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International Bible Society
1820 Jet Stream Drive
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921, USA
In the US, phone: 719-488-9200

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Reflections of Hope: Study Guide

Forward: God, Do You Really Care About Me?

By Sharon Jaynes

I hope you have enjoyed the retelling of the life and ministry of Jesus through the eyes of a woman. But before we can truly appreciate the liberating love that Jesus extended to women as He walked the earth, we need to recognize the devastating darkness that surrounded their world. Before we step into the darkness, let’s remember our wonderful beginnings in the Garden of Eden.

The Bible tells us, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). God spoke creation into being in six days, and after each of the first five days, as the sun set over the horizon, God said, “It is good.” Six times, at the end of each phase of His handiwork, He reiterated His approval. We ride this rhythm of repetition only to be brought to a sudden halt by the Creator’s words when He looked at the lone man with no suitable companion. “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). So God caused Adam to fall asleep, removed one of his ribs, and fashioned His grand finale – woman.

Eve was the crowning touch of God’s creative masterpiece. She was not an afterthought, but God’s grand finale of creation. Woman was fashioned to complete the picture of God’s image bearer. Man could not do it alone. Woman could not do it alone. Both were necessary – working, serving and living in tandem to complete the picture God intended all along.

God concludes the first week of creation and the curtain falls with the words: “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). With the debut of woman, what was “good,” now became “very good.”

So what happened? How did woman move from a mutual place of honor as an image bearer of God in the Garden of Eden to the oppression of subversion we have seen through the centuries? Well, let’s don’t leave the Garden quite yet.

Chapter three of Genesis begins with the daunting words…”Now the serpent.” Satan slithered into the Garden of Eden and tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They believed
Satan’s lie instead of God’s truth, disobeyed His one restriction, and ushered sin, death and separation from God into the world. The Bible tells us that since that time, everyone is born separated from God because of sin (Romans 5:12).

Before man sinned, God said that woman would rule with man (Genesis 1:28). One of the consequences of the fall was that now woman would be ruled by man (Genesis 3:16). From that time on, relational tension between man and woman replaced harmony and oneness.

God loves turning things around. As soon as Eve sunk her teeth into the forbidden fruit, the shadow of the cross rose over the horizon and God’s redemptive plan was set into motion. While the tree in the Garden brought death and the curse, the tree of Calvary brought life and blessing. Jesus came to restore mankind’s broken relationship with God, offer eternal life in heaven, and restore abundant life on earth. But there were thousands of years sandwiched between God’s words pointing toward the coming of the Savior and Jesus’ words on the cross, “It is finished.” And unfortunately, women have been oppressed, abused and misused in every way imaginable.

When Jesus entered the world on that starry night in Bethlehem, His first cry echoed the heart cries of women who had been misused and abused for centuries. By the time Jesus took His first steps onto the dusty ground of Galilee, women led secluded lives. They were not allowed to talk to men in public, testify in court or mingle with men at social gatherings. Women lived in the shadows of the society and were to be rarely seen and seldom heard.

Much like a slave, a girl was the property of her father and later the property of her husband. Women were uneducated, unappreciated and uncounted. They were not allowed to eat in the same room with men, to be educated in the Torah or enter the inner court of the temple with men to worship.

Women were segregated in social and religious life of their communities and considered to be inferior creatures whose sole purpose was domesticity and sexual pleasure. A common prayer of a Jewish man as he rose each day was, “Thank you God that I am neither a Gentile, a slave nor a woman.”

But Jesus came to change all that. He came to restore God’s original design and purpose for men and women that was distorted and disturbed in the Garden of Eden (1 John 3:8). Part of that restoration included restoring women to their original position enjoyed before the fall. Jesus walked on the scene to see God’s female image bearers hidden in the shadows behind lock and key and flung the doors open wide with the truth.

It is easy for us twenty-first century readers to view Jesus’ interaction with women as somewhat ordinary, but it was radical in every sense of the word. He spoke to women publically, taught them openly, ate with them freely and treated them respectfully. In a culture that kept women tucked away in the recesses of the home to be neither seen nor heard, Jesus pulled them from behind the scenes, positioned them front and center and shone the spotlight of His divine love and calling on their lives. As the curtain of the New Testament rises, women fill the stage and take starring roles as God’s grand drama of redemption unfolds.

