

miriam

A Go-Getter Goes Too Far

SHANNON PRIMICERIO

TRUELIFE BIBLE STUDIES



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*To Allie Macrae, Katie Burke, and Katie Kauffman
(and little Sophia too):
Thanks for just being you.
I truly enjoy our Monday-night small group!*

CONTENTS

OVERCOME WITH INSECURITY	9
HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BIBLE STUDY	11
Week One: SMARTER THAN THE AVERAGE GIRL	13
Week Two: A GLIMPSE AT MOSES	29
Week Three: A HEART THAT DANCED	45
Week Four: JEALOUSY RISES	63
Week Five: PUNISHED!	81
Week Six: THE LEGACY OF A TRUE LEADER	101
Note to Leaders: HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY IN A SMALL GROUP	119
NOTES	123
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	125

OVERCOME WITH INSECURITY

ALL OF US ARE INSECURE about one thing or another. For some of us it's our weight; for others it's their broken-out skin. Some of us are ashamed of our test scores, and others are embarrassed about their families. If you asked most of us to look in a mirror and describe ourselves honestly, our flaws would probably outweigh our assets by at least five to one. Why is that?

We see ourselves differently than God sees us. He sees the word *potential* stamped across our foreheads in big, bold letters, but for one reason or another we misread it and assume it says *no good*. Nothing is more stifling than insecurity. I should know — I've battled it for almost all of my life. Although I'm not exactly sure what causes it, I do know who does. Here's a hint: It's not God. The Devil himself is the author of insecurity in our lives.

Even Miriam wasn't exempt from it. In her lifetime, she emerged as a well-known leader and overcame incredible odds. But her

life was also marked by a few wrong choices that had monstrous consequences. I believe those wrong choices were fueled by her insecurities.

I'm writing the introduction to this book a mere few days after a nineteen-year-old girl I knew was killed in an automobile accident that was the result of some of her own bad choices fueled by her insecurities. Insecurity mars our judgment, and it can drive us to do some risky, dangerous, and downright stupid things.

That's why it is important that we get a handle on it and deal with it for what it is in our lives: sin. Insecurity is a reverse form of pride. Instead of thinking we're great, we think we're anything but great. But the end result is that we still spend far too much time thinking of ourselves.

Insecurity was Miriam's downfall. I wrote this Bible study in hopes that it won't be our downfall too. Although Scripture doesn't give us many details about Miriam's life, it does give us enough to learn from and work through over the short period of six weeks. My prayer is that these next six weeks form a turning point in your life and that you are able to begin the process of breaking free from some of the insecurities that have enslaved you. Hopefully, meeting Miriam in her bondage will free us from ours.

So grab a pen and make sure you have your Bible ready. It's going to be an exciting six weeks, and I'm glad you have decided to join me on Miriam's journey from bondage to freedom. Onward and upward we go!

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BIBLE STUDY

YOU HAVE A BUSY LIFE. Homework, sports, and other extra-curricular activities demand a lot of your time. I know that. To make this study easy to fit into your schedule, I have divided Miriam's story into six weeklong segments. But I have not broken each week into daily assignments. It's up to you to find the easiest way for you to get through the material allotted for each week.

In order for you to get the most out of this study, it is vital that you take time to read the assigned passages. The main text for each week is provided for you, but you will be responsible for looking up additional passages on your own. It is also essential that you answer each question thoughtfully and thoroughly. The quizzes and various activities are fun, but they are also important. So don't skip over these portions, thinking you won't get anything out of them.

The ideal way to go through this Bible study is in a small group with some other girls so you can talk through Miriam's story and the

questions and issues that come up while exploring it. If you choose to do so, I recommend that you complete the assignments on your own each week and then get together to discuss what you have learned.

This Bible study can also be a tool to help you develop a regular quiet time with God each morning or evening. It's a great way to get into God's Word on a daily basis and study a girl whose life is completely relevant to your own. I suggest you set aside a specific time each day (like six thirty every morning, or eight o'clock every night) and commit to doing a portion of this study. That way, you will stay on track to finish studying Miriam's story in six short weeks.

It is my prayer that through your study of Miriam, you'll come to see and understand that God's Word is real and relevant to your life today.

Grace and peace,
Shannon Primicerio

week one

SMARTER THAN THE AVERAGE GIRL

Then [Miriam] was before [Pharaoh's daughter]:
“Do you want me to go and get a nursing mother
from the Hebrews so she can nurse the baby for
you?” Pharaoh's daughter said, “Yes. Go.” The girl
went and called the child's mother.

