

# 4 Audacious Marys

Exploring the bold, fearless and valiant women in Jesus' Life.



Small Group Booklet  
August 2017



## Four Audacious Marys

### *In Jesus' story*

South Africa commemorates Women's Month in August. This is in tribute to the 20 000 women who marched for the dignity of women on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1956. We will therefore use this national focus on women as an invitation to examine some of the stories of women in the Bible, and ask how they speak to us in South Africa today.

During this women's month we look at four women named Mary (Mariam in Aramaic), which was a very common name in New Testament times. We examine four such named women whose lives were changed once they met Jesus. Knowing him made them audacious disciples in a culture where women were diminished in favour of men. His message of love and equality changed lives, and in the process shaped both human culture and history. He taught that men and women are equally loved by God, and that they have equally complimentary roles in marriage, work and life. He included women in his teaching about the kingdom of God, and welcomed them as his disciples (Luke 8:1-3). We shall discover from examining the lives of the four Marys that although they lived in a challenging culture, they audaciously accepted their roles in Jesus' story: **Mary (the sister of Lazarus)** made a stand against stereotypes; she took action and rebelled against prescribed roles. **Mary Magdalene** was released from her past and other people's labels. **Mary (Jesus' Mother)** was faithful and obedient to God's call, despite difficult circumstances. **Mary (the mother of James)** gave all she had to Jesus.

This series invites us to pray for and support women both as individuals and as groups. We will be reminded of women's organizations in our church, and in South Africa, and in other countries. We hope that you will take courage from these women by contemplating their lives, meditating on your attitude towards woman, and supporting a change of attitude towards women in your culture and the world. Let's resolutely endeavour to change our culture with God's love! *"If we are to better the future we must disturb the present"* – **Catherine Booth**

*Nadja & Pete*

*Ps. remember to wear black on Thursdays towards a world without rape and violence.*



We would like to celebrate and support the woman in this country and in our congregation by wearing Black on Thursdays for the month of August. See [www.thursdaysinblack.co.za](http://www.thursdaysinblack.co.za) for more information.

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## The Context

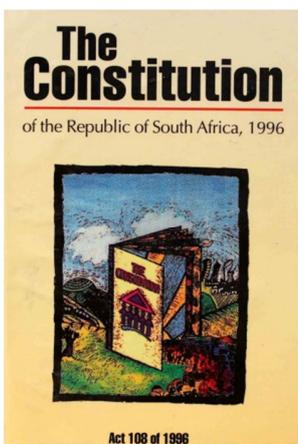
Jesus lived in a patriarchal culture where women had little access to property rights and inheritance, were secluded for being ritually impure, and were regarded as incapable of understanding the things of God without a man present to teach her.



Women were second-class citizens who were mostly treated as property that belonged first to her father, and then once married, to her husband. Often married at the age of 12 or 13, her value in society was just above that of a slave, in a society where men had complete authority over their daughters and/or wives. Women had no civil or religious rights. It was rare for women to own property; they had no formal schooling, and possibly only a basic religious training. She could not hold public office, give testimony, or move around freely in public. A woman's life was her home. There are always exceptions, but on the whole women lived a separate life from men. Interaction with men who were not part of her family was forbidden. Her main role was to take care of her husband, the household and the children. If she was a widow she depended on

the charity of her son, who inherited her husband's property. If she had no son she was obliged to marry her husband's brother in order to retain her place and property in the family.

South African society finds many similarities with the world of Jesus. While gender roles are slowly changing, South Africa is a combination of modern and traditional views, and this complicates the gender-biased landscape. Traditionally, most of the cultures in South Africa were patriarchal, and still in many cases women are commonly treated as submissive nurturers, expected to look after the family and household. Many men refuse to take responsibility for their children, leaving poverty-stricken women to care for fatherless children.



While the South African constitution embraces gender equality, and there are many women that play an active role in the public and economic spheres, we still have a long way to go. We live in a country where minibus taxi drivers strip women for daring to wear a mini skirt, men abuse and in some cases kill their partners, and virginity testing still happens. In many instances there is no equality in the workplace, as women still earn far less than their male counterparts in the same positions, and the 'glass ceiling' of male leadership is a common experience for women. There are 54 000 rapes reported annually, but this is a skewed statistic because many women do not report abuse, because of cultural reasons or personal shame. The struggle for an equal respect for women is far from over. Christian women - and Christian men - need to actively challenge our sexism, and the patriarchal systems that inform this.



