

Women of Mission¹



SABBATH—AUGUST 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 8:41–55; John 4:1–40; Acts 16:14–16; Acts 18:1–3, 24–28; Romans 16:3–5.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘So I [Jesus] tell you [Simon] this. Her [Mary’s] many sins have been forgiven. She has loved a lot. But the one who has been forgiven little loves only a little’ ” (Luke 7:47, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Women often did not have much power outside the home in Jesus’ day. But the New Testament shows that they were important in pushing forward the mission of the church.

WOMEN PLAY IMPORTANT PARTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE. They include good and bad queens, righteous (holy) maidens (young women who are not married), praying mothers, powerful leaders, influential² wives, big-hearted givers, prostitutes,³ prophets,⁴ deaconesses, kind hosts, and faithful supporters and friends of Jesus.

In the New Testament we find examples of how Jesus worked with women. At the same time, many women followed Jesus and supported Him with money (Luke 8:1–3). They also helped care for His needs (Mark 15:41). Jesus ministered to (helped) women in several examples. When many of His disciples (followers) deserted Jesus at His death, women remained true and stayed with Him at the cross. Women were the first witnesses of His resurrection (return to life from death).

This week we will look at just a few of the women in the New Testament.

1. mission—the special duty (work) for Jesus that a church sends a person or a group out to do.

2. influential—having a good or positive effect on someone or something.

3. prostitutes—men or women who earn a living by taking money for sex.

4. prophets—men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 31**BREAKING THE RULES
(Galatians 3:28)**

In the Jewish society where Jesus lived and worked, women were kept out of public life. At Sabbath worship, they were just watchers. They did not participate in services.

In public, men were limited in how much they could talk to a woman, even their wives. Women were not allowed to study the Torah.⁵ They were not even allowed to touch the Bible because they might “pollute” it.

Jesus used a different method. Women were His beloved children just as much as men. His death covered them just as much as any man.

Rabbis (Jewish religious teachers) of the time were not permitted to teach women. But Jesus happily did. In one example, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, sat at His feet like a pupil (Luke 10:38–42).

Prejudice⁶ against women entered every part of life. Men were allowed to divorce women, even for very poor reasons. But women were not allowed to divorce men, even for the most serious offense (crime). Jesus had strong words to say about the current practice of divorce. This kind of practice treated women as if they



Mary, the sister of Lazarus, sat at Jesus' feet like a learner.

were objects (slaves) owned by men (Matthew 19:3–8).

In the space of two chapters in Luke, Jesus breaks the rules by touching a woman the law says is sinful. He touches a dead girl and brings her back to life (Luke 8:41, 42, 49–55). He allows a hemorrhaging (bleeding) woman to touch Him (Luke 8:43–48). He lets a “prostitute” wash His feet (Luke 7:37–39). Read each of those stories. What principles (rules) do you think led Jesus to break these laws? How can those principles be used today?

While He was on earth, Jesus broke down earthly, human prejudices. As the apostle⁷ Paul said, “There is no

5. Torah—the law of Moses; also, the writings of Moses, which include the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

6. prejudice—(1) hating a person because of his or her skin color, religion, or sex; not liking a person because he or she is different from you; not liking someone because he or she looks different or does things differently; (2) a negative opinion or a negative, pre-judged feeling a person has against another person or thing.

7. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus returned to heaven.

Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free person. There is no male or female. Because you belong to Christ Jesus, you are all one” (Galatians 3:28, NIV).

What kind of prejudices are you still holding against any group? How can you recognize those prejudices? More important, why must you overcome them?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 1

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL: PART 1 (John 4:27)

The separation between Jews and Samaritans⁸ was long and bitter (for its historical background, read 2 Kings 17:24–41). The Jewish exiles⁹ returned from Babylon and tried to rebuild Jerusalem’s temple and walls. But the Samaritans tried to stop their work (read Ezra 4:7–22 and Nehemiah 4:1–5). Events such as this and the quarrel over the true site for the temple caused both groups to hate each other. For a Jewish person to call another Jewish person a Samaritan was a terrible insult. Once, a group of people tried to insult Jesus by calling Him demon-possessed and a Samaritan (John 8:48).

