



WHAT THE WOMEN SAW

DISCOVERING JESUS
THROUGH THE EYES OF WOMEN

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IF: EQUIP | **rightnow** MEDIA

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HOW TO STUDY

WHAT THE WOMEN SAW

We are so glad you picked out this study! This six-week study guide was created for you to use on your own or in a group. Throughout the study, you will find reflection questions for your own personal time of study and you will find group questions as well. Use these to facilitate conversation within your small group and dig deeper into each week's topic.

STUDY COMPONENTS:

1. Videos: The videos are a tool to help unpack the weekly topic of the study. Watch the video at the start of each week. We encourage you to watch and discuss the videos as a small group before diving into the daily reading.

2. The PDF (or web page): This is where you will find the daily reading and reflection questions.

This can all be found in two places:

- In the PDF. This is the most effective format for groups. If you need one or more copies, head to shoppe.ifgathering.com.
- IFequip.com. This is our web-based version of the study. Each devotional is added daily. If you access the study through this site, your group members will need to keep journals to write down their answers each day, so they can refer to them during group discussion.

Note: If you are leading a group, it can be helpful to plan an “intro” group meeting to give an overview of the study format and schedule before diving in. This also gives your group members time to get to know one another.

HOW TO STUDY

WHAT THE WOMEN SAW CONTINUED...

TYPICAL WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

1. Get together with your group to watch the video. After week one, review what you learned through the daily readings from the previous week before watching the video.
2. Go over the discussion questions in the Leader's Guide with your group.
3. Do the week's reading and questions on your own (there are five days of content for each week).

HOW TO ACCESS THE WEEKLY VIDEOS:

- **Watch on RightNow Media.**

1. Log in to your RightNow Media account and search "IF:Gathering" to find the *What the Women Saw* video series.
2. If you do not have a RightNow Media account, go to rightnowmedia.org/ifgathering to access the videos for free through an exclusive RightNow Media and IF:Gathering resource library. After creating an account, log in and search "What the Women Saw" to watch the series.

- **Watch on ifequip.com.**

WEEK
ONE

Jesus Equips the Ordinary



Watch

***“Jesus Equips
the Ordinary”***

*with Jennie Allen,
Bianca Juárez Olthoff,
Jada Edwards, and
Sadie Robertson Huff
(20 minutes).*

Do women matter to the kingdom of God?

Jesus was surrounded by both men and women during his ministry on earth. He saw, valued, and cared for women, and he still does today. Each one of us has a significant role.

Through this six-session study, you will discover who Jesus is through the unique perspective of women in the Bible. As you study the lives of Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene and others you will learn from their faith and failures, and be reminded that Jesus cared for and valued the women he was surrounded by. He equipped them, listened to them, walked with them, healed them, and empowered them. And he does the same for you now.

ACCESS THE SESSION ONE VIDEO AT [RIGHTNOWMEDIA.ORG/IFGATHERING](https://rightnowmedia.org/IFGATHERING)

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK ONE



REVIEW

Jennie talked about Mary's surrender to God's call when Gabriel announced the coming of Jesus. In what ways was Mary's response an act of faith? What does surrender look like in your life?

Mary immediately went to visit Elizabeth, her older cousin who was also experiencing a miraculous pregnancy, and they celebrated together. Who is someone in your life you can count on to celebrate with? When have you celebrated God's goodness with that person?

Sadie reflected on Mary's influence with Jesus at the wedding in Cana. What clues did Sadie point out from the text about the warm relationship between Jesus and his mother?



DIG IN

Gabriel greeted Mary by calling her "highly favored" (Luke 1:28). Read the rest of their conversation in Luke 1:28–38. How would you describe Mary's attitude toward the angel's announcement?

Jennie summarized Mary's first words upon greeting Elizabeth in this way: "This prayer, it's full of Scripture. She actually knew God's words. She sat under them, she absorbed them." Read Luke 1:46–53. How well do you know Scripture? Which words would you use, which biblical stories would you tell, to describe the nature of God?

Read John 2:1–11. Sadie referenced Mary's boldness in asking Jesus to help and in her confidence that he would. Why was Mary concerned about the wine? What does this event tell us about Mary's character and her relationship with her son?

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK TWO CONTINUED



MAKE IT MATTER

We are more likely to say “yes” to God when we know and trust him. Describe your Bible study and prayer habits. What are you doing to develop and strengthen your relationship with God?

Because Mary knew her son’s compassion and believed in his supernatural power, she didn’t ask Jesus to do something out of character. How well do you know the character of God? How can you know if your requests are in line with his will?

Following Mary’s example, we should not hesitate to put our requests in front of God, especially when we seek the good of others. How often do we pray expecting God to answer? When have you been surprised at God’s obvious answer?



REFLECT

Reflect on your perception of Mary up until now. How did you regard her before this study? What new insight about her have you learned? How can her life encourage yours?

Read the Magnificat (Mary’s prayer in Luke 1:46–53) this week. Write down what you learn about God. Then write out your own prayer of thanksgiving and praise.

Through the Eyes of Women

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1:37–38

Bible Readings:

Luke 1:1–38;

Luke 1:46–55;

Psalm 139:13–14;

Zephaniah 3:17

You can tell a lot about a person by who surrounds them. Jesus was surrounded by both men and women, and the women around him were faithful friends. He was encircled by women who knew him, who learned from him, who raised him, and who trusted him. These women followed and sacrificed, they cried out and asked questions, they believed and did the unbelievable. These women were ordinary but made extraordinary by Jesus. He lifted them up, raised up their voices, healed their bodies, and placed upon them value, worth, and authority. He loved these women, and he loves you. Each of these women was uniquely created and called to a specific purpose in the life of Jesus as well as for the sake of those in their communities and even for us today.

FAVORED ONE

First among these women was Mary, Jesus’s mother. Mary, who had no accolades or family line. Mary, whose identity was “highly favored.” In Luke 1, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Joseph are all given identities that have to do with their family names as well as their character and social situations. Mary is simply called “highly favored” or “favored one”—twice (Luke 1:28, 30)! Mary’s identity is repeated as she receives the news that she will carry the Son of the Most High. Mary saw her identity through the eyes of God. As the angel repeated her identity to her, so we often need our identity repeated to us: beloved, delighted in, created in God’s image and so much more.

ROOTED SURRENDER

As Mary was strengthened in identity and rich in faith, she chose surrender to God (Luke 1:46–55). She said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She chose surrender and trust. She believed that whatever God said, God would do. The surrender is found in “let it be” and the trust is found in “according to your word.” She trusted who God said he was, and she trusted that God would fulfill his Word. Mary had a humble confidence. Like Mary, our surrender is rooted in believing God’s Word. Do we know and believe God’s words to us?

OUR NAMES

Mary’s identity was grounded in how God saw her. Yours is the same. How does God see you? What does God call you? Do you hear it? Can you see it? God’s Word says many things about you and your name. The psalmist talked about how his soul knew God’s works were wonderful (Psalm 139:13–14). How about you? Does your soul know that God’s works are wonderful? Or do you use different names for yourself? Names that shame. Names that turn you in on yourself. Names that destroy you from the inside out.

“
**Mary’s
identity was
grounded in
how God saw
her. Yours is
the same. How
does God
see you?**
”

What names do you use to identify yourself? If there are names that aren’t from God, ask him to replace those names with truth so you might know your name and be able to respond to him with the humble confidence of Mary.

Jesus Knows Your Name

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

1 PETER 5:6-7

In our culture of social media, Instagram, Facebook, IGTV, and YouTube, we are pressed to believe that if our faith is not celebrity status, it is not really faith. If our faith is not big enough to have followers and likes, then our faith is not enough. If what we do for Jesus isn't seen on certain platforms, then we need to do more for Jesus. Celebrity status is not the litmus test of a life that loves and knows Jesus. It is not about how much others see of us—it is how much we see of God. Mary is a great example of a life of faith. Before anyone knew her name, Mary knew and saw God.

Bible Readings:

Luke 1:46–55;

Psalm 46:10;

Matthew 2:1–18;

2 Timothy 3:12–17

Mary did not have celebrity status at this point. No one knew Mary, yet Mary knew God. Mary knew God with the depth of her being. She knew God and could say, “Let it be to me according to your word.” She praises God with a song in Luke 1:46–55, proclaiming who he is and what he has done. She sings of his justice, his faithfulness, and his sight of the poor and lowly. She believes and knows that God sees her. God sees Mary, and Mary sees God. No one knew her, but Jesus did.

THE GIFT OF QUIET

All of this changes very quickly when Jesus is born. King Herod hears the news and wants to find Jesus so he can kill him (Matthew 2:1–18). Mary is now known, and her son is a threat. Can you imagine what it would have been like if others had known Mary’s story at that point? What if they had known of the crazy, miraculous, culturally problematic pregnancy?

Before she and Jesus were known, Mary was given this gift of quiet and a space to deepen in faith. She was given a few months of reflection. A gift before the chaos. In that time she was able to confide in her cousin, lean into her husband, and deepen her praise and wonder of God. That time of anonymity was a gift of space to ponder, to reflect, to praise, and to get ready for what was to come. And what was to come would be widely public and incredibly painful.

UNSEEN

We all feel the pull to be seen. We want others to notice us, our gifts, and what we have to offer. At times this can be a selfish pull, and we need to remain humble through confession. As we confess our sin, whether it is pride, selfishness, greed, or something else, God’s grace and mercies meet us. At other times the pull of being seen can be the longing to live as God has called you to live, to have someone notice your gifts, your mind, your heart, and your service. With so much competition, minimization, and comparison in our worlds, we are left unseen. Living a faithful life following Jesus does not have to be done on a stage or on a platform. Your obedience to him is not a show.

“ Before she and Jesus were known, Mary was given this gift of quiet and a space to deepen in faith. She was given a few months of reflection. A gift before the chaos. In that time she was able to confide in her cousin, lean into her husband, and deepen her praise and wonder of God. ”

Like Mary, how might these unseen spaces be a gift? How might this humble space be an opportunity to know God more deeply, to trust, and to be prepared for whatever and wherever God is calling you?

Ask

SCRIPTURE:

PSALM 77:11–12

Bible Readings:

Psalm 77; Luke 1:39–45; Luke 2:8–21

In Luke, we find Mary leaning into curiosity as she ponders the story of the shepherds and how they came to find her and Jesus (Luke 2:19). And before that moment, she wondered how she would become pregnant as a virgin, asking the angel, “How will this be?” (Luke 1:34). Farther back in the story we read that she was troubled and discerning when the angel first greeted her and called her “favored one” (Luke 1:29). What we find in Mary is not a silent woman who is stepped all over, but a woman who thinks deeply, considers her situation, and is curious about what God is up to. She is also a woman who moves and acts, knowing that she cannot carry this calling alone. She carries it to her cousin (Luke 1:39).

NOT ALONE

Mary runs to share her reality and curiosity with Elizabeth, and Elizabeth rejoices in the magnificent and miraculous words of God. Elizabeth pours blessing out on Mary. She speaks love and truth, and she shares in the work God is doing in her as well, attesting to the reality of what Mary is going through (Luke 1:40–45). Mary is not alone.