— EXODUS 2:7-8

WE LIVE IN A WORLD where some people lead and most people follow. Especially among your generation (and mine too), girls become satisfied hanging back and letting others take charge. In some cases that's fine, but in others—like living out our faith authentically—we are all called to stand up and be leaders. Miriam was a take-charge girl who wasn't afraid to share her ideas and opinions and put them into action. In many cases, the Bible shows us that Miriam's initiative was the result of a lot of good things. But before we meet her for the first time in Scripture, it is important that we learn a little backstory that will set us up for this week's passage and key verses.

The book of Exodus begins with the Israelites in slavery in Egypt. Under the rule of a cruel pharaoh (king), God's people had no rights or citizenship of their own—they were considered property. Their daily tasks consisted of manual labor, such as bricklaying,

as they constantly worked to build Pharaoh supply cities. Although they lived in their own community instead of in the households of the Egyptian people, they were not free. They had only what was given to them, and they had to adhere to strict rules imposed by Pharaoh. As slaves, they lived in poverty, nearly starving to death and being whipped and beaten if they didn't do exactly as Pharaoh and his cohorts said. They lived in constant fear that their lives could be taken from them at any minute.

But the harder Pharaoh was on the Israelites, the more they multiplied. Pharaoh feared they might become powerful enough to overthrow him. So he imposed a new law: Any son born to an Israelite woman was to be instantly put to death. That's where we will pick up the story. Please read the following passage, Exodus 2:1-6:

A man from the family of Levi married a Levite woman. The woman became pregnant and had a son. She saw there was something special about him and hid him. She hid him for three months. When she couldn't hide him any longer she got a little basket-boat made of papyrus, waterproofed it with tar and pitch, and placed the child in it. Then she set it afloat in the reeds at the edge of the Nile.

The baby's older sister [Miriam] found herself a vantage point a little way off and watched to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh's daughter came down to the Nile to bathe; her maidens strolled on the bank. She saw the basket-boat floating in the reeds and sent her maid to get it. She opened it and saw the child — a baby crying! Her heart went out to him. She said, "This must be one of the Hebrew babies."

A LEADER AS A LITTLE GIRL

Miriam's story is culturally much different from our own. Most, if not all, of us don't live in fear of a loved one being killed at any minute. But we can draw some similarities between our lives and

Miriam's. Just as Miriam stood in the bushes watching over her little brother Moses from afar, some of us have people we look out for in our lives too.

1. Make a list of people you look out for in your life. This list may include siblings, but it can also be opened up to friends and others you know. If you can't think of anybody, describe your situation.

I'm an only child, so I didn't grow up with siblings to watch out for, and I never had an older sibling to look out for me. But I recently had a good laugh when my grandma told me a story about when my mom and uncle were kids. My uncle is two years older than my mom, and one day when they were both in elementary school, he was playing a game with some friends on the playground at school. My mom went over to see what they were doing, and my uncle's friends started teasing her.

"Don't talk to my sister Becky like that," my uncle said to his friends firmly. Then he pulled my mom aside and whispered, "Beat it, Beck," so that no one else could hear. His instinct was to protect my mom, but he still viewed her as his annoying little sister. Your relationship with those you tend to look out for may be similar in its love-hate context.

2. Think of the people you listed in question 1. In what ways do you look out for them? What drives you to do so?

My guess is that your answer had something to do with love. There is something about a family relationship or a deep friendship that stirs our hearts like nothing else. In moments when harm looks as if it is quickly approaching those we love, something fierce rises up within us and gives us courage to fight on their behalf.

Here in the opening scene of Miriam's story, when she was just a young girl, we see a close bond forming between Miriam and her youngest brother Moses. She felt the need to look out for him. This will be an important point to remember as the weeks go on.

3. What one word would you use to describe Miriam's attitude toward Moses at this point? Why?

4. What does that one word tell you about her character?

At a very young age, Miriam stepped into the role God had designed for her. She was ready when the moment required it of her, as we will see in just a minute. Are you ready to step into the role God has designed exclusively for you? Since you may have a hard time figuring out just what that role is, let me offer a tool to help you figure out how He has gifted you.

