

# Women in the Ministry of Jesus



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 1:39–55; 2:36–38; 7:11–17, 36–50; Rom. 10:17; Luke 8:1–3; 18:1–8.*

**Memory Text:** “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Galatians 3:26–28, NKJV*).

Luke's Gospel is sometimes called “the Gospel of Women” because, more than any other one, it makes special mention of how caring Jesus was to the needs of women and also of how involved women were in His ministry.

In the time of Jesus, as in some cultures today, women were deemed of little worth. Some Jewish men in that time thanked God that they were not created a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. Greek and Roman society sometimes treated women even worse. Roman culture developed its permissiveness to an almost unlimited licentiousness. A man often had a wife only in order to produce legitimate children who would inherit his property, and he had concubines for his own sinful pleasures.

Against such a backdrop of women being treated so badly, Jesus brought the good news that women are, indeed, daughters of Abraham (*see Luke 13:16*). How happy the women of those days must have been to hear that, in Jesus, they are children of God and of equal worth with men in the sight of God. The message today for women of all nations remains the same: we are all, men and women, one in Christ Jesus.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 9.

## Women Who Welcomed Jesus' Advent

Only Luke records the reaction of these women to the wonder of cosmic history: that the Son of God took human flesh in order to complete the redemptive mission of the Father and to fulfill the Messianic hopes of His people. Though these women didn't fully understand what was happening, their words and reactions to these astonishing events revealed their faith and wonder at the works of God.

**Read** Luke 1:39–45, the encounter between Elizabeth and Mary. What does Elizabeth say that reveals her understanding, however limited, of the great events that were taking place?

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After Elizabeth spoke, Mary then followed with her own words (*Luke 1:46–55*). Often understood to be a song, these words are full of fragments from the Old Testament, attesting that Mary was a devoted student of Scripture and thus a fit mother for Jesus. Mary's song is rooted not only in Scripture but deep down in her relationship with God. An identity emerges between her soul and her Lord, and between her faith and Abraham's hope.

**Read** Luke 2:36–38. What important truths are brought to light in the story of Anna in the temple?

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Expectant hope finds its radical fulfillment in Jesus. An old widow recognizes the miracle, and from then on she made it her compulsive mission to proclaim the Savior to all those who came to the temple. She became the first woman evangelist of the gospel.

**Try to imagine the wonder and astonishment of these women at the events unfolding around them. What can we do to help keep alive in our own hearts the wonder and astonishment of the great truths that we have been called to proclaim?**

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## Women and Jesus' Healing Ministry

Read Luke 7:11–17, the story about the miracle at Nain. This woman, impoverished and widowed, now faced another trial, the death of her only son. A large crowd of mourners was with her in the funeral procession, expressing public grief and sympathy. The loss of her only son coupled with the uncertain future of life alone turned the widow into a picture of absolute sorrow and hopelessness.

But the funeral procession going out of the city met with another procession entering into it. At the head of the outgoing procession was death in a casket; at the head of the incoming procession was life in the majesty of the Creator. As the processions met, Jesus saw the widow, hopeless and full of grief. “When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry’ ” (*Luke 7:13, NIV*). The plea not to cry would have been meaningless had it not come from Jesus, the Lord of life. For behind the command “Don’t cry!” was the power to remove the reason for her crying: Jesus reached forward, touched the coffin, and ordered the young man to arise. The touch was considered a ceremonial defilement (*Num. 19:11–13*), but to Jesus, compassion was more important than ceremonies. Meeting human needs was more urgent than adhering to mere rituals.

The village of Nain not only witnessed a great miracle but also received a marvelous message: in Jesus there is no difference between the emotional pangs of men and those of women. And His presence confronts and confounds the power of death.

Read also Luke 8:41, 42, 49–56. Jairus was an influential person—a ruler of the synagogue, an officer in charge of the care and services of the synagogue. Each Sabbath he would choose the person who would lead in prayer, Scripture reading, and preaching. He was a person not only of eminence and influence but also of wealth and power. He loved his daughter and did not hesitate to approach Jesus for the healing of his child.

**In these stories, it was the power of Jesus' words that brought a dead son back to his mother and a dead daughter back to her father. Think about how incredible these acts must have been to those who saw them, especially to the parents. What do these accounts tell us about the power of God? What do they tell us about just how limited we are in understanding that power? (After all, science at present doesn't have a clue about how this could happen.) Most important, though, what must we do in order to learn to trust in this power and the goodness of the God who wields it, regardless of our present circumstances?**

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## Women of Gratitude and Faith

In Luke 7:36–50, Jesus turned a meal into an event of spiritual magnitude that offered dignity to a sinful woman. Simon, a leading citizen, a Pharisee, invited Jesus for a meal. Invitees seated, there was a sudden disruption: “a woman in the city who was a sinner” (*vs. 37, NKJV*) rushed straight to Jesus, broke an alabaster box of very expensive perfume, poured the ointment on Him, bowed down to His feet, and washed them with her tears.

