



A Devotion Like Mary Magdalene

by Beth Jones

Mary Magdalene has been the source of many controversial stories through the ages, with everything from her being a prostitute, to mentally ill, to one of the more extreme stories that she became pregnant with Jesus' child, and went to France where her descendants eventually founded the Merovingian line of kings, made famous by the *Da Vinci Codes* book by Dan Brown. (I don't believe this last story is true at all.)

Most western Catholics believe Mary fled to France in a boat with Mary, Lazarus, and others and lived out her life in a cave for 30 years, before dying at the Chapel of Saint-Maximin, in the Aix En province in southeast France. In the Eastern Catholic traditions, Mary is believed to have traveled with Jesus' mother Mary to Ephesus, in modern-day Turkey. http://departments.kings.edu/womens_history/marymagda.html

Some believe she was the writer of the Gnostic Gospel of Mary, in which the apostles Andrew and Peter disagree with what she shared concerning a vision about Jesus, saying to the other apostles about her, "Did he [Jesus] then speak secretly with a woman, in preference to us, and not openly? Are we to turn back and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?" (Gnosticism was not accepted by early Christianity because of its strange views.) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Mary

No one really knows what happened to Mary or where she went. But no doubt that Mary Magdalene, who was probably from the Galilean town of Magdala about 100 miles north of Jerusalem and whose name was probably Miriam rather than Mary, is a very important figure in Christianity, and is surrounded by much mystery. Perhaps future dedicated research will reveal

more about her life (that is really true!). http://departments.kings.edu/womens_history/marymagda.html For sure, she is one of the people in heaven who I can't wait to meet!

It's now been determined that Mary wasn't a prostitute and that she isn't the unnamed sinner anointing the feet of Jesus in Luke 7. http://departments.kings.edu/womens_history/marymagda.html

What we do know about her that is Biblically factual is that she was a *devout* follower of Jesus Christ and the *first* to witness Jesus after His resurrection! She traveled with Jesus and the 12 disciples, and other women who were believed to be wealthy. We first read about Mary Madalene in Luke 8: 13 (The Message) as one of the followers of Jesus.

"Soon afterward, Jesus went on through towns and villages, preaching and bringing the good news (the Gospel) of the kingdom of God. And the Twelve [apostles] were with Him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had been expelled; and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager; and Susanna; and many others, who ministered to and provided for Him and them out of their property and personal belongings."

This passage says that Mary had seven demons cast out of her. Some people believe what this really meant was that she had some type of mental illness or disorder. Others believe it was seven vices (habitual, immoral sins that she struggled with). I personally believe exactly what the Bible says: the woman had seven demons, and Jesus cast them out!

Whatever the case was, in modern-day terms the woman had some serious issues! That Mary had seven demonic spirits cast out of her was certainly one of the reasons she followed Him so passionately; she was extremely grateful that Jesus had set her free from the oppression, torment, and misery that satan had been causing her, probably for years.

It wasn't enough that Jesus had delivered her. Mary had to be near Jesus *every day*! She had to hear His voice, to see His face. She became His faithful follower, even to the very end. She must have drank every word in that Jesus spoke, and I can see her doing all she could to help Him in any way in the ministry, to serve Him. She must have been in humble awe as she saw first-hand Jesus setting others free, too, as He had her. God was allowing Mary to see the glory!

She possibly witnessed the following miracles: Jesus healing Blind Bartimaeus, who cried out "Son of David, have mercy!" Touching the lepers, society's outcasts and untouchables. Expelling the demon from the man's son who had seizures. Making the man's withered hand whole in the temple.

Healing the man with palsy who was paralyzed, whose four friends lowered him through the rooftop. Raising the widow of Nain's son, as well as Martha's and Mary's brother Lazarus, from the dead.

She may have been there to see Jesus calling short Zacchaeus, a tax collector, down from the tree, and said he wanted to dine with him today. Jesus driving out the money changers in the temple. Jesus saying that the woman who anointed his feet with oil had done a beautiful thing. Jesus feeding the 5,000. Jesus telling the woman caught in adultery that He would not condemn her, to go and sin no more.

God had done miraculous things for Mary, and she was also able to see Jesus doing the miraculous for others. She witnessed His daily love, forgiveness, compassion, and mercy.

Can you imagine the pain she felt, then, when her Lord and her close Friend was crucified?