WHAT ARE YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

The Bible says that in addition to our natural talents (like being able to write well or play a certain sport or instrument), we are all given different spiritual gifts. Because it is possible to have more than one spiritual gift, you will more than likely have more than one answer to some of the following questions. Please follow the specific instructions listed for each question.

1. You are going on a mission trip with your youth group over spring break. Your youth pastor comes to you with a list of roles that need to be filled by members of your team. He tells you that you can choose up to three jobs. Which do you choose?
 - a. Teaching Vacation Bible School (VBS) to children in the schools you will be visiting.
 - b. Helping all of the people in the evangelistic drama make sure that their costumes are in order and that they are ready to go onstage.
 - c. Encouraging the non-Christian translators with their English as a means of opening a door to share Christ with them.
 - d. Being in charge of a handful of your teammates and making sure everyone is on the bus on time each day before you go out and minister.
 - e. Donating a bunch of clothes and shoes from your personal collection to clothe teen girls living in an orphanage.

2. Your church is putting on their annual Christmas musical, and they have asked all members of the youth group to sign on for one task. Rank your top three choices by circling the corresponding letter and writing a number (your rank) next to it.
 - a. Sharing the gospel message at the end of the children's play.
 - b. Being the gopher that runs around and makes sure everyone else has what they need during the musical and all rehearsals.
 - c. Offering positive feedback to others in the cast as they work hard at learning their parts.
 - d. Putting together the practice schedule and being assistant director of the play.
 - e. Using your allowance to purchase tickets for people who can't afford them.

3. At school, your class is doing a work project in the local community. Your teacher asks you to choose a job. Circle three that appeal to you.
 - a. Teaching a lesson on your favorite subject in an after-school program for underprivileged children.
 - b. Volunteering at a local rescue mission.
 - c. Grading spelling tests for a first-grade class and writing a positive comment at the top of each one.
 - d. Organizing a team of students who will walk around the city park twice a week and pick up trash.
 - e. Taking a collection and donating your own money toward the purchase of sports jerseys for a teen girls' softball team who can't afford to buy uniforms.

Answers:

Mostly A's=One of your spiritual gifts might be preaching or teaching (Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-13).

Mostly B's=One of your spiritual gifts might be helping others (Romans 16:1-2; Romans 12:6-8).

Mostly C's=One of your spiritual gifts might be encouragement (Romans 12:6-8).

Mostly D's=One of your spiritual gifts might be leadership or administration (Romans 12:6-8; Titus 1:5).

Mostly E's=One of your spiritual gifts might be giving (Romans 12:6-8).

Other spiritual gifts that weren't on the quiz:

Prophecy (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-10; Ephesians 4:11-13):
Receiving a word from God about something that will happen in the future.

Mercy (Romans 12:6-8): Being compassionate and sympathetic toward others.

Wisdom/Wise Counsel (1 Corinthians 12:7-10): Giving wise and correct counsel to others as you are guided by the Holy Spirit.

Knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:7-10): Deep understanding given to you by God.

Faith (1 Corinthians 12:7-10): Believing God no matter what.

Healing (1 Corinthians 12:7-10): Praying over others and watching their physical ailments vanish.

Miracles (1 Corinthians 12:7-10): Performing signs and wonders.

Discernment (1 Corinthians 12:7-10): Knowing if something is from God or from Satan.

Speaking in Tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-10): Being able to speak in a language you have never learned.

Interpreting Tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-10): Being able to interpret a language you have never learned.

Evangelism/Pastoring (Ephesians 4:11-13): Sharing the gospel and watching people come to Christ.

Celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:7-8): Staying single and sexually pure permanently in order to better serve God.

WORDS TO LIVE BY

This week's memory verse is one of my favorites. The gifts God has given you are making room for you in a spot God designed exclusively for you. Write this verse out on a 3x5 card and stick it where you will see it often. Read it aloud several times a day to help you really commit it to memory.

A man's gift makes room for him,

And brings him before great men. (Proverbs 18:16, NKJV)

READY, SET, GO!

We left Miriam standing in the bushes watching anxiously as Pharaoh's daughter stumbled upon baby Moses floating in the Nile River. Let's see what happens next. Please read the following passage, Exodus 2:4-10:

The baby's older sister [Miriam] found herself a vantage point a little way off and watched to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh's daughter came down to the Nile to bathe; her maidens strolled on the bank. She saw the basket-boat floating in the reeds and sent her maid to get it. She opened it and saw the child — a baby crying! Her heart went out to him. She said, "This must be one of the Hebrew babies."