Both women carry a physical miracle. As Elizabeth has experienced the shame of barrenness, Mary is subject to the judgment of her virgin birth and eventual pain and humiliation of her son. Elizabeth knows Mary needs her love, support, and a reminder of God’s presence with her. She offers this joyfully. Both women are in awe of God’s wondrous works, and they share in it together.

CULTIVATING WONDER

As the women shared in wonder, they cultivated curiosity and gave courage. Many of us have lost our sense of wonder. Throughout the years we were quieted, we were told we asked too many questions, or maybe we were told we should not ask questions. Questions, wonder, and curiosity were the enemies of truth. Yet these things lead to deeper and richer truth. The exploration of our doubts and voicing our questions grows in us space to receive what God may be saying in different ways through a variety of people. After all,

God is a creator! His creativity is far beyond our imagination, and we will never out-question God! We are invited to stay curious, listen to God, and connect in community. In community we share, we receive, and we explore what God is doing and saying in each of us. We pay attention to how he is moving through others, remaining open to new ways he is revealing his truth. We stay curious and we see the beauty of his creativity in and through his creation. We don't want to miss it!

“
...see the
beauty
of his
creativity...
”

**Who has been your source of community and connection lately?
Who points you to Jesus?**

Jesus Will Provide

Generosity runs deep in Mary's veins. She is generous with her life as she sacrifices what life would hold, in order to be a mother to the Son of God. She is generous as she shares Jesus with others, even to the point of death. Generosity runs deep and scarcity is nowhere to be found.

Her generosity is what we see at a wedding party when the wine has run dry and the party is still going. She knows her son can fix this social faux pas, and she moves quickly to request he do something about it. She tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Jesus honors his mom's request and goes above and beyond, providing the best wine of the party. This is the first of his signs to the world—proof that he is more than Mary's son; he is the Son of God.

HOLDING GOD TO HIS WORD...AGAIN

When Mary says "Do whatever he tells you," one cannot help but hear an echo of Luke 1:38 when she told the angel, "Let it be to me according to your word." Mary knows God, and Mary now knows the Son of God. The power of God's Word shows up again in Mary's life, and now it is for the sake of others. Trust him and do whatever he says. Mary knows Jesus can be trusted and his words have power. Mary exhorts the servants to trust whatever words come from the Son of God.

“

Rejoice in hope, be
patient in tribulation,
be constant in prayer.

Contribute to the
needs of the saints
and seek to show
hospitality.

”

ROMANS 12:12-13

Bible Readings:

John 2:1-11;

John 14:26;

Revelation 21:5;

Romans 8:26-27

STEP IN AND SPEAK UP

No one else knew Jesus like Mary did. No one else had to trust God like Mary did. The gift of knowing Jesus gave Mary the confidence to intercede and speak up for others, asking Jesus to meet their need. Knowing the power of God's Word, and God's faithfulness to it, gave her the boldness to instruct others to follow Jesus. Knowing God's faithfulness personally, she trusted God's faithfulness publicly.

When we know Jesus personally, we trust publicly and for the sake of others. And the more we know him, the more we trust him. In this knowledge and trust, we then step in for others, their needs, their longings, their healing, and their hope. We, along with the Holy Spirit, intercede for others.

BIG ENOUGH

And God is big enough. He is big enough to hold each person, each struggle, each pain, each disappointment. God is big enough to meet each of those people and places with his love, goodness, grace, and mercy. God is not scarce. God is a God of abundance. And just as he provided an abundance of wine at a wedding party, he provides an abundance of redemption, turning death to life.

This is what God does: he turns things. He moves in the lives of people; he transforms our hearts and minds; and he heals our bodies and souls. It is to God that we pray and ask for the redemption and renewal of all things for all people. In his time, he will do it (Revelation 21:5).

What truth has God made known to you about himself?

What can you confidently say you believe about God?

How Then Do We Live?

“I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

PSALM 57:9-10

Bible Readings:

Luke 1:39-45; Titus 3:4-5; Acts 4:32-33;

Romans 12:1; Romans 15:4

This week we looked at the life of Mary and her relationship with Jesus to better understand who Jesus is and what a life of faithful obedience looks like. Mary knew Jesus, and here's what we learn from her:

KNOWING GOD

We need to know God's Word to believe God's Word. We need to know Jesus to know his character. We need to know the voice of the Spirit to recognize the voice of the Spirit. We know God through Scripture, God's Word to us. We know God through our experiences aligning with what we know of God and the experiences of others that align with God's Word. We recognize the voice of God through these things as well as the peace we receive from the Holy Spirit.

Mary knew God and surrendered in humble confidence, trusting God would do what he said.

SURRENDER

In the unknowns of life, we often grasp for what is known. We look to find anything we can have power over, control the outcome of, or

keep us steady. Yet Jesus's invitation in the unknowns is to trust him and surrender to him. It is a posture of releasing rather than grabbing, a posture of receiving rather than making things happen. This is the posture that Mary took, and she took it as she believed the words of the angel. She took it because she knew the heart of God. She took it because she knew God was faithful and true.

L I S T E N I N G

Mary was able to listen and surrender because she knew the voice of God and trusted it. To know God's voice, we have to hear it often! This repetition of listening embeds our minds with truth.

One spiritual practice that includes surrender and listening is listening to Scripture. As we listen, we choose surrender. We are not in charge of the pace of the speaker, the words spoken, or the leading of the Holy Spirit. As we listen, we learn the sound of God's voice. The steps below are to help you begin this practice of listening to Scripture.

Practice Listening

1. Download a Scripture listening app. You can use bible.com or the Dwell app.
2. Set aside 10 minutes of completely undistracted time. (If you would like, you can do this practice with larger portions of Scriptures, setting aside 30 minutes of undistracted time and listening to three-four chapters at a time.)
3. Sit in a posture that is still and focused on listening.
4. Have a notepad or journal ready to jot down a quick note or mark a spot that peaked your interest or was curious to you. When listening, resist the temptation to analyze what you hear.
5. A great place to start: Beginning with Chapter 1, listen to one chapter of one of the Gospels.
6. After listening, go back over the things that stood out, that peaked your interest. Take these things to God in prayer, asking God to deepen and repeat whatever he wants to as you continue to listen in life and in the Scripture in the days that follow.
7. Daily continue this pattern of listening through the entire book of the Bible.

Remember, the outcome of this time is up to the Holy Spirit. You do not have to prove or show anything from this time. Let this practice of listening and surrender build up a humble posture in you, and one where you will learn the voice of the Spirit not only when you listen to the Scripture, but throughout the day.

WEEK
TWO

Jesus Enables the Faithful



Watch

***“Jesus Enables
the Faithful”***

*with Jennie Allen,
Bianca Juárez Olthoff,
Jada Edwards, and
Sadie Robertson Huff
(10 minutes).*

REWIND & REFLECT

What stood out to you from last week’s study on Mary and her relationship with Jesus?

Did you find yourself living differently this week, or praying differently, because of the example of faithfulness and obedience we saw in Mary?

In session two, we are going to study John 11 to see what we can learn from the friendship between Jesus, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

ACCESS THE SESSION TWO VIDEO AT [RIGHTNOWMEDIA.ORG/IFGATHERING](https://rightnowmedia.org/ifgathering)

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK TWO



REVIEW

Jada, Bianca, and Jennie talked about Jesus revealing his compassion when told of Lazarus's death, then displaying his power over death when he called Lazarus out of the tomb. How did his decision to delay going to Bethany bring glory to him and hope to all of us?

Bianca told the story of Martha's confrontation with Jesus when he finally arrived. When has God disappointed you? How have you dealt with those feelings?

What stood out to you from Bianca's teaching on Martha's and Mary's declarations of faith?



DIG IN

Read John 11:1–5, 11–44. Looking at verse 15, why did Jesus delay going to Lazarus? What reactions did he get from Mary and Martha?

Review Martha's statements of faith in John 11:21–27. What divine characteristics did she affirm, and what titles did she give Jesus?

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK ONE CONTINUED



MAKE IT MATTER

Life brings disappointment to everyone at some point. Martha was upset with Jesus for not coming in time to heal her brother. What can you learn from her response to Jesus when she saw him?

Consider Mary's reaction when Jesus arrived, then think of a time when you have grieved deeply. How does her response help you worship God because he's good, even if he decides not to change your situation?



REFLECT

Mary and Martha were not afraid to express their pain and disappointment to Jesus. How do you tend to approach God in those situations—are you honest, or do you hold back? Consider how you can pray in full honesty to the God who loves you unconditionally.

Think of some “impossible” situations in which you need God to work. Now reflect on Mary and Martha's extraordinary faith in the wake of their brother's death. Which of them do you resemble more? Write out a statement of faith in your all-powerful yet compassionate God.

Your Honesty is Welcome

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 142:1-5

Bible Readings:

Psalm 142;

John 11:1-44;

John 12:1-8;

Luke 10:38-42

There are few people we can be truly honest with in our lives. They are the ones with whom we can let down our entire guard, allow our emotions to run their course, and offer our disappointments and doubts. We cannot do it with everyone, but there are a few that are safe, a few that will receive us as we are no matter what.

Two sisters and a brother were those people for Jesus, and Jesus was that for them. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had a deep friendship with Jesus. It was Mary who fell at Jesus's feet and anointed his feet with her hair and oil (John 11:2; John 12:1-8). It was Martha whom we can find being completely honest with Jesus when her sister leaves her in the kitchen with all the work (Luke 10:38-42). It was Lazarus who was described as being loved by Jesus (John 11:3, 36). Jesus loved this family, and with this depth of love came the freedom to be themselves, to be honest in their disappointment, to be vulnerable with their tears, and to offer Jesus their whole selves, stopping short of nothing (John 11:5).

U N M O V E D

Knowing Jesus well, the sisters sent Jesus a message, "Lord, the one whom you love is ill" (John 11:3). You would expect Jesus to respond with, "Okay, I'm coming right away." But he didn't. He said some cryptic words about his illness not leading to death and being for God's glory (John 11:4). Then he stayed two days longer where he was. He seemed to be

unfazed by the sisters' news, and then said plainly, "He is dead" (John 11:14). He followed this with another cryptic statement: "I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe" (John 11:15). What was Jesus up to? Did he not see their pain? Did he not feel it either?

H O N E S T Y W E L C O M E

Jesus then began moving toward Bethany, the sisters' hometown. Martha heard he was coming and went to meet him, being honest about her disappointment and her expectation of Jesus. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21).

Later in the story, Mary came to Jesus and said the exact same thing, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32).

The community responded with, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" (John 11:37). Another fair question. And Jesus welcomed it all.

H I M S E L F

Jesus eventually raised Lazarus from the dead. He had his purposes in waiting as well as his welcome of grief, confusion, and questions. Jesus did not rush to resurrection, and he met Mary, Martha, and the people with his own humanity as well. Yes, he will resurrect, but there is something in the waiting that he has for each person. He has himself. Waiting for resurrection gave Martha, Mary, and the people more of him. And that is what he gives us as well.

