

4 Audacious Marys



West View
Methodist Church

A West View Devotional Guide
Adapted from Bryanston Methodist small group guide

WEEK 1
MARY, SISTER OF MARTHA and LAZARUS

MONDAY – “Dare to look in the mirror”

Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Galatians 3: 26-29 (NLT) *For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. and all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. and now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.*

For many years in our country women have been considered as ‘2nd class’ citizens. Although our Constitution embraces gender equality, the reality is that many women are still treated differently to men. Many women are subjected to abuse by men, earn less and our rape statistics are shocking.

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus dared to be different in a time when women were treated as servants or ‘property’. She broke the cultural stereotypes by invading the men’s space, and hungry for spiritual knowledge sat at Jesus’ feet. This behaviour was culturally unacceptable as she was engaging with men. However, Jesus included women in His teaching about the kingdom of God and His message of love and equality changed not only Mary’s life, but in the process shaped both human culture and history.

FREDERICK BUECHNER

He said, “One life on this earth is all we get, whether it is enough or not enough, and the obvious conclusion would seem to be that at the very least we are fools if we do not live it as fully and bravely and beautifully as we can”.

- How comfortable are you in challenging the norms of inequality in our country?
- Are you caught in the ‘kitchen’ of not following God’s calling because you fear discrimination, or are you living your dreams in the place God prepared for you?
- Do you show the same acceptance as Jesus when women bravely enter traditionally male spaces such as sports presenters, building contractors and church leaders?
- Are you supporting the women in your community by offering them dignity and the opportunity to grow in areas as yet unattainable to them?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, in this time in our history, teach us to support and encourage one another, remembering that we are all made in your image – all valuable in your sight. AMEN

TUESDAY – Breaking away from the cultural stereotypes

Judges 4:4-5 (NIV)

Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.

Luke 10: 38-42 (NIV)

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "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."

Deborah was known for her courage. At a time in history when women were usually in the background she became a judge, a military strategist, a poet, and a prophet. Deborah was only one of four women designated as a prophet in the Hebrew Bible, and as such, she was said to transmit the word and the will of God. Although Deborah wasn't a priestess who offered sacrifices, she did lead public worship services. Deborah was a woman who was prepared to follow God's leading even though it went against the cultural norm.

Mary was unafraid to take her place at the feet of Jesus when according to the culture of her day she should have been in the background serving and being unseen for the greater part of Jesus' visit.

It is still so easy for us to label people and to overlook the promise of growth and leadership. How would it be if we were to *really* listen to one another's stories, *really* see the gifts that both men and women exhibit so that we can begin to break down the stereotypes and allow everyone to reach their full potential?

"You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending." C S Lewis

- Do you recognise the need to take a fresh look at cultural stereotypes, and if so, what will you do about this?
- How do you feel about "giving your life away for Christ?"

PRAYER: God please help us not to judge others by gender, colour or any other distinction but to see people for who they are, precious in Your sight, gifted in

many different ways and filled with the potential which your grace offers each one. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Examine your gifts

Proverbs 31: 25–31 (NLT)

She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness. She carefully watches everything in her household and suffers nothing from laziness. Her children stand and bless her. Her husband praises her: "There are many virtuous and capable women in the world, but you surpass them all!" Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised. Reward her for all she has done. Let her deeds publicly declare her praise.

John 12 : 1–3 (NIV)

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

One of the gifts which Mary offered to Jesus was the gift of hospitality providing a place of refuge. and recognising His need she gave sacrificially to ensure that He was cared for in every way possible. Her gift is recorded as one of the most significant acts of ministry to our Lord.

As women we are uniquely equipped to nurture, encourage and care for others. We have opportunities to offer comfort, encouragement, hospitality, insight and understanding to those we come in contact with on a daily basis. Offering hospitality is about connection, it is about providing a place where others feel safe to talk, share, unburden themselves and leave feeling strengthened and renewed.

"One of the best gifts you can give to someone, is a wider perspective. It's also one of the best gifts you can receive.

C. Joy Bell

- Are you using your God given ability to help someone achieve new goals?
- How do you understand the gift of hospitality? *Louis, chevalier de Jaucourt describes hospitality in the Encyclopédie as the virtue of a great soul that cares for the whole universe through the ties of humanity.*

PRAYER: God we are grateful for opportunities to encourage and nurture those we meet along the way. Help us to be unselfish in our dealings with those who

need a word of encouragement, a listening ear or a place of refuge where they can rest for a while.

AMEN

THURSDAY – Changing our landscape

"We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking". Richard Rohr

Psalm 46: 5 (NAS)

help her when morning dawns.

God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will

John 12: 25-26 (NIV)

Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

Luke 1: 45 (NIV)

promises to her!

Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his

South African society finds many similarities with the world of Jesus. While gender roles are slowly changing, South Africa is a combination of modern and traditional views and this complicates the gender-based landscapes.

Something to consider: John Wesley's principles in the 18th century included the following in his Political Manifesto –

- Offer the best possible education.
- Empower individuals to feel they can make a difference.
- Promote tolerance.
- Promote equal treatment for women.
- End all forms of enslavement.

