

# Women *in the* Ministry of Jesus



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 1:39–55; 2:36–38; 7:11–17, 36–50; Rom. 10:17; Luke 8:1–3; 18:1–8.*

**Memory Text:** “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Galatians 3:26–28, NKJV*).

**L**uke’s Gospel is sometimes called “the Gospel of Women” because, more than any other one, it makes special mention of how caring Jesus was to the needs of women and also of how involved women were in His ministry.

In the time of Jesus, as in some cultures today, women were deemed of little worth. Some Jewish men in that time thanked God that they were not created a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. Greek and Roman society sometimes treated women even worse. Roman culture developed its permissiveness to an almost unlimited licentiousness. A man often had a wife only in order to produce legitimate children who would inherit his property, and he had concubines for his own sinful pleasures.

Against such a backdrop of women being treated so badly, Jesus brought the good news that women are, indeed, daughters of Abraham (*see Luke 13:16*). How happy the women of those days must have been to hear that, in Jesus, they are children of God and of equal worth with men in the sight of God. The message today for women of all nations remains the same: we are all, men and women, one in Christ Jesus.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 9.

## Women Who Welcomed Jesus' Advent

Only Luke records the reaction of these women to the wonder of cosmic history: that the Son of God took human flesh in order to complete the redemptive mission of the Father and to fulfill the Messianic hopes of His people. Though these women didn't fully understand what was happening, their words and reactions to these astonishing events revealed their faith and wonder at the works of God.

**Read** Luke 1:39–45, the encounter between Elizabeth and Mary. What does Elizabeth say that reveals her understanding, however limited, of the great events that were taking place?

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After Elizabeth spoke, Mary then followed with her own words (*Luke 1:46–55*). Often understood to be a song, these words are full of fragments from the Old Testament, attesting that Mary was a devoted student of Scripture and thus a fit mother for Jesus. Mary's song is rooted not only in Scripture but deep down in her relationship with God. An identity emerges between her soul and her Lord, and between her faith and Abraham's hope.

**Read** Luke 2:36–38. What important truths are brought to light in the story of Anna in the temple?

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Expectant hope finds its radical fulfillment in Jesus. An old widow recognizes the miracle, and from then on she made it her compulsive mission to proclaim the Savior to all those who came to the temple. She became the first woman evangelist of the gospel.

**Try to imagine the wonder and astonishment of these women at the events unfolding around them. What can we do to help keep alive in our own hearts the wonder and astonishment of the great truths that we have been called to proclaim?**

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## Women and Jesus' Healing Ministry

Read Luke 7:11–17, the story about the miracle at Nain. This woman, impoverished and widowed, now faced another trial, the death of her only son. A large crowd of mourners was with her in the funeral procession, expressing public grief and sympathy. The loss of her only son coupled with the uncertain future of life alone turned the widow into a picture of absolute sorrow and hopelessness.

But the funeral procession going out of the city met with another procession entering into it. At the head of the outgoing procession was death in a casket; at the head of the incoming procession was life in the majesty of the Creator. As the processions met, Jesus saw the widow, hopeless and full of grief. “When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry’ ” (*Luke 7:13, NIV*). The plea not to cry would have been meaningless had it not come from Jesus, the Lord of life. For behind the command “Don’t cry!” was the power to remove the reason for her crying: Jesus reached forward, touched the coffin, and ordered the young man to arise. The touch was considered a ceremonial defilement (*Num. 19:11–13*), but to Jesus, compassion was more important than ceremonies. Meeting human needs was more urgent than adhering to mere rituals.

The village of Nain not only witnessed a great miracle but also received a marvelous message: in Jesus there is no difference between the emotional pangs of men and those of women. And His presence confronts and confounds the power of death.

Read also Luke 8:41, 42, 49–56. Jairus was an influential person—a ruler of the synagogue, an officer in charge of the care and services of the synagogue. Each Sabbath he would choose the person who would lead in prayer, Scripture reading, and preaching. He was a person not only of eminence and influence but also of wealth and power. He loved his daughter and did not hesitate to approach Jesus for the healing of his child.

**In these stories, it was the power of Jesus' words that brought a dead son back to his mother and a dead daughter back to her father. Think about how incredible these acts must have been to those who saw them, especially to the parents. What do these accounts tell us about the power of God? What do they tell us about just how limited we are in understanding that power? (After all, science at present doesn't have a clue about how this could happen.) Most important, though, what must we do in order to learn to trust in this power and the goodness of the God who wields it, regardless of our present circumstances?**

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## Women of Gratitude and Faith

In Luke 7:36–50, Jesus turned a meal into an event of spiritual magnitude that offered dignity to a sinful woman. Simon, a leading citizen, a Pharisee, invited Jesus for a meal. Invitees seated, there was a sudden disruption: “a woman in the city who was a sinner” (*vs. 37, NKJV*) rushed straight to Jesus, broke an alabaster box of very expensive perfume, poured the ointment on Him, bowed down to His feet, and washed them with her tears.

