

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### “An Evening with Merryl Blair”

Author of *What My Grandmothers Taught Me*, the 2021–2022 PW/*Horizons* Bible Study

**Tuesday, March 1, 2022**

(With Merryl’s answers in blue.)

1. I was intrigued by Bathsheba—I hadn't really realized the role she played in Solomon being crowned David's successor. Is it too much to imagine that she might have had something to do with Solomon's wisdom, for which he is famous?

I love the idea that her guidance, particularly in his childhood, would have formed his wisdom! Of course, we can't possibly know for sure, as the biblical story isn't concerned with telling us these sorts of details. But mothers had a lot to do with the raising of children to a certain age, and I imagine that even in the harem, Solomon would have spent a lot of time with his mother.

2. I appreciate the reminder that ORDINARY people who do the right thing for love, can have a profound influence over generations.

Indeed! We tend to think that all great things get done by extraordinary people, but of course, there are a lot more ordinary people out there, who plod along doing the best they can, and change the world in small but incremental ways.

3. I hope my granddaughters and grandsons look back with a similar understanding someday.

So do I. I guess that's part of our responsibility, to talk with our young people and take an interest in them so they may learn grace and wisdom from interacting with older generations. In our Western societies, this can sometimes be difficult as families are often far apart, so we might need to work a bit more creatively at this... And watch out for young people near us who could use a 'grandmother'!

4. As I was studying lesson 7 in preparing for Circle later this evening and keeping an ear open to the news regarding Ukraine, I was blown away by the last question Meryll posted on page 65: Are there stories in the news currently that might take us into the horror and grief of these mothers?

I'd love to hear your group discussion on this. Certainly, I've been devastated by the destruction in Syria for some time now; and of course, Ukraine is on our minds at the moment. There may be things closer to home that the story (and question) might alert us to, as well. I think it is important to always read biblical stories with an eye to 'how is this happening now?', not just reading as something that happened long ago & has nothing much to do with me.

5. Could you explain Mary and the Catholic Church?

Not in a brief response!! There are whole courses at Catholic universities taught on Mary... Maybe briefly, think about a couple of levels. One: what the theologians think, which is along the lines of how Mary fits into the work of God amongst humanity; how she is the model of the perfect disciple, who says 'Let it be to me according to your will', which encourages us all to say that. In the later theology of the church, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was finally accepted, after centuries of hot debate, in the 1800s. This was, more or less, a reversal of Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin, which stated that all humankind was sinful from the moment of conception. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception stated that Mary, to be a suitable mother to Jesus, was without sin from the moment of her conception. For the people 'in the pews', this was a sign of hope for all people that Original Sin didn't have a hold over them.

Two: at a popular level, Mary seems to hit a chord with ordinary people. Think about the structures and hierarchy of the church, which was totally male. Early on, it was only the priests and bishops who could read, take worship, serve Communion, etc, so ordinary people only felt they had access to God through these men. No wonder they

found the figure of Mary much more sympathetic, especially women, who felt so much closer to this mother, who had felt the grief of losing a child, than to the celibate priests. They felt Mary could accompany them, and perhaps represent them before God (also relentlessly portrayed as male) with sympathy and insight. VERY brief and inadequate answer, sorry, but the best I can do without writing a large book! I point you again to the publication 'Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ', which sets out really well the more theological positions, though doesn't really touch on the popular faith side of things (which I think a lot of Catholic theologians are a bit embarrassed by, in its naivety).

6. We have a teen circle that meets after church and goes out for lunch, we talk about yet another scandalous story from the Bible. [These stories] should pique their interest, don't you think?

Yes! I find everyone loves a good story, and many people, even those who have nothing at all to do with the church, are really interested in the stories when they are allowed to read/hear them as stories, and enter into the world of the story with their own honest reactions & responses, rather than having them thrust upon them as some sort of manual for living.

