

A woman in a white, textured robe is shown from the waist down, pouring water from a large, dark brown clay jar into her right hand. The water is captured mid-pour, creating a dynamic splash. Below her hand, a large, shallow, dark brown clay bowl sits on a sandy surface, partially filled with water. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape. The overall tone is warm and evocative.

TODAY IN THE **WORD**[®]

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

Seen and Loved

WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

MARCH 2023

The Key to Overcoming Anxiety

From the President of Moody Bible Institute

"When you find a quiet place to be present with God in a position of surrender, you will find the peace you are seeking."



Have you ever been caught up in a cycle of anxiety? Maybe that describes you today. Life feels overwhelming.

Even at night, your mind is occupied. You feel exhausted, depleted, and utterly alone.

In Luke 10, Jesus visited the home of sisters Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. The three siblings were among His closest friends and supporters. While Jesus taught, Martha hurried about the home, caring for the needs of others. Mary, her sister, sat listening to Jesus. Luke describes Martha as "distracted." Martha complained: "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (v. 40).

Imagine, what would happen if Jesus visited *your* home. What an incredible opportunity that would be. Yet, Martha was missing this moment. When we are consumed by worry, we are robbed of being present at important moments. You can be sitting at church on Sunday morning and have a hard time focusing. Your mind is in and out of the doors a million times.

While Martha thinks the problem is her sister, Jesus points out the reality: "You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

What is that one thing Jesus was speaking about? As God's creation, we are composed of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). The physical part we can see in the mirror. The soul is our personality, our thinking, and our will. But our spirit connects us to God. God wants you, the totality of you, to sit in a place that hears Him. Psalm 62:5 says our soul will find "rest in God." Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." When you find a quiet place to be present with God in a position of surrender, you will find the peace you are seeking.

Spending time with the Almighty helps us release our illusion of control. What a comfort it is to realize that He is God, and we are not. First Peter 5 encourages us to humble ourselves before God, to cast all our anxiety on Him. Like Mary, when we take time to sit at the feet of Jesus, we put our life into a God-story perspective. If you are struggling today, sit and rest in the presence of the Almighty. ■

Friend of Sinners

by Dr. John Koessler

“The righteousness of Christ is the only righteousness that makes us acceptable in God’s sight. We can add nothing to it.”

Imagine the Pharisee’s surprise when a woman notorious for her sinful life crashed the dinner party Simon threw for Jesus. She wept as she anointed Jesus’ feet with perfume, wiping her tears away with her hair. Simon grumbled, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39).

Not everyone appreciated that Jesus was a friend to sinners. Simon was right in his moral assessment of the woman’s past. Jesus confirmed it when He said that “her many sins have been forgiven” (v. 47). While it was easy for Simon to see the woman’s sin, he had trouble recognizing his own. It might have been true that Simon had sinned less than her, but he was still a sinner.

This inability to recognize our own sin was not just a Pharisee problem, we struggle with this today. Our morality does not make us less prone to sin. It only makes us less conscious of it. Jesus once said that “it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the

kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:23). It is just as hard for the moral person, for the same reason. “Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness,” C. S. Lewis observes. “It therefore has nothing (as far as I know) to say to people who do not know they have done anything to repent of and who do not feel that they need any forgiveness.” The righteousness of Christ is the only righteousness that makes us acceptable in God’s sight. We can add nothing to it.

This means that, before a moral person can be saved, we must let go of our moral accomplishments the same way the notorious sinner has to let go of sins. We cannot look to our own efforts, no matter how good, to lay claim to acceptance by God. If, as the saying goes, a man is known by the company he keeps, it is no wonder that Jesus is called a friend of sinners (Matt. 11:19). But because Jesus is also a savior, a sinner is no longer a sinner when they have Jesus as their friend. ■

For Further Study

To learn more, read *God’s Abundant Grace* by D. L. Moody (Moody Publishers).

We hope these questions will help you consider (or discuss with others) what God is teaching you through this month's study of His Word. We've left a bit of room to write down your thoughts as well!

WEEK 1: Where are you in your "following Jesus" story? Are you at the beginning, middle, or the end? What encouragement are you seeking right now?

WEEK 2: What labels have you been given? Are they a source of pride or shame? What does the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman teach us about our labels? (see March 9)

WEEK 3: Are you more of a Mary or a Martha? What can we learn about our relationship with Jesus from their story? (see March 17)

WEEK 4: Why do you think Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus? Why do you think Jesus chose to reveal Himself first to her? (see March 23)

Want more questions? Check out the Go Deeper section on our website or app!

TODAY IN THE WORD

Seen and Loved

*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Now remain in my love.—John 15:9*

March is Women's History Month, and we have spent the past three years highlighting women in the Bible. We worked our way through the study of women in the Old Testament, and this month we turn our attention to the New Testament. We will meet women who were called by God to do extraordinary work, women whom Jesus healed and forgave and loved, and women who played an important role in the early church. As we observe these women, it is really *Him* whom we will better know, follow, and adore. Through this study, I pray you will:

- See how Jesus intentionally and specifically interacted with people
- Appreciate the role of women in the ministry of Jesus and the life of the early church
- Receive the love that Jesus offers to you and live in it

Your devotional author,



Kelli Worrall

Kelli Worrall is a Professor of Communications and the Chair of the Division of Music and Media Arts at Moody Bible Institute. She is the author of *Pierced & Embraced: 7 Life-Changing Encounters with the Love of Christ*. Kelli and her husband, Peter, are parents of two children through adoption and enjoy decorating their Craftsman house.

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Managing Editor: Jamie Janosz Senior Editor: Elena Mafter Contributing Editor: John Koessler Writer: Kelli Worrall
Art Director: Lynn Gabalec Graphic Designer: Rachel Hutcheson Marketing & Production: Paul B. Currie

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Elizabeth: An Answer to Prayer

Read Luke 1:5–25

The Lord has done this for me.—Luke 1:25

Elizabeth. Mary. The Samaritan Woman. Lydia. Martha. Priscilla. Each of these women encountered Jesus in a personal way. This month, we will look at women of the New Testament, walking with them as they come face to face with Jesus. Their stories will encourage all of us, both men and women, to follow expectantly after Jesus. Today, we begin in Luke chapter 1.

Elizabeth's name means "God is my oath." We learn that Elizabeth was of the priestly line of Aaron just like her husband Zechariah, and she was old. Being both old and barren was a personal tragedy and a public "disgrace" (v. 25). Despite her pain and humiliation, Elizabeth and Zechariah were "blameless" according to all the commandments of the Lord (v. 6). She did not allow her barrenness to foster bitterness. Instead, she continued to serve, to obey, and to pray (v. 13).

God answered their prayers beyond what they could have anticipated. They simply longed for

a child. But the angel Gabriel brought good news of a son who would bring both personal joy and corporate redemption. This child, an unexpected gift in their later years, would lead many to the Lord.

When Zechariah questioned the angel's message, he was struck mute. Can you imagine his attempt to tell Elizabeth what had happened when he went back home (v. 23)? What a remarkable game of charades that must have been! Elizabeth stayed secluded for five months. Perhaps she feared a miscarriage and wanted to protect her health. Perhaps she wanted to savor the experience in solitude. Or she was concerned about the community's confusion and questioning. No matter the reason, her heart was full of gratitude.

► Where are you in following Jesus? Whether you are just beginning your journey or are advanced in years, like Elizabeth and Zechariah, we hope this story will encourage you. Ask the Lord to soften your heart like Elizabeth's to obedience and humble gratitude.

Pray with Us

Elizabeth lived for decades without receiving one of her dearest wishes. Just as she did, may we trust You, Lord, with the desires of our hearts, whether You give or take away. You understand all, and we trust You.

Mary: Humble Obedience

Read Luke 1:26–38

No word from God will ever fail.—Luke 1:37

Has God ever called you to do something for which you felt utterly unprepared? That is what happened to Mary when she was visited by the angel Gabriel. Mary was young, and Nazareth was an obscure village (population 400). Her knowledge of life beyond her town was limited, yet she had developed a noble character and a remarkable faith.

