



Mirror, Mirror

Reflections on God's Word

Susan Senechal 



A SMALL GROUP
BIBLE STUDY

To Karen and Amy, who reflect God's love to me as we struggle through life together, and in memory of my dad, Arnold Rathje, who mirrored Christ to everyone he met. "For we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). —Susan



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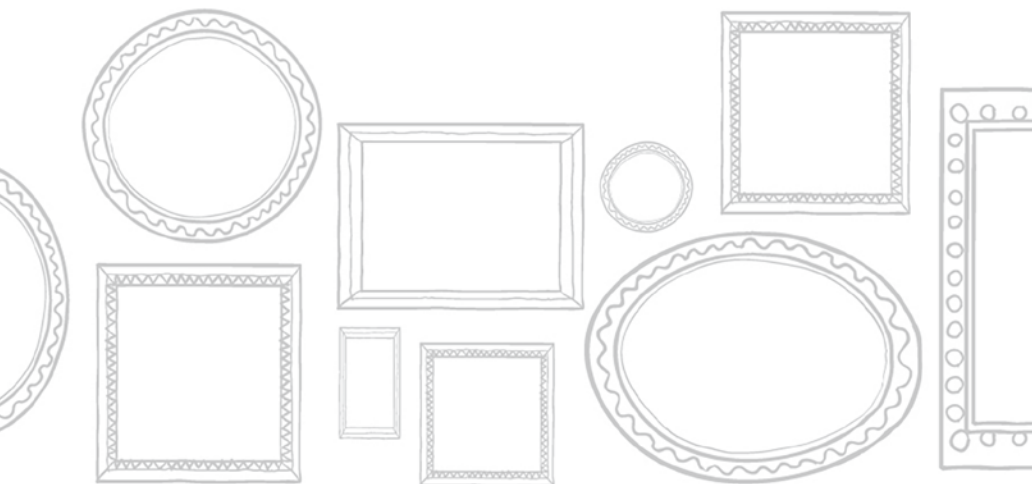
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INTRODUCTION



MIRROR MESSAGE

“We are [God’s] workmanship.” Ephesians 2:10a



I don't like what I see when I look in the mirror. Many women I know don't either. For there we may see wrinkles and graying hair, crow's-feet and liver spots, sags and bags, and . . . how did that two-inch chin hair get there? We lament our muffin top or our bony elbows. Our breasts are never the right size. When we look in the mirror, we see wouldas and couldas and shouldas—and regrets aplenty. We don't like what our reflection says about where we've been and where we're going, so we try to cover what we see with the right makeup and the perfect new outfit. And if we're still not happy, we try not to look in the mirror at all. But consider this: we're seeing our reflections as in a fun house mirror—warped and distorted.

The truth is that we don't see ourselves the way God sees us. He is our Creator and Redeemer. God sees us through the filter of the cross, in the reflection of His Son, with the eyes of love. This study will help us learn to see ourselves this way as well. An image in a piece of glass doesn't reflect who we are in Christ. Looking instead at the person God created us to be will help us form a clearer vision of who we truly are. And God gives us more than a mirror to see that—He gives us His Word.

The sessions in *Mirror, Mirror* focus on looking at ourselves as God sees us. The One who created us knows us intimately; He knows the name He has given us, and He knows the plans He has for us. He has called us into His family and has a job for each of us there. He sees our true beauty even when we see only regrets. And He has a plan for even our most damaged past. He is the one who says to each of us, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued My faithfulness to you” (Jeremiah 31:3).

Designed as a women’s small group study, *Mirror, Mirror* not only delves into the Bible, it also asks you to make personal applications to your own life. Sessions are designed to provide a comfortable place where you can gather with other women and discover who you are according to the truth of God’s Word.

Each session includes a **Mirror Message**, a Bible passage to help you remember who you are in Christ, and thought-provoking questions to help you apply the passage to your own life. My hope is that each of you would place these verses on your mirror as daily (and even hourly) reminders throughout the sessions. And my prayer is that by the end of the study, each of you would know how deeply loved and beautiful you are in Christ.

The author



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MIRROR MESSAGE

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine.” Isaiah 43:1



One of the first people I see every day when I get up is . . . myself. Shortly after rising, I’m sure to get a peek at myself in the mirror, whether I want to or not. And I always know the name of the person I see . . . Susan Marie. Sometimes, however, that’s not what I call her, at least in my head. I might call her “Grumpy,” or “Sleepy,” or “Bashful,” or even . . . “Ugly.” Sometimes I get her name wrong.

