

The Supporting Cast

Luke 8:1-3

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Summary: Most Christians can name some, if not all, of Jesus' 12 disciples. Far fewer know who Joanna, or Susanna are, or what they did in Jesus' ministry. But as chapter 8 of Luke opens, we see several examples of women, representing far more anonymous servants, who faithfully followed and served Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. From these three brief biographies, we can learn several valuable lessons about our own service to Christ.

Church history would neither exist nor advance, nor be filled with so many testimonies of faith and courage and service, were it not for women who are committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

As Luke records for us the life and ministry of the Lord, you discover that women play an important role in the narrative.

Nearly 40 times, Luke will show us Jesus referring to women, talking to women, healing women, and teaching women—which the rabbis in Jesus' day did not do.

Luke records how faithful women came to the cross, came to the Lord's tomb and then announced His resurrection to the disciples.

Women have played—and continue to play—a significant role in the supporting cast of the church today.

I came across the testimony just the other day of Gladys Aylward. She was born in 1902 to a poor shoemaker and his wife who lived ordinary lives in London, England. In her teens and early adult years, she was destined in her culture to serve as a housemaid, which she did until her late 20s, when she heard of a widowed missionary in China, who needed help in the orphanage she had started in the late 1800s.

Gladys applied to the China Inland Mission and was initially accepted into their program but failed to make progress in the Mandarin language and was finally declined by the mission.

Undeterred, she started saving every penny she could and finally, when she turned 30, she had enough saved to buy one-way passage to China. Since traveling the entire way by boat was too expensive, she planned to go as far as she could by train.

Her train ride eventually took her across Siberia on the Trans-Siberian Railway. The only other passengers were soldiers heading toward the front in a war against China.

She was single, alone; she stood barely 4 feet 10 inches tall and would be nicknamed “The Small Woman” throughout her life. But every inch of her was determined.

Eventually, the train came to a halt and all the soldiers got off, grabbed their rifles, and gear and headed for the front lines. She was told the train would stay there and go no further.

She got her two suitcases—one of which was filled with beans and rice and pots and pans—and began walking back along the train tracks. A day later, nearly dead with cold and exhaustion, she reached the station. There, with the help of an English diplomat, she was given passage on a ship to China.

It wasn't any easier when she finally arrived. She joined this widowed missionary and began attempting to reach out to neighbors there in Yangcheng, China. They were ignored.

They noticed that the town was on a major route used by miners driving their donkeys on their journey.

These women realized that what they needed to do was convert all the spare rooms in the orphanage into a hotel, which they did.

The next time a mule convoy was traveling by, Gladys ran out and took the bridle of the lead mule and pulled it into the courtyard and all the other mules followed suit. And with them came the miners. Food and clean rooms were ready, and the men stayed; and they returned again and again to hear the Bible account of Jesus Christ, and the gospel began to find its way into their hearts.

She was fearless and faithful to Christ.



Who is someone in your life you can describe as fearless and faithful to Christ? What stands out about them? What traits do they have that are worthy of emulating?

It's interesting to me that you never hear—not even one time in any of the New Testament gospels—of a female follower of Christ denying Him, or betraying Him, or abandoning Him.

Adapted from J.C. Ryle, *Expository Notes on the Gospels: Luke* (Evangelical Press, 1879, preprint; 1985), p. 119

From these earliest days, they served with faithfulness and humility as members

of the supporting cast of the ministry of Christ while on earth, and they continue that legacy to this day, in a million different ways.

Luke introduces us to three of these faithful women who played a supporting role in this band of disciples.

Luke chapter 8 and verse 1:

[Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities.

Luke 8:1b-2a

Jesus is effectively commencing His first missionary journey. But as the Lord, along with His 12 disciples, begins broadening his circle of ministry, it creates some logistical challenges.

They're leaving home base in Capernaum. They're will camp out as they travel about, and they will need money and food.

There's no mention anywhere that the Lord appealed for a special offering or passed the plate at the end of a service.

Adapted from Ivor Powell, *Luke's Thrilling Gospel* (Kregel Publications, 1965), p. 184

And remember, he was poor. Literally poor. He needed money too. In fact, on one occasion, He needed to pay his taxes and didn't have the money, so He sent

Peter to the lake to catch a fish, which Peter did; and it had in its mouth the money needed to pay their taxes. That's a fantastic way to pay your taxes.

But Jesus didn't tell Peter to stay at the lake and keep fishing.

So, where did they get the money they needed to buy food and provisions along the way?

If you look down at the end of **verse 3**, you'll find the answer:

. . . and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

Luke 8:3b

You could expand this text to literally read: "and many other disciples provided for their support out of their private means."