Luke introduced her, saying only “a virgin pledged to be married” (v. 27). Later, he repeated the fact of her virginity and added her name, Mary (“excellence”). Luke’s word for “virgin” is unmistakable in its importance. Mary had never had sexual relations with a man, though she was betrothed to Joseph, descendant of David. The significant subtext was that the birth announced by Gabriel could only be orchestrated by God.

Mary was alone when Gabriel greeted her, saying literally, “Grace to you, graced one.” Then he assured her of the Lord’s presence with her *personally*. Mary initially felt confused (“greatly troubled”) by this greeting,

but she mulled over the words, trying to understand (v. 29). Gabriel explained that she had “found favor with God” (v. 30), and He will use her in an unprecedented way—to carry and raise the Son of God and eternal King of kings.

Mary missed some of the significance of this pronouncement since she focused on the process. “How will this be,” she asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” (v. 34). Gabriel answered with a shockingly simple explanation of Holy Spirit conception and a concrete confirmation of another baby, this one born into barrenness. “No word from God will ever fail” (v. 37).

The encounter ended with Mary’s humble vow of obedience. We don’t know everything she felt. But before the angel left, she declared, “May your word to me be fulfilled” (v. 38).

► God still uses the humble and seemingly unremarkable to do His work. Perhaps He is asking something of you today? Ask God for the wisdom and courage to obey.

Pray with Us

The things You lead us to do sometimes don’t make sense, God. Give us faith like Mary’s—not only to discern Your calling on our lives but also to accept and obey Your will.

Mary and Elizabeth: A Needed Mentor

Read Luke 1:39–56

*The Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.—Luke 1:49*

When I graduated from college, I moved to the Chicago area to begin my grown-up life. Alone in a new city, I looked for a church community that I could call “home.” I craved the guidance of older women and eventually connected with a few who nurtured my faith with their presence and prayers. I was welcomed into their homes, attended Bible studies they taught, and served in ministries which they led. They listened to my dreams and fears. They encouraged my gifts and persistently pointed me to God’s truth.

We see a similar longing in Mary, who—on the angel’s direction—made the arduous trip to see her older relative, Elizabeth. We see that Elizabeth was sensitive to the Spirit’s guidance. Immediately sensing Mary’s condition, she stepped willingly into the role of mentor. She affirmed Mary’s faith and confirmed her calling, so much so that Mary was able to articulate her own song of praise.

In the beautiful prayer or song, titled the Magnificat, we see the depth

of Mary’s understanding of who God is and what He had already done. She gave Him glory for His holiness and His might. She acknowledged His mercy, sovereignty, and provision “to Abraham and his descendants forever” (v. 55).

Elizabeth provided a safe place for her to continue to process her next steps, built on this firm foundation. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three more months, until the time of John’s birth. Can you imagine the conversations they must have had? Their heads bowed together in times of prayer, they exchanged words of encouragement and proclamations of praise.

► Have you experienced the faith-building care of a mentor? Do you long for that right now? If you are a young believer, consider making this request of a mature believer in your church. If you have followed Jesus for many years, ask Him if you might take on this role with a younger believer. Can you offer encouragement and wisdom to someone who needs support?

Pray with Us

Father, thank You for those You put in our lives who have consistently prayed for us, asked us tough questions, and supported our walk of faith. Give us opportunities to play the same role in others’ lives.

Elizabeth: Courageous Mom

Read Luke 1:57–80

*To shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.—Luke 1:79*

Our son's adoption process involved a three-year trek through the foster care system. Our daughter's journey included a six-year wait on the China Center for Adoption Affairs. But, in God's providence, both adoptions were finalized the exact same day. Daryl was three years old, and Amelia just seven months when they became Worralls. A few months later, we stood before our church community to dedicate our children to the Lord.

As bumpy as my own road to motherhood seemed, Elizabeth's was even more arduous. Her relatives and neighbors knew of her pain and patience. So, when she finally gave birth to a son, they shared in her joy. The community gathered eight days later to witness the circumcision of this miracle child.

According to custom, the baby would be named at the ceremony. Those leading the service believed he would be called Zechariah and were acting on this assumption when Elizabeth interrupted. "No! He is to be called John" (v. 60).

The awkward moment was made worse when the people questioned her judgment. But she held firm. Zechariah had somehow shared with her the angel's instructions, and she was determined to obey. The crowd, however, was not convinced. They turned to Zechariah, still mute, and asked for verification. He wrote on a tablet: "His name is John" (v. 63).

Their astonishment doubled when Zechariah instantaneously regained his speech. This little family suddenly had the attention of everyone who wondered, "What then is this child going to be?" (v. 66). Clearly God was with this family. John's childhood is summarized in verse 80, which attests to his growing strength of spirit. But we know that his faithful mother and father prepared him well for the call God had placed on his life.

► Raising children in today's world can seem like a daunting task. If you are a parent, how are you preparing your children to live out God's call? If not, how can you support parents you know in this important work?

Pray with Us

What a weighty privilege it is to be given a child! And how many challenges there are to raising a child in this world. Father, give us wisdom and sensitivity to guide the little ones in our lives.

Mary: A New Mom

Read Luke 2:1–35

*Mary treasured up all these things
and pondered them in her heart.—Luke 2:19*

No first-time parent, no matter how many books they've read, will feel fully prepared for all the changes a baby will bring. Many say the trip home from the hospital is marked by nervousness. How will we care for this precious new life?

We don't know what training Mary was given on how to care for a newborn. Perhaps she and Elizabeth covered this subject during their three-months visit. However, Elizabeth was a first-time mother as well, so her experience would have been limited.

We also don't know what Mary was feeling as she made the trip to Bethlehem so late in her pregnancy. She probably wasn't required to accompany Joseph. But commentators believe she traveled with him because they didn't want to be apart when Jesus was born. Luke's account of the birth is sparse, so we assume it occurred without incident (vv. 6, 7), although the lack of a proper accommodation would certainly have been shocking. Mary wrapped

the babe tightly in cloth, a normal procedure for newborns and then placed Him in a manger—the opposite of normal! Shepherds, not family and friends, were the first to visit the baby (v. 16). And, consistent with her character, Mary treasured these things in her heart.

As was the custom, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the Temple for His circumcision, Mary's purification, and the presentation of the firstborn (vv. 22, 23). Simeon eagerly met them there and prophesied over the baby, not only about Israel's response but also about Mary's personal pain. "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. . . . And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (vv. 34, 35). Mary's challenges would not end at her Son's birth.

► Nothing could have fully prepared Mary and Joseph for their role as Jesus' parents. Yet God led them each step of the way. What challenges are you facing today? God was with Mary; in the same way, He will be with you.

Pray with Us

We will all eventually face suffering, even if we haven't already. Help us live in faith, not fear. Help us obey You in whatever You have called us to do, regardless of the cost.

Anna: Faithful Servant

Read Luke 2:36–40

Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.—Hebrews 11:6

My mother-in-law, a widow who lives in England, loves Jesus more than anyone else I know. Not long ago, Mum was diagnosed with cancer. Of course, my husband Peter and I were deeply concerned. But Mum? She was excited. “Cancer has given me greater boldness!” she exclaimed on a video call. Then she shared several stories of how she had proclaimed the gospel with more courage than ever before.

In many ways, Mum has followed in the footsteps of Anna. Anna had been widowed after only seven years of marriage, and when she met the baby Jesus, she was “very old” (v. 37). Some commentators explain that she might have been as old as 106—having married around age 15, lived with her husband for 7 years, then served for 84 more years as a widow. The reasoning is that a total age of 84 would not have been so remarkable.

Anna carried the title of “prophetess.” She was known and respected as a woman to whom

and through whom God spoke. Luke further bolstered Anna’s credibility by including the name of her father and tribe.

Anna was at the Temple from morning to night—worshiping, fasting, and praying (v. 37). The word used here for “prayer” carries a sense of urgency and need. It seems that Anna continually begged God to fulfill the Messianic promises. And she lived expectantly, so when she saw Simeon take this baby in his arms, she hurried to his side and immediately recognized the Child as the Promised One. Then, she spread the good news among the other like-minded residents of the region.

► Do you sometimes wonder if your age (or another characteristic) might eliminate you from being used by God? You think, “Surely God can’t use someone like me!” Nothing could be further from the truth! Anna’s story shows that God wants to work in and through each of us.

