




God has daughters too

ABIDEMI SANUSI

Hear the lives of these Bible
women as you've never heard
them before...



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Introduction

I am a fiction writer and avid fiction reader. I love the way scriptural truths can be woven into stories that leap out of the page at readers. I believe that people respond to fiction because of its dramatic value. It is this dramatic value that I sought to achieve in writing this book. I wanted to take readers down the road of biblical history as witnessed by the women profiled.

I've often wondered about the Bible. Why do people believe that it is no longer relevant, that the events narrated within are either of no consequence or, even worse, didn't happen at all, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary? I believe one of the primary reasons the Lord gave us the Bible was so that we would identify with the people and the events in the book, to equip us to deal with our challenges rather than feeling alienated or overwhelmed by them.

Although the women profiled in this book lived in exceptional times, the issues, choices and lives they experienced are, in many ways, not so very different from what we face today. These are women who endured trying circumstances and who allowed God to demonstrate his grace in their lives, even if, outwardly, things did not necessarily improve.

I have selected these particular women because of the challenges or issues that defined their character, faith or both. Leah was a 'married single', Gomer was promiscuous, Deborah was a judge, while Esther was a beauty queen who prevented her people's genocide. Michal had some choices taken from her, while Gomer made decisions herself, only to realize that what she thought she wanted wasn't what she needed. I want to show how God worked in each woman's situation to accomplish his will, sometimes despite, as much as because of, the character concerned.

You will notice that this book promotes the idea that everyone

who dies is fully aware of events taking place on earth. I lifted this theology—mine, I should add—from Hebrews 12:1, which makes reference to the departed saints and angelic hosts looking down on us and cheering us on in our Christian faith. I've taken that literally to mean that they have an overview on other events in the Bible as well as on earth today. And for the women profiled whose afterlife destination is unknown, I have taken creative licence and hinted at where they might be, because I certainly don't know for sure! At times—not too often, I hope—I have taken dramatic liberties for purely creative reasons.

Some readers may be somewhat discomfited by the idea that a few of the women profiled appear to be rather negative, even though they are in heaven. I have taken the line that being present with the Lord does not mean losing the unique personality traits with which he endowed each individual while on earth—and that these characters are continuing to work through their issues in heaven!

Eve: broken families and a murderer for a son

I wasn't always known as 'The one who gave Adam the fruit', 'The sin bringer', 'Mother of Cain the first murderer'. I had a name—Eve, which means 'living'. My other titles are 'The first woman' and 'Mother of humanity', but most people prefer to call me by 'The one who brought about the Fall'. I don't mind. I'm quite used to it. After all, what are titles? However, I do get really annoyed when people conveniently forget that Adam was with me the whole time that the Fall debacle was taking place. He could easily have decided not to partake of the fruit with me. God gave him a will. It's not my fault he didn't use it when I was talking to that serpent. But I digress.

I look out from heaven and I can see how alike women are. I can see your prayers shooting up like lights. All day and all night, you beseech the king with your prayers: 'Have mercy on my son. He's yours, Lord. Protect him and guide him. He's just a bit confused but I know he'll come round.' I know the feeling. I've been there. I carried Cain for nine months; he nursed at my breasts, as did his brother, Abel. They roamed, played and grew up in what you would call modern-day Iraq. They were brothers, and my children. Then Cain, my own son, killed Abel, my other son. I should have seen it coming, but I didn't. Sure, they were different and always at each other's throats, but they were boys—and boys are boisterous. Ask anyone with boys and they'll tell you just how boisterous they are. But I never thought one of them would end up killing the other. So not only did I get Adam and myself sent out of Eden, I spawned a murderer.

