

PRAYERS OF A GOOD HEARTED WOMAN
A Devotional Meditation from
Genesis 37:1-40:23; Amos 2:6-3:8; 1 Samuel 25:1-44; Matthew 1:1-17, 15:21-28;
Galatians 5:19-23; James 5:16
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Waylon Jennings sings of a good-hearted woman whose love for her wayward man sustains her in the hope of building a happy home with him.* The song simply says he is a good timing man with wicked ways she doesn't understand. Paul fills in some details on what that means:

Now the deeds of the flesh are clear: sexual immorality, impurity, indecency, idolatry, witchcraft, hostility, strife, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, just as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit God's kingdom.

Galatians 5:19-21 TLV

The longsuffering woman in relationship with such a man was a standard of literature long before Waylon Jennings sang about her. Two biblical examples come to mind. One is Abigail, whose discernment and fortitude sustained the household of her foolish husband Nabal. The other is Tamar, the Canaanite daughter-in-law of Jacob's son Judah. Her story is sandwiched between the chapters covering the more well-known story of Judah's brother Joseph.

Everyone knows Joseph's story. As the favored son of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel, he became the heir apparent when his older brothers disqualified themselves from eligibility for the birthright blessing. Reuben had a sexual encounter with his father's concubine Bilhah. Simeon and Levi dishonored their father by slaughtering the men of Shechem when Jacob was negotiating the marriage of his daughter to the son of the town's ruler. The four sons by Jacob's concubines proved themselves untrustworthy stewards of his livestock. We don't know what disqualified Issachar and Zebulun, the youngest sons of Jacob's first wife Leah, but they went along with the plot to remove Joseph from the family.

The plot to sell Joseph into slavery was instigated by Judah, the fourth son, who may have considered himself next in line for the birthright after his three older brothers fell out of favor. Tradition says he it was he who brought Joseph's distinctive coat to Jacob, with



For as long as men have sought good times over quiet homes, good-hearted women have quietly waited for them to come home, and fervently prayed for them to come to their senses. (Photo by Nenad Stojkovic, August 31, 2017, via Flickr.)

* Waylon Jennings – Good Hearted Woman Lyrics, (https://www.lyricsfreak.com/w/waylon+jennings/a+good+hearted+woman_20203852.html).

news that they had found the torn and bloody garment, leading Jacob to believe that a wild animal had killed him.

All that heartache might have been avoided had Jacob simply designated Judah as his heir. So why didn't he? The story of Tamar provides the answer.

The problem likely began when Judah decided to take a Canaanite wife. That had been forbidden for his grandfather Isaac and his father Jacob, so why was it permitted for him? Surely Judah knew that his uncle Esau's marriages to Canaanite women grieved his grandparents and likely caused him to lose the birthright. Marrying a Canaanite was not exactly in keeping with the family calling to build a distinct nation through whom God would bring the Redeemer of the world. After all, the Canaanites were the Ancient Near East version of good-timing people whose wicked ways grieved the heart of God. Not only did they have little regard for God's righteous standards, they had little regard for human life. The Canaanite nations were more interested in satisfying their own lusts than in looking out for their neighbors, or even their own children. Such is the fruit of a culture built around a sex cult that empowered women primarily through use of their bodies to gratify men. Such a culture had no use for stable families, and elevated the slaughter of unwanted infants to a form of worship.

Judah must have understood this, and yet he still married into the culture. The enticing nature of loose moral standards and easy gratification of fleshly desires lured him into the very trap Moses would later command Israel to avoid. Judah, it seems, was more inclined to be a good-timing man than a man of God. Jacob may have observed this tendency in his son and concluded he was following in Esau's footsteps, which meant he could not be trusted with stewardship of God's covenant.

The name of Judah's Canaanite wife is not recorded, but we know the name of his daughter-in-law, Tamar. She married Judah's oldest son, Er, a man whom God killed, as the scripture says, because he was so evil. Perhaps Er was so steeped in the Canaanite culture that he had no intent of following the Creator's righteous ways. The same might be true about Judah's second son, Onan, who was supposed to marry Tamar and have a child who would be his deceased brother's heir. Onan was not willing to carry out that role, which is why the Lord killed him as well. With Tamar now twice widowed and still childless, Judah advised her to go back to her father's house and live there until his youngest son, Shelah, was old enough to marry her. Some years later, when Judah had not carried out his promise, Tamar forced his hand by a devious scheme: she disguised herself as a temple prostitute, enticed her father-in-law to have sex with her, and took his staff, signet ring, and cord as pledge for payment of a goat. Later, when Judah learned Tamar had become pregnant, he ordered her to be burned for adultery, only to be shamed into acquitting her when she presented his tokens as proof that he was the father.

Our modern minds wonder why Tamar would do such an immoral thing as to seduce her father-in-law. Then we wonder why Judah declares, "She is more righteous than I, since I didn't give her to my son Shelah." (Genesis 39:26). Neither of them seem righteous to us, and yet Tamar is one of four women mentioned in the genealogy of Messiah Yeshua, so she must have been righteous somehow – but how?

The cultural context helps with that question. Tamar realized Judah had no intention of letting Shelah marry her. If Shelah married someone else and had a child, then she

would have no hope of being anything more than a reclusive widow in her father's house. But Judah called Tamar righteous, and that tells us something not only about her character, but about her hopes and dreams.

Let's imagine Tamar saw the status of women in her deplorable civilization and wanted something better. What could be better than coming into the family of Hebrews, where righteous standards were at least proclaimed, if not always obeyed. The family of Abraham had lived in Canaan for over two centuries, so she probably knew their reputation as people of honor, dignity, and peace. A life among them would have been preferable to what her own people could offer. Thus, when the chance came to marry a Hebrew, she accepted Er's offer.

How tragic when she realized her husband was no better than the wicked men of her nation, and that his brother was just as bad. When they went out carousing, did she sit alone, tearfully pouring her heart out to the God her husband's family supposedly worshiped? I like to think she did. Maybe she prayed for Er's repentance, and then for Onan's, interceding in ways only a grieving wife can. If so, then the evil of their hard-hearted lawlessness comes into better focus. She hoped for connection through her new family to the God of all creation, but they hoped through her family to run as far from Him as they could.

Tamar was a good-hearted woman desperately clinging to the hope of redemption only this righteous family could offer. Maybe she realized that if they continued on the path they had taken, the world's only hope of redemption would be extinguished. That might explain why she took such desperate measures not only to remain in the family, but to help them come back to that redemptive path as well.

That's what I hear in Judah's words, "She is more righteous than I." Tamar provided Judah the wake-up call he needed to become the patriarch his father sought as his heir. Judah fathered the twins Perez and Zerah by Tamar. Perez became his heir, and ancestor of David, king of Israel, through whose line would come Yeshua the Messiah, the Hope of the world.

That same Messiah once encountered another Canaanite woman desperately clinging to the hope of redemption. Her selfless plea on behalf of her demon-plagued child prompted Him to say, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." (Matthew 15:28)

If the prayers of a righteous man accomplish much, then so also must the prayers of a good-hearted, righteous woman.