

WOMEN IN LUKE – Bible Study Guide

This study guide is very simply laid out, without any background material. It provides questions to consider as you read the passages designated. It is directed at specifically understanding how Jesus related to women – how he met their needs – how he went against the society’s view of women and broke their customs by even talking to women.

Luke 1: Elizabeth

1. Discuss Elizabeth’s Barrenness – what were the implications in her day of such a condition. Is there any evidence that she was not at peace with her place in life?
2. Contrast her reaction to the news of the birth ahead with Zechariah’s reaction. Does it tell anything about their faith?
3. What was Elizabeth’s role in the plan of God? Her role as the mother of John, her role as the aunt of Mary. What kinds of things prepared her to be “there” for Mary when she was needed?
4. What did Mary and Elizabeth share in common regarding their experience? Examples of miracle birth, lack of acceptance from community, isolation (silence) from husband/fiancé.
5. Look at how Mary was allowed to participate in the birth of John, thus exposing her to the process of childbirth and preparing her for the birthing of Jesus that she would face alone.

Personal Reflection:

1. Has God used the things that seemed like a disadvantage or hardship in some positive, even miraculous way?
2. Has God given you a person(s) to be with you during a difficult time – someone who understands because of his or her own situation?
3. Do you see your age as a limitation to how God might use you? Can you see how Elizabeth in her maturity was better equipped to support Mary?
4. Have you ever thought of coming along side of someone or mentoring because of the experience you have ‘under your belt’

Luke 1 & 2 Mary

1. Age and person of Mary: What characteristics made her “highly favoured of God”? How does her response give insight to her character?
2. Share some of the favorite things that come to mind when you read this story – how does Mary inspire you personally. How does she scare you – or rather set up a standard that seems beyond reach?
3. What was the cost of obedience?
4. What was the blessing of obedience?

5. In what ways are *we* called to 'house the presence of God' in our bodies?
6. How do we allow the Spirit to overpower us, in order that a miracle might take place?

Look up the other references referring to Mary and how they reveal her character and calling: Luke 2: 48ff, Luke 8:19 – 21

Luke 4: 38-39 Healing of Simon's Mother-in-Law

(Throughout the study, one question needs to be in our thoughts – How do Jesus' action reflect his feelings about women as contrasted with popular cultural opinion? How did he validate the needs of women by his response?)

1. This is a small anecdotal incident – does it tell us anything about Jesus or women?
2. Do you think the fever might have been life threatening in that day or an inconvenience? Do you think Simon was concerned about her health?
3. Did Jesus heal her, just so there was someone to wait on them?

Luke 7: 11 – 17 Jesus Raises a Widow's Son

1. Discuss the place of a widow in society. What was her means of support?
2. "A large crowd from the town was with her" – what does this tell us about the character of the woman?
3. Jesus' heart went out to her – why? Why did he care about this particular widow, when there were many widows around?
4. What did it cost Jesus to raise her son? What happened because he touched the coffin? (think of the laws regarding clean and unclean)
5. What perspective do you gain regarding the authoritative nature of Jesus in this passage? How did people respond to him?

Personal Reflection:

1. What has/could it cost you to meet the need of another?
2. Has Jesus met a need in you in a unique or caring way? Have you felt that God cared about your specific situation?
3. Have you ever felt like God has overlooked you – not met your need – you or a loved one was not healed? How have you dealt with these feelings?

Luke 7: 36 – 50

This passage is so rich and full of meaning – take your time to look at it carefully. Background: It was acceptable for beggars to gather around the outside area of where people were dining in order to get leftovers. They would be eating in an outdoor courtyard. That is why the woman could 'walk in on the party'.

1. Why is this woman a 'sinner' – what has given her this label. Is it a fair label?
2. Look at the theme of knowledge: What does the Pharisee **think** he knows about:

- a) The woman
- b) Jesus
- c) Himself

What does Jesus claim to know about:

- a) The woman
- b) The Pharisee
- c) Himself

3. Look at the concept of love and of forgiveness. The words seem to be used interchangeably in this passage. What does that tell you about each?
4. What did this woman do right?
5. What did the Pharisee do wrong?
6. Did Jesus judge the woman in any way?
7. What does this story tell us about how Jesus treated women in contrast to his society?
8. How would the gift of peace be realized in her life? What would have changed in her situation? Would she still be a prostitute? How would she handle the circumstances of her life differently now that she has met Jesus?

Personal Reflection

1. Is there ways that you feel 'unclean' – labeled by yourself or by society. For example – someone might have a weight problem and feel like it is their fault or branded by that physical challenge.
2. What are ways you have labeled someone because of something you thought you knew about them – or assumed about them that was unfair? Did you work to change your attitude? Are there ways that the church might make a judgment upon a situation or person unfairly?
3. What does Jesus want our attitude to be toward those who struggle in life?

Luke 8: 1 – 3 The Supporters of Jesus:

It is worth a quick look at these verses to see the women's response to Jesus. The commentaries do not give much information regarding their background, but just the fact that these women financially supported Jesus from their own resources, which would be quite sacrificial. You may want to talk about the way women sacrificially support God's work today through our churches and communities. These women's names will occur again at the Resurrection.

Luke 8: 40 – 55: Two Stories – The Dead Girl and the Sick Woman

These stories are also very rich with meaning. It is important to contrast the personality and place in society of the Jairus and the woman hemorrhaging. Each also approach Jesus very differently, yet both receive their heart's desire.

