

**The Unknown Woman – a Desperate Walk**  
**#4 in series “Biblical Characters who walked with God”**  
**Text: Mark 5:24-34**

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations in life that are just plain desperate. They're not “uncomfortable”, or “trying” or “challenging”. They're just desperate. We've tried everything we can think of, but things are still bleak. What do we do then?

Can I take you to this woman in the Bible – the first female in our series of “Biblical Characters who walked with God.” And I want to take you to her because her situation was desperate. About as desperate as anyone's situation could be.

I'd like to be able to introduce you to her by name. But I can't. She isn't given a name. She appears in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but she doesn't have a name. She could be anyone. She could be you. She could be me.

Let's listen as the gospel writer Mark brings this unknown woman into the spotlight. *“Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse.”* (vs 24b-26).

Do you hear her plight? *“Twelve years with constant bleeding.” “Suffered a great deal.” “Spent everything she had.” “Gotten worse.”* Life was desperate for her. She had a chronic menstrual disorder. A perpetual issue of blood. Not a pleasant condition for any woman, but for a Jewish woman, nothing could be worse. No part of her life was left unaffected. Sexually – she could not touch her husband. Maternally – she could not have children. Domestically – anything she touched was considered unclean. Spiritually – she wasn't allowed to enter the temple. All in all she was physically exhausted and socially ostracised and spiritually impoverished.

For twelve long years this had gone on. And it's not that she hadn't tried to get help. She'd been to just about every doctor there was – the recognised and the quacks – but instead of helping, they made things worse. Vs 26 says; *“She had suffered a great deal from many doctors.”* No doubt these doctors pointed her to the Jewish religious writings – the Talmud – which contained no less than eleven prescribed cures for this condition. Trying each one with hope, but each time her hopes dashed.

Mark also tells us that *“over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them”* (vs 26). So she not only has to bear the intolerable physical strain, but has to bear the financial burden as well. It's a double whammy. And perhaps the burdens would have been worth bearing if there was some improvement. But there wasn't. We're told that; *“she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse.”* (vs 26). Each day she woke up in a body that nobody wanted. She is down to her last prayer. And on the day we meet her in the text, she's about to pray it.

Our text tells us that by the time she gets to Jesus, he is surrounded by this great big crowd of people. He's on his way to help the daughter of Jairus – the most influential man in the community. What are the odds – really – that Jesus will interrupt his urgent mission for the town's boss to help a woman like her? Pretty small, that's for sure! But what are the odds she will survive much longer if she doesn't take that chance? Smaller still! So she takes that chance. *“If I can just touch his robe”,* she thinks, *“I will be healed”* (vs 28).

Big risk! To touch Jesus, she's going to have to work her way through that crowd. She'll have to touch people for sure. And if anyone recognises her, she's in deep trouble. They all know her “problem”, and they all want her a mile away. But what choice does she have? She has no money, no clout, no friends, no solutions. All she has is a crazy hunch that Jesus can help and a high hope that he will.

Maybe that's all you have too, a crazy hunch and a high hope. You have nothing to give. But you are hurting. And all you have to offer him is your hurt.

Perhaps that's what's kept some of you from coming closer to God. Yes, you've taken a step or two in his direction, but then you saw all the other people around him. They seemed so clean, so strong, so together in their faith, and you felt out of place. Instead of looking to Jesus, you focussed on them. And so you stepped back.

If that describes you, please note carefully that only one person was commended that day for having faith. It wasn't a wealthy giver. It wasn't a loyal follower. It wasn't a person with a position of influence. It was a shame-struck, broke outcast who clung onto her hunch that Jesus could help her and her hope that he would help her.

And that, by the way, is a pretty good definition of what faith is . . . . a conviction that he can and a hope that he will. Sounds like the definition of faith given in the bible. *"Anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that he exists and that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him"* (Heb 11:6 MSG). It's not too complicated, is it. Faith is the belief that God is real and that God is good. Faith isn't some accumulation of facts from the Bible or from the catechism. It's not some mystical experience. It's the choice to believe that the one who made the world hasn't left the world . . . . that he still sends light into dark places and he still responds to hands that stretch out to him in faith.

There's no guarantee that Jesus would heal her, though. She hoped he'd respond. She longed for him to respond. But she didn't know that he would. All she knew was that he was there and that he was good. That's faith! And that's where we get things wrong sometimes. At times we think that faith is the belief that God will give us what we want. But it's not. Faith is simply the belief that God will do what is right, what is best for us.

So here is this woman, desperate in her dark world, clinging to her crazy hunch that Jesus could heal her and holding to her high hope that he would. And then she acts on her faith. *"If only I can touch him"*. And she reaches out and touches his cloak. It's no big deal. No cartwheels or curtseys. No prostrating herself before Jesus. She simply reaches out and touches his cloak. What a small part she played in this healing miracle. But she did play a part. She did something. She refused to settle for sickness for another day. So she reached out.

That's when healing begins for us too. When we do something. When we reach out. When we take a step. You see, God's help is always there and it's always available. But it is only given to those who seek it. God doesn't force his healing on anyone. He waits for us to reach out to him.

One of my greatest frustrations and sadness's when I'm dealing with people who are struggling with life or with relationships is their refusal to reach out for help. Sometimes they don't see the need to reach out. More often, though, they're too proud or too scared or too stubborn to reach out. Help is readily available, but they choose to dismiss it and so they continue in their pain. And that's so sad.

If only we could take on board the truth of this story . . . that the mighty healing that occurred belonged to God, but it was a healing that began with her touch. Compared to God's part, her part was miniscule. But it was necessary. And so it is with us.

What is it you need to do to bring about healing in your life? And we all have those areas that are not right, that do need healing. Is it to write a letter; to ask forgiveness; to call a counsellor; to confess; to contact mum, or dad; to visit a doctor; to be open to God; to feed a hungry person; to pray; to go? If you are honest enough to look inside, you'll know what needs to be done. You just need to act on it. To reach out to God. And God will respond. He has never rejected a genuine gesture of faith. Never!

One day this unknown woman in the Gospels will no longer be unknown. I'll meet her in heaven and I'll get to know her name. And when I do, this is what I'd like to say to her. "Thanks! Thanks for helping me to see that – when times are desperate - that a crazy hunch that God can help when no one else can is not so crazy. And that I can have this high hope that not only can God help, but that he will help. Thanks for helping me to see that. And thanks for helping me to see that – although there are risks in believing that God can and will help – the risk of faith – that the risk of not believing in God and trying to go it alone is even greater. And finally, thanks for the encouragement to take that risk and to reach out and take my plight to Jesus, to touch him and allow him to touch me with his transforming power. So thanks. Thanks for enriching my walk with God!"