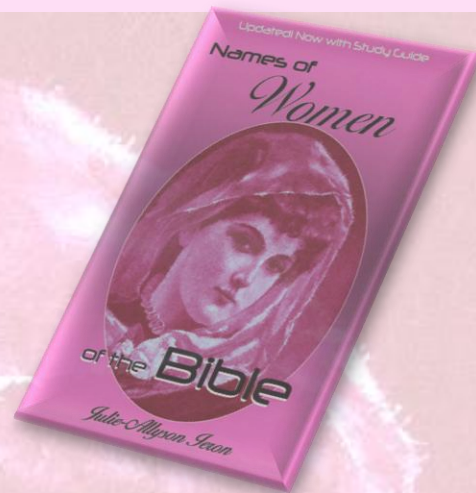


Devotional Reading from the Pages
of
Names of
Women of the Bible
Julie-Allyson Ieron



The year was 1498. A 23-year-old artist made a 150 mile trek from Rome to Carrara, an almost nameless village on the Ligurian Sea. According to his own word, he had been commissioned to sculpt “the most beautiful work in marble which exists today in Rome.” Only the highest quality of marble would do. And that meant Carraran marble; he would make the journey himself to assure its quality.

With great intensity, the artist worked on the huge block of marble. Relentlessly, he chisled away the excess to uncover the exceptional beauty locked within--a man and a woman. A woman of stunning delicacy, her facial features lovingly created, the detail amazingly lifelike, down to the wrinkles in her garment, the helpless gesture of her left hand, the angle of her bowed head that depicted her grief.

And the man. A symbolic representation of the shed earthly shell of the man of sorrows, intimately acquainted with grief. Eyes closed in death. Full-grown but--reminiscent of days gone by--cradled one last time in his mother’s loving arm.

Michelangelo toiled tirelessly for three years to fashion this life-sized depiction of the Savior in the arms of Mary. Arguably one of the most distinctively beautiful works in marble ever created, his *Pietà* (translation: pity or compassion) resides in St. Peter’s in Vatican City.

A woman and a man--lifelike yet lifeless--were formed of the finest marble with tender care by the hands of an artist, who was gifted to be a “co-creator” in the tradition of the only Creator capable of breathing life into His work.

There were many things that God *spoke* into existence. Day. Night. Air. Seas. Land. Countless living creatures to be fruitful, multiply, and fill His creation. But when it came to the crowning achievements of His world, when it came to the creation of man and woman, He became intimately involved. Forming them with His own hand, breathing into them His own life. His touch created a deep and spiritual connection with them.

And from the Creator’s perspective, it wasn’t just good, it was “very good.”

As with everything in creation, these two creatures each had a special purpose to fulfill. Together. And separately.

Man, He created out of the “dust of the ground”; woman, He created out of the man’s rib. As Matthew Henry notes, “The woman was made out of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

The woman’s purpose was to be partner and companion with the man. She was to have her own identity and make her own choices. She had an intrinsic value, having been created in God’s image as had been the man.

God gave her a tender, nurturing heart, which, because of her tragic choice to sin, was to be pierced by *pietà*, even as His own would be--yet another connection with the loving Creator.

It is God’s work through the women of His creation we will study and celebrate in these pages. We will learn to know by name women who alternately display His grace or who evidence the desperate need for His *pietà* in this fallen, groaning world. And in so doing, we will honor the Creator, who not only chisled and caressed our bodies, but conceived a way to redeem our souls.

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