God chose Mary, Jesus’ mother, to initiate His ministry of miracles at the wedding of Cana as He turned the water into wine (John 2:1-12). He delivered the social outcast, Mary Magdalene, from demons and invited her and other women to join His ministry team (Mark 16:9). Jesus’ longest recorded conversation in the New Testament was with a woman – the Samaritan He met at the well. It was this very woman to whom Jesus first revealed His true identity as the promised Messiah. Jesus filled this empty woman with living water and then watched her run into town to become one of the first women evangelists.

Jesus extended His hand to the untouchable. He reached out to heal a woman with a twelve-year issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48) and to resurrect a twelve-year-old little girl from death (Mark 5: 35-43). He called a crippled woman moving in the shadows of society and placed her center stage as He unfolded her bent back and freed her to praise God (Luke 13:10-17). Jesus applauded a widow’s small gift and singled her out as an example of true sacrificial giving (Mark 12:38-44). He forgave a woman caught in adultery and gave her the freedom to begin anew (John 8:1-30).

Jesus invited Mary of Bethany into the classroom of men and made a clear statement by His actions that it was now time for women to learn God’s Word (Luke 10:38-42). The morning of Jesus’ resurrection, He chose to make His inaugural appearance to Mary Magdalene, and called her to testify to the disciples that He had risen from the dead (John 20:11-18).

Jesus healed women spiritually, physically, mentally and emotionally. He
showed them the honor and respect due a child of God. Jesus took the keys of truth and unlocked the shackles to liberate women from the oppression that had them bound and sequestered in the nooks and crannies of society. How proud I am of those women who accepted Jesus’ invitation to come out of hiding. They were cultural change agents who listened to the call of God above the oppressive voices of the culture.

As you consider Jesus’ interaction with women in the Bible don’t miss the wonder and awe of His radically life-changing words. Sit by the well with the Samaritan woman expecting insult and rejection, but receiving acceptance and love. Stand with the woman caught in adultery expecting condemnation and death, but finding forgiveness and new life. Reach with the bleeding woman to touch the hem of His garment in secret, only to be healed and publically affirmed. Rise from the ruins of life with Mary Magdalene, and run with purpose to announce the miracle of Jesus’ resurrection.

As you consider each woman Jesus impacted, I pray you will write your name into the script and experience Him as never before. You are precious to God. Your name is written in the palm of His hand.

If you would like to pray to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and accept God’s invitation to spend eternity in heaven with Him, you can pray the same prayer that Rivka in the film prayed with her friend.

“God, my Father I heaven, You are holy, and righteous. Thank You that You love me. I have sinned against You. Thank You that you sent the promised Messiah, Jesus, to destroy the curse of shame and guilt. Thank You that He died in my place. I want to follow my living Savior. Thank You for forgiving me and accepting me. In Jesus’ Name, Amen”

If you prayed that prayer today, we would love to hear from you. You can contact us at www.magdalenatoday.com and we will celebrate with you!

Sharon Jaynes is an international conference speaker and has authored several books that encourage women. To learn more, visit www.sharonjaynes.com.
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Lesson 1: Jesus, Our Loving Pursuer

much more than I could ever imagine. I try to count Your thoughts, but they outnumber the grains of sand on the beach. And when I awake, I will find you nearby (Psalm 139:13-18, CEV - Contemporary English Version).

What stirs in your heart when you hear these words?

Is it hard to believe that God made you the way you are? Why or why not?

In the Bible, Colossians 1:15-16 (CEV) says:

Christ is exactly like God, who cannot be seen. He is the first-born Son, superior to all creation. Everything was created by Him, everything in heaven and on earth, everything seen and unseen, including all forces and powers, and all rulers and authorities. All things were created by God's Son, and everything was made for Him.

Who created you? For what purpose?

What importance does this have for you?