What is the greatest obstacle to change? Most often it is fear; fear of the unknown and untried, fear of moving out of our comfort zones and fear of failure. God has given us His promise in Joshua 1:9 that He will be with us wherever we go, so what stops us from trusting Him? God will use change to shape and mould us and make us new. Change will keep our lives fresh and full of adventure – why would we resist such an opportunity and instead choose to live an ordinary, humdrum life?

If our love of God does not directly influence, and even change, how we engage in the issues of our time on this earth, I wonder what good religion is. Richard Rohr

- What area of change challenges you most as you consider the parts of life in our country which need to be transformed?
- How are you able to take steps to enable the necessary change to come about?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, help me not to be so comfortable in my situation that I fail to see the need for change in my home, my place of work and in my country. Grant me the courage to speak for those whose voices are not heard and to bring dignity to all.

AMEN

FRIDAY – From intention to action

Psalm 5: 3 (MSG) *Every morning you'll hear me at it again. Every morning I lay out the pieces of my life on your altar and watch for fire to descend.*

1 John 1: 7 (NIV) *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

Change in our lives requires us to allow God to have his way, to renew our spirit, to realign our thinking and to restore our perspective regarding the way we treat the people He has created. We might be tempted to think of prayer as changing God's mind – but it doesn't! Prayer changes us to be more in tune with the will of God. Beginning in the morning, we lay our lives before Him, we ask for wisdom, compassion and guidance as we venture into new ways of living in his kingdom.

The work of God begins while we are asleep and without our help. He continues to work throughout the day in our worship and obedience. Sacrifice isn't something we do for God, but simply setting out the stuff of life for him to do something with. On the altar the sacrificial offering is changed into what is pleasing and acceptable to God. In the act of offering we give up ownership and control and watch to see what God will do with it.

Eugene Peterson.

- Are you more concerned with trying to win the approval of human beings, or God? If God sat with you over coffee, what do you think he would ask about the way you live your life?
- How can you find more time to pray? Do you need to turn off the electronics, watch a little less TV, wake a little earlier?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus create in me a deep desire to spend time at your feet each day. Transform my thinking, my actions and my conversations so that I will be a bearer of Your grace wherever I find myself today.

AMEN

WEEK 1 HOME GROUP MATERIAL
MARY, SISTER OF MARTHA and LAZARUS

Opening discussion **Daring to look in the mirror**

Do you feel encouraged, challenged or intimidated by the changes in which women are involved in life, work and ministry?

Scripture passage

Galatians 3: 26-29 (NLT) *For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. and all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. **There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.** and now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.*

Going deeper

Breaking away from the cultural stereotypes

- How do you feel about the above passage and the way that God sees us as being equal in His sight?
- How do you think changes in traditional roles will affect society as women challenge stereotypes?

Examine your gifts

During the French Revolution three Christians were sentenced to die by the guillotine. One had the gift of faith, one the gift of prophesy and the third the gift of helps.

The first, with the gift of faith who was to be executed said "I have faith that God will deliver me". He was positioned under the guillotine with his neck on the chopping block. The rope was pulled and nothing happened. Believing that this was an act of God, he was freed.

The second man who had the gift of prophesy said "I predict that God will deliver me from this guillotine. The rope was pulled and nothing happened. Believing that this was an act of God, he was freed.

The third Christian whose gift was helps said "I am just as brave as the other two guys"

He was positioned face up under the guillotine and they were about to pull the rope when he stopped them. "Hey wait a minute" he said "I think I just found the problem with your guillotine".

- What gifts could you share in order to enable someone to move out of a situation in which they are trapped because of gender expectations or limitations?

Changing our landscape

Inquisitiveness and questioning are inevitable parts of the life of faith. Where there is certainty there is no room for faith. I encourage people not to doubt alone, rather to find some people who are safe “doubt companions,” and also to doubt their doubts as much as their faith. But it doesn’t help simply to deny doubts or to feel guilty about them. Many people, after all, have been down that path before and have emerged with a strong faith.

Philip Yancy

- What doubts do you have regarding the changing landscape and the dignity of women in South Africa?
- What is your response to the following quote “If we are to better the future we must disturb the present”? Catherine Booth

From intention to action

- How do you propose to support those who are discriminated against because of their gender?
- Will you commit to prayer and action wherever you are able?

PRAYER: Loving God, as we begin to understand how much You love and value each one of us, help us to show Your love and grace to those we interact with every day. Enable us to offer dignity, encouragement and grace to all who cross our path.

AMEN

WEEK 2
MARY MAGDALENE

MONDAY - Labelled by the world

Luke 24:6-10 (NLT) *'He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.' Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples - and everyone else - what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it."*

Mary Magdalene is nearly always distinguished from other women named Mary by adding "the Magdalene" (ἡ Μαγδαληνή) to her name. This has been interpreted to mean "the woman from Magdala", a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Luke 8:2 says that she was actually called "Magdalene".

The word "nonsense" in our reading today catches one's attention immediately. It is also used in the NIV translation and in the Afrikaans translation described as: *"en hulle woorde het vir hulle na onsinnige praatjies gelyk, en hulle nie geglo nie."*

Jesus lived in a patriarchal culture where women had little access to property rights and inheritance, were secluded for being ritually impure, and were regarded as incapable of understanding the things of God without a man present to teach her. Women were second-class citizens who were mostly treated as property that belonged first to her father, and then once married, to her husband.