Then his sister was before her: "Do you want me to go and get a nursing mother from the Hebrews so she can nurse the baby for you?"

Pharaoh's daughter said, "Yes. Go." The girl went and called the child's mother.

Pharaoh's daughter told her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me. I'll pay you." The woman took the child and nursed him.

After the child was weaned, she presented him to Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses (Pulled-Out), saying, "I pulled him out of the water."

7. What do you notice about how Miriam responded when Pharaoh's daughter found Moses?

8. Do you think she had a plan in place before Pharaoh's daughter came along, or do you think she made things up as she went along?

9. What evidence in this passage supports your answer?

Those of us who want to truly rise up and leave a mark on our generation and our world must have a plan in place for how we are going to handle potentially problematic situations when they come. Miriam and her family knew that Moses would never be able to survive by staying with them. If Pharaoh got wind of it, he would have had Moses killed instantly (and he might have had more than just Moses killed too). So instead, Miriam's family decided to give Moses up in hopes that he would be able to live.

But it was only because of Miriam's wise planning that Moses got

to stay with his birth mother until he was old enough to be weaned (no longer breast-fed).

10. What benefits were available to Pharaoh's daughter in Miriam's plan?

11. What benefits were available to Moses' mom in Miriam's plan? (Look at the passage closely. I can find at least two.)

Miriam's plan turned out to be beneficial for all of those involved, and her readiness was rewarded. Imagine how different that day at the river could have been if Miriam had not been ready to respond. Pharaoh's daughter might have walked off from Moses, leaving Miriam to wonder what her brother's fate would be.

Earlier this week I noted that culturally we aren't able to relate to Miriam's story. But there are many situations in our lives where a ready defense, a clear plan of action, is needed. We need to be ready. This is especially true in regard to situations where we may be

tempted to give in to peer pressure if we don't determine our plan of action long before we need to.

12. List several situations where you could benefit from having an answer ready.

Growing up, I attended public school all the way up until college. The summer before I entered my freshman year of high school, I grew leaps and bounds in my walk with God, and I wanted to fully commit myself to Christ and His standards. So I decided that I was never going to attend a party where drinking, drugs, or sexual conduct was taking place. If I never went, I reasoned, I would never be forced to choose between doing what I knew was right and doing what I knew was wrong. By God's grace, I stuck to my commitment through all four years.

When popular girls I wanted to be like or cute guys I wanted to ask me out invited me to these parties, my answer was always no. Sometimes the only reason I was able to muster the courage to say no was that I had already made up my mind long ago. Had I left a decision like that up to the moment, I might have done something I regretted.

13. How can having a plan in place before you ever need it be beneficial?

14. List some of the decisions you have already made that help guide you toward making wise choices. (A common example is not having sex before you are married.)
15. Make one new decision that will help you be ready for a situation you may find yourself in someday. Write it below, and make sure you share it with someone else who can help hold you accountable to that.

Making decisions like this can be hard, especially since the decisions we know we should make aren't always the decisions we want to make. We may have to sacrifice popularity or friends when we choose to make choices different from those that others are making. But let this be a word of encouragement to you: Even though I never partied with the popular people whom I desperately wanted to fit in with, they still voted me friendliest girl in the senior class, and I was a runner-up for prom queen. People saw a difference in me, and they grew to respect it even when they didn't agree with it.

My motto in high school was, "Knowing your weaknesses doesn't make you weak. It makes you wise." I knew myself well enough to know that if I ever let myself go to those parties — even if I was going with the good intention of abstaining from the things I knew

were wrong—I would more than likely make a huge mistake. The pressure to fit in was intense. If I couldn't muster enough courage to tell people I wasn't going to a party with them, I would never be able to find the words to tell them I wouldn't drink or do other things with them.

16. In what area is it hardest for you to make decisions in advance? Why do you think that is?

Talking It Out

Before we close this week, write out a prayer to God asking Him to help you in the area where you are weakest. Ask for wisdom in making decisions ahead of time, and trust that He will come through for you.

Writing It Down

Reflect back on this week's lesson. What point stood out to you the most? Why do you think that is?

Setting a Higher Standard

As a result of this week's lesson, what new goal are you going to set for yourself? (Think of the area in which it is hardest for you to make a decision in advance, and start there.) Remember, setting a goal is the first step to making a true change in your life. A good example would be discovering one of your spiritual gifts and working hard at developing it.