I am also internationally and spiritually known as ‘The sin bringer’. In fact, if I didn’t know any better, I would think my life was a disaster from day one. If God knew that the Fall would occur, why did he bother giving Adam and me free will? He certainly would have saved himself the grief of sin and its effects on humans. After the Fall, I asked him that question again and again, and all he would say was that he couldn’t have a relationship with robots who were unable to exercise their independent will. With humans, both parties had a choice regarding whether or not to accept the relationship offered. His explanation sometimes made me feel better, sometimes a lot worse, as I didn’t think I deserved to be loved by God—because of my part in the Fall. I guess that’s humans for you—never satisfied with what they have, even if it is God’s unconditional love.

Hard times

I am not really sure how I coped on earth during those trying times after Cain murdered my son, but I do know how God coped with me. It seemed that my dreams of family perfection had turned into ashes. There were times when I really hated Cain, hated him with every fibre of my being, and there were times when I loved him so much—even when God put that mark on him, after he killed his brother, to protect him from harm. Sometimes I think God did that to protect him from me. There were times when I would wake up with the sole intention of killing him, because my pain at losing Abel was so great.

Sometimes I blamed God. He knew that Cain had an inferiority complex when it came to Abel. Why couldn’t he just have accepted Cain’s vegetable and plant offering? Cain was a farmer and he thought he was giving God the best of his toil. Abel was a shepherd and he gave God his choicest flock. They were both giving the best of what they had, weren’t they? So why did God refuse Cain’s gift and make him so angry that he killed his own brother out of sheer

jealousy? It was all God's fault, I would reason to myself. He sees the end from the beginning. He knew that Abel would die, yet he did absolutely nothing about it.

Other times, I would go to Abel's grave and just weep, overwhelmed by sorrow. Who knows and understands the grief of a mother except God himself? And let me tell you, when Jesus was nailed to the cross, I saw the Father look away as his Son became sin personified. I saw his grief and was once again reminded of that day in the garden when the serpent enticed me with promises of divine knowledge. I cannot wait for the day when he will be cast into the pit of fire for ever. Fiend. But I digress again.

Where was I? Yes, God and grief. Yes, he understands grief because he has experienced it himself, and don't let anyone tell you any different. During those dark days, I even wondered if I had made Cain kill his brother. After all, I caused the Fall (yes, we're back to that again) and brought sin into the world, didn't I? I would look at Adam and wonder what he was thinking. I mean, our family wouldn't feature on an advertisement for Jesus Family Inc. You know what I mean—serene smiles and halos as big as archangel Gabriel's wings. One night, Adam had the gall to say, 'Abel's death was not your fault.' I couldn't believe it. I think he thought he was comforting me, but he just made me so angry. The best thing he could have done for me then was to shut his mouth. But no, he was, as usual, trying to fix things. Well, on that occasion, he failed—miserably.

'I'm not blaming myself,' I told him. 'But it seems as if you might be blaming me. If I was a good mother, Cain would not have killed Abel. I should have known. I'm a mother; we know and see everything, don't we? No doubt, you'll be reporting to the Lord and telling him how inadequately suited I am to be your helpmate.' I lay awake that night, convinced that God would send an angel to distribute my remains outside Eden as a reminder of my failure as a mother and a wife. Yet, all of a sudden, a sweet fragrance permeated the forest area where we were bedding for the night. It was followed by a stillness and a peace that I knew could only come from the

Lord. His presence sustained me that night, as it still continues to sustain people everywhere today.

Looking back

I've had a lot of time to reflect since then. Of course, being in heaven, I have an overview of situations but, just so that you know, every family in the Bible and living on the earth today experiences challenges and strife. Yes, even the ones you see in church with the toothpaste-advert smiles. You don't believe me? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, David, Solomon and even Jesus himself experienced conflict. It couldn't have been easy for Jesus' brothers, having someone in the family saying deluded things like, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30). And there's all that stuff about their mother, Mary, being impregnated by the Holy Spirit. What distinguishes each family, though, is how they handled their interpersonal challenges. Some of them took matters into their hands and ended up in even finer messes. Others resolved to trust God even when it seemed obvious to everyone that God had a temporary case of amnesia when it came to their situation. It is these same people who are honoured in Hebrews 11, the Bible's 'hall of faith' chapter. It just goes to show that God *never* forgets.

