



## Mary Magdalene – faithful follower of Christ

### Introduction

Mary Magdalene, contrary to popular belief, was not a woman of “ill-repute” saved by Jesus from a life of moral laxity. Rather she was a faithful follower of Christ who showed commitment and constancy in her relationship with him.

Having been set free from oppressive illness by Jesus, she then became one of a number of women followers who gave him practical support and provision from their own resources.

The title Mary Magdalene indicates that she came from the town of Magdala, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee; the use of her home rather than a husband’s name suggests that she was unmarried; a single woman of independent means, which she was free to use in support of Jesus’ ministry.

As the events of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ unfolded, the faithfulness of Mary Magdalene to her Lord developed in ways far beyond her original gratitude and practical service to him. Her constancy in the face of fear and despair was in stark contrast to the faithlessness of most of the male disciples. Surely, it is no coincidence that the reward of being the first to meet the risen Lord was given to one who showed such devotion.

The story of Mary Magdalene can be divided into four episodes:

1. Mary as follower and supporter of Jesus. (Luke 8:1-3)  
This phase of Mary’s relationship with Jesus denotes her as faithful follower and supporter; she portrays qualities of commitment and dependability as she serves him in practical ways. Even at this point we note her prominence, at least amongst the women followers, and her importance to Jesus’ ministry.
2. Mary at the crucifixion. (Mark 15:40-41, Matthew 27:55-56, John 19:25)  
At the cross we see a deepening of Mary’s faithfulness; her loyalty in a threatening situation contrasts with the desertion of so many of the other disciples. Unlike Peter, she is not recorded as having declared unswerving loyalty, but her actions proclaim her dedication to Christ more truly than any words.
3. Mary at the burial of Jesus. (Luke 23:55-56, Matthew 27:59-61)  
The depth of Mary’s faithfulness to Christ is revealed through her steadfast watch over the body of her Lord; even in the midst of her grief and despair for the future. Just as she had served Jesus in life she now makes ready to provide for him in death.
4. Mary at the resurrection. (Luke 24:1-11, Matthew 28:1-10, John 20:1-18)  
We see Mary’s selfless devotion to Christ as she prepares to anoint his body for burial, with no expectation of gain for herself. Mary is rewarded by her encounter with the risen Christ. Rather than losing her Lord through death, she finds that she has gained a new and eternal relationship with him through resurrection.

Each of these episodes in Mary’s life highlights different qualities of her faithful relationship to Christ.

### Ideas for group reflection

Find a way of setting the scene. Consider using some sort of sweet smelling spice (potpourri; scented candle) to aid reflection.

Meditate on the four episodes of Mary's time with Jesus.

Consider different qualities of faithful relationship shown by Mary at varying points in the story.

Explore her emotions throughout the story.

Imagine yourselves in her place at each moment. Would your reactions be the same as hers were?

What do we learn from her witness about faithful relationship; with God and others?

End with a prayer based on Mary's story.

### Prayers

#### We see a gardener

Risen Lord,  
so often encountered,  
so seldom recognised,  
you meet us in the garden of our hearts,  
on the lonely roads of our lives,  
our empty beaches, and greet us.  
But in our blindness,  
we mistake you for someone else.  
Through our tears, we see a gardener;  
in our weariness and wariness, a stranger.  
But you call us back to ourselves.  
Forgive us our hard-heartedness,  
our lack of understanding.  
Open our eyes and our ears to you,  
wherever you are found,  
and give us grace to love you with abandon,  
to throw ourselves into your service,  
as Mary threw herself at your feet,  
as Peter threw himself into the sea.

Amen

*Jennifer Heckart*

Help us to remember,  
when we feel unfairly maligned,  
the faithful witness of Mary Magdalene,  
wrongly recalled as a harlot,  
yet the first to see the risen Lord,  
and the first to proclaim  
the good news of the resurrection.

*Martha Horne (adapted)*

