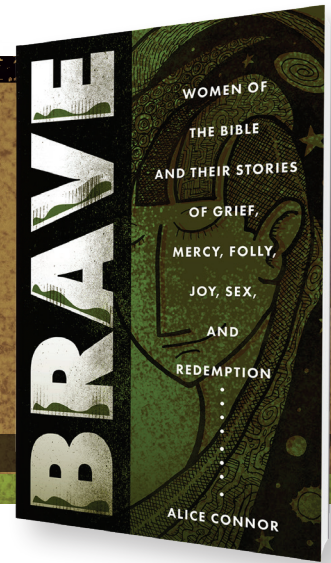


*Brave: Women of the Bible and Their Stories of Grief, Mercy, Folly, Joy, Sex, and Redemption* by Alice Connor

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPLATION AND DISCUSSION



### INTRODUCTION

- What have you learned about women in the Bible over the years? Whether from the Bible itself, from church attendance, from Christians? Be honest.
- How does “reading between the lines” resonate with you as you read scripture? What is missing for you in a general sense? How does it feel to try to guess at what’s being hinted at?
- Why *would* The Big Story working itself out in history use only men as actors?
- What feels R-rated in your own life? Does that feel scary or natural?
- Tell us/yourself about a time when you yourself looked at someone else and thought some version of “how could she possibly.” What was offensive or peculiar to you about that person? What do you think was important to her in that moment? When have you been on the receiving end of “she couldn’t possibly”? What did you learn from that moment?
- What are your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations when you read that the most appropriate pronoun for God is “they”? Wait, scratch that, we’ll talk about it in the next chapter.
- What do you make of scripture and interpretation being a form of fanfiction? What baggage does that word hold for you, if any?
- Who are the women in your family, whether you know them or not, who have shaped who you’ve become?
- What do you think “feminism” means? What does it mean to you?

### GOD IS NOT A MAN: I’M EVERY WOMAN; IT’S ALL IN ME

- What surprised you about God’s story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- How does it feel to think of God as a mother? Try practicing using “she” and “Mother” in your prayer life for a week and examine how you respond.
- What does it mean to you to think of God as a woman, or with womanly attributes? More generally, what does it mean to be a woman, to feel like a woman? What does it mean to be a man, to feel like a man? These are huge questions, of course, with wide-ranging consequences—take your time, be honest, be curious.

- What are your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations when you read that the most appropriate pronoun for God is “they”?
- Brainstorm a list of men in your life who might read this book if you loaned it to them. Consider the trans and nonbinary folk you know who might read it. What do you think they’ll make of this chapter? Why would you want them to read it?
- How do you think about God in your prayers, in your moments of crisis, in your joy? What is God like on the ground, not just in fancy theological terms? Not, what are you supposed to think God is like, but what is God like *to you*? And what is a new way you want to think about God?
- Try using the illustration of God as a jumping-off point for meditation. Stand barefoot in a room where you won’t be disturbed. Close your eyes; let your mind slow. Rest your palms on your belly and feel it rise and fall as you breathe slowly and deeply. As you continue to breathe, let your awareness rise and fall through your body like the waves at the shore. On an in-breath, let your awareness begin at your feet and rise up your legs, your belly and chest, your throat, and peak at the top of your head. On your out-breath, let your awareness sink down through your head, your throat, your shoulders and chest, your belly, your legs, to the floor. If it’s helpful, let this breath and awareness flow slowly, lapping at your feet, ankles, knees, and slowly rise eventually to the top of your head. However you pay attention to your breath as it rises and falls in your body, remember with each breath that it is God’s breath within you, that you are breathing in and out the presence of God. Practice this breathing meditation for as long as you like. How do you feel afterwards?