**What** lessons can we learn from the woman’s outpouring of gratitude and Jesus’ acceptance of her act of faith?

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“When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. . . . Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

In Luke 8:43–48, a case of supreme wretchedness becomes the object of the Savior’s supreme regard. For so long, this woman had an incurable disease that ravaged her body and soul. Yet, in this 12-year tragedy, a flicker of hope suddenly burst on the scene: “She heard about Jesus” (*Mark 5:27, NKJV*).

What did she hear? A little or a lot, we do not know. But she knew that Jesus cared for the poor; He embraced social outcasts; He touched lepers; He turned water into wine; and above all, He cared for desperate people, of which she was one. But hearing was not enough; hearing must lead to faith (*Rom. 10:17*). And that faith led her to a simple act of touching the edge of His garment. That touch was faith-driven, purposeful, efficacious, and Christ-focused. Only such a faith can receive the benediction of the Life-Giver: “‘your faith has made you well’ ” (*Luke 8:48, NKJV*).

**It’s so easy to look at people and judge them, isn’t it? Even if we often don’t verbalize it, in our hearts we judge them, which is still so wrong. How can we learn to stop judging others, even in our thoughts, when who knows what we’d do were we in their situations?**

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## Some Women Who Followed Jesus

**Read** Luke 10:38–42. What important spiritual truths can we take from this story (see also Luke 8:14) for ourselves?

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As the hostess, Martha “was distracted with much serving” (*Luke 10:40, NKJV*) and was busy in getting the best for the guests. But Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word” (*vs. 39, NKJV*). So much so that Martha complained to Jesus that she alone was left to do the hard work. While Jesus did not rebuke Martha for her preoccupation with service, He pointed out the need for right priorities in life. Fellowship with Jesus is the first essential in discipleship; potluck can come later.

“The cause of Christ needs careful, energetic workers. There is a wide field for the Marthas, with their zeal in active religious work. But let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus. Let diligence, promptness, and energy be sanctified by the grace of Christ; then the life will be an unconquerable power for good.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 525.

**Read** Luke 8:1–3; 23:55, 56; 24:1–12. What do these verses teach about the role of women in Christ’s ministry?

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As His ministry expanded, Jesus “went through every city and village, preaching” and teaching (*Luke 8:1, NKJV*), with the 12 disciples accompanying Him. Luke also records the powerful testimonies of certain women whom Jesus had healed, who were touched by His preaching, and who were of wealth, also followed Him in His enlarged ministry. Here are some whom Luke mentions: (1) certain women healed of evil spirits, including Mary Magdalene; (2) Joanna, wife of Chuza, business manager of Herod; (3) Susanna; and (4) “many others who provided for Him” (*vs. 3, NKJV*).

**When we understand that Jesus died for every human being, we can better grasp the true equality of every person before God. How well do we reflect this truth in our attitude toward others? That is, how can you root out, if necessary, any attitude in which you might tend to look down upon others as somehow less worthy than yourself?**

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## Persistent in Prayer, Sacrificial in Giving

Luke shows how Jesus turned to two widows in order to teach important spiritual truths.

In the first case (*Luke 18:1–8*), Jesus pitied a poor and powerless widow who was up against a wicked and powerful judge in her fight for justice. She was a victim of injustice and fraud, and yet she believed in the rule of the law and in justice. But the judge was anti-God and anti-people, and so he obviously did not care to help the widow. Caring for widows is a biblical requirement (*Exod. 22:22–24, Ps. 68:5, Isa. 1:17*), but the judge took delight in ignoring the law. However, the widow had one weapon, perseverance, and with it she wore out the judge and got her justice.

The parable teaches three important lessons: (1) always pray and never get discouraged (*Luke 18:1*), (2) prayer changes things—even the heart of an evil judge, and (3) persistent faith is a conquering faith. True faith has eternal counsel to every Christian: never give up, even if that means waiting for the final vindication when the “ ‘Son of Man comes’ ” (*vs. 8, NKJV*).

In the second case (*Luke 21:1–4, Mark 12:41–44*), no sooner had Jesus finished denouncing the religious hypocrisy and pretension of the scribes and the leaders around the temple than He pointed out a stark contrast to them: a poor widow who reveals the nature of genuine religion.

Jesus described some of the religious leaders as those who “ ‘devour widows’ houses’ ” (*Luke 20:47, NKJV*) and who violate the biblical mandate to care for the widows and the poor. As today, many gave only in order to look pious; and worse, what they gave, they gave out of their own surplus wealth. Their giving really involved no personal sacrifice. In contrast, Jesus asked His disciples to look to the widow as the model of true religion, for she gave all that she had.

Show was the motive of the first group; sacrifice and the glory of God was the motive of the widow. To acknowledge God’s ownership of all that she had and to serve Him with all she had was the force that propelled the widow to give her two mites. What counts before the all-seeing eyes of the Creator is not what we give but why we give; not how much we give but the measure of our sacrifice.

