



CALVARY MURRIETA WOMEN'S MINISTRY

LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES

R&R BIBLE STUDY 2017-2018



LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES

A Bunch of Marys: Mary of Nazareth: Lesson 6

This week we have the privilege of studying one of the most honored and blessed women in Scripture. Although Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of the most widely known women in all the world, many only have a seasonal interest in her. She's usually only remembered by two incidents in history: the birth of our Savior in a dirty stable in Bethlehem during the Christmas season, or standing at the foot of the cross, watching Him suffer and die on Good Friday, a precursor to our Easter celebration. But she is so much more than a character in the Christmas story. Can you imagine being Jesus' mom? Can you imagine feeding Him, playing with Him, and tucking Him into bed, all the while knowing that that He would be the Savior of Israel? I honestly can't even fathom the amazing amount of conflicting feelings and emotions that Mary must have experienced for all 33 years of her son's life. We don't read many of Mary's actual words, but we hear her heart through the Gospel writers, as she was most likely the one to tell them her story. Even in that, her humility is so evident, since she doesn't make the story "all about her" like I probably would have. She kept the focus on Christ without giving herself much glory or credit. One thing we'll notice about Mary is that she is simply an ordinary woman who said yes to an extraordinary God. She wasn't chosen because of her wealth, social status, or worldly success. On the contrary, Mary was poor, from a small insignificant city, having no training or education. She wouldn't be able to offer Jesus worldly wealth or introduce Him to the culture of the age. But she loved God and knew the Scriptures. She wasn't chosen for her talent, or for any awards she'd won. She wasn't chosen because she was Miss Nazareth in the local pageant. Mary was chosen because she trusted in her God. She is an example to women, both young and old. She stood firm in her faith while playing a vital role in history. During every season of life, Mary stood strong, clinging to her faith and embracing her God-given purpose in life.

Mary of Nazareth was Jesus' first disciple. Her life was a "pattern of good works" like it talks about in Titus 2:7, blazing a path of faith and courage for every woman since. She is a hero, a role model, and an example of what it means to be a woman who fears the Lord (Proverbs 31:30). Carolyn Custis James wrote, "Mary was the first to believe and lay down her life for the Gospel. She was the first to leave all to follow Jesus, first to love Him and minister to His body, first to hear and treasure His words, and the first to share in His sufferings. Incredible as it sounds, for a brief time Mary had Jesus all to herself. She was His first disciple." Mary experienced much loss in her life, yet we see no evidence of anger or bitterness. Mary was blessed, but it's easy to forget that her blessings came with a great price. I pray that as we spend this week studying her life, you'll put yourself in her place, trying to feel what she must have felt as a teenager, a woman, a mother, and a follower of Jesus Christ. And may you remember that you, too, have purpose and are loved and valued by God. That's a reason to rejoice!

First Day

Before we begin answering questions, let's read Mary's story to lay some groundwork for what we'll be talking about, and hopefully gain your own perspective before I tell you mine!



1. Read the following verses and write a **brief** character sketch on Mary of Nazareth. Who is she? What can you tell about her personality? Her character? Her responses to life? You don't need to write all the "facts" you find or retell the story. Focus more on who Mary is. This will take you a good amount of time, so it will be your only assignment for today. **Luke 1:26-56, 2:1-52, Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1-23, John 2:1-12, 19:25-27, and Acts 1:14.**

Memory Verse of the Week: "Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.'" Luke 1:38

Second Day

Practice your memory verse. Do you consider yourself His maidservant?

1. Let's go back to Luke 1:26-38 and Matthew 2:18-25. Describe how Mary was called to be the mother of Jesus. Why was she "troubled"?
2. What was her response? What does her response tell us about her heart and her attitude?

Mary is thought to be between 12 and 14 years old. This encounter was about to change the course of her life. The angel's appearance obviously caught her by surprise, but despite her young age, her faith was strong. She didn't let her age or doubt stand in her way. The God of Abraham, Jacob, Hannah, and David was no stranger to Mary. She called herself "The

maidservant, or handmaiden” of the Lord. “This phrase refers to a female slave whose will was not her own. Instead, she was obligated to perform her master’s will without question or delay. A handmaiden would sit silently, watching for hand signals from her mistress (Psalm 123:2), which she would obey without question or hesitation.” (Elisabeth George) Mary considered her will to no longer be her own; she was wholly committed to her God. Even though she didn’t understand it all, she embraced His will, showing an attitude of acceptance and surrender.

