The Story of Women Who Followed Jesus
compiled from passages in Mark, Luke, John and Acts

Day One

Anticipate: “to look forward to” or “expect”

This week we’re looking at what ministry by women, to women should look like. We’re going to meet several women from the Gospels whose stories will inspire us. In the Gospels, Jesus and His disciples were preaching the kingdom of God from village to village. But the women were there, too! As we get to know them this week, we’ll ask ourselves: What were they doing? What can we learn from them? How can we follow their example of ministry in the twenty-first century? How do we glorify God and make Him known — together?

Like women who follow Jesus today, these women were diverse. Some were single; others were wives and mothers. Jesus healed them and delivered them from demons; He set them free for one purpose — to glorify God. They came from homes at the center of political power and from the back streets of tiny villages. They were bound together by one person and one event — an encounter with Jesus. His tenderness and respect for women was radical in a culture where a rabbi or religious teacher would not speak to a woman in public.

Once these women had encountered Jesus, they followed Him together! They bonded as they ministered to their King. They fed the disciples, gave of their resources and traveled with Jesus and His team from Galilee to Jerusalem.

We find them at the foot of the cross, grieving with Jesus’ mother; they experienced the pain of loss as a community of women. They are in the garden, prepared to minister still, even to the body of their Savior. Mary Magdalene kneels in awe and reverence as she becomes the first to see the risen Lord. She is the first person commissioned to tell of the miracle of His resurrection.

After Jesus taught the disciples for 40 days concerning the kingdom, He ascended to the Father. He left them to anticipate the coming of the promised Holy Spirit and the power He would provide to advance the kingdom.

Key verse:

Then He said to them all, “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

—Luke 9:23
among all peoples. In anticipation, they turned to prayer — unified, dependent prayer. The women were there with the disciples asking for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, just as Jesus taught them.

A few of these women are named — Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary the mother of Jesus. Many of them are unnamed and most often referred to just as “some women” by the Gospel writers. Whether named or unnamed, they all ministered to Jesus and supported the advancing kingdom of God. They were kingdom women!

1. Are you ready to meet these women? Read the following story compiled from the Gospels. The Scriptures portions are italicized. The bold font has been added to emphasize the actions of the women and the actions of Jesus. As you read, ask yourself: Who were these women? What were they doing? What did Jesus do for them? Why were they following Jesus?

Together following Jesus …

Soon afterwards He was traveling from one town and village to another, preaching and telling the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary, called Magdalene (seven demons had come out of her); Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward; Susanna; and many others who were supporting them from their possessions.

(Luke 8:1-3)

Together at the cross …

There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they would follow Him and help Him. Many other women had come up with Him to Jerusalem.

(Mark 15:40-41)

Together in the garden …

The women who had come with Him from Galilee followed along and observed the tomb and how His body was placed. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

(Luke 23:55-56)
Together in confusing circumstances …

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men. “He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?’”

And they remembered His words.

Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. (Luke 24:1-11)

(Peter and John ran to the tomb to investigate the women’s story. They found the tomb empty and the linen cloths lying there.)

For they still did not understand the Scripture that He must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went home again. (John 20:9-10)

Together celebrating resurrection …

But Mary stood outside facing the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus’ body had been lying. They said to her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“Because they’ve taken away my Lord,” she told them, “and I don’t know where they have put Him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus.

“Woman,” Jesus said to her, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Supposing He was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you’ve removed Him, tell me where you’ve put Him, and I will take Him away.”
Jesus said, “Mary.”

Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” — which means “Teacher.”

“Don’t cling to Me,” Jesus told her, “for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father — to My God and your God.” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them what He had said to her. In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together, with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews. Then Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” Having said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” (John 20:11-21)

Together in prayer …

After He had suffered, He also presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:7-8)

All these were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers. (Acts 1:14)

2. Today we are focusing on these women who followed Jesus together. List the names of the women who followed Jesus in these Scriptures. Write down beside their names what you discover about each one from the text. Were they married? Single? Are family members mentioned?
3. According to the Scripture you read today, what had Jesus done for all of them? (See Luke 8:1-3.)

4. How did these women hear about Jesus? (Read Luke 8:1.)

5. How do people hear today? (Read Romans 10:14-15.)

6. Mary Magdalene is singled out as one from whom Jesus drove out “seven demons.” (See Luke 8:2 and Mark 16:9.) What changes do you think had happened to her? (Read Luke 8:26-39 for clues.)

7. Does it surprise you that Mary Magdalene is part of the first “women’s leadership team” serving and following Jesus? Would you put her on your leadership team? What can we learn about team work from these women?

8. How did these women make Jesus known to others?

But how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How welcome are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things!

—Romans 10:14-15
WEEK TWO: FOLLOWING JESUS

Day Two

Prepare: “things done to make ready”

As you think and meditate on the story, you participate in the Spirit’s work of teaching and applying the Word.