“
**Waiting for
resurrection
gave Martha,
Mary, and the
people more of
him. And that is
what he gives
us as well.**
”

**As you begin this week and dive deep into this story, is there an area of your
life, or a story from your life that Jesus is welcoming you to tell?
Is there a disappointment, a grief, or a question you have?**

Stay

“Trust in him at all times,
O people; pour out your
heart before him; God is
a refuge for us.

PSALM 62:8

Enneagram, StrengthsFinder, Myers-Briggs, DISC, or any other personality or motivational assessment will tell you we're all so very different. Not only are we different within, we have experiences that have shaped us, skills we have developed, and years of life that have taught us. Some of us are question askers, others of us are storytellers. Some of us dig for detail while others want the big picture of where we are going. Our uniqueness does not stop with our relationship with God. We bring it with us to Jesus as well.

Bible Readings:

John 11:17-37;
John 11:4, 15, 42;
John 11:38-40

Mary and Martha were different sisters—same family, very different women. And Jesus welcomed their uniqueness as they processed the death of their brother, their disappointment with Jesus, and what was to come.

They exclaimed the same truth to Jesus (John 11:21, 32) yet followed it with different actions. Martha shared words, questions, and dialogue. Mary brought her tears and fell down before Jesus. Jesus responded to these sisters exactly where they were.

J E S U S M E T T H E M

Martha came with her words, thoughts, and questions. Jesus dialogued with Martha about theology, faith, and resurrection. Their interaction led Martha to make a statement of faith, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (John 11:27). Before the resurrection of Lazarus, Martha again had an opportunity to affirm her faith (John 11:39–40).

Mary came full-body, with tears. Her release of grief and confusion was both emotional and physical. Jesus met her with his own tears... Jesus met her with his own tears as well as his anger at death itself (John 11:35, 38). The release of his own tears, his anger, and his emotions led the surrounding community to exclaim, “See how he loved him!” (John 11:36).

S T A Y I N G W I T H J E S U S

Throughout the story you can’t help but wonder, why didn’t Jesus just heal Lazarus? Why did he wait for both the women to express their disappointment? Why did he linger?

He previously indicated that this all was bigger than what was happening in the present. He talked about resurrection and life and belief and glory, but why not go ahead and show Martha his power right away, or dry Mary’s tears right away (John 11:4, 15, 42)? Why did he let them grieve? Why did he himself grieve?

Truly, the ways of God are a mystery, and this mystery does not always bring us comfort. Yet, the invitation we see in this story is that God is a God who enters our story and stays there. God is a God who is willing to hear our questions, to wrestle with us, to patiently care for us. God is a God who is willing to feel the depth of emotion, anger at death, and sadness at loss. He is a God who is *with* us. And this God invites us to stay *with* him in our disappointments, our questions, our tears, and whatever we uniquely bring.

“ God is a God who is willing to feel the depth of emotion, anger
at death, and sadness at loss. He is a God who is with us. ”

Seeing how Jesus stayed with the sisters, how does he want to stay with you?

Is there an area of your life he has been quiet about, or unmoving?

Jesus Isn't Leaving

SCRIPTURE:
PSALM 73:21–26

Bible Readings:
Psalm 27:13–14; John 6:66–69;
Matthew 28:18–20

The longer we wait for something, the more hope diminishes. We wait for a phone call from a job interview and the days keep passing by. We hope for a child, yet another month goes by with disappointment from our bodies. We wait for a loved one to turn their life around, and they continue to make choices that lead to their destruction. The minutes, hours, days, and months stack up, and hope grows fainter.

DON'T HOLD BACK

Martha and Mary lost hope. It was the fourth day since Lazarus had died. He was beyond death. Even a resurrection at day one, two, or three would have been miraculous, but day four? That was beyond impossible. We cannot know what it was like to wait for Jesus, to call out to him, to wait with hope, and then for hope to die. Or maybe we do know what it is like. We have called out for Jesus, we have prayed, we have let him know the situation, but we have had to wait, and in the waiting, our hope has died. So, next time, why bother with hope?

This is where some of you are. Why bother Jesus about anything? It is too painful to hope again. It is one thing when another person disappoints you, but Jesus? That is brutal.

Martha and Mary knew disappointment, pain, and lost hope. That was where they began with Jesus. He came toward them, and they responded and didn't hold back. If we can be honest about our pain, if we can express disappointment as fully and truly as these sisters did, then maybe, just maybe, we can get to a place where we can hope again.

WHO ELSE?

Jesus longs to hear from you. The good, the bad, and the ugly. He sees it all, and when we release our words, thoughts, emotions, and more, he meets us with his love, grace, mercy, and power. Who else do we have but Jesus?

Psalm 73:21–26 says, “When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

In the Gospel of John, it says, “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God’” (John 6:66–69).

Jesus is with you. He isn’t leaving. In fact, he sent the Holy Spirit to be with you. He hears you, he sees you, and he longs for you to see him. Meditate on the Scripture from Psalm 73 or John 6 and write down any hope that rises up, even if it is just a glimmer. Hold on to this glimmer and ask the Holy Spirit to expand your hope. God isn’t leaving you.

“
Jesus is with you. He isn’t leaving. In fact, he sent the Holy Spirit to be with you. He hears you, he sees you, and he longs for you to see him.
”

When have you felt alone recently? How were you reminded that Jesus was still with you?

Jesus Can Be Trusted

Have you ever been caught saying one thing and doing another? That third cup of coffee you know is not good for you, but you go ahead and drink it. That person you know is not good for you, but one date couldn't hurt. And every parent knows children are masters at calling you out when you say one thing and do another.

To speak is one thing, to act is another. Our actions reveal what we really believe, more so than mere words. Our sister, Martha, puts this on display as she continues to interact with Jesus.

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?

Before the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus said to Martha that her brother would rise again. She said, "Yeah, I know that he will rise again in the last day" (John 11:23–24, paraphrase). Jesus responded with, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26). Martha responded with, "Yes, Lord" (John 11:27).

Later in the story, when Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus and asked the stone be moved to uncover the opening, Martha exclaimed, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days" (John 11:39). Jesus responded

“
Jesus said to her, “I
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who lives and believes
in me shall never die.
Do you believe this?
”

JOHN 11:25–26

Bible Readings:

John 11:38–45;

Galatians 5:1;

Romans 6:1–11;

Ephesians 3:20–21

with, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” (John 11:40).

Martha said she believed Jesus, and Jesus said, “Watch me do what you say you believe.” She got to live what she believed, and Jesus was faithful to do what he said. How often does Jesus say to us, “Do you believe?”

L I V E L I F E

Jesus invites us to live a life that is alive and resurrected. We say we believe it, and now we get to live it. After all, Jesus has brought us from death to life! As he did with Martha, Jesus graciously calls us to grow in faith and to live with hopeful expectation. Do we live as though we truly believe he is making all things new?

A C O M M U N I T Y B E L I E V E S

This resurrection and life are for all to receive. As Jesus called Martha to live out her faith and to trust him, others saw Jesus at work in Martha’s life. “Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him” (John 11:45). The community watched as Jesus loved this family, growled at death, talked to his Father in heaven, and used his power to bring life from death. And many believed.

When we make way for Jesus to show his love and resurrection power, others notice. As we grow in our belief in Jesus as the resurrection and life, we have the opportunity to continue to throw off our former life of death and live into his resurrection, power, and promises (Galatians 5:1). He has given us life and when we live it, others long to live as well. It is only by his resurrection power that we can do this.

How is God inviting you to live your faith? Where is Jesus saying, “Trust me”? As you live your faith, may others see the resurrection power of Jesus and give glory to God and God alone.

How Then Do We Live?

“O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

PSALM 131:1-3

Bible Readings:

Luke 4:1-13; Luke 23:50-56; Luke 24:1-10

Zooming in and out of a picture or story gives us different perspectives. When we zoom out of the story of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, we see the story that Jesus is living. The story of walking toward death for the sake of life.

As soon as Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, the plot to kill Jesus begins. Even as he is bringing resurrection and life back to this community, he is walking toward his death that will lead to resurrection and life for all people. What Jesus did in the life of one man, in a community in Bethany, he will do for the world.

OUR TEMPTATION

We live zoomed in on our stories. And when we have to wait, we are restless for what is to come. While we wait, we are all tempted.

Even Jesus was tempted (Luke 4:1–13). Our temptations can include making things happen out of sync with life and God’s timing, withdrawing and isolating as we turn in on ourselves and exclude others, or denying what is happening. Or maybe even more practical things such as: overeating or over drinking, bursts of anger, or lethargy with work that needs to be done. Sometimes our waiting will be for a few days and for other things a lifetime. Waiting is hard. But it does not have to be done alone. As with any temptation, the invitation from Jesus is to pour ourselves out to him, to know him more deeply, to wait in community, and to get any other help we need.

AS WE WAIT

Martha, Mary, and the community had to wait for the resurrection of Lazarus. The disciples and the women at the cross had to wait for the resurrection of Jesus. Life from death requires waiting. As we wait, we prepare for what we know, and we rest. Key word: rest.

When the women at the cross saw Jesus’s body taken down, they followed it to the tomb and watched how it was laid (Luke 23:50–55). Then they went back home and prepared ointments and spices for the body of Jesus. They stayed present with what they knew and prepared for what was to come. Then the women rested according to the commandment of the Sabbath (Luke 23:56).

The invitation that is extended to us is to rest. Rest from our worries, rest from solving the problems, rest from idle busyness that makes us feel better because at least there is some type of movement. Rest in the provision of Jesus, trusting that resurrection will come in its time.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

For some things, resurrection will come in this life. For other things, we will have to wait until the final resurrection when all things are made new and death is no longer. While we wait, we grieve, we rest, and we remain in the present while preparing for the future.

What are you waiting to see resurrected? Is it a marriage? A relationship? A loved one’s life? Maybe it is the spiritual life of another? Or maybe it is your own life?

“ The invitation that is extended to us is to rest. Rest from our worries, rest from solving the problems, rest from idle busyness that makes us feel better because at least there is some type of movement. ”

Write a prayer below, expressing honestly the situation, your hopes and dreams, and your thoughts toward God. Give him everything. Ask God to show you what is yours to do now while choosing to rest in him. Then speak this prayer out loud and consider sharing it with a trusted friend. Rest in God. Trust him. Pour yourself out to him. He is listening.

WEEK
THREE

Jesus Heals the Wounded



Watch

**“Jesus Heals
the Wounded”**

with Jennie Allen,
Bianca Juárez Olthoff,
Jada Edwards, and
Sadie Robertson Huff
(8 minutes).

REWIND & REFLECT

What would it have been like to be waiting on Jesus to heal your friend or loved one? Have you ever been in that position?

What parts of this story can you hold onto the next time God does not answer your prayers the way you thought he would?

In session three, we are going to look at multiple stories throughout Scripture where Jesus healed women and discover what we can learn from the way he interacted with them.