In John 19:25 (NKJV), Mary is listed as one of those who watched Jesus dying on the cross, along with his closest relatives and the disciple John. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."

There Mary stood, watching Jesus die an excruciatingly painful death before her. Crucifixions, which were meant for the worst of criminals, were a *torturous* means of death. Let's walk through this moment in history, what Jesus really went through, and look at it from Mary's lens. This information is medically very graphic (unpleasant), and is being used solely to show that the great suffering Jesus went through must have caused Mary intense agony.

The following medical details come from David Terasaka, M.D., and follower of Christ. The website is [http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?](http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=3&contentID=3129&commInfo=8&topic=Crucifixion)

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Jesus was most likely in good physical condition prior to his death, as He had been a carpenter – a job requiring much manual labor - and He traveled throughout the country for his years of ministry. (Terasaka)

His physical suffering actually began in the garden. As Jesus was praying prior to going to the cross, knowing what was to come, He was in so much agony that He sweated blood. This medical condition is called "hemohidrosis" or "hemahidrosis," where the capillaries in the sweat pores become fragile and leak blood into the sweat. It has been medically documented in cases

where patients have experienced extreme stress or shock to their systems. (Terasaka)

Jesus had to walk over two miles at night before his crucifixion, and endured betrayal by his friend Judas, abandonment by his disciples, mockings by the religious leaders, and severe beatings before He went to the cross. (Terasaka)

Jesus was flogged before the cross. During a flogging, a victim was tied to a post, leaving the back completely exposed. The Romans used a whip which had small pieces of bone and metal attached to leather strands. Jewish law limited the number of blows at 40 in Deuteronomy 25:3, but later it was changed to 39. (Terasaka)

Roman law didn't put any restrictions on the number of blows. Many times the victim died from the beatings. During the flogging, the skin was ripped off from the back, exposing a bloody mass of muscle and bone like hamburger. Extreme blood loss from the flogging often caused unconsciousness or death. (Terasaka)

When they put the crown of thorns on his head, the thorns may have been one to two inches long, driven into scalp, causing severe bleeding. (Terasaka) Isaiah 52:8 says that the Messiah was beaten so badly that He wasn't recognized, and people were horrified to look at him because He didn't even look human. This is what Jesus went through BEFORE the cross.

Think if this had happened to one of your family members or your closest friends. Picture Mary seeing Jesus in this kind of condition, being totally helpless to do anything about it. Can you feel her pain, her confusion about why God was allowing this, and her heart-breaking sorrow?

Because Jesus was so physically weak from the flogging, and fell, Simon of Cyrene (North Africa) had to help Jesus carry his crossbar, which may have weighed anywhere from 80 to 110 pounds for about 650 yards. At Golgotha, nails about 7 inches long were driven into Jesus' wrists, considered part of the hands. The nails would have been driven between the radial and ulnar nerves, which would have caused continual shocks of pain through his arms. The knees were bent and rotated, causing much discomfort. (Terasaka)

When the cross was upright, there was a lot of strain on the wrists, arms and shoulders, resulting in dislocation of the shoulder and elbow joints. The arms held up and outward caused the rib cage to be in a fixed position, and made it very hard to exhale. It was impossible to take a full breath. (Terasaka) If you've ever gone to someplace that had very high elevation, or had severe sinus congestion, asthma, bronchitis or pneumonia, you know it's

hard to breathe and somewhat uncomfortable and/or painful. This was far, far worse.

To try to relieve the trouble with breathing, the victim would try to raise up his body, which caused great pain in the legs and feet. Then when the pain became too much, he would slump down again, again having much difficulty breathing. This is probably why Jesus spoke in short sentences on the cross. (Terasaka)

Death by crucifixion was slow suffocation. Shallow breathing caused small areas of the lung to collapse, fluid built up in the lungs, and the heart failed. (Terasaka) Can you imagine witnessing a family member or a friend subject to such torture and dying such a slow, painful death?

Can you see Mary Magdalene there, watching all of this in tears, with no way of relieving His pain or hurrying His death so He would stop suffering so much? Have you ever been in that place before, where something was totally out of your control, where your spouse, child, or friend was suffering physically or hurting emotionally, and you could do nothing about it? I have. It's an extremely helpless feeling.