## **SARAH: HAVE IT ALL, LOSE IT ALL, YOU READY FOR MORE YET?**

- What surprised you about Sarah’s story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- What’s your immediate reaction—thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations—to read that Sarai likely didn’t exist historically? Sit with that reaction for a moment. What do you lose or gain?
- How does it affect your reading to consider how old Sarai and Abram were? How would the story have been different if they were spring chickens? Or middle-aged parents of teens? What does this suggest to you?
- What do you think actually happened to Sarai each time she was taken as someone else’s wife? How much does it matter that we don’t know? What is your discomfort level with Abram’s actions?
- Are you cranky about how Sarai used Hagar’s body and how she treated her later? Why or why not?
- What comes up for you to think of Sarah’s laughter being delight that she might have sexual pleasure again as an old woman? When have you heard sex and sexual pleasure spoken about in church in a positive light?
- Sarah and Abraham are not paragons of virtue; they’re exemplars of humanity, and God uses them. How do you see God using you in your own messiness?
- Whose bodies are being used as pawns in a larger game now?
- Find some markers or pens or crayons—whatever you like to doodle with. Sit comfortably with the image of Sarah in front of you. (If you prefer, photocopy it first—you have permission to do it just this once...) Take a deep breath. Maybe another one. As you

continue to breathe slowly and deeply, allow your mind to slow down; soften your gaze. Contemplate the pain and violence of the world and in yourself. Use the markers or pens or crayons to doodle in the white space around her. When you are ready, begin to contemplate vulnerability and the blessings it brings. Contemplate the ways that you are strong and resilient and delighted. Doodle in the black shadow around her hair as you think of these things.

## RACHEL AND LEAH (AND BILHAH AND ZILPAH)

- What surprised you about these women's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- What does it suggest to you that Rachel was a shepherd? That Leah's eyes were beautiful or ugly or wise?
- Scripture suggests it was fated or set up by God that Rachel was at the well. Do you think God works that way? Why or why not?
- Most myths don't deal a lot with minutiae or people's feelings about events, regardless of gender. How unfair is it for Alice to keep harping on these four women not having a voice and not talking about their feelings?
- What do you make of Jacob being the one without a voice in the narrative of childbirths?
- Magic works in this story—the mandrake, the mottled sheep and goats, the assumed power of the household gods. What do you do with this information, considering that our culture and our theology say magic isn't real? What is scripture trying to get across? What feels magical or supernatural to you now?
- What does your name mean? What does it mean to your family? Do you attribute any significance to that meaning? If you could name yourself (which you totally can, by the way), what would you choose? Listen, go all out: try on something like Cookies for Dinner or Calm Under Pressure as well as Lucinda or Fitzwilliam.
- What in your own life has been contained within parentheses? What stories or lives through history feel parenthetical to you? Do those feel like afterthoughts or more like further information?
- Try using the illustration of Rachel and Leah as an icon for meditation. Sit comfortably and relax your gaze. Allow your eyes to move over the image. Notice, distantly, what draws your attention, what loops your eyes make as they move across the image. What do you settle on? What disturbs you? Look into their eyes in silence and feel them looking back at you. Breathe slowly and allow your emotions to bubble up—fear, loss, awe, confusion. Sit as long as you feel called to, then slowly come back to yourself. What was that like? What did you learn from Rachel and Leah?

## MIRIAM: TO THE WORLD WE DREAM ABOUT AND TO THE ONE WE LIVE IN NOW

- What surprised you about Miriam's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- Alice once heard a preacher say all our lives are reflective of the story of the Exodus: we are enslaved to something (addiction, self-interest, a job, etc.), we all have the possibility of the Promised Land and healing on the horizon to reach for, and we all wander between

the two, sometimes interminably. To what are you enslaved right now? In what way are you wandering? What does the Promised Land look like to you?