I am horrible with names. One of the first things I tell new ladies in my Bible study class is that if I don’t remember their name, it’s not because I don’t care about them. Really. I come

by it genetically. Growing up the fourth of five children, and the third girl, my dad often called me “CinLinSue” (Cindy, Linda, Susan) or, on a bad day, “DaCinLinSue” (our brother David was the oldest). When my future husband came to my parent’s home for Christmas the first time, he was called David, Jeff (my brother-in-law), and Mike (my cousin’s husband) more often than he was called Mark (his given name). We joke that we should wear nametags so my family can get the names right.

But the story I use to prove to my new Bible study friends that it’s not them, it’s me, is the one about something that took place a few months after I got engaged. I was invited to a friend’s wedding, which took place in a community where I used to teach. Of course, I took my soon-to-be husband, although he knew no one else who would be there. The ceremony was lovely, and after it was over, I was ready to say hello to some friends. The first one was sitting just a couple of rows behind us. As we were leaving the church, I said, “Hi, Donna. How are you?” (Donna’s name has been changed to protect the innocent . . . or because I have forgotten her real name). And then, by way of introduction, I added, “This is my fiancé, Tim.” My fiancé stuck out his hand toward hers and said, “Nice to meet you, Donna. My name is Mark.” That’s right, I *got my fiancé’s name wrong*. No, it wasn’t a Freudian slip; Tim was actually the groom. It’s just that I was working so hard to remember this woman’s name that I forgot Mark’s. Ouch. But he’s good-natured about it, and a few months later I did remember to say, “I, Susan, take you, Mark. . . .”

How about you? Are you good with names? Do you have any tips to share about how you do it? If so, I’m all ears.

Do you know what your name means? Did you perhaps choose the names for your children because of their meanings?

Mark and I did. After a long wait through the adoption process, we named our son Matthew, as we knew that surely it was only by a “gift of God” that we welcomed him into our family. When the time came to adopt our second child, a girl, I chose the name Brianna because I liked the name, although my husband wasn’t sold on it. On the day we went to meet her birthmother, in the seventh month of her pregnancy, we arrived at the adoption agency only to find out that she was in the hospital in premature labor. We spent the day praying for the child who might soon be ours, and when my husband discovered that *Brianna* means “strong,” he knew we had a name by which to call our child, who would have to be strong to survive if born that early. Praise God the contractions were stopped, and Brianna was born right on time two months later. Little did we know that God would answer our prayers for a strong daughter by making her *strong-willed* as well.

I’m not sure my parents looked up names in a book before naming me, but in recent years I have found their choice fascinating. According to baby name books that I’ve consulted, *Susan* means “like a lily.” I had always thought that was a stupid meaning. After all, what does it mean to be “like a lily”? Then one day in Bible study, we read Luke 12:27–31 and suddenly it became clear to me. “Consider the lilies . . . do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.” What an apt description of me, the anti-worrier. And what an appropriate name.

1. Take a moment to look up your name in a baby name book. There are also baby name sources online. Can you see a way in which your name describes you? If yes, share it.

In biblical times, name was associated with character: what a person was called was what a person was. Naming something or someone implied dominion or ownership. Names had significance. I'm not sure that's so true today. I'm not sure what "Moon Unit" means or what is the significance of "Snookie." But in the beginning, right from Genesis 1, names had meaning. In Genesis 1:26, we read "Then God said, 'Let us make *man* in our image.'" The Hebrew word is *adam*. That's right, Adam means "man." Cain means "brought forth," and his brother's name, Abel, means "meaningless, empty." With a name that reminds me of the British throne's "an heir and a spare," little could Eve have known the shortness and emptiness of her second son's life.

2. When Rebekah's second son was born (Genesis 25:26), what was he named?

The name means literally "he grasped the heel," but figuratively in Hebrew it meant "deceiver." Think about the contemporary idiom "You're pulling my leg." A quick glance at Genesis 27 will give you just one example of Jacob's name ringing true to his character.

So, name means character. What you are called is who you are.

Now read Isaiah 43:1. Notice the words "He who *created* you, O Jacob." The Hebrew word is *bara*. It is first used in the Bible in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God. . . ." The Hebrew word for "create" is used only of divine, never of human, activity. When God is speaking to His people in Isaiah 43:1, He reminds them that He has a unique and special claim on them as their Creator. He reminds us that He is our Creator as well.

Read the next line: “He who *formed* you, O Israel.” The Hebrew word is *yatsar*. (The first use of this word is in Genesis 2:7.) *Yatsar* means “to squeeze or mold into form (like pottery); to determine, form, fashion, shape, and purpose.” God created you (from nothing), formed you, molded you, shaped you, and determined your purpose, right from the beginning.