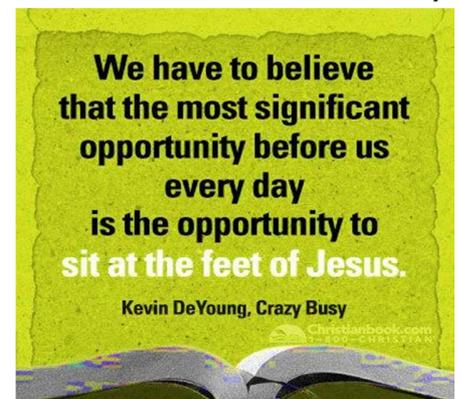
# MARY

## The sister of Martha & Lazarus – WEEK 1



LUKE 10:38-42  
JOHN 11:1-3  
JOHN 12:1-3

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus was also called Mary of Bethany (a region in Judea). It would appear that their home was a place of refuge for Jesus, and that they had become good friends with him. Martha showed her love by preparing food, as expected by the culture of the day. Mary, in contrast, broke the cultural stereotypes by invading the men's space. She went in and sat at Jesus feet, hungry for spiritual knowledge. This behaviour was culturally unacceptable as she was engaging with men – and more specifically talking with a man that was not her husband. To compound the problem, she ministered to Jesus by using precious ointment and lovingly wiping his feet with her hair. Women never ate in men's company or spent time talking to them. Instead they had to be veiled and only seen when serving them. Mostly they stayed in the background. However in this case Mary had come to know Jesus well: she knew Jesus did not discriminate against, or stereotype women, otherwise she would never have dared to join the men.



Many men fear that women will take away their power and authority in society. They feel that they have to defend their territory against women. They also believe that women inherently do not have the knowledge or intelligence to speak on certain topics - especially when these topics are seen as male dominated spheres of society like politics, sports and religion! Even in the church to this day some congregants do not like female Ministers to lead a church: some expect women to organize the catering and the children's ministry (i.e.: to be in the background).

Mary trusted Jesus and so followed her heart and who she believed God called her to be. She did not stay in the kitchen hoping someone else would lead the way for women to break free from societal bonds. Instead, she took action and stepped into the place that God called her. **Note:** this does not mean that women can't work in kitchens! There is nothing wrong with Martha wanting to serve Jesus in the kitchen - if that is where she was called by God. However, if she was doing it because of cultural bonds, it would be very sad. Our lives should be aligned to our calling. Only a life "given away" to Christ, and dedicated to him is worth living. Mary defied all stereotypes, courageously giving her all, to put Jesus first. **Our place is where God calls us to be, go there!**



? If Jesus entered your home today would you recognize him? How would you know that it is him?

? What would he say to you and how would you feel? See the points

below and expand please.

- Turn off the electronics!
- I see your grief.
- We need to spend more time together.
- Where are you?
- Stop worrying!
- The past is in the past.
- Slow down.
- Are you taking care of yourself?
- Your own words.

? **As a woman:** Are you caught in the "kitchen" of not following God's calling because you fear discrimination, or are you living out your dreams in the place God prepared for you? Explain.

**As a man:**

Do we show the same acceptance as Jesus when women bravely enter traditionally male spaces - such sports presenters, building contractors, and church leaders?

? Which cultural stereotype (against women) is most prevalent in your culture today? What action can you take to fight it?

? Do you anoint Jesus in your heart? Are his feet perfumed with your best gifts? Do you sit at his feet with a grateful heart, forgiven in worship? Explain why or why not.



OR *Let's Connect!*

To pray is to spend time with God. It is one of the most important ways to understand the heart of God and create a deeper relationship with God. We might be tempted to think of prayer as changing God's mind - but it doesn't! Prayer changes us to be more in tune with the will of God. The more time we spend with God, the more we are shaped by the Spirit of God. Remember: God does answer prayer. Sometimes God says "Yes", sometimes God says "No", and sometimes God says "Wait". Never stop praying!

**Please pray for your own attitude towards women to change and for opportunities to arise for you to make this world a better place for woman and children. Also pray for our church and its woman's organizations, our country and the other countries in the world where women are still suffering.**



Imagine yourself sitting in your favourite place at Jesus' feet (under a tree, in a field, your room). Feel his eyes looking at you with such love that it feels like your heart will burst. Just be with Him. Listen, pray, worship.

