

February 14
Lesson 11 (NIV)

CALLED TO SUPPORT

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 4:13–25

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 15:40; 16:1–9; Luke 8:1–3; John 20:10–18

LUKE 8:1–3

¹ After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³ 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.

MARK 15:40

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome.

JOHN 20:10–18

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "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.' "

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.

KEY VERSES

After this, Jesus traveled 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. —Luke 8:1–2

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Unit 3: The Call of Women

LESSONS 9–13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the acts of devotion by the women who followed Jesus.
2. Explain the importance of women being the first eyewitnesses to testify about Jesus' resurrection.
3. Describe some ways to demonstrate his or her loyalty to Jesus.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Celebrity
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Women in Jesus' Ministry (Luke 8:1–3; Mark 15:40)
 - A. Day by Day (Luke 8:1–3)
 - B. In Crisis (Mark 15:40)
- II. Mary, Jesus' Witness (John 20:10–18)
 - A. Sad Scene (vv. 10–11)
The Great Disappointer
 - B. Angels Appear (vv. 12–13)
 - C. Rabboni Revealed (vv. 14–18)
A Familiar Voice

Conclusion

- A. He Found Her
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Alphaeus *Al-fee-us*.

Arimathea *Air-uh-muh-**thee**-uh* (*th* as in *thin*).

Chuzá *Koo-za*

Galilee *Gal-uh-lee*.

Herod Antipas *Hair-ud An-tih-pus*.

Magdala *Mag-duh-luh*.

Magdalene *Mag-duh-leen* or *Mag-duh-lee-nee*.

rabbónirab-*o-nye*.

Salome *Suh-lo-me*.

synagogues *in-uh-gog*.

Tiberias *Tie-beer-ee-us*.

Zebedee *Zeb-eh-dee*.

Introduction

A. Celebrity

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) declared, “There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.” The idea is that bad publicity at least keeps the public aware of the celebrity’s existence. Not getting any publicity can be the death knell to a person’s “well-knownness.”

There is no doubt that Jesus was a celebrity, although the term doesn’t do justice to him. He was celebrated for the value of his teachings and for the miracles that he performed. His teachings and his miracles both brought joy to those who followed him. As we consider some of the women who experienced that joy, theirs can be ours as well.

B. Lesson Context

Jesus became well known in the Jewish villages and towns of Galilee by traveling among the people. Peter described this by saying Jesus “went around doing good” (Acts 10:38), a ministry that included teaching, healing, and casting out demons (see Mark 1:14–15, 34). Jesus traveled with a large group that included the core 12 disciples and others. The opportunity for women to

play a prominent role in Jesus' ministry made it unusual. Jerusalem had no famous women rabbis. The Jewish high council, the Sanhedrin, had no female members. The prominent sects, the Sadducees and Pharisees, were made up of men only.

The inclusion of women who were not the wives or other family of the disciples was even more unusual (compare 1 Corinthians 9:5). Many charges were made against Jesus during his ministry, including drunkenness, Sabbath breaking, blasphemy, and using the power of Satan (see Mark 3:22–23; Luke 7:34; John 5:18; etc.). Because women traveled with them regularly, we might expect similar charges regarding sexual sins. But no record claims that either Jesus or any of his disciples (male or female) were accused of sexual immorality while they ministered together.

Mary Magdalene was one of these women. She has been especially misunderstood throughout history. Some factions have tried to uncover a romantic entanglement between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. These stories are found only in sources written long after the first century.

For example, a second- or third-century nonbiblical collection of sayings called *The Gospel of Philip* presents Mary Magdalene as Jesus' "companion." *The Gospel of Mary*, another heretical document, claims that Jesus revealed special, secret knowledge to Mary alone.

Other fanciful legends claim that Mary traveled from Jerusalem after the crucifixion to the south of France. Medieval accounts sometimes included Mary in the legends concerning the Holy Grail—the cup Jesus supposedly used at the last supper and that supposedly was used to collect some of his blood at the cross. Yet the actual biblical accounts about Mary Magdalene are sparse on details and have none of these legendary elements. Her real witness is even greater than those!

I. Women in Jesus' Ministry

(LUKE 8:1–3; MARK 15:40)

Luke 4:14–15 introduced Jesus' first preaching tour of Galilee. Now Luke 8:1 takes us to the beginning of Jesus' second preaching tour there.

