

Maybe you've seen the movie "Sybil?" It's from the 1970s, super scary. It's a true story about a woman who had dissociative identity disorder, or multiple personalities. Trust me on this, guys, ...even on their worst days, your wives or girlfriends are nothing like Sybil. I know, because I was like Sybil. I was possessed by seven evil spirits. The Bible doesn't say when I became demon possessed or how I behaved, but use your imagination.

Depending on which evil spirit took control, I could be passive or aggressive, quiet or violent, or behave like the most wanton woman in town. In fact, that particular demon was in control of my life one summer day. I sat on the outskirts of town to lure men into my evil life. Jesus and his disciples walked by as they were traveling from Cana to Capernaum, and I accosted them. Jesus rebuked the demon, and I fell to the ground, just fainted. When I awoke, he took my hand, and helped me stand, and told me to "Go, and sin no more." Jesus. From that day on, I began to follow Jesus from a distance, just to hear what he had to say, to serve him in any way I could.

This story may help you to imagine my life. The Bible only says three things about me before the crucifixion of Jesus, although commentators and painters have imagined much more. The Bible says that my name is Mary, called Magdalene; it says I was cured of seven demons; and it says I supported Jesus out of my own means.

My name has come to be Mary Magdalene. Many commentators believe that means I came from Magdala, a small fishing village on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. That village's synagogue was rediscovered in 2009, and the village is now archaeological wonder and an important tourist site. It is certain that Jesus traveled by Magdala when he traveled on the path from Capernaum to Nazareth or Tiberias.

Luke wrote that seven demons had come out of me, while Mark wrote that Jesus had driven them out.<sup>1</sup> You can be assured that the demons were fixed on my destruction.

I was one of the first woman to follow Jesus, but far from the last. Other women started joining me. Susanna, another woman Jesus had healed. She wasn't poor like me, though, so she could really help Jesus from a financial point of view. The woman who helped the most, both financially and politically, was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager. That was Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 16:9

I believe God intervened directly to add Joanna to our group. Her husband was very wealthy, and could also direct other resources our way. More importantly, he was always aware of what Herod Antipas was doing, and he influenced Herod by controlling the information that Herod had obtained. Chuza wasn't able to save John the Baptist, but he did deflect Herod's attention away from Jesus on many occasions, and gave Jesus news that might have encouraged him to take a few trips out of the region.

In the Jewish world, women were not considered property, like they were in the Roman world. But many of our women were not well educated.

Maybe that explains one reason why women were attracted to the teachings of Jesus. They could understand his teachings. Unlike the Jewish rabbis who spent most of their time with every dotted "i" and crossed "t" and nuance of the Jewish language, Jesus tried to teach important lessons in a simple way. He used parables that we could understand and apply to our lives.

The first parable I ever heard Jesus tell was to a large group of people who had gathered from many towns. He motioned to a man planting a field nearby and said, "A farmer went out to sow his seed." We all looked to the east and saw a man casting seed from a small sack. Jesus described exactly what the man was doing, but it was something we had all seen so many times, we didn't notice anymore. We knew that the man would have to cast seed on different types of ground, and that his results would be proportionate to the type of soil the seeds landed in. Yet, without further description, we all knew that Jesus was talking about something much more important than farming. But some of us weren't quite sure what those important things might be. For the rest of our lives, whenever we saw a farmer, we would reflect on that story and what it could mean.

Later, Jesus explained to the apostles and what he meant, and we women got to overhear the conversation. For once, women got to hear the intimate secrets of a wise rabbi. Jesus explained how his teachings and the Word of God were like the seeds, and people's hearts were the different types of soil. Each of us went to sleep that night hoping our hearts were the fertile soil that would return a hundredfold. None of us wanted to have the rocky or thorny hearts that would reject his teachings, but we understood it was a warning that some of us did have such hard hearts and would eventually be exposed.

One windy summer day, Jairus the synagogue leader came to Jesus and begged him to heal his only daughter. She was only twelve years-old, and you can imagine how distraught he was that his only daughter was dying. You can also imagine that Jairus knew that he and his wife would not likely have any more children. Jesus responded to Jairus' request immediately.

