

The Discipleship of Women in the Gospel of Luke

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Unlike the writers of the other Synoptic Gospels, Luke focuses on the role of the outcast – especially women – to demonstrate the inclusiveness nature of the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. Luke highlights the participation of women in response to the call of Jesus to discipleship.

Discipleship in Luke's Gospel can be equated with following Jesus as he travels from Galilee to Jerusalem. Discipleship involves sharing the life, destiny and dignity of the Lord. For Luke, discipleship involves a call from Jesus (Lk 8:2; 10-11) (Lk 12:8; 14:26-27; 18-22).

The audience to whom Luke addresses his Gospel is an inclusive audience: "Gentile, the unclean, the poor, women, Samaritans, rich tax collectors and other outcasts, as well as the elect people who have repented of their initial rejection of Jesus, God's prophet and chosen one." Women are included. And as you will see, they hear the message and they respond. These women are just as capable as men of faith, spirituality, and responsibility before God. As such, both men and women are called to the role of discipleship

In the story of Martha and Mary (Lk 10: 38-42), Jesus focuses on the importance of hearing and responding to his message. Mary listened to Jesus and Martha is being called to hear the message.

In the narration of the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, we know that women accompanied Jesus and the twelve apostles, often providing for them out of their own resources (Lk 8: 1-3). They were sharing in the life and ministry of Jesus – following him on his journey. The fact that they were with him is very significant. The phrase to “be with him” is technically understood as an expression for discipleship and a willing attachment to Jesus (Lk 8:38, 9:18, and 22:56). Clearly these women displayed a willing attachment to Jesus by being with him and the twelve on their journey. There is additional evidence in the Galilean ministry that God’s kingdom is not exclusive but inclusive. For example, Jesus cures a male demoniac and also Peter’s mother-in-law (Lk 4: 31-44).

When Jesus selects the twelve apostles, the selection takes place before a large group (Lk 6:13). His great discourse to a large crowd included many disciples (LK 6:17).

There are also a large group of disciples when Jesus enters Jerusalem (LK 19:37) and when he speaks of the meaning of discipleship (LK 14:25-35). Since it is apparent from these readings that Jesus was not excluding anyone from his call to discipleship or to join his ministry, women were probably part of the large group. Discipleship is not limited to a select few or an exclusive class.

Women respond to healing as demonstrated in the Galilean ministry (Lk 8:3), the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Lk 4:31-44), the women with a hemorrhage (LK 8:43-44) and Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:54-55). The woman with the hemorrhage had followed Jesus in a crowd and reached out to touch the hem of his garment. She responded to the ministry of Jesus. Jesus, after seeing the crippled woman in the synagogue, called to her and healed her (Lk 13: 10-13). In calling out the woman, Jesus was including her in his call to discipleship.

In the passion narratives, we again find the women who were first mentioned in the Galilean ministry. Luke refers to them as "the women who had followed him from Galilee" (Lk 23:49) These women had followed Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry. The Greek, from which the bible was translated, uses a very specific word, which means discipleship of Christ.

Thus, these women left everything and followed Jesus (LK 5:11).

The travel narratives (LK 9:51 – 19:27) can be interpreted as a teaching period for the disciples of Jesus. It was a period of preparation for the disciples for the period of time which would follow the death and resurrection of the Lord. The women would have received these important instructions since they were part of the group of disciples, which followed Jesus.

In the passion narratives, the women followed Jesus to Calvary (LK: 23:27). These same women who followed Jesus throughout his ministry, who started with him in Galilee, were also with him at his crucifixion (LK 23:49). They heard the call, responded and became attached to Jesus, sharing in his life and his death. Following his death on the cross, they remained after everyone had left (LK 23:48-49).

When Jesus was placed in the tomb, the women who went to anoint his body were the women disciples who had been with him since Galilee were present (LK 23:55). In sharing in the dignity of his life and death, the women prepared the spices and perfume oils which were to be used to anoint his body (Lk 23:56) – probably frankincense and myrrh.

On Easter morning, it was the women who first approached the tomb of the one whom they had followed (Lk 24:10).

The women from Galilee were the first to witness to the Good News that Jesus had risen from the dead (LK 24: 6-9). These same women were present when those who had seen Jesus on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem to share what they had seen and experienced (LK 24:33).

The women who had followed Jesus from Jerusalem had heard the call, followed him, participated in his life, attached themselves to him, witnessed his death and became witnesses to his resurrection – albeit not the actual event itself as it was witnessed by anyone. They had been fully involved in his ministry, including miracles, cures, his passion, his crucifixion and the fact that he had risen from the dead. They were indeed true disciples of Jesus.

The role of the Mother of Jesus cannot be ignored, as she was indeed a disciple and the first evangelist. In response to an angel, Mary hears the Word of God and does exactly what God asks of her (LK 1:38). Jesus himself intimates that his mother was one who “hears the word of God and keeps it” (Lk 8:21, 11: 28-29).

Luke portrays women in the role of discipleship to stress the theme of inclusiveness. At the time the Gospel was written, women were considered lowly and outcast. The women in the role of discipleship “came mostly from the lower and poorer strata of Jewish society . . . the majority were probably single.”

Luke’s concern for inclusiveness can also be seen in his style of parallel references to men and women. Following each parable concerning a man, Luke sites a parable concerning a woman. He parallels the annunciation to Zechariah of the impending birth of his son John the Baptist with the annunciation to Mary of the impending birth of her son Jesus. Luke parallels the prophecies of Simean to the prophecies of Anna. It is very clear that Luke desires to point to the inclusive nature of Christ’s ministry. His call to discipleship is not exclusive – it is inclusive, all are called to be Disciples of Christ – all are called to *follow him*.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus elevates women to the same level as men. In doing so, he breaks all barriers of social standing. All are equal in the eyes of Jesus: rich and poor, male and female – all are called to discipleship and to share in the Kingdom of God.

Luke employs a wider meaning of the term discipleship to show that true discipleship is not limited to a few or to a select.

Portraying women in the role of discipleship accomplishes Luke's objective. Just as the women from Galilee followed Jesus and responded to his ministry so too are all people called to be disciples, to follow Jesus.

These women are not only courageous, faith-filled women but they stand as an example – as role models. They are a testimony to the equality of all human beings in the eyes of Jesus – equality without exception.

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Let us pray:

**O Jesus, living in Mary,
Come and live in your servants,
In the spirit of your holiness,
In the fullness of your power,
In the perfection of your ways,
In the truth of your virtues,
In the communion of your mysteries:
Overcome every oppressing force
In your spirit,
For the glory of the Father.
Amen!**