

Tale from the Garden!

International Women's Day (IWD) takes place on Tuesday 8th March 2022, with activities taking place throughout March. This year the campaign theme is 'Break the Bias'. International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality.

Imagine a gender equal world, a world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination, a world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive, a world where difference is valued and celebrated.

Individually, we're all responsible for our own thoughts and actions - all day, every day. We can break the bias in our communities. We can break the bias in our workplaces. We can break the bias in our schools, colleges and universities. Together, collectively, we can all break the bias - on International Women's Day and beyond.

Whether deliberate or unconscious, bias makes it difficult for women to move ahead. Knowing that bias exists isn't enough, action is needed to level the playing field.

Perhaps the Lotus Flower is one plant that teaches us that whatever our gender, whatever our circumstances, wherever we come from, we can, & should, all be able to aspire to whatever we hope for. Believing in yourself means having faith in your own capabilities. It means believing that you CAN do something — that it is within your ability. When you believe in yourself, you can overcome self-doubt and have the confidence to take action and get things done.

The lotus has a life cycle unlike any other plant. With its roots latched in mud, it submerges every night into river water and then miraculously reaches out to the light & re-blooms the next morning, sparklingly clean, becoming the most beautiful flower ever.



In many cultures, this process associates the flower with rebirth and spiritual enlightenment. With its daily process of life, death, and re-emergence, it's no wonder that the lotus holds such symbolism.

The lotus flower's daily resurrection is certainly interesting, and surely symbolic of revival. But the flower also has a fascinating **will to live**. A lotus seed can withstand thousands of years without water, able to germinate over two centuries later.

Due to the waxy protection layer on its petals, its beauty is blithely unaffected when it re-blooms each morning. It continues to resurrect itself, coming back just as beautiful as it was last seen, day after day. With such refusal to accept defeat, it's almost impossible not to associate this flower with unwavering faith. Although cultures have largely dubbed the lotus as a spiritual figurehead, it is most emblematic of the faith within ourselves. It is particularly what the Buddhist proverb, aims to edify; 'living life with unwavering faith, as the lotus does, ensures the most beautiful revivals.' Its characteristics are a perfect analogy for the human condition: even when its roots are in the dirtiest waters, the Lotus produces the most beautiful flower.

According to Buddhism, every person has the potential to become perfect and enlightened, and it is just a matter of time until each human reaches the light. Buddhists believe that it's necessary to be reborn thousands of times, polishing one's being through many incarnations, until one reaches 'nirvana' – the highest state of consciousness that humans can access. So, the Buddha is sometimes depicted sitting on a Lotus flower, symbolizing the one who overcame the pain of what prevails in the material world and became enlightened, just like the Lotus flower which starts to grow in the dirty and muddy water but manages to surpass the water and produce a perfect flower. Many Hindu gods are depicted sitting or standing on a Lotus flower for the same reason.

Micheal Jackson and Diana Ross starred in a movie in the 1980's which made a powerful statement to black people across America. The movie was entitled the "The Wiz" which was an urban version of "The Wizard of Oz".

In this colourful screenplay the Good Witch sang a song entitled "Believe in Yourself". The statement this song made caused a lasting lesson - that success in life comes only if you believe in yourself.

CONFIDENCE IS A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS, WITHOUT IT FAILURE LOOMS OVER THE HORIZONS OF OUR FUTURE.

To be confident is to be sure, unwavering, undoubting. But to be sure there must be assurance.

When Moses was told by God at the burning bush to go before Pharaoh and demand the freedom of his brothers and sisters. Moses was unsure of himself. He began to make excuses and to think of reasons why he shouldn't carry out the commands of God. He complained about not being able to speak well & wondered by what authority he would be speaking for.

Moses, the one that is acclaimed for his courageousness and vision, was unsure of himself. But that is when God stepped in and placed in his hand a small rod. The Lord commanded him to go forward and use what he'd been given.

What was it that God had put in his hand? Had he been given a voice? Had he been given a smile? Had he been given a word to speak? Had he been given a hope to share? He gave Moses a rod.

When Moses stepped before Pharaoh he had his hands wrapped tightly around that rod. HE WAS CONFIDENT! HE WAS SURE!

The challenge to all of us today, man or woman, is to discover the nature of the rod in our hands & how to use it with confidence.

Moses used his rod to challenge the powers of Egypt. He used the rod to roll back the waters of the Red Sea. He waved his rod, and in answer God provided food on Israel's table.

But Moses misused his rod once and provided water for the people without giving God his due credit and had to pay a major price.

The power of the little rod, the precision of thought, and fire of spirit that God has placed in each of our hands will help us to fight off the enemies, roll back the waters of opposition, and put bread on our table, but always remember that whatever we accomplish in our lives, it did not come from the rod, but rather the power of the God behind the rod! We must always give him first place in our life.

