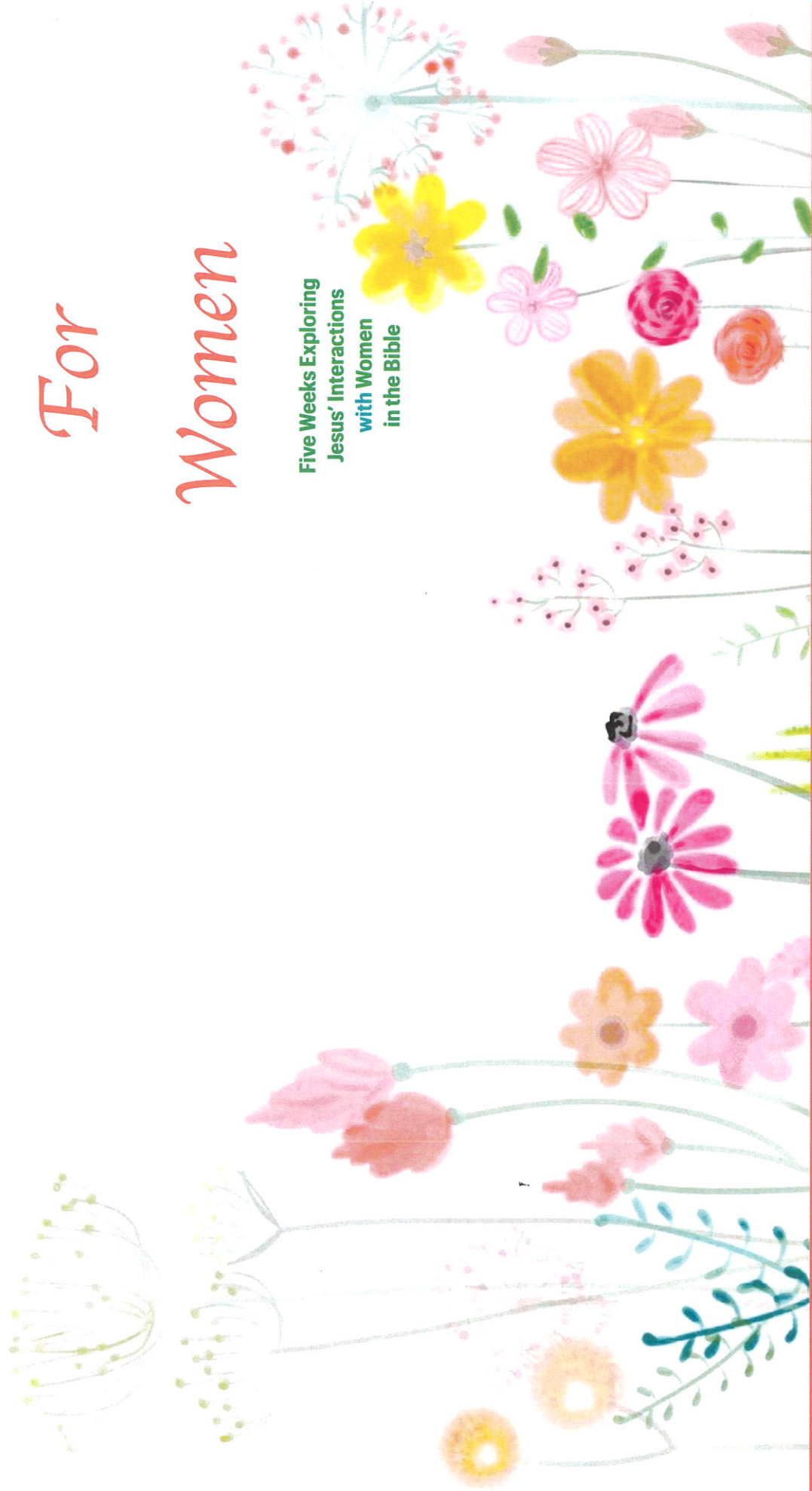


# Jesus Cares For Women

Five Weeks Exploring  
Jesus' Interactions  
with Women  
in the Bible



Helene Ashker





# *Jesus Cares For Women*

*Discussion Questions  
By Helene Ashker*

- 1. The Sorrowful Woman*
- 2. The Suffering Woman*
- 3. The Adulterous Woman*
- 4. The Woman Who  
Worshipped*
- 5. The Fulfilled Woman*



# **I** The Sorrowing Woman

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The two crowds met on the steep slope of a hill near the gates of the city of Nain. They were located six miles from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The view was wide across the plains. They could see the snowy heights of Mount Hermon on the horizon.