- What does it mean to hope?
- Miriam was not the first nor the last child to survive a horrific massacre. Jochebed was not the first nor the last parent to despair for her children in the midst of a horrific massacre. How do you see these two women in current events? In American or world history?
- Where *was* Miriam all those times, do you think? Given her importance in the narrative, why do you suppose she's not mentioned in large swaths of it?
- Why do you suppose Miriam was the only one punished for insubordination? What stories do you have from history or your own life of women or other minorities in a similar position?
- Find some markers or pens or crayons—whatever you like to doodle with. Sit comfortably with the image of Miriam in front of you. (If you prefer, photocopy it first—you have permission to do it just this once...) Take a deep breath. Maybe another one. As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, allow your mind to slow down; soften your gaze. Contemplate the ways that you are absent in your life. When do you pull back? When do you allow someone else to take charge or even walk over you? Slowly color in Miriam's hair as you contemplate. Ask yourself how you show up, how you rise to a challenge, how you speak truth when it's hard. Doodle in the white space around her as you contemplate these things. When you're ready, come back to yourself. What do you notice?

## DELILAH: WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER HERO

- What surprised you about Delilah's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- What did you know about the Exodus and the Exile before reading this chapter? Holding the wilderness wandering, the entry into the Promised Land, the massacre, and the subsequent decline in your mind, does Judges' theory that Israel's Exile to Babylon is the result of the people's unfaithfulness make sense to you?
- Tell us/yourself a story about a time when you tried to work out what you had done to cause your own suffering or when you found a scapegoat to blame your suffering on.
- Why did Delilah do what she did? What story about her resonates with you or helps you identify with her?
- Why is Samson held up as a judge? What purpose does his and Delilah's story serve in Judges and in The Big Story?
- This is a big question, but why are women so feared, their accomplishments and abilities so denigrated and buried? To be clear, many women are celebrated, many aspects of womanhood are held up as admirable, yet not the whole woman, not the accomplishments that threaten men. Why?
- What does it mean to call something heroic? What does that word carry with it? Who are heroes to you now? And in calling them heroes, how much leeway do you give them when they mess up?
- Delilah's story seems to hinge around ambiguity. What does that word mean to you and how does it make you feel to name some, if not all, of scripture ambiguous?
- Try using the illustration of Delilah as an icon for meditation. Sit comfortably and relax your gaze. Allow your eyes to move over the image. Notice, distantly, what draws your



attention, what loops your eyes make as they move across the image. What do you settle on? What disturbs you? Look into Delilah's eyes in silence and feel her looking back at you. Breathe slowly and allow your emotions to bubble up—fear, loss, awe, confusion. Sit as long as you feel called to, then slowly come back to yourself. What was that like? What did you learn from Delilah?

## THE LEVITE'S CONCUBINE: IT GETS BETTER. EVENTUALLY.

- What surprised you about the Levite's concubine's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- There was a time that ancient rabbis set age limits on some parts of scripture—notably Song of Songs and Ezekiel. Do you think readers should be a certain age or maturity to read this story in particular? Or that the Bible ought to have trigger warnings noted? Why or why not?
- What do you make of the fact that this woman has no lines in the story?
- Some folks speak of scripture as a guidebook for Christians trying to live godly lives, or at least kind lives. How does this story act as a guide to modern audiences? If it doesn't, what does it act like?
- Where *was* God in all of this? How much do you think God was involved in the men's decisions, from their perspectives and from God's?
- So what's the moral of this story? What are we supposed to come away with? And regardless of authorial intent, what are we actually taking away?
- Why is this story OK to have kept in Holy Scripture?
- Who do we now consider unworthy and mistreat or allow to be mistreated by our inaction? Why do we consider them unworthy? Be honest with yourself, even if you can't bear to say it out loud.
- Who are you walking with who is suffering? Who walks with you in your own suffering?
- Try a physical meditation based on the illustration of the Levite's concubine. Sit comfortably and relax your gaze as you look at her. Let your eyes roam over the image, noticing where your attention is caught and what you avoid. With your fingers, slowly trace the lines of her face, a gentle caress. When you feel centered, set the illustration aside and rest one hand palm up in your lap. With a finger of your other hand, gently trace the outside edge of your hand beginning at the base of your thumb. Trace the edge up to the tip on an in-breath, then back down into the wide space between thumb and forefinger on an out-breath. Trace up to the tip of the forefinger in an in-breath, back down between the forefinger and middle finger on an out-breath. Continue breathing and tracing slowly, becoming intimately familiar with your hands as you do so. Cherish your fingers and your skin. When you are ready, come back to yourself. What do you notice?