The most direct and quickest route

between Jerusalem in the south and Galilee in the north was through Samaria. But when Jews made this trip, they would often take a longer route around Samaria. By taking this longer route, they would avoid their long and bitter enemies.

Look up the following verses in Luke. What do they show about Christ’s attitude (feeling) toward Samaritans? What should this tell us about what our attitudes must be toward those hated by our own culture? Luke 9:51–56; Luke 10:30–37; Luke 17:11–19.

In more than one example, the Gospel writers¹⁰ show Jesus traveling directly through Samaria. One time on His way from Judea to Galilee, He stopped at the Samaritan town of Sychar. It was the site of Jacob’s well and near Mount Gerizim, the holy place for the Samaritans. It was the site of their temple. There Jesus had His famous conversation not just with a Samaritan but a Samaritan woman (read John 4).

Much to the woman’s surprise, Jesus asks her if she would get water for Him to drink. Jesus’ action shocks her because Jesus was a Jew and she was a Samaritan and a woman!

8. Samaritans—people from Samaria living in what was once the northern kingdom of Israel. After the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrian army from the north, many Jews intermarried with non-Jews. Together they settled in an area called Samaria, north of the southern kingdom of Judah. The Samaritans were greatly hated by the Jews living in the southern kingdom of Judah.

9. exiles—people who are forced to live in a country that is not their home country. The Jews of the southern kingdom were taken as prisoners or slaves to Babylon for 70 years. Then they were freed by the Babylonians to go back to their homeland in Judah.

10. Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the Gospels. The four Gospels tell the story of Jesus’ life and His teachings.



Jesus shocks the woman at the well by speaking to her, a Samaritan woman.

As Jesus speaks to this woman, He breaks several cultural¹¹ rules. The apostle John says that when he and the other disciples returned, they “were surprised to find him talking with a woman” (John 4:27, NIV). It was not thought to be proper for a man, even a religious teacher, to be seen talking to a woman of the hated people.

Jesus did not let social rules stop His mission. How do you find the right balance between not breaking social rules and doing what is right?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 2

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL: PART 2 (John 4:1–40)

Read John 4:1–40 about Christ’s meeting with the woman. In what

way does Jesus connect the woman’s daily life to the spiritual truth He wants to share? How was Jesus able to connect to her spiritual needs?

The woman is so excited by what she has seen and heard that she rushes back to town. She does not even bother to take her water jar (John 4:28). She has met the Messiah, and she just has to share the news with others.



The woman at the well is so excited by what Jesus tells her that she rushes back to town, forgetting her water jar.

The first part of her testimony¹² is an invitation for the townspeople to meet the Man who knew her life story (verse 29). Here is a simple but time-tested truth about witnessing. Our mission is not to convert (change) people. Our job is to sow the seed of

11. cultural—having to do with the ideas, skills, arts, tools, and way of life of a certain people at a certain time.

12. testimony—the many good things a person tells to others about what God has done for him or her.

the good news in people's hearts and bring them to Jesus. From there, the Holy Spirit oversees their spiritual change. The people later say after meeting Jesus, " 'We no longer believe just because of what you said. We have now heard for ourselves. We know that this man really is the Savior of the world' " (John 4:42, NlrV).

The second part of the woman's testimony is a question—"Is not this the Christ?" (verse 29, KJV).

Many lessons could be taken from this story. But one important point is that Jesus clearly broke the rules of His time. He witnessed to a Samaritan woman. And this woman became His messenger and evangelist¹³ for the gospel.

Jesus helps a Samaritan woman to be a witness for Him. She was not the purest kind of person to begin with. At times it seems as though Jesus tried hard to go against every social rule of His time. What lessons should we learn from this for ourselves about who is or is not qualified to work for the Lord?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 3

WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH (Acts 16:14, 15)

Throughout the book of Acts and in Paul's letters, women are often named as playing a part in the early church. The early Christians did not worship in churches. Instead, they

met in people's homes, often around the meal table.

Many of these homes were owned by women such as Lydia, a businesswoman who traded purple cloth. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke met her in Philippi, in Macedonia, when they worshiped on Sabbath with a group of women by the river.

In Acts 16:14, 15, what part does Lydia play in the early church?

