

## ***Discipleship***

### ***Gender and Discipleship***

Lesson #5 for February 2, 2008

Scriptures: Mark 5:25-34; Luke 1:26-38; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; John 4:4-30.

1. This lesson is about the place of women in the ministry of Jesus. There are only about 20 women actually named in the Gospels. They lived in what was decidedly a patriarchal society. Men dominated and ruled every aspect of life. Women had essentially no rights. And yet, in their quiet, unassuming ways, they had enormous influence on the life of Christ and on the spread of the gospel.
2. So, how did we get into such a mess. Let us review God's original plan for males and females.
3. God is Love. To become like Him, we need to learn to love. God created us male and female so that we could learn to love and appreciate beings that are different from ourselves. *Viva la difference!*
4. God created marriage and the Sabbath as twin institutions to teach us about love and intimacy. In marriage and in our homes, we learn love and intimacy on a human level ("horizontal"); through the Sabbath, we are supposed to learn love and intimacy with God ("vertical").
5. If we cannot learn to love and appreciate beings that are different from ourselves, we have not yet understood the most basic principle of Christianity.
6. Many people believe that the basic principle of Christianity is a legal one. They explain that Christ died "to pay the price" for my sin. Through "justification" God declares me "right" through a legal process. I then have the "legal right" to a place in heaven. This approach is ultimately very selfish. One scholar who criticized Seventh-day Adventists for their theology put it this way: "When I get to heaven, if even God asks me how I got there, I will show Him my legal right to be there!"
7. God's goal is to "love us into the kingdom," not to provide some basis on which we can selfishly demand our right to be there!

No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian. {MH 470.1}

8. The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. **This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan.** This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, "with healing in His wings." Malachi 4:2. {DA 22.1}

9. Love cannot be commanded. It must be learned by example and practice. The home is the best possible context for us, as human beings, to learn love.

Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives. As the youth go out from such a home, the lessons they have learned are imparted. Nobler principles of life are introduced into other households, and an uplifting influence works in the community. {MH 352.3}

10. Jewish males, along with all the other males that we know about in ancient times, exercised absolute dominance over their wives because they had the physical strength and aggressiveness to do so. By doing so, they effectively destroyed the purpose of marriage. Marriage was abused and became a means to accomplish their selfish goals and to serve their own needs. When Jesus stated that marriage was intended to be a lifelong, loving commitment to one person, even the disciples were shocked. (Matthew 19:3-12)
11. To get a little clearer view of how women were regarded in New Testament times, consider the following passage from Ecclesiasticus (not Ecclesiastes) 42:14: "Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good." The Mishnah added, "May the words of Torah be burned, than that they should be handed over to women."
12. Roman Catholicism has traditionally taught that Mary was immaculately conceived because no ordinary, human, sinful mother could possibly bear in her womb the holy Son of God! Think of the times when Jesus while performing various miracles touched people who were considered unclean. What was He trying to teach us about the relationship between God and His sinful children?
13. A traditional Jewish male prayer said, "Lord, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." And these categories were mentioned in "descending" order intentionally! Two Bible writers (Paul and Luke) seemed to have overcome their male dominated cultural biases and to have reached out to women. Notice how Paul responded to the Jewish prayer by stating, "So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28, GNB)
14. Let us turn now to the material in our lesson for today. If there was one person who had more influence on the life of Christ than any other, it was probably His mother, Mary. Unfortunately, we know virtually nothing about her child-rearing techniques. Think of the story of Mary from where the Bible picks it up. Imagine trying to convince others around you that although you are pregnant—and obviously so—you have never had sexual intercourse with any male including your fiancé! She was probably still a teenager when God picked her! Jesus is the only human being ever born on this earth who had the opportunity to choose His parents. Why do you think He chose Mary? Why do you think He chose Joseph? How many people do you think actually believed Mary's story?
15. We have only a few words of what the angel said to Mary. Do you suppose the conversation was considerably more extended? What else do you think the angel might have said to Mary? Did he come back on a later occasion to explain further? How old was Joseph at that time? He already may have had as many as eight children! (See Matthew 13:55,56; Mark 6:3)
16. Review the story of the interaction between Jesus and His mother, Mary, at the wedding feast

as recorded in John 2. What does that interaction imply about their relationship? Had Mary grown accustomed to relying on Jesus to solve problems?