Pray with Us

You, who have been at work through history to accomplish Your will, can use us for the same purpose. We have no inadequacy or failing that Your grace and power cannot overcome. In our weakness, You are strong (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

Mary: Great Distress

Read Luke 2:41–52

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. —Deuteronomy 6:6–7

When boys reach adolescence, they feel a growing need to assert their autonomy. As they drive toward independence, their mothers cling to closeness and sometimes the mother-son relationship stretches and shifts.

In Jesus' time, the cultural expectation was that at age thirteen, Jewish boys would be considered an "adult," officially responsible for their actions. To prepare for this momentous occasion, they received intense instruction during their twelfth year. Jesus may have been in the middle of such training at the time of today's passage, when Jesus' family traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover. That year, when Mary and Joseph started the journey home to Nazareth, Jesus stayed behind in the Temple. A whole day had passed before they discovered His absence!

Imagine the shock and concern his parents felt. They returned to Jerusalem and looked everywhere for their son. Three days later, they found Him in the Temple, intently listening to the teachers and asking questions.

His exceptional understanding of the law was evident to all, but Mary was not impressed. She immediately unleashed her anxiety, calling His actions a personal affront ("Why have you treated us like this?"). She said they had been "anxiously searching" for Him, revealing her deep mental anguish and pain (v. 58). Her comments won't seem unusual to any parent who has experienced the trauma of searching for a child.

Jesus responded with twelve-year-old boldness. He articulated a growing understanding of His own identity and mission (v. 52). The time was approaching when He would step out on His own to do the work that God had set for Him. Mary added these events to the others that she stored up in her heart.

► This passage will strike a chord with all parents, teachers, and mentors as we train the next generation. We must do our part in raising them to love and know God, then we release them to God, trusting them to His care and service.

Pray with Us

Father, the lesson of equipping the young and helping them transition into independence applies not only to parents but to mentors and teachers. Guide us through this process, to Your glory!

Mary: A Mother's Request

Read John 2:1–12

*Everything is possible for
one who believes. —Mark 9:23*

Several years ago, I studied the biblical record of Mary from beginning to end. I looked at every passage where she is mentioned and traced her path as a woman, mother, and then disciple of her own son. Despite her extraordinary role in God's redemptive plan, she was also utterly human.

Mary was likely serving at the Cana wedding, which Jesus and His disciples were attending. Cana was not far from Nazareth, so it might have been the marriage of a family member or close friend. Weddings were important events in Jewish community life and often lasted for several days. The standard for hospitality was high, so when the host ran out of wine, it would have been humiliating.

Mary stepped up with some creative problem solving. She went to Jesus and told Him, "They have no more wine" (v. 3). The subtext was that He should do something about it. She knew He could perform a miracle. She was ready for the public display of His power; Jesus was not. Jesus' response of "woman" may

sound disrespectful in English, but it was simply a formal address. Mary's request had presumed upon Jesus as her son, so He respectfully redefined their relationship yet again. He would not act under her direction, but only in submission to God.

Some sort of silent communication must have passed between them though. Maybe a look or a nod, because, despite Jesus' response, Mary instructed the servants to do everything Jesus said. Then Jesus told the servants to fill six stone jars with water and turned it into 120 gallons of the best wedding wine.

John called this event a "sign through which he revealed his glory" (v. 11). Through it, Jesus was doing more than merely displaying His power. He also revealed His identity, and His disciples responded with faith.

► As we continue our study, we will see many of the women respond to Jesus in faith. Pray that your own faith would be strengthened as you witness their transforming encounters with our Savior.

Pray with Us

Lord, as we make our requests to You, we remember that You are the God of the universe. We therefore make our requests humbly, with deference to Your will, secure in knowing that You listen with wisdom and love.

Samaritan Woman: Labels and Lies

Read John 4:7–42

*Whoever drinks the water
I give them will never thirst.—John 4:14*

We all wear labels—labels related to our relationships, our occupations, our hobbies, our virtues, even our flaws. Some are a source of pride; other we try to shed. What are some of your labels?

One afternoon, a Samaritan woman went to the well. She likely went during the heat of the day to avoid her community since she carried significant shame. She must have been startled to find a Jewish man there, and more surprised when He asked her for a drink.

“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman,” she answered (v. 9). Notice that she led with their labels and believed the lie that came with them. But Jesus responded with truth and grace. He focused on *His* identity and His gift for her (v. 10). The woman’s interest was piqued, and her longing revealed. Yet she continued to question Him. “You have nothing to draw with,” she pointed out. “Are you greater than our father Jacob?”

(vv. 11, 12). While she focused on physical things like the missing jug and deep well, Jesus wanted to satisfy her spiritual thirst and give her eternal life.

When the woman finally asked for this water, Jesus told her to get her husband. When she replied that she had none, Jesus demonstrated that He knew everything about her. He called her to truth and offered her grace all over again. When the woman declared that she knew that the Messiah would come, Jesus proclaimed, “I who speak to you am he” (v. 26).

Just one conversation with Jesus changed the Samaritan woman’s life. She left the well, sought out her community, relished being known by Jesus, and was used by Him to bring others to faith.

► What are your labels? What lies do you believe? And what longings do you have that are never satisfied? Bring them all to Jesus and receive the Living Water He offers. Your life will never be the same again.

Pray with Us

Dear God, give me the Living Water You promised to the Samaritan woman. I confess my sins and ask for forgiveness. Let me have a relationship with You. Change me to be like You, to love, obey, and delight in You.

Peter's Mother-in-Law: Healed to Serve

Read Mark 1:14–34

Jesus healed many who had various diseases.—Mark 1:34

It seems that almost every day we hear of a loved one who has been stricken by illness or disease. Maybe it is even you. Today's devotional reminds us that God holds all power over our hearts and our bodies. It is always appropriate to turn to Him for healing.

In the early days of Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist was in prison, and Jesus began to publicly proclaim the good news of God. He invited everyone who heard to repent and believe. His first official act was to call four fishermen as disciples—Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Jesus took these new recruits to the synagogue of Capernaum, where He began to teach. The people were amazed by His authority.

Immediately, Jesus sparked opposition. An evil spirit, who knew Who Jesus was and why He came, addressed Him directly, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" (v. 24). Jesus rebuked the spirit, and

it left the man. If the people were already amazed by Jesus' teaching, imagine their response to this dramatic miracle. Word spread quickly throughout the region.

After this very public presentation, Jesus was likely looking to be refreshed in the home of Simon and Andrew. But Simon Peter's mother-in-law was sick with fever, a serious illness with supernatural implications. Jesus took her hand; "the fever left her" is a mild translation. The strength of the literal verb ("forsook, hurl, release") may indicate that this fever had been induced by demons.

This is the first record of a physical healing by Jesus in Mark's Gospel. And the story is repeated in three Gospels. Why? Perhaps because immediately after she was healed, she began to serve. Once bed-ridden, she was now a committed follower of Jesus.

► What is our response to answered prayer? Do we quickly forget? Instead, like Peter's mother-in-law, let it spur us on to service, giving God the glory with our testimony.

Pray with Us

May we make it a practice to remember how You have healed us, freed us, and given us new life. Especially in heavy circumstances like personal illness or a loved one's death, remind us of Your goodness and mercy.

Widow of Nain: Don't Cry

Read Luke 7:11–17

*God has come to
help his people.—Luke 7:16*

Have you noticed through this study how much Jesus cared for women? Time and again, He met them personally and changed them profoundly. Luke 11 tells the story of the widow of Nain.

Jesus and His disciples went from Capernaum to Nain, a journey about 20 miles to the southwest. By this time, a large crowd was following Him. As they approached the town gate, a funeral procession was passing by. The body would have been wrapped in cloth and carried on a burial plank. The mother and many mourners followed.

Jesus learned that the dead person was the only son of a widow. Scripture tells us that when Jesus saw her, His heart filled with compassion (v. 13). A widow without children would have been utterly alone, devoid of provision or protection.

Then He did a shocking thing. He stopped the funeral procession (a breach of Jewish custom) and said to the woman, “Don’t cry” (v. 13).