## PRAY FOR / JOIN THE Women's Manyano

The Woman's Manyano, better described as The Prayer and Service Union of the Methodist Church, has over 62 000 members. Their activities are centered on bringing hope and a future for women and children in distress. They generate funds for missionary work and encourage a missionary spirit towards those in need. Ultimately, all of their efforts are to the service and glory of God, as well as for the extension of His kingdom on earth. "Thursday, Saturday and Sunday remain the main days for Women's Manyano Prayer meetings. Women conduct Bible studies, retreats, prayers cells and conventions to look deeply into discipleship. House to house pastoral visits are done for the bereaved, the elderly, destitute and sick, not forgetting their families, church, structure, leaders, congregants, communities, country citizens and community structures." (Taken from the Women's Manyano Conference Report by Mrs Debina Tlhakanye, 2016) Find out more on the Methodist Church of SA's website: [www.methodist.org.za](http://www.methodist.org.za)



## PRAY for / Support POWA



POWA is a women's rights organization that provides services, and engages in advocacy, in order to ensure the realization of women's rights and thereby improve women's quality of life. POWA's uniqueness as an organization is in providing services to survivors, and engaging in social advocacy. Their work is rooted in the belief that change can

only be said to be effective when women's lives are directly improved through interventions. (Taken from the POWA web-site: [www.powa.co.za](http://www.powa.co.za), 2017)

## PRAY FOR:

**South Africa:** Women in South Africa only received equal rights with the Bill of Rights that was captured in the new constitution in 1996. As already noted above, we have much work to do to see women taking a respected place in our society. Tragically, in the 2015/16 year, 142 sexual offenses and 117 rapes against women were reported per day. There are many more women who do not report these violations against them.



**India:** The Indian constitution accords equal rights for women, but life is still very difficult for Indian women. Research shows that 68% of women in the world's second largest nation suffer from some sort of domestic violence. Long held traditions also attempt to discourage giving birth to daughters, and tragically it is estimated that 300 to 600 thousand pregnancies with female fetuses are terminated each year.

## BIBLE VERSES:



2 GALATIANS 5:10  
PHILIPPIANS 1:21  
JOHN 12:25-26  
GALATIANS 1:10-12  
1 PETER 2:21-25  
PSALM 16:11  
PSALM 84:10-12

# MARY

## Magdalene – WEEK 2



MATTHEW 27:55-61  
MATTHEW 28:1-4  
MARK 15:40-47  
MARK 16  
JOHN 20:1-18  
JOHN 19:24-27  
LUKE 8:1-3  
LUKE 24:9-11

Mary Magdalene is nearly always distinguished from other women named Mary by adding "the Magdalene" (ἡ Μαγδαληνή) to her name. This has been interpreted to mean "the woman from Magdala", a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Luke 8:2 says that she was actually called "Magdalene". It is clear that Mary Magdalene had a special relationship with Jesus. She was present at the tomb; she was the first person to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection, and the first to tell the Good News of that miracle. Within the four Gospels she is named at least 12 times, which is more than most of the apostles. Carla Ricci suggests that "The place she [Mary Magdalene] occupied in the list cannot be considered fortuitous", because over and over, Mary Magdalene's name is placed at the head of specifically named women, indicating her importance among the followers of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> In fact she was seen as an apostle in her own right and thus represents the women who followed Jesus. Luke tells us that these women had unheard of freedom and mobility whilst following Jesus. Women normally did not leave their homes except to travel to feasts, visit family or attend to daily chores and if they did it would only be for a short time.

What prompted Mary to step out of this subservient culture and become such a devoted disciple to Jesus? Luke says that she received a special blessing of healing and forgiveness. We are not sure what the "seven demons that possessed her" means<sup>2</sup>, but we know that she was afflicted and that Jesus healed her. Released, she became the person God intended her to be. She accepted his forgiveness and was set free, no longer letting her past actions or others' labels influence her.

Just as God chose Mary Magdalene, despite her past – so God knows our past, and chooses us with perfect insight. He knows what we are capable of and what we can become.

<sup>1</sup> Ricci, Carla and Paul Burns. *Mary Magdalene and Many Others*. Augsburg Fortress, 1994

<sup>2</sup> Luke 8:2 & Mark 16:9



? Are you struggling to get over your past? Have you been discriminated against? Turn to the person next to you and share as much as you are comfortable to do. Pray for each other to let go of the past and hurtful labels.