## HANNAH: I PUT MY THING DOWN, FLIP IT, AND REVERSE IT

- What surprised you about Hannah's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- The text says, "Infertility is no small thing." What is your experience of infertility, either in yourself or in those close to you? How helpful do you find it as a metaphor for God's work? What does it say about God that they might intentionally "close a woman's womb" or forget

us and our needs and desires? Does the responsibility inherent in those reasonings make things feel less chaotic? What is lost?

- How do you characterize Elkanah as a husband? In particular, how does his question “Am I not more to you than ten sons?” sit with you? Is he missing it entirely, deeply compassionate and suffering with her, or something else?
- You are not worthless. This isn’t a question, just a statement maybe you need to hear.
- How comfortable are you with calling Hannah (and Mary) a prophet? What does that word mean to you?
- If indeed feminism and Hannah’s story are about letting people do what brings them joy and not putting limits on them because of their gender, what does that open up for you?
- Look up the people named in the last paragraph. Well, except for Beth, who is delightful but unlikely to have a Wikipedia page. Who else would you say has Hannah’s voice now?
- Try using the image of Hannah as a jumping-off point for meditation. If your partner or child is willing, sit with them in chairs or on the floor across from each other. Breathe slowly and just look at each other’s faces. Let your eyes wander over their eyebrows, their cheekbones, their ears, their hair, their mouth. Gaze into each other’s eyes for a time. Maybe giggle a little bit because it’s weird. But come back and gaze some more. Feel the love you have for them. And feel the belovedness they hold from God. Breathe. Remember how they were made in the image of God. Remember how you were made in the image of God. When you’re ready, place your hands palm up on your lap to signify you’re done. Afterwards, talk a little bit about what you saw and about how beautiful each other is.

## MICHAL AND JONATHAN: I HAVE VAGUE AND MESSY POSITIVE FEELINGS TOWARD YOU

- What surprised you about Michal and Jonathan’s story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- How do you feel about a man being included as a focus of one of these chapters? Horrified? Hurt? Betrayed? Intrigued?
- The text says, “Michal’s love was intense and sudden and inevitable. She is the only woman in scripture said to love a man... How powerful must her love have been for the text to name it so starkly.” Why do you suppose Michal is the only one to be named this way?
- Based on this chapter, were David and Jonathan romantic and/or sexual partners? Why does it matter to you that they were or weren’t? Why would it matter to same-gender couples? To men?
- Jonathan and Michal both go to great lengths to protect David. Perhaps this is a literary device to shed more glory and honor on the man who would be king. Perhaps it’s a reflection of how foolish and determined we are in love. Tell us/yourself a story about a time you did something extreme or extremely silly to care for someone you loved. My mom once dove through the open back of our station wagon to yank the steering wheel to the side, crashing the car into a fence post, to save toddler me and my infant brother inside because the car’s parking brake was faulty and the car had started moving.
- Who do you have messy, positive feelings about? Have you told them?
- Try using the illustration of Michal and Jonathan as an icon for meditation. Sit comfortably and relax your gaze. Allow your eyes to move over the image. Notice, distantly, what draws your attention, what loops your eyes make as they move across the image. What do you

settle on? What disturbs you? Look into their eyes in silence and feel them looking back at you. Breathe slowly and allow your emotions to bubble up—fear, loss, awe, confusion. Sit as long as you feel called to, then slowly come back to yourself. What was that like? What did you learn from Michal and Jonathan?