17. It is obvious from the stories we read in Scripture that some women related to Jesus in very unassuming, quiet, and traditional “female” ways. Martha was like that. Susanna and Joanna (Luke 8:1-3) were probably two more like that. But other women such as Mary Magdalene were much more bold in approaching Jesus.
18. As we look at the stories about women, we note that by far the majority of the women named in the Gospels are mentioned in the book of Luke. Why do you think that is? Could it be that as a physician, Luke was more concerned about women? Or could it be that the Greek audience to whom Luke was writing would be more respectful of women?
19. Review the story of the woman who touch the hem of Jesus’ garment and was healed. (Mark 5:25-34; compare Mark 6:56; Matthew 14:36; Acts 5:15; 19:12) Notice that while men tended to approach Jesus boldly and address Him, sometimes even shouting His name, women tended to try to slip in quietly, hoping just to touch Him. What does that tell us about their position in society? The woman in the story had excessive and irregular vaginal bleeding. According to Mosaic law, she would have been considered “unclean” and was not even supposed to touch her husband or her children until she had been declared clean by the priest. (Leviticus 15:19-30) What was the original purpose of such a law?
20. It is interesting to note that the woman with the unusual hemorrhage had spent all her money on doctors. The Talmud tells us that there are cures for such hemorrhaging including carrying an ostrich egg wrapped up in a linen rag in the summer or a cotton rag in the winter. If that does not seem to stop the bleeding, one can carry a kernel of barleycorn found in the dung of a white, female donkey. From where do you suppose the idea came that those “treatments” might help with hemorrhaging?
21. What do you think actually happened when she touched the hem of Jesus’ garment? Was Jesus a possessor of some kind of magical powers that could flow out through His garments? Whose power actually healed the woman? “The miracles of Christ for the afflicted and suffering were wrought by the power of God through the ministration of the angels.” {DA 143.1} She was not supposed to touch Jesus, a Rabbi. Was Jesus contaminated by her touch? Why do you think Jesus insisted on stopping and pointing her out? If He had not stopped and asked questions, would we have ever heard about this woman?
22. Several reasons may be advanced for Jesus’ not letting the woman slip away quietly, unnoticed: (1) As with the faith of the centurion (see on Luke 7:9), Jesus wanted the faith of the woman to be an example that others might follow. (2) He desired her to carry away the lasting joy of knowing that she had been personally noticed and recognized by Jesus. (3) He wished to erase from her mind any superstitious thought that healing had come about as the result of a mere touch (see on Mark 5:34). (4) For her own benefit He desired her to acknowledge the blessing she had received. To be “saved” (see on v. 28) from her disease, but without being “saved” from the disease of sin would prove only of temporary benefit. 5SDABC 608
23. It would also give her the opportunity to witness freely since her story had been made public already.
24. Read Luke 10:38-42. What would have happened at the home of Mary and Martha if Martha had followed the example of Mary? Would Jesus have finally asked both of them to get up and

prepare a meal? Would He have provided the meal in some way? Certainly, what Martha was doing by preparing food for her guests was not wrong! It was just not as good as what Mary had chosen. How often do we in our daily activities sacrifice or set aside what is really important for what we think is urgent?

25. Read Luke 8:1-3. Where do you think Susanna, Joanna, and Mary got money to support Jesus and the disciples? Did women normally have access to family bank accounts?
26. Read John 4:4-30. The story of the woman at the well of Sychar and her conversation with Jesus is familiar to us. Why do you suppose she was drawing water in the middle of the day when no other women were present? Was it so that she could be “private”? Was it because the other women would not associate with her? Was she truly shocked when Jesus spoke to her? Did Jesus think He would be contaminated by speaking with the Samaritan woman? Jesus used some very clever techniques to awaken a desire and “need” in this woman’s mind, meeting her on her own terms, and convicting her of her need for the Messiah. What kind of reputation do you suppose this woman had in the village? Did everyone despise her? Did the villagers all know her story? Or is it possible she moved to this village with her “boyfriend” to get away from her past history?
27. In this lesson we have noted that Jesus paid little attention to the normal taboos and limitations placed on Him by His society. What do you think we should learn from that?
28. It is very difficult for selfish human beings to reach out to individuals who are essentially different from themselves and truly love them. But, that is the only context given us in the human setting in which to really learn love. Jesus apparently treated all human beings alike. He did not display any obvious bias or prejudice. Can we learn to be like that? Is it possible in our day for human beings to really love other human beings, even their spouses? If we had better marriage relationships, could we serve better as witnesses for God? What biases and prejudices do we live with?
29. What would happen if those of us with the “Larger View” had the most loving, caring, and committed marriages in the world? What if we had no bias or prejudice against any other human being? Would people notice? Would we be correct witnesses for the “truth” about love, the very essence of Christianity (1 Corinthians 13) and God (1 John 4:8,18)?

© 2007 Kenneth Hart, M. D. ***Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.*** [Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last modified: January 5, 2008

C:\My Documents\WPISSTG-Hart\Discipleship\SS-Disciple-5-2008-02-02.wpd