ACCESS THE SESSION THREE VIDEO AT [RIGHTNOWMEDIA.ORG/IFGATHERING](https://rightnowmedia.org/ifgathering)

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK THREE



REVIEW

In the opening scene, Jennie, Jada, Sadie, and Bianca marveled over the breadth of Jesus's compassion—he healed the young and the old, men and women, insider and outsider. Which characters in Luke 8:40–56 were recipients of Jesus's care? In what ways were the people alike, and how did their stories differ?

Jada emphasized how this passage teaches women that they are valued. In what ways do you see your church valuing the voice of women? How do you, personally, advocate for other women, whether relationally, professionally, or socially?

Jairus and the woman with the discharge of blood both exhibited hope—a conviction that Jesus could help them followed by action to seek that help. They didn't give up. When have you shown hope in a difficult time? What or who helped you endure well?



DIG IN

Read Luke 8:40–56. Discuss the ways in which Jesus broke cultural boundaries. What caused the woman with the discharge of blood to ignore lifelong “rules of engagement” when Jesus came to town?

What parallels do you see in this passage? What do you learn about Jesus through his interactions with the woman, with Jairus, and with Jairus's daughter?

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK THREE CONTINUED

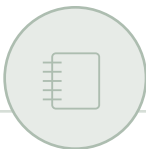


MAKE IT MATTER

Consider Jesus's care for the sick woman and Jairus's daughter. Neither of these people were prominent in that culture, yet he took time out of his schedule to meet their needs. Where in your church, or in your community, do you see needs? What sorts of needs?

Together, list five tangible ways you can express Jesus's love to your hurting, lonely, sick, needy neighbors. What steps could you and your group take to meet those needs this week?

This session encouraged us to stay hopeful no matter how long we've suffered. It reminded us to know our value to God. What does it look like to remember these truths through hard times?



REFLECT

Jada encouraged us not to give up hope: "That moment with Jesus is coming." Do a search in your Bible (or app) on the word hope. Write out several encouraging Scriptures and memorize them.

Sometimes our experience in the church doesn't match up to Jesus's ideal. Women have not always been valued the way he values us. Pray for your church leadership, for their hearts to be soft and ears open to God's view of women rather than the culture's or their tradition's. Be specific as you pray.

Who Am I?

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 8:54-55

Bible Readings:

Galatians 3:28-29

How many memories do we have of feeling ignored, inferior, and just plain worthless as women? No doubt, these stories could fill volumes of books. Even though we've tried to brush them off or forget them, they can eventually take their toll. And we consciously or unconsciously alter our behavior because of them. We try to speak more softly. We hesitate to voice our opinion, even when asked. We suffer in silence.

But this is not God's intent for us. In his eyes, we are precious women of worth who are loved beyond measure. He wants to heal our wounds and restore us. This week, we will unpack a few stories in the Bible that illustrate how God values the healing of women. We'll discuss some of Jesus's encounters with women and see how his healing power changed their lives.

Our stories come from the book of Luke, which has long been called the woman's best New Testament friend because in it, Jesus elevated the women of the first century from their low, secondary positions to valuable members of God's kingdom. Let's see how he does that.

HEALING WHEN IT LOOKS LIKE ALL HOPE IS GONE

Today, let's look at Luke 8, where Jesus heals a young girl. In the latter verses, we find

Jesus among a crowd who desperately wanted something from him: healing. From the crowd emerged Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. His little girl was gravely ill, and he desperately asked, even begged, Jesus to come see about the young twelve-year-old girl.

With a crowd in desperate need of his help, Jesus could have refused. Instead, he valued the healing of a girl so much that he immediately went with Jairus. Unfortunately, the young girl had died by the time they arrived at the house and all who were present were grieving. Instead of offering condolences, Jesus had other plans.

In the room with the seemingly dead girl, three disciples, and two parents, Jesus lovingly said, “Child, arise.” And she immediately got up.

NEVER LOSE HOPE

This passage shows the spectrum of who God cares about—he cares about everyone across the board. In the preceding passage, Luke recounts the healing of a man controlled by demons. It’s no coincidence that we see the healing of both genders. In fact, this is Luke’s pattern in many of his passages that recount Jesus’s miracles. The healing of a woman follows the healing of a man. Why would Luke do that? He wants to show that women are just as valuable as men in God’s eyes. This healing of Jairus’s daughter shows the value of human life to Jesus. He cares about our healing, no matter how old we are. This isn’t to pit men against women or vice versa. We all need the healing and restoration of Jesus, and he wants to restore all who come to him. In Christ, we all have equal standing, no matter our ethnicity, our gender, or even our socioeconomic status (Galatians 3:28–29).

“
**We all need the
healing and
restoration
of Jesus, and
he wants to
restore all who
come to him.**
”

**Do you have scars from the past? What situations seem hopeless to you?
How do you think God can heal them? Will you pray and trust him to do so?**

There Are No Barriers to Jesus

“
And he said to her, “Daughter,
your faith has made you well;
go in peace.”

LUKE 8:48

Yesterday we discussed Jesus and his miraculous healing of Jairus’s daughter. On the way to Jairus’s house, a woman in desperate need of a healing interrupted their journey. Today, we focus on that interrupted moment.

Bible Readings:

Luke 8:43–48

As Jesus walked with his disciples and Jairus through the crowd, he felt healing power being extracted from him. Turning around, he asked, “Who touched me?” Finally, a woman stepped forward, timid and afraid (Luke 8:47).

Unlike Jairus’s daughter, this woman was well into adulthood and had been bleeding for

twelve years. This was more than an irregular menstrual cycle. Scholars suggest that this disease could have been endometriosis or even uterine cancer. We remember that number twelve, right? It's the age of Jairus's daughter. Luke doesn't want us to miss this. This woman had been dealing with a disease for as long as Jairus's daughter had been alive.

Because the symptoms of her disease included a continual discharge of blood, she was deemed ceremonially unclean and made anyone she touched unclean. This meant that she could not go into the temple or be around people at social events. For twelve years! What must life have looked like for this poor woman, who had to endure seclusion in a society where community was the cornerstone of the culture? It is scary to have to deal with a disease; it's even more daunting to have to do it alone.

THE PRESENCE OF JESUS

Notice the difference between Jairus's family and this woman. Jairus was a leader of the synagogue, making him a man of status and perhaps one with an abundance of financial resources. This woman was a social outcast, and she was poor—she'd spent all of her money on doctors, hoping they would find a cure. She was as desperate as Jairus and reasoned that if she could just touch the hem of Jesus's garment, she would be healed. When Jairus came to Jesus, he knelt in front of him to get his attention. However, this bleeding woman initially came behind Jesus, planning to obtain her healing and then fade back into obscurity. Jesus had other plans.

“Who touched me?” he asked (Luke 8:45).

The woman, healed, came forward and confessed (v. 47). Obviously, Jesus knew who had touched him in that special way. Why would he make her come forward?

By bringing her to the public eye, he validated her healing, putting an end to her public embarrassment and shame. He also served as the ultimate witness that she was no longer ceremonially unclean. Remember that little tidbit that Luke gave us about Jairus? He wasn't just any kind of leader—he was a leader of the synagogue. So Jesus declared her ceremonially clean in front of a religious leader. Coincidence? We know better.

The interconnected stories involving the bleeding woman and Jairus's daughter show us that Jesus is concerned about all women, no matter what our age or station in life. He wants to lovingly heal us and restore us to himself first, and then restore us to fellowship with our communities.

“ The interconnected stories involving the bleeding woman and Jairus’s daughter show us that Jesus is concerned about all women, no matter what our age or station in life. ”

In what ways do you identify with the bleeding woman? Have there been issues or circumstances that have caused separation between you and your communities? These could be your spiritual community or even your family. How do you think God wants to repair those barriers? What steps do you think he wants you to take?

Power Belongs to Jesus

SCRIPTURE:

LUKE 4:39

Bible Readings:

Luke 4:38–39

The fourth chapter of Luke gives us a day in the life of Jesus. Earlier in the chapter, we find Jesus going into the synagogue and reading from Isaiah. “He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18). For the rest of the chapter, he demonstrates the passage he read from Isaiah, healing and delivering many. Again, Luke shows us an example of Jesus healing both a man and a woman, and the woman happened to be Peter’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:33–39).

Luke tells the story simply and briefly. When Peter’s mother-in-law took ill, Jesus rebuked the fever. Her health was immediately restored and she began to serve them (Luke 4:38–39). Although it takes only two verses to tell the story, we can draw powerful lessons from it. It emphasizes not only Jesus’s ability to heal but also his authority to heal. In healing Jairus’s daughter, Jesus spoke to the young girl. The woman with the issue of blood touched him and received her healing. However, during his encounter with Peter’s mother-in-law, Jesus actually spoke to the disease itself, rebuking it. For the first time this week, we see what role evil forces can have in our lives. The comfort is knowing that Jesus has the power and the authority to overrule any disease or demon. And he will help us in our time of need, because we are his daughters.

HEALED TO SERVE

As we revisit these stories, no doubt we are impressed by these miraculous examples of God’s power, and we should be. But these miracles also reveal something about God and about us that we should pay close attention to. God desires the very best for us, including our healing. He wants us to come to him in humble submission. Telling Jesus where we hurt allows us to confess our need for him and vulnerability to him. We tell him where we hurt; we tell him how disappointed we are, how angry we are, how scared we are. But we tell him this in hope, with the knowledge that he hears us and delivers us. It is what David does over and over again in his psalms. But he never loses hope.

Jesus also wants to heal us so that we can wholly participate in his kingdom. Notice what Peter’s mother-in-law does once her health returns. She immediately returns to service. When Jesus heals and restores us, it is never for our benefit alone. As we are healed, we are freed to serve at his pleasure—to concern and commit ourselves to being involved in the healing and discipleship of others.

“
**Jesus heals
and restores us**
”

What stories do you have of God healing you, both physically and emotionally? Do you know a woman who is hurting and in need of God’s compassion? How can your stories help to heal her?

Jesus For Us All

This week, we've seen the miraculous, healing power of God in the lives of women. Each story has shown us the incredible value that God has for healing women of all ages. We've seen Jesus's encounter with women who had been sick for only a little while. Others, like the woman with an issue of blood, had been sick for quite a while. Today we meet another woman with a years-long illness. Luke 13 introduces us to a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. Eighteen years. Unlike the woman with the issue of blood, this woman was able to enter the temple and interact with her religious community. However, she was still in pain. Due to an issue with her spine, she was permanently bent over. How painful it must have been!

All of that changed once Jesus saw her. One Sabbath day, he called her over to himself and laid his hands on her (Luke 13:12–13). Immediately, she straightened up, something that she had not been able to do for nearly twenty years. What was her response? She began to glorify God. Can't we imagine the tears of joy and relief she must have cried that day? And wouldn't we expect those around her—those who knew of her years-long disability—to rejoice with her? Something else happens instead.