**What** lessons can we learn from the woman’s outpouring of gratitude and Jesus’ acceptance of her act of faith?

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“When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. . . . Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

In Luke 8:43–48, a case of supreme wretchedness becomes the object of the Savior’s supreme regard. For so long, this woman had an incurable disease that ravaged her body and soul. Yet, in this 12-year tragedy, a flicker of hope suddenly burst on the scene: “She heard about Jesus” (*Mark 5:27, NKJV*).

What did she hear? A little or a lot, we do not know. But she knew that Jesus cared for the poor; He embraced social outcasts; He touched lepers; He turned water into wine; and above all, He cared for desperate people, of which she was one. But hearing was not enough; hearing must lead to faith (*Rom. 10:17*). And that faith led her to a simple act of touching the edge of His garment. That touch was faith-driven, purposeful, efficacious, and Christ-focused. Only such a faith can receive the benediction of the Life-Giver: “ ‘your faith has made you well’ ” (*Luke 8:48, NKJV*).

**It’s so easy to look at people and judge them, isn’t it? Even if we often don’t verbalize it, in our hearts we judge them, which is still so wrong. How can we learn to stop judging others, even in our thoughts, when who knows what we’d do were we in their situations?**

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## Some Women Who Followed Jesus

**Read** Luke 10:38–42. What important spiritual truths can we take from this story (see also Luke 8:14) for ourselves?

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As the hostess, Martha “was distracted with much serving” (*Luke 10:40, NKJV*) and was busy in getting the best for the guests. But Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word” (*vs. 39, NKJV*). So much so that Martha complained to Jesus that she alone was left to do the hard work. While Jesus did not rebuke Martha for her preoccupation with service, He pointed out the need for right priorities in life. Fellowship with Jesus is the first essential in discipleship; potluck can come later.

“The cause of Christ needs careful, energetic workers. There is a wide field for the Marthas, with their zeal in active religious work. But let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus. Let diligence, promptness, and energy be sanctified by the grace of Christ; then the life will be an unconquerable power for good.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 525.

**Read** Luke 8:1–3; 23:55, 56; 24:1–12. What do these verses teach about the role of women in Christ’s ministry?

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As His ministry expanded, Jesus “went through every city and village, preaching” and teaching (*Luke 8:1, NKJV*), with the 12 disciples accompanying Him. Luke also records the powerful testimonies of certain women whom Jesus had healed, who were touched by His preaching, and who were of wealth, also followed Him in His enlarged ministry. Here are some whom Luke mentions: (1) certain women healed of evil spirits, including Mary Magdalene; (2) Joanna, wife of Chuza, business manager of Herod; (3) Susanna; and (4) “many others who provided for Him” (*vs. 3, NKJV*).

**When we understand that Jesus died for every human being, we can better grasp the true equality of every person before God. How well do we reflect this truth in our attitude toward others? That is, how can you root out, if necessary, any attitude in which you might tend to look down upon others as somehow less worthy than yourself?**

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## Persistent in Prayer, Sacrificial in Giving

Luke shows how Jesus turned to two widows in order to teach important spiritual truths.

In the first case (*Luke 18:1–8*), Jesus pitied a poor and powerless widow who was up against a wicked and powerful judge in her fight for justice. She was a victim of injustice and fraud, and yet she believed in the rule of the law and in justice. But the judge was anti-God and anti-people, and so he obviously did not care to help the widow. Caring for widows is a biblical requirement (*Exod. 22:22–24, Ps. 68:5, Isa. 1:17*), but the judge took delight in ignoring the law. However, the widow had one weapon, perseverance, and with it she wore out the judge and got her justice.

The parable teaches three important lessons: (1) always pray and never get discouraged (*Luke 18:1*), (2) prayer changes things—even the heart of an evil judge, and (3) persistent faith is a conquering faith. True faith has eternal counsel to every Christian: never give up, even if that means waiting for the final vindication when the “‘Son of Man comes’” (*vs. 8, NKJV*).

In the second case (*Luke 21:1–4, Mark 12:41–44*), no sooner had Jesus finished denouncing the religious hypocrisy and pretension of the scribes and the leaders around the temple than He pointed out a stark contrast to them: a poor widow who reveals the nature of genuine religion.

