

The Jesse Tree

A day by day journey through Advent

Heart of Mary Women's
Fellowship



heartofmarywf.com

About This Study

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.

Looking for a group? Please visit www.heartofmarywf.com/groups to find a meet up near you.

Are you already in one but not listed on our website? Looking to start one? Please contact us for more information about our "HOM Ambassador" program. We have team members available specifically to help you grow a local group and lead other women through community, prayer, and devotion. Their support is available at all times. We also want to help you grow! We will advertise your group on our website & social media! And we have free resources for you as well. Please email us at heartofmarywf@aol.com

Note: All written content has been reviewed by a Catholic spiritual director to cross check that all statements align with the teachings and tenants of the Roman Catholic Church.

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[Genesis 2:18-25](#)

The story of our creation as man and woman is a story of love. We can only understand this story once we understand something about God. God is communion of Persons, a Trinity: three unique Persons yet one God. God the Father pours forth His Love to God the Son, and the Love that exists between them is so powerful that from it springs the Holy Spirit. God then created us in this Trinitarian Image to be a communion of persons giving ourselves to one another in an interdependent exchange of love. But this immense reality is so difficult to see and even more difficult to live out. Unfortunately we can only see, this all too familiar story of creation through the eyes of sin and brokenness.

Let us try to see it today with new eyes.

God creates Adam, places him in Eden, and gives him the command to call and name the creatures picking one to be his helper. Despite his efforts he does not find a helper fit for him. So God makes Woman. It is no mistake that we were fashioned from his rib. We were not made from his head to be above him or his feet to be beneath him but from his rib - the part closest to his heart, to be beside him. When

he sees Woman he cries out, *"AH! Flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone."* It's as if he is looking at the innermost part of himself and he knows he was created to be with this woman and she to be with him. At last he has found communion, his other self, his helper.

What does it mean to be someone's helper? The Hebrew word here is Ezer. The only other time we see it in scripture it refers to God himself saving people from life threatening situations.

Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life (Psalm 54:4)

or

Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. (Psalm 33:20).

I think there is a temptation when we read this story to think that woman was somehow created to do the laundry and cook the meals, to somehow be subservient. But those psalms paint a much bigger picture. We are Adam's partner in battle. We are there to be life giving with him. It is the two together that bear God's Image to the world.

So why is this so hard? Quite simply, we're sinners! It's not easy to bear God's image. Furthermore, there is so much brokenness surrounding the family. That brokenness has caused us to put up huge walls in our hearts and in our lives and not just when it comes to the opposite sex. Being in communion necessarily requires being open to receiving love from another. The passage above ends by saying, "the were naked and not ashamed." This nakedness is not just in the body but also in the heart.

I think we all know the constant temptation to hide our hearts. There is a multi-billion dollar industry telling women to hide: to be thinner, to be more beautiful, to be more crafty, to be better mom's and better friends. Inside, we know that we are broken, and that these societal demands are really unattainable, so we hide. This is the opposite of what God had planned.

St. John Paul II was constantly quoting the document, *"Joy and hope"* where it says, *"man...cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."* We were made for communion, to be constantly giving. Not the kind of giving that causes



Genesis 2:7-9

Have you ever thought about yourself being clay in the potter's hands? God makes you! Notice that I say makes, it's an ongoing process. Today, right now, he is forming you. His hands are all over you. His desire is to make you more and more yourself with each passing moment.

The story of man's beginnings is your story. When we are born we are stained with original sin. Just as water helps mold clay, God uses the water of baptism, along with the other sacraments, to continually shape our character. Don't you think God could have just thought us into existence? Of course! But He chose to mold us "*out of the ground and breathe us into life.*" His desire is to enter into our mess and make something beautiful. It takes time and patience. Sometimes, it seems as though we are on that wheel of Maggie Renfro Genesis 2:7-9

Man's creation! Oh the beauty of our beginnings. We know that the first man was called Adam, which in Hebrew means "*clay.*" His name gives us insight into the first moments of life. God desired to make a creature that was moldable, one that could

learn and grow. Scripture uses the image of us being “*clay in the potter’s hands*” (Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Romans). The Lord’s desire is to spend time forming us.

Have you ever seen someone work on a potter’s wheel with clay? The potter has to be incredibly skilled and precise; too much water and the clay collapses, not enough and it becomes too stiff. The clay must be held delicately, so as not to crush it, and yet with enough firmness to form the intended shape, otherwise the force from the spinning causes the clay to warp. It is precise work that requires constant attention from the potter. His hands cannot stop touching the clay.

Make no mistake - we were handcrafted! The analogy of course falls short because God gives us powers of thought, action, and creativity. He molds us into His image and likeness; He puts Himself into each unique creation life and we’re spinning out of control. We tense up and try to take control. Luckily, God is persistent, time is on His side and He waits for us to be still. Too often we grow tired of the process because we can’t see what He’s doing. Perhaps we even get dizzy and our vision of reality becomes skewed. We need to remember that we aren’t sitting where He is sitting. His ways are not our ways. He is in control.