The time and place of the woman's healing angered the ruler of the synagogue. The Jewish leaders in Jesus's day had imposed strict laws on top of the Mosaic

“

As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

”

LUKE 13:17

Bible Readings:

Luke 13:10–17;

1 John 3:1

law. Healing on the Sabbath day was considered an act of work and thus prohibited. However, Jesus rebuked the religious leaders and insisted that the Sabbath was the perfect time for this woman's healing to occur. But Jesus didn't just call her a woman. He called her a daughter of Abraham.

Notice how Jesus, in a few sentences, showed how valuable this woman was in his sight, calling her a daughter of Abraham. Let's not miss the significance of this phrase, which certainly wasn't lost on the religious leaders. The Jews took great pride in being the children of Abraham, nearly considering themselves religious royalty.

Jesus not only showed the value of this woman by healing her, but with one phrase, he revealed her true identity. As a daughter of Abraham, she was entitled to healing and restoration as much as anyone else. And so are we.

HEIRS OF CHRIST

The Scriptures have much to say about our inheritance and our identity and all of the benefits we receive because of who we are in him. Nothing is too great for Jesus's healing power in our lives. Not evil spiritual forces, not culture, not human-imposed rules.

As daughters of someone far greater than Abraham, we should expect the same love, the same care for our lives that Jesus gave to the woman. As John wrote, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God . . ." (1 John 3:1a). No matter how long we've been in our emotional or physical state of illness, he is eager, willing, and able to make us whole.

**What lies has someone communicated about your identity, either in word or action?
What biblical truths from today's reading can you use to help fight those lies?**

How Then Do We Live?

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

ISAIAH 41:10

Bible Readings:

Romans 8:35, Jeremiah 30:17

Today, let's reflect on some of the things we've read this week and highlight some observations.

HE CARES DEEPLY FOR US

Jesus cares about our pain, be it physical or emotional. He knew that the bleeding woman's problem wasn't solely physical; he met both needs. Notice how loving he was in his interactions with the women, endearingly calling them "daughter." What assurance for us to see that Jesus's touch contains more than power but also the presence of his love.

HE WANTS US TO COME TO HIM

Jesus desires that we come to him in faith. When we are at the end of ourselves, he is enough. We can come to him, believing he can help. Jesus won't condemn us for asking for help either.

HE WON'T ABANDON US

Let Jesus's urgency to raise a little girl from the dead be a reminder to us that when we are in the pit, he's coming. His love is our blessed assurance, and nothing can separate us from it (Romans 8:35).

HE WANTS TO USE OUR STORIES

Jesus heals us to love us, but also so that we can be examples of the good news and share his love with others.

WE HAVE HIS APPROVAL

Accept his loving approval. We are his daughters. We are who Jesus declares us to be, whether in pain or in process or in victory. We can act like we are his, trusting and obeying our Father. In this, he is pleased, and we are blessed.

How can you share with someone the ways Jesus has healed you emotionally or physically?

WEEK
FOUR

Jesus Sees the Marginalized



Watch

***“Jesus Sees the
Marginalized”***

*with Jennie Allen,
Bianca Juárez Olthoff,
Jada Edwards, and
Sadie Robertson Huff
(10 minutes).*

REWIND & REFLECT

What stood out to you the most from week three?

When have you felt like something was separating you from God? Which parts of the last session reminded you that nothing can stop him from loving you?

In session four, we are going to see the way Jesus broke down cultural and societal boundaries to care for women.

ACCESS THE SESSION FOUR VIDEO AT [RIGHTNOWMEDIA.ORG/IFGATHERING](https://rightnowmedia.org/ifgathering)

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK FOUR



REVIEW

Jada, Jennie, Bianca, and Sadie discussed the way Jesus “busted through” cultural barriers to meet with the Samaritan woman. Which divides did he bridge by engaging in conversation with her at the well?

How did the Samaritan woman react after talking with Jesus?

Jennie talked about the reconciliation we experience through faith in Christ. His death and resurrection made the way for sinners to be forgiven and reconciled to God. If you have experienced that relational peace with God, when is the last time you shared it with someone? How did it go?



DIG IN

Read John 4:3–39. In this passage, we read the longest recorded conversation Jesus had with anyone. Why is knowing the location, as well as the sex, race, and religion, of the two who talked important for understanding the significance of this discussion? What made this event so unique?

How did Jesus identify himself to the woman? How did she then describe him to her town when she ran back to tell everyone?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–21. Jennie paraphrased its message: “We have been reconciled to reconcile.” In what ways have you been an ambassador for Christ, helping others become reconciled to God? What does it look like to pursue peace in your relationships?

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK FOUR CONTINUED



MAKE IT MATTER

Jesus had a serious theological discussion with the woman at the well. In doing so, he honored her personhood and showed her respect. Think of women in your community who are seeking to know God better. How can you engage with them and encourage their yearning for God?

Our global community is more connected now than ever. Think of someone near you who is unlike you, whether ethnically, religiously, or otherwise. In what ways can you make a connection with them this week?



REFLECT

Jennie's daughter befriending a Rwandan girl gives us a concrete example of breaking down cultural barriers in the name of love. Spend time thinking through your circles of influence and how you can reach out to someone different than you.

Jesus revealed himself to the woman, telling her, "I am he" (the Messiah she'd been waiting for) in John 4: 25–26. When did you discover Jesus's true identity? Who could you share that good news with this week?

What Can Separate You from Jesus?

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 4:42

Bible Readings:

Luke 10:25–37;
2 Corinthians 5:18

Of all of the “water cooler conversations” we’ve had at work, none have ever resembled the one like Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4, have they?

The Samaritans were descendants of Israelites who had intermarried with local, non-Jewish people and settled in the region that became known as Samaria. They were rejected by the Jews, both socially and spiritually.

What have we heard about the Samaritan woman? From our modern perspectives, we’ve assumed that she was an immoral woman who’d married and divorced five husbands. At the time she met Jesus, she was living with a sixth man, this time not even bothering to marry him. In order to accurately interpret this passage, we need to reconcile our modern connotations with the cultural realities of first-century living.

Women in the first-century Middle East did not experience the freedom that we women enjoy today. They were legally and socially treated as property with little power. It’s more likely that she had been widowed or divorced her several times. Living without the protection of a man could have been risky, both in terms of physical safety and financial security. Living with a man who was not her husband likely, then, implies that she was either his concubine or second wife in order to avoid poverty.

RECONCILED TO RECONCILE

Looking at the woman through first-century eyes will help us see that her story was one of loss, pain, and shame. Enter Jesus, who broke down barriers to:

- Cross a gender divide—he spoke to a woman while she was alone (John 4:7).
- Cross a social divide—he, a Jewish man, spoke to a Samaritan woman (v. 9).
- Cross a religious divide—he asked for water. The Samaritans were considered unclean. The water that she gave Jesus would have been considered unclean also. Jesus didn't care (v. 9).

He then engaged this woman in a deep, theological discussion as if she were his equal. This was Jesus's longest recorded conversation. We should take note of that. Jesus's longest recorded conversation in the Bible is not with his disciples or with the religious leaders of the day. It is with someone whose gender and religious pedigree counted against her.

This intentional interaction illustrates something powerful and relevant to us. Jesus breaks societal rules and norms, refusing to let cultural constraints deter him from encounters with women who desperately need his presence.

But also consider this: The conversation at the well wasn't just for this woman's salvation alone. The encounter with Jesus brought God's presence to the entire community (v. 29). They initially came because of the Samaritan woman's testimony, but they stayed because of all the things they heard from Jesus himself.

We'll explore how God reconciles us to himself first and then uses us to reconcile others to himself later on this week. Our encounter with God is never for our benefit alone. He wants to use our whole story, including the painful and shameful parts, to draw others to himself.

“
He wants to use our whole story, including the painful and shameful parts, to draw others to himself.
”

Is it painful to share your past with others for fear of judgment or rejection? What person or group of people can you share your story within order to draw them to Christ?

Do We See People Like Jesus Did?

“Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.

JOHN 8:10–11

We turn the television off, shaking our heads in disappointment. How many more news stories will we hear that broadcast the suffering of the marginalized at the hands of those in power? Racism, sexism, classism—they are all injustices that God opposes. Not only do we find these stories in our modern news outlets, but the Bible recounts heartbreaking stories that demonstrate the depth and extent of humanity’s brokenness. Like our stories today, the privileged and powerful took advantage of those of lesser socioeconomic status, threatening their very lives. But Jesus cares about those who live on the fringes of society, those whom others turn up their noses at. Today we turn to John 8 and see how Jesus rightly shows the

Bible Readings:

John 8:1–11

balance between standing up against injustice and extending mercy and compassion.

Unlike the Samaritan woman, this woman had been caught in an act of sin and ostracized because of it.

Picture it. In the early verses of John 8, Jesus was teaching the crowd. He was interrupted by the religious rulers, who had brought a woman with them. What was the reason? They accused her of adultery, having caught her in the very act. And they demanded that Jesus condone her to be stoned to death. What must the crowd have thought? What must that have been like for the woman, to be caught in the act but also to be brought before the public in such a shameful way? Perhaps her friends and family members were in the crowd also.

But John reveals this was a setup, having nothing to do with the woman or condemning sin. The Pharisees wanted to condemn Jesus and bring some charge against him that would finally drive him out of town.

How cruel of these leaders. Instead of responding with a definitive yes or no, Jesus looked at them and demanded that the one who was without sin should be the one to throw a stone at her. He refused to let those in power take advantage of the outcast for their evil purposes. Neither did he allow the marginalized woman to remain in her brokenness. He said to her, “Go your way and sin no more.” What a healing and virtuous moment.

G O S P E L T O T H E M A R G I N A L I Z E D

Repeatedly, the Scriptures show us Jesus’s incredible compassion for the marginalized. He does more than just improve their physical circumstances. He gives them a sense of identity and purpose and shows them, and us, just how valuable everyone is in God’s eyes.

Because many societies still view and treat women in ways that do not honor God, God wants us to stand up against these injustices and show women that they are loved, they are valued, and they are precious in his sight. He will readily forgive sin, no matter how unworthy we feel our sin has made us.

We have the incredible privilege of restoring value to those who live in the margins, including women. Why? We have Jesus and he has equipped us with such good news that will heal and restore hurting people.

“ Repeatedly, the Scripture show us Jesus’s incredible compassion for
the marginalized. He give them a sense of identity and purpose and shows
them, and us, just how valuable everyone is in God’s eyes. ”

Do you know women with pain and shame in their past or even present lives? How can you communicate to them God's grace and forgiveness? Ask for God's wisdom and guidance to help you.

Jesus Heals

SCRIPTURE:

MATTHEW 15:28

Bible Readings:

Matthew 15:21–28

History bears countless examples of the ways in which mothers have protected their children during the presence of danger. Natural disasters, wild animals, car jackings—all of these have proven matchless against the seemingly supernatural power of women looking out for their young. What wouldn't we do for our children?

Today, we see Jesus's compassion extends to all, no matter what. In Matthew 15, we come across an extreme circumstance. A demon had oppressed a woman's daughter. She realized that only the power of Jesus could remedy the situation. Her action was to reach out to the one who alone can heal.