God Knows You:

You have looked deep into my heart, LORD, and You know all about me. You know when I am resting or when I am working, and from heaven You discover my thoughts. You notice everything I do and everywhere I go. Before I even speak a word You know what I will say, and with Your powerful arm You protect me from every side. I can't understand all of this! Such wonderful knowledge is far above me (Psalm 139:1-6, CEV).

Know

In the film Rivka says: “The God who created all of this? I doubt He even sees me, much less knows me. Perhaps God Almighty would love a holy man, but not someone like me.”

Like Mary Magdalene, Rivka and the other women in the film, every woman has a story to tell. You have a story to tell. Your story has a beginning, middle and eventually, an ending. Interwoven into each of our stories is visible proof of a Loving Pursuer—the One who created you with a purpose and gives life and meaning to your story. During these next few weeks, may you come to know and see, as Rivka eventually did, that you matter to God. He sees you and He knows you!

DID YOU KNOW?

In a speech, Dr. Larry Crabb, a well known Christian psychologist, author and speaker said, “The core terror of women is invisibility.” Do you agree with that? Why or why not?

One of the names for God in the Bible is El Roi, which means “The God who sees.”

LIVE

No matter where you are in your journey, you are precious to God. Even before He created you, He saw you and knew you.

God Sees You:

You are the One who put me together inside my mother’s body, and I praise You because of the wonderful way You created me. Everything You do is marvelous! Of this I have no doubt. Nothing about me is hidden from You! I was secretly woven together deep in the earth below, but with Your own eyes You saw my body being formed. Even before I was born, You had written in Your book everything I would do. Your thoughts are far beyond my understanding,
Reflections of Hope: Study Guide

Lesson 1: Jesus, Our Loving Pursuer

God, my Father in heaven, You are holy and righteous. Thank You that You love me. I have sinned against You. Thank You that You sent the promised Messiah, Jesus, to destroy the curse of shame and guilt. Thank You that He died in my place. I want to follow my living Savior. Thank You for forgiving me and accepting me. Amen.

Go Deeper: Whether you already have chosen to believe these truths about Jesus, or you still struggle with doubting them, take some time this week to talk to God about your doubts. Review any of the above verses and reflect on them throughout the week. If God teaches you anything about your doubts, please consider sharing with the group next week.

What does this passage tell you about God?

- He looks deep into our hearts.
- He knows all about us.
- He knows our thoughts.
- He notices everything we do, everywhere we go, and everything we say.
- He protects.

Does it change your view of Him? If so, how?

- I can trust Him.
- He is bigger than I understood.
- I never thought about God knowing all about me.

What does this passage tell you about how God feels about you?

- How humbling and amazing it is that even though God knows everything about you (the good, the bad and the ugly!), He still wants a loving relationship with you. He pursues you. He loves you.

God Loves You:

I am sure that nothing can separate us from God’s love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39, CEV).

Tell

Challenge: Perhaps you are like Rivka and have long wondered if God knows you or even sees you. At the end of the movie, Rivka chose to believe that God really does love her and she placed her faith in Jesus. Through a simple prayer, like the one below, you too can choose to believe that Jesus created you, sees you, knows you and loves you. You! Will you tell Him today that you believe?
Lesson 2: Jesus, Our Gracious Forgiver

Adulterous Woman: Will He forgive me?

SHARE

Would anyone like to share if you reflected on the verses from last week? Did God reveal anything to you about your doubts?

WATCH

Clips DVD, Lesson 2 or Movie DVD - Chapter 12; THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN FORGIVEN.
**Lesson 2: Jesus, Our Gracious Forgiver**

- Where was her partner? What does this tell us about the accusers?

- How do you think she felt after being caught and dragged out in public by a mob?

- How would you feel about having your wrongdoings exposed?

In the same way, when we do something against the law, something that hurts another person, or something that hurts God, He takes those things very seriously and calls them sin. Sin is going our own way, thinking our own thoughts and doing what we want, rather than what God wants. Sin can involve either attitudes or actions or both.

God’s standards in the Bible show us His heart, and when we rebel against them and pursue our own desires, we miss God’s best for us and we grieve Him.

