

# NCF - 31<sup>st</sup> March – The First Team

## Part One: Fiona Holton

### **Women followers of Jesus**

In New Testament times the teacher/learner method of intentional discipling was a widely recognized method of teaching, and Jesus used it to train the future leaders of his church. In the Gospels we can see how Jesus, while choosing twelve men as his disciples, also began to develop women, changing inherited patterns and beginning to restore to the church and the world the partnership of men and women which was lost at the Fall.

The fact that women were followers at all, in a culture where few women were literate or had any formal education, is in contrast to the accepted practices of the day (women were discouraged in rabbinic laws from leaving their homes)

### **Mary Magdalene**

Mary's epithet *Magdalene* most likely means that she came from the town of Magdala, a fishing town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is also suggested that she was single or she would have her husband's surname. Luke chapter 8 verses 1-3 lists Mary as one of the women who travelled with Jesus and helped support his ministry "out of their resources", indicating that she was probably relatively wealthy. The same passage also states that seven demons had been driven out of her.

Mary was present at the crucifixion - Matthew 27 verse 55 says

<sup>55</sup> Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. <sup>56</sup> Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph,<sup>[f]</sup> and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Mark 15 says

<sup>40</sup> Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph,<sup>[d]</sup> and Salome. <sup>41</sup> In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

Luke just says - some women but John also names her specifically.

We're told that Mary Magdalene was one of the women who kept vigil at Jesus' tomb. It was customary at this time for Jewish women to prepare bodies for burial. Corpses were considered unclean, and so it was always a woman's task to handle them.

When Mary goes to the tomb, Jesus' body is no longer there. The fullest account of Mary's role after discovering the empty tomb is in the Gospel of John. She is in a state of shock and

runs to where the disciples are gathered to tell them the news. When she reports to the disciples she is not believed. Peter and another disciple return with her to the tomb, to see for themselves.

Then, something even more extraordinary happens.

Mary is alone when someone asks her why she's crying. She believes it's the gardener, and says, "they have taken my lord's body and I do not know where it is". The figure says her name. And then she sees Jesus. She is overwhelmed and says "Master!" and goes forward to reach out to him, but he stops her. He says "don't touch me". Instead, she must go to the others and tell them that he has risen from the dead. It's an awesome moment. Jesus stands before her, yet he's beyond her reach.

When Mary finally realizes that the man talking to her outside the tomb is not the gardener but Jesus Himself, she addresses Him as "Rabboni," meaning "my great teacher." She sees Him as the person He was to her in His time on Earth, the man in the flesh, not what He is now—her Lord and Saviour.

Of course, she would want to hold on to Him! He was the man who had quite literally set her free from the hold of demons. He had been her friend and her mentor. The last time Mary had laid eyes on Jesus, He had been brutally murdered—crucified—and she'd been weeping over the loss of Him for the past three days.

**Jesus entrusted the news of His resurrection to this lady, who recognised who He was.**

Martha

Martha is described in both Luke and John. Together with Lazarus, her brother and Mary, her sister, they lived in the village of Bethany, near Jerusalem

The Bible first mentions Martha in Luke 10. She is in her home, where she is hosting Jesus and the disciples. Jesus was well-known to Martha and her siblings; in fact, Jesus loved this little family John 11:5 On the day that Jesus visited, Martha's desire was to be a good hostess—to serve the best meal with the best possible presentation, for Jesus' It's clear Martha has a servant's heart. We can hear the unspoken longing behind her plea to Jesus in her home that day—she just wanted to serve her Master and serve Him well. Well-intended "doing" is good, but not when it distracts us from what is best.

We see Martha again just after her brother, Lazarus, had died in John 11. The sisters had sent for Jesus when Lazarus fell ill but He did not arrive in time to heal him. When Jesus finally approached Bethany, four days after Lazarus' death, Martha ran out to meet Him and declared, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. She firmly believed that Jesus could have healed Lazarus of his illness. And her faith is not diminished by the fact that Jesus had arrived "too late." Jesus encourages Martha with one of His "I AM" statements: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives

by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (verses 25–26). Martha's response is one of great faith and understanding of Jesus' divine nature: "Yes, Lord . . . I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" . Martha's faith was rewarded that very day as she witnessed her brother's miraculous resurrection from the dead .

The third time we encounter Martha in the Bible, she is doing what Martha was known to do—serving , John 12:2 . Jesus is again attending a dinner in His honour in Bethany, and Martha is again serving. It is on this occasion that Martha's sister, Mary, anoints Jesus' feet with expensive perfume (verse 3). It becomes apparent that Martha was likely a woman of some means, evidenced by the size of her home, the frequency of her hosting dinners, and the expensive perfumed oil her sister owned.

**In Martha's life-changing encounters with Jesus, we see the importance of balancing service with worship, of trusting the Lord even when all seems lost, and of using our material resources for the glory of God.**

Joanna

**Joanna** (Her name means "Yahweh has been gracious",<sup>[2]</sup> a variation of the name "Anna" which means "grace" or "favour").

Joanna is shown as the wife of Chuza, steward to Herod Antipas . As the wife of an important court official, she would have had sufficient means needed to travel and contribute to the support of Jesus and the disciples. Joanna, along with Mary Magdalene and Susanna were among the "certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities" (8:2). Whether Joanna had been demon-possessed or suffered from some mental or physical disability we are not told. It is evident that this female of the upper class, restored to normal health by Christ, gave her life to Him. She is here seen as one of the travelling company who went before Christ and the Twelve to arrange for their hospitable reception. Out of her own resources many expenses were met, and in this way she ministered . Having freely received His healing touch, she freely gave of herself and of her means for His welfare.