AN OUTSIDER'S FAITH

Let's not miss the implications of this story. This woman wasn't just any woman. She was a Canaanite. Tyre and Sidon were non-Jewish cities, about fifty miles away, and there was no need or any likely reason for Jesus to go to or through these cities. By car or train, fifty miles is less than an hour away. On foot or even by donkey, it is quite a long distance. But Jesus traveled those many miles to meet a need.

What a noise and disturbance this woman was causing! So much so that the disciples practically begged Jesus to grant her request to quench her outcry. Wanting to draw out the contrast between the pride of religious bigotry and the power of persistent faith, Jesus stood by while she pleaded her case, despite insults and obstacles. No matter what Jesus and his disciples said to her, she dug in her heels, determined to get healing for her child.

At surface reading, it could seem like Jesus was being unintentionally cruel to this woman. But maybe it was more for our benefit, to show us the extent of her faith.

Sometimes the marginalized refuse to be silenced. She knew that Jesus could help her, and she refused to leave him alone until he granted her request.

FAITH FOR ALL

At one time, not being Israelites would have excluded us from access to God and his promise of salvation. But because of Jesus's sacrificial death, God has granted access to all who will come to him in faith. That means that we have 24/7 access to him. He promises to not only hear us, but to answer our prayers, according to his will. As women, this gives us the ultimate confidence. When we feel dismissed or undervalued, Jesus lovingly reminds us of how special we are to him and that our identities are anchored in him.

“
God has
granted access
to all who will
come to him
in faith.
”

In what areas of your life is it hard to believe God: finances, health, relationships? What can you take away from this woman's story that will help to build up your own faith?

Reconciled to Reconcile

From our stories this week, we have seen the power and compassion of God through Jesus's encounters with women. One experience with Jesus changed them forever. The same has happened to us. Before Christ's death on the cross, we were sinners and enemies of God. But after the cross, we are new creatures—recipients of grace and heirs of salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Reconciliation has to do with a change in our relationship with God. Now that we are reconciled to God, he involves us in his work of reconciling others to himself.

Let's revisit the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus and see how one experience forever changed her life and also the lives of those in her community. From the cultural clues from day one of this week, it's much more likely that the Samaritan woman's story is one of loss related to pain and shame, not sin. After her conversation with Jesus, she ran to town to tell her community about him. The townspeople accepted her witness, with many coming to faith in Jesus (John 4:41).

God uses our story, brokenness and all, to draw others to himself. Our changed lives are a powerful testimony to others of God's healing and restorative power. They communicate that God's grace and love extends to all. God doesn't care what society says about us. He wants us women to see ourselves as he sees us. And he will break society's rules to do it.

“

All this is from
God, who through
Christ reconciled us
to himself and gave
us the ministry of
reconciliation

”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:18

Bible Readings:

John 4:41

Jesus held a deep theological conversation with a woman. He traveled miles to minister to a Gentile woman. He saved an adulteress from death. No matter what marginalized state these women existed in, Jesus met them where they were and opened their eyes to his compassion and power of reconciliation. He's done the same for us. As his disciples, he calls us to the same wall-busting, rule-breaking ministry of reconciliation.

We get to bust down walls and cross divides like Jesus did. When we follow Jesus, we walk right behind him as he tears down dividing walls. There are dividing walls of ability, age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status. There's no kind of person he didn't come to save. We should live that way.

THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

For us, breaking down barriers will most often take more than a day. It might take six months' worth of Sunday dinners or several invitations to church before one is accepted. It might look like uncomfortable, intense dialogue or silently sitting with someone. Whatever wall-busting looks like in our lives, it requires our presence. Stepping into someone else's world requires humility and vulnerability in order to establish relationships and build trust. We have to keep showing up so that we can communicate the same message to women in our communities. They are seen, they are heard, they are loved.

How are you crossing the divides, as Jesus did, to make relationships and walk alongside those who are marginalized? What can you do to make a difference and close the gaps right where you are now geographically?

How Then Do We Live?

“They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

JOHN 4:42

Today, let’s reflect on some of the things we’ve read this week and highlight some observations on Jesus’s transformative gentleness with those in the margins.

GOD LOVES TRUTH SEEKERS

God is pleased when we genuinely seek truth, when we seek him. God says to love him with our whole mind. Intellectual study, theological learning—Jesus welcomes our inquisitive minds too.

GOD’S WIDER PRESENCE

Consider that there are theologians and evangelists outside of your local church or city who have a testimony and lessons to teach you. Keep your eyes and ears open for his voice to come from places and people least expected.

GOOD NEWS FOR BAD TIMES

What a world we live in today, huh? New diseases, natural disasters, and global crime can cause the world to wonder if there is any good news. We know there is! Are you willing to share your faith as eagerly as the Samaritan woman did? Her neighbors were moved by her testimony. Who do you need to tell about what Jesus has done in your life?

CROSSING THE DIVIDE

Jesus was intentional about crossing divides and bridging gaps to meet the spiritual and physical needs of those considered outcasts. He calls us to follow him in the same work of overcoming gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic walls to bring his message of joy and hope and healing to people who desperately need him and us. Women came to Jesus because they sensed his compassion and gentleness in his approach. Jesus has given us the power to reach out to other women. With passion and care, we assure them that they are seen, that they are heard, and that they are loved.

How do you want to live differently because of what you've learned in this week's lesson?

WEEK
FIVE

Jesus Gives Hope



Watch

“Jesus Gives Hope”

*with Jennie Allen,
Bianca Juárez Olthoff,
Jada Edwards, and
Sadie Robertson Huff
(10 minutes).*

REWIND & REFLECT

Did anything surprise you about Jesus from last week’s lesson?
If so, what?

How did the content from week four encourage you to love
people differently?

This week, we’re going to look at the life of Mary Magdalene to
discover that Jesus never gives up on us.

ACCESS THE SESSION FIVE VIDEO AT [RIGHTNOWMEDIA.ORG/IFGATHERING](https://rightnowmedia.org/ifgathering)

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK FIVE



REVIEW

Sadie reflected on how God gives us second, third, and countless chances to start over. None of us is defined by our worst moments in life. How do you respond to that statement? What feelings does it bring up in you?

Mary Magdalene went from a demon-possessed outcast to a trusted disciple after Jesus healed her. How has your life changed since Jesus came into it?

Bianca explored Mary's faithful friendship with Jesus from the day he saved her, through the months of support, to his crushing crucifixion and glorious resurrection. Who is a person in your life who has proven to be loyal over a long stretch of time?



DIG IN

Luke 8 describes Mary Magdalene as one "from whom seven demons had gone out." In verses 1–3, we see her among a group of women disciples who supported Jesus's ministry financially. Describe the contrast between her before-Jesus and after-Jesus life. How can her story speak into yours?

Read John 19:17–25. In these verses, we read how Mary loyally remained by Jesus during his trial, suffering, and crucifixion. In fact, her presence was noted in each of the four Gospel accounts. Think of a difficult time in your life. In what ways did a friend, or friends, show loyalty and love to you?

LEADER'S GUIDE

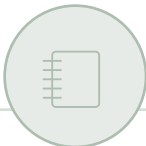
WEEK FIVE CONTINUED



MAKE IT MATTER

This session reminds us that we are not defined by our worst choices or greatest shame. As Mary went from rejected to chosen, so do we—in Christ. In what ways have you experienced freedom? What does it look like to offer others second chances after they fail you?

Bianca focused on Mary's loyalty to Jesus. What sort of friend are you? How well can your friends count on you when things get tough?



REFLECT

Spend time thanking God for rescuing you. Name those hurts, sins, legacies that kept you far from him, and contrast them with the freedom and healing you now have.

Consider how you have responded to God's grace. Like Mary giving back to Jesus, what can you do to show your gratitude this week?

Think of a friend who has always been there for you. Do something to express your love and appreciation for him or her.

Who Was Mary Magdalene?

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 8:1-3

Bible Readings:

Luke 7:36–50

The name Mary is a derivative of Miriam.ⁱ Miriam, the sister of Moses, is a central character in Hebrew literature and one that many Jewish mothers would have been proud to name their daughters. So proud, in fact, it is estimated that of the Jewish women living in Palestine during the first century, twenty-five percent were named Mary.ⁱⁱ

When Luke identifies her in 8:2 as “from whom seven demons had gone out,” he is setting her apart and confirming which Mary he is speaking of, in much the same way that we often give identifying labels to friends who share the same name.

When we come across Mary Magdalene in Luke 8, we have just left the scene where a woman knelt and anointed Jesus’s feet with perfume and tears. Jesus says to the woman at his feet, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:50). The very next woman mentioned is our Mary Magdalene. The woman who anointed Jesus’s feet with oil and Magdalene were witnesses to the importance of Jesus’s death. It is a contrast to the men’s inability to hear the predictions of the coming crucifixion.

Can we blame people for mixing the two into one person? Of course not, but neither is it fair to either woman to merge their stories. Each of the two stands alone in her relationship to Christ, his forgiveness, his healing, and the call she was given. The first woman is unnamed

while Mary Magdalene is clearly identified and given access to a rabbi, something unheard of during that time.

WHERE MAGDALENE'S STORY BEGINS

Mary of Magdalene was the first of three women who represented a group that followed closely with Christ. Out of their own pockets these women took care of the material needs of Jesus and the twelve disciples who had been called to leave their jobs and follow him. Jesus could have chosen any number of ways to provide for these men, but as he often did, he chose the unordinary and welcomed women into his inner circle.

Magdalene didn't simply show up one day and begin this journey. The identifying tag line the Gospels consistently give her is the only peek we get into the before. We aren't told where it happened or how, though Jesus found himself often near her hometown of Magdala, healing men, women, and children of demon possession.ⁱⁱⁱ

Not once is Magdalene described as a sinner. Rather, she is identified as one who was healed. Still, her past isn't the story. God's intervention in her life is the focus. It was a testament to who Jesus was, the Messiah who came to restore life. Her tagline, "from whom seven demons had gone out," stood as a testimony to the evidence of Jesus's authority and power over the demonic world. From this moment on, Magdalene would be present and give witness to that power.

“
**Not once is
Magdalene
described as a
sinner. Rather,
she is identified
as one who
was healed.**
”

**Has Jesus ever done anything in your life that has been a testament of his power?
How have you also seen him work in the lives of those around you?**

You Belong Here

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

GENESIS 1:27

Have you ever wondered if Jesus really sees you?

Mary Magdalene, as a woman, did something extraordinary. In Luke 8:1–3 it states that she and some other women traveled with Jesus and the apostles. This was extraordinary because women were not permitted to sit at the feet of a rabbi to learn.

Rabbinic literature of the time placed women as inferior to men both socially and religiously. Here are a few of the restrictions Barbara J. MacHaffie highlights in *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*. Women were:

- Not spoken to by men in public.
- Seen as seducers of men, a temptation to be avoided.

