

If Jesus Embraced Women in Ministry, Why Can't We?

One of the ways in which Jesus defied convention was in his treatment of women. Think, for example, of his willingness to have a conversation, alone, with a Samaritan woman of very dubious reputation (John 4). Jesus always treated women with dignity and respect. Whereas I can think of several examples where he publicly rebuked men, I cannot think of a single example where he scolded a woman or publicly shamed or embarrassed one. On the contrary, he went out of his way to defend them. (Luke 7:36-50, John 8:3-11) But Jesus went beyond that. In a society that was highly patriarchal:

He gave illustrations that women would relate to—for example, about yeast in a lump of dough (Luke 13:21), sewing a patch on an old garment (Matthew 9:16).

Women, as well as men, were the heroines of his stories—the woman who lost a piece of silver (Luke 15:8-10), the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-5).

He never told a story where a woman was the “villain” of the piece. (The closest example would be the five foolish virgins.) Men were often cast in that role.

He publicly honored women as examples to follow—the widow who gave two small coins (Mark 12:41-43), the woman who poured ointment on his head (Matthew 26:6-13).

He welcomed their children. Although the text doesn't specifically state so, I suspect it was mothers who brought their children to Jesus so he could bless them (Matthew 19:13-15).

He defended their rights. Jesus stood against the common practice that a man could divorce his wife for no reason

(Matthew 19:3-8).

Jesus didn't dumb things down when he talked to women. Some of the most profound conversations recorded in the Gospels occurred with women. Think of the talks he had with the woman at the well in John 4 (the first time he revealed his Messiahship) or with Martha about the resurrection (John 11).

The story of Mary and Martha shows Jesus encouraging Mary to sit at his feet learning from him rather than being relegated to the kitchen (Luke 10:38-42). In a society where a woman was not viewed as being a credible witness, Jesus revealed himself after his resurrection to women, and entrusted them to take the news that he had risen to the disciples (Matthew 28:1-10).

Jesus chose twelve men to be with him. What is often forgotten is that a group of women accompanied him too. Luke's gospel describes these women: Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples. (Luke 8:1-3)

Another relevant passage comes in Matthew 27: 55-56 which describes the scene at Jesus' crucifixion. And many women who had come from Galilee with Jesus to care for him were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. (Matthew 27:55-56)

If you trace back to see when Jesus left Galilee for Jerusalem, it is clear that this occurred in Luke 9. So a group of women were with Jesus throughout most of Luke's

Gospel. Paul had a group of co-workers who were women. In fact, of the 27 people mentioned in Romans 16, ten were women. So let's take a closer look at the Scriptures that have traditionally been used to prevent women from fully participating in all that God has for them.

*Adapted from **Felicity Dale's** e-book, A Simple Guide to the Challenging Scriptures for Women. Felicity is the author of numerous books including The Black Swan Effect and Simply Church. She is an advocate for women in the church and trains people to start simple, organic house churches around the world.*