

The Woman with the Issue of Blood

HER CHARACTER: So desperate for healing, she ignored the conventions of the day for the chance to touch Jesus.

HER SORROW: To have suffered a chronic illness that isolated her from others.

HER JOY: That after long years of suffering, she finally found peace and freedom.

KEY SCRIPTURES: Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48

Monday

HER STORY

*S*he woman hovered at the edge of the crowd. Nobody watched as she melted into the throng of bodies—just one more bee entering the hive. Her shame faded, replaced by a rush of relief. No one had prevented her from joining in. No one had recoiled at her touch.

She pressed closer, but a noisy swarm of men still blocked her view. She could hear Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, raising his voice above the others, pleading with Jesus to come and heal his daughter before it was too late.

Suddenly the group in front of her shifted, parting like the waters of the Jordan before the children of promise. It was all she needed. Her arm darted through the opening, fingers brushing the hem of his garment. Instantly, she felt a warmth spread through her, flushing out the pain, clearing out the decay. Her skin prickled and shivered. She felt strong and able, like a young girl coming into her own—so

glad and giddy, in fact, that her feet wanted to rush her away before she created a spectacle by laughing out loud at her quiet miracle.

But Jesus blocked her escape and silenced the crowd with a curious question: “Who touched me?”

“Who touched him? He must be joking!” voices murmured. “People are pushing and shoving just to get near him!”

Shaking now, the woman fell at his feet: “For twelve years, I have been hemorrhaging and have spent all my money on doctors but only grown worse. Today, I knew that if I could just touch your garment, I would be healed.” But touching, she knew, meant spreading her defilement—even to the rabbi.

Twelve years of loneliness. Twelve years in which physicians had bled her of all her money. Her private affliction becoming a matter of public record. Every cup she handled, every chair she sat on could transmit defilement to others. Even though her impurity was considered a ritual matter rather than an ethical one, it had rendered her an outcast, making it impossible for her to live with a husband, bear a child, or enjoy the intimacy of friends and family. Surely the rabbi would censure her.

But instead of scolding and shaming her, Jesus praised her: “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

His words must have been like water breaching a dam, breaking through her isolation and setting her free. He had addressed her not harshly, but tenderly—not as “woman” or “sinner,” but rather as “daughter.” She was no longer alone, but part of his family by virtue of her faith.

That day, countless men and women had brushed against Jesus, but only one had truly touched him. And instead of being defiled by contact with her, his own touch had proven the more contagious, rendering her pure and whole again.

MENSTRUAL BLEEDING

*A*ny woman who has suffered through “an issue of blood” knows the difficulties and the debilitating effects of the disease. When blood flows freely and frequently instead of in its regular monthly pattern, women endure not only the untidiness of the condition but can also experience a loss of strength and weight.

The woman in this story suffered from such a hemorrhage for twelve long years. She was probably weak and thin. Because of the ritual uncleanness that surrounded such a condition, she most likely didn’t often go out in public. Imagine twelve years of this:

When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. Whoever touches them will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

—LEVITICUS 15:25–27

A woman was considered unclean for a mere seven days when she had her regular period (Leviticus 15:19). This woman, however, bore not only the inconvenience but also the curse of being unclean for twelve years. Anyone and anything she touched became unclean. Imagine: She gives her husband a plate of food and their hands touch—he’s unclean. She gives her neighbor a hand with her laundry and their hands touch—she’s unclean. Anything she sits on at home becomes unclean, as does anything she sits on at a neighbor’s home or in public. Before long, everyone is aware of her uncleanness and no one wants to be around her.

Many different conditions could have caused this woman’s ailment: fibroid tumors, an infection, a hormone imbalance. Whatever

the cause, the doctors she had seen over the years had taken all of her money but given no relief. With the forthrightness and compassion that are characteristic of the gospel writer Mark, he says this woman “had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors.” In fact, at times their cures were probably worse than her sickness. Still, no matter how much money she spent or how much agony she endured, her sickness seemed impossible to cure. Until she met the God of the impossible.

What doctors couldn’t do, Jesus could. No repulsive or painful remedies. No visits to doctors more interested in financial gain than in her cure. With just a soft, loving touch of his coat, she was cured. Healed. Freed. Immediately!

The glory of Christ is that he succeeds where others fail. He brings healing when doctors say none is possible. He offers forgiveness when the heart says it can never be forgiven. He extends comfort when the agony is too great to carry, and peace when all is chaos. He presents the possible after twelve years of impossibility.

HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

Read Mark 5:24–34.

1. Choose three words to describe the suffering this woman had experienced for twelve years.
2. She probably touched others in the crowd accidentally while trying to get to Jesus. As an unclean woman, what was she risking by doing this? What did it take to accept such a risk?
3. Why do you think she was afraid to admit she was the one who had touched Jesus?
4. Is there anything about this woman—her suffering, her actions, her healing—that reminds you of yourself? If so, what is it?
5. If you have pursued Jesus for healing and haven’t yet received it, what do you do with this story?

*G*od promises to heal us. That statement may seem to fly in the face of the many who have suffered from illness and disability for years on end, but we need to remember that our concept of healing is not necessarily the same as God's. For some, healing may not take place here on earth. True healing—the healing that will cure even those who don't suffer from any particular physical ailment here on earth—will take place not here but in heaven. There, God promises the ultimate healing from our sickness, our disabilities, our inclination to sin.

Promises in Scripture

I am the LORD, who heals you.

—EXODUS 15:26

*O LORD my God, I called to you for help
and you healed me.*

—PSALM 30:2

*Praise the LORD, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion.*

—PSALM 103:1–4

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

—REVELATION 21:3–4

HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."

—MARK 5:27–28

- REFLECT ON: Mark 5:21–34.
- PRAISE GOD: That his touch produces peace and freedom.
- OFFER THANKS: That faith is a gift that increases with use.
- CONFESS: Any tendency to play it so safe you actually begin to suffocate the faith you have.
- ASK GOD: To bring this woman's story to mind the next time you are faced with an opportunity to exercise real faith.

Lift Your Heart

*T*rying to live the Christian life without faith is like trying to eat a steak with a straw, or kissing someone without using your lips, or propelling an airplane with foot pedals. It doesn't nourish you, never thrills you, and won't get you anywhere. If you feel the spark of faith fading, ask God to take the little you have and fan it to flame. Before you go to bed each night this week, remind yourself of your need by lighting a small candle at your bedside and praying this prayer:

*Father, forgive my little faith
Make it big
Reduce my ego
Make it small
Give me a chance
To touch you and be touched
No matter how foolish
No matter how frightened*

*No matter how strange I feel
Fan my small spark into a brightness
Lighting the way ahead.
Amen.*

Pray it like you mean it, and God will not fail to provide you with opportunities to exercise your faith. (Don't forget to blow out the candle before you close your eyes!)