

THE PEOPLE JESUS LOVED

WEEK 1 – Mary of Magdala (Mary Magdalene)

Most of the content for this week's devotions was inspired by a sermon series, "The People Jesus Loved", by Adam Hamilton, senior pastor at the Church of Resurrection, Kansas, January 2025.

MONDAY – Mary Magdalene and our spiritual New Year's resolutions



John 19: 25 *Near the cross of Jesus stood His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.*

2 Corinthians 3: 2 & 3 *"You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."*

The "People Jesus loved" series focuses on the stories of four people in the gospels whose lives were transformed by an encounter with Jesus, starting this week with Mary Magdalene, as an example of how Christ's transforming power can change our lives. Coming at the beginning of the new year, this series is also a 'Back to Basics' series, inviting us to re-commit ourselves to the call to follow Christ.

Twelve scripture references to Mary Magdalene by name can be found in the four Gospels. When one reads all of these in rough sequence, a picture emerges of a woman once beset by demons, but healed by Jesus, who, together with some other women, most of whom are unnamed, travelled through Judea and Galilee with Jesus and His twelve disciples, helping support them by catering for their daily needs. Mary Magdalene was

one of only a handful of followers of Jesus who were present at the crucifixion and who visited His tomb. She was also the first to see the risen Christ and was entrusted by Christ Jesus to bring the good news of His resurrection to the disciples.

Consider: "When others see my attitude, behaviour and actions, it is as if they read a letter about who I am. What does my letter portray about my faith?" But an even more profound question is this: "Do I know how to fix things which are highlighted in my letter as incompatible with a reborn believer?" Will it help to make at least one spiritual New Year's resolution to help address current shortcomings highlighted by my portrayed spiritual letter? What are your answers to these questions?



Prayer: Abba Father, may the words of my mouth, the meditation of my heart and all my actions be pleasing in Your sight. I ask this in the name of Jesus, my Rock and my Redeemer. AMEN (*Personalised from Psalm 19: 14*)

TUESDAY – Mary Magdalene; created, formed, redeemed and called



Isaiah 43: 1b *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*

Luke 8: 1-3 *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 (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

John 20: 17 & 18 *Jesus said (to Mary Magdalene), “Do not hold on to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to My brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that He had said these things to her.*

The scripture in Isaiah 43: 1 has always been one of the anchor scriptures in my faith, as I am sure was also the case for Mary Magdalene, who is a beautiful example of that scripture in action. But just consider this – what if, after Jesus had cured her of seven demons, she had been convinced by some of her previous “friends” that she had an evil past, and would never fit in with Jesus and His followers. Mary Magdalene would have, for

one, neither featured in the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion nor of the resurrection of Christ.

Consider: What are the voices from the past that pop into your head, and what do they tell you? Are they trying to sow doubt in your mind as to whether you are truly sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ, or are they, on the contrary, casting doubt on the choices you have made?



Prayer: Loving Shepherd of the sheep, thank you for Your gracious promises as contained in Your Word, and specifically also in Isaiah 43. As Your new creation in Christ, I accept these promises as also applicable to me. Thank you that You have redeemed me, called me by name, and I am now Yours, by grace through faith. I love You Lord. In Jesus' name. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Mary Magdalene; called, committed, courageous



Isaiah 41: 1 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Ruth 1: 16 *But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."*

Mary Magdalene was indeed "called, committed and courageous", and since she knew the scriptures (Isaiah 41:1), she would have faithfully stayed close to Jesus to the very end.

Early in my career, I had been a member of an environmental phenomenon research team. My colleague Koos was always the first to volunteer for uncomfortable assignments, always quoting some version of Ruth 1:16; that is, until the day when he bluntly said "No" when confronted with a trip of 2 km through a raging river in flood, to where I wanted to be. Nobody else was "interested" either. I then realised that I had not told my team members what our mode of transport would be, namely, a helicopter ride instead

of two of us in a small boat. Even though this is a work example, I believe that it is also like that in our spiritual walk – we can only expect to be truly successful if all believers working toward a specific cause have access to the same information.