Jesus described some of the religious leaders as those who “‘devour widows’ houses’” (*Luke 20:47, NKJV*) and who violate the biblical mandate to care for the widows and the poor. As today, many gave only in order to look pious; and worse, what they gave, they gave out of their own surplus wealth. Their giving really involved no personal sacrifice. In contrast, Jesus asked His disciples to look to the widow as the model of true religion, for she gave all that she had.

Show was the motive of the first group; sacrifice and the glory of God was the motive of the widow. To acknowledge God’s ownership of all that she had and to serve Him with all she had was the force that propelled the widow to give her two mites. What counts before the all-seeing eyes of the Creator is not what we give but why we give; not how much we give but the measure of our sacrifice.

**How much do you sacrifice of yourself for the good of others and for the cause of God?**

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**Further Study:** He “who remembered His mother when He was hanging in agony upon the cross; who appeared to the weeping women and made them His messengers to spread the first glad tidings of a risen Saviour—He is woman’s best friend today and is ready to aid her in all the relations of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 204.

“The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 464, 465.

### Discussion Questions:

❶ One of the most interesting aspects of the Gospels, including Luke, has to do with the role of women in regard to the resurrection of Jesus. All the Gospel stories have women as the first ones to see the risen Christ and to proclaim His resurrection to others. Biblical apologists have been able to use this fact to help affirm the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which some people deny or question. Why is the role of women here so important? Because if, as some claim, the stories of Jesus’ resurrection were fabricated by the authors, why would they have put women, who weren’t highly regarded in that society, as the first ones to see and to proclaim Jesus? If they were making up stories in order to try to get people at that time to believe, why use women as opposed to men? Discuss.

❷ In a society that didn’t always recognize the dignity of women, Jesus recognized the status that belongs to them in God’s creative order as children of God. Women as well as men are made in God’s image and equal in His sight. At the same time, however equal before God, men and women are not the same. How can we affirm the equality of men and women before God and yet, at the same time, affirm and acknowledge the differences

## More Precious Than Money

RUTH, JAPAN

Ruth was born and raised in Ecuador without knowing God. She sensed that something was missing in her life and visited many churches, but none satisfied. Then she visited a Seventh-day Adventist church and found that “the people were kind, and the pastor treated people equally.”

Ruth received a DVD—*The Last Hope*, featuring presentations on Revelation by Pastor Luis Gonçalves. Not sure what it was about, Ruth set the DVD aside and forgot about it.

Sometime later Ruth and her husband moved to Japan, where they obtained work in manufacturing. Although successful at her job, Ruth still wasn’t satisfied. One day, she noticed an advertisement in a free newspaper, inviting people to the Seventh-day Adventist church. Remembering her friendly encounter in Ecuador, Ruth decided to visit. While there, she was delighted to meet Diana, the head elder’s wife, who was Brazilian. Diana offered to study the Bible with Ruth. When the two met for their first Bible study, Diana brought a DVD by Pastor Luis Gonçalves! Ruth realized that it was the same DVD she had received in Ecuador. Convinced that this was more than just a coincidence, Ruth watched the DVD. As she continued studying, Ruth was convicted that she had found the truth.

When she learned that the seventh day was God’s holy day, Ruth quickly decided to quit working on Sabbath. “Are you crazy?” her coworkers asked. “You get paid a higher rate on Saturdays. Why don’t you earn the money and give it to your church?”

“There’s something more precious than money,” Ruth replied. “Such as going to church each Sabbath and learning new things.”

Soon Ruth was ready to make a full commitment and was baptized. When her coworkers realized that Ruth was serious about her newfound faith, they turned against her. “You’ve changed,” some told her. “I can’t work with you,” said another. But her supervisor still valued Ruth and allowed her to take every Saturday off.

“Many things have changed in my life,” Ruth explains. “The way I think, my habits, my relationships with people, everything. Before, I had a hard heart, but now I’m rich in emotion and can empathize with others.”

Ruth is one of the many South American immigrants in Japan. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist international church in Japan are actively seeking to reach others like Ruth. One of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects is to help build an international evangelistic center in Japan. For more stories either in print or video, visit [www.adventistmission.org](http://www.adventistmission.org). Did you know that you don’t have to wait for the end of the quarter to give to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects? You can give any time on our secure Web site at [giving.adventistmission.org](http://giving.adventistmission.org).



## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Galatians 3:26–28*

► **The Student Will:**

- Know:** Recognize that Jesus treated women with dignity and equality.
- Feel:** Embrace that men and women are equal in Christian fellowship.
- Do:** Accept and practice treating the opposite sex fairly.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: How Jesus in His Ministry Related to Women**

- A** Why do you think that Luke, more than any other Gospel, emphasizes the affirmative roles played by women in the ministry of Jesus? Consider, for example, Luke 2:36–38, 8:1–3, and 10:38–42.
- B** Luke 24:1–11 tells that Christ’s resurrection was first revealed to women, and they were the first bearers of the good news. What does this tell of the role women played in the gospel proclamation?

**II. Feel: Women Have Roles to Play in Christ’s Ministry.**

- A** From Mary’s response upon hearing that she was to bear the Jesus Child (*Luke 1:28–38*) and from her song of self-dedication (*vss. 41–55*), what are the lessons one can learn about the importance of women’s roles in ministry?
- B** How can you better serve the poor and powerless in your church after you read Jesus’ interaction with two such people in Luke 18:1–8 and 21:1–4?

**III. Do: Accept and Practice Treating the Opposite Sex Fairly.**

- A** All church members—male and female—have roles to play in God’s plan and mission. What are those roles?
- B** Culture often transmits, from generation to generation, inequality between men and women. How can you as a Christian overcome the pressures of culture? Can you give some biblical examples in which it was overcome?

► **Summary:** Paul, upon his conversion, discovered that in Christ there is no Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave. Luke, of course, traces this oneness to the teachings and practice of Jesus Himself. How should we reflect Jesus in the role of women in our local church’s ministry?

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Luke 7:36–50*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Of all the results of sin, none is so disruptive and destructive to human relations as the sin of divisiveness between person and person—be it on the basis of gender, race, color, or nation. Both Creation (*Gen. 1:26, 27*) and Redemption (*John 3:16*) proclaim the oneness of humanity.

**Just for Teachers:** Guide the discussion in such a way that, while respectfully allowing for diversity of opinion, you reinforce the principle that no matter our differences, we should look to Christ as our Model for our relations with others, especially in areas of potential conflict over gender or race, color or creed.

**Opening Discussion:** The Christian church has a high standard to live up to: unity and dignity on the basis of one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and one faith. In light of this confession of faith, can racial tensions, inequality between men and women, or caste prejudice in any situation, particularly within the church, ever be justified? Why, or why not?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (*Gen. 1:27, NKJV*). From that opening affirmation of the creation of man and woman, Scripture upholds the dignity of all human beings. Nowhere is this equality and dignity of man and woman as predominant as in the New Testament, especially in the teachings and ministry of Jesus.

In this week’s lesson, we focus on the role women played in the ministry of Jesus, and how the Lord related to them with grace and dignity. Begin with the scriptural portrayal of how women responded to Jesus’ birth and then review how Jesus ministered to women. Finally, focus on how women were chosen to be the first heralds of the Resurrection.

## Bible Commentary

**I. Women and the Infant Jesus** (*Review Luke 1:41–56, 2:36–38 with your class.*)

Of the four Gospels, only Luke provides in such detail the awe and wonder

with which three women welcomed the good news of the Savior who was to be born. The fact that Luke's Gospel emphasizes from the outset how God chose three women to bear the joyous news of the Messiah speaks volumes about the dignity that the New Testament accords women.

**Mary.** "Favoured" and "blessed" (*Luke 1:28*), Mary was divinely chosen to be not only the mother of Jesus but also the first proclaimer of the mission of the Messiah. Mary's glorious Magnificat predicts four revolutions that Jesus would bring about in history: (1) a spiritual revolution that would bestow God's tender mercy and grace on all those who fear Him (*Luke 1:46–50*); (2) a moral revolution that would reveal God's strength (*vs. 51*); (3) a social revolution (*vss. 51–54, NKJV*) that would challenge the proud, bring down " 'the mighty from their thrones,' " " '[fill] the hungry,' " and deal with the pride of the rich (*vss. 52, 53, NKJV*); and (4) a prophetic revolution that would establish forever the kingdom promised to Abraham (*vs. 55*). A young girl thus becomes the singer and the bearer of the hope of the redeemed.

**Elizabeth.** Herself a living wonder about to become the mother of one who shall prepare the way for the Messiah, Elizabeth suddenly discovers the greatest wonder of all: her cousin Mary, as a virgin, is soon to become " 'the mother of my Lord' " (*vs. 43, NKJV*). Under the urging of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth breaks out in a prophetic song with three blessings and two confessions (*vss. 42–45*). Consider how deep and significant are the words of this aged woman, and chart out her blessings and confessions.