## THE QUEEN OF SHEBA: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

- What surprised you about Makeda's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- Who in your life has been so enchanting to you as Makeda and Solomon were to each other? Maybe your seventh-grade crush? Maybe your first true love? Maybe someone you saw at the grocery store yesterday and only at a distance? Or maybe it was Brendan Fraser in *The Mummy*, so capable, so sarcastic, so kind, so damn hot—sorry, what were we talking about?
- How *is* a raven like a writing desk?
- Why did the writers of Kings and Chronicles include this brief interlude? Was it solely to show how amazing Solomon was (and by extension Yahweh) that this equally amazing foreign dignitary would grace him with her presence? Why else might they have included it?
- Cultures around the world make up stories about outsiders, sometimes based in fact, more often created out of whole cloth. “Other people are different, they’re weird, they’re not like us” becomes “how they are is shameful or even evil.” What are examples you’re aware of even now of assumptions and fabrications about people who aren’t familiar? How do you, personally, combat these assumptions?
- Tell us/yourself a story about a time you welcomed someone who was an outsider (to you or your community) and everyone’s lives were enriched.
- Try using the illustration of the Queen of Sheba as a jumping-off point for meditation. Find a palm-sized object—a stone or a hard-boiled egg or a carved trinket. The item doesn’t matter. Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Hold the object in the palm of one hand, resting the other hand on top, enclosing it gently. Feel its weight, its temperature, its texture. Breathe in and out slowly, imagining the object absorbing all the pain and heartache you carry with you. As you continue to breathe slowly, let your out-breath fill the object with grief and bullshit and your in-breath fill you with lightness and forgiveness and possibility. As you continue to breathe slowly, imagine the object shifting purpose. Now, instead of a repository of pain, it is a source of strength, warming your body and spirit, filling you with light and life. When you are ready, come back to yourself. What do you notice?

## JEZEBEL: NO MORE EVIL THAN THE NEXT GUY

- What surprised you about Jezebel's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- How do you reconcile your own faith with the existence of other faiths? Is it possible for multiple faiths to be right and worthwhile? Is it possible to be “on Yahweh’s side” and also recognize Jezebel’s humanity and giftedness? Is it possible to be a Christian and to recognize Muslims or Sikhs or native practitioners as valid?
- “In the secular world, history books tell us, [Ahab] was successful in foreign policy, helping neighboring nations defeat the invading Assyrians. The writer of the books of Kings is deeply embarrassed by all of this and insists that Ahab was more evil than any of his

predecessors.” How do you resolve the discrepancy between Ahab’s portrayal in scripture and his place in history? How do you decide what to trust and what to believe when they disagree?

- When have you asked whether God was real? What pushed you to that existential question “Where is God?” What has been meaningful or substantive to you in that process? What have you grieved?
- What have you heard about Jezebel that makes her evil? Compare and contrast her with any of the men in scripture.
- Perhaps Jezebel’s primary sin was in holding people’s lives lightly, in feeling entitled to her position and power. Who do you see acting that way now?
- Try using the illustration of Jezebel as an icon for meditation. Sit comfortably and relax your gaze. Allow your eyes to move over the image. Notice, distantly, what draws your attention, what loops your eyes make as they move across the image. What do you settle on? What disturbs you? Look into Jezebel’s eyes in silence and feel her looking back at you. Breathe slowly and allow your emotions to bubble up—fear, loss, awe, confusion. Sit as long as you feel called to, then slowly come back to yourself. What was that like? What did you learn from Jezebel?