Jesus and a large number of His disciples climbed up the hill, as the other group moved down the hill toward the rock-hewn tombs that lined the eastern side of the road. This last group was led by mourners whose shrieks and lamentations pierced the air.

In the middle of the procession, relatives and friends moved slowly under the weight of a young man on an open bier. The dead man's mother walked beside the stretcher, weeping. She was a widow, and now she had lost her only son.

The birth of this son had been an occasion for great celebration. In the Jewish culture, giving birth to a son gave a woman value in her husband's eyes. A baby boy ensured the hope of passing on the family wealth and name. His presence was guaranteed social security. It would be his responsibility to care for his aging parents, and especially for his widowed mother.

It was thus the hope of every Jewish woman to have a son, and God had granted this woman that desire. But now . . . she was left utterly alone. Already she had suffered her husband's death, and now her only son's. She knew, as did those who followed her to the burial caves, that the future held only the grim prospect of destitute dependence upon the mercy of friends and strangers.

As the widow and the procession of mourners were leaving the city gate, just then Jesus and His disciples



reached the top of the hill and the city's entrance. Totally of His own initiative, Jesus came alongside to talk to her.

What happened next astounded the widow and the crowd that followed her. No one would have believed it if they hadn't observed the incident with their own eyes. In fact, news of it spread like wildfire through the entire region. People whispered to each other in fearful and awed tones. Soon there wasn't a household in the district that wasn't discussing Jesus and what He had done.

Read Luke 7:11-17 and consider these questions as you discover the conclusion to this story.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Read Luke 7:12-13 again. Try to imagine what the widow might have been feeling.

2. What motivated Jesus to approach the widow? (verse 13).

3. In this scene, what action did Jesus take? (verses 14-15).

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John 1:12

4. If you had been the widow, how would you have responded to what Jesus said and did?

John 5:24

5. What was the crowd's response to this miracle? (verse 16).

If you would like to begin a new life with Christ, you can express that desire to God very simply in prayer. You can do that by praying and acknowledging to God that you realize you've sinned and you need His forgiveness. You can ask Christ to come into your life right now and give you a new life in Him.

Have you ever taken this step with Jesus Christ?  
Do you have any questions about what it means to receive Christ?

6. Judging from what you have seen in this encounter, how would you describe Christ? What kind of person is He?

7. Have you ever had a loss or disappointment so shattering that you felt you wouldn't recover?

## Considering Christ

Jesus saw this woman's need and compassionately reached out to help her. He seemed acutely aware of her pain and more than willing to help.

Here is another short, perhaps familiar passage from Matthew's Gospel in which Jesus Himself states His willingness to lift our load. What does Christ promise to give those who carry heavy burdens?

*"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."*

Matthew 11:28-30

*He said, "Surely they are my people . . ."; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed.*

Isaiah 63:8-9

## Wrapping Up Your Study

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As these five scenes demonstrate (and the rest of the New Testament bears witness), Jesus treated women as individuals of unique worth and value. Because of His example and model, wherever Christianity has influenced a culture throughout the centuries, the status of women has dramatically changed for the better. No conqueror or religious leader before or since has done for women what Jesus has done.

Yet each of the women in these stories experienced more than the personable, warm response of a compassionate man. The Lord Jesus Christ quite literally transformed the lives of the women in these New Testament accounts.

Jesus longs to meet the needs of women in our generation as well. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). You can encounter Christ, just as these women did, by responding to what He has done for you.