Bible Readings:

Genesis 1:27;

Luke 8:1–3;

Mark 16:9–11;

Mark 2:23–3:6

- Not permitted to testify in a court of law.
- Not counted in the quorum for forming a synagogue or congregation.
- Not allowed past the outer court in the temple in Jerusalem.
- Seated separately in the synagogues.
- Not permitted to read aloud or take on a public position.
- Not permitted to study the Scriptures.^{iv}

This same attitude is seen in Mark 16:9–11, when Magdalene rushes to the disciples to tell them she has seen the risen Christ. Verse 11 says, “But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.”

W O M E N W H O L E A R N E D A T T H E F E E T O F J E S U S

Jesus’s entire ministry involved challenging the status quo. He flipped tables, challenged religious leaders, and spent his time with sinners. He once walked through a field with the disciples, plucking heads of grain to eat, and even healed a man on the Sabbath, much to the dismay of the Pharisees (Mark 2:23–3:6).

In Luke 8:1–3 the women in the story are alongside the twelve Jesus teaches regularly. They travel with and provide for their material needs. Not only were they invited to the table with Jesus, they were financially making it possible for the men to be there as well. If the text here is not clear enough that women were permitted to sit at Jesus’s feet and learn, then another text shows this clearly.

In Luke 10:38–42 we find Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary. As we studied in week two, these women are the sisters of Lazarus. This Mary was revered for turning from her traditional role of service in the home and plopping herself down at the feet of the visiting rabbi to drink in all he has to teach. Be reminded of the words of Jesus to Martha, who argued that Mary’s place is in the kitchen: “Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (v. 42). Martha did nothing wrong, but Mary didn’t either.

Jesus welcomed and encouraged women to sit at his feet and learn in a culture that told them they did not belong there. He did not value one sex over the other. He saw male and female as they were created, in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). He welcomed everyone to follow him. Just as he still does.

“ Jesus’s entire ministry involved challenging the status quo. He flipped tables, challenged religious leaders, and spent his time with sinners. ”

Is there something big you have felt called to but shied away from, believing it wasn't your place as a woman? How does Mary Magdalene's story challenge or confirm your views of womanhood?

Jesus Offers Second Chances

SCRIPTURE:
JOHN 20:11–18

Bible Readings:
Matthew 27:55–61

Mary Magdalene is a woman whose story has been conscripted throughout church history. She has been depicted as a prostitute, prophetess, mystic, celibate, passive helpmate, feminist icon, and the mother of Jesus’s child. “How the past is remembered,” writes James Carrol, a theologian and historian, “how sexual desire is domesticated, how men and women negotiate their separate impulses; how power inevitably seeks sanctification, how tradition becomes authoritative, how revolutions are co-opted; how fallibility is reckoned with, and how sweet devotion can be made to serve violent domination—all these cultural questions helped shape the story of the woman who befriended Jesus of Nazareth.”^v

A WOMAN CALLED

It’s not clear where Magdalene’s wealth came from. Scripture is vague on that point, as it is with many of her details. The city she came from, Magdala, was a wealthy and culturally advanced town. Her money could have come from family or from her own work. Its source is unclear and not the focus of the story. What is clear is that she is a woman with a past, a woman Jesus healed, and a woman who was devoted to her savior and gave what she had. When Jesus called, she followed.

Scripture tells us that Magdalene followed Jesus during his earthly ministry after he healed her. She went from broken to whole and she was unleashed to follow Jesus. She was a witness to the words he taught and also to his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. She was present through it all. Where the twelve disciples were, there was Magdalene along with the other women who followed.

MARY ON A MISSION

During Jesus’s time, he welcomed women into his ministry. We’ve seen it in his interaction with his mother, Mary, with the sisters Martha and Mary, the women he healed, the women he spoke to, and the women he called to bear witness and testify to his identity. Because of what Jesus had done for Mary Magdalene, she was able to minister to others. In Matthew 27, we see her with Jesus’s

mother at the crucifixion. We often undervalue ministry of presence to stand with someone in the darkest of moments and support them in the midst of pain. Mary Magdalene was the loyal friend who stood by a broken-hearted mother who was helpless in stopping the humiliating and undeserved death of her son.

We also know she was one of the first people to run and go tell people Jesus was risen from the grave. She had such a place of connection with Jesus and privilege of getting to be the first one to carry the gospel. That was a long road to go from demon possessed to the first one to carry the gospel, but that's what Jesus does to us. He changes everything.

You may feel disqualified to follow him because of your past, but as we see with Mary Magdalene, Jesus restores.

“
Because of what Jesus had done for Mary Magdalene, she was able to minister to others.
”

**What are some myths that you once believed?
What was it that helped you decipher myth from truth?**

How to Be a Loyal Friend

As we read about yesterday, Mary Magdalene was present during Jesus's ministry, at the foot of the cross, at his burial, and at his resurrection. She was the friend that remained, the one that refused to look away. She is mentioned a total of fourteen times in the New Testament, more than most of the apostles. She is almost always mentioned first, identifying her as an important person and leader in the community. The only list where her name is not first is when she is standing at the foot of the cross with Jesus's mother.

SHOW UP EVEN WHEN EVERYONE ELSE RUNS AWAY

Suffering is hard to bear witness to. No matter how good of a friend you are or think someone else is, when tragedy happens, people run. Think through your own life. In the hardest moments, were you surprised by who was and wasn't by your side?

In the Gospels, we are told that Jesus was abandoned by the disciples. One betrayed him with a kiss, while the others ran. Peter, the very disciple Jesus would later command to build his church, denied even knowing him (Matthew 26:69–75). Only “the disciple whom he loved” is mentioned as being present at Jesus's death (John 19:25–27), surrounded by the women who never left. But Magdalene was always nearby, likely with the women who followed behind

“

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

”

JOHN 19:25

Bible Readings:

John 19:25–27;

Matthew 26:69–75;

27:5–56

weeping as Jesus carried the cross to Golgotha, and most definitely standing beside his mother, identifying as one of those closest to him in life (Luke 23:27). She showed up.

From the very first time she is introduced, Magdalene shows up and takes part in Jesus's ministry. Grateful for her healing, she is transformed in both body and soul. Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, an associate professor at Saint Vincent College, describes Magdalene as "one of Jesus's success stories." Her healing resulted in "faithful ministry as well as social reintegration, leadership, and recognition."

R E S T O R E D

Magdalene's presence and the presence of those with her are the reason the Gospel writers had the eyewitness testimony they needed to write the details of what happened that day at the crucifixion. Jesus's death and resurrection that followed would become our second chance, and Magdalene was there to bear witness to it all.

**When has someone shown up for you during tragedy?
What are some ways you could be more proactive about simply being
present for those you love when they are going through hard times?**

How Then Do We Live?

“Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

JOHN 20:16

Bible Readings:

John 20:11–18; John 10:1–21

“No, Mary.”

“But which one? Mary, his mother, Mary, Martha’s sister? You’ve got to give me more to go on.”

“Mary, the one from Magdala who had seven demons cast out.”

The disciples may have needed a tagline to identify her, and the church fathers may have confused her with the others, but Jesus knew her. And when he called her “Mary,” she recognized his voice.

Mary returned to Jesus’s burial site in John 20 only to find that his body was not there. She went to the disciples to tell them and they ran to the tomb to see for themselves. They left, but Mary remained. She was grieving Jesus, weeping at his empty tomb, wondering where his body has gone. It was then that Jesus came to her and called her by name.

HE CALLED HER NAME

Jesus once told a parable of a good shepherd (John 10:1–21). He said that “the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name . . . a stranger they will not follow” (vv. 3, 5).

Jesus called Mary by name and she knew his voice and obeyed. This was her friend and rabbi, risen from death. He had done the impossible and she had been chosen, called by name, to tell the others.

APOSTLE TO THE APOSTLES

Magdalene is described as an apostle to the apostles. She is mentioned fourteen times in the Gospels, more than most of the male apostles. Her story was well known, and as an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ, she was the first to tell the apostles. She delivered the message that they would then take to the world.

JESUS GIVES HOPE

Mary Magdalene's past didn't define her. Being a follower of Jesus did. He rescued her and if we ever think we're beyond help, what Mary Magdalene saw in Jesus is a reminder that he is our hope and savior.

**Is there something in your life that feels impossible? Why is that?
What would happen if you handed it over to God?**

WEEK
SIX

Jesus Empowers



Watch

“Jesus Empowers”

*with Jennie Allen,
Bianca Juárez Olthoff,
Jada Edwards, and
Sadie Robertson Huff
(12 minutes).*

REWIND & REFLECT

What did you learn about Mary Magdalene that you didn't know before?

What area of your life has felt a little hopeless lately? What characteristics of Jesus remind you that he's still worth following?

In our final session, we're going to review what all this means for us. What did these women see in Jesus and what does it mean for our lives today?

ACCESS THE SESSION SIX VIDEO AT [RIGHTNOWMEDIA.ORG/IFGATHERING](https://rightnowmedia.org/ifgathering)

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK SIX



REVIEW

Jennie, Jada, Bianca, and Sadie marveled at Jesus's choice to reveal himself post-resurrection to Mary Magdalene and send her to "go tell the disciples" that he was risen. How do you think he has called you to be a witness to your community?

By choosing a woman to be his first witness, Jesus was showing his people how he valued women. In what ways have you considered women—or yourself—less valuable to God than men are? How does the Resurrection narrative challenge your presuppositions?

Jesus's ministry happened in small towns, on hillsides, with everyday people. Most of us will live in a similarly inconspicuous manner. In what ways are you carrying on his mission day to day, moment by moment?



DIG IN

Read John 20:1, 11–18. What does the fact that Mary was the first person to deliver the gospel teach us about the value of women in the kingdom of God? How can you encourage women in your church or social circle to be bold when talking about their faith?

Read Acts 1:8, 12–14. From the Mount of Olives, Jesus empowered his followers to take his message across the world. How have you obeyed his call to go and make disciples?

LEADER'S GUIDE

WEEK SIX CONTINUED



MAKE IT MATTER

Over the course of the series, what have you learned about women's participation in Jesus's ministry? What has God taught you about himself? What have you learned about God's love for you?

How do we live in the in-between, waiting for Jesus to come back? How are you trusting God with the outcomes in your life? What does loving people look like in your life?



REFLECT

Go back through this series and identify at least one woman whose story impacted you. What specific elements resonated with you from her story? In what way can she encourage, challenge, or inspire you?

Take some time to reflect on what God has taught you through this study. What's one takeaway you've gathered from this series? What could it look like for you to apply it to your life today?

Do We Trust Him?

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 1:6-8

Bible Readings:

Acts 1:6-11;

Luke 1:38

We've learned a lot of who Jesus is so far as we've looked at the life of his mother, the relationship he had with his friends, the women he healed and cared for, and the woman who was the first to see his resurrected body. So why does it all matter and what does it mean for our lives today?

