

# How Jesus Related to Women



We feel how Christ values us through the women he encountered.

- 2** **INTRODUCTION**  
**Feeling Our Value as Women**  
Christ affirms us by the way he treated women.  
*by Karen Arneson*
- 4** **PRACTICALLY SPEAKING**  
**Does Jesus Like Me?**  
I know he loves me, but I've always wondered if God enjoys me.  
*by Jennie McLaurin*
- 8** **THE HEART OF THE ISSUE**  
**Jesus and Women**  
In his treatment of women, as in many other areas, Jesus of Nazareth was a radical contrast to the standards of his times.  
*by Evelyn and Frank Stagg*
- 11** **LEADERSHIP TOOLS**  
**The Woman Who Got It Right**  
Finding our voices  
*by Sue Edwards*
- 14** **GETTING DEEPER**  
**The Woman at the Well: Thirsty for Truth**  
Jesus showed great compassion for this woman we find in John 4:5–42.  
*by Liz Curtis Higgs*
- 17** **BIBLICALLY SPEAKING**  
**The Adulteress**  
A stone's throw from grace.  
*by Liz Curtis Higgs*
- 20** **FINDING OUR VOICES**  
**A Good Cry**  
God can use anything we surrender to him—even our tears.  
*by Liz Curtis Higgs*
- 23** **BRINGING IT HOME**  
**Task Master**  
Is doing it all, all at the same time, really the best way?  
*by Liz Curtis Higgs*
- 26** **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**  
More places for more help.





# Feeling Our Value as Women

Christ affirms us by the way he treated women.

*by Karen Arneson*

**J**esus was born into a society that exalted men but saw women and children as property—and not very valuable property at that. Jesus shook up that image. He held up a mirror revealing the value of all people, who are created in the image of God, worthy of love.

We often don't feel our value as women, but it would be wise to go to the Author of love for further study. God tells us that we are only able to love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

How did he love us? The purest expression of God's love toward us is Jesus. "For God so loved the world"—that's you and me—"that he gave his only Son"—that's Jesus. Jesus came to save us, but he also came to show us God. Jesus' life on earth revealed God's love and modeled love in action. Understanding that love, accepting that even in our sin we are unconditionally loved, frees us to live in community with others.

There are numerous examples in the Gospels of Jesus' relationships with many different types and genders. He surrounded himself with 12 men—his disciples. He invited little children to come to him. And he turned society on its ear by listening and responding to women. His loving treatment of women helps us see how he valued us.

# Introduction





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Feeling Our Value as Women*

3

Following are a few examples.

### **Jesus and the Bleeding Woman (Matthew 9:20-22)**

An important ruler approached Jesus to ask him to bring his daughter back to life. So Jesus went with him. Curious crowds pressed in all around, eager to see a miracle. A poor, suffering woman dared not directly approach Jesus, because she was unclean; yet she believed if she could just touch his garment she would be healed. The Scripture says that at her touch, “Jesus turned and saw her.”

### **Jesus and Greek Woman (Mark 7:24-30)**

Jesus was on a mission, and his first priority was Israel, God’s chosen people. A Greek woman had heard of Jesus and believed he could cast out a demon that possessed her daughter. She sought him out and fell at his feet. She pleaded with him to help her daughter. Jesus’ response seems harsh, “First let the children eat all they want ... for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” The woman persists, “Yes, Lord ... but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” The woman was an interruption. But Jesus healed her daughter.

### **Jesus Visits Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)**

Mary and Martha were Jesus’ friends. In this instance, Martha was consumed with all the little details of getting dinner on the table. Mary preferred to sit with and listen to Jesus. Martha felt put out and complained about Mary’s lack of help. Jesus said, “Mary has chosen what is better.” Jesus preferred Mary’s company to Martha’s service.

In this downloadable resource, we will examine how Jesus showed love and respect for women. First, we’ll take a look at the heart of the issue—our identity in Christ. Then, we’ll look at the interactions of Jesus and various women in the Bible. We’ll be challenged to consider how his example might change the way we view ourselves.

Ready? Let’s dig in.

Blessings,

*Karen Arneson*

*Contributing Editor, Gifted For Leadership*

*Christianity Today International*

Introduction





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Does Jesus Like Me?*

4

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

# Does Jesus Like Me?



I know he loves me, but I've always wondered if God enjoys me.

*by Jennie McLaurin*

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Singing this children's song always made me feel self-conscious. Not just because of its age appeal, but because of its words. Yes, the Bible says Jesus loves me. And preachers say he loves me so much, he would have died just for me had I been the only person in the world.