Accepting the reality of what Christ has done for you by His death on the Cross is very similar to accepting a gift that another person has purchased for you. That gift is a mark of that person's graciousness toward you—the expression of his or her love.

When you and I accept the gift of God's love in Christ, we are saying that we believe that our sin has created such an insurmountable barrier between us and God that only the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, could bring us back into a right relationship with Him. The following two verses express in a succinct, clear way what that belief really means. How would you put these verses in your own words?



rather boldly declares the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be the pivotal point of Christianity.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. Why does Paul say that Jesus' resurrection is so important?

*Never before has the world clamored so loudly for answers and never before has it been so committed to the idea that no answers are available.*

Ayn Rand

*"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Jesus Christ

## 2 The Suffering Woman

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The suffering woman lived in the city of Capernaum, near the harp-shaped Sea of Galilee. She is commonly referred to as "the woman with the issue of blood."

Here was her plight: For twelve long years, this woman had been steadily losing blood. She must have been a woman of some means—at least she possessed enough financial resources to continue to seek out one doctor after another. But the medical world had no more to offer her than if she had lived four hundred years earlier. She may have taken ground-up willow bark to try to reduce her pain. This was a bitter tasting remedy containing salicin, an aspirin-like drug that would have only aggravated her bleeding.

Yet even worse than her physical condition was the social and religious ostracism she was certain to have faced. The prevailing opinions of her day were much the same as our own: Bad things don't happen to good people. You get what you justly deserve. Thus, to be stricken with a chronic, incurable disease such as this was tantamount to a confession of sinful behavior, presumably illicit immorality.

The Old Testament regulation regarding her disease indicated that she was ceremonially unclean and unable to participate in the social and religious life of the Jewish community. She could well have been divorced by her husband and shut off from her family. She was a social and spiritual leper.

She had, no doubt, heard of Jesus and the amazing things He had done. Sometime earlier, in the very same town, Jesus had healed a paralyzed man. He had also spoken some startling words as He healed him: "Son,

your sins are forgiven." Of all the audacity! Why, no one could forgive sins but God alone!

Now she heard that Jesus was back in Capernaum. As usual there was a crowd of people around Him, but she was desperate. She had to get to this man. Keeping her face down to avoid being recognized, she waded out into the sweating mass of people following Him. Persistently, she worked her way deeper into the tight circle surrounding Him until finally she was near enough to touch Him. She reached out and lightly touched His garment for just as instant.

In the next moment, an incredible series of events was set into motion. Read Mark 5:21-34 to find out the interesting end to this story. Consider the following questions.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. What motivated this woman to come to Jesus?
2. What emotions do you think this woman experienced as she reached out to touch Jesus?
3. What gave her the determination and strength to push through the close-packed crowd? (Mark 5:34).

3. Why do you think she didn't recognize Jesus?

4. What did Jesus tell her to do? (verse 17).

5. Why do you think Mary was the one He appeared to first after He was raised from the dead?

6. Why is the resurrection of Christ essential to our faith?

#### **Considering Christ**

Christ revealed Himself to many people after His resurrection. The end of each Gospel contains a more detailed account of those incidents. A clear summary of those appearances is also found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

The apostle Paul uses this as powerful evidence of the authenticity of Christ and His message. In fact, Paul

The group of Jesus' closest followers had all traveled together the sixty or seventy miles on foot from Galilee. And yet, unlike many of Jesus' disciples, Mary remained faithful even when the tide turned against Jesus. She had been with Him when the crowds cheered. She would also be there in His suffering and death.

In all probability, Mary watched Jesus drag the heavy cross to Golgotha. She witnessed the soldiers nail His hands and feet to the cross, and listened to people hurl insults at Him. She felt the earth tremble as darkness filled the sky at three o'clock in the afternoon, and later heard Jesus cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" She stayed near the cross until He died, and then she followed His body to the tomb. (Read Mark 15:33-47 for more details.)

As soon as the Sabbath was over, Mary visited Jesus' grave again. It was almost sunrise, and she brought spices to anoint His body. When she reached the tomb, she was surprised to see that it was open. Mary was privileged to be the first witness of an extraordinary event. Read about the rest of this event in John 20:10-18.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. What range of emotions must Mary have felt as she endured through the last week of Christ's life?