- How does Jesus respond to this woman and provide for her in her situation?

- Why did Jesus’ response mean so much to her?

- Did the adulterous woman have to do anything to be forgiven?

This is how a relationship with God differs from being religious. Religion says you do what is right in order to earn acceptance, love and forgiveness. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ is not based on our performance because we already are accepted, loved and forgiven.
Lesson 2: Jesus, Our Gracious Forgiver

How does this fact apply to how we treat others?

When Jesus talked with this woman caught in sin, He did forgive her but He also stated, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” He was telling her to embrace her new identity as someone who is free and forgiven. In the same way, we are forgiven, but with that freedom comes responsibility and a new identity. This doesn’t mean that we will never fail again, but it does set a new direction in our lives.

1 John 1:9-10 (NIV) says:

“If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.”

So when we do fail, how do we get right with God again?

Confess our sin and ask for forgiveness.

Challenge: Confession means that we agree with God about any wrong thoughts, attitudes or actions. We agree with Him that they are wrong, ask forgiveness and acknowledge that we already are forgiven by God because of Christ’s death on the cross.

Note to leader: Pass out a pen and piece of paper to each one in your group.

Let’s make confession practical:

1. Make your own sin list on a piece of paper and then destroy it. This list is just between you and God, so be completely honest. Silently ask God to help you see the things in your life that displease Him. Write down whatever God brings to your mind. As you write each one, confess it to God. Remember you have a loving God who forgives you—He even gave His Son for you!

2. After you have written your list, write the words of 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

The following verses refer to spiritual death.

Colossians 2:13-14 (CEV) says:

You were dead, because you were sinful and were not God's people. But God let Christ make you alive, when He forgave all our sins. God wiped out the charges that were against us for disobeying the Law of Moses. He took them away and nailed them to the cross.

According to these verses, what happened to the “charges against us?”

We don’t live by the “Law of Moses,” which is referred to in the verse above, yet we all live by some sort of moral, ethical and cultural code that resides within us. As women we tend to put ourselves under a high level of pressure to perform well. When we fail, we try our best to cover up our imperfections.

God tells us in Romans 8:1 (NIV), “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

According to this verse, what is true of those who are “in Christ Jesus?”

How can knowing we are not condemned change the way we view ourselves?

Life & Death are significant words in the Bible. The Bible refers to spiritual life and death as well as physical life and death.

John 17:3 (NASB - New American Standard Bible) refers to spiritual life: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Spiritual life and death are significant words in the Bible. The Bible refers to spiritual life and death as well as physical life and death.
across your list. It says, “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

3. When you have completed your time of prayer and confession, thank Him for His forgiveness by faith, and then destroy your list as an illustration of the forgiveness God has granted you by tearing it to pieces, shredding it or burning it in order to show how completely God has forgiven you.

-go deeper- Where is your sin (sin list) now?

Being forgiven brings freedom from guilt!

Psalm 103:12 (NIV) says:

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

Hebrews 10:17 (NIV) says:

“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

This week, ask God to reveal your sin as it happens. Confess it to God, ask forgiveness and thank Him for forgiving you.

SHARE

Would anyone be willing to share if God showed you sin in your life as it happened this week? How did you respond?

WATCH

Clips DVD, Lesson 3 or movie DVD - Chapter 3; THE BIRTH OF JESUS.
Even though Mary could have been thinking and feeling a number of things, what was her actual response?

She questioned how this could happen, yet she trusted God. She was willing to allow God to use her to fulfill His plan.

How do you think you would have responded?

What about my plans for my life?

What about Joseph?

What will everyone think when I am unmarried and pregnant?

Did You Know?

Mary was betrothed to Joseph which, in her culture, was a promise as strong as marriage. Though Mary still lived with her family, she was legally considered Joseph's wife. If she was suspected of being unfaithful, Joseph had the right to have her killed like the woman caught in adultery or at least force her to leave the town in shame and disgrace. Therefore, Mary's pregnancy was a huge ordeal to both of them.

Her choice to be obedient demonstrated faith, especially in light of the consequences that she faced.