A. Day by Day (Luke 8:1–3)

1a. After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

Luke summarizes Jesus' strategy for the near future: he continued to tour Galilee, traveling *from one town and village to another*. Towns were larger population centers that had markets and government officials. Villages were small clusters of homes where people who worked the farms lived, perhaps alongside a few merchants and craftsmen. Both villages and towns would have one or more synagogues, which were community centers for Jewish worship.

Jesus' *proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God* took three forms. First, he taught on this by use of parables (example: Luke 8:4–15). Second, he demonstrated the nearness of the kingdom through power over demonic forces (8:26–39). Third, he performed miraculous healings, even raising the dead (examples: 8:43–48, 53–56).

1b. The Twelve were with him,

The Twelve refers to those disciples whom Jesus also called apostles (see Luke 6:13–16).

2a. and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases:

Certain women also followed Jesus from village to village. Perhaps because “the Twelve” of the previous verse were all men, sometimes we forget that women also travelled with Jesus. They played important roles in his ministry, though often in the background (see Luke 8:3c, below).

The Greek word translated *cured* suggests a total restoration, not just the absence of disease. Physical health is restored when *diseases* are overcome; spiritual health is restored when *evil spirits* are driven out.

2b. Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;

The name *Mary* is a form of the name of Moses’ sister, Miriam; she was a prophetess and musician-leader of women during the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 15:20). Mary’s nickname, *Magdalene*, comes from her home, the village of Magdala located near Tiberias on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee. This would be like calling someone from the city of Dallas “Tex,” a nod to his home state.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned at least twice in each Gospel, making her one of the most frequently mentioned women in the New Testament. Hers is the most dramatic story among these women, for Jesus drove *seven demons* from her. Those were malevolent nonhuman spiritual beings that could enter and influence a person. We can assume that the situation was fully beyond Mary’s ability to control. No details exist in the Gospels about this exorcism, but Mary’s story seems to have been known among Jesus’ followers.

Many mistakenly identify Mary Magdalene with the sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet in Luke 7:36–50. That proposal seems to be strengthened by the similar account of a woman named Mary who anointed Jesus’ feet in John 12:1–3. But the sinful woman of Luke 7 is not named there, and Mary Magdalene is named not long after (today’s text). We might conclude therefore that Luke surely (1) would have known whether the two women were one and the same and (2) would have made the identification if it were the case. But that is an argument from silence.

The claim that the Mary of John 12 was Mary Magdalene ignores the fact that there are five other women by the name of Mary in the Gospels, so we should take care not to misidentify them (example: Matthew 27:56, 61). The Mary of John 12 is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

3a. Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household;

Joanna likely had resources to contribute to the costs of sustaining the traveling group. Her husband, *Chuza*, served the Galilean governor Herod Antipas. Chuza’s position as *manager* was a trusted one, and likely came with an excellent salary.

3b. Susanna

Susanna is otherwise unknown in the New Testament. She shares a name with a Jewish heroine whose story occurs in an apocryphal (spurious) addition to the book of Daniel.

3c. and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

At least some of the *many others* were undoubtedly motivated to be near Jesus because of being healed by him. They followed Jesus out of selfless gratitude and provided money, time, and other support for his ministry. Such women were the unsung heroes of the group, just as many noble women in churches are today.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you improve your behind-the-scenes support of your church's ministries?

Digging Deeper

What was an occasion that surprised you when your behind-the-scenes support suddenly thrust you into the limelight, such as in Acts 6? How did you handle it?

B. In Crisis (Mark 15:40)

40a. Some women were watching from a distance.

Our text skips ahead to the crucifixion, where several *women* refused to abandon Jesus (compare and contrast Mark 14:27, 50–52, 66–71; John 19:26, 38–39). While some women watched from *a distance*, others stood much closer—close enough to hear Jesus speak from the cross (John 19:25–26). One or more women may be in both groups, moving back and forth as Jesus suffered. The listing in John 19:25 differs from what follows here, suggesting that none of the Gospel writers intended to give an exhaustive listing of the women present.

40b. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome.

Mary Magdalene is perhaps the leader of this group, being named first. The second *Mary* is further identified by the naming of her sons. *James the younger* is likely the son of Alphaeus mentioned in the list of apostles (Mark 3:18); the phrase *the younger* may distinguish him from the more prominent apostle James, the son of Zebedee. This Mary may also have been the mother of Levi/Matthew (Mark 2:14). The third woman, *Salome*, is probably “the mother of Zebedee’s sons” (Matthew 27:56).

