

Underdogs and Outsiders: A Bible Study on the Untold Stories of Advent

Tom Fuerst | Reviewed by Jennifer Klauth

In *Underdogs and Outsiders*, author Tom Fuerst brings new light to understanding the importance of the women Jesus selected to be a part of his genealogical line. Most of us skip over these lists, eager to get to the exciting adventures of a wandering miracle worker, but Fuerst rightly calls out the significance of the inclusion of these women who were Gentiles and/or in lowly-esteemed life stations.

He takes us into the lives of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary, describing why they would have been outcasts, what it would have felt like to be them, and how God turned their stories into a path for the Savior. He gently but firmly challenges our assumptions about these women who many have cast aside as “women with a past” or temptresses. Fuerst does not gloss over the crimes committed against these women by our beloved biblical heroes (for example, he addresses the story of David and Bathsheba for what it is—a rape of an innocent married woman and the murder of her husband—rather than a woman “asking for it”).

Looking at the Scriptures within this context, he challenges readers to see people as God does, and to honor them for the ways they’ve impacted the kingdom of God. Fuerst calls us to let go of our preconceived notions of others, listen to the voices of the marginalized, and use our own voices to amplify their stories. This line from the study sums it up well: “The stories of underdogs and outsiders we have read have shown us that God can work through strange and scandalous circumstances (Page 80),” and in fact, often prefers it!

Some of the personal anecdotes seem like a bit of a stretch connecting to the text. For example, in chapter two, he begins with a story about becoming a Christian, praying for his family, and reading the Bible, and then transitions to the story about Rahab with “it’s in one of these troublesome stories that we find Rahab . . .” Although the anecdote could be a powerful lesson on missing the heart of God in Scripture, it didn’t connect with the story.

Fuerst calls us to empathize with biblical women who were outcast and looked down upon, and then asks that we do the same in our time. I think this might be a fantastic resource for building compassion and understanding in churches who aren’t egalitarian yet, but are interested in studying more about women in the Bible.

This book is intended to be read as a study, and is well structured for that purpose. It is printed in a large easy-to-read font to accommodate many types of readers. Chapters are brief, but thought provoking, and include explanation of historical context. Fuerst includes reflection questions, prayers, and practical applications for living out the lesson of God’s radical inclusion in our time. I highly recommend this study in your Advent journey!