This story has the power to show us God’s heart and His intentions for creating us. He’s not distant no matter how skewed our vision is. He is present and patient and forming us, even now.

There is a temptation, especially during this Advent season to busy ourselves with planning, parties, and presents. Christmas seems to catch us off guard. The enemy tricks us by taking our attention off what is important. We place pressures on ourselves that God does not place on us.

In my life I’m guilty of taking on too much; guilty of too much volunteering, too much busyness! As women we share in His creative work in a very particular way. We love to make things beautiful and make others feel welcome and comfortable. Those are amazing gifts but sometimes, while preparing my home for guests, or making food for my family, or planning the annual Christmas party, I forget that He created me.



[Genesis 3:1-7, 23 & 24](#)

"She took of its fruit and ate." How many of us are guilty of this? Thousands of years later and we still desire what we ought not. After all, she had EVERYTHING!! A perfect husband and amazing home, her every need was provided for, and the greatest gift of all - she literally *"walked with God."* What was the original woman going through? Thousands of years later can we relate to her struggle? I think so! Let's take a closer look at what was going on.

First, I think that the woman felt as though God was holding out on her. The serpent says, *"Did God really tell you not to eat of the tree?"* The serpent places doubt in her heart. We can all relate to that ugly voice inside us that whispers in our darkest places and suddenly our heads have run away with us. We've begun to consider all possibilities of betrayal. Next, she begins floundering. How do I know this? Woman tells the serpent that God told them not to eat or even touch the tree. Look at the previous text, Genesis 2:16 & 17 (Read carefully). Does God tell them that they may not touch the fruit? No, He does not. How many of us have fallen into this? When we feel threatened by something or want to be taken seriously, we exaggerate. It's

a desperate attempt at being heard. She's floundering. Lastly, where is her husband? Scripture tells us that she gives the fruit to her husband, "who was with her." The Hebrew text indicates that he was literally standing right next to her, watching her flounder, fail, and fall. Didn't God just say in Genesis 2:18 "*It's not good for them to be alone (paraphrase)?*" Yet, the woman does not ask Adam for help and he does not step up and offer it. Neither did as they were created to.

I think each of us can relate to the struggle that was playing out. No matter what your brand of sin tends to be, the process of sin is always the same. Every sin is rooted in a mistrust of God's plan for us. We doubt Him and His plan and, thinking He is holding out on us, we desire to "*fix*" God's plan by grasping for something apart from what He gives us. In the woman's case it was the fruit of the forbidden tree, but in our own lives it could just as easily be security, control, pleasure, or affirmation. Finally, we make the decision to do what is beneath us: sin.

But there is hope in this story. Genesis goes on to tell us that God then bars Adam and Eve from Eden "*to guard the way to the tree of life*". At a glance this seems cruel, like salt in an open wound. But if Adam and Eve would have eaten of the Tree of Life (eternal life) after the fall, they would have remained in sin forever. So he places an angel at the gate and sets up a plan to restore man. Only God doesn't want to just restore original innocence. He wants to elevate it even further. By becoming man, God does just this. He elevates humanity. St. Augustine says that original sin is the "*happy fault that merited for us so great a redeemer.*"

The challenge is then to look at our sin as St. Augustine did. The next time you flounder, fail, and fall, take a moment, look to Heaven and know that God can and will use your faults to bring about salvation. We need only look to the saints to know this is true. St. Paul's zeal killed Christians. God used that zeal to make him one of the greatest evangelists. St. Augustine had a passion for worldly knowledge and pleasure. God used that passion to make him one of the greatest instructors in the Church to this day. St. Francis was the "*popular kid*". God used his ability to influence people to rebuild the Church! -Maggie

Reflect: It's true each of us can relate to that first woman-we're all sinners. But we can also relate to another woman, Mary. Mary's yes to God's will undid Eve's no.



[Gen. 6:5-8, 13-22; 7:17, 23, 24; 8:1, 6-22](#)

Sometimes I feel really impatient with a project, and just slam my laptop shut, and have to walk away. Other times, a paper isn't going the route I had expected, so I delete and start over. How many of us have gotten frustrated with something we're working on and just had to take a deep breath and walk away? Whether it's something you're writing or making, or it's your own children that you need a breather from, we all get overwhelmed and need to step back sometimes. We, however aren't perfect. We aren't the Lord, who STILL got so frustrated with humankind that he said: *"I will wipe out from the earth the human beings I have created, and not only the human beings, but also the animals and the crawling things and the birds of the air, for I regret that I made them."*

Holy moly, think of how BAD the people were that even our LORD was like *"Ehhh, nope, let's start this humankind over again, these guys are AWFUL!"* and did just that!? Noah, however, was all right in God's book. So God told Noah how to get the boat prepped, and Noah followed His instructions. Personally, I can think of a few things I would have left off the boat, but I'm not great at following directions sometimes. The rains came, and they brought the floods, which lifted the ark and wiped the earth clean. The floods stuck around for 150 days, and the ark came to



Genesis 12: 1-3

Raise your hand if change is easy for you, you value the very idea of letting go of your “norm” and finding something totally new totally easy to adjust to. Nope? No hands? Didn’t think so. I cannot think of one instance in my life that change hasn’t brought some sort of anxiety, some sort of feeling of uneasiness. Now, that’s not to say that all change is bad, quite on the contrary, I think change is healthy, it motivates us, it moves us and it’s all in all good for us. But low and behold change is seldom ever comfortable. It’s hard for most of us to give up what is comfortable. We are creatures of habit, and change challenges that.