OR *Let's Connect!*

Please pray for your own attitude towards women to change and for opportunities to arise for you to make this world a better place for woman and children. Please pray for our church and its woman's organizations, our country and the other countries in the world where women are still suffering.



Sit in a quiet place and imagine yourself in a glass house. What are the things you would hate people to see about yourself and your habits? Which things make you cringe with embarrassment? What are you proud of? Meditate on this and then imagine God cleaning your house so that it is empty, and allow him to enter it completely, so that it is only you and him in this sacred space.

### PRAY FOR / JOIN THE MCSA Young Women's Manyano

The **Young Woman's Manyano** grew out of the Woman's Manyano and is for ladies who are not yet married. They have around 7500 members nationally and spend their time with missionary activities, prayer meetings and caring for the sick and bereaved. Healing services are held in societies and on a district level. Find out more on the Methodist Church of SA's website: [www.methodist.org.za](http://www.methodist.org.za)



### PRAY FOR / CONTRIBUTE TO / JOIN THE Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa

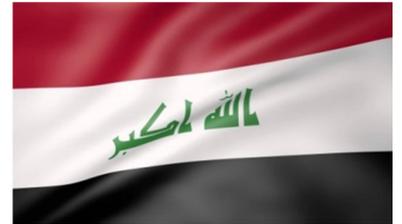
The **Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa (PWMSA)** is a Non-Profit Organization launched in 2006 to coincide with the 50th Anniversary of the 1956 march of South African Women. The Movement was launched to create a broad front for development for the women of South Africa - one that would enable women to speak with one voice to address their



concerns using a single platform of action irrespective of race, class, religion, political and social standing. (Taken from the web-site: [www.pwmsouthafrica.org.za](http://www.pwmsouthafrica.org.za))

## PRAY FOR:

**Iraq** The lives of Iraqi women are extremely difficult. There are no women in senior government roles, but that's not the only field where women are suffering. Over the past thirty years, the number of women in the workforce has severely decreased. And the problem isn't just at work. Religious leaders, and not governmental laws, regulate women's treatment at home and in marriage.



**Pakistan** This country has a huge gender inequality gap, especially in terms of economic participation for women. The treatment of women varies across classes and regions, but most religious groups advocate subordination of women. There is a high percentage of domestic and child abuse and forced marriages still continue to take place.

## BIBLE VERSES:



PSALM 103:12-18  
DANIEL 9:9-12  
MATTHEW 6:14-15  
EPHESIANS 4:31-32  
1 JOHN 1:9-10  
ACTS 3:19-23  
2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-20



# Mary

## The mother of Jesus – WEEK 3



LUKE 1: 46-55  
MATTHEW 1: 18-19  
MATTHEW 13: 53-57  
MATTHEW 27: 55-56  
MARK 15: 40-41  
LUKE 2: 33-35  
JOHN 19: 24-27

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, has been used as an example of Christian womanhood for the past 2000 years. She is without doubt the most famous of the Marys in the Bible. But we do not only applaud her for being the mother of Jesus alone; we study her character and faith because she dedicated her life to God with complete obedience. She definitely did not have an easy life, but this did not stop her living her life with joy.

Mary was a very ordinary betrothed woman awaiting her wedding, when she had to face the ridicule and censure of people as she became pregnant with Jesus. After his birth it didn't necessarily get better. She was so poor that all she could afford at her purification ceremony were two doves. Her family fled the persecution of King Herod and lived as homeless exiles in Egypt. She returned to Palestine to a life of rural poverty, and she is presumed to have lost her husband before Jesus began his public ministry. She teaches us that regardless of circumstances a person can live the "Good News" with courage and beauty. She embodies "motherhood" and the difficult choices we sometimes have to make as mothers.

Because Mary lived close to God, she had the courage to stand next to her son as he was crucified – a mother's nightmare! Discipleship requires faith, love and obedience to God. **Only then can we tackle life dancing the song of our Saviour** (Luke 1:46-55).

*For Reflection:* When the going gets tough, do you trust God to take you where you need to be? Do you believe his promises that he has plans to prosper you? Especially when it feels like

the whole world is against you? Choosing to be positive in life always take courage and audacious living.



? “We have a culture of blaming others and playing the victim in situations!” Is this true for you? Which difficult area in your life do you like to blame on others?