So, these women, along with other disciples—men and women—in addition to the 12 disciples literally funded out of their own private resources the earthly ministry of Jesus.

How's that for an investment?

Now these three women Luke is about to introduce to us as members of the supporting team had this in common: all three of them had been cured by Jesus.

The first woman is introduced to us here **in verse 2**, the middle part:

Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out . . .

Luke 7:2b

Now Mary is not to be confused with the prostitute we learned about last Lord's Day; the woman who brought her vial of perfume and anointed the feet of Jesus.

Nowhere in the Bible is Mary Magdalene called or referred to as a prostitute. The medieval church created that tradition without any evidence.

The Gnostic gospels later created their own version of this woman with whom Jesus fell in love, eventually married, and moved with to the south of France, where they raised a family. As the apostle Paul would say it, "That's a bunch of baloney."

But the truth remains, she had lived a miserable life in her home village of Magdala.

Demonic possession typically brought with it strange physical and emotional disorders. Later in this chapter, Luke will introduce us to a demonized man who lived a deranged life, making his home in a cemetery.

This doesn't mean that every case, or most cases, of mental illness is demonic possession.

But demon possession typically brought with it physical and emotional and mental anguish, along with distress and pain.

Adapted from Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible Commentary: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 194

We're not given anywhere in Scripture an account of the moment when Jesus met her, delivered her, and set her free. But

you can only imagine what a day that must have been in her life.

When Luke says here in **verse 2** that Jesus healed these women of evil spirits and infirmities, the word Dr. Luke uses for "healed" is the medical term from *therapeuw* which gives us our word for therapy.

Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 160

It's a comprehensive word that in the 1st century emphasized an entire restoration to health.

No wonder Mary Magdalene wants to do nothing more than follow Jesus over these next two years.

She and other women will serve Him along with the other disciples (Matthew 27:55); she will eventually follow along with other women who trail behind Him weeping as He walks up Golgotha to be crucified (Luke 23:27); she will stay on that hill with other women until the Lord dies (Matthew 27:56); she will prepare spices with other women to anoint His body for burial (Luke 23:56); she will be the first person to see the Lord resurrected (Mark 16:9); she, along with other women, will be the ones to deliver the news to the rest of the disciples that Jesus is alive (Luke 24:10).

That's quite a resume for a former demonized and hopeless woman without a prayer.

Ostracized; unclean; unwanted; avoided; no doubt abandoned by everyone who

might have known her before she fell under the power of the devil.

We're not told how, or how long it was before she was found by Jesus.

What we *do* know is that He found her, just like He found you. And delivered you.



While Jesus may not have delivered you from demon possession, we know He has delivered all Christians from the judgment of sin. How can we give back to our Savior in the same way Mary did?

Lest we relegate Mary's deliverance to some distant past, don't ever forget that Jesus is still delivering people today; and He's delivering people just as easily in the 21st century as He did in the 1st century.

This wasn't a strain on Jesus; He didn't have to buy extra holy water and double the holy smoke and sing some loud monotone chant and utter strange incantations.

Watch Him deal with demonized people in Scripture; He just speaks.

In fact, when Jesus shows up, the demon possessed person isn't helpless; the demons are helpless.

What I love about Mary Magdalene joining this group of disciples is that it highlights the Lord's ability to take

someone hopeless and helpless and give them hope.

Let me observe here and put it into principle form this way:

Having a dark past doesn't handicap the Lord's ability to give you a bright future.

Jesus took someone who was ostracized and gave her a new family of disciples: brothers, and sisters, fathers, and mothers.

Now Luke introduces us to another woman here in verse 3:

And Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager.

Luke 8:3a

We're not told what she was healed from, but she also becomes a devoted follower of Christ.

But it's as if Luke wants us to know that the gospel has reached the upper echelon of Roman society. Luke adds that she's married to Chuza, a high-ranking member of Herod's court.

Adapted from David E. Garland, [Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2011), p. 342

The word Luke uses to define Chuza's position is the title for someone in charge of managing the personal property and financial portfolio of the king. He's the king's personal CFO.

This would have been an incredibly influential role; he would have commanded the respect of the court.

Chuza and Joanna would have been on the friend list of King Herod.

But get this: the king isn't a friend of Jesus.

Herod's father, known as Herod the Great, had tried to find and kill Jesus after the Magi had informed him that the King of the Jews had just been born.

He failed and his hatred of the Jewish people only intensified.

Now one of his sons, Herod Antipas—this Herod here in Luke's Gospel account—will be the one to order the death of John the Baptist. He will be the one to conspire with Pilate to crucify Jesus.

