

GOD, DO YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT ME?



GOD, DO YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT ME?



By Sharon Jaynes

I hope you have enjoyed the retelling of the life and ministry of Jesus through the eyes of a woman. But before we can truly appreciate the liberating love that Jesus extended to women as He walked the earth, we need to recognize the devastating darkness that surrounded their world. Before we step into the darkness, let's remember our wonderful beginnings in the Garden of Eden.

The Bible tells us, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). God spoke creation into being in six days, and after each of the first five days, as the sun set over the horizon, God said, "It is good." Six times, at the end of each phase of His handiwork, He reiterated His approval. We ride this rhythm of repetition only to be brought to a sudden halt by the Creator's words when He looked at the lone man with no suitable companion. "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). So God caused Adam to fall asleep, removed one of his ribs, and fashioned His grand finale – woman.

Eve was the crowning touch of God's creative masterpiece. She was not an afterthought, but God's grand finale of creation. Woman was fashioned to complete the picture of God's image bearer. Man could not do it alone. Woman could not do it alone. Both were necessary – working, serving and living in tandem to complete the picture God intended all along.

God concludes the first week of creation and the curtain falls with the words: "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). With the debut of woman, what was "good," now became "very good."

So what happened? How did woman move from a mutual place of honor as an image bearer of God in the Garden of Eden to the oppression of subversion we have seen through the centuries? Well, let's don't leave the Garden quite yet.

Chapter three of Genesis begins with the daunting words... "Now the serpent." Satan slithered into the Garden of Eden and tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They believed

Satan's lie instead of God's truth, disobeyed His one restriction, and ushered sin, death and separation from God into the world. The Bible tells us that since that time, everyone is born separated from God because of sin (Romans 5:12).

Before man sinned, God said that woman would rule with man (Genesis 1:28). One of the consequences of the fall was that now woman would be ruled by man (Genesis 3:16). From that time on, relational tension between man and woman replaced harmony and oneness.

God loves turning things around. As soon as Eve sunk her teeth into the forbidden fruit, the shadow of the cross rose over the horizon and God's redemptive plan was set into motion. While the tree in the Garden brought death and the curse, the tree of Calvary brought life and blessing. Jesus came to restore mankind's broken relationship with God, offer eternal life in heaven, and restore abundant life on earth. But there were thousands of years sandwiched between God's words pointing toward the coming of the Savior and Jesus' words on the cross, "It is finished." And unfortunately, women have been oppressed, abused and misused in every way imaginable.

When Jesus entered the world on that starry night in Bethlehem, His first cry echoed the heart cries of women who had been misused and abused for centuries. By the time Jesus took His first steps onto the dusty ground of Galilee, women led secluded lives. They were not allowed to talk to men in public, testify in court or mingle with men at social gatherings. Women lived in the shadows of the society and were to be rarely seen and seldom heard.

Much like a slave, a girl was the property of her father and later the property of her husband. Women were uneducated, unappreciated and uncounted. They were not allowed to eat in the same room with men, to be educated in the Torah or enter the inner court of the temple with men to worship.

Women were segregated in social and religious life of their communities and considered to be inferior creatures whose sole purpose was domesticity and sexual pleasure. A common prayer of a Jewish man as he rose each day was, "Thank you God that I am neither a Gentile, a slave nor a woman."

But Jesus came to change all that. He came to restore God's original design and purpose for men and women that was distorted and disturbed in the Garden of Eden (1 John 3:8). Part of that restoration included restoring women to their

original position enjoyed before the fall. Jesus walked on the scene to see God's female image bearers hidden in the shadows behind lock and key and flung the doors open wide with the truth.

It is easy for us twenty-first century readers to view Jesus' interaction with women as somewhat ordinary, but it was radical in every sense of the word. He spoke to women publically, taught them openly, ate with them freely and treated them respectfully. In a culture that kept women tucked away in the recesses of the home to be neither seen nor heard, Jesus pulled them from behind the scenes, positioned them front and center and shone the spot light of His divine love and calling on their lives. As the curtain of the New Testament rises, women fill the stage and take starring roles as God's grand drama of redemption unfolds.

God chose Mary, Jesus' mother, to initiate His ministry of miracles at the wedding of Cana as He turned the water into wine (John 2:1-12). He delivered the social outcast, Mary Magdalene, from demons and invited her and other women to join His ministry team (Mark 16:9). Jesus' longest recorded conversation in the New Testament was with a woman – the Samaritan He met at the well. It was this very woman to whom Jesus first revealed His true identity as the promised Messiah. Jesus filled this empty woman with living water and then watched her run into town to become one of the first women evangelists.

Jesus extended His hand to the untouchable. He reached out to heal a woman with a twelve-year issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48) and to resurrect a twelve-year-old little girl from death (Mark 5: 35-43). He called a crippled woman moving in the shadows of society and placed her center stage as He unfolded her bent back and freed her to praise God (Luke 13:10-17). Jesus applauded a widow's small gift and singled her out as an example of true sacrificial giving (Mark 12: 38-44). He forgave a woman caught in adultery and gave her the freedom to begin anew (John 8:1-30).

Jesus invited Mary of Bethany into the classroom of men and made a clear statement by His actions that it was now time for women to learn God's Word (Luke 10:38-42). The morning of Jesus' resurrection, He chose to make His inaugural appearance to Mary Magdalene, and called her to testify to the disciples that He had risen from the dead (John 20:11-18).

Jesus healed women spiritually, physically, mentally and emotionally. He

showed them the honor and respect due a child of God. Jesus took the keys of truth and unlocked the shackles to liberate women from the oppression that had them bound and sequestered in the nooks and crannies of society. How proud I am of those women who accepted Jesus' invitation to come out of hiding. They were cultural change agents who listened to the call of God above the oppressive voices of the culture.

As you consider Jesus' interaction with women in the Bible don't miss the wonder and awe of His radically life-changing words. Sit by the well with the Samaritan woman expecting insult and rejection, but receiving acceptance and love. Stand with the woman caught in adultery expecting condemnation and death, but finding forgiveness and new life. Reach with the bleeding woman to touch the hem of His garment in secret, only to be healed and publically affirmed. Rise from the ruins of life with Mary Magdalene, and run with purpose to announce the miracle of Jesus' resurrection.

As you consider each woman Jesus impacted, I pray you will write your name into the script and experience Him as never before. You are precious to God. Your name is written in the palm of His hand.

If you would like to pray to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and accept God's invitation to spend eternity in heaven with Him, you can pray the same prayer that Rivka in the film prayed with her friend.

“God, my Father I heaven, You are holy, and righteous. Thank You that You love me. I have sinned against You. Thank You that you sent the promised Messiah, Jesus, to destroy the curse of shame and guilt. Thank You that He died in my place. I want to follow my living Savior. Thank You for forgiving me and accepting me. In Jesus' Name, Amen”

If you prayed that prayer today, we would love to hear from you. You can contact us at www.magdalenatoday.com and we will celebrate with you!

Sharon Jaynes is an international conference speaker and has authored several books that encourage women. To learn more, visit www.sharonjaynes.com.