There was probably an element of unbelief that someone could rise from the dead and that the women's story was far fetched but the element that women did not know what they were talking about was present.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned 12 times in the Bible saying that she followed Jesus, was present at the Crucifixion and at the tomb, yet the western world, in films, portraits and/or literature has labelled her as a harlot, married to Jesus and even having a child with Jesus.

Not only do women often struggle with pasts that hold them back, they also live with judgements and labels such as Mary Magdalene did. This is a label based not on what they've done, but simply because of what they are – a woman! Many women are judged by the way they dress, rather than by their character.

As we observe the life of Mary Magdalene we see that Jesus Did not use such discriminating labels or demeaning words. Jesus demonstrates how to empower a woman to be who God created her to be. We can learn to embrace what God thinks of us, and resist the hurtful words and attitudes of disrespectful people. It is only Jesus' opinion that really matters. Once we are forgiven and released, we can all blossom into the leaders God intended us to be.

- Have you ever been wrongfully labelled because of your race, culture or friends?
- How many people have you or do you label because of their sexuality, race, culture, etc.

PRAYER: Thanks Lord for everything I am and receive from you. Please help me not to label anyone else because of who they are and what they do. Help me to simply love others. AMEN

TUESDAY – Healed and Restored by Jesus

Luke 8: 1-3 (NLT) *“Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.”*

Jesus starts his ministry of touring the country to preach and announce the Good News and Kingdom of God. Mary Magdalene and many other women follow Jesus right from the start of his ministry.

It was not uncommon for women to care for a rabbi with providing food and financial support. But to leave your home and to travel around the country was opposed by the Jewish culture at the time. It was viewed as scandalous behaviour for women and hence the labelling as discussed yesterday.

Why would Mary Magdalene then behaved in such a manner? What caused her to disregard the Jewish norms and customs?

We read that Jesus cast seven demons from Mary Magdalene. In the first century, demons were widely believed to be the cause of physical and

psychological illness. Bruce Chilton, a scholar of early Christianity, states that the reference to the number of demons being "seven" may mean that Mary had to undergo *seven exorcisms*, probably over a long period of time, due to the first six being partially or wholly unsuccessful. Bart D. Ehrman, a New Testament scholar and historian of early Christianity, contends that the number seven may be merely symbolic, since, in Jewish tradition, seven was the number of completion, so the statement that Mary was possessed by seven demons may simply mean she was completely overwhelmed by their power and completely restored. Consequently, her devotion to Jesus on account of this healing must have been very strong.

Whatever the cause or symbolism, Mary Magdalene was completely healed, forgiven and restored by Jesus. Therefore she followed him with a passion from the start to the end of his ministry on earth despite the rejection and labelling of the Jewish community.

Jesus broke through the social structures of the time in a quiet but deliberate manner. Through his message and conduct he brought about great changes in the lives of people. In the same manner Jesus Christ saves and restores people suffering from injustices, and all kinds of labelling today. Christ Jesus gives you the courage to execute his instructions and lifestyle even if it raises a few eyebrows!

- Have you been completely healed and or restored by Jesus in any way?
- If so, what was your response to him? If not, why not turn to Jesus next time something in your life just becomes too much?

PRAYER: Thank you Lord Jesus for dying on the cross for me. Thanks for allowing me to pray and find you any time I want to do so. Help me not look down on people but rather stoop to help them up.

AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Love the ones you are with

Matthew 25: 34-36,40 (NLT) *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me.'*

⁴⁰And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'"

When you read today's passage and study Mary Magdalene's service to Jesus during his ministry you see many similarities. She joined Jesus and his disciples

right at the start of his ministry, left her home and travelled with the group to feed and care for them using her own resources. She stood at his cross until he died. She was there when he was buried. Early that Sunday morning she went out early with spices to rub on his body as was the custom. She was the first to see and speak to the risen Christ. She was the ultimate servant and an example to all of us on how to keep serving and caring for others. She remained with Jesus whether the situation was good or bad.

Mary Magdalene reminds us of so many women one meets at church and other Christian gatherings who serve the Lord selflessly and with dedication. In the Methodist Church the Women's Auxiliary movement, and Women's Manyano are always ready to step in when there is a need for caring and supporting others. In any healthy marriage there is always the caring and supporting wife and/or mother who cares for the family. They are the ones who spoil others with their love, caring and compassion and sometimes do so despite being labelled, mistreated and abused.

A while ago there was a story of a divorced dad who still brought his ex-wife flowers and treated her to an early breakfast on her birthday. When he was asked why he did it, he stated that as a father he was still responsible to demonstrate to his sons how to treat women.

I am a proud dad of two sons. My eldest son asked me after the birth of our first grand daughter how do you raise daughters? My answer was: "Son, just love her mother." When my other son got married he became the dad of a seven-year-old stepson. He also asked me how do you raise a stepson? He got the same answer to just love the mother. We are all responsible to teach our children how to treat women as well as men. Our example is the one who shapes our children's' behaviour towards others. Our example should inspire our children to be more like Mary Magdalene - a person saved by Jesus and always building others up rather than trying to look down on anyone in any way.

- How do you serve the risen Christ Jesus?
- Is your conduct towards the opposite sex an example to your children and/or other people you may influence?