Jesus had to fight his way through the immense crowd to walk toward the house of Jairus. As he did, Jesus stopped and stared at the people around him. "Who touched me?" he asked. Jairus about had a fit because he was frantic about his daughter and wanted Jesus to run. Peter,

always the sarcastic one, said, "Master, everyone is crowding in and touching you." Jesus replied, "Power has gone out from me, so someone touched me in a very different way."

A woman, seeing that she would not go unnoticed, admitted she had touched Jesus, and that she had been healed. He just looked at her with compassion and said, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." Years later, Dr. Luke told me that she had been bleeding for twelve years. (She stops as the impact of this washes over her.) She had impoverished herself by seeking doctors to heal her, nothing had worked. It wasn't until then that I realized what a great miracle had happened that day. I missed it because of what happened next.

A servant from the household of Jairus arrived and announced that his daughter had died, and that he should not bother Jesus any more. Jairus almost collapsed with grief, but Jesus said to him "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." Looking back, I think that was the first time I ever heard Jesus command someone not to be afraid, but it certainly was not the last. When I later learned the story of how Jesus waited to come to Lazarus until he was dead, I wondered if he hadn't done the same thing with Jairus' daughter by paying attention to the woman who was healed from bleeding.

Anyway, Jairus must have believed, because Jesus kept walking to his house. When he arrived, he told the mourners to quit wailing because the girl was not dead. They laughed at him because they *knew* she was dead. Taking only Peter, James, John and the parents into the room, Jesus simply took the girl's hand and commanded her to get up. Her breath of life returned to her, and she got up. Like a good Jewish mother, her mother gave her something to eat as a first response. Jesus told everyone not to tell anyone what had happened, but I suspect they could not really keep it quiet.

I told you that Jesus healed me of seven demons, but that was just child's play for him. Across the lake from my hometown of Magdala was the region of the Gerasenes. This region was well known for having a man...demon possessed...a demoniac, ran around naked, lived in tombs, could not be held down even with chains.

Jesus decided to go to that region, so his apostles took him. Upon landing, the demon-possessed man appeared and, rather than attacking Jesus, he fell at Jesus' feet and began shouting, "What do you want with me? Don't torture me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God!" Jesus replied, "What is your name?" The man...demoniac replied, "Legion", because there are so many of us."

Maybe the man wasn't being literal, because a Roman legion had 5,000 men. But, the number of demons in him certainly dwarfed my measly seven. Even though Jesus had never eaten pork, and so didn't disdain its taste, he still ordered the demons to leave the man and enter a huge herd of nearby pigs. These pigs rushed over the steep bank and drowned in the Sea of Galilee. You can only imagine that the pig herders rushed back to town and told what had happened.

When the people from town arrived, they found the former demoniac, man, dressed and sitting peacefully at the feet of Jesus. The townspeople freaked out and asked Jesus to leave their region because they were so overcome with fear, so Jesus got in the boat and prepared to leave. However, a most curious thing happened next. The man asked to go with Jesus! But Jesus commanded him to return home and just tell people what God had done for him. He did, and all of the people were amazed.<sup>2</sup>

That's all we have to do... is be you willing to tell people what God has done for us. If a former demoniac can, who knows what the results will be if you do? The Bible seldom tells us about what happens to people who Jesus healed, but this is one case where I think it does. The next time Jesus arrived in the area, the people welcomed him. I think the former demoniac man may have been one of the most impressive evangelists of all time.

I was a faithful follower of Jesus until the end of his life, and I am not exaggerating. I watched at a distance with other followers while Jesus hung on the cross and died.<sup>3</sup> I watched Joseph of Arimathea place the body of Jesus in a tomb and roll the large stone over the entrance.<sup>4</sup> At dawn of the Sunday after Jesus was killed, Mary and I went to the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, and an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled away the enormous stone. Then, he sat on it, on the top of the stone, it was so scary that the guards of the tomb passed out, like dead men. He spoke to us...to women! "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" It was so...(she can't find the word) Then, "He's not here, he's risen." Oh my...(she can't finish her sentence) We ran, to tell the disciples of the Good News.<sup>5</sup> But before we had gone far, Jesus appeared to us. He told us not to be afraid, but to tell his disciples to meet him in Galilee.<sup>6</sup> I finally got to tell the disciples of all of my news. I started with the greatest piece of news in the history of mankind. "I have seen the Lord!"<sup>7</sup> I have seen the Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 5:20

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 27:56

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 27:61

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:1-8

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 28:9-10

<sup>7</sup> John 20:18