From the very beginning, the life of Jesus was marked by the unconventional. From birth to death he was countercultural. Taking his place on earth in the womb of an unwed mother, he lived with the stigma of perceived secrets. His exit was unlike any before as well. Crucified and buried, he rose from the grave and presented himself first to a woman and then for forty days to those closest to him.

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

There is a slow realization throughout Jesus's ministry that this message is not just for the Jews. Jesus did not come to rescue one tribe or one people group. He came to rescue all people. He broke down barriers and welcomed in the untouchables, the unclean, the sinners, and the women. He shattered legalism and elitism and welcomed all who would believe.

Those who were closest to him, those who witnessed the words he spoke and the love he gave to all, Jesus described as witnesses. He charged them to tell those in Jerusalem and then to fan out from there until all the world had heard.

Jesus's work wasn't done, but his time walking on earth as a man was. He left the charge to all those who believed in him to share the good news with others. They were to live out the words and deeds he had been teaching them all along.

WILL WE GO WHEN CALLED?

Trusting God is not an easy call. He asks hard things of us. He tells us to go and bear witness to the ends of the earth, to tell others of his goodness, and to surrender willingly to him. It's unconventional, it might even start rumors about your reputation, and it will most definitely be uncomfortable.

May we all have the strength of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to say when called on, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). No matter the cost, no matter the difficulty, may we have the strength to be obedient to God's call.

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Is there something or someone God has placed on your heart? What is holding you back from saying, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word"?

There is Work to be Done

“And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

ACTS 1:10–11

When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, he told her not to cling to him (John 20:17). A few weeks later when he ascended into heaven, the disciples were asked why they were standing about gawking. There was work to be done. A charge was given in both instances to go and tell, not to stagnate in the past but to push forward with the message they had been commanded to share.

Bible Readings:

Acts 1:6–11;

John 20:17

MOUNT OF OLIVES

The place where Jesus ascended into heaven and gave the charge to those he left behind was the Mount of Olives. Located on the eastern side of Kidron Valley, it is the hill that faces the old city of Jerusalem. It earned its name for the olive trees that once covered it and is an important location throughout the Bible.

King David ran from his son Absalom during the rebellion across the Mount of Olives (2 Samuel 15:30). It is the hill on which King Solomon built high places for the gods his wives worshiped (1 Kings 11:7–8). Ezekiel had a vision that “the glory of the Lord” was present on the Mount of Olives (Ezekiel 11:23), while Zechariah prophesied that God would stand in this spot and it would split in two (Zechariah 14:3–4).

Every time Jesus traveled from the temple to Bethany, the route would take him over the Mount of Olives. His triumphal entry to Jerusalem was from this location (Luke 19:29). It was here he wept, knowing the city would one day be destroyed (Luke 19:41–44). Jesus answered questions and shared many parables under the shade of those olive trees. An audience seeking God was waiting for him always on the Mount of Olives. It was where those who traveled to the temple would sleep and would continue to do so up until the destruction in AD 70.

In the years that followed Jesus’s ascension, what were the conversations beneath those trees? Perhaps hushed whispers filled the air of a Messiah who had already come, risen from the grave, and ascended into heaven in the very spot where they now slept. Did they speak of the men and women who witnessed the event? Were there rumors of where they had gone and what they were doing?

GO INTO ALL THE WORLD

The location was significant as the starting place for what was to come. It was the beginning of a new movement, a new commandment to love as Jesus had done.

Those who had watched Jesus ascend stood in awe, possibly trying to process all that had happened over the last three years. They had expected liberation from Roman rule led by a Jewish warrior king. Instead, they were given a manger-born Messiah who loved them unconditionally and challenged them to go out into the world, loving the unlovely and unloveable with the same boldness. His death had been a crushing blow. But then, a resurrected Christ! He breathed new, spirit-filled life into the future. Their faith had been strengthened and the power of God was undeniable.

The men in white robes who appeared asked them why they waited. This wasn’t where Jesus told them to stay. He told them to go. There was urgency in the command because he would come back again but at a time no one could predict. Perhaps it was in this moment that some of the parables Jesus had shared began to become clear in their minds. Jesus had a way of telling stories that slowly unwrap for us as life makes us more aware. The

the ten virgins who weren't prepared for the long wait. Perhaps in this moment the reason for all they had seen and witnessed suddenly made sense.

What has God been placing on your heart lately to go and do?

You are Empowered by Jesus

SCRIPTURE:

ROMANS 10:14–15

Bible Readings:

Romans 10:14–15; Matthew 20:1–16

Once those present on the Mount of Olives began to understand what all had taken place, they headed out to do the work. The early church was filled with faithful followers, men and women, who obeyed the call to become witnesses first at home and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. They shared the news of Jesus with eagerness and love. No one was excluded from this message; all were welcomed.

THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

Think about the story in Matthew 20:1–16. It describes a landowner going out in the early morning to hire a crew to work his vineyard. Later in the day he goes out and hires more workers, and again later does the same. The last group is hired an hour before the day is finished. When it comes time to pay the workers, he pays the last crew the same that he had promised the first. They are all paid equally though the burden was greater for the first crew, and there is complaining because of it.

When the story was first told, there seemed to be a parallel between the religious leaders of the day and the first group of workers, while the tax collectors and sinners that Jesus associated with were the ones who were invited in last but reap the rewards. Following the ascension, the parable gained a larger meaning, one that started with the chosen people of Jerusalem and extended God's grace outward to the entire world.

We did not have the privilege of standing on the Mount of Olives and watching Jesus ascend into heaven, and we may or may not be here for his return. No one knows when that will be. But we have been invited into the bigger story. His generosity, grace, and love have been poured out for us all. Friend, while we are not the women who saw Jesus, we are the women who have been called to carry on the message today.

BELIEVE GOD FOR THE BIG, SERVE HIM FOR
THE SMALL

We are not all called to do the same work, just as the women who interacted with Jesus were not all called in the same way. Each of their stories is unique and important, and so is yours. Your story is part of a much bigger story. It is a story that beautifully weaves together and declares the diversity and beauty of who God is.

It's time to start believing God to deliver big on his promises and start serving him in the everyday small ways he calls us to. Some are called to preach, some are called to financially back others, some are called to make sure the rooms are ready for the banquets, while others are called to go out and labor in the fields. There is no one right way to serve God, there is only obedience when he calls you.

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**Your story is
part of a much
bigger story.**

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**What is something you can do today, big or small, to obey God's
call on your life? How do you feel he has uniquely gifted you?**

Tear Down Walls

You and I were entrusted with the message of God's love. That's a big responsibility, one that should not be taken lightly. Jesus didn't stand on platforms and scream at sinners about their sins. He left most of his words of judgment for the religious leaders of the day. Instead, Jesus went to sinners. He loved individuals where they were, whether they had created their own mess or inherited it. Those individuals responded to his outpouring of love. They had no defense when confronted by the ministry of reconciliation.

RECONCILERS FOR GOD

We have a divine connection in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His love is unconditional and transcends every dividing wall imaginable. He broke down the barriers and reconciled us to God. What was asked of the disciples on that mountaintop is also being asked of us, to simply tell others that the work has already been done. God's grace is sufficient. You and I have been charged to be reconcilers for God, spreading his love to all we meet. To do this we must first see others as God does, as his sons and daughters and not his enemies.

LOVE LIKE JESUS DID

Jesus didn't come to promote a political party or a religious sect or to condemn people. He came to heal, to restore, and to pour out grace and love. This is what the women saw. He explored the margins and went to the outcast and the

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...but just as we have
been approved by
God to be entrusted
with the gospel, so we
speak, not to please
man, but to please God
who tests our hearts.

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1 THESSALONIANS 2:4

Bible Readings:

2 Corinthians 5:17–21

forgotten. He hung out with women, with lepers, with tax collectors, and with those who were despised. Jesus traveled to the small towns and the rural places, and he ministered to those who were in desperate need. We live out his love best when we knock down dividing walls and live lives that reflect his overflowing grace.

Loving isn't easy. Sometimes it is the hardest thing that is asked of us. The good news is that we weren't left to figure this out on our own. Instead, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue the mission Jesus left for us. Go and share the good news of Christ's forgiveness, his healing, and the community of faith he made available to all.

Begin today to offer every area of your life in obedience to live as Jesus lived. Tell others about the good news. Go to the places that are uncomfortable and start loving the people who live in the margins of your life. In doing so you might just find that God's love flows both ways.

Do you find it difficult to love as Jesus did? Imagine yourself walking through the world and seeing Jesus in every man, woman, and child you encounter. This includes the one you see in the mirror. Would that change your ability to love as Jesus did?

Jesus Values You

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

JOHN 11:25-26

Bible Readings:

John 11

There are times in the middle of a crisis when it is difficult to remember that Jesus values each and every one of us. Life is full of suffering, loss, and moments that crush our souls. So often we cry out to God, “If you had just been here.” We are dumbfounded when his answer is simply, “Do you believe?”

DO I BELIEVE?

Those three little words can feel crushing and complex in the middle of tragedy. Suffering surrounds us and we feel adrift and alone. Where was God? It’s the same question that Martha asked. She called for him to come, knowing he could heal her brother, and he didn’t. She couldn’t understand and if we’re honest, in the middle of our own crushing suffering, we can also have a hard time understanding.

WE WEREN’T ASKED TO SUFFER ALONE

The story of Lazarus and his sisters is beautiful because we see that Jesus is not immune to suffering. He enters in and shares our sorrow. He wasn’t just sad for Mary and Martha. He was sad with them. Yes, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead—a powerful

expression of Jesus’s power over death—but before that he came alongside Mary and Martha in their suffering.

John 11:35 says, “Jesus wept.” How powerful those two words are. Jesus loved Lazarus deeply as well as the sisters. We don’t understand why they had to endure the pain of Lazarus’s death in order for this lesson to be taught. Why did it have to be this family? Why did Jesus have to wait so long to make his point and pour out his grace?

Often our suffering has no answers on this side of eternity. We don’t get the big picture view. What we do get is a God who loves us and never leaves us. Jesus entered into their suffering. He saw them in their pain, and he wept. In the same way, he sees our pain and does not ask us to suffer alone. He stands with us, weeping, and offers us compassion and community in one another. Jesus sees all of us and values our lives, our struggles, and our suffering. It is all part of our story and part of who we are. None of it is outside of God’s grace.

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?

In John 11:26, Jesus asks Martha, “Do you believe this?” It is the same question he asks each of us. Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Do you believe his grace is sufficient and his love is unconditional?

God sees you, values you, and loves you unconditionally. Rest in that.

Do you believe this?

Notes

ⁱ Johann Roten, “Myriam and Mary,” All About Mary, University of Dayton online (Dayton, OH: January 17, 2020), <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/m/myriam-and-mary.php>.

ⁱⁱ Sandra Glahn, ed., *Vindicating the Vixens: Revisiting Sexualized, Vilified, and Marginalized Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2017), 258.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *Twelve Extraordinary Women* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 173.

^{iv} Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988), 9.

^v James Carroll, “Who Was Mary Magdalene?” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 2006, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/who-was-mary-magdalene-119565482/.

^{vi} Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 185.