1. Read the story slowly today; as you read, picture each scene. Then read the story again out loud; while you read aloud, think about how these women ministered to Jesus.

2. How were these women supporting Jesus and His ministry? (See Luke 8:1-3)

3. The Greek word *diakoneo* is translated “help” in Mark 15:41; in Matthew 27:55 it is rendered “ministered” to describe how the women served Jesus. The word has the sense of caring for someone’s every need. Look at each of the scenes in this week’s “Scripture story” individually. How did the women “help” Jesus through their presence and participation?

   As He traveled preaching the kingdom?

   As He suffered on the cross?

   After His burial in the garden?

Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to Him were there, looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

—Matthew 27:55-56
WEEK TWO: FOLLOWING JESUS

After the resurrection?

In the upper room praying?

4. What did they give to Jesus? Why? Does this remind you of the woman’s offering in our story last week?

5. How can you “help” Jesus and glorify Him? Read Matthew 25:31-40 and ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment to see someone today who needs the touch of Jesus through you.

6. What is one thing you can do today to make Jesus known?

“Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or without clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and visit You?’

“And the King will answer them, ‘I assure you: Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.’”

—Matthew 25:37-40
Day Three

Prepare: “things done to make ready”

As you think and meditate on the story, you participate in the Spirit’s work of teaching and applying the Word.

For each of the next three days, we’re going to focus on a specific part of this week’s story and study how the women ministered to each other as they followed Jesus. Today we will focus our attention on how the women might have interacted with each other as they journeyed together.

1. Read the section of our Bible story titled “Together following Jesus.” Picture the women traveling with Jesus and the twelve disciples. We know some were married and had sons also traveling in the group. Others like Mary Magdalene probably were single. The Jewish mothers could have provided stability and prevented accusations of impropriety for the traveling band; age was respected and honoring parents was a command. New Testament writers often used the metaphor of the “household of faith” for the church, and Paul gave instructions to Titus (Titus 2:3-5) for older and younger women so that “God’s message will not be slandered.”

2. What are some ways women traveling together minister to each other?

3. Have you ever been on mission with other women? What did you learn?

4. What potential tensions can you see arising among this group of women?

   Generational tensions?
Family tensions?

5. Read Mark 10:35-45. What did James and John ask of Jesus?


7. How did this create conflict among the disciples?

8. What did Jesus teach and model about serving each other? (See Matthew 20:25-28.)

9. Is there a woman you know who serves others who you can serve today? Think about a staff wife, a woman on staff or one of the women’s leaders in your church? Maybe a campus minister, a woman who works in pre-school or a single mom would be blessed by your ministry?

“... and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life — a ransom for many.”

—Matthew 20:27-28
Day Four

Prepare: “things done to make ready”

As you think and meditate on the story, you participate in the Spirit’s work of teaching and applying the Word.

We’re continuing our focus on how the women ministered to each other as they followed Jesus. Today pay attention to how the women comforted each other.

1. Read the section of our Scripture story titled “Together at the cross.”

2. Mary the mother of Jesus was there at the cross watching her Son suffer gross indignity and cruel pain. Who was there with her? (See John 19:25.)

3. Read the following verses and imagine how you would feel as a mother watching as your child experienced such shame. What did Jesus suffer willingly for you and for me? Write your responses.

Matthew 27:27-31

Matthew 27:35-37

Matthew 27:39-44

Matthew 27:46

Matthew 27:50-53
4. How did these women support each other and Jesus’ mother with their presence?

5. Have you experienced the pain and sorrow of a death in your family? Do you remember those who walked with you through the experience? How did they help you most?

6. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. Paul speaks of the “God of all comfort.” How can God use our painful experiences to comfort others?

7. In the introduction to the Glorify Bible study, you read about my battle with cancer. Women gave me comfort through their prayers and gifts. What are some practical ways you can bring comfort to others and bring glory to Christ’s name?

8. Jesus’ burial was rushed to avoid violating the Sabbath. (See Luke 23:50-54.) Just as the women grieved together, they also rested on the Sabbath before going to anoint the body on the first day of the week. During intense emotional times, rest is essential for our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. The women kept the commandment to honor the Sabbath. Read Deuteronomy 5:15 and write down what they were to remember on this day of rest. Why would this day be important for the women to remember what Jesus had done for them?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. —2 Corinthians 1:3-4
Day Five

Prepare: “things done to make ready”

As you think and meditate on the story, you participate in the Spirit’s work of teaching and applying the Word.

We’re going to spend one more day looking at how the women ministered to each other as they followed Jesus.

1. Read the entire story again, and think of all that these women have experienced together. After you read the whole story, focus your attention and thoughts on the women going to anoint Jesus’ body in the garden and their encounter with the angels and the resurrected Lord Jesus.