PRAYER: Dear Lord. Help me to serve you with a dedicated, loving and caring heart and mind. Please teach me how to be an example to all those within my sphere of influence to respect people of the opposite sex, other races, cultures and beliefs.

AMEN

THURSDAY – Lost, separated from Jesus

John 20: 11-13 (MSG) *“But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she knelt to look into the tomb and saw two angels sitting there, dressed in white, one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus’ body had been laid. They said to her, ‘Woman, why do you weep?’ ‘They took my Master,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know where they put him.’”*

At the first mention of Mary Magdalene we meet her as a follower of Jesus. Then we learn that somehow she must have been looking for Jesus as a desperate woman who needed help. She was possessed by demons and must have led a terrible afflicted life. She must have heard about Jesus from somebody who told her that Jesus was the way to be healed and therefore been dearly looking for Jesus to help her. Their meeting changed her from this forlorn being into a selfless loving and caring Jesus follower.

The death of Jesus must have been a terrible loss to her. The Crucifixion of her dearly beloved Jesus must have been a terrible experience for her. Once again she was lost but bravely still cared for Jesus after his death. She saw them putting him into the grave. No wonder she could not wait for the earliest opportunity to go and attend to his body as required at that time.

Imagine the shock she must have felt when she discovered that his body was not there anymore! She wept. In her grief she forgets that Jesus told them a couple of times that after three days he will rise. Even the ancient scriptures professed to this event. She does not give up looking. Through her tears she still stoops down and looks into the grave, and desperately tries to find Jesus again. It is the second time she is desperately seeking Jesus, and what happens? He appears to her soon after this.

Once again Mary Magdalene teaches us that we should never stop looking for Jesus if we feel lost and desperate. If we persist, He will find us. If we dearly love Him and seek Him, in His time He will attend to our desperation and fear. Through our tears we will eventually meet Him and our tears will change into joy and peace.

- Have you ever felt cut off from Jesus and felt abandoned? If so, how did you recover from being lost?
- Do you need to reach out to Jesus at this moment?

PRAYER: Thank you Lord for always finding me and meeting me at just the right time. Help me to always seek you, whatever the situation I am in. AMEN

FRIDAY – Honoured by God

John 20: 14–18 (EHP). *“After she said this, she turned away and saw Jesus standing there. But, she didn't recognise him. Jesus spoke to her, ‘Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?’*

She, thinking it was the gardener, said, ‘Mister, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can take care of him.’ Jesus said, ‘Mary.’

Turning to face him, she said in Hebrew, ‘Rabboni!’ meaning ‘Teacher!’

Jesus said, ‘Don't cling to me, for I have not ascended to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.’ Mary Magdalene went, telling the news to the disciples: ‘I saw the Master!’ and she told them everything he said to her.”

Mary Magdalene, the faithful, dedicated follower and servant of Jesus gets mentioned 12 times in the New Testament. Far more than many of the disciples. Eight times she is mentioned first on the list indicating her importance in the group of followers.

The ultimate honour by God is that she is the first person who the risen Jesus speaks to - the first witness who sees the risen Christ. She also becomes the first person sent by the risen Jesus to go and tell the disciples the Good News. Later the disciples (Apostles) get the same instructions to go and tell the world the Good News. What an incredible honour that God chose Mary Magdalene to be the first disciple to witness the miracle and to go and share the Good news to the world!

It is not difficult to understand why God chose her. The sinner, who needed to be healed and restored by Jesus. The grateful woman, who was part of a group of women who cared for Jesus and His disciples. She must have known Jesus very well after being so close to all of them for three years. The lady who was with Jesus at the Crucifixion, His death, His burial and finally wanting to attend to His body after His death – unlike most of the disciples who fled when Jesus was arrested. Her love, dedication and selfless care must have pleased God tremendously. No wonder she won the prize and scored the biggest news scoop ever recorded. She became the apostle to the Apostles!

- God blesses us continuously. How do you show your appreciation to God or do you think you deserve them?
- Why do you think God called you into a specific ministry you are serving?

PRAYER: Thank you Father for creating me as a perfect person in your eyes. Help me to grow in your grace when I am labelled and put down by others.

AMEN

WEEK 2 HOME GROUP MATERIAL

MARY MAGDALENE

Ephesians 4: 31-32 (NLT) *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”*

What prompted Mary to step out of a subservient culture and become such a devoted disciple to Jesus? Luke says that she received a special blessing of healing and forgiveness. We are not sure what the “seven demons that possessed her” means, but we know that she was afflicted and that Jesus healed her. Released, she became the person God intended her to be. She accepted His forgiveness and was set free, no longer letting her past actions or others’ labels influence her.

Just as God chose Mary Magdalene, despite her past – so God knows our past, and chooses us with perfect insight. He knows what we are capable of and what we can become.

Not only do women often struggle with pasts that hold them back, they also live with judgements and labels. This is a label based not on what they’ve done, but simply because of what they are – a woman! Many women are judged by the way they dress, rather than by their character. If a man has many girlfriends he is a “stud”, if a woman has many boyfriends she is a “slut”. More disturbing is the fact that a woman’s values are judged in sexual abuse cases by uncomplimentary comments such as “She must have asked for it”.