Joanna is named among the women mentioned in Luke 24:10, who, along with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, took spices to Jesus' tomb and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty

The women who gathered at the tomb were a diverse bunch. Consider Joanna. She was the wife of Chuza, a house steward of Herod, who had means and influence and shared them liberally with Jesus (Luke 8:3). Yet she was running around with Mary, the mother of Jesus ( a young woman many thought bore a son out of wedlock.... She could have been filling her days with palace goings-on, and instead was following an itinerant Jewish carpenter, who hung out purposefully with tax collectors and fishermen.

**Joanna learned this sister-in-Christ behaviour from watching and modelling Jesus.** We know from Luke that Jesus healed her. In grateful response, she could've still allocated her resources to His ministry and stayed busy with her affluent responsibilities. Instead, she didn't just share money from afar, she *wholly engaged*. She prepared His body for burial, she went to grieve at His tomb, and she hung out with His mother. She's a long way from Herod's banquet table!

Joanna, then, was among the last at the cross, and among the first to witness the empty tomb and likewise among the first to proclaim that the Lord whom she had so dearly loved was risen indeed.

Joanna broke from her society's expectations and, as a result, found herself in unparalleled company. His healing touch impacted more than just what afflicted her—being around Jesus made her more like Him. *He* got His hands dirty, *He* talked to people nothing like Him, *He* went to where the need was. **Joanna showed herself as a disciple when she acted as Jesus did.**

It probably cost Joanna her reputation, some relational strain, certain creature comforts, and possibly her security. It has been written that her husband lost his job because of his wife's beliefs and behaviour, following Jesus.

Jesus elevated women by including them as disciples and at his resurrection he affirmed their ministry as messengers. The Gospel writers were dependent on the testimony of women such as Mary his mother as well as Mary Magdalene for reconstructing the narrative of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Mary his mother, and 'the women' were there after the resurrection, devoted to prayer and waiting for the future to unfold (Acts 1:14). And when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, everything changed. The prophecy of Joel, that God would pour out his Spirit on all his people, was fulfilled: Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, Your young men will see visions, Your old men will dream dreams, Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18) Women as well as men were equipped by God's Spirit for all that he would call them to do. From these examples, we can see that Jesus inaugurated a new way, a new attitude to women, recognizing that what mattered was their response to God rather than the roles which society dictated for them. As he invested in the twelve male disciples, so he also invested in those women who chose to follow him throughout his ministry. And when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, God's new society was established, and women as well as men were empowered. We are now more aware than we used to be of the cultural background in which the early Church came to birth, where in Greek and Roman society women were used to having a role in religious leadership, so that in some contexts it was not so hard for women to step into leadership in churches as they were established in homes, and for their leadership to be accepted. In the first churches, old distinctions of race, class and gender were abolished; qualification for service depended (with a few cultural concessions) no longer on gender and societal position but on gifting, and those women who had been 'with' Jesus, were able, until restrictions were made, to serve alongside men.

References from

The Bible, NIV

Women of the Bible - She Reads Truth

Women followers of Jesus – CPAS

### Part Two: Gill Stephenson

The phrase that comes to mind about the women was that they were followers of Jesus.

Over the last 2 months - what were his 12 disciples like and what is a disciple anyway?

**Helpful bible verse:**

**Matt 16 v 24**

**Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”**

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus?

In those days, women would often be the breadwinners so that the men could study under a rabbi. Certainly some of the women who followed Jesus were wealthy and supported Jesus and the other disciples. Today, we don't have that sort of set-up, but what can we learn about following Jesus that is applicable to us?

Practically – ducklings following – what can we tell?

1) Going in the same direction

Same direction = giving control

He has to be master of our lives rather than trying to run them ourselves.

Have we given control to him?

Trust trust trust

Scary – balance between doing and not doing. Sometimes we need to be still

**Exodus 14v 14:**

**The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still**

## 2) Proximity

In those days it was an incredible honour for a rabbi to invite you to 'follow him'. It meant spending lots of time together to learn and observe and see how they lived and what they knew and to imitate him and become more like him. You were living together in close proximity which allowed you to do all these things.

Scary word relating to be in close proximity is obedience.

No point in learning all about your teacher if you then don't obey.

### **John 8 v 31**

**If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.**

We need to obey him every day. He knows what is best and has told us how he wants us to live in the bible. And this is how we get to be like Jesus – being in close proximity and being obedient. He calls us to follow Him.

### **John 10 v 4**

**his sheep follow him because they know his voice.**

How to become like him? Close proximity/obedience

As it was an incredible honour to be asked to follow a rabbi back then, so it is for us to be asked to follow Jesus.

3) Knowing who it is you're following/being familiar with them – think about following someone in a crowd

Every day life like following in a crowd – much easier when we know what he's asked us to do and can apply it in every day situations.

Not only about me and what I'm doing - seeing others / compassion/ heart for the lost / loving others Is his Holy Spirit filling us with his love and are we seeking to touch others for Christ?

### **Ephesians 5 v 1-2**

**Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.**

Jesus really did throw out the cultural rulebook when it came to dealing with women when he was alive. Let's be like those women who were followers of Jesus and make sure we're going in the same direction (giving Him control), getting and staying in close proximity (being obedient) and knowing who we're following and being like him (seeing others and treating them the way he would)