7. Who decided Solomon should be the next king? David? God? Bathsheba?

The story is deliberately ambiguous. David does promise Bathsheba that Solomon will reign after him, but then does nothing about it (the aging David is shown as a rather weak, somewhat pathetic figure). The name of the child born to David and Bathsheba is originally Jedediah, 'God's beloved', which is a hint that God has a hand in it without saying it outright. It is certainly a sign of hope, at the end of the whole sorry tale of David's rape and murder. 'Solomon' is the name he takes at his coronation, and is based on the word 'shalom', peace, so again: a hint that God's in there somewhere. Then Solomon's request that he be given wisdom from God confirms that he was the

right choice. Sadly, like most, eventually power goes to his head & he become a despot who exploits his people for his own building programs.

8. We haven't studied Bathsheba yet so I will ask this question: How much do you focus on her being raped?

I certainly look at how she is treated in the text, which is very clear that it is David's abuse of power, and that she is the abused. There is no doubt that she is acted upon and has no ability to refuse. She is 'taken' to David (& "taken' is often associated with rape). Then, in Nathan's parable, she is obviously the poor man's ewe lamb who is taken for slaughter by the rich man: a very telling picture of how a raped woman might feel!

### **Verbatim Participant Comments**

- Very grateful to you and for you. This study has appealed to more women of more different ages at our Church than in any of the 20 plus years I have been attending PW Bible studies.
- I could listen to you all night.
- I have loved how you have used the word hesed. I feel so comforted by God every time I read it. Thank you
- This was wonderful!! Hope you do more studies!
- My Bible Study group is using your CD and LOVE it! Great discussions and moments of contemplation and reflection. Wonderful presentation this evening! THANK YOU! I hope you will write another *Horizons* Bible Study for us! We all love this one!
- The group is really enjoying this study and we really like the way you have done the DVD.
- Thanks! This was outstanding.
- We hope there will be one for the 2022–2023 Bible Study and that it will be as well done as this year's.

- Thank you for this great information. Thankful follow-up posting will be coming soon. Peace and grace to everyone.
- This year's Bible study, and the video series with Meryll, is so well done! Meryll and Magdalena have made it easy to teach. BRAVO, and thanks to all for tonight!
- Thank you! It's been a pleasure to have this opportunity to hear you talk, Meryll Blair.
- Thanks to everyone for such a wonderful evening!
- Thanks! Great Discussion!
- This has been a great study for this year.
- What an amazing evening! Thank you to Meryll Blair and your entire team!!
- Gracias y bendiciones desde Cabo Rojo Puerto Rico Sinodo Boriquen
- This was the fastest and most wonderful 90 minutes I have spent ZOOMing since this technology came into my life.
- Thank you so much for a wonderful webinar.
- Thanks for an enjoyable expansion of the Study. I especially enjoyed and appreciate the great Aussie Flavor that you added, which made for greater enrichment, for me. Blessings and God's best in your future Bible Study writings. All the best.
- Many thanks.
- Beautiful
- Thank you!
- Thank you for the beautiful benediction!
- Thank you, Meryll!
- Thank you so much for your time with us. My favorite study in several years.
- Thank you so very much!
- Thank you so much. Wonderful evening!
- Thank you very much for the study and these thoughts tonight. Our groups have enjoyed it very much.
- Thank you for the lesson.
- This has been wonderful! I need to check out since my battery is fading.
- This was fantastic! Thank you, Meryll and those who provided this for us!

- Thank you for a wonderful evening and excellent study!
- Waves of blessing on everyone! Thank you for a wonderful evening.
- Truly enjoyed these 90 minutes Meryll. God Bless. To be introduced to these Ladies of the Women has been an eye-opener for me.
- Yes, thank you! My entire circle has been enjoying this study!
- Excellent study. Thank you.
- Thank you so much. I was so disappointed when I realized I had calculated the time difference wrong and ended up being an hour late joining. I am glad it will be available on YouTube.
- Beautiful evening! Thank you!!
- Thank you, Meryll, for a wonderful evening. Please keep writing your Bible stories. God bless you.