

# Gender *and* Discipleship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Mark 5:25–34, Luke 1:26–38, 8:1–3, 10:38–42, John 4:4–30.*

**Memory Text:** “Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word’ ” (*Luke 1:38, NRSV*).

Women were, one way or another, intimately involved in Christ's ministry, even from the start. Mary, His earthly mother, gave birth to the infant Jesus. Of course, only a woman could have done that, but her example of faith and submission remains a powerful one for all who would seek to be a disciple of Jesus. Then, all through the Gospels, we can see the crucial role of women. From Mary the mother of Jesus, from the woman who touched His garment and was healed, to the woman at the well, and others, it is clear that a woman open to the prompting of God's grace could be a follower and disciple of Christ.

In an attempt to gain more insights into what it means to be a disciple, this week we will take a look at how Jesus interacted with some women.

**The Week at a Glance:** What incredible things was Mary, Jesus' mother, asked to accept on faith? What does the Bible say about the role of women in the ministry of Jesus? What can we learn about discipleship from the story of the woman at the well?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 2.*

## “Be It Unto Me”

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

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Even in an ancient society, where the concept of the supernatural was much more readily accepted than it is in many of our modernistic, scientific cultures, the angel’s words to Mary must have stretched her faith to the limits. 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. Her question, “How shall this be?” was natural and normal enough. But once the angel pointed her to the miracle of her cousin Elisabeth, who conceived in old age (*Luke 1:5–25*), and then gave her the powerful reassurance, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (*vs. 37*), Mary responded with an affirmation of faith and acceptance.

**Read** prayerfully and carefully her response to the angel: “Be it unto me, according to thy word” (*vs. 38*). What kind of attitude does this reveal? What kind of model of faith does Mary’s example provide for us?

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After centuries of theological discussion on the question of the Incarnation (the coming of Jesus in humanity), the subject remains an incredible mystery. Imagine how much this young woman did not understand about what was happening to her. And yet, even with all she did not know, she surrendered herself in faith to the Lord and wanted His will to be done.

**As with Mary, we are asked to believe in things we do not fully understand. Compare your spirit to the spirit of faith Mary represented here. How open are you to trusting God on the things you just do not understand?**

## Female Followers of Jesus

**Luke** 8:1–3 describes Jesus’ second Galilean tour. Besides the Twelve original disciples, who else accompanied Jesus on this tour?

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Luke is very explicit that women accompanied Jesus on His missionary tours. This should not be surprising, because Luke’s Gospel emphasizes the salvation and the release Jesus brought to the outcasts, the women.

“Luke is the only gospel writer to record many of the details of the early life of Jesus, and often does so from the viewpoint of the women most concerned—Mary, Elisabeth, and Anna. . . . It is as if Luke were saying the gospel of the kingdom of heaven was as much for women as for men, and that their part in its proclamation was equally important.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 769, 770.

Jesus’ act of allowing female disciples was unique. Various religious movements in that time did not include women. Some teachers said that women were emptyheaded, were not to be taught, should not be seen in public with men, and should be confined to the home and domestic arts. Yet, from the earliest pages of the Gospel right up to the end, women, in one way or another, were involved in the life and mission of Jesus.

**Read** Matthew 27:55, 56 and Mark 15:40, 41. What more do they add about the role of women in the ministry of Jesus?

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Having been healed of various maladies, some of these women showed their love and devotion by assisting in His work and providing for His sustenance. Some of them might have been widows, since they were part of the missionary tour and had sustenance to provide for the needs of Jesus and His disciples. Whatever the specifics, the Word of God shows that women played an important role in the earliest days of the church.

**Read Galatians 3:28.** Looking beyond the immediate context, what should these words tell about how contrary to the principles of Christ prejudice is? Examine your own heart. What attitude and prejudices might you be holding that are contrary to God’s Word?