3. Knowing the definition of a maidservant, would you refer to yourself as one? Are you facing a situation or challenge that seems impossible to you? Do you face situations you don’t understand with an attitude of acceptance and surrender? How does Mary’s example encourage you?

Carolyn Custis James wrote, “Mary’s decision to embrace God’s purposes unleashed an avalanche of difficulties and drew her into a disorienting mix of breathtaking privilege and unspeakable pain.”

4. What are some of the “avalanches” of difficulties she would face? What are some of the things she may have “lost”?
5. What would happen to her reputation? What would her friends and family think? How would everyone’s opinion of her change? What about her soon-to-be husband’s opinion?
6. What does Paul say about “loss” in Philippians 3:7-14?
7. Have you ever experienced “loss” when you’ve said yes to God? Has the Lord changed your perspective to see it as gain and/or growth? Discuss your thoughts. What are some of the “costs” of following Jesus?

8. Let's talk about Joseph for a minute. What do his responses and actions tell us about him and his own faith in God?

Joseph is another unsung hero in Scripture. The story of the birth of Christ is sometimes told without even mentioning him. But Mary and Joseph were a team. Joseph supported Mary in her "mission" and they worked together to advance God's kingdom. No matter how hard or dangerous their path became, Joseph was there to support her. He obeyed God and rather than put her away, he embraced her and took her as his wife. When Herod's jealousy exploded and put them in danger, he dropped everything and relocated to another country so they would be safe. I think a lot of what he did would be considered counter cultural for that time, but he is an example of loving his wife as "Christ loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25). He did whatever it took to help Mary be faithful to her calling. What a great example of being selfless partners. Two "ordinary and normal" people doing something extraordinary.

I love the fact that they were so "normal." Max Lucado writes. "Normal has calluses like Joseph, stretch marks like Mary. Normal stays up late with laundry and wakes up early for work. Normal drives the car pool wearing a bathrobe and slippers. Normal is Norm and Norma, not Prince and Princess. Norm sings off-key. Norma works in a cubicle and struggles to find time to pray. Both have stood where Joseph stood and have heard what Mary heard. Not from an innkeeper in Bethlehem but from a coach in middle school or the hunk in high school or the foreman at the plant. We don't have room for you ... time for you ...a space for you ...a job for you ... interest in you. Besides, look at you. You are too slow ... fat ... inexperienced ...late... young... old... pigeon-toed ... cross-eyed ... hackneyed ... you are too ordinary."

9. Have you ever felt too "ordinary" or "normal" to be called by God for great things? Have you ever been told "there's no room for you"? How does this story encourage you? And how does Mary and Joseph's response challenge you? (They certainly didn't seem to feel sorry for themselves, did they?)

Mary gives birth to what seemed to be an "ordinary" baby boy. He didn't levitate or walk on water (yet). He didn't enter the world with pomp and circumstance. No one can say, "Wow, look at how Jesus entered the world!" He was born in an everyday, ordinary world, like where we live. God came into this world in people like you and me. Ordinary. John 1:14 tells us that "The Word became flesh."

"The splendor of the first Christmas is the lack thereof. The artist became oil on his own palette. The Potter melted into the mud on his own wheel. God became an embryo in the belly

of a village girl. Christ in Mary. God in Christ. The Word of God entered the world with the cry of a baby. His family had no cash or connections or strings to pull. Jesus, the Maker of the Universe, the one who invented time and created breath, was born into a family too humble to swing a bed for a pregnant mom-to-be.” (Another great quote by Max!)

10. I know we can't fully understand the ways and mind of God, but why do you think He chose to send Jesus to the world in such an ordinary way?