But he didn't die just for me. Jesus' love extends to everyone who claims him. Receiving that love can seem like being part of a class-action lawsuit: The terms of agreement apply to me as they do to millions of others. While reassuring, his love hasn't always felt very personal.

And though I believe Jesus loves me, I haven't always been confident he likes me. As a child, I'd been told no one who really knew me would like me. Of course, I'd learned God, who knows me completely, loves me unconditionally, no matter how unlovely I am. But is that love coupled with gladness? After all, I've realized from personal experience I can be loved without being enjoyed.

### **Playing Favorites**

Growing up, I often heard my parents say they loved all their children equally. While I believed my parents, I also knew some

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Does Jesus Like Me?*

5

of my siblings gave my parents more pleasure than the rest of us kids did. I yearned for my mother's face to light up when I entered her room. But all too often, my childhood faults alienated me from her. I was too loud, too bossy, too demanding, too much like my father. Eventually, I withdrew from my mother's presence rather than risk disapproval. Of course, I knew God was perfect and my parents weren't. But one particular image of Jesus convinced me he liked some followers more than he liked others. In fact, Jesus appeared to have a clear favorite. Over and over, in paintings, movies, and Bible illustrations, I saw Jesus surrounded by his disciples at the Last Supper. And one of the men, always pictured next to Jesus, was actually resting in Jesus' lap.

That disciple was John, and he had a nickname that filled me with longing. John was "the disciple Jesus loved." What a claim! This phrase was attached to a warm tenderness. Any assurances of God's feelings toward me seemed detached from love's caress.

In my mind, John was nearly perfect—the meek and mild male counterpart of the Virgin Mary. I wasn't like John. Despite my strivings to emulate him, my personality persisted strong and loud.

I knew God used these traits, allowing me to raise my voice against injustice toward outcasts and the poor. But I couldn't see myself as Jesus' bosom buddy. Jesus reserved that status for gentler souls, such as one of the women at my church who was kind, quiet, patient, and humble. I could easily imagine Jesus opening his arms wide to greet her.

### **Claiming Names**

I grew resentful of these favored followers. The week before Easter, while preparing a Bible study on Jesus' last days, I again encountered John, "the disciple Jesus loved," seated beside him at the table. I wondered how John earned that unfair title. No one, not even Peter the Rock, could top it. Being called a heart's treasure was better than being labeled a hardhead.

I felt ashamed of my envy, and sad. I owed Jesus everything, and he certainly didn't owe me any favoritism. I just wanted to know God was glad to have me at his table, too.

Then, as I read on in my study, I saw a different side of John. Just after Jesus predicted his betrayal and death to his 12 disciples, two of them—John and James—started arguing over front-row seats in





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Does Jesus Like Me?*

6

heaven (Mark 10:32–45). Even the disciples' mother joined in, asking for special favors from Jesus (Matthew 20:20–21).

John's personality wasn't meek and mild after all. When Jesus called John as a disciple, Jesus gave him a very different nickname, one not so endearing: "Son of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). Jesus rebuked this loved one for his pride, power grasping, and foolishness. John was far from perfect!

So how did John become known as "the disciple Jesus loved"? I realized Jesus didn't give John this nickname. John simply claimed it. John wasn't necessarily Jesus' favorite; he simply recognized the ability of Christ's love to redefine self-image. John understood Jesus could know him completely, call him "Son of Thunder" to his face, and still desire his friendship and enjoy his companionship.

This unique love drew John to trust Jesus entirely, to sit as close to him as possible, even to risk rebuke by confiding in him a desire for fame and honor. And John's joy in this relationship spilled onto the pages of Scripture. John's calling himself this nickname in his gospel and Bible letters isn't a threat or an obnoxious boast. It's an invitation to be confident in God's love.

### Getting Personal

God used John's nickname to set me free from my doubts about Jesus' love. If John could call himself this name, I could, too. The more I thought of myself as "the disciple Jesus loves," the more I could trust God with who I really am.

I still have my strong personality and mixed-up desires. I still long to be better than I am. I still might merit the nickname "Daughter of Thunder."

But my new nickname brings me constant joy. Sometimes, I confide to God I really must be his favorite, because he sure does like me. Then I laugh out loud. I'm not worried anymore that Jesus sighs when I enter his presence. I think his face lights up with affection. Because I'm "the disciple Jesus loves." And that love is very personal, for I'm fully loved—and liked—as fully me.