## “If I May Touch His Clothes . . .”

**Read** Mark 5:25–34, the famous account of the woman healed from a distressing malady. Though the story does not portray the woman as a disciple per se, she displayed the kind of faith so necessary for discipleship.

Notice the interesting contrast between how she approached Jesus and how Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, did (*Mark 5:22, 23*).

**What** were the differences between their approaches? At the same time, what was the one thing they apparently had in common?

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As far as we can tell, this woman had not seen Jesus before. According to the text, it was when she had heard of Him that she came. 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 (*see also John 20:29, Heb. 11:1*).

No question; according to the texts, the woman was desperate. Levitical law deemed her unclean. People were not to come in physical contact with her. If she had been married, she would not have been allowed intimate relations with her husband; in fact, technically, she would not even have been able to touch her own children. All this for 12 years!

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

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However secretly the woman sought to act, Jesus turned it into a public display. She told Him (and everyone listening) what had happened. By giving her own testimony, she did her first act as a disciple. Now that the whole event was known publicly, 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; she now could tell others about Him, as well.

**Why must we continue to trust in the Lord even when healing, as or when we want it, does not come? If we stop trusting, what have we left?**

## Troubled by Many Things

In order to be a disciple, we need to know Jesus personally. We must have a close relationship with Him. This can come only by spending time with Him. In our busy lives, with so many important things vying for our time, how easy it is to get caught up in things, even good and important things, and let our relationship with God slip.

**Read** Luke 10:38–42. How does this episode reveal how even good things can distract us from what is most important? What message for you can be found in the story of these two female “disciples”?

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Mary *heard His word*. No one can be a true disciple who does not hear His word. The text said, too, that she 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 adopt the posture of a disciple or learner. That she sat at Jesus’ feet meant that she was His student (*compare Acts 22:3*).

In contrast was her sister, Martha. The Greek text says that she was “drawn away” by much serving. In one sense, this could be understandable. After all, the Master had come to their house, so it was their responsibility to tend to their guests’ needs. At the same time, her plea that her sister help also echoed customary conventional values and expectations. Mary’s place was in the kitchen—the part of the household designated for women—not in the dining area with the men.

Yet, Jesus did not rebuke Mary; He chided Martha. He named her twice, perhaps showing concern. Martha’s complaints were justified, but Jesus’ rebuke reminds us there are issues more important than other necessary things. We all need to take heed, for sometimes we allow the urgent to crowd out the important or the good to exclude the vital and necessary.

**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 adjustments might you need to make? At the same time, can one ever be too much like Mary and not enough like Martha? If so, how?**

## The Woman at the Well

**Read** John 4:4–30. How did Jesus go about winning the confidence of this woman and, essentially, turning her into a disciple?

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The process of winning the woman of Samaria deserves the most careful study on the part of all who set out to win others to Christ.

There were four main stages in this process: (1) The awakening of a desire for something better (*vss. 7–15*); (2) The awakening of a conviction of personal need (*vss. 16–20*); (3) The call for a decision to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (*vss. 21–26*); (4) The stimulus to action appropriate to the decision (*vss. 26–30, 39–42*).

Imagine what must have gone on in the mind of this woman. First, this stranger, a Jew, shows her unexpected kindness. The next thing she knows, He reveals to her some of her deepest and darkest secrets, something that most likely no one but she knew. Her response, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet” (*vs. 19*), is a confession, not only of her own sins but that Jesus is Someone special. Notice, too, that when the woman sought to change the subject, Jesus did not press her anymore with her sins. Instead, He picked up on her conversation and used it to point to more truth, ultimately leading her back to Himself, this time not as a prophet but as the Messiah. Impressed by Jesus—no doubt mostly by His knowledge of her secrets—the woman believed Him.

**Look** at how she witnessed to her own people (*vss. 29, 39*). What so impressed her about Jesus? Might there not have been a bit of a confession in her own witness? How effective was this witness?