Mary didn't fight God, refuse him, or claim she had other plans. She could've resisted in many ways and given many excuses. Neither did she offer God any advice or assistance in His plan. She simply accepted it. From Mary we can learn to neither “resist” nor try to “assist” God in His plans for us.

11. In what ways have you tried to “resist” God's plan for you? How have you tried to “assist” Him as well? Why are both so wrong? How is it a trust issue?

That's it for today. I pray that we can say, along with Mary, “Let it be to me according to Your Word, Lord”!

Third Day

Review your memory verse.

1. Today we're going to backtrack a bit and read an encounter that happened before Mary actually gave birth. She spent about three months with her pregnant cousin and sister in the Lord, Elizabeth. Read Luke 1:39-56. Describe this encounter between the women.

In verses 46-55, Mary, who rarely speaks, opens her mouth and sings a song that is today called “The Magnificat,” a joyous outpouring of gratitude of all God has done. From these verses, we see that Mary knew her God very well through the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the writings of the prophets. There are 15 quotations from the Old Testament.

2. What are some things she was praising God for? Are her words God-centered or self-centered?

3. Did Mary think she needed a Savior? Do you think Mary was sinless, as some teach?

Elizabeth George wrote, "This song is a song of joy, characterized by gladness and celebration. A song of substance drawn from the Scriptures; a song from the past, reflecting Hannah's song from 1 Samuel 2, a song for today since God is the same yesterday and today, and a song for eternity because God's Word, where the song is recorded, will stand forever!"

4. Is your soul magnifying the Lord? Take a minute and write your own "Magnificat" and song of praise, thanking Him, who has done great things for you!

After Mary gave birth to Jesus, the angels announced His birth to the shepherds, who then traveled to Bethlehem to see Him. They returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen. And we have Mary, in Luke 2:19, keeping all these things and pondering them in her heart. What was she thinking? What was she feeling? Was she excited? Nervous? Did she feel all alone in the world, without her friends and family to celebrate her? But the angels were rejoicing, and the shepherds were celebrating. The little drummer boy was drumming. And Joseph, her beloved, faithful husband, stood by her side.

5. Read Luke 2:21-34. As was the custom, they took Jesus up to Jerusalem. Describe what happened there.
6. In verse 35, what did Simeon say to Mary? How do you think that made her feel?

The name Mary comes from a root word meaning "bitterness." Seems like an odd name for Mary since her attitude and countenance showed anything but bitterness. But Mary had many "bitter" experiences in her life, as Simeon prophesied in verse 35. Most of us naturally think of Jesus' death on the cross as being the incident that would make Mary feel like a sword would pierce her heart, but I think she had that feeling many times during His 33 years of life. Every time she heard about another plot to kill Him, every time someone labeled Him as a traitor or a blasphemer, every time they reminded her He was illegitimate. What about after the wise men

came to visit (Matthew 2:1-23) and the angel appeared to Joseph and told them to flee to Egypt and stay there for a while because Herod was killing all the male children under 2 in an attempt to kill her son, Jesus. How do you think she felt, knowing other babies were dying so hers could live? Yep, I think that would feel like a sword through my heart. I wonder if she lived with a constant knot in her stomach, wondering, pondering, praying ... or was she at perfect peace? I can't wait to ask her. As a mom, if my child is threatened, the momma bear thing rises up with a vengeance. Would she be any different than you and I?

We don't get to read many of the conversations between Mary and Jesus, but the ones we are privy to are very significant.

7. Let's jump ahead to when Jesus is age 12. Read Luke 2:41-51. Describe what happened.

8. What did Mary ask Jesus? How did He respond? What do you think He meant?

After His parents realize He was gone, they hurry back to find Him. For three days, I imagine they were frantic. Have you ever lost your kid, even for a second? When they ask Him where He was, His response pierced her soul. Since he really had no earthly father, He was referring to His Heavenly One. At the age of 12, a Jewish boy would begin to transition into manhood, moving from the care of his mother to his father. (Some believe that at age 12, the child could decide to travel with either mom or dad, explaining why they both thought the other had Him!) Jesus' response probably took Mary by surprise. (I bet a lot of His words did.) But at this transitional time, Jesus was beginning to define His Heavenly "mission" here on earth. He was essentially making the correct transition to His Father, His "real" Father. Jesus also knew that every Jewish son must be subject to his parents, which is why He went home with them and were subject to them. But His relationship with His parents began to change. If you have children, do you remember the beginning of the "letting go"? Ugh, another sword in the heart.

