

---

# This Woman's Worth: Still Making a Way

---

Rochelle Samuels

*MTS in Practical Theology, D.Min. Student*

*Associate Minister, Salem Missionary Baptist Church, Lilburn, Georgia*

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup>She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup>She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup>for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." <sup>29</sup>Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup>Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" <sup>31</sup>And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" <sup>32</sup>He looked all around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup>But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup>He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." *Mark 5:25-34 (NRSV)*

I am Rochelle Samuels. Unlike the woman in this text, you now know my name. I will also share with you a little of my history. I was born and raised in the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, New York. Samuels is my late husband's name, and through my maiden name, I can trace my family's lineage for centuries. DNA results identify my ancestral line back to the Carolinas by way of slave ships from Cameroon, Nigeria, and other parts of the African continent. There are other facets of my DNA makeup, but for all intents and purposes of post-colonialism, I am an African-American woman barely within the margins of society.

The woman in this Mark 5 text was not even in the margins. She has no name, no family, and no identity. Unlike Jairus, the synagogue leader, and his daughter's introduction, this woman is introduced by her condition and circumstances. Although we know she was healed on the streets of Capernaum over two thousand

---

This woman has been lifted from the pages of Scripture so many times and depicted as such so often that this minimization of her story has become embedded in our memory of her and our theology of her. But this woman's story is worth more than fifteen minutes on a Sunday morning, objectified as a faith lesson.

---

years ago, we continue to keep this woman hemorrhaging. She is, for many, still hemorrhaging, still bleeding, still with an issue, and still waiting to be recognized beyond this first-century Palestine moment. This woman is treated as if her story is only worthy of preaching moment. This woman has been lifted from the pages of Scripture so many times and depicted as such so often that this minimization of her story has become embedded in our memory of her and our theology of her. But this woman's story is worth more than fifteen minutes on a Sunday morning, objectified as a faith lesson.

Labels and other forms of characterization, categorization, and classification are too easily placed on people based on a condition that too often becomes their eternal identity—even when we know God has delivered them from their previous disposition. Labels keep people bound in lower positions than they deserve, giving some reason to keep them outside of margins, boundaries, and societal norms. This woman's condition in first-century Palestine kept her set apart from society.<sup>1</sup> But who was

---

1. Purity laws outlined in Leviticus 15:19-30 deem this

**All three synoptic writers have stripped this woman of her identity, distancing her from any familial connection, most likely due to her condition.**

she before her bleeding started? Who was she before she became “the hemorrhaging woman”? What was her whole story? This question is never addressed, considered, or evaluated when we sit at attention listening to that faith message on Sunday morning. Nor is the relevance of agency as this woman forges forward, not allowing the shell of existence society placed upon her to deny opportunity or purpose.<sup>2</sup>

Surely, this woman was loved as some point between birth and twelve years of bleeding. Just how much she *was* loved could be indicative of her worth prior to this moment in her life. This woman had the wherewithal to support herself over the past twelve years. I suspect this financial support to have come from her family—her father particularly is my guess. Yet we find this woman dying with no one around to care for her but herself. Family, friends, and society had abandoned her because she was of no value to the community system.<sup>3</sup>

All three synoptic writers have stripped this woman of her identity, distancing her from any familial connection, most likely due to her condition. This condition would have brought the family shame and not honor. This system of honor and shame is important and embedded in first-century Palestine’s culture.<sup>4</sup>

woman, anything she sits or lays on, or anyone who touches these things unclean and impure “all the days of the discharge.” Verse 31 commands the Israelites to remain separate from this impurity. (All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.)

2. In “Gospel of Mark” in *Women’s Bible Commentary* (Eds. Carol A. Newsome, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 480, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon acknowledges the Markan writer’s challenge to the ancient patriarchal hierarchy. This woman embodied what Mitzi Smith refers to as womanist sass—refusing to submit to oppressive systems. See Mitzi J. Smith, “Race, Gender, and the Politics of ‘Sass’: Reading Mark 7:24–30 Through a Womanist Lens of Intersectionality and Inter(con)textuality,” *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* eds. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2016), 95.

3. With no historical information on this woman, we can only explore possibilities of her economic status. In the agrarian ecosystem of first-century Palestine her condition would have rendered it impossible for her to participate in the family enterprise—which was contributory to societal status. See John J. Pilch, and Bruce J. Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers: 2016), 3; and Sheena Orr, “Women and Livelihoods in First Century Palestine: Exploring Possibilities,” *The Expository Times* 121, no. 11 (2010), 545.

4. Pilch and Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 20.

Even the synoptic writers protected family honor, canonizing her family’s non-presence for eternity. It is as if her family could not deny the value of her story’s retelling but the emphatic disassociation symbolizes the worthlessness cast upon her humanity. And to this day we continue to dishonor her—linking her identity to a condition she no longer has.

Over the course of twelve years, this woman spent her entire inheritance on doctors who watched her decline in stature, financial status, and physical livelihood. For twelve challenging years, this woman fought her condition and her life. Left isolated, deemed unclean, unable to work, and certainly unable to have children, this woman was of no value to the family structure or society, and she was disinherited by both. With limited options and exhausted financial means, this woman resorted to a radical and unconventional path to healing. This woman sought the opportunity to be healed by a different source—Jesus.