As we observe the life of Mary Magdalene we see that Jesus never used such discriminating labels or demeaning words.

Jesus demonstrates how to empower a woman to be who God created her to be. Women can learn to embrace what God thinks of us, and resist the hurtful words and attitudes of disrespectful people. It is only Jesus’ opinion that really matters. Once we are forgiven and released, we can blossom into the leaders God intended us to be. Mary Magdalene realised that her love for God meant more than who she was perceived to be. Although she knew firsthand about sin, God’s mercy and forgiveness changed her life completely. She was a new person!

- Have we evolved from a male-centered society, or do we still think that women should be seen and not heard? Can women also be the heroes of the Christian story? Discuss.
- What labels and double standards do you think are most prevalent in our society today?

- Which label in this world really hurts you? Explain.
- Are you struggling to get over your past? Have you been discriminated against? Turn to the person next to you and share as much as you are comfortable to do. Pray for each other to let go of the past and hurtful labels.

PRAYER: Please pray for your own attitude towards women to change and for opportunities to arise for you to make this world a better place for women and children. Please pray for our church and its woman's organisations, our country and the other countries in the world where women are still suffering. AMEN

WEEK 3
MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

MONDAY - Pregnant, but not married.

Mary's faith in God and her courage.

Luke 1:26:38 (NIV)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

In a large orthodox synagogue in Jerusalem, the question was asked: What would happen if a young, unmarried girl broke the Ten Commandments and became pregnant? The answer came quickly: "It doesn't happen!" It seemed to be something that was unconscionable.

"10 Commandments?" " Only ten? There were 613 rules for life that Orthodox Jews live by even today and they would certainly have applied to Mary. A woman, pregnant outside of marriage, would have been despised and not made welcome wherever she went. (Num 5: 7-11). She might even have been put to death, by stoning.

Mary's family. The Bible tells us nothing about Mary's family, except that they were devout in their religious practices. Her father must have given permission for Joseph to marry Mary, while she was still very young. It is likely that the two families knew each other well. Joseph came from a good home (in the line of David).

We are not told of her family's response when it was discovered that Mary was pregnant. They must have believed and accepted the testimonies of daughter and future son-in-law (visitation by angels) and did not act against her. Joseph was clearly guided not to get Mary out of his life by divorcing her.

The census. When the census was proclaimed, both Mary and Joseph went, as the law required, to Bethlehem, “David’s town”. This was a very courageous move as they must have anticipated great disapproval and censure from the people there, especially Joseph’s family. Speculation: It was likely that Joseph had relatives in Bethlehem, but these normally hospitable folk did not find any room for the couple. They were allocated a shed “at the back” where the animals were kept.

- How important is it for you to “do the will of God”? In today’s world where God’s word is often neglected and abused and questioned, how do we, as followers of Jesus, respond to people breaking the ten Commandments? (especially Number 7: You shall not commit adultery).
- What should our attitude be to Christians ‘living together’?

PRAYER: Lord God, please show me your way each and every day. Be so real to me that I may learn to be as faithful to You as Mary was. For Jesus’ sake. AMEN

TUESDAY – Mary and Elizabeth

Luke 1: 39-56

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

Mary’s Song: and Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.” Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Mary hurried to her cousin Elizabeth to tell her the amazing news. Elizabeth, who was supposedly beyond child-bearing age, also had amazing news. Maybe Mary had already heard about Elizabeth’s miraculous pregnancy; we don’t know.

Mary's song says so much about God and has been used through the centuries to encourage others in their faith. Mary must have repeated these words many times over as she faced both good and tough times through Jesus' life. But she lived with joy, praising God for the fact that she was chosen to be the mother of the Saviour. [She kept all these things in her heart]

After Jesus' birth, things didn't necessarily get better. She was so poor that all she could afford for her purification ceremony were two doves. [The normal sacrifice would have been a year-old lamb, but for the poor, two doves would suffice. Leviticus 12]

Persecution and flight to Egypt: Herod, furious that he had been outwitted by the Magi, planned to eliminate any boy child who might be the One chosen to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Matthew 2:13-23). Having been warned in a dream, Joseph and his family fled the persecution and lived as homeless exiles in Egypt. The threat of death was so real that they needed to get as far away as possible. Joseph and Mary believed and acted on God's promises. Look at a map of the Holy Land at the time of Christ, and notice that the journey from Bethlehem to Egypt would have taken quite some time. The family lived as refugees and survived under difficult conditions. They lived in exile for about two years before returning to a life of poverty in Galilee. That was after Herod's death.

- Read Mary's song again and think about each phrase. How would you write your own song praising God for the way you have responded to Jesus' call, "Come, Follow Me" and your subsequent journey as His Disciple in today's world?
- Contrast your life to that of Mary as she lived each day in obedience to God's will.

PRAYER: Thank God for your salvation in Jesus Christ and recommit your life to Him.

AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Mary watched her amazing Son as he grew in stature and wisdom.