I remember the first time I gave birth. Adam, bless him, hovered anxiously around me. The situation was comical, to say the least. We didn't know what to expect so we just did what came naturally. Well, you feel like pushing, so you push, and out comes a baby. The umbilical cord? Well, I wasn't going to have the infant hanging around me like some kind of albatross, so it had to go. 'Go ahead and cut it!' I yelled to Adam, who had a lost look on his face. And so it was with us as a family. We tried to train our children in the way they should go. We didn't always succeed but we gave it a shot.

And so should you. Life on earth means living in a fallen world—a world full of evil and incomprehensible violence. On the whole, we try to shield our families from evil influences but we cannot do

that indefinitely. God in his infinite wisdom does not hide us from life's challenges, because he knows that we can learn something about ourselves and about him from those experiences. Shouldn't you, as a parent, do the same for your children? Of course no mother wants to bury her offspring. I buried my son, and I had to look into the eyes of his murderer—my other son. What pain, what anguish, and what evil! But was God's pain any less than mine when I partook of the forbidden fruit and ushered in a reign of sin? He could have shielded himself from that pain by creating robots instead of humans with independent will, but he chose not to do that. He didn't shield himself.

I remember going to Adam after Cain left for the country of Nod (which means 'wandering') and saying, 'My family is broken, never to be fixed. Life will never be the same again.' I was right. Things never were the same again. I had to learn how to rely on God even though I was plagued with guilt. Yes, guilt, every woman's burden. But one day, after Cain killed Abel, I went to Nod to see him. I looked at the mark on him and knew that I would do everything to help this boy—my son, the murderer. And I also knew that somehow God would take care of everything. I didn't know how things would turn out, but I knew that my family was in his hands and that all I needed to do was trust and pray. And here in heaven, I'm still trusting and praying for all God's children.

What is a model family?

We didn't have television in my day, so Adam and I didn't have any family 'role models' for comparison. We had the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—which is always a better deal. In Eden, Adam and I saw how they flowed together, rather like a musical composition. The best way to describe this would be to use earth-speak: God says, 'Turn the light on', Jesus flicks the switch, and the Holy Spirit provides the electric current. I hope that explains it better. When we were banished, though, we found a rather unusual role model for our family: animals.

Ever watched an animal family? They're not so different from humans—honestly. When Adam had one of his 'I'm-not-a-man-I'm-a-little-boy' days, he simply went to watch the lions. He would come back from these trips with his strength restored a thousandfold. He used to tell me it was the lions' majesty that inspired him. I would tell him that it should inspire him to help me some more with the children and our daily business of living. Then he would feign ignorance of what I said and I'd give him the silent treatment for the rest of the day. The trouble is, we had no neighbours except the angel that guarded Eden, so I couldn't go and mouth off to anyone. Come night-time, Adam would reach out for me and I would crawl into his arms rather peevishly. I never could keep up a quarrel for long.

I've noticed that, on earth, a lot of women carry their marital hurts over to the next day. There's no sense in doing that. Do it for a week, a month, a year, and it builds up—and before long your mind is a cesspit of hurt and pain. The key is to live each day as the last, one day at a time. When Adam ate the fruit I gave him, I saw him in a different light, and, to be truthful, I wasn't sure that I liked what I saw. Just for a minute, I thought he was weak, and that made me uncomfortable. But God really helped us out. He made us clothes (pure leather, I'll have you know) and actually clothed us himself, much like Jesus covering those who believe in him with his own purity.

The first few days outside Eden were hard. It seemed as if, everywhere I looked, I saw accusing eyes. I would go past the angel guarding Eden and just keep my gaze fixed on the ground. I didn't want to see the disappointment on his face, the kind of disappointment I thought I saw in Adam's eyes every time he looked at me. Then, one day, my husband took me by the hand and said, 'This is our life now, and we'll make it work. God will see us through. I still blame you for taking the fruit from that serpent but, then again, no one forced me to eat it. I chose it freely.'

