





## Theme: Jesus Loves People THIS Much! "Women Who Were Seen as Less Than"

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### Weekly Memory Verse:

***18 Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her. – John 20:18***


**Meditation Moments for Monday, May 18** – Read **Luke 8:1-3**. Remember that each Gospel comes from a different community with a different audience after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Luke's Gospel is written to a mostly non-Jewish audience by a physician who also wrote the book of Acts. This passage is the earliest point in Jesus' ministry where any of the gospels named Mary Magdalene. While each Gospel names Mary specifically, they each do so at different points in their telling of the Jesus story. *The Chosen's* depiction of Jesus reaching out to Mary is a "plausible" imagination of how they might have met, based on Luke 8:2. Those who developed *The Chosen* take creative license and their guideline was "plausibility." Scholar Richard B. Vinson noted in the *CEB Study Bible* that the reference to "seven demons" in Luke 8:30 and 11:26 was "a sign of her misery, not her wickedness." Luke's gospel was the most inclusive of women and most often noted Jesus' positive treatment of them.


-  Our usual picture of Jesus' ministry has him traveling the Holy Land with 12 men. Luke expands the picture by naming three women, along with "many others," who not only followed Jesus but, "provided for them out of their resources." Unfortunately, many Christians have believed that Jesus only valued men to continue his ministry on earth. How does Luke's direct report alter any of your ideas about men and women in church leadership?
-  When we read that "seven demons had been thrown out" of Mary we sometimes think of horror films. But there was not as much knowledge of physical

and mental health in the first century as we know today. Demons in the first century could be anything such as unexplained physical illnesses, psychiatric disorders, or addictions. While we don't know details, Mary was a troubled person until she met Jesus, who set her free from these demons. What destructive habits, beliefs or influences has Jesus set you free from? How do you express your gratitude? What do you wish Jesus would free you from? Freedom starts by being honest and naming them.

**Prayer:** *Lord God, thank you for the "demons" you have freed me from. Help me to give ALL my demons to you. Please continue to guide me to grow in the freedom you came to offer me from all that is destructive. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 19** – Read **Matthew 27:55-56, 61 and Mark 15:40-47**. Mary Magdalene's name was not used in the gospel of Matthew or Mark until Jesus died on the cross. We might not notice a detail that showed her importance to the early Christians. Mary Magdalene is always listed first in groups of named female disciples. It is especial profound to note the difference between the female disciples who stayed with Jesus while Jesus' male disciples betrayed him in [Matthew 26:48-49](#); abandoned him in [Matthew 26:56](#); and denied they knew him in [Matthew 26:69-75](#). It was the women who seemed to show great strength and faithfulness through the fear and terror of the crucifixion.

 The scene of Jesus' crucifixion was not a quite "devotional" moment, unlike some paintings we may see. The Romans deliberately made crucifixions as horrifying as possible. They wanted them to terrify people about the consequences of falling afoul of their Roman overlords. What kind of gritty, determined love for Jesus would it have taken for the women to stay at the scene to the bitter end?

 There was another reason the Romans and the Temple rulers who demanded Jesus' death may have allowed the women to stay at the scene of the crucifixion. They considered women insignificant, not worth their attention. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary *Matthew for Everyone* that a way Romans and Temple rulers tried to deny Jesus' resurrection was "perhaps the women went to the wrong tomb." Why did Matthew and Mark make it plain that the women knew exactly where Jesus' body was?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you triggered profound loyalty in Mary Magdalene when you delivered her from the destructive forces in her life. Grow in me that same loyalty and commitment as I recognize how you have delivered me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 20** – Read **Matthew 28:1 and Mark 16:1**. Jesus' resurrection is just a "given" to many of us who follow Jesus, and even some who don't. But neither Matthew nor Mark tried to pretend that Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" went to the tomb on that fateful Sunday morning because they expected Jesus to be alive. Matthew made it sound like curiosity led them there. Mark tells us they also brought the traditional spices to finish anointing Jesus' dead body to honor their rabbi and master. After all, they'd seen him die, hadn't they?

- 🔥 Author Philip Yancey, in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, wrote, “We who read the Gospels from the other side of Easter, who have the day printed on our calendars, forget how *hard* it was for the disciples to believe.” Imagine Mary Magdalene, carrying spices to finish properly preparing Jesus’ dead body for burial, instead finding no body at all in the tomb she knew had held it on Friday. What would **you** think if you were in her shoes?
- 🔥 Yancey also noted, “People who discount Jesus’ resurrection tend to portray the disciples... as gullible rubes with a weakness for ghost stories.” But Matthew didn’t say the Mary’s told each other, “He’s risen!” It took a messenger from heaven, like at the birth of Jesus. Matthew 28:5-6 reads, “The angel said to the women, ‘Don’t be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn’t here, because he’s been raised from the dead, just as he said.’” What, other than reality, could have moved people who **knew** Jesus was dead to believe he’d risen?