When faced in this day with inconceivable circumstances, we, too, take a similar route. While we do not have a physical Jesus to touch, we seek relief from our own unimaginable issues, situations, and conditions from God through personal prayer and communal prayer in our church setting because we know that with a simple “touch” from Jesus that *everything is gonna be alright*. We know that God will *make a way out of no way*. This woman was faced with a no-way-out situation. Relegated to a position as an outcast, this woman could not proceed toward Jesus to request healing as Jairus had just done. Such an approach by a woman, healthy or not, went against the acceptable societal norms of first-century Palestine. Public speaking roles were designated for the male figurehead—the father or husband—and this woman had neither, that we are aware of, who was willing to do so on her behalf.<sup>5</sup> In this society, she was silenced and shut out. So, what do we do when obstacles, walls, borders, laws, and norms keep us confined and left to die? Do we sit in complacency, waiting to die, and allowing the burdens of what used to be design our outcome? Do we sit in silent misery hoping that unethical dominant systems will suddenly accept that our differences are not reasons to deny our humanity? Do we allow our unvoiced cry for justice to join the complicity of rogue dehumanization of marginalized people?

**With limited options and exhausted financial means, this woman resorted to a radical and unconventional path to healing. This woman sought the opportunity to be healed by a different source—Jesus.**

5. Ched Myers in *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2017), 198, says “This patriarchal system precluded women from assertiveness in public life, interpersonally and socially.”

We could, but this woman chose differently. Rather than waiting for someone else to step in to speak on her behalf, knowing that no one ever would, this woman devised a plan to reach Jesus from behind.

The back is not always a terrible starting position. Sometimes the back position is your greatest vantage point. This starting position is a beginning and not the end—unless you choose to not move forward. At some point you must decide that crisis will not determine your end nor will crisis define your legacy. God desires more from you than sitting and waiting in contemplation for Jesus to come. Forward movement awards opportunities for advancement. This woman analyzed her situation, and she carefully, deliberately, and intelligently strategized a path to Jesus. Yes, there were obstacles in her way. And, yes, she knew it would not be easy but she was determined to make it. Through this thronging crowd and what seemed like an impossibility, her faith to believe in the true and living God made a way to infinite possibilities.

This woman faced multiple obstacles and impediments, all designed to keep her away from the only source of healing. But the only way through this tightly packed crowd of resistance was persistence. She was fighting a mob, a mass of her supposed peers, her community, and even the disciples who were undoubtedly forming an inner circle around Jesus, protecting Jesus like bodyguards as they traveled along the way to Jairus' house. The disciples were much like the doors and walls of the church, seemingly constructed to protect what was in but often keeping people out. Doctrines, bylaws, unspoken rules, and even politics are put in place in these sacred spaces to qualify the haves and the have-nots. "Church folk" decide who is worthy of being touched by Jesus, who is worthy of membership, who can lead, who can speak, and who is able to stand in the pulpit to preach. These, our brothers and sisters in Christ, put themselves in positions to decide and judge who is acceptable in the Kingdom and who is not when they have not secured their own place yet. This woman was fighting against deliberate strategies designed to keep the status quo, but this woman had a strategy of her own.

Knowing society's standards, laws, and norms, this woman pushed against the grain, and she fought for her life, making her way toward a moving target. No walls, borders, or obstructions were going to keep her from reaching Jesus. Skin-to-skin contact was not necessary. Words were not necessary. Public affirmation to validate her healing would not have changed the outcome. Her faith was undeniable and often the context of this story's hermeneutical reflection. This woman's type of faith, that unshakable faith, is what brings about true healing. True faith is not conjured up to win votes or prove your worth for a common cause. Having true faith requires an uncompromising belief in God that can only be authenticated through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This woman and Jesus had a perfect exchange on that street in Capernaum, one that propelled her into an eternal connection with Jesus Christ. No church doctrine can validate her inclusion in the Kingdom.

---

Two thousand years later everything is not all right because this woman still wears the label of a hemorrhaging woman. Two thousand years later this woman has been left on the street in Capernaum with no indication or contemplation about her contribution to society or relevance to Jesus' ministry. And two thousand years later, women are still treated as walking and talking uteruses whose main purpose is to replenish the earth with white, male, heteronormative ideologies.

---

I believe the message in this woman's story is about more than faith or physical healing. There is a bigger reason why God put a pin in her story. This woman was called out by Jesus specifically for such a time as this. Her family had disinherited her. Society had discarded her. And we, the church, continue to highlight and immortalize her bleeding, her womanly disposition as a principle for exclusion.