The next part of Isaiah 43:1 reads, “*Fear not.*” Do you recall from your elementary school days what kind of sentence this is? If you said “imperative,” you are correct. “Fear not!” It’s a command, kind of like “Thou shalt not fear.” No matter what the situation looks like, no matter what circumstance you are facing, do not be afraid.

Is there something you are facing right now that makes this command difficult? If you feel comfortable, share it with your group. If you’re not comfortable sharing it with others, just share it right now with God in a quick prayer. It can be this simple: “God, I’m having trouble remembering Your command to fear not. Help me to trust in You.”

Through the prophet Isaiah, God now continues the sentence: “I have redeemed you.”

I love a good coupon—fifty cents or a dollar at the grocery store, a coupon for a discount at dinner (my kids say we won’t even go out if we don’t have a coupon; they call us cheap). But have you ever looked at the bottom of a coupon? Most say “not redeemable for cash” or “cash value 1/100 of a cent.” Coupons are worthless unless redeemed properly.

3. In the Bible, a “redeemer” (often called “kinsman-redeemer” because this person was a relative) is someone who bought an unfortunate relative out of slavery or paid a debt. The kinsman-redeemer rescued him or her by paying the slave price or the debt he or she could not pay. When God calls Himself our Redeemer in this verse, it looks forward to the price He would pay on the cross. As New Testament believers, we can look back on it. What are we told in 1 Peter 1:18–19?

The NIV translation uses the word “redeemed,” while the ESV says “ransomed.” Bought with a price, we are no longer trapped, helpless, worthless, hopeless in our sinful state, but dearly loved and freed children of God.

- 4a. The next line of the verse reads “summoned” in the NIV, but I prefer the ESV version: “I have called you by name.” The same Hebrew word is used in Exodus 31:2 and in Isaiah 45:3–4. In each of those passages, what meaning is implied by the word translated “called” or “summoned” in Isaiah 43:1?

God “calls me by name.” He doesn’t say, “Hey you, over there, come here.” Unlike my dad, He doesn’t run down a list of names until He gets to the right one. He chose me and you specifically, invited us into His presence, brought us into His family. He does not summon us in the legal sense of the word, but as the first definition in my dictionary explains, “to call upon to do something specified.”

Summon is from the Latin word *summonere*, which means “to remind.” God calls me by name and reminds me that I am His, as Isaiah 43:1 continues, “I have called you by name, you are Mine.”

- b. We are God’s twice over because He is our Creator and our Redeemer. What do we learn about this choosing, this calling, in Deuteronomy 7:6–8?

We are chosen simply because God loved us and chose to call us. We are His treasured possession.

- 5a. Some of us, however, may have names we don’t like. We have been called hurtful names by a bully at school or work, a parent, a spouse, or even ourselves when we look in the mirror: fat, skinny, useless, worthless, unloved. What did Sarah call herself in Genesis 18:11–12?

- b. What does Gideon call himself in Judges 6:15?

- c. What does God call Gideon in Judges 6:12?

What we have been named or called, or how we see ourselves, is not necessarily who we are. This is not a contradiction of what I said earlier about naming conventions in biblical times because God doesn’t just call us by our given name—He renames us. Read Isaiah 62:2–4.

As God restores His people unto Himself, He gives them a new name. The new name reflects a new status. Notice the name changes in verse 4: From Forsaken to Hephzibah, which means “My Delight is in Her”; from Desolate to Beulah, which means “married.” God’s new names for us reflect our new status in Him and His delight in us. The new name, then, is one through which God bestows on us honor, authority, and character.

And now look again at the end of Isaiah 62:2: “that the mouth of the LORD will give.” The Hebrew word for “mouth” is *peh*. It means “mouth, as a means of blowing.” Blowing reminds me of breath, and breath reminds me of the Holy Spirit. Take a look at Genesis 1:2. Write the second half of the verse here:

6. The word translated “Spirit of God” is the Hebrew word for “wind” or “breath.” With that thought, look again at Isaiah 62:2. “You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.” From where do we get our new name?

In fact, it is as we are filled with the Spirit in Holy Baptism that we receive our new identity.

7. So, God doesn't just name us, He renames us. And really, as the Creator, He is the only one with the right to name. Remember, in biblical times, to name something implied dominion and ownership. What did God tell Adam in Genesis 2:19?

Let's take a look at the way God renames some of His people. Most of the names and "renames" will be given as part of the text in your Bible or a footnote on the verse.

In Genesis 17:5–6, Abram is renamed Abraham, which means "exalted father." When I think of an exalted father, I think of cultures that honor and esteem a man who has lived many years. On a trip I took to Kenya, I saw that everyone who entered a room bowed their head to a man simply because of his longevity. On the one hand, a man may have been called "exalted father" even if his offspring had been few. On the other, "father of a multitude of nations" can mean only numerous offspring, as Abraham is told in verse 5.