Everyone must have wondered Who is this man and what is He doing!? Jesus touched the coffin (an act of Jewish uncleanness) and said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” (v. 14).

To everyone’s amazement, the son immediately sat up and spoke. Then, Jesus personally reunited him with his mom. While the raising of Jairus’s daughter happened in the family’s home, this resurrection occurred at a city gate in plain view of the public.

Luke says the bystanders were “filled with awe and praised God” (v. 16). They called Him a prophet. Although they recognized that God was working through Him, they did not yet realize that Jesus was God Himself. Even so, news of His work continued to spread.

► The passage can challenge us in many ways: to make up our own mind regarding the identity of Jesus, to worship and praise Him for His healing work. It also should motivate us to spread the good news of what He has done.

Pray with Us

Raising a physically dead person back to life seems like the ultimate miracle. But it is even more significant when You raise a spiritually dead person to life. Every believer has experienced this miracle, and we praise You for it!

Mary: Mothers and Sons

Read Mark 3:20–35

*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven
is my brother and sister and mother.—Matthew 12:50*

As a college professor, I've witnessed many tearful "good-byes" between parents and their children. Most parents worry when sending their child, even one who is nearing adulthood, into the unknown.

In today's passage, we again meet Jesus' mother Mary. As word about Jesus had spread across the region and His crowd of followers had grown, the response was not entirely favorable (Mark 3:2, 6). Religious authorities sent a delegation to discredit and defame Him. "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (v. 22).

Jesus did not shy away from these confrontations. Just as He had answered the Pharisees' questions in Mark chapter 2, He boldly addressed these accusers by challenging their logic. "How can Satan drive out Satan?" (v. 23). His parable pointed out the absurdity of their claim.

Jesus' mother and brothers heard of His growing influence and the escalating opposition. They were afraid and went to find Him and bring

Him home. We don't know the state of Mary's heart. At least some of His family members thought Jesus was "out of His mind" (v. 21). Mary may have gone along because she was worried about her son. The brothers may have wanted to protect Jesus from danger, but they also may have feared that the controversy would affect their family.

When they arrived at the scene, the crowd prevented them from reaching Jesus. They had to send their message like a game of telephone. But when Jesus learned of their presence, His response was shockingly counter-cultural. "Who are my mother and my brothers?" In a society where the family was the basis of social and economic life, Jesus asserted that the greater connection was a common dedication to God.

► Our earthly families are certainly a gift to us, but Jesus' response encourages us to deepen our bonds within the family of God. What steps might you take to strengthen your connection with fellow believers?

Pray with Us

Lord, help us build strong ties with the church. Help us love one another as You love us—accepting one another, holding each other accountable, and encouraging one another to grow in You and in Your Word.

Two Daughters: A Total Healing

Read Mark 5:21–43

Your faith has healed you.

Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.—Mark 5:34

One of my favorite writing professors always said, “Sometimes in order to tell one story well, you need to tell two.” Two stories, told side by side, create a deeper meaning than either could convey on its own. In Mark chapter 5, the stories of Jairus’s daughter and a hemorrhaging woman are told as a pair. We are meant to understand them together. But why?

In many ways, Jairus and the bleeding woman were as different as could be. Jairus was a respected leader in the synagogue, educated, comfortable, a family man. The bleeding woman was destitute, unclean, and isolated. What they had in common, though, was their need for Jesus and their belief in His power. Both came to Him—humbly—with hope that He could heal. And Jesus gave them equal attention.

In fact, Jesus interrupted His visit to Jairus’s dying daughter when the woman touched His hem. Instantly, she felt in her body that she was well and tried to slip away unnoticed. But Jesus sought her out and listened as

she told Him (trembling) “the whole truth” (v. 33). Luke 8:47 adds that this was a public proclamation: “In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.”

Then Jesus said: “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering” (v. 34). The address “daughter” implied an intimate, provisional, loving relationship and a commitment to care. Jesus commended her faith. He offered her complete peace, freedom, and healing: social, emotional, spiritual.

While Jesus was still speaking to the woman, He received word that Jairus’s daughter had died. But this provided Him an opportunity to raise her from the dead and display His power on another level.

► Are you in need of the healing work of Jesus? Maybe your ailment is physical, maybe it is emotional or spiritual. Bow humbly and hopefully at His feet. Bring your wounds to Jesus today. Touch His hem and believe.

Pray with Us

Father, You are Lord of all. You have the power to heal afflictions of the body, mind, and soul. If it be Your will, we ask for healing for ourselves and our loved ones—from trauma, addiction, or illness.

Herodias and Salome: A Tragic Request

Read Matthew 14:1–12

*I will send my messenger,
who will prepare the way before me.—Malachi 3:1*

In today's world, the Christian commitment to holiness runs counter to cultural trends. Politicians, pastors, and others who speak up for biblical truth do so knowing that they will face public ridicule. But this is nothing new.

In Matthew 14, two women played a very different role in the Gospel narrative. Jesus was nearing the end of His two-year ministry in Galilee, and news of His growing popularity had reached even the highest-level ruler—Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Herod had established his capital in Tiberias, eight miles down the coast from Capernaum, where Jesus had made His ministry base. We can be sure he kept an eye on Jesus' activities.

Herod came to a curious conclusion. "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead!" This seemingly came from superstition, rumor, and fear. Matthew takes this opportunity to explain what happened to John. Herod had likely taken John into custody a full year and a half prior to this account. Just

as Jesus had begun challenging the religious leaders, John had publicly condemned Herod's problematic and incestuous marriage. Herodias had been his brother's wife and the daughter of his older half-brother. Herod arrested John in response.

While imprisoned, John received reports about Jesus' ministry from his own disciples (Matt. 11:2–6). Jesus sent John a personal confirmation of His identity. Then, on Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias (Salome) danced at the party. Herod was so pleased that he promised her anything. Herodias, full of hatred toward John, seized the opportunity for revenge. Upon her mother's prompting, Salome asked for John's head on a platter. After John's disciples buried his body, they went immediately to find Jesus and tell Him the news.

► Standing up for biblical truth will probably not make you popular. In fact, it can often come at a cost. Many will say they believe in Jesus, but fewer will risk much on His behalf.

Pray with Us

We are inspired by stories of faith in the persecuted church. Many of us wonder if we would have the courage to risk so much for Your name. Boldness for the gospel comes from You, Lord. Give us such boldness.

Questions & Answers

by Dr. Michael Rydelnik, Moody professor of Jewish Studies and host of Moody Radio's *Open Line*

This month's Q&A column honors an important anniversary of the Jewish Studies program at Moody Bible Institute.

Q What did Paul mean when he described the gospel as being “first to the Jew, then to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16)?

A Some think the word “first” (Greek *proton*) should be taken sequentially, meaning the gospel was proclaimed first to the Jewish people and now it is for the “Greek” or the Gentiles. This is unlikely because the verb that governs the whole verse (“it is the power of God for salvation”) is a present tense. If the gospel is still the power of God for salvation and still for everyone who believes, it is still “first to the Jew.”

Others understand it to mean that the gospel should always be presented to Jewish people before reaching out to other people groups. The problem, once again, is that the word “first” does not require a sequential sense. In fact, most Greek dictionaries and lexicons say it does not have that kind of chronological meaning in this context.

It is best to understand the word “first” to mean “preeminently” or “especially.” This is how most Greek

lexicons and dictionaries understand the word as used here. In fact, Paul uses the word “first” with this sense in Romans 2:9 and 3:2. The gospel is for all people, but it has *special significance* for the Jewish people. The promises of the Messiah and salvation were given to the Jewish people and, even if most rejected it, the gospel remains a message designed especially for them.

Q Why do some people claim to be “Jewish followers of Jesus”? Does maintaining ethnic or social distinctions contradict Galatians 3:28?

A Since I’m Jewish, people have often asked me this question. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Why do I still say I’m Jewish even though I believe in Jesus?

The Bible does not teach that we become a mass of undifferentiated humanity when we believe in Jesus. In heaven “every nation, tribe, people and language” will worship before the throne of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9). Being Jewish is an ethnic identity, not merely religious practice, and faith in Jesus does not change a person’s ethnic identity. Further, the apostle

“Moody has the only full accredited Jewish Studies program at a Christian undergraduate school in America, and we’ve had it for 100 years.” —Dr. Michael Rydelnik

Paul repeatedly identified himself as a Jew (Acts 21:39; 22:3), a dishonest statement if his faith in Jesus meant he was no longer Jewish.