The time for following Jesus was not over for these loyal women. They remained with him in those dreadful hours, watching and waiting for an opportunity to minister to the Savior once more. That opportunity came a few hours later when they observed where Jesus’ body was laid (Mark 15:47) and resolved to remedy his hasty burial with customary spices (16:1).

II. Mary, Jesus’ Witness

(JOHN 20:10–18)

We meet Mary Magdalene for the third time, this occasion being resurrection morning. Arriving at the tomb, she had found it opened (John 20:1). She ran to tell Peter and John, who then ran to the tomb to see for themselves (20:2–9).

A. Sad Scene (vv. 10–11)

10–11. Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb

Once again, the reaction of *the disciples* can be compared and contrasted with that of *Mary Magdalene* (see on Mark 15:40, above). Whereas the men went *to where they were staying* to think about what the empty tomb could mean, Mary stayed.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you help encourage the members of your church to adopt and develop the “staying power” of Mary?

Digging Deeper

In what ways is Mary’s “staying power” like and unlike your own? Why?

The tomb was a cave-like room carved into the limestone hillside. Although Mary already knew it was empty, she probably hoped to notice something missed earlier, some hint of what had happened. Mary’s heart was broken at this apparent insult to her Lord.

THE GREAT DISAPPOINTER

My wife and I thought our family was complete with a son and daughter when we learned that another child was coming. Several months later, we welcomed Mary Elizabeth into our home. Five weeks after that, our delight turned to grief with Mary’s sudden death.

I retreated into work and studies, an expression of denial and deep disappointment in the dashing of our hopes and dreams for Mary. My wife poured herself into caring for our other two children. In doing so, she nurtured them through their grief, in contrast to my emotional absence.

The disciples’ reaction of heading home suggests that they reacted to Jesus’ death as I did to Mary’s: back to “business as usual” to occupy their minds. Mary Magdalene responded more as my wife did: seeking to find whatever meaning and solace she could in the middle of her pain. By doing so, Mary Magdalene met the risen Lord. What does this suggest about proper Christian reactions to death, the great dissembler?

—C. R. B.

B. Angels Appear (vv. 12–13)

12. and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

Jesus’ *body* had been laid on a carved ledge inside the tomb. But instead of holding that body, it had become witness to the presence of *two angels*. Though their *white* clothes could have clued Mary regarding their identity (compare Matthew 28:2–3; Luke 24:4), the angels also could have looked rather ordinary (Mark 16:5; see John 20:13, below). Their sitting *at the head* and *the foot* emphasized the absence of the expected occupant.

13. They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

Despite their unexpected presence, Mary did not seem to recognize the two angels as supernatural beings. Their question was not a rebuke but an act of kindness, inquiring as to the nature of her pain. Though addressing her as *Woman* may seem abrupt or rude to modern ears, the term here should be taken as a respectful address.

Regardless of who these two were or why they were there, Mary blurted out the cause of the great burden on her heart. The mystery of Jesus’ absence could be solved if someone would just tell her *where they have put him*, presumably in another tomb for reasons unknown to Mary. She did not consider that Jesus may not be dead (compare Luke 24:5–8).

C. Rabboni Revealed (vv. 14–18)

14. At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

Apparently not expecting an answer from the white-clad visitors, Mary *turned* from the tomb and saw another person in the garden. We are told this is *Jesus* before Mary knew, much like we knew the other two were actually angels. How could she have failed to recognize this person she loved so much? Perhaps her tears obscured her vision.

This is not the only time after the resurrection that disciples fail to recognize Jesus (see Luke 24:13–16; John 21:4). His post-resurrection body was different in some way (Luke 24:30–32; John 20:19, 26). But that body also bore the marks of the crucifixion (John 20:20, 27). The changes in his appearance plus the utter impossibility of his being alive probably contributed mightily to her lack of recognition.

What Do You Think?

What improvements can you make in staying on guard against things that cloud your full awareness of Christ in your life?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do the blindnesses in Matthew 15:13–14; 23:16–26; John 9:39–41; 2 Peter 1:5–9; and Revelation 3:17 warn you to action in this regard?

15. He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

Jesus repeated the angels’ question (John 20:13, above), thus pushing to the heart of Mary’s suffering. He already knew she was weeping because of his death and was seeking his body.