I bristled inwardly when he said he blamed me for what I'd done, but I let it pass. I had to—what else could I do? I was hungry and

had no idea how to find food, much less cook it. I started thinking about Eden and how we were never hungry. We just ate plants and fruits whenever we felt like it, and everything was replenished by the Lord, much as things are in heaven. But anyway, there we were, Adam and I, and he'd just told me we had to move on. No point looking at the past. Adam wasn't to know it, but he had given me the basic strategy for surviving life in a fallen world. Eden was gone, lost for ever, and we had to look to the future. This meant facing life together, as one unit. It also meant leaving the 'blame game' at the gate of Eden—or as near to the gate as the angel would allow us to go. Instead of attacking each other, we had to attack the situation confronting us before it destroyed us completely as a couple and as a family. It was a strategy I wished I didn't have to employ when Abel was murdered. It would have been much easier to attack Adam, the Lord and everything else around me in my grief. I thought I was the only one suffering. After all, I was the woman, the life bearer, a title that I felt gave me the supreme right to emotional pain, to the point of being almost selfish about it. You may know what I mean because you may have done the same yourself. You may be in the midst of it as you're reading this and, like me, you probably think you earned the right to be selfish. You're the life bearer, for goodness' sake!

In my bereavement, I forgot that my family was hurting too. I might have lost a son, but so had my husband, and the rest of the family had lost a brother—or two, as Cain was banished. And that is how a tragedy such as ours can tear families apart. In our grief, we almost isolated each other. I thank God for granting Adam wisdom. He allowed me to grieve privately and gave me the confidence to reach out to my family so that we could grieve together. It was a painful time in our history, but in the end it drew us closer.

Strategies for survival

You may think that yours is the only family in church, or even on your street, presenting a distinctly inferior version of a godly family.

But the Lord's family is not inferior; he does not make mistakes. I wish I could give you a glimpse of my perspective and show you what God's family really looks like. On earth, they probably wouldn't have got a look in on your local Christian TV channel, but they pleased God in humanly inexplicable ways. Do you know why? They never forgot whose they were: they were God's children and a part of God's family.

Can I tell you who I'm sitting next to? I'm sitting next to a man who, while on earth, had to kill his own wife in a civil war because they were from different ethnic groups. It was either the wife or the children. He went on the rampage after that, killing people left and right until God gave him a revelation of heaven. He came to his senses and went back to his community to put his family together.

To my left is a young girl—I believe her earthly age was 16—who almost destroyed her family with her promiscuity, drugs and violence towards her siblings and mother. Actually, her family were thrown out on to the pavement by various landlords because they couldn't cope with her. She stole whatever she could, and reduced her family to being paupers because of her various drug treatments and goodness knows what else. Do you know why she's here? Her little brother prayed for her incessantly. He never gave up even when the mother herself gave up (albeit temporarily), weary of mind and body. The girl made it here—barely, actually. Her pimp shot her and she just had time to whisper, 'Jesus, forgive me' before she left the earth. Her brother is a preacher on earth. He's now 30 earthly years. I'm so proud of him. He's my son—well, grandson, a million times removed.

Why am I telling you all this? Because I want you to know that there is always hope for tomorrow, and for a better day. I don't know if I would have survived the onslaught experienced by the two families I have described, but I've noticed that God seems to know exactly how much you can take. Despite what you may think or feel, he never, ever gives up on his children. Night and day, heaven is filled with the sound of prayer for the earthly saints from angels and heavenly saints. If you could only hear it!

I know, I know. There are no easy answers, despite what the titles scream out from the bookshelves: *Quick Spiritual Steps for Perfect Families!* Situations won't always be resolved easily. It's an ongoing process, and, a lot of the time, it's a painful one. But rest assured, it's just for a while, a season—much like our time on earth.

The key is process. I'm not sure you know this, but God is as interested in our process of growth as in the final outcome. Think of the apostle Paul. Yes, he was a fiery one, but at the end of his life he could say with all equanimity, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, *I have kept the faith*' (2 Timothy 4:7). At the end of every challenge or situation, can the same thing be said of you? Don't get me wrong: there will be instances when our faith weakens and we grow weary in doing good. What I am talking about is a consistency in our faith that enables us to face challenges head-on. That is what pleases God.

I'll also tell you something that will prove an enormous help to all of you who are mothers and wives. I've had a lot of time to consider earthly matters from a heavenly perspective, and I find it incredible that human beings essentially make the same mistakes over and over again. King Solomon said, in one of his greatest moments of lucidity, that there was 'nothing new under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Why do we always wait for things to get much, much worse before confronting the situation in front of us? Take the e situation of my son Cain. I should have known that Cain wouldn't let the Lord's indictment against his offering pass. He was always hot-tempered, always striving to do good and always by his own efforts. Maybe he thought that the plants—the offering of his own labour—would please God. After all, it's the thought that counts, right? Maybe he didn't realize how seriously God took the whole animal sacrifice thing. I don't know what he thought, but either way, God was not satisfied with his offering and made it known to him. Cain wasn't happy—at all. I think he was even angrier because the Lord revealed to him what was in his heart and he didn't like that one bit. God knew he was planning to kill his brother and told him as much: 'If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if

you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it' (Genesis 4:7).

Well, Cain didn't listen. He knew what he was going to do and nothing anyone said—not even God—would change his mind. So he persuaded Abel to go out into the field with him, and killed him while they were there.

I think I always knew what would happen, but I didn't want to say or do anything that would make matters worse between the two of them. You'd think I would have known better, but I was learning, and at great personal cost, the effects of sin on life. There are some reading this who know that something is not quite right with their child, or spouse, or another member of their extended family. Maybe your children are hanging around with the wrong 'sort'. Maybe your spouse is engaging in less-than-salubrious activities. Or maybe you yourself have developed a habit which, left unchecked, could metamorphose into a destructive one. I know, I know. It's easier to bury your head in the sand and tell yourself that it will go away. I understand that you don't want to make a fuss. I understand that you don't want to rock the boat. Believe me, I understand all that, but believe me too when I say that, further down the line, you *will* wish you had made a fuss. You *will* wish you had brought your head out of that sand and you will wish you had been honest with yourself about that habit.

We've been talking about strategies for survival but none of them would matter one jot if we forget about the most important one of all: communication. As you know, when I was on earth we didn't have family counsellors, parenting classes, marriage instruction manuals and Lord knows what else they're filling the libraries, bookshops and churches with nowadays. We just had ourselves and that was it. In many ways, it was easier. We were living in such close proximity with one another that nobody had a chance to become an island. Allow me to rephrase that: there were precious few opportunities to nurture humanity's ingrained desire to be selfish. It just wasn't possible. What 21st-century people call a 'biblical community' was normal everyday life to us. When people wanted

to get married, the older generation pulled the engaged couple aside and mentored them on married life. When couples had disputes, the whole family was involved in the mediation process and, no, it wasn't called interference. The bottom line was that we communicated without making 'communication' the mystical buzzword that it has become these days.

Ongoing steps to family restoration

Restoration is an ongoing process, so stop looking for quick and easy answers. Think of it like this. We all have somewhere that we like to call our home, even if, in some cases, that 'home' is a cardboard box by the roadside. A house is an empty shell. It's the little touches that we add to the place that turn it into a home. And so it is with families. If we don't nurture each other, care for each other, encourage each other and learn to accept each other's faults, we will end up with a collection of individuals who just happen to be living with each other and no more. If we do work at it, we end up with a family.

For the single parent wondering where they fit in with this Christian Family Robinson scenario, I say, 'Wait a minute!' I'm not finished yet, and I certainly haven't forgotten you. There are many books and sources of help for single parents, especially single mothers, but I know that you can still feel left out of the whole Christian family business. You may feel that you don't measure up. And if you're a single mother and your children make Beelzebub look like the archangel Gabriel, then everything I've talked about is definitely for you. Remember, you are not alone. Anyway, chances are that your pastor's children are worse than yours.