It is easy to see the words translated to read the story about this woman's twelve-year health decline and miraculous healing from her Jesus encounter. But two thousand years later everything is not all right because this woman still wears the label of a hemorrhaging woman. Two thousand years later this woman has been left on the street in Capernaum with no indication or contemplation about her contribution to society or relevance to Jesus' ministry. And two thousand years later, women are still treated as walking and talking uteruses whose main purpose is to replenish the earth with white, male, heteronormative ideologies.<sup>6</sup> For two thousand years Jesus and this woman have pushed against the norms of society. The church should be doing the same. But more and more we see the church working against what Jesus was trying to establish in this text.

---

6. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza in *Wisdom Ways* reconceptualizes patriarchy "as a socio-cultural and religious system of domination, where in antiquity it was the rule of the lord, slave master, husband, elite freeborn, propertied, educated gentlemen to whom disenfranchised men and all wo/men were subordinated." She designated this as Kyriarchy. "Kyriarchal relations of domination," she says, "are built on the elite male property rights as well as the exploitation, dependency, inferiority, and obedience of wo/men." See Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 118.

This woman's story is the story of today's church before there was a church. We see it every day with our embedded church doctrines and theologies limiting, among things, women (black, white, or other) from preaching, LGBTQIA+ from leading, and children from speaking as if everything they say has zero validity. The church is practicing what I will call a fringe theology. This fringe theology loosely accepts those hanging on the edge, those not quite in the margins. Like a fringe, these not-quite-church-like folk are decorative and present, but not fully attached. They may shimmer and stir up some excitement for a celebration or special occasion, but they can be easily shut out or cut off if they become too loose, too liberal, too black, too poor, or too troublesome for the status quo. Like a fringe, we can cut people off and continue on without missing a beat. Fringe theology speaks the Bible and not God. What happens when core values become ornamental and just something to attract, lure, or portray a societal value not ordained by God, a value that looks good on paper or on social media but is worthless to God's everlasting Kingdom? What happens to the souls attracted by frivolity and unsustainable trivialities of biblical interpretation? Who will be held accountable for that? A reversal of ethics has invaded the church body which marginalizes and dehumanizes our faithful sisters and brothers who are condemned by norms, doctrines, walls, denominations, and positions of faith.

This woman's story could have been and has been skipped over and continued on to Jairus' story, but God said, "Pause." God made a point of putting her story on the inside of Jairus' in each of the synoptic gospels. It was a healing inside of a healing. This woman was treated as a fringe of society, but Jesus brought her fully and completely into the fold. Jesus called her into God's family, into our family. When Jesus asked, "Who touched my clothes?" he turned to the crowd where the woman was and not to the disciples. Jesus' lack of response to the disciples indicates he was not expecting any of them to answer. Jesus did not want a confession to something the disciples did not know. The disciples' response was defensive—answering a question with a question while trying to justify why they could not possibly know the answer. I imagine the tone and mood of the question more likely resembled, "Which one of you in this crowd touched me?" But it was not likely Jesus had an issue with being touched, intentional or not. After all, the crowd was tightly packed around Jesus and the disciples as they traveled along.

The woman could have easily disappeared back into the crowd after she touched Jesus' hem. The healing exchange had already taken place. Why would Jesus want to expose this personal moment to this crowd? What purpose did it serve for the writer to document a verbal exchange when the healing had been completed and acknowledged? If this were simply a healing story, the encounter could have ended in verse 30a. But that would be an incomplete telling of the whole truth. Up until Jesus asked his question, the woman was silenced, ostracized, and beyond marginalized. But the whole truth shows that this woman was decisive, she was deliberate, and she was no longer bound to society's labels. She responded to Jesus' call with humility, honor, with reverence, and because this

**H**er body was broken, left to die with no family tomb prepared to receive it but Jesus called her Daughter. This is not just a healing story. It is a restoration story, a resurrection story, and a reconnection story. No longer alone or disconnected, this woman is eternally bound to the Kingdom of God.

woman rose to Kingdom-worthy stature, she was wonderfully and fearfully made whole. Although her healing was sealed with that private exchange of healing power, Jesus publicly declared her His Daughter, the highest title of honor spoken specifically by God.

This is not just a healing story. This is the Bible's truest rags-to-riches story. We found this woman, suffering, in pain, bleeding, penniless, and dying. Her body was broken, left to die with no family tomb prepared to receive it but Jesus called her Daughter. This is not just a healing story. It is a restoration story, a resurrection story, and a reconnection story. No longer alone or disconnected, this woman is eternally bound to the Kingdom of God.

Remember, this is Jesus' title for her. Therefore, this woman is the Daughter of the Wonderful. She is the Daughter of the Counselor. She is the Daughter of the Mighty God. She is the Daughter of the Everlasting. She is the Daughter of the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Lords, and the King of Kings.

This woman is no longer disinherited. She is not the rag she wore for twelve long and painful years. She is no longer hemorrhaging. She is the Daughter of Jesus, the Savior, the Resurrected One, and she has an inheritance to the Kingdom of God. She is an heir to infinite worth, yet we promptly place her story on a shelf, dusting her occasionally when we are combing scripture for a symbol of faith or for a miracle story.

What Jesus is saying in this text is that every member of the body matters. Yes, all lives matter—that includes female lives, LGBTQIA+ lives, disabled lives, poor lives, and, yes, my black life matters too.