In Genesis 32:26–28, Jacob, whose name meant _____, is renamed *Israel*, which means _____. In this passage, Jacob has just spent the night struggling, or wrestling, with God. I don't know much about wrestling, but I do know that you cannot wrestle someone from across the room. It's a contact sport. Hand to hand. Body to body. When God renames Jacob *Israel*, He says, "You have gotten close to Me." We, too, may be renamed by God when we wrestle with Him, when we go through a tough battle and prevail, when we draw near to Him.

8. Can you name a time when you wrestled with God? Was this a time when He "renamed" you and called you "Beloved, Blessed, Chosen"? If you like, talk about this experience with your group, or simply make a note of it here.

9a. What are we told in Psalm 73:28?

In Matthew 16:17–18, Jesus calls Simon *Peter*, which sounds like the Greek word for rock. And in Acts 13:9, Saul (whose name means “asked of God”) is called *Paul*, which means “little” and emphasizes his humility and weakness in Christ. I can’t help but think that this name change is part of the story behind 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.

b. What is the last sentence in that passage?

10a. One of my favorite “renamings” in the Bible is one we are never really told about. Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27 both tell of the same event. What is it?

b. What is different about this event when we are told about it in Matthew 9:9?

c. If ever a person was “unaptly” named, it is Levi. The name *Lēvi* would be a person from the tribe of Levi. The Levites were set aside as ministers of religion, but what is Levi?

d. What do you know about tax collectors? With whom are they generally grouped (Matthew 9:11)?

e. But in the book he penned himself, how does Levi call himself?

I told you earlier what Matthew means. Do you remember? Who better to recognize the gift of God's grace than one called out of a position of hatred to be one of the twelve disciples!

We need to remember that God can rename us, no matter what we have been called until now. Paul says it best in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come." Through the water and God's Word at our Baptism, the old has been washed away and we are new in Christ. We have a new name, Christian, and a new identity, beloved. And what God calls us is what we are. He knows us, He loves us, and He calls us by name. We are His!



Prayer of Reflection:

O Father God, despite what others have called me, despite the names I have sometimes called myself, thank You that You have given me a new name— Christian. Help me always to remember that I am Your beloved child. Help me to reflect that name to everyone I meet so that they, too, may be made new in Christ. I pray in His name and for His sake. Amen.



ANSWER GUIDE

SESSION 1: KNOWING THE PERSON YOU SEE IN THE MIRROR

1. Answers will vary.
2. Jacob's name means "deceiver." In order to get the blessing meant for the firstborn, his brother Esau, Jacob dressed in Esau's clothing, covered his smooth skin with goatskin, and pretended to his blind father to be his hairy brother. The trick works, his father is deceived, and Jacob gets the blessing.
3. We weren't redeemed with gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ.
4. "Called" or "summoned" could also be translated "chosen" or "selected." It's not a random calling but a purposeful one. God chose us out of all the people on the earth not because of anything we have done, but simply out of love. He loves us!
5. Sarah calls herself worn out and old. Gideon calls himself the weakest and least. But God calls Gideon "mighty man of valor."
6. The second half of Genesis 1:2 says that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." We get our new name from God's mouth . . . from the Spirit of God.
7. God told Adam to name the animals, and whatever you call them, that is its name. Once called by the name, that is who or what it is.

9. Abram is renamed Abraham, which means the father of a multitude. Jacob is renamed Israel, which means he struggles with God. In Psalm 73, we are told that “it is good to be near God.” (And it is, even if you are wrestling with Him!) In 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, Paul says he will boast all the more gladly in his weaknesses so that the power of God may rest upon him.
10. Mark 2 and Luke 5 both tell the story of Jesus calling Levi, the tax collector. In Matthew, we learn that Levi is also known as Matthew. Tax collectors were Jewish locals employed by Romans (yuck) to collect taxes (double yuck). They could collect as much as they wanted and keep the excess (triple yuck). They were hated by the Jews and considered traitors.

SESSION 2: CHOSEN

- 1–2. God doesn’t look at appearance or stature. God looks at the heart! In 1 Samuel 16:12, David is called “ruddy” (having a fresh, healthy look; a “pretty boy”). In verse 18, we learn he is a skillful musician, a brave warrior, a wise speaker, and good looking. We learn in 1 Samuel 17:50 that he has a good aim—he kills Goliath with a stone. And finally, 1 Samuel 18:14 tells us he had success in all he did.
3. God calls David a man after God’s own heart. God chose the nation of Israel not because of their greatness but because of His love.
4. Matthew was a tax collector, sneered at by Pharisees, grouped with “sinners.”