Consider: Considering the voices that you sometimes hear in your mind, you realise that these are either voices from your past or the present. I believe that there is nothing wrong with listening to voices in your head, but there comes a time when those voices are in conflict with the gentle whispers from the Holy Spirit. That is where I then draw the line; the conflicting voice has to go. Has it ever happened to you, and how did you deal with it?



Prayer: Father God, my refuge and my strength, when fear and discouragement threaten to overpower me, You are my Rock and my Refuge. Abba Father, I worship, praise and thank you for making me strong and courageous, just like Mary Magdalene, who stayed true to her calling and stayed with You all the way to the Cross. I pray this in Jesus' name. AMEN

THURSDAY – No one expected this!



Mark 16: 1-3 *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?"*

The four Gospels paint a very clear picture of what happened at the crucifixion and the events that followed. Neither the eleven disciples nor the women who went to the grave on the Sunday morning expected to see that the tombstone had been rolled away, and that Jesus had risen from the dead, even though Jesus had prepared them for it.

Mary Magdalene was standing alone at the grave, crying, when first the Angels and then the risen Christ Jesus spoke to her. Anxiety, despair, even doubt, turned to joy in an instant. While lingering at the grave, in quiet reflection, Mary Magdalene then finally saw the truth and truly believed.

Consider: Is your faith strong enough to weather fear, uncertainty and disbelief and still remember God's promise? If you feel uncertain, ask yourself, do you have the type of caring, honest, trusting commitment to God that Mary Magdalene had to Jesus? What are those things preventing you from spending time in prayer, worship and in scripture, whether at church or in your quiet time? I have found that removing obstacles sometimes challenges long-held beliefs. Only by doing it with the help of the Holy Spirit will one ever be able to succeed in challenging those beliefs and removing the obstacles.



Prayer: Christ Jesus, I have heard Your knock at the door of my heart and with joy have opened for You to come in. I long to spend time in Your presence in true fellowship, I yearn for You to be the centre and foundation of my life. Thank you for always being available and willing to talk with me. Help me to transform my prayer time into a conversation with You, listening more and speaking less. I trust in Your unfailing love and grace. My Lord and Saviour, I pray this in Your name. AMEN

[Loosely based on Proverbs 2:3-5; Psalm 42:1-2; James 4:8; Revelation 3:20]

FRIDAY – On a spiritual journey with our spiritual family



John 20: 18 *Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that He had said these things to her.*

Hebrews 10: 24 & 25 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Romans 15: 30 *I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.*

The scriptures above, from the letters to the Hebrews and the Romans, stress the importance of Christian believers standing together as a community, in fact being part of a “spiritual family”, to spur one another on and to support each other, as well as to join in prayer to God for one another and the community.

The picture sketched of Mary Magdalene in the Gospels shows that after her redemption and salvation, she became a member of Jesus’ spiritual family, with them informing and supporting one another in fulfilling their respective calling. Jesus so trusted her that, after His resurrection, He asked her to be

the Apostle to the Apostles, as depicted in John 20: 18.

Consider: Are you perhaps missing your calling? I have asked myself that many times, both from a secular and a Spiritual/Biblical perspective. I had a clear picture in my head about why I wanted to study in my chosen field, but over time, after a number of unplanned and unexpected about turns, it has only in recent years dawned on me, in fact, became crystal clear, why I had to follow “the long, winding route from Egypt to the Promised Land”. It absolutely blew my mind. Have you also experienced anything like that? Can you identify anyone who is a spiritual brother or sister to you?



Prayer: Abba Father, we thank You for the gift of community of believers and for the bonds of love and fellowship that unite us as the body of Christ. We acknowledge that You have called us to work together in building Your Kingdom, guided by the Holy Spirit, supporting and encouraging one another in our shared faith. We pray this in Jesus’ name. AMEN