

INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

MARY MAGDALENE

PART 1:

Who was Mary Magdalene?

- Mary Magdalene was a female disciple of Jesus who followed Him during his time of ministry in Israel.
 - Although often confused, Mary Magdalene was not Mary the mother of Jesus or Mary from Bethany, the sister of Lazarus or Martha.
- The first mention of Mary Magdalene in the Bible is Matthew 27:56
 - Chronologically, the first time Mary is mentioned when Jesus is telling the parable of the sower [Luke 8].
- We know Mary as “Mary Magdalene”, but Magdalene is not her name, just an indication of where she was from: Magdala.
 - Magdala was a city on the shore of the Sea of Galilee
 - In Hebrew, Magdala means “tower” [מַגָּדְלָה]
 - Magdala is a well preserved city that archeologists have been able to study thoroughly. Based on historical documents, archeological artifacts, and the well preserved architecture of the city, we know that Magdala was a town whose economy thrived on fishing and the textile industry.
 - Some theologians believe that Mary was able to follow Jesus’s ministry, support Him financially [Luke 8:2-3], and go on the road with Him and his other disciples because she and or her family were connected with the garment industry in Magdala.
- The Bible does not specify if Mary was married or single. We also aren’t told her age or profession.
 - Because Mary was following Jesus with his other disciples, it’s likely that she was unmarried.
- Many churches and traditions have taught that Mary was a prostitute or even Jesus’s wife, but there is absolutely no Biblical evidence supporting those theories. Many people have associated Mary with the “sinful woman” mentioned in Luke 7:37, but there are no indications or implications that that woman is Mary Magdalene.
 - One of the only reasons people have associated the “sinful woman” in Luke 7:37 with Mary Magdalene is because Mary is mentioned for the first time in Luke 8, following the story of the “sinful woman” and Simon. It would be very odd

however if Luke would have only identified the woman in Luke 7 as the “sinful woman” and then proceeded to mention Mary Magdalene by name, and identify her as the woman Jesus cast 7 demons out of, a few verses later if they were the same woman.

- Mary was afflicted by 7 demons, which Jesus cured her of [Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9]
 - Mary was among other women who were disciples of Jesus that He had healed. Luke specifically details that the other women, Susanna, Joanna, and as Luke says, “many others” were also afflicted by evil spirits and illnesses.

What was happening in the world during Mary's life?

Culturally, politically, historically

- Mary, Jesus, and his disciples lived in Judea, a territory in Palestine [a region between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River].
 - The Roman Empire had control over Palestine along with Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, and Greece, and the whole Mediterranean.
 - [Modern day Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Northern Morocco, Northern Algeria, Northern Tunisia, Northern Libya, Northern Egypt, Jordan, and small parts of other modern day European surrounding the Mediterranean.]
 - The Romans governed their territories via kings, Roman governors, or “puppet kings” who were allies of the Roman empire. Marcus Pontius Pilot was the governor of Judea at the time of Jesus’s death.
 - Religious freedom was allowed
 - Tiberias Caesar Augustus was the Emperor of the Roman Empire at the time
 - Roman religion practiced the belief that people and everything around them had spirits. They believed their ancestors watched over them, and there were many gods and deities that ruled different areas of life. Roman gods were worshipped in temples. When Rome took over Greek colonies, they adopted some Greek mythological beliefs into their religious system and their gods became more centered on emotions and feelings like love, hate, and jealousy.
 - People residing in Judea were required to pay taxes to Rome and follow Roman law.
 - If Jewish religious leaders found someone breaking Jewish law, they could punish them accordingly. If a person, however, broke Roman law, they would face Roman punishment [i.e. the reason Jesus was crucified and taken to Pontius Pilot; the religious leaders presented him as treasonous to the Roman empire]
- There were a handful of political groups that wanted freedom from Rome, like the Herodians and Zealots, who occasionally performed demonstrations in acts of rebellion.

Overall, there was high tension between the Jews in Judea and the Romans who occupied the region.