From young girls using their voices to grandmothers raising up the next generation to be confident in themselves, it's amazing to witness courageous women in action. And in a time where equality is still fiercely fought for, we can celebrate International Women's Day by honouring some of the great women of the Bible whose strength and compassion still resonates.

MARY – FAITH-FILLED WOMAN OF THE BIBLE

"Are you a Martha or a Mary?" I've lost count of the number of times I've been asked this question and to be honest, I've always resonated more with Martha. Not for the Mary/Martha story but for another reason. Martha appears three times in the Bible including one of the most powerful testimonies in Scripture, when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. And it's in this story that Martha shows the unshakeable strength of her faith.

A personal friend of Jesus, Martha lived in Bethany with her brother Lazarus and sister Mary. In John 11, Lazarus falls seriously ill and despite sending a message to Jesus asking for help, Lazarus passes away before Jesus arrives. However, Martha's absolute faith in Jesus shines through when she runs to meet him.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. (John 11 V21-22).

Jesus does the miraculous and resurrects Lazarus to complete and full health. How amazing is it to witness that strength of faith, to be so convinced of God's provision and power no matter what happens in the real world?

Through Martha's story we learn the importance of trusting God even when all seems lost.

ESTHER – AN INFLUENTIAL WOMAN OF THE BIBLE

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4 V14).

This Scripture has as much weight and resonance today as it did back then. Because you have been born for such a time as this. Your voice matters. You matter. And never let anyone tell you different.

A young Jewish woman in the Persian empire, Esther was beautiful and 'won the favour of everyone who saw her.' But this queen was never meant to be simply ornamental – she is one of the most prominent women of the Bible. Faced with the possibility of death, Esther chose to act despite fear when the people she loved were placed in danger. She was a prayerful woman – praying and fasting to God, waiting upon His timing. And through her influence, she was able to prevent the genocide of the Jews in her kingdom. How amazing is that!

The book of Esther in the Old Testament shows how courage can save a nation and how an unlikely hero can change the course of history.

ABIGAIL – A STRONG WOMAN OF THE BIBLE

Wisdom and beauty both found a home in Abigail, whose story is found in 1 Samuel. Described as, "... an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband was surly and mean in his dealings" (1 Samuel 25 V3), Abigail carried herself with dignity and integrity despite her circumstances.

And when the lives of those around her were placed in jeopardy, Abigail 'lost no time' & leapt into action in order to save them.

DEBORAH – A POWERFUL WOMAN IN THE BIBLE

A prophetess and honoured judge, Deborah is one of the most awe-inspiring women of the Bible. A great role model for all those called to lead, Deborah, "held court under the Palm of Deborah...and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided." (Judges 4 V5).

One of the hallmarks of Deborah's leadership is her willingness to follow God's call and to give Him the credit rather than leading out of her own strength. The song of Deborah reminds us that in the battles of life, we are not alone or unaided.

ANNA – A DEVOTED WOMAN OF THE BIBLE

In just three sentences, the life of Anna is shown to be an extraordinary journey of trust and devotion, overflowing with her love for God. An 84-year-old prophetess, Anna recognises Jesus as the Messiah and became one of the first Christian missionaries, going forth to share the good news of Jesus.

"There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Ashe. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." (Luke 2 v36-38).

Eighty-four years of waiting, of worshipping, of trusting. Every day Anna chose to hold true to her faith no matter the circumstances. She devoted her whole life to trusting in God's provision and her long years of waiting were rewarded by being able to gaze upon the face of Jesus.

FAITH-FILLED, INFLUENTIAL, STRONG, POWERFUL, DEVOTED ...

There are so many amazing women in the Bible who inspire us. We pray for these women to be our role models, to encourage us to step out in faith, to be Godly leaders in our spheres of influence.

In honour of International Women's Day, let's celebrate all women today & always. Their ambition. Their strength. Their courage.

Let's finish with a few empowering quotes from women across all generations.

"Know what sparks the light in you so that you, in your own way, can illuminate the world." Oprah Winfrey

"If you truly pour your heart into what you believe in, even if it makes you vulnerable, amazing things can and will happen." Emma Watson

"Nothing is impossible, the word itself says 'I'm possible'!" Audrey Hepburn

"The most difficult thing is the decision to act; the rest is merely tenacity." Amelia Earhart

"If you're comfortable with yourself and know yourself, you're going to shine and radiate and other people are going to be drawn to you." Dolly Parton

"If you were born with the weakness to fall, you were born with the strength to rise." Rupri Kaur

"I really think a champion is defined not by their wins but by how they can recover when they fall." Serena Williams

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Eleanor Roosevelt

And remember what the Buddhist proverb said, 'living life with unwavering faith, as the lotus does, ensures the most beautiful revivals.'