So, what does Paul mean? Paul is saying it doesn’t matter whether someone is Jewish or Gentile, a slave or free, a man or a woman—when we trust in Jesus, we are justified by faith in exactly the same way and united in Christ spiritually. Even so, we remain distinctly Jewish, Irish, Italian, or French, or any other ethnicity, as much as we remain men and women.

Q Why don’t Jewish people believe in Jesus?

A Some Jewish people do believe in Jesus. In fact, Paul uses this as a proof that God hasn’t rejected the Jewish people (Rom. 11:1). He goes on to say that there will always be a remnant of Jewish people who will believe because they are chosen by grace (Rom. 11:5).

For Jewish leaders of first century, Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they were expecting. They wanted a political and military deliverer to liberate them from Rome, not a sacrificial Redeemer. But if you ask

your Jewish friends today why they don’t believe, that’s probably not what they would say. They might not even know why most Jewish people don’t believe in Him.

But there is one special reason. It is the antisemitic history of the church. Great Church Fathers and Reformers spoke terrible words about the Jewish people. The Crusaders killed many Jewish people in the name of Jesus. Even many professing Christians participated in the Holocaust. Why would a Jewish person want to follow a teaching that promoted hate? As a result, Jewish people feel as if they are committing cultural suicide by believing in Jesus.

Believers need to adopt a loving and caring attitude toward Jewish people. We need to take a strong stand against antisemitism. When we present Jesus, we must demonstrate His love for His own people. And our lives need to be so transformed by knowing the Lord, that Jewish people will be “envious” of our faith (Rom. 11:1). This is what Paul meant when he said Gentile followers of Jesus should make the Jewish people envious of the salvation Gentiles found in Jesus, the promised Jewish Messiah. ■

The 5,000: Filled Up

Read Matthew 14:13–21

They all ate and were satisfied. —Matthew 14:20

In one week, all four members of our family became sick. As hard as I tried to keep all the balls in the air, several dropped. It's humbling to realize how fragile and fallible we really are. It is hard to admit we have needs that we can't meet ourselves. Self-sufficiency is a stubborn and sneaky (dare I say?) sin, a particularly problematic form of pride.

Today's passage is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. The story occurs at a ministry low point for Jesus. He had been rejected by His hometown (Matt. 13:53–58) and His cousin had been killed (14:1–12). The opposition against Him was escalating.

Jesus withdrew by boat to a solitary place. The implication is that He needed some time to mourn, to attune His heart with His Father's, and to gather the spiritual strength for His next phase of ministry.

The only hiccup was that Jesus was still very popular. Crowds followed Him on shore and were waiting when He landed at a remote

spot along the coast. Only Matthew explains that the estimate of 5,000 did not include the women and children who were also there, so the actual crowd may have been 10,000 or more (v. 21).

Despite His own desire for solitude, Jesus moved among them with compassion and healed the sick. When evening was near, the disciples approached Jesus. The people were hungry, so the disciples recommended that He send them away into the nearby villages to purchase food (v. 15).

Jesus, however, said the people should stay. He intended to feed them Himself. Taking their limited resources, He miraculously multiplied them into an abundance. Everyone ate and was satisfied, and they collected twelve baskets filled with leftovers.

► Our Savior knows our needs. He knows you are human, hungry, and helpless. Even so, He looks at you with love. Are you feeling empty today? Look to Jesus. He alone can satisfy your deepest needs.

Pray with Us

In loss, in physical pain, in exhaustion, You know what we feel because You have felt it Yourself. Comfort us, fulfill us, teach us the meaning of living for You. You do not protect us from pain, but You do help us through it.

Canaanite Woman: A Lost Sheep

Read Matthew 15:21–28

*Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith!
Your request is granted.”—Matthew 15:28*

In every country, every nation, and maybe even in your town, there are places most people avoid. The people who live in those communities don’t mingle with the rest of society. These places are often marked by crime and darkness. Yet many churches and ministries move into those areas to shine the light of the gospel.

Not long after He fed the five thousand, Jesus withdrew to Gentile territory. He had been rejected by His own in Nazareth. His cousin John had been killed by Herod. The religious leaders were escalating their opposition. So, the plan was to go through the Gentile region, into Judea, and ultimately to Jerusalem.

Near the infamous pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus and His disciples encountered a Canaanite woman. In the Old Testament, the Canaanites were the most wicked and despised of Israel’s enemies. Much of that cultural tension remained in Jesus’ day. Despite her reputation, the woman approached Jesus. She repeatedly called Him “Lord,” and begged Him

for mercy (v. 22). Her daughter was demon possessed, and she was desperate. She showed her familiarity with Messianic prophesy by calling Jesus the “Son of David.”

Just three miles away was the pagan temple to Eshmun, a god of healing. This woman was surely familiar with this place. Yet she chose to come to Jesus. When Jesus did not immediately acknowledge her request, His disciples assumed He would send her away. Instead, Jesus engaged her in banter during which He maintained His commitment to reach Israel (“lost sheep”). She told him that even the Gentiles (“dogs”) would be blessed by the Jewish Messiah (vv. 26–27). Her answer showed her faith. Jesus affirmed her belief and healed her daughter.

► Are there people or places you see as beyond the reach of the gospel? Ask God how He wants you or your church to serve them. No one is beyond His love or reach, and many are searching for the hope only He can bring!

Pray with Us

This story moves us to gratitude that You have opened salvation to the Gentiles, as well as the Jewish people! None of us deserves Your grace, but You freely give it. May we proclaim Your mercy to others as undeserving and needy as ourselves.

Mary and Martha: The Better Thing

Read Luke 10:38–42

*You are worried and upset about many things,
but few things are needed—or indeed only one.—Luke 10:41*

Often one of our children (ages 11 and 14) still complains that he or she is being treated differently. Someone had to do a chore that the other did not. One of them received more screen time or ice cream or rides in the front seat. Sadly, even grown-ups can play the comparison game.

This brief scene in Bethany is recorded only by Luke. Jesus and His disciples had arrived in the Jerusalem area, and as He prepared His followers for what was to come, He delivered some intense training on key aspects of the faith. He was likely doing some such teaching at the home of Mary and Martha, sisters to Lazarus, when this conversation took place. Ironically, as He lectured on discipleship, the two sisters provided a perfect and living illustration.

Martha worked intently on the preparations involved with hosting an important person like Jesus. She wanted to show Him the honor He was due. By contrast, Mary took the opportunity to sit at His feet and absorb His every word. When Martha

asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her, she assumed He would affirm her critique and come to her aid. The original Greek wording indicates her confident expectation.

Jesus' response was gentle, but firm. "My dear, dear Martha." He rebuked her—tenderly—for her trivial concerns and her unnecessary focus on comparison. Jesus did not criticize her work, only her expectation that Mary must join.

Mary provided the flesh-and-blood example of devoted discipleship that Jesus was asking for. It was also significant that Jesus deemed a woman to be worthy of His teaching. In that first-century culture, women did not often receive an education. That Jesus publicly affirmed her choice was no small compliment.

► It's tempting for us, as well, to serve at the expense of being fed. We can unfairly evaluate the focus of others and compare them to ourselves. May we prioritize our own heart and soul nourishment, even over service.

Pray with Us

There are so many ways we can and do go wrong. We throw ourselves into service at the cost of spending time with You; we judge others because their obedience to You looks different from ours. Teach us to pursue You first.

Adulterous Woman: No Longer Condemned

Read John 8:1–11

*Go now and leave
your life of sin.—John 8:11*

Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* wore a red "A" for most of her adult life as penance for her sin of adultery. While Hester carried that public condemnation, her lover, the young minister Arthur Dimmesdale, suffered in secrecy and died in shame.

In Deuteronomy 22, the law stated that unfaithful wives should lose their lives, but the method was not prescribed. (The Mishnah specified *strangling*.) When an *engaged* woman was unfaithful, the woman *and* the man should be stoned. Consequently, many Bible commentators conclude that the woman in John 8 was engaged.