- Simon, the disciple of Jesus, is recorded in the Bible as being a Zealot [Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13]
- In the patriarchal culture of Jewish Palestine during this time, it was highly unusual for a rabbi to have female followers as mentioned in Luke 8:1-3. Palestinian Hebrew women were treated very poorly and were not valued as equals.
 - In Jewish Palestine men could divorce their wives for any reasons, big or small, but women weren't allowed to divorce their husbands for any reason.
 - Women were treated as second class citizens and generally regarded as weaker and less intelligent and of less value than men. Because of the systems of marriage and women's lack of political, educational, and social rights, it was common to view women as property.
 - Hebrew women had very little property rights. In the very rare occasion they inherited property from their fathers, any male heirs would have first picked. If no male heirs claimed the land, the woman's husband would manage the property or estate.
 - It was a highly debated, controversial topic, during this time in history, among Jewish leaders if women should be educated in the Torah [the Jewish Holy text: the first five books of the Bible]. Generally, only Rabbi's wives were educated.
 - Being widowed or divorced would make surviving extremely difficult.
- The religious leaders of this time were rabbis and temple priests.
 - Jewish people were required to pay a temple tax as well as a tax to the Roman government.
 - There were also two prominent sects of Judaism practiced. The Pharisees and Sadducees were constantly in conflict with one another over the Torah and Mosaic text.
 - Jesus's teachings and instructions were in great contrast to the law-centered, often legalistic practices of the religious leaders at the time.

Mary in the Bible

- In the first chronological mention of Mary, she is introduced as the woman who Jesus healed from seven demons. Mary, and the other female disciples with Jesus, were all detailed as having been healed from "evil spirits and diseases" [Luke 8:1-3].
 - Some Biblical scholars believe this means that the demonic spirits were causing mental and or physical illnesses to the women. It's unclear exactly how Mary had been affected by the demonic spirits, but we can gather some ideas based on other encounters in the Bible where Jesus healed people from demonic oppression and possession. Demonic affliction caused people:

- Seizures, convulsions, foaming at the mouth, uncontrollable screaming
 - Luke 9:37-43
- Muteness
 - Luke 11:14
 - Matthew 9:32
- Blindness
 - Matthew 12:22
- Loss of control and extreme violence
 - Acts 19:16
 - Matthew 8:28-34
 - Luke 8:26-39
- Illness
 - Acts 19:12
 - Matthew 15:21-28
 - Matthew 17:14-21
 - Mark 7:24-230
 - Luke 8:38-41
- It's assumed that because Mary is the only one Luke noted as being affected specifically by seven demons, she was afflicted the worst.
- Because of the ways women were viewed and treated in Jewish Palestine, Jesus's treatment of women and their involvement facilitating His ministry was a huge, revolutionary contrast to the culture of His time.

Let's talk about Mary Magdalene:

Mary is only mentioned by name a few times in the Bible, but her legacy is incredible. She was a deeply afflicted woman, and we don't know how the demons influencing her afflicted her exactly, but we know that it was worse than the rest, and based on other scripture about the horrors of demonic influence, it was probably pretty terrible on her body, mind, and soul. We don't get to hear the details of the story of Jesus healing Mary from the seven demons, but we can see that it transformed her life and led her to be a faithful follower of Jesus. If you look at the other stories of the Bible that detail demonic affliction, the victims were out of their minds, experiencing seizures, and being influenced to hurt themselves or others. They were experiencing literal hell. But, Jesus saved them from their afflictions and they were all instantly healed. And the demons not only left, they immediately fled in fear because they knew the powers of God had absolute authority, power and triumph over any and every power in hell. Imagine being Mary: maybe for you her experience is really relatable. You are out of your mind. Your body is experiencing deep pains and medical issues. You are out of control, in literal ways. Your life seems desperately hopeless. No one can help you. No one knows the deep, dark, horrendous things you endure on a daily basis. The burdens that weigh hard on your tired soul

are too heavy for you or anyone else to move. Something or someone owns you. Maybe everyone has given up on you. You have no chance.

And then, Jesus comes. Jesus; the Lover of your soul, the Savior of the world, the Son of God who can do anything and overcome any battle. He is loving, He is kind, He is faithful, He is gentle, He is patient. He knows your hurts, your struggles, your afflictions, your sins, and the ugliest, muckiest, dirtiest, worst things about you and still He picks you up, dusts you off, embraces you, and saves you; not just your body, mind, ailments, and afflictions but your soul. He is the only one that owns you now, and He gives you freedom. Jesus gives you a new name, a new hope, a new future.

Hebrews 6:19-20 “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. ...”*

2 Corinthians 3:17 “*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”*

He has no conditions; all Jesus wants is your faith in Him. Jesus doesn't say “I'll save you if you do this or that”, or “I'll take back my salvation if you sin or mess up or end up back here in this dirty pit”. Nope. Jesus just saves you, loves you, and promises no one, no powers of hell, no sin, and no mistake can ever take you from His everlasting love.

Galatians 2:16 “*know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”*

John 10:28-29 “*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.”*

Romans 8:38 “*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Jesus takes your burdens.

Matthew 11:28- 30 “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Jesus gives you His peace that passes all understanding.