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## How Jesus Related to Women

*Does Jesus Like Me?*

7

### Thought Provokers

- *Have you ever struggled with whether Jesus enjoys you? If so, how?*
- *Do you think women struggle with this issue more than men? If so, why?*
- *What will it do to our relationship with Christ if we don't believe he enjoys us?*

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Jesus and Women*

8



THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

# Jesus and Women

In his treatment of women, as in many other areas, Jesus of Nazareth was a radical contrast to the standards of his times.

*by Evelyn and Frank Stagg*

**T**he world Jesus entered largely discriminated against women. He rejected the false criteria upon which the double standard was built. He measured men and women by the same standards, the inner qualities of character and not by such accidents of birth as ethnic or sexual differences. He affirmed women by his manner, example, and teaching.

### **The Manner of Jesus**

Jesus included women where Jewish piety largely excluded them. Women were excluded from participation in synagogue worship, restricted to a spectator role, and forbidden to enter the Temple beyond the Court of the Women. A woman was not to touch the Scriptures, lest she defile them. A man was not to talk much with a woman, even his wife. Talk with a woman in public was yet more restrictive.

Jesus brushed aside all such discrimination. He astonished his disciples by talking openly with “a woman” at Jacob’s well (John 4:27). His dearest friends included Mary, Martha and Mary Magdalene. There were many women who ministered to (or with) him, following him from Galilee to Golgotha (Mark 15:41).

Having already affirmed Martha by accepting her invitation to dinner, He affirmed Mary’s choice of sitting at his feet to hear him teach (Luke 10:39). He did not question her right or competence to

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Jesus and Women*

9

hear his word, he commended her for choosing “the good part,” declaring that “it will not be taken away from her” (v. 42). Many have sought to take from women like Mary precisely what Jesus affirmed as rightfully theirs.

The story of the anointing of Jesus by “a sinful woman” is amazing (Luke 7:36–50). She showered her love and gratitude upon Jesus, and he affirmed her and her act. Without a hint of impropriety, Jesus let this woman thus touch him and express her feelings toward him. The pious Pharisees were scandalized that Jesus let her do this, and would have forbidden it even if the woman had been “good” and not “a sinner.”

Equally amazing is the story of the woman with an issue of blood who touched Jesus (Mark 5:25–34). According to the code in Leviticus, a woman with an issue of blood was “unclean,” defiling everyone and everything she touched (15:19–33). Had Jesus followed this code, he would have denounced the woman for touching him and demanded her punishment. Instead, Jesus had her stand up and openly identify herself; and then he publicly affirmed her: “Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healed from your scourge” (v. 34). Jesus thus rejected the cruel stigma imposed upon women. He rejected the fallacy that “an issue of blood” is defiling.

### **The Teaching of Jesus**

Jesus also rejected the double standard for marriage, divorce and adultery. He put marriage and divorce in new perspective in answering the question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mark 10:2). It would never have occurred to his questioners to ask, “Is it lawful for a wife to divorce her husband?” Under Jewish law, a wife could not divorce her husband.

Jesus traced divorce to the hardness of human hearts, not to the intention of God. But Jesus did more! He recognized husband and wife as equally free and responsible in marriage and divorce. Significantly, Jesus built upon the story in the first chapter of Genesis (Genesis 1:27, supplemented by 2:24), not the “rib story” as such: “Male and female he made them; for this cause a man shall leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Marriage thus is a partnership, with no double standard in marriage or divorce.

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Jesus and Women*

10

Jesus corrected current understanding of adultery at two points: 1) adultery begins as lust in one's heart, not just when overt; and 2) adultery can be committed against a woman (Matthew 5:27–30). Jewish law saw adultery as a sin against a husband, not against a wife. For a husband to visit a prostitute or an unmarried woman was not seen as adultery. Rape of a single girl was a crime, but not adultery. It was considered adultery only if the rights of a husband were violated.

Jesus declared two things in saying, “The one looking upon a woman with a view to lust has already committed adultery against her in his heart.” Although the main point may be that lust itself is adultery, the charge “against her” is innovative. Jesus rejected the fallacy that adultery is a sin against a husband only; adultery can be committed against a woman.

### **The Risen Christ and Women**

According to the Gospels, women were last at the cross and first at the empty tomb, and the first to see the risen Christ. Peter and the other male disciples first heard of the resurrection of Jesus from women. The risen Christ, at the most important juncture for the Christian movement, trusted and commissioned women to proclaim to men the basic tenet of the Christian faith—he is not dead but alive!

*The Staggs are the authors of Women in the World of Jesus (Westminster Press, 1979). This article first appeared in a 1988 issue of CHRISTIAN HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY magazine.*

## Thought Provokers

- *Can you think of any other examples of how Jesus gave women dignity and value?*
- *The apostle Paul also followed Jesus' example in this. Read about some of the women he knew and relied upon in Romans 16.*
- *How might knowing how Jesus valued women affect the way we view ourselves today?*





LEADERSHIP TOOLS

# The Woman Who Got It Right

Even those wary of church can be drawn into God's family.