**Prayer:** *Jesus, thank you for Mary Magdalene’s faithfulness when she thought you were dead, that she went to the tomb to make her amazing discovery that Sunday morning, and that she was willing to hear the messenger and believe! Amen.*


**Thursday, May 21** – Read **Luke 24:1-4 and 9-11**. We read in Luke 1:3 that the gospel writer “investigated everything carefully.” He added a strikingly honest note about Mary Magdalene in his resurrection report. Like Matthew and Mark, he said the women went to the tomb to ready Jesus’ body for burial, and an angel told them Jesus was alive. But, he said, when the women gave the apostles the news, “their words struck the apostles as nonsense.” Remember that Luke tells us in 8:1-3 that these are women who’ve been with the group since Galilee. That doesn’t seem to matter as the men seem to dismiss their testimony as that of hysterical and emotional women.


- 🔥 When he wrote his gospel, Luke clearly believed the women’s testimony. But he chose to honestly report the realities of the world he lived in. All four Gospels tell us the women were the first witnesses of the resurrection, a fact that no conspirator in the first century would have invented. Jewish courts did not even accept the testimony of female witnesses. Who do you think the initial response of the male disciples disappointed more: the women or Jesus himself?

- 🔥 The disciples’ understanding of God didn’t have room for God’s reality. Scholar N.T. Wright says in *Luke for Everyone*, “The resurrection itself would be a large-scale event. After Israel’s great and final suffering, all God’s people would be given new life, new bodies... nobody had ever dreamed that one single living person would be killed stone dead and then raised to a new sort of bodily life the other side of the grave, while the rest of the world carried on.” Why do we need to hold our ideas of God in ways that let God surprise us?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, people who knew and loved you said that, against all their expectations, you were fully alive again. Save me from being too smart to believe their eyewitness testimony. Amen.*


**Friday, May 22** – Read **John 20:1-2 and 10-13**. John's gospel gave the largest, most personal account of what Mary Magdalene felt on Easter morning. It seems likely that at some time John got to listen as Mary told **her** story of that morning. But all through his gospel, John focused on the MEANING of what happened. Jesus or John mentions life or eternal life forty-seven times in the gospel. That's more than Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined. John's gospel anticipated Jesus' defeat of death.

 Each of the Gospels tell us there is at least one angel, the Greek word for "messenger," at the empty tomb. John, however, tells us there are two angels, sitting inside the tomb on the ledge "where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot." Exodus 25:19-22 tells us there are two angels on either end of the Ark of the Covenant, with their wings making the "mercy seat." How did John's detail say the risen Jesus fulfilled what the ancient ark symbolically pointed to, which was God's presence?

 The detail in John 20:6-6 is also important: "Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place." If the body had been, the spiced grave clothes and head covering would not have been removed and laid neatly to the side. How did the grave clothes mean Mary's initial guess fell well short of what had really happened?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, keep the wonder of the resurrection alive in me. Transform how I see the world and my role in it. You have overcome death and disbelief. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 23** – Read **John 20:14-18**. We come to the glorious final point of Mary Magdalene's story. In verse 15, Jesus called her "Woman." This was as rude then as it sounds today. He spoke to his mother that way in [John 2:3-4](#). But after she stated her sorrowful question, it got personal. Jesus simply called her name— "Mary"—and she replied "Rabbouni," the personal form of the more formal "Rabbi". In that moment of connection, Mary's sorrow turned to joy in a flash. Jesus knew her. She was not a statistic, not as a woman with a troubled past, but she was known by name. He trusted her, commissioning her as the first witness to his resurrection: "Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them." Scholar N. T. Wright said in *John for Everyone*, "If someone in the first century had wanted to invent a convincing story about people seeing Jesus, they wouldn't have dreamed of giving the star part to a woman. Let alone Mary Magdalene." Jesus knew her, trusted her, empowered her. The human barriers of gender and reputation were all gone in his new creation.

 John used a symbol to point to that new creation. Jesus body was placed in a tomb in a garden. The Gospel opens with the words "In the beginning," the same words that open the Book of Genesis. Genesis starts in a garden where paradise is restored, and Jesus is going to restore paradise in a garden tomb. Mary even mistook Jesus for a "gardener." How has Jesus' creative power brought newness and restoration in your life? How can you join in that work of restoring the world to God's original intention?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, fill me, like Mary Magdalene and those first witnesses to the resurrection, with your light and life. Guide me to ways to share it with others. Amen.*

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