2. What was Mary Magdalene's initial response to the empty tomb? (John 20:1-2, 11).

4. Why do you think Jesus insisted on publicly identifying this woman?

5. Why was this woman so afraid when she was forced to admit that she was the one who had touched Him?

6. In what ways did Jesus show that He thought of her as a worthwhile individual?

7. What do you think this woman told her family and friends about Jesus when she went home?

8. How do you think Jesus touches lives today?



# 5

## The Fulfilled Woman

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### Considering Christ

This woman was not the only one who came to Christ with a sense that in His identity lay the essence of far more than a mere man. Read Matthew 16:13-17 and note the different speculations that existed concerning who Jesus was. What did He say about Peter's declaration?

Who do people say He is today?

Who does Jesus claim He is? (John 14:8-11).

*Jesus answered, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."*

John 14:9

As Christ continued His public ministry, more and more people began to travel with Him from one town to the next. Some were no doubt just curious onlookers. But others followed because they could not help but accompany the person who had so radically changed their lives. Mary Magdalene was among that latter group. She had long ago moved from the ranks of the curious to the convinced.

Little is known of her life before she met Christ except for this descriptive phrase that occasionally follows her name: "Mary Magdalene, out of whom [Jesus] had driven seven demons" (Mark 16:9). Christ healed her of whatever debilitating physical, emotional, or spiritual problems engulfed her. She may have been an obscene screamer, or one who laughed uncontrollably. Mary was, no doubt, an embarrassment to her family, avoided in the neighborhood, and restricted from Temple worship.

But whatever the exact malady of her past, Christ had given her a new life. She was so grateful that she joined the group of women who traveled with Christ and contributed to His support out of their private means. In fact, the Gospels lead us to conclude, by the prominent mention of her name, that Mary Magdalene was a leader among those women.

No heroic acts were ascribed to Mary Magdalene, but she was present and available to serve Jesus in any way she could. During the last events of Christ's life and death, she was an ever-present figure. She was most likely in the crowd of disciples and friends who accompanied Christ on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

John 10:14-18

Colossians 2:13-14

*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:8

# 3

## The Adulterous Woman

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At the height of Christ's ministry, the people followed Him everywhere He went. His popularity, however, was an increasing threat to the Jewish leaders. They searched for a way to discredit Him. The woman who is the subject of this study presented the golden opportunity to do so—or so they thought.

On this particular occasion, Jesus appeared in the Temple courts at dawn. There was still a chill in the air, and the sky was streaked with red. People gathered around Him, and soon He sat down and began to teach.

Suddenly angry voices interrupted His lesson. The scribes and the Pharisees (the Jewish religious leaders) elbowed their way to the front like a vigilante squad, dragging a disheveled woman with them.

Shoving her in front of Jesus, they shouted out her sin for all to hear. "Teacher," they said, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

Here, then, was the trap they had waited for, and this woman was merely the bait. If Jesus said to let her go, then He would be guilty of rejecting the Old Testament Law. If He told the scribes and Pharisees to stone her, then the crowd would claim He was no longer a sympathetic friend of common people. He would also be challenging Roman law, which did not allow the Jews to carry out the death sentence.

As this woman stood in front of Jesus with the hostile crowd behind her, she must have been terrified. Death by stoning was painful and prolonged, and that ordeal might well be hers within the hour.



She watched Jesus bend down from where He sat and begin tracing something on the ground in front of her. The accusing voices grew louder and more insistent. At last Jesus straightened up, looked directly at the men, and spoke.

To find out what Jesus said, and how this story ends, read and consider this scene in John 8:2-11.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. How did the scribes and Pharisees treat this woman?
2. What guilty party was strangely missing from this scene?
3. What emotions did this woman probably experience during this dramatic encounter?
4. Why did the scribes and Pharisees leave when Jesus said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her"? (John 8:7-9).

How did Jesus respond?