When the scribes and Pharisees arrived at the Temple, Jesus was teaching. They presented the woman caught in adultery, appealed to the law, and demanded a judgment. The case was fishy. Presumably, if they caught the woman, they also knew her partner. Where was he? Clearly, they were less concerned with justice and more interested in setting a snare

for Jesus. Would He disregard the law and destroy His credibility? Or uphold the law and ruin His reputation of compassion? Forced to choose between justice and grace, what would Jesus do?

He stooped and wrote in the dirt. We don't know what He wrote, but when Jesus did speak, He referenced Deuteronomy 13:9 and 17:7, which says the accusers of a crime should throw the first stones. Jesus added that they should be without sin. The scribes and Pharisees were silenced. One by one, they shuffled away. When they were gone, Jesus called her "Woman," the same respectful term He used for His mother in John 2. Then He released her from condemnation, absolved her sin, and set her free.

► The scribes and Pharisees reveal our own tendency to pass judgment and condemn. The woman shows our struggle with shame. Jesus shows us life-altering forgiveness and an opportunity for new life.

Pray with Us

You alone understand the full depth and gravity of our sin. Yet You, who alone are qualified to pardon sin, are the most willing to forgive! Give us Your heart of compassionate forgiveness.

Mary and Martha: Hear Me

Read John 11:1–46

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.—John 11:25

Do you long to be heard? From the moment we are born, we want someone to answer our cries and meet our needs. It's a fundamental human desire that we see Jesus meet again and again.

In John 11, Jesus clearly heard the desperate request of Martha and Mary. “Lord, the one you love is sick,” they cried. But even though Jesus heard (vv. 4, 6), He did not hurry. He lingered for two whole days, a terribly long time in a life-or-death situation. Jesus then revealed the motivation behind this delay: “It is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (v. 4).

Jesus longed for that glory to lead people to belief (vv. 14–15). When Jesus finally arrived at their home, Mary and Martha both expressed their disappointment. They believed He was the Christ and could have prevented Lazarus’s death. They did not yet understand that He was able to reverse it.

Jesus wanted to reveal more of Himself to them—His ultimate, eternal power over death. He told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (v. 25). Clearly, Jesus empathized with their pain. He was deeply moved (v. 33), and He wept (v. 35). Then He ordered the stone to be rolled away from the tomb, and despite Martha’s concern about the odor, He prayed to His Father and called forth life. At its core, this is a love story. Jesus’ abiding affection for this family is declared repeatedly (vv. 3, 5, 36). And even though you and I don’t always get a Lazarus ending this side of heaven, we can always trust His love.

► This passage reveals so much about Jesus! He hears, even when He doesn’t hurry. He empathizes with our pain. His glory is on display if we have eyes to see. It should move us to belief. He loves us and longs to give us life.

Pray with Us

One of the biggest lies we can believe is that our tears don’t matter to You. When Lazarus died, You clearly demonstrated that, even though You see the bigger picture, our pain still grieves You.

The Widow's Mite: Giving All

Read Mark 12:41–44

Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. — 1 Chronicles 29:14

In his epistle, James warns us about playing favorites. If a wealthy person comes to church with gold rings and fancy attire, we should not give that person preferential treatment over someone in shabby clothes. “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (James 2:5).

The message of the widow and her two mites is similar. God’s economy is drastically different from ours. At the beginning of Mark 11, Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem to the people’s resounding praise. The next morning, when He returned to the Temple, He drove out the money changers because they had turned the house of worship into a den of thieves.

At the end of His time in the Temple, Jesus sat across from the treasury in the Court of Women, where many rich people donated large sums of money. Their wealth was evident to all by the clang of their offering as it was thrown into the bell.

Eventually, a poor widow shuffled by and dropped into the coffer two copper coins (lepta), the smallest Greek coins, worth 1/64th of a denarius. Each day, the Temple authorities gave this amount to the poor, so they could buy bread. This poor widow was giving her bread allowance back to God.

When Jesus noticed her, He gathered His disciples. He praised the poor widow for giving “all she had to live on.” While the religious leaders probably preferred the large gifts, many were given out of abundance and self-sufficiency. The widow demonstrated radical trust in God to provide her daily bread. She gave out of devotion, dependency, and faith.

► What do we choose to give? How much do we give? This passage challenges us to check our own giving and our attitude toward wealth. Spend time thinking about your relationship to money. How can you give “all” to Jesus?

Pray with Us

The widow’s gift sounds a bit reckless to us. What about her other financial obligations? Was this being a good steward? Help us, like her, to trust You with all we are and with everything we have.

Woman with Oil: Extravagant Love

Read Mark 14:1–11

Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.—Mark 14:9

We perceive the world through the five senses that God has given us. And worship, as God ordained it in both the Old and New Testaments, was a multi-sensory experience. Consider the Lord's Supper, baptism, sacrifices, and feasts. Maybe our modern worship services could benefit by giving us more to see and touch and even smell.

The Passover was only two days away. Up to three million people may have come to Jerusalem for the festivities that year. The chief priests and scribes were nervous. They had witnessed Jesus' popularity. They risked a riot if they made a public arrest. So, they doubled down on their plan to seize Jesus secretly.

That afternoon Jesus left the crowd and retreated to Bethany, this time to the home of Simon the leper. When a prominent person visited a home, it was customary to leave the door ajar, so others could join the gathering. While Jesus was reclining at the table, a woman entered with a jar of very expensive perfume.

She went to Jesus, broke the vial—demonstrating the totality of the gift—and poured it over His head. This was far beyond normal courtesy. Jesus would have been drenched. The sweet fragrance would have filled the room. It was a bold, extravagant, sensory-filled expression of love.

Some people, possibly even the disciples, scolded (“snorted” or “roared”) the woman. They thought she wasted the perfume. It could have been sold and given to the poor. But Jesus defended her and called her act beautiful. He questioned their concerns. Devotion to Him must outweigh all material matters. He connected her act to His impending death, and He promised her a place of prominence in the gospel proclamation.

► This woman's love for Jesus spilled over with an extravagant gesture. Many of us have spoiled the people we love with over-the-top gifts. Have we ever done the same for God? How can you give to God extravagantly?

Pray with Us

You are worthy of every act of devotion and each extravagant gift. This story reminds us that loving, knowing, and serving You is the glorious purpose of our lives. May our love for You grow and grow!

Mary: Final Act of Love

Read John 19:16b–30

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit. —Psalm 34:18*

Mary is standing at the foot of the cross. We can only imagine how her mother's heart suffered to see Jesus beaten severely and bleeding profusely. He was forced to carry His own crossbeam until Roman soldiers seized Simon of Cyrene and ordered him to help. The destination was "Calvary," on a public roadway near Jerusalem.

On either side of Jesus, a criminal was crucified. The inscription over His head, intended as mockery, read "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (v. 19). Written in three languages, the inadvertent testimony of truth would be read by thousands of Jews, passing by for the Passover.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each recorded that many women followed Jesus to the cross, mourning and wailing (Luke 23:27). John listed only a specific four: Mary His mother, His mother's sister, Mary wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (v. 25). John noted his own presence as "the disciple whom He loved" (v. 26).

Each Gospel writer documented certain final words of Jesus. But only John recounted this final act of familial love: When Jesus looked down and saw Mary's sorrow, He said, "Woman [using the respectful address again], here is your son" (v. 26). Speaking to John, He said, "Here is your mother" (v. 27).

Jesus' brothers had abandoned Him (7:1–5). Joseph had likely died. Mary had supported Jesus throughout His ministry and to this traumatic end, but she was about to be left alone. Jesus was telling John to care for her as his own. "From that time on, [John] took her into his home" (v. 27).

Knowing that all things had been accomplished and Scripture had been fulfilled, He requested a drink. When He received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" and gave up His spirit.

► As we encounter the cross through Mary's eyes—the person who probably loved Him most—we can feel the pain He endured in palpable ways. We grieve, yet not without hope.

Pray with Us

You were in so much pain, Jesus, yet You remembered to care for Your mother and to fulfill all that had been prophesied about You. No matter what misery we may endure in earthly life, You are and will be our eternal consolation.