Maybe Mary thought [and hoped!] that Jesus, who had done so many miracles, would come off the cross indeed, as his tormentors were taunting Him to do if He was really the Son of God.

What do you do in difficult circumstances when God is silent, and people who don't believe in Jesus are jeering about your God? How do you respond when your prayers aren't working, and things even seem to be getting much worse? What do you do when it seems all hope is gone in a situation? Just hold on, because resurrection power is coming! "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." (Psalm 30:5, NKJV)

Yet how dark an hour it must have felt to Mary when Jesus said, "It is finished!" and He died! She didn't understand, and neither did the others. Wasn't He the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God, the King? How could He die?

When she went home that night, I am sure she must not have slept, but laid awake, trying to figure it all out, just as we do when we don't understand what is going on in our lives during hard times. We think, "Is God angry? Does He even exist? Did He go on vacation? Does He have call-waiting? Did He forget about me? Why isn't He doing anything about this? Doesn't He care?"

The memories of her friend's suffering must have felt unbearable. She must have felt so afraid, so grieved, and wondered what on earth God was doing. Yet Mary held onto her faith in God, no matter how dark things seemed!

Then in John 20: 11-18 (NKJV), we see her again at the tomb, crying, looking for Jesus' body which was now missing:

"But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

"She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

"She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). "

"Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her."

Mary didn't understand why the things happened to Jesus the way they did. All she knew was that He was her beloved Savior, Deliverer and Lord. And when the third day came, she had to go to His tomb. Then at the grave when she found He was missing, it was almost too much to bear. Where was her Jesus?

Have you ever felt this way? Where is God?

Song of Solomon 5:8 (NKJV) says, "I opened for my beloved, But my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him. I called him but he gave me no answer...I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick!"

Yes, Mary Magdalene was lovesick. Her heart had been captured by Jesus, and she had to find Him. Can you imagine the incredible joy and happiness she must have felt when Jesus said her name and she realized He was ALIVE! Wouldn't you freak out if a dead person became alive? How could it even be possible? Yet nothing is impossible with God! (Luke 1:37)

What situation is in your life that seems impossible? What circumstance is in your life that looks totally hopeless, or is too big and wonderful a dream to believe in for yourself? Start believing for the impossible today –God is able!

Mary did go and tell the others about Him. She obeyed God. Mary, the woman who had seven demons cast out of her, the woman who had so many problems, was now being used mightily by God to spread the good news about Jesus! “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7, Amplified))

Mary, who had been oppressed and tormented by the devil, was free, for whom the Son sets free is free indeed! (John 8:36) Mary, the faithful disciple of Jesus, the woman who loved her Lord and her Friend, had not lost Him after all; He was not missing! He had not gone AWOL! He was not even dead; He was ALIVE!

“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” (Revelation 1:18, NKJV)

Mary, just a woman in a male-dominated culture which often devalued women, was the first to witness Jesus alive, and to tell others about Him!

Mary Magdalene is a woman in the Bible who has been surrounded by mystery and controversy. But there is one undeniable fact. Mary was Jesus’ passionate, dedicated follower. She was grateful to God for all that He had done.

She only wanted to be near her Lord, Deliverer, and Friend, Jesus. She desired to serve Him and to glorify His name. She walked and talked with Him every day, and she loved the sound of His voice, the sight of His face.

Mary could not get enough of Him. She couldn’t stop clinging to Him. She was hungry for Jesus. She wanted more of His love, more of His presence each day. He had been there for her when she needed Him the most. He had delivered her and made her whole. Jesus had changed her life.

She would be faithful to Him. She would follow Him, even until the time of death. And when she found out that He was resurrected, that He had risen from the grave just as He had said, she just had to share the good news with others. She couldn’t contain her joy. Jesus had a mission for her. He was sending her, to use her for His purpose and His glory! Jesus, her Lord and Friend Jesus, was alive!

Mary Magdalene is a woman who is shrouded in mystery, but one thing stands out about her. She deeply loved Jesus, and was His passionate fol-

lower. She was dedicated to Him until the very end. And she was a woman targeted by satan, but whom God set free and chose her of all His followers to see the risen Christ first.

I think that is because God knew how grateful she was for what He'd done for her. Jesus was her dear Friend. I desire an intense and faithful-to-the-end devotion like Mary Magdalene, don't you?

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