1. Who was Jairus? What did he do for a living and what place did he hold in society?
2. How were daughters valued in that society?
3. What does Jairus' love for his daughter say about him in relation to his society?
4. Who was the ill woman? What was her infirmity and what hardship did it cause her? What place was she relegated to in society because of her illness?
5. How does Jairus approach Jesus? What risk did he take by coming to Jesus?
6. How does the woman approach Jesus? What risk did she take by coming to Jesus?
7. What danger did the woman put Jesus in by touching him?
8. How does Jesus' response validate the need of this woman? How did she find wholeness in Christ?

Personal Reflection

1. How do you approach God and prayer? Do you boldly come in public like Jairus, not caring what others think? Do you share your prayer requests with your church or small group? OR are you more private person, dealing with your problems quietly – reaching out to God in subtle ways? Remember that Jesus responded to both types of prayer.
2. Do you have physical problems that keep you out of community? How do you deal with the infirmity? How has God healed your pain?
3. Is there any part of this lesson that gives you more courage to come to Jesus with your problems?

Luke 10: 38 – 42 Mary and Martha

This is a familiar, favorite study of women. They like to compare the two sisters, deciding whether they are more a Mary or a Martha by nature. As you study this again, look at Jesus' response to the personalities of these two. Think about how he shows that he cares for both and understands how they both approach life. See how Jesus really understands women in this story. He understands the trap of doing rather than being that we fall into. He understands how worries consume us and distract us from what is really important. Once again, he sees the role of women different than his society. Women are invited to learn – they are not just good for fixing meals and keeping house. The spiritual health of women is important. He again elevates the place of women and their rights in society.

Rather than offering questions – have an open discussion on what this passage has meant to women in the past and bring out the points mentioned above.

Luke 13: 10 – 17 The Healing of the Crippled Woman

1. Discuss briefly the significance of the Sabbath among the Jewish people and its place within the law.
2. Would a woman's need be worth breaking the Sabbath for in Jesus' day?
3. What risk did Jesus take to minister to her?
4. Visualize this woman as bent over – head down – going through life never looking anyone in the eye. Now see Jesus lifting her straight and looking directly into her eyes. What would that experience do to her self-esteem?

Personal Reflection

1. Consider what issues affect a woman's self esteem. What kinds of attitudes keep women hanging their head – afraid to look others in the eye? Do you think it is true that women generally have low self-esteem?
2. How has Satan played a part in keeping you in bondage and crippled for years?
3. How has Jesus esteemed you – lifted your head and given you new dignity?
4. In what ways have laws kept you from experiencing compassion or being compassionate?

The following parables may be handled together, or you may not want to include them at all. They reveal an indirect picture of women's place in society.

Luke 13: 34 – 35: Jesus' Prayer

This is a brief interlude to simply ask the group how this image of God encourages the place and role of women in that society.

Luke 15: 8 – 10: Woman with the lost Coin, Luke 21: 1 – 4; Widow's offering

These are two short parables that reveal how a woman's concerns are important and that she is valued. The widow is given a place of honor by her actions. Not only is the small offering valued, but also this insignificant woman is valued.

Luke 18: 1 – 8: Persistent Widow

This parable deals primarily with prayer and the nature of God. This parable often gets misinterpreted, by emphasizing the widow's persistence (hence the title). However, the point of the parable is that God is **not** like an unjust judge and you do not have to plead and beg to get him to listen to you. The parable shows a widow, the least powerful, least influential person in society pitted against one of the most powerful people of society. In the eyes of God, her prayers are as valid as any others. There is no distinction – no value judgment. She has every right to plead her case before God and God will hear that prayer.

Questions:

1. Do you find prayer easy or difficult to do consistently? Do you find it easier to pray for the needs of others or for yourself?
2. What gives you confidence that God has heard your prayers?
3. Are there times when you feel like you have to beg God for answers?
4. What is the difference between being persistent and being a nag? Which reveals faith in God?

Luke 23: 26 – 31 Final Words

This is one of the most compelling passages of Scripture regarding the importance of women to Jesus. Compare this with the “woe to” verses in Luke 11. Jesus had some harsh words to say to the men of authority in his day, but never has a harsh word to say to women. In fact, in the midst of extreme pain and suffering as he stumbles under the weight of the cross, he turns and speaks to the women in mourning. He addresses them with compassion and understanding.

1. What is Jesus warning these women about? What situations will be difficult for them in the future? Try to think beyond the North American Culture, to some of the cultures that oppress women or where the church is being persecuted.
2. In what ways has life for women been difficult since the time of Jesus?
3. What do you think is meant by these words: “For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” What are ‘these things’ that men are doing? Again, reflect on Luke 11 as well as the crucifixion.
4. Does Jesus still weep for us? What injustices need to be righted?

Luke 23:49, 55; Luke 24: 1 – 12 – Cross and Resurrection

This final episode is the cornerstone of the place given to women by God. He entrusts the witness of the resurrection to women. Their witness was not valid in a court of law, but more that adequate for God’s crowning work of salvation.

1. What does this say about these women – that they would be first to the tomb? What was the role of women in that day (and even today) that would place them there?
2. What might have been the hope they found in Jesus, and how was that hope dashed at his death. What would these women be grieving, besides the loss of someone they loved.
3. How was that hope rekindled by his words and presence?
4. The Gospel begins and ends with women. In light of all that has been studied, what part have women played in God’s Salvation Story?
5. Has this study affected how you see women within the Christian church and their roles?