9. Jesus was here to be about His Father's business. He is our example in all things. So how about you? What "mission" has God given you, and are you busy doing His work, whatever that is? (Or are you busy doing your own?)

10. Let's read another conversation between Jesus and His mom in John 2:1-12. Jesus performs His first "public" ministry. Describe the setting and then summarize the conversation between Jesus and Mary.

For some reason, they ran out of wine at the wedding they were attending, which was very socially unacceptable. Many scholars speculate on why Mary was taking such a special interest and showing so much concern over this, saying that she was most likely either a relative or close friend. It's awesome that her first response is to turn to Jesus, knowing that He could fix the problem. I've always been a bit confused on why Jesus would say what He says to her in verse 4, then turn around and multiply the wine. Some commentators believe that He changed His mind because He knew His mom was so concerned, and He did it out of love for her. I read something that makes more sense to me, although I like the sentiment of that. By calling her woman, I don't think He was being disrespectful, because that was a common mode of respect among the Hebrews at the time. Herbert Lockyer wrote, "His purpose in speaking to His mother as He did was to check any undue interference on her part of His mediatorial work. As Augustine put it, 'He does not acknowledge a human womb when about to work Divine works.' Although Mary was blessed among women, she needed to learn that she must not be permitted to control the operations of the One sent by the Father. As the Son of Mary, Jesus was willingly subject to her, but now as the Son of God, Mary was to be subject to Him." Ouch. Another sword.

11. What does Mary's response to Jesus show us about her character?

See you tomorrow, ladies! I hope the Lord is revealing some special truths to you through this wonderful lady named Mary!

Fourth Day

Ponder your memory verse. Let the significance of Mary's words sink down deep in your heart.

We know that Joseph was still alive when Jesus was 12, but most scholars think he must have died sometime in the next 18 years since there is no record of him after that, and he is not present at the cross. So Mary was also a widow, as well as a single mom, seeing that she had

other children with Joseph after the birth of Jesus (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55). Let's read a few more exchanges between Mary and Jesus.

1. Read Luke 12:19-21, Mark 3:20-21, 31-35. Jesus was busy in ministry, not taking much time to eat or sleep. His mom and family were worried that He was not taking proper care of Himself, like any mom would. How did Jesus respond when others told Him they were there? What was He trying to say? What message was he trying to give?
2. How do you think those words made Mary feel?

This was another turning point for Mary in her relationship with her son. He was redefining family, directing them to focus on what matters most. Biological ties were not the most important relationships for those who follow Him, but spiritual ties that are based on a commitment to Christ took priority. The greatest call on our lives is to trust and believe in God and His Word, even for His mother. But still, I'm sure the words stung.

3. Let's observe another interesting comment regarding Mary in Luke 11:27. Jesus is teaching, and a woman in the crowd is really moved, and desiring to honor Him publicly, shouts out some interesting words. What did she say?
4. How did Jesus respond? Why? What truth is He trying to convey?
5. As a mom, how do you think those words would make you feel? How do you feel when someone compliments you on your kids or on how you've raised them?

If I was Mary, I think I would've been shaken up when I heard what my son said. We pride ourselves on the way we raise our children; we see our parenting as probably our highest calling by God. But Jesus does something here quite profound. He pretty much points to two important roles for women, motherhood and family, and redefines them. Many of us have grown up with the desire to be married and have kids. Nothing wrong with that, except when we let that define us. When we feel "less than" because we are single, or have no children, then there's a problem. Jesus says "MORE blessed are those who hear the