Luke 2:33 and 41-52 The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him.... Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to

look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Jesus at the Temple. There must have been many events in Jesus' childhood when Mary was astonished at her son. Most mothers are amazed at their childrens' progress, but for Mary, Jesus was more than amazing! She kept all these things in her heart, knowing that God had appointed the most remarkable person in history. We know nothing of Jesus' earlier childhood, but the fulfillment of God's promises must have kept coming back to Mary

The story of Jesus in the temple, as related above, makes us wonder how it was that so much time elapsed before they realized he was not with them. Things were very different then. Jesus normally would have travelled with the women. But at age 12, he would have associated more with the men in the group. (There were no means of communication except on a person-to-person basis. No telephones; no cellphones!)

Jesus had been in discussions with the teachers who were amazed at his understanding and his answers. A 12 year old! Mary must have understood Jesus' reference to his Father's house, even though the others did not.

There are no scripture references covering Jesus' life between the ages of 12 and about 30. There have been a number of speculative writings, including "The Hidden Years" [e.g. a novel by John Oxenham, 1925]. which attempts to fill this 'gap', but there is no credible corroborative evidence. So, it's a case of "We don't know".

- Consider some of the events that might have taken place in Jesus's 'teenage years and his early adulthood. There's no doubt that he would have spent much time studying the scriptures. Since He knew who He was, He would have spent many hours in prayer, preparing for His Ministry.
- Was He really a skilled carpenter, because that is what Joseph (His earthly father) did for a living? Or a stone-mason as some have speculated: lots of stone for building, but a scarcity of wood in the area!

PRAYER: Jesus, son of Mary, Son of God: I do not need to fill the gaps of Your youth! But I do need to know how my life is planned to fit into Your plan. I need to learn more of Mary's faith and obedience so I can truly "follow you"! AMEN

THURSDAY – Jesus' Ministry.

There are many scripture references to Jesus' ministry. Most do not refer to Mary's presence.

Jesus' Baptism. Was Mary there? Almost certainly!

Since this was such an important part of Jesus' life story and since Jesus' relative was baptising people for 'the remission of their sins', and in preparation for the "kingdom of heaven" it is quite likely that Mary was present, although none of the Bible references specifically states this to be so!

Matt 3:13-17 *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Also **Mark 1: 4-6; John 1: 29-33; Luke 3: 21-23**

Luke 3:23 *Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry.*
(Mary would have heard these words, and hidden them in her heart)

The wedding at Cana in Galilee. Mary was there!

In John 2: 1-11 the wine ran out. An embarrassment for the host! Mary showed her faith in Jesus and demonstrated her leadership. Acquiring more wine would have been a man's job. Mary took charge.

John 2: 1-11 "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he

called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him"

Turning water (H₂O) into alcohol (C₂H₅OH) (wine) was a miracle that not even today's chemists can explain! The servants obediently filled the large water jars. Imagine their comments as they did as they were told. Imagine their amazement when the good wine was served. Try to imagine the bridegroom's sense of wonder!

- If you are witness to a miracle, would you tell others of the changes made to your life?

Jesus Raises a Widow's Son. There was quite a crowd of mourners. Was Mary one of them?

Luke 7: 11-17 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 bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers 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.

- Jesus demonstrated His power to raise this young man to life, and in so doing brought immense joy to the widow. It did not matter whether the life-changing activity was for someone famous or someone whose name is not recorded. The widow and her family and friends would never have forgotten Jesus' words that brought the son back to life.
- Relating this to today, it does not matter whether you are well known or seemingly unimportant. What does matter is that when Jesus enters your life, His life-changing intervention becomes a lasting reality for others to marvel at!
- Mary treasured these things in her heart. Give thanks for her life of faith and obedience.

PRAYER: Lord God, by your grace, please sustain my faith in Jesus so that I remain Your witness in all aspects of my life.

AMEN

FRIDAY – Crucifixion and Resurrection. Mary was there!

Crucifixion. It must have been the worst thing that a mother could imagine for her child: to be witness to Jesus's blatantly unfair trial, His scourging and then His death on a cross. Something to run away from and try to forget forever. A nightmare.

In the midst of Jesus' pain and humiliation, He saw his mother standing by with his Disciple whom he loved.

John 19:26-27 *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother". From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

Matthew Henry comments: "Jesus tenderly provides for His mother at His death. It is probable that Joseph, her husband, was long since dead, and that her son Jesus had supported her. Now that He was dying what would become of her? He saw her standing by and knew her cares and griefs, and He saw John standing not far off. So, He established a new relationship between His beloved mother and His beloved disciple. He said to her, "Woman, behold your son, for whom, from now on, you must have a motherly affection," and to John, "Behold you mother, to whom you must pay a sonly duty." and so from that hour, that hour never to be forgotten, that disciple took her to his own home.

Notice the care Christ took of His dear mother. He was not so much taken up with a sense of His sufferings as to forget His friends, all whose concerns He bore. His mother, perhaps, was so taken up with his sufferings that she didn't think of what would become of her, but He did. He had no other way to provide for His mother than by His interest in a friend, which he does here.

He calls her *woman*, not *mother*, not out of any disrespect to her, but because *mother* would have been a cutting word to her who was already wounded with grief. He directs her to look upon John as her son: "Behold him as thy son, who stands there by you, and be as a mother to him."

This was an honour put upon John, and a testimony both to his prudence and to his fidelity. If He who knows all things had not known that John loved Him, He would not have made him Mary's guardian. It is a great honour to be employed for Christ and to be entrusted with any of His interest in the world.