Herod won't be holding any testimony meetings or singing sessions in the palace.

If there was a difficult person to reach with the gospel, if there was a difficult place to find an opening for the gospel, it would be the world of King Herod.

And yet, look who just declared her allegiance to Christ.

But let me make another observation here:

Sometimes God reaches an unexpected person in the most unlikely place.

We're not told when Jesus met her and healed her; we don't know what was wrong with her; but we do know that it was so remarkable that she not only followed Jesus as one of His disciples, but her husband went along with it. She is the wife of Chuza.

I can imagine that this created a buzz in the palace. "Have you heard Chuza's wife got religion? She's turned into a fanatic! She's even giving all her money to this poor rabbi and his followers; have you heard?"

And don't overlook the fact that when Joanna decided to follow Christ, she effectively crossed the railroad tracks, so to speak, she left a pampered life behind to set up camp, wash dishes, fix meals, mend clothing, and take on the most menial of tasks along with these other women.

She's choosing, as it were, to get on a train and travel through Siberia with a suitcase full of beans and rice and pots and pans.

Hard work, long hours, and a lot of miles.

Joanna is now serving alongside people she would have stayed away from before following Christ. What a great picture of the church to this day.

Luke introduces us to another woman here in verse 3; if you don't look

carefully, you might miss her. The text simply says:

*Joanna, the wife of Chuza,
Herod's household
manager, and Susanna.*

Luke 8:3b

That's it. We know nothing more about her.

Mary Magdalene will become rather famous. Joanna is married to a powerful man—they were insiders at Buckingham Palace, probably had their own key to the palace.

But Susanna remains a mystery to this day.

Let me put this into another principle:

Being unknown is not the same thing as being unessential.

While the early church may have known her well, we know nothing more than that she was healed by Jesus, and she followed Him, and she helped serve Him and gave her finances to support Him.

Charles R. Swindoll, *New Testament Insights: Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 194

She is unknown to us, but she was essential to the work of Christ.

Now if you are tempted to think she got shortchanged here; she got left out of the award recognition ceremony, just read on. The text goes on to say:

And Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

Luke 8:3c

Note that: **“Many others” who provided for them out of their private funds.**

These men and women weren't even named.

At least Susanna was named, but these people remain completely anonymous.

We don't know who they are, we only know what they did: the menial tasks of keeping camp, mending and cleaning clothes, and cooking the meals, and giving their money to buy the provisions along the way. All we know is that they helped Jesus.

They helped Jesus—that's it! But wait, isn't that enough?

Isn't that enough!

Most often the Lord has us doing menial things, not miraculous things.



What are some ways you have been called to serve God that may not have seemed glamorous or important at the time? How did God grow you and use you to glorify Him in those moments?

The poet reminds us:

Is your place a small place?

*Tend it with care—He set
you there.*

Is your place a large place?

*Guard it with care—He set
you there.*

Whatever your place,

*It is not yours alone—He
joins you there.*

Adapted from John Oxenham in Robert J. Morgan's [Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations and Quotes](#) (Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 459

We tend to forget we are serving Him; we are serving *with* Him. That's what being a co-laborer means. We work with Him, and He works *with* us and *in* and *through* us.

It will come home to us one day. Can you imagine on that day, standing before the Lord and Him saying to you, "You helped Me. You helped Me in so many menial tasks and unseen acts: cleaning dishes, changing diapers, teaching a lesson, writing a book, praying that intercessory prayer, giving sacrificial gifts, or just a cup of cold water. You dedicated long hours and a lot of miles along the way; but you did it for Me. Thank you for helping Me."

With this perspective, our attitude remains joyful and humble and grateful—and a little surprised—that we were allowed to be a member of His supporting cast.

Like Gladys Aylward, who was interviewed some time before she died and said that she had a meeting earlier with Elizabeth Eliot where Elizabeth had been deeply encouraged by this elderly missionary to China.

Gladys recounted in her interview that she had been surprised God used her like He did because of her limitations: physically and academically.

With humility and humor, she said this in this final interview:

"I wasn't God's first choice for what I did in China. There had to have been someone else—it couldn't have been me. It must have been a man—a wonderful man—a well-educated man. But I don't know what happened to him—perhaps he died; perhaps he wasn't willing. He never came. And God looked down . . . and saw me."

Adapted from internet sources on the life of Gladys Aylward

Beloved, I want you to consider the opening verses of Luke chapter 8 to be an invitation to join this glorious company of dedicated women—this supporting cast of servants; some were wealthy, some were impoverished; but all of them—like us—have this in common: we will serve the One who set us free.

And that will be enough!

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