2. Rites of passage, births, illness, marriage and death are often the purview of women. In many cultures around the world, women wash and prepare bodies for burial. Today in many undeveloped countries, women wail and cry as signs of grief even as a body is carried to the grave or to be cremated.


3. Concentrate on the emotions these women experienced. Verse 4 says they were “perplexed.” Why were they confused?

4. The angels remind the women of the words Jesus spoke when they were in Galilee. Read the passages listed below. What could the women have remembered about these prophecies of Jesus’ death and resurrection?

   Matthew 17:22-23
5. The honesty of the Scripture is refreshing. As the women go to tell their story in Luke 24:10-11, how do the men respond to the women’s report?

6. Do you have trouble trusting God’s Word, His promises? Read 2 Corinthians 1:20. How does the Scriptures’ affirmation give you confidence?

7. Praising God in all circumstances and believing His promises gives Him glory! You can glorify God through your praise even when the circumstances are confusing and you do not fully understand what or why something is happening.

Review John 20:11-18. The Gospel of John gives us the “rest of the story”! Mary Magdalene returned to the garden alone. She was crying. What was she looking for? What clues do you find in the text?

8. Can you imagine what it was like for Mary to hear Jesus calling her by name? How could she recognize His voice? (See John 10:14.)

9. What did Mary tell the disciples? How did her obedience glorify God?
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10. As you finish up this week’s study, ask the Lord what He is saying to you. Is God leading you to tell someone else what He is saying to you? Read Psalm 96:1-3. How does our speaking of Jesus glorify Him?

Day Six

Celebrate: “to commemorate an event, to publish abroad, to make famous”

Let the story live through you.

Today’s study can be done with a group or alone.

1. As the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord, they also received a commission from Jesus. Read the entire story again as a group. Give special attention to the last scenes in John 20:18-21 and Acts 1:3, 7-8, 14.

2. When Jesus stands among the disciples for the first time in John 20:19, He greets them saying “Peace.” Jesus uses the word “peace” again in John 20:21 and verse 26. Why do you think the disciples needed “peace” at this moment?

3. Read the following verses and share what they teach you about having and maintaining peace in difficult circumstances.

Isaiah 26:3
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John 14:27

Philippians 4:6-7

Colossians 1:20

4. Why is “peace” important to the commission Jesus gives them in John 20:21?

5. What do the words “as the Father has sent me” bring to mind? What had the disciples just witnessed in Jesus’ life and death?

6. God is a “sending” God! He sends us into the world to take the Good News of the kingdom to those who have never heard the message of hope and abundant life Jesus revealed. In Acts 1:3 we read that Jesus taught the disciples for 40 days about the kingdom of God. Few of us have ever lived under a monarch with total authority over our lives and rights. How would you describe the kingdom of God? What does it mean to you to know Jesus as the “King of kings”?

Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”
—John 20:21
7. Read Exodus 19:3-6 and 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10. What did you learn about our responsibility as followers of the King from these passages? In Exodus 19:5 our King states, “all the earth is Mine.” In 1 Peter 2:9, what are we called to proclaim?

8. Why should you want to praise God? What has He done for you?

9. Jesus commissions us to be His “witnesses” and promises the “power of the Holy Spirit” by His authority. When He tells us to be witnesses “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” it’s a reminder that “all the earth is Mine.” Let’s see how God is using women to share His love and glorify Him across the street and to the ends of the earth.

Watch the video “NAME Next Door.”

How are Cathy, Ian and Ruthie going to befriend their immigrant neighbors?

How are they applying some of the lessons you learned this week about women comforting one another? What obstacles have these immigrants faced?

How are they sharing Jesus and ministering in His name?
Who are your neighbors? How can you minister in Jesus’ name to them?

Cathy and Ian and Ruthie have intentionally gotten to know their “neighbors.” Where have you seen immigrants in your community? How can you get to know them better? (for more suggestions, leaders can share Iva May’s interview on the resource CD.)

10. Watch the video “I Live in a Hut.”

How are these women “following Jesus”?

What challenges are they facing together?

Physical

Emotional

Spiritual

Why are they learning stories?
How are they living out the lessons we studied this week? Share what you learned this week about women ministering to Jesus, each other and going to tell their story and His story.

Amy G., one of the women in the video, left a corporate job to move to Mali and minister side by side with other women. As a group, make a list of what God might be asking you to leave behind in order to minister and share the Gospel with other women. Then take a few minutes to talk about the list. What would be easy for you to give up? What would be more difficult?

How can we support these women in “I Live in a Hut” and others who are “sent” to the ends of the earth?

11. Read Acts 1:14. What do you learn about prayer in this verse? How can prayer support the spread of the Gospel?

12. Spend some time in your group praising God. He is worthy of all praise! Then pray for Cathy, Ian, Ruthie and for the women working in West Africa. You may want to also pray specifically for other missionaries you know. Close by thanking God for what you learned this week from His word.