

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

*Disciples of Jesus love and lead in ways
that challenge cultural norms and
transform communities.*

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Women of the New Testament: A Bible Study on How Followers of Jesus Transcended Culture and Transformed Communities

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

The topical guides in the LifeChange series of Bible studies cover important topics from the Bible. Although the LifeChange guides vary with the topics they explore, they share some common goals:

1. to help readers grasp what key passages in the Bible say about the topic;
2. to provide readers with explanatory notes, word definitions, historical background, and cross-references so that the only other reference they need is the Bible;
3. to teach readers how to let God's Word transform them into Christ's image;
4. to provide small groups with a tool that will enhance group discussion of each passage and topic; and
5. to write each session so that advance preparation for group members is strongly encouraged but not required.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take forty-five minutes to complete.

Overview and Details

The study begins with an overview of the women of the New Testament. The key to interpretation for each part of this study is context (what is the referenced passage *about?*), and the key to context is purpose (what is the author's *aim* for the passage as it relates to the overall topic?). Each lesson of the study explores the story of one or more women in the New Testament with a corresponding passage from the Bible.

Kinds of Questions

Bible study provides different lenses and perspectives through which to engage with the Scripture: observe (what does the passage *say*?), interpret (what does the passage *mean*?), and apply (how does this truth *affect* my life?). Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God's Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, *Lord, what do You want me to see here?*, *Father, why is this true?*, and *Lord, how does this apply to my life?*

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember what you're learning.

Study Aids

Throughout the guide, there are study aids that provide background information on the passage, insights from commentaries, and word studies. These aids are included in the guide to help you interpret the Bible without needing to use other, outside resources. Still, if you're interested in exploring further, the full resources are listed in the endnotes.

Scripture Versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. The other version cited is the English Standard Version.

Use any translation you like for study—or preferably more than one. Ideally you would have on hand a good, modern translation such as the New International Version, the English Standard Version, the New Living Translation, or the Christian Standard Bible. A paraphrase such as *The Message* is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and Meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return

to the passage as often as you can during the day for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For Group Study

A group of four to ten people allows for the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other-sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and workplace Bible studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per meeting. This guide is formatted so you will be able to discuss each of the questions at length. Be sure to make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all the background and discussion questions to be covered. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray for one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another resist temptation, assure each other that each person's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. If you wish, you can spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons and discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow your time of sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down what others have shared, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about what they shared at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Taking notes during discussion will help you remember to follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and have clarity on an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating.

Some best practices for groups:

1. If possible, come to the group discussion prepared. The more each group member knows about the passage and the questions being asked, the better your discussion will be.
2. Realize that the group leader will not be teaching from the passage but instead will be facilitating your discussion. Therefore, it is important for each group member to participate so that everyone can contribute to what you learn as a group.
3. Try to stick to the passage covered in the session and the specific questions in the study guide.

4. Listen attentively to the other members of the group when they are sharing their thoughts about the passage. Also, realize that most of the questions are open-ended, allowing for more than one answer.
5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion—especially if you are the leader. Allow time for everyone to share their thoughts and ideas.
6. As mentioned previously, throughout the session are study aids that provide background information on the passage, insights from commentaries, and word studies. Reading these aloud during the meeting is optional and up to the discussion leader. However, each member can refer to these insights if they found them helpful in understanding the passage.

A Note on Topical Studies

LifeChange guides offer robust and thoughtful engagement with God's Word. The book-centric guides focus on a step-by-step walk through that particular book of the Bible. The topical studies use Scripture to help you engage more deeply with God's Word and its implications for your life.

INTRODUCTION

Women of the New Testament

WOMEN ARE EVERYWHERE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. They follow and serve Jesus, seek Him for healing, and play creative and essential roles in the early church. Motivated by love, these women are honest and persistent, often defying cultural gender norms in their pursuit of Jesus. Their bold faith, displayed by their words and deeds, disrupts a male-dominated world.

For much of our history since, however, their stories have been mediated and interpreted through a male-centric lens, which often misses these disruptions. This may mean that you will be surprised when you see what an active and courageous role women played in the days when Jesus and His apostles announced the arrival of the Kingdom of God, and the role Jesus continues to invite all His disciples into today.

In this LifeChange study guide, we will study how Jesus welcomes marginalized and culturally neglected people as disciples, publicly affirms their faith as examples for others, and empowers them to lead and use their gifts. We will also allow the women's words to speak for themselves as they follow Jesus and tell others about Him:

- “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” —Mary (Luke 1:38)
- “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” —the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years (Mark 5:28)
- “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!” —the Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon possessed (Matthew 15:22)
- “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” —Martha, after her brother Lazarus died (John 11:27)
- “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.” —the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:29)
- “I have seen the Lord!” —Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the Resurrection (John 20:18)

As Jesus reveals Himself to these women, they express a remarkable understanding of His identity and mission. Throughout their interactions with Jesus, women are seen, empowered, and commissioned by their Savior in powerful ways. Alongside men, they generously give and serve and teach and lead in ways that help spread the gospel. As we consider these extraordinary women, may we all—men and women alike who follow Jesus—be inspired by their stories, draw closer to Jesus in wholehearted devotion, follow Him in countercultural ways, and partner together to transform communities.

MARY AND ELIZABETH

Luke 1:39-56

THE BEGINNING OF LUKE INTRODUCES us immediately to two women, who at the time the Gospels were written were unlikely main characters in the grand story of God's redemption. It "invites the reader into the world of [Mary and Elizabeth] and begins the story of Jesus from their perspective."¹ Elizabeth comes from the priestly line of Aaron and marries Zechariah, who is himself a priest. She lives a life of righteousness and integrity (Luke 1:5-6) but carries the lifelong societal disgrace of being childless. Mary, on the other hand, is a young virgin, probably between twelve and fourteen years old, who is betrothed to be married to Joseph. Imagine her surprise when the angel Gabriel visits her and tells her that she is "highly favored" and will give birth to the promised Messiah (verses 28-33). Though Mary must have many questions, her response is full of faith: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled" (verse 38).

The angel tells Mary that her cousin Elizabeth, even at her advanced age, is with child. Mary immediately makes the long journey from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea to see her. Elizabeth's child would be John the Baptist, the prophet who would prepare the way for Jesus. Despite their differences in age and situation, Mary and Elizabeth find refuge and strength in one another while God is literally growing something new and miraculous inside each of them. They powerfully affirm and bless the work of God to each other through prophecy.

The events that take place in the beginning of Luke are not just important for Mary and Elizabeth personally but constitute a pivotal point in the story of God's relationship with His chosen people—and ultimately in the fulfillment of God's salvific purposes not only for the Jews but also for the entire world.²

9. During the three months that Mary stays with Elizabeth, the elder Elizabeth must be mentoring her young cousin. Elizabeth is probably an ideal mentor for Mary since, after years of barrenness, she is also experiencing the fulfillment of God's promises. What preparation do you need in this season? What steps can you take to pursue a mentor to help equip you in that preparation?

10. Mary and Elizabeth submit themselves to God and experience deep joy and deep sorrow as they watch their sons grow up and fulfill God's mission in ways they do not expect. When you say yes to following Jesus, you follow Him one step at a time, not knowing all the challenges that will come in the journey. What might help you say yes to God's calling for you, despite the uncertainty and difficulties you may face?