Life is not easy. My escapade with the forbidden fruit has made sure of that. However, the good Lord in his mercy has given us the grace to conquer and work through life's challenges. A lot of the time, it feels like a bloodbath of an adventure; but a lot of other times, it will feel as if you're sailing on eagle's wings. But that's the Lord for you...

I've shared my sorrows, my joys and everything that Adam and I went through when Cain murdered Abel. Sure, there were times when we blamed ourselves. After all, didn't we spend time in Eden and have distinct recollections of how things could have been? Then again, we came to terms with the fact that Cain was full of self-motivated works from the beginning. He wanted to serve God on his own terms. As you and I know, that's sheer religiosity, and the Lord hates it. Whoever heard of the sheep going to the lion and saying, 'I know you're big and mighty but you're just going to have to do things my way and that's it.' The sheer effrontery of it! Well, that's how Cain appeared to God. The fact is that he wasn't willing to change or embrace the laws that God laid down, and that was his downfall. It was a bitter truth to swallow but Adam and I eventually managed it. We tried not to let it affect the other children and family members—we encouraged them not to speak evil of Cain—but neither did we forbid them from talking about the whole event. If you have children or family members in prison, or there is some terrible event or shameful secret in your life, don't let it enslave you. That would mean you had become a slave to fear, and the Lord has not given us timid spirits but the Holy Spirit, who is full of power, of love and unabashed boldness (2 Timothy 1:7). But all that means nothing if you do not allow the Lord to work through you. It will take a lot of courage. When you open up to people (not just anyone, though: use discernment) about your situation, you will be making yourself vulnerable, which is not a comfortable state. But that's because your human shield of protection is gone—and that is good, because it leaves you with no other choice but to rely on God. That's always the best thing to do.

There are no perfect families, only families that are being perfected—yes, even those with family members in prison. So your son or daughter is serving time for murder? Well, my son killed my other son. So someone in your family has accusations of rape against them? Well, I helped bring in a reign of evil called 'sin' and the whole earth has been living with its repercussions ever since. I urge you to hold your head higher and draw your strength from the Lord

if you're currently faced with those situations. And even if those accusations are true, the Lord will give you the courage, strength and grace to get through the whole process. Don't close your heart to him out of shame or fear. Remember, he sees the end from the beginning. Open up your heart to him and allow him to heal you and your family. And of course, I will be praying for you and cheering you on all the way.

Ten women. Ten stories. One God.

Eve • Sarah • Leah • Zipporah • Deborah • Michal • Bathsheba • Esther • Job's wife • Gomer

Hear the lives of these Bible women as you've never heard them before: their individual battles with family tensions, powerlessness, love and loss—and their relationship with the God of love, who will not let them go, no matter how many times they kick against him. While these ten women lived in exceptional times, the issues and choices they faced are not so different from those we face today. And just as they experienced God's grace, so we can experience it at work in our circumstances, no matter how difficult.

Abidemi Sanusi is a writer and editor of www.christianwriter.co.uk. She has also written *Kemi's Journal of Life, Love & Everything* (SU, 2005), dubbed the 'Christian Bridget Jones' by *The Independent on Sunday* newspaper, and has contributed to *Inspiring Women Every Day* Bible reading notes (CWR), *Empowering Women* (CWR), *Closer to God* (SU), *Day by Day with God* (BRF) and *Good Housekeeping* magazine. A former human rights worker, she was born in Nigeria and currently resides in the UK.

Abidemi Sanusi's first book about the challenges facing single Christian women helped illustrate and focus a BBC World Service radio series on the same subject. As a Nigerian living in Britain, she has unusual and enlightening insights into how Christian lifestyle issues play themselves out in different societies and cultures. I hope her readers will find her new book equally inspiring and relevant.

KRISTINE POMMERT, SENIOR PRODUCER, BBC WORLD SERVICE RELIGION



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