*by Sue Edwards*

I'm one of three full-time women on the faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary and during our weekly faculty meeting, I sometimes struggle to find my voice. I want to be like the woman in Mark 7:24–30 who found middle ground between silence and aggression. Her little daughter needed healing, and even though she was a Gentile, she was not afraid to tell Jesus exactly what she needed.

Jesus traveled to Tyre and did not want anyone to know he was there; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, she fell at his feet, begging him to heal her child (Mark 7:24–26). However, he was not there to minister publicly but to secure private time to instruct his disciples—so he denied her request. Perhaps Jesus did not appreciate the interruption.

In ministry, we often find we must go to male leaders for what we need. For a variety of reasons, sometimes these men are not receptive. Back in the 90's, I served as volunteer director of women's ministries in a megachurch. I was at the mercy of the male pastors for resources. But I had not yet found my voice, so during the few meetings with the senior pastor, I clammed up and did not express my needs well.

I taught the Bible to large groups of women—sometimes hundreds—and talked openly with my family and friends, but with





## How Jesus Related to Women

*The Woman Who Got It Right*

12

him I was inhibited. As I interacted with this male leader, I was confused. How should I act? Forceful like a savvy business woman? Demure and shy like I had been taught by a Bible-study leader years earlier? I did not understand that I was his spiritual sister, a sacred sibling, so I did not act like one.

This Gentile woman in Mark 7 could easily have felt confused too, especially since she was not “one of his kind.” But she did not let that deter her. She was direct and upfront because her cause was worthy. Her daughter needed healing. My cause was worthy too. I needed resources to minister to thousands of women in our church. But I allowed this man to intimidate me. Not this woman! I should have taken a lesson from her. She asked directly, but her request was denied nevertheless. What do we do then?

First let the children eat all they want, he told her, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs. (Mark 7:27) Ouch! That hurt! Jesus painted a picture that excluded her. In the passage, the children represented his disciples who were waiting to be fed. The children’s bread was figurative language for the benefits his disciples enjoyed, and the dogs were not street mongrels but probably house pets, who sat under the table hoping for a tasty morsel to fall. Jesus was not comparing her to a Gentile dog, the Jewish derogatory term for outsiders. But Jesus still denied her request—and being compared to any dog, even a pampered pet, could not have been pleasant. But she did not allow hurt feelings to overwhelm her nor did she respond defensively. Instead, she understood that she was not on his agenda for the day. But she persisted nevertheless. She believed her need was worthy to be on his agenda.

Yes, Lord, she replied, but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs (Mark 7:28). Not angry but consensual words. He was right. She was not a disciple or a Jew. But she was somebody and so was her daughter. She did not want much of his time, just a crumb. And with wise, reverent words she continued her argument. He heard her out, was impressed with what he heard, and granted her request. For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter (v. 29). Men respect women who believe in their cause and are willing to make a cogent case, as long as they do so with grace and humility. This Lebanese sister models the healthy balance between drawing back and rushing forward foolishly. I’ll reread her responses the next time I need to speak up.

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*The Woman Who Got It Right*

13

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### Thought Provokers

- *Whether we lead in our homes, churches, or communities, it is likely we work alongside men. As Christian women, we are sensitive to behaving in a godly manner. Maybe we wrestle with the question of submission. How does this affect the strength of our voices as discussed by the author?*
- *How might the idea that Christian men in leadership are our "sacred siblings" free our voices?*
- *What encouragement do we find in the encounter between Jesus and the Gentile woman in Mark 7? What lessons can we learn?*





## How Jesus Related to Women

*The Woman at the Well: Thirsty for Truth*

14

### GETTING DEEPER

# The Woman at the Well: Thirsty for Truth



Jesus showed great compassion for this woman we find in John 4:5–42.

by *Liz Curtis Higgs*

**W**e don't know her name or age. But her conversation with the Lord is his longest one-on-one chat recorded in Scripture. Reason enough to give our sister from Samaria a fresh look.

It was high noon on a hot day. Jesus, tired from traveling, chose a sensible rest stop—Jacob's well outside the town of Sychar—while waiting for his disciples to go into town for food. When our unnamed woman appeared with clay jar in hand, Jesus made a simple request: “Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7).