**How much do you sacrifice of yourself for the good of others and for the cause of God?**

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**Further Study:** He “who remembered His mother when He was hanging in agony upon the cross; who appeared to the weeping women and made them His messengers to spread the first glad tidings of a risen Saviour—He is woman’s best friend today and is ready to aid her in all the relations of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 204.

“The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 464, 465.

### Discussion Questions:

❶ One of the most interesting aspects of the Gospels, including Luke, has to do with the role of women in regard to the resurrection of Jesus. All the Gospel stories have women as the first ones to see the risen Christ and to proclaim His resurrection to others. Biblical apologists have been able to use this fact to help affirm the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which some people deny or question. Why is the role of women here so important? Because if, as some claim, the stories of Jesus’ resurrection were fabricated by the authors, why would they have put women, who weren’t highly regarded in that society, as the first ones to see and to proclaim Jesus? If they were making up stories in order to try to get people at that time to believe, why use women as opposed to men? Discuss.

❷ In a society that didn’t always recognize the dignity of women, Jesus recognized the status that belongs to them in God’s creative order as children of God. Women as well as men are made in God’s image and equal in His sight. At the same time, however equal before God, men and women are not the same. How can we affirm the equality of men and women before God and yet, at the same time, affirm and acknowledge the differences?

## More Precious Than Money

RUTH, JAPAN

Ruth was born and raised in Ecuador without knowing God. She sensed that something was missing in her life and visited many churches, but none satisfied. Then she visited a Seventh-day Adventist church and found that “the people were kind, and the pastor treated people equally.”

Ruth received a DVD—*The Last Hope*, featuring presentations on Revelation by Pastor Luis Gonçalves. Not sure what it was about, Ruth set the DVD aside and forgot about it.

Sometime later Ruth and her husband moved to Japan, where they obtained work in manufacturing. Although successful at her job, Ruth still wasn’t satisfied. One day, she noticed an advertisement in a free newspaper, inviting people to the Seventh-day Adventist church. Remembering her friendly encounter in Ecuador, Ruth decided to visit. While there, she was delighted to meet Diana, the head elder’s wife, who was Brazilian. Diana offered to study the Bible with Ruth. When the two met for their first Bible study, Diana brought a DVD by Pastor Luis Gonçalves! Ruth realized that it was the same DVD she had received in Ecuador. Convinced that this was more than just a coincidence, Ruth watched the DVD. As she continued studying, Ruth was convicted that she had found the truth.

When she learned that the seventh day was God’s holy day, Ruth quickly decided to quit working on Sabbath. “Are you crazy?” her coworkers asked. “You get paid a higher rate on Saturdays. Why don’t you earn the money and give it to your church?”

“There’s something more precious than money,” Ruth replied. “Such as going to church each Sabbath and learning new things.”

Soon Ruth was ready to make a full commitment and was baptized. When her coworkers realized that Ruth was serious about her newfound faith, they turned against her. “You’ve changed,” some told her. “I can’t work with you,” said another. But her supervisor still valued Ruth and allowed her to take every Saturday off.

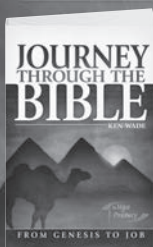
“Many things have changed in my life,” Ruth explains. “The way I think, my habits, my relationships with people, everything. Before, I had a hard heart, but now I’m rich in emotion and can empathize with others.”

Ruth is one of the many South American immigrants in Japan. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist international church in Japan are actively seeking to reach others like Ruth. One of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects is to help build an international evangelistic center in Japan. For more stories either in print or video, visit [www.adventistmission.org](http://www.adventistmission.org). Did you know that you don’t have to wait for the end of the quarter to give to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects? You can give any time on our secure Web site at [giving.adventistmission.org](http://giving.adventistmission.org).

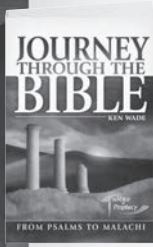


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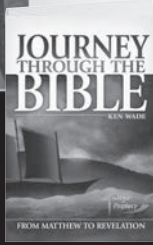
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# PLANTING A CHURCH WITH PANCAKES

When Mrs. Shin's 13-year-old daughter, Bo Hwa, was lonely because there were no teens at church, Mrs. Shin knew what to do. Getting up before dawn, she handcrafted 2,000 *hotok* (Korean pancakes) and sold them every morning to hungry students near the local high school. As she befriended her young customers, the young people soon went to the Shins' home and learned about Jesus. Over the past 16 years, more than 400 young people have been baptized as a direct result of the Shins' ministry. Meeting in a makeshift building, the young members are delighted that their church plant has been chosen to receive part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read more of the story in the youth and adult Mission magazine at [www.adventistmission.org/resources](http://www.adventistmission.org/resources). Please plan to give generously to this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.



*Hint:* Did you know that you don't have to wait to give your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering? Just go to our secure Web site, [giving.adventistmission.org](http://giving.adventistmission.org).

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