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The Lord changed this woman, apparently no bastion of purity and piety, into a powerful witness for Himself. What lessons can you draw from this story about (1) not judging the hearts of others and (2) forgiveness and grace even for the worst of sinners?

**Further Study:** Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 607, 608, 656, 657, 669, 670, 785, 786, 940–942; Ellen G. White, “Lazarus, Come Forth,” pp. 524–536, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The ‘one thing’ that Martha needed was a calm, devotional spirit, a deeper anxiety for knowledge concerning the future, immortal life, and the graces necessary for spiritual advancement. She needed less anxiety for the things which pass away, and more for those things which endure forever. Jesus would teach His children to seize every opportunity of gaining that knowledge which will make them wise unto salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 525.

“One of the characteristics of the Gospel of Luke is its frequent references to Christ’s ministry for the womenfolk of Palestine and the ministry of some of them on His behalf. This was something new, for the role of Jewish women in public life had been a relatively minor one, although in isolated instances, prophets like Elisha had ministered to women and been ministered to by them.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 769.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go back over the story of Mary being told about becoming Jesus’ mother. Again, think about what amazing things she was told to believe, things she could not possibly understand. Think about many of the things we Christians are told to believe that we cannot possibly understand. And though we do not understand them, we still have faith and even reasons to believe them. Bring your thoughts to class and, as a class, talk about these things and why we can and should believe them, regardless of what we do not understand. How can we help others who are struggling to believe in things that, in the end, have to be taken on faith?
- 2 At a time when, in most countries, the membership of the church seems to be predominantly female, why should the church not discourage female discipleship?
- 3 Jesus was revolutionary, transforming, liberating, innovative, restorative, sensitive, and supportive. No one was ignored, marginalized, or ostracized in His presence. Contemporary disciples should emulate Him and model His example for all classes, cultures, genders, peoples, and nations. How can you help your local church be a place where all are welcomed and can find a role in service?

# Chrislam

by DANIEL PEREZ

Only a few of the teenagers attend the little mission school on our island in southern Philippines. Most are embarrassed because they can't read or write and don't want to be teased by their younger siblings who attend the mission school. So these teenage boys spend their time diving in the coral reefs and catching fish. They keep us supplied with fresh fish every day.

We teachers wanted to reach these young men, but we were not sure how. Finally we decided to try to engage them through sports. We told the boys what we wanted to do, and they helped us clear an area to make a simple basketball court. We found a metal ring to use as the hoop and pooled our money to buy a basketball. Then we taught them to play. They enjoyed the game and soon played quite well. We formed teams to encourage them.

We went swimming with them and invited them to eat at our cottage. Sometimes we worshiped with them in their Mosque. We became friends.

During a group massage session we held for the boys, some of them opened their hearts to us. They talked about problems they faced, and we listened. Little by little we realized that they noticed we don't smoke, don't drink fermented coconut juice, and don't eat shellfish. Their religion forbids these things, but they do them anyway.

One day they expressed their questions to us. "Teacher," one said. "You are different from most Christians we know. You don't smoke or drink alcohol or eat pork as most Christians do. Our elders tell us that smoking and drinking alcohol is bad because it destroys the *Masjid* [temple] of Allah.

"We Muslims worship on Friday, and most Christians worship on Sunday. You Adventists are a bridge between Muslims and Christians, and you worship on Saturday. Thus, you live the life of true Islam. That is why we respect you as you live up to what a true child of Allah should be. Thus, we will call you Chrislams, which means Christians who live as Islam."

We were humbled as we realized that our actions had spoken so clearly what our mouths couldn't say to these sincere and open young sons of Islam. Pray for them as they search for the path to the living God. Pray for the student missionaries who teach these children of Allah to truly live for Him.

Our mission offerings help support Mountain View College, which sends student missionaries throughout southern Philippines.

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DANIEL PEREZ is a pseudonym. Because of the sensitive nature of the work in his area, we have chosen to protect his identity.