Mary Magdalene: Seeking Her Savior

Read John 20:1–18

*He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?
Who is it you are looking for?”—John 20:15*

Very early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and other women returned to the garden to complete the burial. On Friday, after Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had placed His body in a tomb. By Jewish custom, the body should be buried by sundown.

As a devoted follower, Mary had been a first-hand witness of the crucifixion (Matt. 27:55–56). Her devotion ran deep as Jesus had cast seven demons from her (Luke 8:1–3). We can only imagine her dismay when she arrived at the tomb to find the stone rolled away. She ran to tell Peter and John who bolted to the garden. When they saw the burial clothes folded and purposely placed, John believed (v. 8).

After the disciples left, Mary lingered, taking advantage of the solitude to grieve with tears. Eventually, she peered into the tomb and saw two angels where the body had been. When they asked her why she wept, she told them, “They have taken my Lord away” (v. 13).

She turned and saw a man who had a question of His own: “Who is it you are looking for?” (v. 15). Perhaps it was still dark or her eyes were blinded by tears because she thought He was the gardener and had moved the body. “Tell me where you have put him, and I will get him” (v. 15).

Then, Jesus uttered her name: “Mary.” Imagine the love in His tone! Full of joy and awe, she responded: “Rabboni” (v. 16). Jesus gave Mary an important mission—to go and tell the disciples: “I have seen the Lord!”

That Jesus chose Mary for this assignment is astounding. Women were rarely trusted with significant work. They were not typically messengers. They couldn’t serve as legal witnesses. What made Mary credible? That she sought and served her Savior.

► Hebrews 11:6 says that God “rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Mary went to the tomb seeking Jesus, and He met her there, forever changing her life. Seek Jesus today as you read His Word and pray.

Pray with Us

Lord, today we pray for believers whose faith has grown stale. Turn them back to You; stir up love for You in their hearts and give them hope. Whatever has caused them to lose their focus, restore them to intimacy with You.

Mary: Mother and Disciple

Read Acts 1:1–14

This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back.—Acts 1:7

Mary was not only the mother of Jesus, she was His disciple. In the book of Acts, Luke continues the story of Jesus. During Jesus' 40 resurrected days on earth, He appeared to the apostles and gave them many "convincing proofs that He was alive" (v. 3). The accuracy of this evidence mattered to Luke.

Jesus promised the apostles the gift of the Holy Spirit and instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for this baptism (vv. 4–5). Finally, He commissioned them as His witnesses and ascended "before their very eyes" into the clouds (v. 9).

The apostles left the Mount of Olives and walked back to their upper room in Jerusalem. There, they could talk and pray away from the street-level crowds. Luke listed the men by name—the same disciples as in Luke 6:14–16, excepting Judas Iscariot. Luke also continued his practice of honoring women by acknowledging their presence, though not by name. As we have seen, faithful women

served Jesus during His ministry and were with Him at His death. Certainly, it makes sense that they were present at the beginning of the Church.

Mary is mentioned by name in verse 14, her only appearance in the book of Acts. It is a fitting finish to her biblical story. Luke presented her as a model of trust and obedience in his gospel record. She experienced the greatest joys and sorrows motherhood can bring. And through it all, she was a disciple of her own Son.

Interestingly, Jesus' brothers were also there. Their unbelief from six months prior (John 7:5) must have been reversed. Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). Perhaps that was the impetus for his (and other brothers') belief.

► This group "all joined together constantly in prayer" (v. 14). *Constantly* means "resolutely, persistently, even obstinately." A community is made strong by prayer. Do you have a prayer group? Maybe today is a good time to begin one.

Pray with Us

Father, for those of us who are not in a strong community of believers, we ask You to bring us into fellowship with others who love You and are devoted to prayer.

Sapphira: Deadly Lies

Read Acts 5:1–11

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.—Ephesians 4:15

Are you a truth-teller? We all like to think of ourselves as honest, but sometimes it is difficult to speak truth to others, to ourselves, and even to God. Today's reading provides a shocking caution against telling lies.

In Acts 4:32–36, Luke painted an idyllic picture of believers living in unity. The early church shared everything. If anyone sold property, the apostles would collect and distribute the funds to people in need. Luke provided the example of Barnabas, who sold his field and donated the proceeds (v. 36).

In Acts 5:1–11, Ananias and Sapphira wanted the same admiration Barnabas had enjoyed. They, too, sold a piece of property. However, instead of donating the entire amount, they kept part of the money for themselves. Ananias brought *some* of the money to the apostles. Immediately, the Holy Spirit revealed the deception to Peter who accused Ananias of allowing Satan to “fill” (“control” or “influence”) his heart (v. 3). Ananias not only lied to the apostles, he lied to God (v. 4).

Ananias's giving was not compulsory. God hadn't demanded it; nor had the apostles. The land had been his to do with as he pleased. So had been the money. Ananias's sin wasn't keeping back funds; it was faking generosity. He had lied against God. In Ananias, we see the dangerous progression of sin. Envy led to pride; pride to greed; greed to lies. Instantaneously, Ananias died. The young men removed his body and buried it.

Three hours later, Sapphira arrived, unaware of her husband's death. Peter questioned her too. Foolishly, she lied as Ananias had done. She also died. Luke wrote that “great fear seized the whole church [*ekklesia*]” (v. 11). This fear was appropriate, a fear of displeasing the holy God.

► Sapphira's story teaches us to take sin seriously. We must always seek to be honest before God and live a life that is open and truthful. Spend some time today in confession. What do you need to bring before God today?

Pray with Us

Help us overcome our shame and frankly confess our sins. You already know what they are, and it is right for us to confess them and ask for Your forgiveness. Please forgive us and restore us to righteousness.

Tabitha: Doing Good

Read Acts 9:32–43

*She was always doing good
and helping the poor.—Acts 9:36*

Did you know that Random Acts of Kindness Day is February 17? The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation provides ideas on how to make kindness the norm in society. If such an organization were present in Tabitha's day, she might have been a founding member!

We meet Tabitha, also called Dorcas in Greek, at the close of Acts 9. Peter was traveling, visiting "the Lord's people" (v. 32). He served in a pastoral role for new believers and his healing ministry in Lydda and Joppa opened the gospel door to the Gentiles.

When Peter arrived in Lydda, he met Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for years. We don't know if he was a follower of Jesus, but Peter called on Christ's power to heal the man. Immediately, Aeneas rose. God used that miracle to bring to the Lord "all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon" (v. 35). Healing often played an evangelistic role but happened also within the Christian community.

In verse 36, we are told of Tabitha, who is identified as a "disciple,"

known for her devotion to helping the poor. She was well loved. While Peter was still in Lydda, Tabitha died, and the disciples sent for him, believing he could help. When he arrived, Tabitha's home was filled with widows. They were weeping and showing off the robes she had made for them.

Tabitha's body had already been prepared for burial. However, with authority, Peter followed the protocol Jesus had used with Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21–43). He asked everyone to leave the room. He knelt and prayed. Then he said to the dead woman, "Tabitha, get up" (v. 40). She opened her eyes and sat up. Tabitha's resurrection became huge news, and "many people believed in the Lord" (v. 42).

► Are you known for your kindness? As believers we are called to do good and to be kind. But unlike the world's view, this is not random kindness. Rather, our kindness, as Christians, should always point people to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pray with Us

Even when we earnestly desire to be kind, we aren't always sure how to be so. Give us insight, wisdom, and opportunities to show Jesus-centered and gospel-oriented kindness, especially toward those who don't know You!

Lois and Eunice: Godly Parenting

Read Acts 16:1–5

*One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.—Psalm 145:4*

What role do grandparents play in a child's life? Often they are known for spoiling their grandkids. But they can play a key role. Through prayer, words, and example, they can pass on their faith to the next generation.

In today's reading, we meet Timothy whose faith was shaped by his mother and grandmother. Paul and Barnabas had just finished their first missionary journey, and the Jerusalem Council was convened (Acts 15). The discussion centered around circumcision and its connection to salvation. The decision was not to impose the law on Gentile believers.