**Anna.** Eighty-four years old, widowed a long time, and poor in the world's goods, this prophet lived in the hope of the promise of the Messiah and spoke every day to whoever would hear in the temple precincts that the promise would never fail (*Luke 2:36–38*). Such firm and unshakable faith was rewarded when she saw the newborn Jesus brought to the temple. Neither age nor gender nor status can ever blur or blot out the great hope of the coming Savior.

**Consider This:** How do Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna reinforce the truth that all members of the church have roles to play in God's plan and mission? What can you do to help your church nurture and utilize the potential of its members, particularly those from the neglected and marginalized sectors of the body of Christ?

## II. Jesus Ministered to Women (*Review Luke 7:36–50, 8:43–48 with your class.*)

Most major characters that march through the biblical narrative and the prophetic proclamation are males, and this has led many to charge that the Bible is a male-dominated and oriented book; yet no other religious text in the world has done so much to liberate women and to proclaim their dignity as the Word of God does.

While the Old Testament is filled with such testimonies of women in ministry and leadership (Sarah, Miriam, Ruth, Naomi, Esther, and Deborah to name a few), the New Testament proclaims that Christ abolished the wall of partition and that in Him there is neither male nor female nor any other divisive distinctions (*Gal. 3:28, 29; Eph. 2:14–22*). With that biblical background, it is noteworthy to see that Luke, more than any other Gospel, underscores the dignity, respect, and honor Jesus bestowed upon women, and equally how Jesus welcomed the role played by women in His ministry—all this at a time and in a society that was so negative toward women. Note a few such instances:

- *Women received healing or raising of the dead from Jesus.* Of the 15 healing miracles that Luke records, five touch the lives of women (*Luke 4:38, 39; 7:11–17; 8:41–48, 49–56; 13:10–17*).
- *Women became learners, followers, and supporters of Jesus* (*Luke 10:38–42, 8:1–3*).
- *Women became Jesus’ examples in persistent prayer* (*Luke 18:1–8*) and *sacrificial giving* (*Luke 21:1–4*).
- *Women ministered at the cross* (*Luke 23:55, 56*) and *became the first witnesses to the Resurrection* (*Luke 24:1–11*).

**Discussion Activity:** Self-sufficiency is the greatest enemy of salvation. The Pharisees felt self-sufficient and, hence, believed they needed nothing, including God’s grace that alone forgives. Contrast their pernicious self-sufficiency with the humility of the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, felt an absolute inner need, sought Jesus in faith and gratitude, and received those precious words of assurance: “ ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace’ ” (*Luke 7:50, NKJV*).

**Consider This:** What kind of faith has the power to arrest Christ’s attention, stop Him on Main Street, and bring healing to a withering body and purpose to an aimless soul (*Luke 8:43–48*)?

### III. Women, the First Proclaimers (*Review Luke 24:1–7, 9–11, 22 with your class.*)

Although Luke records several women who served Jesus faithfully in His ministry (*Luke 8:1–3, 10:38–42*), it is of significance that women were the last to leave the cross (*Luke 23:55, 56*) and the first to witness the empty tomb on the third day (*Luke 24:1–7*). They were also the first to proclaim the good news of the risen Savior (*vss. 9–11*). At a time and in a community where women were held in low esteem, Heaven bestowed upon them the unique privilege of being the first proclaimers of the resurrection of Jesus.

**Discussion Questions:**

- ❶ Why were women chosen as the first witnesses and first proclaimers of the Resurrection? (*See Luke 24:10–12.*)
- ❷ How does that choice signal that God was assigning also to women a role to play in the spread of the gospel?

**►STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Luke, as the first historian of the church, noted with care the role of women not only in the ministry of Jesus but also in the development of the early church. In Acts, Luke speaks of Sapphira, Priscilla, Drusilla, Bernice, Tabitha, Rhoda, Lydia, and several other women. To Luke, the good news of the gospel is for men and women alike, and so is the proclamation and spread of the gospel.

**Thought Question:** According to the Gospels and the book of Acts, women played a significant role in ministry and the gospel proclamation. What does this teach us about the value God places on women in His work, then and now?

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Jesus lovingly says to the dead 12-year-old daughter of Jairus: “ ‘Little girl, arise’ ” (*Luke 8:54, NKJV*). What love! What pathos! Children are precious in the sight of Jesus. Child abuse violates the innocence of children and places a lifelong burden of suffering on victims and perpetrators alike. It is a deadly sin.

**Discussion:** Bring to class some newspaper clippings of recent child abuse cases. Or ask your class members if they are aware of any such cases. If possible, show class members the trailer to *The Hideout* ([www.thehideoutfilm.com](http://www.thehideoutfilm.com)). Then discuss the following: How should you react to child abuse if you see it in the family, in the church, in the school, or anywhere else?