The Resurrection. Was Mary there?

John 20:1-11 *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she*

came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead). Then the disciples went back to where they were staying."

Only in John's Gospel are we told that Jesus' mother, Mary, may have been present to witness Christ's resurrection. Careful study of the four gospels indicates that there could have been two, three or even four women named Mary at the tomb. So we do not know for certain!

In summary: Mary, the mother of Jesus teaches us that regardless of circumstances a person can live the "Good News" with courage and beauty. She embodies "motherhood" and the difficult choices we sometimes have to make as mothers.

Because Mary lived close to God, she had the courage to stand next to her son as he was crucified – a mother's nightmare!

Discipleship requires faith, love and obedience to God.

But there is no doubt that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus has changed the world. We, as Jesus' disciples, are so privileged to be bearers of the truth that has set us free! Praise the Lord, using your own words as the significance of this truth influences the way you think, the words you use and the life you live!

WEEK 3 HOME GROUP MATERIAL MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

For Home Group material this week, please reflect on the questions posed to you during the course of this week.

As a group select the ones you feel are speaking to your group and in need of more in-depth study. Then read the relevant readings and enter into discussion.

May you all be blessed as you tackle some of these pertinent thoughts and questions.

WEEK 4
MARY, MOTHER OF JAMES

MONDAY – Behind the Title

Mark 15: 40, 47 (NIV) ⁴⁰Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Mark 16: 1 (NIV) When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

Little is known about this Mary. It would appear that her greatest claim to fame was that she was the mother of James and John (also known as Jonas) and the wife of Clopas. She was recognized for her value as a mother to these two boys. But is that all there was to her?

In today's society labels and titles are very popular: Dr....., Prof....., CEO....., Does it give us a feeling of elevated status or a greater self-worth? Then on the other end of the scale is "I am only a housewife". People have assigned greater worth to some occupations, and less to others; and even written off certain ones as insignificant. Yet do any of these titles reveal the person behind them?

In the eyes of Jesus – none of this is important. His entire ministry taught equality – that each person mattered.

All of us, men and women, are more than our titles. Our relationships do not define us.

We need to look beyond the labels and find the person God created.

- We all have a mother. How have you viewed this woman? Do you know who and what she is beyond the title of 'mother'? What are her dreams?
- Do you place more worth on some occupations than others? Do you view some as more menial than others?
- Perhaps you feel less important because of your job or because you do not have a university degree?

PRAYER: Lord, we pray that we may recognise our own and others unique calling from You. May we take care not to see only the labels, but the person You created. We give thanks for the women, who on 9th August 1956 took a stand and marched for the dignity of all women. May we, 62 years later, through Your grace and courage continue to speak out against such injustices. AMEN

Let us journey together this week and find out who this woman, Mary, mother of James and John really was.

TUESDAY – More than Meets the Eye

Luke 8: 1-3 (NIV)

After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others [Mary mother of James being amongst them]. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Mark 15: 40and41 (NIV)

Some woman were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

We see that this Mary was part of the group that travelled with Jesus and was taught by him day by day. Jesus turned the norms of the time upside down – recognising the worth of these women and encouraging them to participate in discussion – certainly not the accepted practice! He enabled them to flourish in what would have been seen as strictly male roles. He was the greatest advocate for human rights; and for women to be recognized. So what has happened today...?

- Why has society, why have WE, ignored this aspect of Jesus?

Significantly and unusually we see that Mary is a woman of wealth, and that she contributed financially to Jesus' ministry. It was uncommon for women of that time to have financial control. Two characteristics are important here.

- She broke from tradition and the norm;
- She risked her own financial security in order to support Jesus' ministry.

This shows she had strength of character and the ability to stand firm when societal norms would have been judging her.

So much more than: "Mary, mother of James and John".

- The women in your family –
 - Are they happy with the roles they are in?
 - Is the structure of your family built on assumptions, traditions and expectations? – Or on mutual respect, equality and discussion?

- Moms – are you “so equal” that you have neglected your role as a mom and carer?
- If you are fortunate enough to be in a family where there is equality and respect, and expectations are being met, take a moment to give thanks for this freedom.

PRAYER: We pray today for the Methodist Women's Manyano and Women's Auxiliaries throughout the Connexion. Guide and bless all their members and their work. We thank You for their commitment to supporting and uplifting communities and spreading your Word. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Were You There?

John 19: 25-30 (NIV) *Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. Later, knowing that everything had now been finished and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

In the film *The Passion of Christ*, the Crucifixion scene is particularly graphic and one finds oneself flinching at the brutality of what is on screen – almost wanting to turn away. Then there are the audible sounds of the nails being hammered into Jesus' hands. It certainly affects most viewers.

Mary, the mother of James stood firm at the foot of the cross and remained with Jesus to the end, when most ran away. This was not a movie set, nor were they actors. This was REAL for her. She saw the sweat, the tears and the blood. The trauma of witnessing that scene must have remained with her for the rest of her life. Yet – she had the STRENGTH to endure it and the COURAGE to remain until He died. This was not a weak woman!

- The tough, brutal Roman soldier, Longinus, was profoundly changed by witnessing the Crucifixion – stop for a moment to understand that if it had such an impact on this tough, unbelieving guy, these women who loved Jesus and stayed beneath the cross, must have been monumental!
- Where would you have been on the day of the Crucifixion?

