

# From a woman's perspective

## Lawrence resident's study leads to book on biblical women

April 23, 2005

On Mary Townsend's writing desk, there's a greeting card from a friend. The front of it bears a quotation from the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it." That message inspired Townsend as she worked on a bold project of her own.

Townsend, 85, spent 10 years and more than \$6,000 researching, writing and ultimately self-publishing a book, "Telling It Like It Is: The Truth about All the Women of the Bible."

The past two years of her effort were spent finding a publisher who would work with her and then the long process of shepherding the book into print.

Townsend, a longtime member of St. Luke AME Church, 900 N.Y., took delivery of 500 copies of "Telling It Like It Is" in February.

She explains why she spent a decade toiling over her book.

"I wanted to get God's word out with the focus being on women, no longer in an ancillary role to the men in the Bible. The Bible was written by men, for men, and that's fine. I love the Bible. But I could see that the women, some of their voices were silent, or they got maybe 10 lines and that was all," says Townsend, a Lawrence native.

"I just wanted to speak for those women whose voices are silent now and to tell others what wonderful women these were, what they went through, their strengths and their weaknesses and the roles that they played, the problems that they faced in their daily lives -- so similar to what we women face now."

Townsend is asking \$19.95 per copy of her book, which was prepared and printed by Leathers Publishing, an Overland Park company.

"I'm not interested in getting my money back that I invested in it. I would give it away. But in the Bible it says you should be paid for your labor, so then I decided I'd go ahead and charge," she says.

## Written for own learning

Townsend's book is a thick, 372-page volume that presents thumbnail sketches of just about every woman who appears in the Bible, even those who aren't named specifically.

Baker, Jim. "From a Woman's Perspective." *Lawrence Journal World*. 23 April 2005. 27 Aug. 2012 <[http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2005/apr/23/from\\_a\\_womans/](http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2005/apr/23/from_a_womans/)>.

(Like the end titles of a movie that identify every character, some of the women in "Telling It Like It Is" are simply listed in the book's index as "Woman who anoints Jesus" or "Woman who lost a silver coin.")

Every woman, that is, except one.

"I have found an error, because there's Mary of Rome that I inadvertently omitted. I never saw it until the book was practically ready to be published. I'm not perfect. So I don't write about Mary of Rome," Townsend says.

She's the first to admit that she's no biblical scholar; she doesn't have any special qualifications to expound upon the holy book.

In fact, when Townsend -- a retired assistant professor of psychology and academic administrator at Kansas University -- began this project, she had no idea where it might lead.

"I wasn't writing a book; I did not have any agenda. I was interested in trying to understand the Bible. I didn't understand half the stuff that was written there," she says.

"So I said, 'I'm going to read the Bible every day and take notes on something that jumps out at me on the page.'"

What jumped out at her were the stories of the women of the Bible.

"Every evening, I would tell my sister (Helen Hawkins, also a Lawrence resident) about what I had learned about this woman or that woman, and she would say, 'Oh Mary, that's so interesting. I've been going to church a long, long time, and I've never known that about Eve. I've never known that about Hannah.' She said, 'I think you ought to write a book,'" Townsend says.

"I said, 'Girl, are you kiddin'? I'm just doing this for my own learning.'"

Eventually, Townsend's sister won her over, and she decided to turn all her notes into a book.

And, Townsend says, she's glad she did.

"Whenever I was on that computer and I was writing about those women, I had the most wonderful feeling inside me. It's not happiness -- it's deeper than that. I felt so good. I can't explain what happened, why I did what I did, but I loved doing it."

## **Manual for living**

Those who worked with Townsend to prepare her manuscript for publication are her biggest fans.

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"I was looking through my files, and there were numerous notes and letters from her, and she never failed to say, 'You all are such a blessing' or 'I'm so grateful God led me to you,'" says Mollie Eulitt, who worked closely with Townsend at Leathers Publishing.

"With Mary, I never got the sense that any obstacle (in the publishing process) was going to get her down. I think the end product was always in her mind, and she just never flagged in her energy and dedication."

Candace Hyatt, a freelance professional indexer who lives near Seattle, worked with Townsend to create an index for the book.

"She just has an energy about her that is so warm and caring. After I finished the index, I sent it to her, and she said it brought tears to her eyes," Hyatt says.

"I've never gotten a response like that from an author or an editor. I could tell she was getting teary over the phone. I just adore her."

Now that Townsend's writing project is finally complete, is she done with her daily habit of consulting the Scripture?

"Oh no, no. I love the Bible," she says. "I read it every day, because it tells you how to live. It's the best manual."