Uh-oh. (1) Jews weren't supposed to speak to Samaritans. (2) Men weren't permitted to address women without their husbands present. And (3) rabbis had no business speaking to shady ladies such as this one. Jesus was willing to toss out the rules, but our woman at the well wasn't. “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman,” she reminded him. “How can you ask me for a drink?” (John 4:9).

She focused on the law; Jesus focused on grace.

#### **An Offer She Couldn't Refuse**

He began, “If you knew the gift of God ...” (John 4:10). If. A tantalizing invitation. And gift. A truly irresistible offering. Especially “the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:15).

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*The Woman at the Well: Thirsty for Truth*

15

Instead of insisting she pour him a drink, the Lord offered her “living water” (John 4:10). Water from the ground was common, but living water? Now he had her attention.

This polite but gutsy woman pointed out the obvious: “You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?” (John 4:11). Her natural curiosity prompted her to ask questions, as seekers do today. Such queries are no cause for nervousness. Jesus knows how to handle doubt and disbelief.

To quench her spiritual thirst, the Lord first confessed the truth about plain H<sub>2</sub>O: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again” (John 4:13). Then Jesus made a bold promise: “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst” (John 4:14). In one sentence he shifted from everyday life to everlasting life.

Was our girl ready for that leap of faith? Not quite. She wanted whatever he was offering, but only so she could avoid returning to the well for water. If we’re honest, we get this motivation. Eager to satisfy our physical desires, we overlook our spiritual needs.

Time for an intervention.

### **Speaking the Truth in Love**

Jesus told her, “Go, call your husband and come back” (John 4:16). Not an odd request, since women couldn’t converse alone with a man in a public place. But Jesus’ request was more about uncovering truth than about following society’s rules.

When she confessed, “I have no husband” (John 4:17), Jesus affirmed her answer, then gently exposed her sin: “The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband” (John 4:18).

Five marriages didn’t make her a sinner. Due to warfare, famine, disease, and injury, men in those days dropped like flies. A widow became either a beggar, a prostitute, or another man’s wife. Each time, this Samaritan woman had chosen the best option.

But sharing her bed with a sixth man who wasn’t her husband? That was a sin.

Did she fess up? Nope. She changed the subject.

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*The Woman at the Well: Thirsty for Truth*

16

She talked about worship, Jerusalem, the differences between Jews and Samaritans. Again, we get her evasion. Before I knew Jesus as my Savior, if someone steered conversation down a spiritual path, I veered toward religion and away from relationship. Too scary, too personal.

Finally, the woman at the well did her best to shut Jesus down. “When [the Messiah] comes, he will explain everything to us” (John 4:25).

How stunned she must have been at Jesus’ revelation: “I who speak to you am he” (John 4:26). The next moment, the arrival of his followers confirmed his identity and gave the woman time to process the truth: The Anointed One had come!

Overjoyed, she left her water jar and went back into town to urge her neighbors, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (John 4:29).

In any century, our response to the Lord is the same. We confront our true selves, experience God’s grace, and share the good news.

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## Thought Provokers

- *Psalm 42:2 describes the psalmist’s thirst for God. For what are you spiritually thirsty? What promises do you find in Matthew 5:6 and John 6:35?*
- *Despite this woman’s five-husband past and immoral present, her future changed forever because of Christ. If you have a shameful history, what hope can you draw from Titus 3:3–7?*
- *Like the Samaritan woman, Peter and John were compelled to share the good news (Acts 4:19–20). What have you seen and heard about Jesus that you’re ready to share with others?*





BIBLICALLY SPEAKING

# The Adulteress



A stone's throw from grace

by *Liz Curtis Higgs*

**H**er story is scandalous, first word to last. And glorious.

At dawn, the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees tarried by a nameless woman's door, itching to drag her out of bed and into the temple, where Jesus was teaching. Moments later, half-dressed at best, the woman was forced to "stand before the group," like Hester Prynne wearing her scarlet letter, cheeks stained with shame.

The words of the Pharisees were harsh, accusatory: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery." This woman? Look, she wasn't alone in that bed. Where was her partner in crime? Sleeping in? Reading the *Mount Olives Times*? Since Mosaic Law insisted "both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death," how come they weren't both hauled into the temple?

### **Sting Operation**

Listen, the Pharisees weren't interested in punishing the man or the woman. They were after Jesus. And so they threw words at him, sharper than any rocks: "In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

Oh, great. If Jesus told them, "Stick to the Law: Stone her," his grace-filled teachings went out the window. But if he said, "No! Don't stone her," he opposed the Law of Moses, a dangerous move for a rabbi. The Pharisees thought they had him nailed.