After the Council, while preparing to return to missionary travels, Paul and Barnabas differed in their strategy and agreed to part ways. Paul took Silas and headed to Syria and Cilicia. In Lystra, they met Timothy. Timothy's mother Eunice was a Jewish believer and his father was Greek. Paul wanted to add him to their team. There was, however, the matter of circumcision. Timothy was half-Jew, and the Jews in that area would have known that. It

may have been a barrier to the gospel, so, despite the Council's decision, Paul asked Timothy to be circumcised. The fact that Timothy agreed is further testimony to his character and heart of obedience.

Timothy became a significant ministry partner for Paul. They worked closely together (Acts 18:5; 19:22). And the apostle sent Timothy on individual missions (1 Thess. 3:1–6). Paul even wrote two of his epistles directly to this "true son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2).

In 2 Timothy 1:3–5, Paul opens his second letter by once again commending Timothy's faith. He also acknowledges the key role that Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois played in his discipleship. Their sincere faith had become Timothy's own.

► Grandparents and parents aren't the only ones who can help pass down their faith to the next generation. Are you investing in people younger than yourself? What is one way you can strengthen their faith in Jesus?

Pray with Us

You love young people, Lord. May we share Your tender heart for children. Give us opportunities to pour into them, just as older saints have poured into us.

Lydia: Open Heart and Home

Read Acts 16:11–15

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. —Hebrews 13:2

People with the gift of hospitality know how to make others feel welcome, comfortable, and special. They create beautiful gathering spaces. They plan, prepare, and serve delicious food. But most of all, they know how to make people feel welcome and loved.

Shortly after Timothy joined his missionary team, Paul received a vision of a man, begging him: “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (16:9). So, Paul took his team, and they went. Because Luke himself was on this trip, his detailed travel log is a firsthand account (v. 11). After a long journey across the Aegean Sea, they landed in the port of Neapolis and traveled ten miles inland to Philippi.

On the Sabbath, the team went to the river to find a place for prayer. The term “place of prayer” typically referred to a synagogue, but no synagogue had been established, since it required ten men. Instead, the women would gather at the river to pray.

One of the first converts was Lydia, a wealthy businesswoman

and seller of purple cloth. Luke wrote of her conversion. “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” (v. 14). While Paul faithfully shared the gospel, God was the true evangelist. Following Lydia’s lead, everyone in her household was baptized, perhaps even her employees. One person can influence a whole family! This happens multiple times in Acts—an entire household comes to Christ because of one initial conversion.

Lydia then invited Paul’s team to stay at her home. She saw his visit as confirmation of her faith. Paul often established a homebase when he went to a new town, and Lydia’s house became that, so much so that he returned there with Silas after they came out of prison (v. 40).

► How can we become people known for hospitality? Perhaps it is by allowing people to stay in your home. Or maybe you can gift them with a meal. In what ways might God use your hospitality for the sake of the gospel?

Pray with Us

Grant us the gift of hospitality! It is one thing to clean a house and prepare a meal, it is quite another to make each guest feel welcome and at home. Give us a godly interest in others and the gift to show them Your love.

The Slave Girl: Opposing the Gospel

Read Acts 16:16–24

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.—Matthew 5:11

Wherever we preach the gospel, we should not be surprised to encounter opposition—whether on the foreign mission field or in our own hometown. Jesus Himself faced hostility. And, as we see in the book of Acts, so did Paul.

Today's story sits side by side with the joyful conversion of Lydia and her household (vv. 11–15). The two narratives are opposite in every way. While Lydia was a woman of wealth and status, this young girl was a slave, controlled by an evil spirit and exploited by her owners. The spirit of divination enabled her to predict the future, a skill by which her owners earned much money. This spirit also recognized the divine source of Paul's message, so that the girl followed Paul around town shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God" (v. 17). Ironically, she wasn't wrong.

Yet, while Lydia's testimony resulted in her family's conversion, this girl's proclamation was only irritating. For three days, Paul tried to be patient,

but this was not the sort of publicity that he wanted. So finally, on the third day, he called on Christ's authority and ordered the spirit to leave.

Her owners were furious, seized Paul and Silas, and dragged them into court. The charge was "advocating customs not lawful for us Romans" (v. 21), a serious offense which required legal action. While Lydia had welcomed Paul's team into her comfortable home, the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped and severely beaten and thrown into a maximum-security prison cell without a trial (vv. 22–23). Humanly speaking, this was the direst of circumstances. But the rest of the story (vv. 25–40) reveals how God used it to display His glory and to reach even darker places with the gospel.

► Are you facing opposition? When you stand up for Jesus, do not be surprised to experience mockery, criticism, or even anger. Be faithful to the message, knowing that God is on your side!

Pray with Us

Lord, at this moment there are believers imprisoned for refusing to deny You. Assure them that they are not alone and that the global church grieves with them and prays for them. Give them lasting endurance and abiding joy.

Priscilla and Aquila: Partners in Ministry

Read Acts 18:1–26

Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you.—Acts 18:9–10

In December 1999, my husband and I honeymooned in Athens and took a daytrip over to Corinth. We even drove up to the ruins of the Acrocorinth with ancient columns from the Temple of Aphrodite.

Acts 18 recounts the transition from Paul's second to third missionary journey. He left Athens and went to Corinth on his own, the final stop on his second itinerary. Ancient Corinth was strategically located, with an eastern and western port. It was the largest city of the Roman empire with 200,000 residents (20 times more than Athens). The main north-south roads converged here. It was a prosperous city and the worship center for Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Her temple was home to a thousand temple prostitutes, which provides context for the love chapter in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 13).

When Paul arrived at Corinth, he was weak and fearful (1 Cor. 2:3). The work had been arduous. But he was quickly welcomed into the home

of fellow-tentmakers, Priscilla and Aquila. Paul stayed with them, making tents during the week and preaching the gospel on the Sabbath in the synagogue to the Jews, and also to the Greeks.

Paul's focus shifted, however, when the Jews of Corinth became abusive. In response, Paul "shook out his clothes in protest" and turned his attention solely to the Gentiles—with surprising response. Crispus, the synagogue ruler believed, as did many Corinthians (v. 8).

The ministry was so fruitful that Paul stayed in Corinth for almost two years. In that time, he had developed a deep and trusting relationship with Priscilla and Aquila, so much so that he took them along as he began his third missionary journey. The three sailed first to Ephesus, where Paul left the couple to serve as teachers and guardians of the gospel.

► Ministry isn't meant to be done solo. We need partners in the mission who can strengthen us when we're weak and share with us in the work.

Pray with Us

Today we pray for believers in ministry who feel alone and unsupported. Give them friends and mentors who will foster their spiritual growth, offer guidance in their ministry, and encourage them to press on.

Euodia and Syntyche: Better Together

Read Philippians 4:1–9

Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.—Philippians 2:2

One of my roles at Moody Bible Institute is to advise the student Literary Practicum Team. This group of ten students work together to produce two major publications. At the beginning of every year, I tell them that I am just as interested in their teamwork as I am in their creations. And, while there are always bumps along the way, it is always rewarding when they present the two books knowing they did together what not one of them could have done independently.

In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul stressed the importance of unity in the body of Christ. While our reading centers on Philippians 4:1–9, I encourage you to read through the entire book if you have time. Paul raises the theme in 1:27–30. Believers should “[strive] together as one for the faith of the gospel.” Through harmony, they could face opposition without fear (1:28). What’s true in physics is true in the church: cohesion builds strength. Paul continued in chapter 2,

reminding them that Christ alone was the source of unity (2:1). Paul instructed them to put aside their selfish motives and to value one another above themselves (2:3).

With all this talk about unity, it might be surprising that Paul concludes the letter by mentioning two women who were in conflict: Euodia and Syntyche. He pleads with them to “be of the same mind in the Lord” (4:2). Paul was gentle but clear. He acknowledged their work for the gospel cause. And he asked a third party to step in as mediator.

Why should believers strive to live in unity? So the gospel can go forward and that “the peace of God that transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (v. 7)

► Are you in conflict with another believer? Do everything you can (even calling in a mediator) to resolve this disagreement, for the good of the gospel and to experience the peace that only God can give!

Pray with Us

Conflict can feel hopeless. How can two opposed parties be reconciled? If both are devoted and submissive to You, harmony can be restored. Do this work in us and those with whom we are in conflict. Restore our unity for Your glory.

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