## HULDAH AND THE THREE WISE WOMEN

- What surprised you about Huldah’s story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- What is wisdom, really?
- Like the story of Leah and Rachel, here the Medium of Endor’s magic seems to actually work. What do you make of that?
- How often have you read in this book or noticed for yourself that what you’ve been taught is simply not what scripture says? What purpose do those false narratives serve?
- The text says, “The Medium of Endor acted as a midwife for an ending as much as a beginning.” What are the endings in your life that are also beginnings? Do you resist those endings? Or do you help usher them in?
- In researching this chapter, Alice found a “scholarly” book about Huldah having written 90 percent of the Hebrew Scriptures, the assertion proven by anagramming her name and searching for the anagrams using a concordance. How do you tell whether a commentary or even a book like *Brave* is trustworthy?
- Whose fault is the current state of the world? Give examples.
- Who are the Wise Women in your life? In the life of your spiritual community? What makes them wise? And what makes you call them Wise Women as a title, regardless of gender?
- Find some markers or pens or crayons—whatever you like to doodle with. Sit comfortably with the image of Huldah in front of you. (If you prefer, photocopy it first—you have permission to do it just this once...) Take a deep breath. Maybe another one. As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, allow your mind to slow down; soften your gaze. Contemplate all the times you’ve had questions about God. You needn’t cling to them; just allow the feelings of wanting to ask questions, having them answered or having them shut down, flow through you with your breath. When you’re ready, use the markers or pens or crayons to write questions in her hair. They could just be single words that evoke questions. Doodle question marks or anything that arises in you. Continue to breathe deeply and



slowly, being gentle with yourself and those who come up in your questions. If you like, simply breathe and be and color in her eyes and lips and skin. When you're ready, come back to yourself. What do you notice?

## VASHTI AND ESTHER: FIERCE-ASS WOMEN

- What surprised you about Vashti and Esther's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- How does it feel to hear someone call part of scripture an exaggeration and ridiculous? What purpose does exaggeration serve here?
- Why do you suppose people attribute Vashti's reticence to some sort of unlikely and sudden physical deformity? Is it so strange that she might not want to parade herself in front of drunken men? What logical leaps have you seen people make to justify why a woman does something?
- Tell us/yourself about a time when you stood up to power and what the consequences were. Where was God in that moment? What did you learn?
- How would it change the story for you if Esther and Mordecai were spouses rather than cousins?
- Mordecai says, "If you keep silence at such a time as this..." What is the silence you keep? Who are the people who need your voice?
- Why do you think this book is in the Bible?
- How do you show up as a woman? What do you choose? How do you dress, work, interact in ways that say "woman" to you?
- Try using the illustration of Vashti and Esther as an icon for meditation. Sit comfortably and relax your gaze. Allow your eyes to move over the image. Notice, distantly, what draws your attention, what loops your eyes make as they move across the image. What do you settle on? What disturbs you? Look into their eyes in silence and feel them looking back at you. Breathe slowly and allow your emotions to bubble up—fear, loss, awe, confusion. Sit as long as you feel called to, then slowly come back to yourself. What was that like? What did you learn from them?

## JUDITH: ANTIFA BEFORE IT WAS COOL

- What surprised you about Judith's story? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- Who is in your genealogy who was feisty? Embarrassing? Who you wish you could meet? Who would you put in your fictional genealogy if you wrote one?
- What would you be willing to do if it meant saving all the lives of your town?
- So much of scripture is about whether God is on the people's side or not. "If God is with us, who could stand against us?" and similar sentiments. Does the presence of God mean the absence of conflict? Why or why not?
- What happened in you—thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations—when you read about Judith beheading Holofernes and calmly carrying his head back in a sack? Did Judith do right in murdering Holofernes? Ought they have deescalated or entered peace talks? In other words, is she someone to look up to?