What a rich story must lie behind these few words. In two sentences Lydia accepts Jesus. She witnesses about her newfound beliefs to her entire household. She is baptized¹⁴ with her household. And she opens up her home to the apostles. Lydia is the first recorded convert (new believer) in Europe. And her home is the base (center) from which the apostles minister (work) in the area.



Lydia was a businesswoman, who traded purple cloth in Philippi. She accepts Jesus and opens her house to the apostles.

13. evangelist—a Christian who preaches the gospel (good news) of Christ to many people at one time.

14. baptized—to be put completely under water and be brought up out of it. This shows that Jesus has forgiven this person's sins and has given him or her a new life.

From Acts 18:1–3, 24–28; Romans 16:3–5; and 1 Corinthians 16:19, how was the Lord able to use Priscilla for ministry?

After some time in Corinth, Paul sailed to Syria with Priscilla and Aquila. Here Priscilla and Aquila opened up their home to a Jew named Apollos and taught him about Jesus (Acts 18:24–26). Apollos later became a great help to the church in Achaia (Greece) (verses 27, 28).

Romans 16:3–5 explains that Paul was giving his thanks to both Priscilla and her husband. Clearly, Priscilla had an important part in the work of the early church. And Paul wanted to give her credit for it. How can we be more sensitive in supporting women in whatever they do?

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 4

**“I COMMEND TO YOU PHOEBE”
(Romans 16:1, NKJV)**

Women were limited by social rules and expectations. But in the early Christian church they honored themselves through lives of service. The Bible does not give many details. But it is clear that women played an active part in the mission of the church.

What important principle can we get from this one short verse in Romans 16:1?

Paul is writing to the church in Rome. He praises a woman by the name of Phoebe and speaks of her as “our sister” (Romans 16:1, NIV). Phoebe belonged to the church in Cenchrea—a port city a few miles from the city of Corinth.

Paul describes Phoebe as “a servant of the church” (verse 1, NIV). In his writings, Paul often uses the Greek word *diakonos*. *Diakonos* means a “servant” and in other places “deacon.” Here it means that Phoebe was one who served the church. Paul continues, “She has been a great help to many people, including me” (verse 2, NIV).

Many other women in the New Testament are known for their good works. What can we learn from Acts 9:36; Romans 16:7, 12; Philippians 4:2, 3; Philemon 2, and the verses already studied about the different positions women held in the early days of Christianity?

Women played an important part behind the scenes in supporting the early church. Many played leading parts in the work of sharing the good news. No doubt, in the closing work of the gospel, women will continue to have an important part.

Man or woman, how can you best use your gifts in the work of ministry (work done for Jesus) and mission?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 5

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “As soon as the Samaritan woman who talked with Jesus at Jacob’s well found the Savior, she brought others to Him. She proved herself a better missionary¹⁵ than Jesus’ own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to show that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were fixed upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that there was a harvest of souls around them. But through the woman a city full of people was brought to hear Jesus.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 102.

“The Lord has a work for both women and men to do. They can do a good work for God, if they will learn first in the school of Christ the all-important lesson of being humble. They must carry the name of Christ and also have His spirit within themselves.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, December 4, 1907.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ In some parts of the world, women do not have any leadership parts in the

church. People often think of this as just a cultural issue. But others see it as a serious religious issue. When do customs and cultural issues become religious issues?

❷ Ellen G. White says that the woman at the well proved a better missionary than Jesus’ disciples did. What special strengths can women bring to the mission of the church? Without getting into the serious issue of the ordination¹⁶ of women, how can we better support and involve the women who are part of our movement and message?

❸ As a class, talk about Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Take that story and put it into your own culture. Imagine Jesus working with someone who is hated by your own culture.¹⁷ What can you learn from this example about what the gospel command¹⁸ is really all about?

SUMMARY: Throughout the New Testament, women appear more in background parts. But Jesus and the apostle Paul often praised women—for their acts of love and mercy and for pushing forward the mission of the church.

15. missionary—a person sent out by a church to spread its religion in a foreign country.

16. ordination—a very special service and prayer that makes a person an official minister (preacher), elder, or deacon in the church.

17. culture—the way people live, dress, think, eat, and socialize with one another.

18. gospel command—Jesus’ command to spread the gospel or the good news that He saves us from our sins and gives us eternal (forever) life.