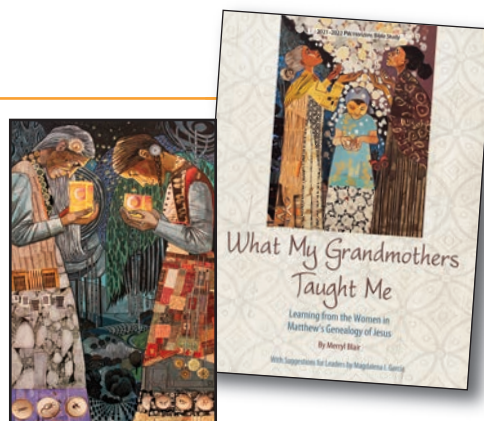


People of Story

BY MELVA LOWRY

For use with Lesson Nine of the 2021–2022 PW/Horizons Bible study, *What My Grandmothers Taught Me: Learning from the Women in Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus* by Merryl Blair



Scripture: Matthew 1

We have come to the end of our study, but this is not the end of learning about and honoring our foremothers in faith. As we have seen in each lesson, our foremothers' stories contain much more to explore and reflect upon. I hope that this Bible study has awakened a curiosity about and awareness of the important roles women play in ensuring the survival of families. That women navigate a male-centered world has not changed throughout the centuries. Many of the relationships and encounters we studied were uncomfortable, even troubling, and speak to the harm and trauma that our foremothers experienced. This study also calls us to name and reclaim the stories of the women who we did not study. Such women constitute an important part of Jesus' genealogy and built the backdrop of the stories we did study.

As we move toward the end of this journey and you continue to go deeper into your own story, I offer this prayer from Cole Arthur Riley, creator of *Black Liturgies*, a social media site that highlights daily life and liturgies through the lens of the Black experience.

God of Hagar,
You go down in the depths of our suffering
and remind us

We are people of story.

Just as you met Hagar in the desert with tender curiosity, would you guide us into that same curiosity of self and narrative, that we might be people, not without trial, but people who sense our place in the story of God and believe in our belonging.

Truly you are the one who sees us.*

Amen. We are all people of story. We are the continuation of our families' physical and spiritual stories. We

enter into our physical familial story and our faith story at different points in history.

Take a moment to outline, write, draw or otherwise render the story of you joining your physical familial story. Add details about what was happening the day you were born. Was your entry into the world quick, unique or during a holiday?

Take a moment to draw, write or capture the moment you entered into your spiritual family. Can you remember anything in particular about that day? Who was with you? Can you remember how you felt or any reactions from others?

We are living in times that will be noteworthy to personal, national and world history. How will we tell our individual stories and how will our collective story be told? How will we set the stage for those who come after us to understand this time? We are being called to be mindful of the information we take in and how we process the onslaught of opinions and facts. On a daily basis, we encounter a flood of opinions and facts (which are often represented interchangeably). We must mindfully process these to understand our own stories and to share them with others.

In this study survival was often the goal in our foremothers' stories because the culture devalued women. Likewise, the stories we are still curating today demand that we paint the harsh realities, especially of the effects of colonization and the violence and racism in our country's history. As we relay our Christian genealogy, we cannot erase the ways the Church gained momentum and followers. When we leave out key details or factual information, we are manipulating the truth and causing systemic harm to those who survived and the generations who will follow.

Since 2016 I have seen many white women speak up about their hurt and trauma that arose during that year's election cycle. There was an energy from white women on both sides of the political spectrum speaking up in ways that I had not witnessed thus far in my lifetime. Women spoke boldly of why they voted the way they did, and technology allowed us to witness the emotional response of the election outcome.

Stories from the 1900s suffragist movements were being retold as if in real time; and yet the voices of minority women who spurred much of the momentum were still absent. It is during this time the stories began to shift. Particularly in the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter, leadership from Black women and people of color expanded our collective story. Then, in the wake of the 2020 election, we started witnessing some historic firsts for women of color in the United States.

The list below includes profiles of women of color and an interview on difficult truths and finding inspiration. Choose one or two to read or listen to, then discuss or reflect on the questions.

Deb Haaland, first Native American Cabinet secretary
[npr.org/2021/03/15/977558590/deb-haaland-confirmed-as-first-native-american-interior-secretary](https://www.npr.org/2021/03/15/977558590/deb-haaland-confirmed-as-first-native-american-interior-secretary)

Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett, a scientist vital to the development of the Moderna vaccine
[asm.org/Biographies/Kizzmekia-S-Corbett,-Ph-D](https://www.asm.org/Biographies/Kizzmekia-S-Corbett,-Ph-D)

Kamala Harris, first woman, first African American and first Asian American to serve as Vice President of the U.S.
[whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-harris/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-harris/)

For the podcast, *Faith and Feminism*, Meghan Tschanz interviews Cole Arthur Riley, creator of *Black Liturgies*. At 18:12–22:22, Cole reflects on the church's complicity in harming Black individuals, and at 1:01:44–1:03:25 talks about people who inspire her.
meghantschanz.com/episode-135-black-liturgies-with-cole-arthur-riley/

Questions

- What did you hear in their story? What stood out to you?
- How would you write this person into the collective story that is our history?
- What was left out of their story?
- What did you gain from knowing their story?
- What potential harm could be done if we left their story out of the collective history?

Since the time of our biblical grandmothers, women have made many advances. They take leadership roles, but also are recognized and respected for their leadership. There is still more to do to reduce the harm and trauma women experience. There are many voices that still need to be heard. As we move forward, let us lean into our own stories. If we can have the courage to reclaim our own voices and erase shame from the harm we survived, then maybe we can have the boldness to listen intently as someone else speaks their own story.

God of the collective, we thank you for creating us uniquely in your own image. You gathered us along the way through wildernesses and across oceans. Lord, you were with us when the journey was easy, and you also gave us wisdom when we encountered dangerous terrain. As you call us to reclaim our stories and those of our ancestors, give us grace to be patient with ourselves, give us love to accept the bitter tears and a sense of freedom to move forward and allow others to tell their own stories. Thank you for this time of study and fellowship. May our circles continue to expand in the days, months and years to come. Amen and Ashe.

Melva Lowry is an ordained ruling elder who works as the co-director for Asheville Poverty Initiative and Assistant Director for Youth at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church.

Notes

* Cole Arthur Riley, [instagram.com/blackliturgies](https://www.instagram.com/blackliturgies), July 5, 2020.