## How Jesus Related to Women

*The Adulteress*

18

Breathless with anticipation, the crowd watched as “Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.” This is the only place in Scripture where Jesus wrote something, and we don’t know what it was. Talk about frustrating! Did he list the Ten Commandments to prove he knew the Law? Write out the many sins of the Pharisees? Or scribble, “Don’t go away mad, just go away”?

### Written in Stone

Most scholars think the Lord was doodling. Yup, just drawing lines in the shifting sands of the temple floor, sparing the accused woman from his holy gaze, waiting until the crowd was ready to hear his answer. Finally he stood and said, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

None in the temple that day qualified, and they knew it. None of us do either.

Only one person in recorded history “has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” Only one person could have rightfully condemned her. Only one person could have thrown that first rock.

But he didn’t. That’s not why he came. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Jesus came to save an adulteress that day in the temple, and he came to save you, beloved.

He bent down again to draw in the sand, giving his words time to sink in. Sure enough, “those who heard began to go away one at a time.” How like Jesus, gently whispering the truth into each ear, convicting each heart, one by one.

### The Last One Standing

I’m surprised the woman, who surely was aware of her sins, didn’t head for the temple door after her detractors made their exit. Instead, she stood there as if pinned to the ground with hope. Sinner though she was, could she possibly be forgiven?

Jesus straightened up and met her gaze, then asked, “Has no one condemned you?” Yes, they’d accused her, but they’d not condemned her. Only this innocent man could sentence her to die, yet he held no stones in his hand. Did he plan to punish her with words?

No, he didn’t.

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*The Adulteress*

19

Brave soul that she was, she managed to answer his question. “No one, sir.” She gets extra credit for resisting the urge to deny her guilt or blame her bed partner.

“Then, neither do I condemn you,” Jesus assured her.

She was a free woman. Free! Still a sinner, but forgiven. Still guilty of adultery, but her death sentence had been quietly lifted, then placed on Jesus’ shoulders.

Grace came to the temple that morning.

### A Fond Farewell

The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees missed the Lord’s final benediction, but you can bet those who remained didn’t. They hung on every word. “Go now,” Jesus told her—a gentle release, not a harsh rebuke—”and leave your life of sin.”

We hear you, Lord. What a relief to know that because of your grace, we can leave behind the past, as this woman did, and walk in a whole new direction.

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## Thought Provokers

- *As leaders we suffer our share of finger-pointers. Sometimes, we are guilty. How might Jesus’ response to the adulteress give us courage to lead?*
- *In our many leadership roles, to whom are we accountable? Our families? Our bosses? Who is the final authority in our lives? How might this understanding help us in dealing with all others who hold us accountable?*
- *The author suggests that Jesus doodled in the sand to spare the adulteress his “holy gaze.” Have you ever experienced the grace of God averting his holy gaze? Why is this significant? How might it relate to our roles as both leaders and subordinates?*





FINDING OUR VOICES

# A Good Cry



God can use anything we surrender to him—even our tears.

*by Liz Curtis Higgs*

I cry easily and often. Happy tears, sad tears, over-the-top tears, Hallmark commercial tears—you name it, I’ve leaked over it. Hankies up, girlfriends, if you’re with me on this.

Out of sheer joy, I cry at church more than anywhere else. When I hear a wondrous truth spoken or a glorious song lifted in praise, when I see a new believer step forward or an old saint read the Scriptures, I’m so overwhelmed with God’s presence that tears flow down my cheeks.

Not little drips—buckets. Sheets of water. A monsoon.

Even after 16 years of marriage, this baffles my husband. He looks over at me, eyes wide with concern, and whispers, “Are you okay?”

“Oh, yeah.” I smile blissfully as another waterfall plunges over my chin and pools on my silk blouse. “Couldn’t be better.”

While I’ve made peace with my non-stop tears, I know many women are ashamed of their tearfulness. One day I talked with a dear woman in Missouri named Marcia who thought her tears were a stumbling block to serving God. After hearing me teach about the woman in Luke 7 who anointed Jesus’ feet with her tears, this leaking sister sought me out.





## How Jesus Related to Women

*A Good Cry*

21

Between sniffs she explained, “I want more than anything to help hurting people in my church who go to the altar for prayer. But the minute I hear their stories, I start weeping, which embarrasses me to no end. Now I just hide in the pew.”

“Aha!” I gave her a big hug. “You have a ministry of tears.”

“A what?”

“When you weep right along with people, your tears help keep them from feeling foolish. The Bible tells us to ‘mourn with those who mourn’ (Romans 12:15), and to ‘comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God’ (2 Corinthians 1:4). See, babe? Your tears don’t hurt, they help!”