In Genesis 12 God promises Abram. Those promises led to covenants and according to one of my theologically advanced coworkers, these promises lay the brickwork for the Bible. The entire Bible. How cool is that? How awesome that we have a God who promises us in times of change, tells us that if we cling to him, if he remains the lamp, the torch, in which we use to light our lives, we need not despair. Now of course God promised Abram some pretty huge things- land, a dynasty and worldwide blessing. Those are some awesome prizes, but I have to remind myself that Abram, like you and I, I’m sure didn’t come across those things without some feelings of uneasiness.

It was all new, all change, and I'm sure all, to some extent, anxiety inducing.

One major change that I walked through in life was attending college. I came from an extremely small town full of like-minded people and was thrown into a world much different than what I was used to. Suddenly I wasn't surrounded by people who were all the same, instead I met people from many walks of life, many backgrounds and religions. My hometown is majority Catholic, mostly cradle-Catholics. Let's just say my college dorm floor had a majority of "undecided" or "I used to be Catholic when I lived with my parents." The change was hard. It was the first time I had to walk my faith without having my parents there to wake me up for Mass, or telling me what to believe or how to believe it.

This change proved extremely uncomfortable. I grew homesick at times, I found it hard to make friends, I constantly teetered between this "new world" and the one that I had left. As much as I wanted to let go of my "small town girl" ways, I continuously felt the pull of God bringing me back, calling to me.

Luckily I found a campus ministry that I would like to credit with "saving" me and probably most of the reason I remain a practicing Catholic today. I fear without their fellowship, I would have lost my faith to a world full of empty promises. I learned that God promises more, so much more. I learned that you don't have to know the most to be the best disciple of Christ, you don't have to be the most perfect or make the least amount of mistakes, you just have to be willing to bring yourself back to Christ. To ask for forgiveness, admit you need Him in your life and to keep walking the path he asks you walk. I learned that I had the sword I needed inside of me to defend my faith, to keep that fire inside.

The Lord asked Abram to leave what he was comfortable with, all with a promise of a new life, a new better and greater life. We are all called by the Lord to use our talents, our lives in different ways. Life constantly changes. It grows, it moves and it's unexpected. Our stability remains our rock, our Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 13:8 says "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." There is no greater promise than this. No matter the change that occurs in our lives, our God is never-changing. He is and always will be. -Dana



[Gen. 22:1-1](#)

Oh that we would ALL have the faith and obedience that Abraham has! Can you imagine, the Lord calls to you and asks you to offer your own child? Your one and only child? As someone without children, I can't even imagine, but I would be devastated if I had to sacrifice someone I love, or even my little weenie dogs.

Abraham gets a couple of servants together and tells Isaac that they need to go make a sacrifice to the Lord. They traveled for two days, and on the third day Abraham told his servants that he and Isaac were going to go pray and come back. Abraham cut the wood for the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac's back. Just as Christ, the only son of God, was forced to carry the wood he'd be hung upon as a sacrifice, Isaac had to carry the wood on his back that he'd be sacrificed to. Isaac was obviously confused, probably thinking "wood, check, fire, check, sacrificial animal...no check?" so he asked his father. Abraham replied to him that God would provide the sacrifice. They kept walking, and the Lord told him where to build the

altar. He puts Isaac on the altar, and at the very last second an Angel stopped Abraham. The Lord was testing Abraham, and after seeing that he would have sacrificed his only son because the Lord had told him to, the Lord gave him a promise: *"I will bless you and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore..."*

In many cultures from the beginning of time to even present day, the number of descendants one has enriches one's family and elevates one's status. Blessing Abraham with unending descendants was especially significant because of how difficult it was for them to conceive in the first place. The Lord's blessing was two-fold, however. He also told Abraham that those descendants would find blessings in whatever lands/countries they wound up in. His descendants would be so blessed, all because Abraham was so obedient and trusted the Lord so much.

We're all tested, all day, every day. Whether it's an impatient or judgmental in-law, coworkers who don't do their part, children who refuse to listen or do well in school, everyone has their own set of tests each and every day. It's what we do with those tests and how we react to them that makes a difference in our day to day and in our eternal future. Will we take up our cross as the Lord did, the bundle of wood as Abraham and Isaac did? Or do we take the easy route and ask for forgiveness later? It's too easy to snap at someone or to be impatient. It's easy to decide that someone else's problems are their own, not for you to worry about. The hard thing is to pick up our bundle of wood and do what the Lord asks of us, but that's what we must strive for. We aren't made for easy. -Mandi

"The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness."—Pope Benedict XVI

Reflect: What's one area you really struggle to give your yes to God? What can you do to better prepare to give your yes?