Philippians 4:7 “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

You thought there was no way out, no hope, no life for you, no purpose, no ease from your pain, and then Jesus shows up and saves you, heart, soul, body, and mind.

Psalm 116:1-9 “*I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord: “Lord, save me!” The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the unwary; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. For you, Lord, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living.”*

Whether or not you experienced the physical or mental healing of Jesus, you can relate to Mary’s healing of her broken and lost soul when she found Jesus because that is all of us: broken, lost, no hope, no future, drowning in sin and Jesus saves you, knowing it all. He thought of you on the cross, knowing your sins and worst secrets, but He loved you so much that He stayed on so He could pay your penalty and save you through His resurrection.

Mary experienced the newness of life in two different ways. Jesus healed her and cast out seven demons from her, and she got to experience life again. Her physical and mental burdens were lifted. Mary also experienced new life trusting in Jesus. Her soul was not only unafflicted thanks to Jesus’s divine authority and healing, her soul was forever saved and was secure in Jesus. She accepted Him as her savior, and she could begin healing her bruised and battered soul because she had the eternal promise of the true Doctor, the Great Physician.

Reflection Questions:

What are physical, mental, or emotional ways God has healed and saved you? What can you praise Him for today? What are some of the things you love most about Jesus? When Jesus gave you the free gift of salvation, what do you remember your reaction to be?

PART 2:

Mary in the Bible

- Mary and the other female disciples were following Jesus and supporting Him along with the other male disciples [Luke 8]
- Mary and the other female disciples supported Jesus financially [Luke 8:3]

- Some of these women were married, some most likely single, but Luke specifies that all of the women used their own means and finances to support Jesus's ministry.
- Mary was at Jesus's crucifixion
 - Mary, Mary Jesus's mother, John, Salome, Mary James and John's mother, and Mary the wife of Clopas were at Jesus's crucifixion [Matthew 27:55-56, John 19:25-26]. It's unclear if any other disciples were present, but Mark describes "many other women" there who cared for Jesus during His ministry [Mark 15:40-41, Luke 23:27].
- Mary took part in Jesus's burial
 - Joseph of Arimathea prepared Jesus for burial and laid Him to rest in his own tomb [Mark 15:42-47, Matthew 27:57-61, John 19:38-42, Luke 23:50-56]. Mary Magdalene and Mary Jesus's mother were there and watched this. It's uncertain, but according to Luke 23:55, there may have been more women accompanying them as well.
 - This emphasizes her close relationship to Jesus
- Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus resurrected after his death on the cross. Mary Magdalene, Mary Jesus's mother, and Salome had purchased spices to anoint Jesus' body with and they headed to the tomb early in the morning on Sunday. The stone that sealed the tomb had been rolled away by an earthquake, and the women could see that Jesus' body was gone. Thinking Jesus's body had been stolen, Mary ran to Peter and John and told them what she saw. They all returned to the tomb, and the disciples found Jesus's burial clothes. Mary wept, thinking Jesus's body was stolen, and two angels were there at the tomb and asked her why she was crying. She explained that she was looking for Jesus's body. Jesus appeared to her and when she realized it was Jesus, she hugged him and Jesus sent her to tell the disciples about his resurrection. [Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16, Luke 2:1-12, John 20:1-18]
 - The story of Jesus's resurrection all share different details from different perspectives, but Mary's name is mentioned in all four accounts.
 - It's unclear why Mary didn't immediately recognize Jesus, but it's possible that it was because Jesus appeared different after His resurrection.
 - In Luke 24:13-35, two disciples were walking and spending time with Jesus and also didn't realize it was Him until they sat down for dinner with Him.
 - Mark 16:9-11 and Luke 24:10-21 explain that there were other women with Mary [Joanna, Jesus's mother and the "other women" not named]. It's unclear if the other women were inside the tomb with Mary Magdalene when she spoke to Jesus. Because she is the only one mentioned and named talking with the angels and Jesus, scripture seems to indicate that she was probably the only one inside

the tomb while the other women waited outside, or perhaps the other women watched while she was the only one who actually spoke to Jesus. Or, the other women may have had encounters speaking with the angels and Jesus which are simply not mentioned.

- Jesus appearing to women first is another clear indication of Christ's revolutionary treatment of women in contrast to first century patriarchy. Jesus appeared to women first which was very symbolic of how much he valued them as equals.
 - The gospel of John specifically highlights women of faith, like the Samaritan woman, Mary of Bethany, Martha, Jesus's mother, and Mary Magdalene. These women had faith that Jesus was the messiah and had faith in His abilities as the Son of God.
- Mary told the disciples what she saw and that Jesus had been raised from the dead [John 20:18, Matthew 28:8-9, Mark 16:9-11, Luke 24:9-12]. The disciples didn't believe her until Jesus revealed himself to them later.