“Where you there when they crucified my Lord....”

Mary, the mother of James was.

PRAYER: Lord, we pray for each individual and organization that is working among abused and raped women. Give them the strength to endure the atrocities that they witness and the kindness and gentleness to bring healing to the brokenness.

AMEN

THURSDAY – When the right Way is the Only Way

“All it takes for evil to triumph, is when good men do nothing”

Mark 16: 1-2 (NIV)

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

Matthew 27: 65 and 66 *“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.*

Mary was among those ladies that went to the tomb early in the morning to prepare Jesus' body with spices. She was intent on showing respect in death and following the correct Jewish traditions. She knew they would have to confront the Roman soldiers, and she knew they would have a problem moving the stone. But despite the fear and the challenges she was resolute. She was going to get it done. Having witnessed the brutality of the Roman soldiers in the past three days, I am not sure how much courage I would have had coming face to face with those soldiers!

This was a woman of substance and courage – no longer can she be called just a mother, or just a housewife.

- How firm is your resolve to do what you know to be right, despite fear and obstacles?
- Is it not time for us all to get to know each other beyond the titles and job descriptions?
- How well do you know your employees? When they are not working for you – who are they, what are they doing and achieving?
- The lady that takes care of your children and your home – do you know her children?

PRAYER: Lord, as Christian men and women grant us wisdom and courage to speak out against the abuse of women in South Africa and to actively demonstrate a better way. Help us to challenge patriarchal dominance in our society and to always let Your love be shown through us. AMEN

FRIDAY – Where Does That Leave Us?

Mary, the mother of James and John. Woman of non-conformity, strength, courage, substance and truth.

We started out with little knowledge of this Mary. But a picture has emerged of a formidable woman. She was the mother of James, the apostle. Her strength, courage and devotion to Jesus must have had an influence in James' life and decision to become an apostle.

Through all of these four Marys, and many other examples in the Bible, Jesus shows time and again His high regard and respect for women. This does not mean that through Jesus there are no longer differences or distinctions (Galatians 3:28), but men and women are equal in God's eyes. Let us not forget that God did create us man and woman as part of His plan. Jesus taught that men and women have equal and complimentary roles in life, marriage and work. Not that we are the same.

There are very few solo parts in life, but many make up the harmonies and beauty of the choir! Society identifies us in terms of our family and relationships, or achievements. There is no measure for the influence we have on people or the kindness we share. History only records great events.

But – we are more than our relationships. We are more than labels and titles. We need to find the person God sees.

Hopefully when you next encounter Mary, mother of James, she will take on a new significance for you. May she remind you that you may not be well known, or little might be said about you, but there is so much more to you than meets the eye.

We all need to redefine ourselves as a disciple of Jesus.

- Who are the 'Marys' in your life? Who are you overlooking as insignificant? Perhaps you feel this way yourself?
- In celebrating women in this month of August – can we all look at our mothers, wives and daughters and build them up to be women of Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, what would You have me do? Open my eyes that I may see You. Where can I be Your mouth or hands in helping the plight of women. Give me the courage to heed Your prompting and the strength to do what is right. AMEN

WEEK 4 HOME GROUP MATERIAL

MARY, MOTHER OF JAMES

Matthew 1: 1; 5 (NIV)

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham; ⁵Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse.

Reflection and Discussion

Having spent the last few weeks studying four great women, there are two others worth mentioning that are in direct line to Jesus, and neither are of Jewish descent: Rahab and Ruth.

- What, if any, is the significance of the women in Jesus' genealogy coming from pagan backgrounds, being touched and blessed by God and then serving Him for the rest of their lives?

Women can change society, they have the capabilities of great strength, in many areas they can perform to the same standards of men. Does this make them equal?

- Discuss the complexities of advocating equal rights for women. Particularly taking into account that God created us man and women, yet Jesus spoke out clearly and often against discrimination of women.

Scripture reading

Read together **Ruth 2**

Ruth was strong and opposed societal norms, yet she retained her caring and nurturing of Naomi and graciously accepted Boaz's kindness. Boaz ignored Ruth's past and background and treated her with dignity and generosity. There is no doubt that Ruth could have made it on her own, yet she accepted the safety Boaz offered.

Through Boaz's example should we not rather be campaigning for safe people and not equal people?

*Safe people: Understand the Father heart of God
 Encourage character and potential
 Provide comfort and kindness
 Care about well-being
 Facilitate growth of a person
 Direct people to God as a safe place.*

Mark Driscoll (adapted)

In conclusion, we cannot ignore the complexities of cultural issues regarding the rights of women.

- Do those outside of a culture have the right to campaign against it – whether we see them as abhorrent or not?
- Are all women of South Africa wanting the same thing?
- Should we not seek first to understand?

Going deeper

Below is a list of organisations who aim to address the rights of women. Perhaps select one or two, if not all, and Google them.

Reading brings knowledge; knowledge brings understanding; and understanding builds bridges.

P♀WA

Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa (PWMSA)

Empowerment Institute IMAGINE

Rape Crises SA

MCSA Women's Association

Future Families

Khuluma

Black Sash

Suffragettes

Close in Prayer