? We judge others (and especially people in the Muslim community) very harshly on how they treat their women. Is it possible that we too disrespect our women? More especially if we reflect on some aspects of our traditional cultural behaviors? Discuss.

? Read Luke 1:46-55. If you had to sing a song to God about your life, what would it say and sound like? Will it be loud and angry, soft and peaceful, emotional, grateful? Please explain why.

? When has a virtuous decision made you very unpopular with others? How did you stay strong?



OR *Let's Connect!*

**Please pray for your own attitude towards women to change and for opportunities to arise for you to make this world a better place for woman and children. Please pray for our church and its woman’s organizations, our country and the other countries in the world where women are still suffering.**



**Read, Pray and Meditate:** I am bursting with God-news; I’m dancing the song of my Saviour God. God took one good look at me, and look what happened— I’m the most fortunate person on earth! What God has done for me will never be forgotten, the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others. His mercy flows in wave after wave over me. He bares his arm and shows his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts. He knocks tyrants off their high horses, pulls victims out of the mud. The starving poor sit down to a banquet; the callous rich left out in the cold. He embraced his chosen child, ME; he remembers and piles on the mercies, piles them high. It’s exactly what he promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now. (Luke 1:46-55, the Message)

## PRAY FOR / JOIN THE MCSA Women's Auxiliary

The Women's Auxiliary was established in the early 1900s, with the mandate, “To advise the various associations as to the best ways of helping the womanhood of the Church to reach the highest and the best character and service”. The first Women's Annual Conference recorded was held on Saturday 26 June 1915. Their Aim is also their Motto – “To Know Christ and Make Him Known” and their goals include the extension of the kingdom of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit by building up and spiritually revitalizing women in Societies, engaging in and encouraging evangelical outreach, being part of the ministry and mission of the Church, keeping postal contact with women unable to attend regular Branch meetings and encouraging involvement in District and Connexional joint projects. There are approximately 4600 Women's Auxiliary members. Find out more on the Methodist Church of SA's website: [www.methodist.org.za](http://www.methodist.org.za)

## PRAY FOR / CONTRIBUTE TO / JOIN THE Business Woman's Association

As the voice of women in business, the **Business-woman's Association of South Africa (BWASA)** is the largest and most prominent association of business and professional women in South Africa. It plays a key role in highlighting the current status of women in leadership and acts as a lobby group that advocates on women's business issues in an effort to transform the SA economy. *(Information directly taken from the BWASA web-site: [www.bwasa.co.za](http://www.bwasa.co.za))*



## PRAY FOR:



**Peru:** Physical abuse and violence against women is a worldwide problem. But nowhere more than in the South American nation of Peru, particularly in more rural areas, where 61% of women have been victims of physical abuse. Even more specifically, 52% of Peruvian women have been slapped by their partner, according to the World Health Organization.

**Turkey:** Turkey has an ongoing struggle with gender equality as only 30% of Turkish women are employed and in some regions not educated at all. Women continue to be the victims of rape, domestic violence and honour killings (member of family killed because they caused shame to the family). In some cases they are also subjected to arranged childhood marriages. They often suffer with physical violence at some point in their lives.



## BIBLE VERSES:



LUKE 1:42-45 (ELIZABETH'S CRY)  
LUKE 1: 46-56 (MARY'S SONG OF PRAISE)  
LUKE 1: 67-75 (ZECHARIAH'S PRAYER)  
LUKE 1: 76-80 (ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY)  
LUKE 2: 13, 14 & 19  
LUKE 2: 29-32 (SIMEON'S PRAYER)  
LUKE 2:34-35

# MARY

## Mother of James – WEEK 4



MARK 16: 1  
MATTHEW 27:55 -56  
MARK 15:40  
LUKE 24:10

This Mary is the mother of James (a disciple of Jesus known as “James the Younger/Less), and his brother Joses/Joseph. She was one of the women disciples of Jesus who witnessed his crucifixion and went to the tomb to anoint his body with spices. Like the others, this Mary traveled with Jesus and was taught by him. Although women were not allowed to lead or fulfill pivotal roles in any sphere of society, this woman was different: she had money, which she used to support the ministry of Jesus and the disciples. It was uncommon for women to have control of finances in those times. Jesus changed that, he allowed women to blossom into what would traditionally be seen as male roles. Mary, along with woman such Joanna, the wife

of Chuza – Herod’s steward – and Susanna, played an important role in Christian history and traditions with their various contributions (Luke 8:1-3).



