

Significant Women In Scripture **Women of the New Testament:**

In the Old Testament segment, we brought to light women of different backgrounds who, each in their own way, impacted the greater story of God's redemption of His people. As we explore some of the significant women of the New Testament, we will meet women who were a very important part of Jesus' ministry, and in early text are actually referenced by the writers as one of two groups of disciples: the Twelve and the Women. The Twelve refer to the first apostles, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Women refer to an unspecified number of female disciples who also followed Jesus, welcoming him into their homes, financing his ministry, and often teaching. The women remained by his side; through his death, burial, and resurrection. They would also be active participants in the moving forward of The Great Commission.

In the book of Luke, we meet Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah. A woman who could not have children of her own. Elizabeth didn't allow this disappointment to change her relationship with God. She was faithful, obedient, and committed. Because of her age, Elizabeth had figured her time for having children had passed. However, due to her relationship with God, he rewarded her righteousness with a child. Not just a child, but the forerunner to the Messiah, John the Baptist.

In our churches we have women who have prayers that have seemingly gone unanswered, yet they continue to be faithful servants, committed to God. These are the women we are ministering to, during their times of trial and who in turn minister to others out of compassion and empathy.

In Acts, chapter 5, Sapphira and her husband Ananias tried to elevate themselves through "good deeds". They saw the attention Barnabas had received for selling a piece of his land, and then donating the money to the apostles for the care of the poor. They wanted this same respect, and didn't mind making a little money too. They sold a piece of land, donated a good portion of the money to the apostles, but keeping a small portion for themselves. She was guided by self interest. When questioned about it, she tried to continue the deceit and paid the price for it with her life.

I will guarantee you, that during the time you are in ministry, you will encounter someone like Sapphira. Someone who has gone down the wrong roads, and paid a heavy price for it. Her testimony sets and example of what not to do, she is given wisdom to see the roads others are mistakenly headed down, and becomes the cautionary voice to stop them. However, these women in our churches have died to their old selves, new creations in Christ. They are not only women who caution others from repeating their mistakes, but are often there to counsel those who didn't heed the caution. A tool in God's redemption of His people unto himself.

Ephesians 5:16 guides us to make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. We live in a time where hope is a precious commodity. We can see hope in many of the encounters women had with Jesus. The syrophenician woman of Matthew 15, who had faith, humility and hope that Jesus could heal her daughter of possession by demons. In Mark 5, we encounter the woman who had a bleeding disorder, more than an illness... she was considered unclean and that meant people avoided her. Her faith led her to reach out in faith to touch just the very hem of his robe. She had such faith in what He could do!

These women are like the many who struggle! They have children that cause them difficulty and grief, where they need divine intervention. They have illnesses and afflictions, of the mind, body and spirit... and they come seeking Jesus, because they recognize something special in Him. They have great faith

that one day, they will be healed.... their affliction relieved, their child restored.

This is our body of believers, broken... bent... bruised. Looking for the ultimate healer, looking for Jesus. They come in every Sunday, faithfully, waiting on God. Or, they come in for the first time looking and hoping for God's hand to change their future.

We all know of the story of Mary & Martha, in Luke 10. Mary content to sit at the feet of Jesus, Martha distracted by busyness of attending to their guests "needs". Any woman can identify with Mary and Martha, at some point in their life, or even from situation to situation. We encounter these women in our church, our community, and even within ourselves.

Martha was so busy in "hospitality" mode that she not only neglected being attentive to Jesus, who was sitting in her own home, but she was also chastising her sister for not helping. So upset, that she even tried to get Jesus to talk some sense into her. She didn't get the response she expected, Jesus instead turned the tables and talked some sense into Martha. It was the person, not the preparations that was important, and Mary recognized it.

Mary, on the other hand, recognized that there was something greater, something more important. She tossed aside the meal preparation and hosting duties, to sit at the feet of Jesus. Mary was focused on Jesus, kneeling at his feet in the posture of a disciple. Mary knew to stop the busy, seize the opportunity, and Jesus recognized her for it. He knew His time here was short, and there would be time for busyness. He wouldn't deny her this opportunity.