Word of God and keep it.” He elevates that above motherhood. Being a mom can’t define us, our identity is in Christ. Carolyn James again writes, “According to Jesus, a woman’s life is truly blessed not when she becomes a mother, but when she hears and obeys the Word of God. The crowning glory for a woman is to be a disciple of Jesus, something every woman can do. It is our only path to blessedness. To base our identity on anything else is to stand on shaky ground. But nothing can ever take away from us our calling as disciples of Jesus.” Although the roles of wife and mom are treasured and sacred, we can’t define ourselves by whether or not we have husbands or children. We often define ourselves and our parenting by how well our children have “turned out.” If Mary let this define her, she would have crumbled. Think about it, her son was crucified as a common criminal while people yelled obscenities and made horrible accusations. No husband and a criminal son. Although she knew He was innocent, publicly, the shame must have hung over her like a dark cloud. But as Jesus continued to remind her that her identity was in Him, and not her “motherhood” of Him, Mary could stand strong. I am not trying to take anything away from motherhood, but rather, elevate our calling as a disciple!

6. Write your thoughts on the above paragraph.

7. How do you define yourself? Do you tend to find your identity in being a mom, or wife, or a successful and important business woman, or do you ever struggle with this?

8. How does finding our identity as a woman in anything other than Christ lead to insecurities, fear, anger, or a million other things?

9. Why do you think so many women fail to understand where their true identity lies? How can God’s Word combat this?

10. Tomorrow we’ll look at the last two appearances of Mary. But what have you learned or been reminded of so far this week about Mary of Nazareth?

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

When Jesus heard that John the Baptist was preaching in the desert, He knew it was time to go (Matthew 3). When He left, He didn't appear to return home. Once His public ministry was launched, He was busy about His Father's business. Mary had yet another stab as she said goodbye, having to now love her son from a distance. Mary had many losses, and this was one more. She would now hear His words from maybe a crowd, or a seashore, or in a packed house. Saying goodbye is hard to do.

1. Read John 19:25-27. We are now at the foot of the cross. Where is Mary? Explain how you think she must have felt. What was going through her mind?
2. Who did Jesus ask to take care of His mom? Why do you think that was His choice?
3. In all His agony and pain, Jesus was not thinking about Himself; He thought about His mom and the pain she must have been feeling. How is this an example to us? (When we are in pain, who are we usually focusing on?)
4. Read Paul's exhortation to us in Philippians 2:1-11. What does he say? How does this relate?

We often have to say goodbye to loved ones to follow God's will in our lives. Max Lucado reminds us that "Mary wasn't the first one to be called to say goodbye to loved ones for the sake of the kingdom. Joseph was called to be an orphan in Egypt. Hannah sent her firstborn son away to serve in the Temple. Daniel was sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. Abraham was sent to sacrifice his own son. The Bible is bound together with goodbye trails and stained with farewell tears. In fact, it seems goodbye is all too prevalent in the Christian's vocabulary. Missionaries

know it well. Those who send them know it too. The doctor who leaves the city to work in a jungle hospital has said it. So has the Bible translator who lives far from home. What kind of God would put people through such agony? What kind of God would give us families and then ask us to leave them? A God who knows that the deepest love is built not on passion and romance, but on a common mission and sacrifice. A God who knows that we are only pilgrims and that eternity is so close that any 'goodbye' is in reality a "see you tomorrow." A God who did it Himself."

5. Have you had many goodbyes in your life? Maybe not just to people, but to dreams, etc? Has God asked you to make some sacrifices for the kingdom? What do the following verses say about this?
 - a. Luke 9:24
 - b. John 15:12-14
 - c. Philippians 3:8
 - d. Hebrews 13:16

6. How is Mary an example of how to handle the goodbyes?

7. After Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead, He appears to another Mary first, Mary Magdalene. So, as a mom, how would you feel about that?

8. Our last snapshot of Mary in Scripture is found in Acts 1:12-14. Where is she?

Mary is found right where we'd expect her. Praying and waiting with the other disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit. She did not have super-human powers, she was one of them, a disciple of Jesus, anxiously awaiting the power of the Spirit to come and equip them for service. Her focus was on her Father's business, just like her son's. She was at peace. She knew her identity, even after all her loss, grief, and heartache. She had won; won the abundant life. Her Son was her Lord.

9. How does the life of Mary of Nazareth encourage and/or challenge you? How has the Holy Spirit used the example of her life to speak to your heart?