Let's talk about Mary Magdalene:

Mary was faithful to Jesus and His ministry, and she clearly, truly believed that He was the Messiah. Mary gave her time, she cared for Jesus, she traveled with Jesus, she funded Jesus's ministry with her money, and she stayed close to Jesus even when others fled. We can see Peter openly denying Jesus in John 18:15-18; 25-26. At the crucifixion, the only male disciple of Jesus mentioned is John. Jesus's mother and some female disciples of Jesus were there when Jesus died, but none of the other male disciples of Jesus's core group that He served in ministry with for years were in sight. But, Mary was there. Mary was there for the crucifixion, the death, the burial, and was at her Lord's tomb, ready to care for His body.

In John 20:11-18, you can almost hear the heartbreak and desperation in her voice when she asks Jesus and the angels where her Lord's body is. She thinks someone stole her Rabbi's body and she is weeping, tired and aching in her heart. It's day three of the longest, worst weekend, so far, in the actual history of the world, and she just wants to lay her Lord to rest. She loves Jesus. I think Mary's love for God and His Son is the reason why people falsely believe she was His wife, but really she just deeply, truly, and honestly believed He was the Messiah of mankind, and she **loved** Him.

She ran to tell the disciples of the amazing things she had seen. What I think is so incredible about this is that Jesus chose Mary to be the first one He came to after His resurrection. Jesus chose Mary to be the one to tell His other disciples that He had been raised from the dead. Jesus chose the once broken, lost, and demon-afflicted woman He saved from desperation to be the first one to share the gospel: That Jesus had been raised from the dead and He was risen indeed. He didn't need her, He could have revealed Himself to everyone in a split second, but He chose

to use her and demonstrate His ability to transform, redeem, love, save, and use absolutely anyone.

Jesus chose Mary and Jesus chooses you.

Mary is a girl who people have a lot of ideas and misconceptions about. Maybe that's the way you relate to her: people make assumptions about you, have ideas based off of rumors about you, or maybe just make up their own thoughts about you. If Mary were alive, trust me, she would understand. It seems that most of the misconceptions and off-the-wall rumors about Mary came about after she had passed, and continue long after she's gone, but the one detail remains: that woman loved Jesus. She loved Him with her heart, soul, and life.

Mary probably did receive some backlash and looks during her time with Jesus though. Jesus was breaking the norm and making a huge splash by having women facilitate His ministry and be his disciples. The culture at this time was not for women, not for equality, and by in large were not about women being taught religiously by Jewish leaders as men were. It was a huge controversy at the time, but it never stopped Mary.

Maybe you really feel the pain and relate to Mary's post mortem dilemma. People made some serious and wild stuff up about her. But here's the thing: for Mary of Magdalene, it's not a problem. A. because Mary is in the presence of God in heaven so what people think of her could not matter less to her I'm certain, and B. because Mary's legacy is not the rumors or lies made up about her. There is no mention in God's Word of the ideas that she was a prostitute or a lover of Jesus; the Bible says Mary was a faithful servant who deeply loved her Lord. Mary is not defined by the things people say or judge her on, Mary is defined by her identity in Christ. Mary is remembered for her love for God, Jesus saving her from affliction, and her service for the Lord. It's not a problem for Mary, and it should absolutely not be a problem for you. Just like Mary, you are defined by nothing but your identity in Christ. If you are a follower of Jesus and you believe Jesus is God's only son who lived the perfect life you could not live, that He died the death in your place that you deserved, and that God raised Jesus from the dead, defeating the power of sin and death forever, then you have an eternal promise that can never be broken of salvation with God forever. THAT is your identity. God and what God has done and what God says about you are what define you. It's easy to say and it can be so hard to accept, especially when people, and people you like, love, and care about, speak rumors or lies or say hurtful things about you. But nothing is more true or permanent or defining than God sending His only son to die for your sins because He loved you so much and has made you a new person through Christ's redemptive power. You are His. That is the truest and most important part of who you are. Be a Mary Magdalene. Be a disciple of Jesus. Follow God Faithfully, love Him truly, and never leave His side. Give to Him, serve Him, and share the gospel with no cares about anyone's thoughts of it but His alone.

Reflection Questions:

What can you learn from the life of Mary Magdalene? How do you relate to Mary? What things in your life [relationships, spouse, career, “success”, house, money, status] do you use to define your identity instead of Jesus? How can you strip everything else away and make Jesus’s work on the cross for you your identity?

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