Later, after I printed off all the Bible verses I could find on “leaking” and sent them to my new friend. I discovered that Marcia got the message loud and clear. She wrote back: “During this evening’s service, a lady in our church knelt at the altar, praying and crying desperately. Guess who God shoved down the aisle to help her? After she shared her needs with me, I did my usual leaking and a whole lot of blubbering. I had a difficult time speaking above the sobs, but I prayed with her and loved her. And you know what? She knew my heart. And God knew my heart.”

(Hang on a second, let me find a tissue.)

She finished with, “One of the verses you sent me said, ‘He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy’ (Psalm 126:6). All my life, I thought my tears were a curse. I just wanted you to know, I’m reaping a harvest of joy in Missouri!”

Marcia’s experience shows God can use anything we surrender to him. Laughter and tears. Joys and sorrows. Victories and mistakes. Strengths and weaknesses. We minister to others best when we offer our true selves—“as is”—not waiting until we’ve cleaned up our act or dried up our tears, but right now, leaks and all.

My role model for crying isn’t Mary or Martha from the Bible; it’s Marcia from Missouri who bravely gave herself to God and trusted him to bring the tissues.

Features





## How Jesus Related to Women

*A Good Cry*

22

*Liz Curtis Higgs, author of 19 books, including Mad Mary (WaterBrook Press), lives with her family—and many boxes of tissues—in Louisville, Kentucky. This article first appeared in a 2002 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

### Thought Provokers

- *Read Luke 7:36–50. How does Jesus affirm this woman's tears?*
- *Do you find it easy or difficult to cry? Why?*
- *How might God use your tears for his purposes?*

Features





BRINGING IT HOME

# Task Master



Is doing it all, all at the same time, really the best way?

by *Liz Curtis Higgs*

**B**usy moms do it out of necessity. Drivers do it at 60 mph. And teenagers do it better than anybody.

Multitasking. No longer mere computer lingo, the word now describes life as we know it. Noshing on a burger while steering a car through traffic while fumbling with directions.

Gone are the days of one task at a time. Now we do everything simultaneously. Work. Play. Eat. Travel. We feel so efficient, so on top of things. Look, Ma ... no hands!

But when one of those multiple tasks includes a human being, we may be missing what matters most: an eye-to-eye and heart-to-heart connection.

I watched a young mother at the post office sort through her mail, talk on her cell phone, and try to keep tabs on her toddler. Nothing too dangerous there. Except she tossed out a letter, only to realize she meant to keep it, called out to her wayward little girl without really getting her attention, and apologized numerous times into her phone, "Sorry ... what did you say?"





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Task Master*

24

The child was clearly frustrated. No doubt the caller on the other end of the line was, too. Both of them received the same unintentional message: “You’re third on my list of priorities right now.” Do we really have to do three things at once to feel productive?

Apparently we do, and I’m the worst of sinners.

While on the phone with a long-winded friend, I open my e-mail, turning down the computer speakers so she won’t hear the telltale sound effects, even as I wave a sheet of fast-food coupons at my husband, pointing to what I want for lunch.

Or I’ll take a stack of correspondence into our family room and tune in a movie I’ve been eager to see. Distracted by the film, I have to read each letter twice, not really connecting with the dear person who’s written to me, nor fully involved with the story on the screen. When a family member joins me and starts to chat, I catch myself scribbling words that make little sense, trying to follow the movie out of the corner of my eye and only half-listening, half-nodding to whatever my loved one is saying.

Is there any hope for a multitasking mama?

Yup. A simple one: Follow the Lord’s example.

When Jesus spoke with people, they had his complete attention. The Bible does not say, “And while he sanded wood and kept watch on a pot of stew, Jesus said . . .” He simply listened, then responded. Individually and compassionately.

In Jesus’ meeting with the woman at the well—his longest one-on-one conversation ever recorded in Scripture—she was amazed a Jew was even willing to speak to a Samaritan: “How can you ask me for a drink?” (John 4:9). The disciples were taken aback, too, when they “returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman” (John 4:27).

Clearly Jesus put conversations first on his to-do list, ignoring what was politically correct or productively expedient. Nothing mattered more than this thirsty woman.





## How Jesus Related to Women

Task Master

25

His disciples got the message: “No one asked, ‘Why are you talking with her?’” (John 4:27).

She got the message, too, putting aside her task in favor of talking to people: “Leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town ...” (John 4:28).

Now it’s our turn to get the message: Relationships aren’t a task. Listening intently is the most valuable gift we can give. And looking into the eyes of someone we care about is time wisely spent.

