherent in weaving is that the overlap of strands creates strength. The pattern that emerges is a lovely symbol of how we are strengthened as we rest upon the promises of God.

We can also rest on the knowledge that God keeps His promises. When it seems as if He does not, remember His ways are not our ways. His timing is not of our choosing. His answers may not be the ones we want to hear.

The mother of my dear friend prayed and fasted for her son's healing from Lou Gehrig's disease. After Steve died she told me, "I realized that God answered my prayer in His own timing. My son is now healed and whole. I am at peace."

I've often wished I could give God a calendar with my "need to know by" dates written in bold letters. And yet, I have discovered that when the deadline passes and still I wait for an answer, His perfect timing is indeed. . .perfect.

Dear friend, take comfort in the assurance that God knows all you face and will never leave or forsake you.

"Before they call I will answer."
ISAIAH 65:24 NIV

Creative Design

Baskets are created from so many things: reeds, twigs, roots, leaves, leather, vines, feathers, pine needles, fabric, wire, seaweed, bark, quills, etc.—each one different because the material used is unique.

What forms you is also unique.

Perhaps you have a memory box—a collection of the bits and pieces of life: a curl of baby hair, an award, a postcard, a first corsage. Most of us don't keep a box of what we want to forget—the rejection letter, the speeding ticket, that less than stellar job review—yet both joy and sorrow have made us who we are.

God takes the bits and pieces of each life to bring about His plan for that life. He uses experiences, adventures, ancestry, choices, regrets, and people who remain unaware of their influence—both those we admire and the ones we never want to emulate.

In *Slender Reeds*, God used who and what Jochebed already knew in His redemptive plan for the Hebrew people. While everything seemed dark and hopeless, long ago He had begun gathering the bits and pieces to provide an unexpected answer to her plea for help.

Dear faithful reader, thank you for journeying with me through *Slender Reeds: Jochebed's Hope*. I wait with great expectation to hear how God works in your life.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

EPHESIANS 2:10 NIV