Mary, still not recognizing Jesus, repeated her response (John 20:13). She assumed this man was *the gardener* and therefore someone who would know what had happened (see 19:41). The tomb where Jesus’ body had been placed, that of Joseph of Arimathea (19:38–42), was apparently located within a well-maintained garden.

What Do You Think?

Since Jesus already knew the answer to the question he was asking, what does His technique teach you about how to counsel grief-stricken people?

Digging Deeper

How does 1 Kings 19:9b–10 further help frame your answer?

16. Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

Jesus did not explain. In one of the most dramatic moments found in the Gospel accounts, he simply spoke her name.

And she knew his voice. She had heard Jesus say her name many times before. All her plans unraveled, for there was no corpse to minister to.

Mary addressed Jesus with the title of respect she had used many times. *Rabboni* is a variation on the title *rabbi*, which means “my teacher.” The form used by Mary may imply heightened respect, something like “my honored teacher.”

A FAMILIAR VOICE

“Grampa, this is your granddaughter. I’m in trouble in [a foreign country]. I’ve been arrested on a phony charge, and I need \$500 so I can be released and come home.”

In my surprise, I thought that the call might be genuine. However, some things didn’t ring true: no name, wrong number, vague about details, *almost* but *not quite* my granddaughter’s voice.

I told the caller I would call back, hung up, and called my granddaughter’s phone number. She, in her familiar voice, assured me that she was in no trouble. Such scam calls can purport to come from many sources: the IRS, the Social Security Administration, your bank, a computer company, even a “kidnapper”!

When Mary met Jesus, she didn’t recognize him at first. She was still in shock from the events of the last few days. But when Jesus spoke, there was no longer a question about his identity. She knew the sound of her rabbi’s voice.

We should stay in the Word of God so much that we are familiar with his voice there. That way, if we should get a “scam call” of false teaching, we’ll know it’s not the Lord.

—C. R. B.

17. Jesus said, “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.’ ”

Jesus’ command *Do not hold on to me* has a dimension beyond merely rejecting a hug. Apparently, Mary’s desire was to somehow detain Jesus, to cause him to stay with her and the other disciples. However, Jesus would ascend to his *Father*. There would be no negotiating his departure.

Instead of clinging to him, Mary was to go back to the men who had been there earlier (John 20:10, above) and update them on what had actually happened and been said at the tomb.

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.

Mary Magdalene did not prepare an elaborate presentation for *the disciples*. Her testimony was basic and beautiful.

Sometimes the most effective witnessing is in telling of our experience with Jesus and the changes he brings to our lives. Mary had plenty to say that day—explaining how a heartbroken, sobbing woman became a joyous, confident eyewitness for the disciples.

Jesus knew her name, and he called her to serve him by being his witness.

Conclusion

A. He Found Her

We often portray nonbelievers who come to church as “seekers”; we say that those who seek Jesus will find him. In today’s story, Mary Magdalene, a firm disciple and believer, was a seeker in a different sense: she sought Jesus’ body and was not easily dissuaded from her quest. But that quest was mistaken, for there was no longer a dead body.

Try as she might, Mary did not find Jesus. He found her. Jesus had first found Mary to deliver her from demonization. He then found her weeping in a tomb, a woman for whom the recent days had been a dark nightmare.

Isaiah promised, “[God] will come to save you” (Isaiah 35:4). As it was with Mary, so it is with us: If we seek Jesus but don’t find him, it may be because our search is based on a mistaken idea. We clear up any mistakes by reading the facts of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension in the Bible. That’s where hearing his call starts.

What Do You Think?

In what ways does Jesus’ resurrection encourage you most today? Why?

Digging Deeper

When was an occasion that a time of discouragement was overcome by refocusing on His resurrection? How did you grow from this experience?

B. Prayer

Father, we thank you for the hope we have through your Son Jesus, a hope that overcomes our fears. May we—like Mary and the other women who followed Jesus throughout his ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection—never lose our desire to serve you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus knows where and how to find those who seek him.¹

¹ Krause, M. S., Boatman, C. R., Schmidt, D. C., & Nickelson, R. L. (2021). [Called to Support](#). In R. L. Nickelson, J. A. Kenney, & M. K. Williams (Eds.), *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2020–2021* (Vol. 27, pp. 201–207). Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing.