

Women and Discipleship¹



SABBATH—JANUARY 26

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 5:25–34; Luke 1:26–38; Luke 8:1–3; Luke 10:38–42; John 4:4–30.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I serve the Lord,’ Mary answered. ‘May it happen to me just as you said it would’ ” (Luke 1:38, NlrV).

WOMEN WERE VERY MUCH INVOLVED IN CHRIST'S MINISTRY (WORK), even from the start. Mary, His earthly mother, gave birth to the Baby Jesus. Of course, only a woman could have done that. But Mary's example of faith remains a powerful witness for all who would try to be disciples of Jesus. We can see the important work of women all through the Gospels.² We will study Mary, the mother of Jesus, the woman who touched His garment (robe) and was healed, the woman at the well, and others. From them, it is clear that a woman open to the leading of God's grace can be a follower and disciple of Christ.

We will try to better understand what it means to be a disciple. So, this week we will study how Jesus worked with women.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON IN BRIEF (SHORT): What wonderful things was Mary, Jesus' mother, asked to accept on faith? What does the Bible say about the part of women in the ministry of Jesus? What can we learn about discipleship from the story of the woman at the well?

1. discipleship—the practice of accepting Jesus and following Him.

2. Gospels—the books in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called Gospels.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 27**“BE IT UNTO ME” (Luke 1:26–38)**

Try to put yourself in the position of Mary in Luke 1:26–38. What can we learn about her character³ from these verses? What very difficult things was she told to believe?

In Jesus’ society, people accepted spiritual and heavenly things more quickly than we do today. But the angel’s words to Mary must have tested her faith to the limit. *First, she would be pregnant though still a virgin.* Had that ever happened before in the history of the world? If that were not hard enough, her child would be the Son of God. Mary’s question, “How shall this be?” was natural and normal enough. But the angel pointed her to the miracle of her cousin Elizabeth, who gave birth to a child in old age (Luke 1:5–25). Then the angel gave her the powerful promise, “For with God nothing will be impossible” (verse 37, NlrV). Mary answered with strong faith and acceptance.

Read prayerfully and carefully Mary’s answer to the angel: “May it happen to me just as you said it would” (verse 38, NlrV). What kind of attitude (feeling) does this show? What kind of model of faith does Mary’s example give to us?



The angel Gabriel told Mary that her Child would be the Son of God. As with Mary, we are asked to believe in things we do not fully understand.

For many hundreds of years, discussion has gone on about the question of the Incarnation (the coming of Jesus as a human). But the subject remains something we cannot completely understand. Imagine how much this young woman did not understand about what was happening to her. And Mary did not know much about what went on. But she surrendered (gave) herself in faith to the Lord and wanted His will to be done.

Like Mary, we are asked to believe in things we do not fully understand. Compare⁴ your spirit to the spirit of faith Mary showed here. How open are you to trusting God on the things you just do not understand?

3. character—who you are. All the things a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of. Your character is the sum of the choices you make such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

4. compare—to show how things are the same.

MONDAY—JANUARY 28**FEMALE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS
(Luke 8:1–3)**

Luke 8:1–3 describes Jesus’ second Galilean tour (trip). Along with the Twelve original disciples, who else went with Jesus on this tour?

Luke is very clear that women went with Jesus on His missionary trips. This should be no surprise, because Luke’s Gospel focuses on how Jesus helped the outcasts,⁵ the women.

“Luke is the only gospel writer to record much about the early life of Jesus. Luke often does so from the viewpoint of the women such as Mary, Elisabeth, and Anna. . . . It is as if Luke were saying that the gospel [the good news] of the kingdom of heaven was for both women and men equally. It is also Luke’s way of saying that the women’s part in the Gospel was equally important.”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 769, 770.

Jesus’ act of encouraging female disciples set him apart from other teachers. Different religions in that time did not include women. Some teachers said that women were empty-headed and should not be taught. Women should not be seen in public with men. They should remain home to cook and care for children. But, from the earliest pages of the

Gospel right up to the end, women were involved in the life and mission of Jesus.

What more do the verses in Matthew 27:55, 56 and Mark 15:40, 41 add about the role (work) of women in the ministry of Jesus?

Some of these women were healed of different diseases. They showed their love by helping Jesus in His work and caring for Him. Some of the women might have been widows since they were part of the missionary tour and had money to support the needs of Jesus and His disciples. The Bible shows that women had an important role (part) in the earliest days of the church.



Mary, Joanna, and Susanna showed their love by helping Jesus in His work and caring for Him (Luke 8:1–3).

What should Galatians 3:28 tell us about how much prejudice⁶ goes

5. outcasts—people who are rejected by society.

6. prejudice—strong opinion or feeling that is formed without hearing both sides of an issue; pre-judged feeling against people who are different from us.

against the principles (laws) of Christ? Examine your own heart. What attitude (feeling) and prejudices might you have that go against God's Word?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 29

“IF I MAY TOUCH HIS CLOTHES . . .” (Mark 5:25–34, KJV)

Read the famous story in Mark 5:25–34 about the woman healed from a depressing disease. The story does not say the woman is a disciple. But she showed the kind of faith so important for discipleship.

Notice the interesting difference between how the woman tried to reach Jesus and how Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue (Jewish church), did (Mark 5:22, 23).

What were the different ways in how they reached Jesus? At the same time, what was the one thing about them both that was the same?

This woman had not seen Jesus before. According to the verse, when the woman first heard of Jesus, she came to Him. Someone had witnessed to her, telling her of this Man. And she moved ahead in faith, even without seeing anything for herself. This was her first act of faith (read also John 20:29; Hebrews 11:1).

No question! The woman felt a great need. Jewish religious law made her unclean. People were not to touch

her because she was unclean. If she had been married, she would not have been able to have sex with her husband. And she would not even have been able to touch her own children. All this for twelve years!

What was the next great act of faith on her part?

The woman tried to touch Jesus secretly. But Jesus turned it into a public example. She told Him (and everyone listening) what had happened. By giving her own testimony, she did her first act as a disciple. Now the whole event was known to the public. So, how much easier it would be for her to tell others about what Jesus had done for her. She had come to Jesus because she had heard about Him. Now she could tell others about Him, too.



The woman in Mark 5:25–34 touches Jesus and is healed. She showed the kind of faith that disciples must have.

Why must we continue to trust in

the Lord even when healing does not come? If we stop trusting, what do we have left?

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 30

TROUBLED BY MANY THINGS (Luke 10:38–42)

To be a disciple, we need to know Jesus very well. We must have a close relationship with Him. This can come only by spending time with Him. In our busy modern lives, many important things demand our time and attention. So, it is very easy to get involved in things and forget God.

How does Luke 10:38–42 show from Martha’s experience that even good things can pull our attention away from what is most important? What message for you can be found in the story of these two female “disciples”?

Mary heard Jesus’ word. No one can be a true disciple who does not hear His word. The verse said, too, that Mary also sat at His feet. First-century teachers sat on high stools while their students sat at their feet on lower stools or the floor. To sit at one’s feet means to be a disciple or learner. That Mary sat at Jesus’ feet meant that she was His student. (Compare Acts 22:3.)



That Mary sat at Jesus’ feet meant she was His student.

But her sister Martha was different. The Greek text says that she was “drawn away (overtired)” by much serving. In a way, we can understand Martha’s problem. After all, the Master had come to their house. So it was the responsibility of both sisters to care for their guests’ needs. At the same time, Martha’s plea that her sister help also showed a normal social custom. Mary’s place was in the kitchen. It was the part of the household for women only, not in the dining area with the men.

But Jesus did not rebuke (scold) Mary. He scolded Martha. He named her twice, perhaps showing His caring love. Martha was correct in making her complaints. But Jesus’ rebuke reminds us there are issues more important than other necessary things. We all need to be very careful because

sometimes we let necessary things cause us to forget God and spiritual matters. But God and spiritual matters are more important.

How can you find the proper balance in your own life between things that must be done and spending time at the feet of Jesus? What changes would you need to make? At the same time, can one ever be too much like Mary and not enough like Martha? If so, how?

THURSDAY—JANUARY 31

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL (John 4:4–30)

How did Jesus win the faith of this woman in John 4:4–30 and turn her into a disciple?

The method of winning the woman of Samaria deserves the most careful study in how to win others to Christ.

There were four important parts in this method: (1) the awakening of a desire for something better (verses 7–15); (2) the awakening of an awareness (knowledge) of personal need (verses 16–20); (3) the call for a decision (choice) to accept Jesus as the Messiah (verses 21–26); and (4) the desire to act on the decision (verses 26–30 and 39–42).

Think about what must have gone on in the mind of this woman. First, this stranger, a Jew (Jesus), shows her much kindness. Next, He shows

her some of her deepest and darkest secrets that only she knew and no one else did. Her answer, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet” (John 4:19, NIV) is a confession. It is both a confession of her own sins and a confession that Jesus is Someone special. When the woman tried to change the subject, Jesus did not push her any more with her sins. Instead, Jesus picked up on her conversation and used it to point to more truth. He slowly led her back to Himself. This time He did not focus on Himself as a prophet but as the Messiah. The woman was so impressed with Jesus’ knowledge of her secrets that she believed Him.

Look at how the woman witnessed to her own people (verses 29, 39). What so impressed her about Jesus? Could there have been a bit of a confession in her own witness? How well did this witness work?

The Lord changed this sinful woman into a powerful witness for Himself. What lessons can you learn from this story about (1) not judging the hearts of others and (2) forgiveness and grace even for the worst of sinners?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 1

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5,

pages 607, 608, 656, 657, 669, 670, 785, 786, 940–942; Ellen G. White, “Lazarus, Come Forth,” pages 524–536, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The ‘one thing’ that Martha needed was a calm, spiritual spirit. She needed to care for knowledge about the future, eternal life, and how she could improve her spiritual life. She needed to worry less about the things which will not last forever. She needed to be more concerned about things that will last forever. Jesus would teach His children to take every opportunity [chance] of gaining that knowledge. This knowledge will make them wise unto salvation [God’s plan for saving sinners].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 525.

“The Gospel of Luke is well known for its focus on Christ’s ministry [work] for the women of Palestine and their work for Him. This was something new, because the role [work] of Jewish women in public life had been rather unimportant, except for a few examples such as the prophet⁷ Elisha. Prophets like Elisha had helped women and, in turn, women had helped them.”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 769.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Go back over the story of Mary being told about becoming Jesus’ mother. Again, think about what wonderful things she was told to believe. These are the things that she could not possibly understand. Think about many of the things we as Christians are told to believe that we cannot possibly understand. But we still have faith and even reasons to believe them. Bring your thoughts about this to class. And as a class, talk about these things. Discuss why we can and should believe God, no matter what we fail to understand. How can we help others who are struggling to believe in things that have to be taken on faith?

❷ In most countries, the membership of the church seems to be largely female. So why should the church not discourage female discipleship?

❸ Jesus was positive in His influence⁸ on people. No one was ignored or rejected in His presence. Modern-day disciples should copy Him and use His example for all classes, cultures,⁹ sexes, peoples, and nations. How can you help your local church be a place where all are welcomed and can have a duty to serve Jesus?

7. prophet—a man or woman sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

8. influence—the power to change persons or things.

9. cultures—the ideas, skills, arts, tools, and ways of life of certain people at certain times.