Like Mary, we must seize the opportunities that God puts before us to be WITH HIM, and it is very easy in Women's Ministry to get caught up in Martha Moments. Women's Ministry is a balance of being Mary and Martha, at any given time. We need the wisdom to discern when to be which, and we only do that through the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

Luke 24 reveals to us Joanna, a woman of influence and financial means. Through a chance encounter with Jesus, where He would heal Joanna ... her life was changed. Joanna became a full devoted follower of Christ with her resources, time and her energy. She provided for Jesus and the disciples when they traveled, and she actually traveled with them. Her dedication didn't end at the crucifixion, as she hurried to the tomb on Sunday to prepare his body for burial, making her among the first witnesses to the resurrection!

Christ changed the lives of women he countered not just through healing, like Joanna, but also through exposing their sin and turning them away from it. We see this when He encounters the Samaritan woman at the well, or the woman charged with adultery who was about to be stoned. Jesus stepped in, intervening in their lives, saving them and redirecting them. He had compassion and mercy for women, and through these interactions others would be impacted.

Women in the New Testament were active in the ministry of Christ. They were students at his feet, they provided financially to support the ministry, they followed him, were healed by him, listened to him, served him and the disciples, and were witnesses to the resurrection. The role of women in the scriptures, doesn't end at the resurrection.

As we move beyond the Gospels, we see that women continued in the movement of the Good News and were important in the Great Commission!

Paul references a couple in the New Testament several times, by the name of Aquila and Priscilla. This couple had the opportunity to learn directly from Paul, and then they would find themselves teachers of the word. An interesting fact, is that among the six times the couple are mentioned in the scriptures, four of the times Priscilla's name is mentioned first.

While the scriptures do not explicitly explain this, it would be out of character for the culture of that time period. This has led many to assume that of the couple, Priscilla may have been the stronger student, stronger teacher. Just like Deborah was called to lead Israel in the Old Testament for God's purposes, Priscilla was called to teach. Paul accounted her as a valuable friend and asset in the forward movement of the good news. Just like Paul, they would travel spreading the word, living the Great Commission.

In Acts 9, the story of Tabitha (also known as Dorcas) unfolds, as we learn about a woman who greatly cared for the poor and the widows in her community. She was so well known that when she died, Peter came to her home himself, praying for a miracle. God agreed that Tabitha was important, and she was raised from the dead. Tabitha was so significant, that she was actually referred to as a disciple.

In his letter, Paul refers to his fellow prisoner Junia in Romans 16 as being notable among the apostles. Some contend she was actually considered an apostle, others simply that she was held in high regard by the apostles. Either way, this was a woman of significance who's faith landed her in prison with Paul.

Phoebe was a benefactor of the early church, and she was significant in the role of directing home churches in her city. She is actually identified in the scriptures as a Deacon. To be a deacon (leader/teacher) in the church, you had to meet certain requirements that we will address in the next segment. Phoebe was viewed as an asset to the ministry and called in to an important position within the church.

God calls and equips those he calls, according to His purposes. Tabitha/Dorcas was referred to as a disciple, Phoebe was a deacon, Priscilla was a teacher, Deborah was a judge (leader) over all of Israel. God used, and elevated women in the scriptures, and he is doing so today. If this is for God's purpose, we must ask then: What is God's purpose for Women's Ministry?

I think Gloria Furman explains it best, when she says that women's ministry is any occasion where women minister to other women. This may be in the form of mentorship, bible study, speaker events, hospitality, service, financially, emotionally, and prayerfully. God designed women as image bearers, with a uniqueness to our own gender, and we have the ability to understand that uniqueness as sisters in Christ.

Scripture supports that God would call women into significant roles in the history and formation of the early church. In order to understand why these women were called, we need to unpack how God calls people into leadership in the first place, what is He looking for, what guidelines have the scriptures put into place, and then how do women fit in to this plan. To do this, we must go directly to the word of God.