In one moment, Mary's life forever changed as a result of God choosing to use her to carry out a task that in human terms would be impossible. But as the angel Gabriel said, "Nothing is impossible with God." None of us will be asked to carry the Son of God as Mary was. However, God does ask us to do something that is also impossible—to faithfully follow Jesus every day.

Someone has said that to live the Christian life is not difficult; it is impossible.

The following verses show how impossible it is to live life as a Christian without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 16:24 (NIV) says, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.'"
**Lesson 3: Jesus, Our Power for Living**

1. The **natural person** is described as never having invited Jesus into his/her life.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB) says, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” Some words that characterize the natural person are pride, fear, guilt, worry and disobedience.

2. The **spiritual person** is described as being directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:15 (NASB) says, “But he who is spiritual appraises all things…” Some words that characterize the spiritual person are trust, obedience, peace, forgiveness and love.

3. The **carnal person** is described as someone who has invited Jesus into his/her life, but lives in defeat trying to follow Jesus in his/her own strength.

1 Corinthians 3:1 (CEV) says, “My friends, you are acting like the people of this world. That’s why I could not speak to you as spiritual people. You are like babies as far as your faith in Christ is concerned.” Some words and phrases that characterize the carnal person are frustrated, defeated, self-righteous, little desire for growth, and an up-and-down spiritual experience.

**Self-Directed Life (natural person)**

S - Self is on the throne
† - Christ is outside the life
● - Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration

**Christ-Directed Life (spiritual person)**

† - Christ is in the life and on the throne
S - Self is yielding to Christ
● - Interests are directed by Christ, resulting in harmony with God’s plan

**Self-Directed Life (carnal person)**

S - Self is on the throne
† - Christ dethroned and not allowed to direct the life
● - Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration

Which of the three diagrams best describes your life?

Which person would you like to be?
Most people want to be directed by the Holy Spirit. Let's look at how to live a Spirit-filled life.

In the Bible, we see God represented in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God has provided us with the Holy Spirit to live inside us to give us the power we need to live life as followers of Christ. Although the Holy Spirit lives in all people who have invited Christ into their lives, we are not filled with the Holy Spirit unless we allow Him to direct and empower us. We choose to be filled (directed and empowered) with the Holy Spirit through faith on a daily, even moment-by-moment basis. This is the difference between the spiritual person and the carnal person.

The Bible gives us a command to be filled with the Spirit.

**Ephesians 5:18** (NIV) says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

We know that being filled by the Holy Spirit is God’s will for us because He commands it. We have God’s promise in **1 John 5:14-15** (NIV—emphasis added) which says:

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.”

### TELL ME MORE

Spiritual breathing is a powerful word picture which can help you experience moment-by-moment dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Just as we physically breathe out bad air and in good air, we can practice spiritual breathing.

**Exhale:** Confess your sin the moment you become aware of it—agree with God that you are wrong and thank Him for His forgiveness.

**Inhale:** Surrender control of your life to Christ, and rely on the Holy Spirit to fill you with His presence and power by faith.

**Lesson 3: Jesus, Our Power for Living**

Just like Mary responded in faith by trusting God in her situation, we also need to respond in faith by trusting God to live the Christian life through us.

- How can you, like Mary, respond to the Lord?
- How are we filled with the Holy Spirit?

### TELL

**Challenge:** Begin each day this week by asking God to allow His Holy Spirit to direct your life. Share with at least one person what you have learned this week about the Holy Spirit.

**Go Deeper:** To learn more about how the Holy Spirit can be active in your life, read and reflect on the following passages: **Galatians 5:16-26, Romans 5:1**, **Romans 8:1** and **Ephesians 5:18**. You can also read the booklet, *Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life?* by Bill Bright. It can be ordered through Campus Crusade for Christ or found online at: [www.greatcom.org/english/spirit.htm](http://www.greatcom.org/english/spirit.htm).
Lesson 4: Jesus, Our Powerful Deliverer

Mary Magdalene: Will He free me?

SHARE
Did you have an opportunity to talk with someone about the Holy Spirit last week? What happened? Did you see a difference in your life last week after asking the Holy Spirit to direct you?