5. What did Mary's action show about her devotion to the Lord Jesus?

#### **Considering Christ**

This scene foreshadows the crucifixion of Christ, which is the ultimate statement in all of God's communication with us. God, at last, became the Word that He spoke; that is, He took on human form and lived among us. And now we see Him on His way to being crucified in Jerusalem.

But what does His death really mean? What difference can it make to us as individuals? The Old Testament prophets spoke of the death of the Messiah, Jesus spoke of His own death, and later books in the New Testament explain even further its significance.

Consider these three major references as you seek to formulate your own conclusions about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 53:4-6

become ill. She and her sister, Martha, sent for Christ, but by the time Jesus got there, Lazarus had been dead for four days. In a moving account in John's Gospel, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44).

To see what Mary did, read Mark 14:1-9. (This passage speaks of an anonymous woman who, we learn from John's account of the same occasion, John 12:1-8, was Mary of Bethany.)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How would you describe the type of relationship Jesus had with Mary? (John 11:5).

2. What event was Mary thinking about as she anointed Him with this expensive perfume?

3. How much could Mary have sold the perfume for if she had lived today?

4. How did the men around Mary respond to what she did?

5. Why do you think she stayed, even after her accusers had gone? Why didn't she just slip off when the crowd left?

6. Who is the one who had the right to accuse her? (John 8:46-47).

7. How would you describe the way Jesus treated this woman?

8. What motivated Jesus to forgive her? (John 3:16-17).

9. Since all those in the crowd were confronted with their sin, why was this woman the only one Jesus forgave?

10. Think about Christ's final words to her. How was this woman's new life to be different from her life before?

### Considering Christ

As this scene closes, the spotlight lingers on the two key figures: Jesus and the woman who was caught in adultery. Her sin, committed in private, was made public by men not a whit more righteous than she. Yet here she stood—forgiven, protected, and secure in the presence of the only one who could have justly condemned her. Ironically, she was able to take *refuge* in Christ only because her dark, hidden secrets had been exposed . . . and forgiven.

We all long for a similar sense of safety and security. But to experience that kind of spiritual refuge, we, too, must be willing to look honestly at ourselves and to turn from our sin. When the Bible uses the word “sin,” it is speaking of the basic tendency we each have to go our own way, to do our own thing.

If the secrets of our hearts were laid open and bare before a holy God, what would He see? What would we see? In the book of Romans, there is a short passage that summarizes the predicament we find ourselves in apart from God’s intervention. Read Romans 3:10-12 and try putting these verses in your own words.

There is, thankfully, a more hopeful note following only a few chapters later. In Romans 5:8, what is that message of hope?

*God, the heavenly parent, is love, and therefore He wants children upon whom He can lavish His love and receive their love in return.*

E. Stanley Jones

*[Jesus] loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.*

Revelation 1:5

# 4

## The Woman Who Worshipped

Jesus Christ is so often pictured in the midst of crowds of people that we sometimes forget that He knew the pleasure of a quiet, intimate evening with close friends.

Mary and Martha and their brother, Lazarus, were some of those who knew the joy of His private company. They often entertained Jesus in their home. Martha orchestrated the dinner while Mary listened attentively to Jesus. In Christ’s willingness to teach Mary, He defied the Jewish tradition that held that women need not be taught—indeed, they weren’t capable of learning (Luke 10:38-42). Mary was drawn to this man who treated her with such respect. She was accepted and secure in His company.

In this scene, we find Jesus once again having dinner with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—but this time in the home of Simon the leper. Christ had stopped in Bethany on His way to the great Jewish feast in Jerusalem, the Passover.

Jesus knew that this would be His final trip to Jerusalem. The opposition to His ministry was building. Yet strangely, His closest friends seemed oblivious to the confrontation sure to come—all of His friends, that is, except Mary.

Mary saw the significance of what was happening. This was not merely another pleasant evening spent with Jesus. Mary demonstrated her awareness of the events about to unfold, as well as her devotion to Jesus, by one extraordinary act.

Mary had good reason to express her gratitude to Jesus. At an earlier point, her brother Lazarus had