Whatever the circumstances that brought her there, an independently wealthy woman was very difficult to find in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. She risked her financial security by sharing her money with Jesus and the disciples. This was an incredible gift to them. She must have believed in the message and teachings of Jesus enough to give all she had. Her determination to follow Jesus made her one of the first witnesses of Christ’s life. What an example!

Like Mary, we all have resources allocated to us, and the choices we make with the opportunities we are given show what we really care about. *For thought:* when we do not give away what we have, our already-full hands will struggle to receive the blessings God has waiting for us.

The way Mary lived her life with selflessness and dedication must have influenced her son James to become an Apostle. As parents we are not only our children’s care-takers – but also their primary examples. We have to teach our children to use the opportunities given them with responsibility and accountability to God, other people, the world, our country, and each other. **When we honour God with our lives, possessions and choices - we invest in what will last, not in earthly security or pleasure, but in eternity (Matthew 19:21).**



? It is often said that you can say a lot about a person when you see how they spend their money. What do your spending habits reveal about you?

? Acts 2:44-47 The Message (MSG)

***Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.***

The early church shared all they had. How would you feel if the church asked you to share all you have? What do you think of this as a way to give witness? Explain.

? All of us have blossomed because of the love and care of a woman. Share with your group your appreciation for one woman in your life.



OR *Let's Connect!*

**Please pray for your own attitude towards women to change and for opportunities to arise for you to make this world a better place for woman and children. Please pray for our church and its woman's organizations, our country and the other countries in the world where women are still suffering.**



Imagine your life as a tapestry, what is the picture? Do you think that God intended it to be this specific picture? Where is God in this picture (a character, a golden thread, absent)? Sit in silence and pray to God to help you define what your contribution to his story is. And if it is not the picture you have of your life, to help you to change it.

**PRAY FOR / JOIN Soul Sisters @ BMC**

Soul Sisters was started to connect women from all cultures and ages to spend time in fellowship. They meet the first Saturday of every month to listen to an inspirational speaker for a few hours. They started meeting early 2017 and have had many successful meetings. Do you have “connect groups” at your church? What do you love doing that you can share in fellowship with others? Start a group!

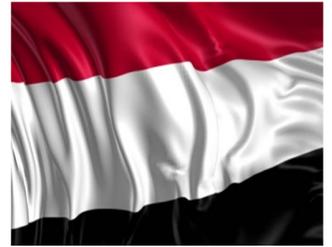
**PRAY FOR / CONTRIBUTE TO / JOIN THE Empowerment Institute**

The IMAGINE program from the **Empowerment Institute** is designed to empower women in challenging life circumstances to envision and create new possibilities for their life, family and community through participation in a training program called the “Empowerment Workshop.” This training program has successfully been applied over the past 30 years in numerous countries worldwide. Women all over the world, find their voice, express their power and live their dreams – holding their communities in their hands. (<https://www.imagineprogram.net>)



## PRAY FOR:

**Yemen:** The World Economic Forum (WEF)'s annual Gender Gap Report ranked the small Middle Eastern nation of Yemen as the worst for women out of the 136 countries listed. Access to education for girls is severely limited, as many are married before they reach their eighteenth birthday, leaving the female literacy rate at a dismal 35%. As you can imagine, these statistics continue to hurt women later on in life—the pay gap is astronomical, with women making just 30% of what men do.



**Nepal** Throughout the world, women typically have a longer life expectancy than men. This is not the case in Nepal! This Southeast Asian country, governed by patriarchal communities, often sees women's lives dictated by their husbands, fathers, or sons. Marriage early on in life is the norm for Nepalese women, but education is not—just 25% of women are enrolled in higher education institutions.



## BIBLE VERSES:



GENESIS 13:14-17  
DEUTERONOMY 12:8-10  
DEUTERONOMY 15:7-9  
MATTHEW 6:30-33  
LUKE 12:29-32  
I TIMOTHY 4:11-14  
ISAIAH 55:1-5





## SOURCES CONSULTED

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**This book was produced and printed by the Grace of God, and with contributions from: Pete Grassow & Nadja Atkinson – Co-Writers, Kerry Wetton – Cover design, Carol Roodt – Proofreader and Bendi Jabulani Mashinini – Printer.**

**Bryanston Methodist Church  
AUGUST 2017**