



Women of Faith, Action, and Power

Religious women often find marital resilience through devotion to God and trusted faith communities.

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AMERICAN FAMILIES OF FAITH

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The story of Queen Esther focuses on a terrifying extermination order in Ancient Persia to eliminate the Jewish population—and a high-stakes marital challenge. Queen Esther, a Jew, was married to the Persian King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes). The king had permitted his highest-ranking official, Haman, to pass the extermination order without knowing its consequences to the Jewish people—or the Jewish identity of his own wife.

Esther's uncle, Mordecai, urged Esther to approach the king to plead for her people's lives. But Persian law dictated that anyone who approached the king in his inner court without being specifically summoned would be put to death. The only exception was if the king extended his golden scepter to spare the person's life.

Faced with the threat of her people's destruction, Esther called her community to **fast and pray** before she approached the king:

Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

Esther then stepped forward with courage to do what was right despite immense danger.

She expressed her strength not only inwardly, but in an outward act of faith. Through her religious actions and the united actions of her faith community, she successfully persuaded her husband, the king, to spare her people—and her own life.

Esther's inspiring story is retold once a year in the Jewish community, and her courageous spirit lives on in the daily lives of highly religious women. For highly religious women, Esther is not just a historical figure but a functional model for navigating challenging situations, including in the home. In this article, we will discuss the findings from a **recent study** we conducted about the religious actions that women of faith, like Esther, take to overcome their marital challenges and hardships.

Belief in God Leads to External Resources That Strengthen Marriage

Esther's unwavering faith in God gave her the strength to face the king, even if it meant she might die. In our study, while the lives of believers were not on the line, family happiness was. We found a recurring theme of what religious women do to call down the power of God into their family life. Gwen, an African American Christian, called it the "big three" and said this:

If you are doing the big three: prayer, **being in the word**, and fellowshiping with those of like faith then it helps you, and you can encourage other people when they do see that you're still happy in your marriage after umpteen years.

So how do prayer, scripture, and fellowshiping contribute to happy marriages and families? We turn now to insights from our study participants.

Prayer

Our study participants commonly expressed a connection between their [relationship with God](#) and the way they chose to act in their marriages and families. They reported that they built strong bonds with God through prayer. Anne, a Catholic, said:

My faith has had its ups and downs. During the lowest downs where I've really been kind of far from God, I haven't been a very good wife, and I haven't been a very good mother. But when I've come back to God and been closer and been more faithful and more active in my own personal prayer life, then I've been better: a nicer person and a better wife and a better mother. So, they just, they're totally hand in hand. I can't really separate prayer and my family relationships.

Not only did prayer help participants improve their relationships, but it also fostered spiritual and personal growth. Alyshia, an African American Christian, offered this:

Having a solid relationship with the Lord ... He will tell you when you are out of line. The Lord will change you and say, 'Look at thy selfishness; ... and then we can see a little more clearly. Definitely, a solid relationship with God helps with my marriage and family relationships.

In addition, husbands and wives used prayer as a means of resolving disagreements. Yui, a Chinese Christian, said, "When we had some disagreements, we prayed together, [confessed our sins](#) before God, and learned to forgive each other." For many of the women we interviewed, prayer was not merely a religious practice—it involved a sacred connection to get closer to God and closer to family.

Scripture Study

Reading sacred texts or scriptures emerged as another key resource for the women we interviewed. Moriah, a Jewish wife, said that [reading the Torah](#) brought her and her spouse closer together:

So often you just stop talking. You don't communicate, and so I think when we read Torah together, which we really try to do pretty often, it does create

conversation and more understanding, and I think certainly that reduces conflict. It prevents conflict. It also helps remedy conflict once it's there.

Cassandra, an African American Christian wife, also commented:

I get all of my inspiration and all of my guidance from the Bible. That's how I learned how to treat others. How to treat people and how to be in my marriage with my relationship with my husband. And that is what puts things in priority, in order. That's where I get it from. And when I make decisions, I always say, 'I don't make decisions just based on what I think. It's coming from scripture.' It's gonna be scripture-based or it's gonna be something on that ground.

Not only did scripture study reportedly influence couple communication and personal decision-making, but it also enhanced participants' relationships with both God and with their spouse—reflecting similar benefits to prayer. Mercy, a Baptist wife, relayed this about God's word:

When two people are married, what's wrong in you really influences the other person. But for me, I find the only way that I grow very effectively is through God's touch in my life. So I study in scripture and learn more about who God is and what His heart is for our relationship, for His world that He's made. It helps me to be able to grow myself so that I can better apply what I learn into my relationships.

Participating in a Faith Community

Just as Esther drew support from her uncle and the Jewish community, the women we interviewed drew vital support from their [faith communities](#). Emily, a Baptist wife and mother, highlighted how her congregation gave her needed support:

So, faith helps me because I realize that there is a different way to do [life]. And I can actually learn how to do it differently, with other people who are also learning too. Some people I know are much further along, and I can learn from them. And I find that I can actually share experiences with other people that

help them. I think being in a faith community is helpful that way, because we realize that we're not alone.

Sometimes I'll go to Bible study and I'll realize: 'Boy, the kinds of things that my husband Michael and I maybe are facing or dealing with are nothing compared to what someone else might be experiencing.' Or I can learn from other people and bring it back into our marriage and say: 'Hey, this is something somebody shared with me; and what do you think?' So it's a dynamic thing. There's all these relationships that affect us and we have those relationships because we have the same faith.

Similarly, Noor, an Arab American Muslim wife and mother, commented on how her *masjid* (mosque) and its faith-based classes have offered her direction in her marriage:

Basically, I need to learn more about Islam to strengthen our marriage, even make it stronger. I think that by getting more in depth in Islam, which I'm trying to do now, I'm going to classes and everything. So, it's helping me understand a lot more; and I think that it makes me understand more my role in our marriage and how I'm supposed to act.

Many of these women of faith drew marital support from their faith communities. These supportive relationships were often so strong that many women referred to "sisters" and "brothers" in their "church family" who had helped their marriages to grow spiritually, temporally, and relationally. Many of the women of faith emphasized that growing alongside others helped them navigate their marriages and parenting with greater wisdom and perspective than they would have found on their own.

A Legacy of Courage

Our study participants' words echo the legacy of Esther: courage is born not only from within, but from a life rooted in faith and the relationships it enriches. Like Esther, these women found strength not in their circumstances but in their devotion to God and in the support of a covenant community.

By turning to the "big three" of prayer, studying sacred texts, and engaging in marriage-strengthening fellowship with others, their faith shaped how they navigated marital

hardship in myriad ways. The sacred practices of these women did more than comfort them; these relational efforts empowered them. Prayer, study, and covenant community worked together to foster clarity, compassion, and resilience in the face of difficulties and challenges in family life. Ultimately, the perspective of these women was that active faith in God can help provide not only a set of coping tools, but a deeper sense of strength, purpose, and connection within their marriages.

About the authors



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