WATCH
Clips DVD, Lesson 4 or Movie DVD - Chapter 5; MARY MAGDALENE IS FREED FROM DEMONS.
Lesson 4: Jesus, Our Powerful Deliverer

- In the film, how did Jesus respond to Mary Magdalene and the possibility of becoming unclean Himself?

- Why do you think the evil spirits left when Jesus commanded them to leave?

Hebrews 1:1-3a (NIV) says: In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV) says: When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And the voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.”

Jeremiah 32:17 (NIV) says, “Ah, Sovereign LORD, You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You.”

- What do these verses say about who Jesus is and His power?

- How was Mary Magdalene’s life changed as a result of her encounter with Jesus?

- Is God speaking to you through Mary’s story? What do you need to be freed from in your life?

DID YOU KNOW?

In the culture of the day, being near someone who was inhabited and controlled by evil spirits would make you unclean, and therefore unable to go to the Temple or even associate with others of the community until you were considered clean again.

In the Old Testament, God established many “rules” for the Jewish people to follow. He gave rules that determined whether someone was ceremonially clean or unclean. When a person was “unclean,” it basically meant he or she had to be separated from the people and from God. They had to wait until they were ceremonially clean before they could again be in fellowship with God and with others.
Through our relationship with God, Jesus can also deliver us from any ongoing struggles. In our world today we find people reaching for all types of things to provide a temporary level of comfort. These may include food, shopping, money, gambling, alcohol, drugs, pornography, television or the Internet. Although the level of dependency may vary, we all sometimes seek something external to soothe our internal pain.

No matter what your struggle may be, they all have the same effect—they keep us from experiencing the fullness of God's power in our lives.

Like Mary Magdalene, we can be released from the power of bondage to live a life where we can experience God's freedom and purpose. Through Christ's power, we can begin to live in true freedom, overcoming the hold that negative influences can have over our lives.

Remember, when following Christ, our struggles may not end. God can give us the power to endure and persevere, and He can use these things to build desired qualities in our lives.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** (NIV) says: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

**James 1:2-4** (NIV) says: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

♥ What in your life would be different if you relied on God when you have struggles?
SHARE

Would anyone be willing to share about the struggle/difficulty that you entrusted to God this week?

Would anyone like to recite Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV) from memory? If not, let’s read it together. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
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Lesson 5: Jesus, Our Compassionate Provider

What was this woman’s need when Jesus saw her?

She was a widow and was now alone.
She was grieving the loss of her only son.
She would have no way to provide for herself.

How did Jesus respond to her and provide for her in this situation?

Jesus saw her and her need.
He brought her son back to life.

What did it mean to the widow that Jesus raised her son from the dead?

What looked like a hopeless situation was turned around. She was given hope and her son was returned to her.

Psalm 68:5 (NIV) says, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.”

What does this passage tell us about God’s character?

He sees and cares about our needs.
He understands the losses in our lives.
God is neither distant nor uncaring, but is willing to be the father to the fatherless and a defender of widows.

Like the widow we all experience circumstances that seem overwhelming. We may feel hopeless, lost, grieved, anxious, depressed, fearful or even despondent.

♥ Are you struggling with something right now?

Philippians 4:6-7, 19 (NIV) says: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds, in Christ Jesus. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

What needs are included in the word “all” in these verses?

WATCH

Clips DVD, Lesson 5 or Movie DVD - Chapter 6; JESUS RAISES WIDOW’S DEAD SON AND TEACHES.

KNOW

Luke 7:11-17 (NIV) says: Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a large crowd went along with Him. As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, “Don’t cry.”

Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

DID YOU KNOW?

Adapted from source: www.stathanasius.org/bible/oct_8_2000.html

From the events described in Luke, it appears that the widow of Nain was not well off financially. First, the dead man was being carried in an open coffin (v.14). Second, when Jesus spoke to him, “Young man, I say to you, arise” (v.14), he sat up and began to speak immediately. There was no need to unbind the widow’s son from any burial wrappings, for there were none. From the open coffin and lack of burial wrappings, we can assume he was being carried to a pauper’s grave. Clearly, the widow was very poor.