My New Year’s resolution? Do one task at a time and do it well, always putting people first.

Sure, it’s old school. About 2,000 years old.

Thank the Lord it’s never too late to learn.

*Liz Curtis Higgs is the author of many books, including her historical novel, Fair Is the Rose (WaterBrook Press). She lives with her husband and their two teenagers in Kentucky. This article first appeared in the January/February 2005 issue of TODAY’S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

### Thought Provokers

- *The author says, “The disciples were taken aback, too, when they ‘returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman’” (John 4:27). Why would they have been surprised about this, and what does that tell us about how Jesus valued women in a time when women were not considered valuable?*
- *In our busy, busy lives, we all strive to make the best use of our time. When does multi-tasking become a poor use of our time?*
- *Read Matthew 9:20–22. When the woman with the issue of bleeding reached out and touched the cloak of Jesus, according to the NIV, “Jesus turned and saw her.” Now read, Matthew 15:21–28. Here Jesus does not immediately answer, but when he does he has no need to ask the woman to repeat herself. What do these encounters teach us about how Jesus values us? About how we should be relating to others?*





# Additional Resources

More places for more help.

**Women of the Bible**, a downloadable resource from GiftedForLeadership.com, serves as a guide to get you acquainted with the women of the Bible—as well as the Author of their stories. You’ll encounter Rahab, an unlikely hero, Mary Magdalene, friend and follower of Jesus, Rachel who had it all and wanted more. Then there is Judge Deborah, a role model for women called to lead. You’ll also meet the so-called “Bad Girls of the Bible” and find out what they have to say to you.

**All the Women of the Bible** by Herbert Lockyer, Zondervan, 1988. This complete and insightful guide to the Bible’s most famous and infamous, named and unnamed, women of faith covers the matriarchs, the prophetesses and queens, the women around Jesus, and even the common ladies of the Bible. Learn how their lives teach us that the most extraordinary things can occur from ordinary beginnings, and that the model for authentic femininity lies in God’s plan for each woman. Who were they and where did they originate? What role did they play in the Bible story and how are their lives similar to the lives of women today? All these questions, and many more facts, can be found in this guide to the women of the Bible.

**Twelve Extraordinary Women: How God Shaped Women of the Bible and What He Wants to Do with You** by John MacArthur, Thomas Nelson, 2008. Spend some time with familiar biblical characters Rahab, Eve, Sarah, Anna, Mary, Martha, and women with no names at all, such as the Proverbs 7 seductress and the faithful woman of Proverbs 31. You’ll discover how God shaped the lives of your scriptural sisters and how he wants to mold you.



## How Jesus Related to Women

*Additional Resources*

27

**Remarkable Women of the Bible** by Elizabeth George, Harvest House Publishers. What can 21st-century Christian women learn from their biblical sisters? George says, “Plenty!” Spend time with these ancient models of faith and you’ll soon be striving after Deborah’s wisdom; Jocebed’s selfless motherhood; Ruth and Naomi’s devotion; Hannah’s sacrifice; Esther’s courage...and the list goes on! Adapted from *Women Who Loved God*.

**Jesus Cares for Women** by Helene Ashker, NAV Press, 1989, gives you everything you need to overcome inhibitions and experience the joy of confidently sharing God’s Good News through a woman’s Bible study. The leader’s guide and study are both included. By exploring how Jesus interacted with woman in the Bible, each lesson briefly introduces the gospel in a practical and non-threatening way, putting you and your group at ease.

**Jesus Changes Women** by Helene Ashker, NAV Press, 1998. Faith is like a beautiful flower. It must be fed, watered, and nurtured to grow. Focusing on the lives of biblical women like Deborah, Mary, and others, Ashker’s 8-lesson study will help you blossom in Christ. Discover how to root yourself in God’s love, nourish your faith with Scripture, enjoy fellowship, and more. Includes leader’s notes.

**Jesus: A Meditation on His Stories and His Relationships with Women** by Andrew M. Greeley, Forge. Jesus of Galilee taught through stories, which even today contain the power to startle us out of our prejudices and preconceptions. Now Father Andrew M. Greeley, one of America’s most beloved storytellers, examines the parables told by Jesus in search of a fuller understanding of the man and his message.





## How Jesus Related to Women

*Additional Resources*

28



# Do You Feel **Alone** as a Woman Leader?

**IF** you're a capable, called, and gifted Christian woman in leadership, join the conversation at **GiftedForLeadership.com**. This blog, along with downloadable resources, will help you safely converse with other women about the issues you face. You'll walk away feeling encouraged, supported, challenged, and definitely not alone!



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