- How important is it to you that these stories—or other particular, meaningful stories—are historically accurate? Does Judith’s story mean more or less to you if it’s a novella, not history? Or does it not matter because it’s in the Apocrypha? How important is it to you that, say, Abraham and Sarah are historical?
- How much of Judith’s beauty and sensuality is a performance?
- Try using the illustration of Judith as a starting point for meditation. Let your eyes rove over the illustration, the blood, her hidden eyes, her full mouth, her garment, her hair. Consider the strong will and the desperation she might have felt. Set the image aside and breathe slowly. Allow your attention to expand beyond where you are sitting to about ten feet away, almost like a bubble. Breathe. Allow your attention to expand again, your bubble to get a bit larger to include your neighbors’ houses or the buildings and people near you. Breathe. Allow your attention to expand again, the bubble widening to include your neighborhood and all the people in it. Breathe. Continue in this way, slowly expanding the bubble of your awareness even to encompass the whole globe if you like, but stopping earlier if you like. Hold all the people within that awareness with compassion and mercy—even people who have hurt you or people you know. When you’re ready, allow your attention to shrink down incrementally again, continuing to breathe slowly. What did you notice about this practice?

## FOREIGN AND BLEEDING WOMEN: TIME TO PICK MY HEART UP OFF THE FLOOR

- What surprised you about these women’s stories? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- On the ground, in practical terms, what is faith like and what does it do? How does faith make things better?
- What was Jesus doing in calling Ruhi a dog? Was it banter? A test? A misunderstanding? Why was he resisting? What does their conversation tell you about God?
- Thich Nhat Hahn offers this gem to people who are struggling: say, “Beloved, I am suffering, please help me.” Or alternatively, “Beloved, I see you are suffering, I’m here for you.” Note, it’s not “Here is my specific suffering and all the ways you need to fix it” but “I’m suffering.” The simplicity is beautiful and communicative. Ruhi does this with Jesus. When have you said similar words to your spouse or sibling or friend? Or, considering the pain you’re currently carrying, to whom could you say something like this?
- Why is it that both women’s healthy and unhealthy bleeding is considered impure?
- Have you ever had a miraculous healing experience? Or seen it in another person? What was it like? Alternatively, when have you experienced emotional, spiritual, social resurrection?
- How do these two women’s actions show you their faith?
- Try using the illustration of these women as an icon for meditation. Sit comfortably and relax your gaze. Rest your eyes on the women’s faces. As you breathe slowly, let your eyes travel around the image, noticing the jagged edges, the darkness, the texture, the expression, their open hands. After a few minutes, set the image aside and rest your hands palm up in your lap, open as the women’s hands are in the image. Feel the air across your palms; notice the feeling of emptiness and waiting to be filled. If you like, squeeze your hands shut into fists and feel the sense of clinging and need, then reopen them to sit open and exposed in your lap, ready and waiting again. Breathe slowly. Ask yourself what you need, and then sit and listen for a possible answer. What do you notice?

## LESSER-KNOWN MOMS: HOW TO PARENT WITH BODY, HEART, AND MIND

- What surprised you about these women’s stories? What did you learn? What offended you? With whom did you identify?
- Have you ever been given one of those “How to Christian Mom” books? Did you read it? What was it actually like?
- Who are the mothers you’re related to who have protected you, taught you, raised you? Who are the mothers you’re not related to who have nurtured you, stood up for you, or hurt you?
- If you yourself are a parent, what changed when your children were born? Don’t stop with the surface changes like diapers and schedules. What changed within you? What ended and what began?
- Who do you count as your children? And what does that mean?
- What are moms (and dads) for? What are parents supposed to do or be?
- What do you make of Alice’s saying moms are meant to show up? How does that resonate with you?
- Find some markers or pens or crayons—whatever you like to doodle with. Sit comfortably with the image in front of you. (If you prefer, photocopy it first—you have permission to do it just this once...) Take a deep breath. Maybe another one. Color the image however you like, not thinking too hard about color choices. As you color and doodle, bring to mind someone who has been a mothering presence to you, whether or not they were your mom. Hold them up in your mind and heart in thanksgiving. Imagine them in the same posture as this image, tall and strong and open to the divine. Invite healing and wholeness from God for them. If you like, say “Thank you” aloud. Bring another someone to mind who has mothered you. Continue as long as you like. What do you notice?