Under Mosaic Law, virtually no special provisions were made for widows because the oldest son - who had the birthright or extra share of the property - had the duty to provide for her. Additionally, the Scribes and Pharisees of that day were known for foreclosing on widows’ houses when the poverty-stricken widows ran out of money (see Matthew 23:14, NASB).
What does God promise He will do?

Since God’s promise is to meet every need, what do we need to do?

When it seems like God is not meeting our needs immediately, can we still trust Him?

1 Peter 5:7 (NIV) says, “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”

Matthew 6:31-34 (NIV) says, “Do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

What does God ask us to do in these verses?

What do you think it means to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness?”

What are some practical ways to apply these truths to your life?

Tell

How do we cast our anxiety and burdens on Him? (see 1 Peter 5:7)

Tell Me More

In the Bible, “to cast” refers to physically putting a load on an animal like a donkey or an ox. Jesus invites us to literally “cast” our burdens and anxiety upon Him.

Challenge: Do you have some things you need to “cast” on God? For example: finances, relationships, physical needs (food, clothes, health, housing), emotional needs (fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, loneliness, depression), work.

Matthew 11:28 (NIV) says, “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Go Deeper: Make a commitment to ask God to provide for you in the most critical area of your life. Share next week what has happened in response to your prayers.

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Lesson 6: Jesus, Our Complete Restorer

LESSON 6:
JESUS, OUR COMPLETE RESTORER
Woman Healed of Bleeding: Will He heal me?

SHARE
Did you ask God to provide for you in a critical area this past week? What happened?

WATCH
Clips DVD, Lesson 6 or Movie DVD - Chapter 9; JESUS RAISES DEAD GIRL; HEALS BLEEDING WOMAN.
Regardless of the possible consequences for herself, the hemorrhaging woman was desperate and determined to see Jesus. In order to touch Jesus, the woman had to elbow her way through the crowd that stood in her way. She had confidence that only Jesus could help her.

- What did she believe that gave her the courage to push through the crowd?

- What did Jesus restore by healing her?

- What is preventing you from reaching out to Jesus?

God really cares about restoring all the different areas of your life because He deeply cares about you. “I don’t know which brings greater healing, Jesus’ power or His compassion.” – Mary Magdalene, in Magdalena: Through Her Eyes

Restoration can be a process. After waiting 12 long years and spending all her money the day came when she met Jesus and glorified God through being healed by Him in response to her faith. God is in control of all things and has His own timetable for us. Even when we have faith like this woman did, He sometimes answers us in a different way, or at a different time than we might expect. It is important for us to be willing to accept His will for us no matter what the answer.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV) says: Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because He was tempted in every way that we are. But He did not sin! So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness and we will find help.

- How does Jesus respond to us when we come to Him?
This woman received from Jesus exactly what she desired—her physical healing. Not everyone gets exactly what they desire. Paul gives us an example from his personal experience in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV): To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

God did not heal Paul when he asked, so he was forced to depend on the Lord’s strength in the midst of his weakness. Likewise, God does not always heal our physical problems, but He always enables and strengthens us to endure the problem.

James 1:2-4 (NIV) says: Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

☐ According to these verses, what are some of the reasons God may choose not to restore us or answer our prayers the way we expect?

TELL

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NIV) says: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

As Christians, we are not immune from difficulties. The way Jesus helps us becomes part of our story and can encourage others who may be going through something similar. The comfort and healing that God gives is not intended just for us. We glorify God and give Him praise when we share with others what He has done for us.

Challenge: If God has offered you restoration in an area, look for an opportunity this week to share your story with someone who needs encouragement.

Go Deeper: Write down some areas in your life that need restoration. These could be physical, relational, spiritual or others. Commit those to the Lord and believe by faith that He will restore them.

If you have an area that has not been restored in the way you desire, entrust that to God. Thank Him by faith for whatever His answer is. The act of thanking God demonstrates faith. Don't stop trusting in God's goodness. He is a good God and He loves you!

Please be aware that many of us have deep and complex issues. This may mean seeking the guidance of a trusted friend, pastor or a professional counselor. Do not be afraid to seek further assistance to find complete restoration. Ask God to help you find the right person to help.
LESSON 7:
JESUS, OUR LIVING WATER

Woman at the Well: Will He satisfy me?

SHARE

How has God encouraged you this week in an area of your life that needs restoration?

If you had an opportunity this week to encourage someone with your story, would you be willing to share?

WATCH

Clips DVD, Lesson 7 or Movie DVD - Chapter 7; THE WOMAN AT THE WELL.
Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am He.”

Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are You talking with her?”

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

What is this woman’s story?
DID YOU KNOW?

It was culturally unacceptable for a man and a woman who were strangers to converse in first century Palestine.

There was also great racial tension between Jews and Samaritans at that time, as the Samaritans were a mixed race. The woman even asks, “How is it that you a Jew ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?” To Jews at that time, the word “Samaritan” was like another word for “dog.” The Jews often would walk miles out of their way to avoid going through Samaria and having contact with the Samaritans.

The fact that this woman came to the well at mid-day tells us something about her. She was probably labeled an outcast for her immoral behavior and thus socially rejected.

The Samaritan woman did not even expect Jesus to speak to her much less ask her for a cup of water.

- Jesus initiated a conversation with this woman. What does this reveal to us about His character?

- Why do you think Jesus asked the Samaritan woman about her husband?

Jesus spoke frankly about the woman’s past and present living situation. Nothing about her life was hidden from Him. He understood the pain and brokenness in her life. He did not reject her. He compassionately showed her the way to life which was and is Himself.

- How was the Samaritan woman trying to meet her own needs?

Lesson 7: Jesus, Our Living Water

- What are ways that we try to meet our own needs today?

- How does Jesus say He would meet her needs? How does that apply to us?

LIVE

People who truly believe in Jesus begin to experience a change in themselves, their attitudes and their perspectives. They become “new people.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV) says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” The Samaritan woman’s immediate response to go tell others in her town shows that she believed in Jesus and became a new person.

Three things happened as a result of the conversation that the Samaritan woman had with Jesus. Her past no longer separated her from a relationship with God. Many people in the town became believers along with her. Jesus’ followers saw Him reach across cultural and racial lines.

Galatians 3:28 (NIV) says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

John 7:37-39 (NIV) says: On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

- What does it mean to have living water flowing from us?
Reflections of Hope: Study Guide

Lesson 8: Jesus, Our Lifelong Friend

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

When we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our lives, we begin to see Him change us from within and others will see this fruit in our lives.

TELL

- What kind of person did Jesus say the Father is seeking? (See passage at the beginning of this lesson.)

Although we don't know who will respond, we like the Samaritan woman need to tell others about what God has done for us.

John 4:39 (NIV) says, "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony. 'He told me everything I ever did.'"

The outcast woman became the hero of the town. Jesus reconciled the woman to Himself, and then He used her to bring many in the town to God.

Challenge: Who in your life still needs to hear about what God has done for you? Telling others your story is one way to be a true worshipper. Make a list of people and begin to pray that when they hear about Jesus they will respond like the Samaritans did.

Next week's celebration will have a time of sharing. The following questions can give you some direction in your thinking:

- Has your view of Jesus changed during this study? If so, how?
- What is one area in your life that you want to develop as a result of this study?
- How has Jesus touched your life while we have been studying about Him together?

This is a time to celebrate what God has done during this study! We're going to have a party! The idea is to celebrate all that God has done during this study.

Who do you know that would benefit from watching Magdalena: Through Her Eyes, and sharing in the Bible study? Make a list of these people right now. Remember how watching the film opened your heart to God? Imagine how it could open your friends' hearts too!

Friends I would like to share Magdalena with:

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SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Ten Basic Steps for Christian Maturity by Dr. Bill Bright
How to Forgive... When You Don't Feel Like It by June Hunt
Seeing Yourself Through God's Eyes by June Hunt
Lord, I Want To Know You by Kay Arthur
Practical Christian Living developed by Priority Associates
Your Scars Are Beautiful To God by Sharon Jaynes