DAY 1: John 20:11–18

The first person to ever remind me that women are equal to men and that women with vision are unstoppable was my adoptive grandfather. The pastor of a country church in eastern Oregon, he ensured I had room to see myself as Jesus saw me: as a passionate young woman of color who believed in the life-saving message of Jesus Christ. Before I had even graduated high school, he invited me to share from the Scriptures to his congregation of less than fifty people, most of whom were over fifty-five. As I gave my impassioned plea to love God and love people, to allow the fire of the Spirit to be all consuming, he was the first to respond by standing up, turning around, and kneeling at the pew to pray. I had a truth to tell, and he took it upon himself to root me on. For his generosity and conviction I am forever grateful.

In scriptural debates over whether women can minister, share, or speak truth to power, it’s wise for us to look at how Jesus himself tasked Mary Magdalene, a supporter of Jesus’s ministry and devout follower, with relaying the message of the resurrection. From the text, we gather that she was fiercely loyal to Jesus and his ministry. However, according to scholars, in the first century her word would have held no merit in a court of law, or in many cases the court of public opinion, as it was believed that women couldn’t be trusted to tell the truth due to fear of punishment or because they only sought personal gain. Yet, Jesus treated women with the utmost respect, honor, and grace. He allowed them to lead within his ministry and he empowered them. He was countercultural, casting vision for a woman’s place within the ancient world.

Jesus invited women in and then he sent them out to be ambassadors of hope, goodness, and restoration.

**REFLECTION QUESTION:** How have you allowed women to influence your understanding of the gospel or the world around you?
In my Sunday school lessons, I remember hearing the story of Naaman, who was healed of leprosy after dunking himself in the Jordan River. I was amazed at how a man could be known and cleansed by the God of an Israelite slave girl. It was Naaman’s slave girl, captured and forced to serve Naaman and his wife, who had the idea for Naaman to visit the prophet Elisha in Samaria. A girl, far from home, was heard and believed when she spoke up to suggest potential healing for her master. This girl’s belief in her conviction, that her God is a healer, was not deterred while she was captive to foreigners. Her God was good, capable of healing, and she passed this truth along to a suffering Naaman.

As women and girls are heard rather than silenced when they have a conviction or truth to tell, the world will improve. Naaman’s nameless servant is among millions of other women and girls throughout history who have spoken up to advance societies, call out social ills, and speak truth to power when oppressed. Women’s voices, although stifled for different reasons throughout history, remain a tool for contributing to human flourishing.

**REFLECTION QUESTION:** What women through history have moved the moral arc toward justice? What can we learn from them?
DAY 3: 2 Samuel 11

The story of David and Bathsheba has been told and retold time and time again. It has been made into movies, weaved throughout sermons, and sometimes used as an example for women of what not to do. It’s a tragic story of loss, heartache, and exploitation. At first glance it may appear that Bathsheba was an active participant in the events of 2 Samuel 11, yet a closer examination reveals she was most certainly not. While Bathsheba cleansed herself after her cycle, a voyeuristic King David beckoned her, and she had no choice in the matter. He was the king, and she was a woman with no right to reject his call. He took advantage of his position and power, and she was at his mercy. She didn’t ask for it, look for it, or deserve what happened to her.

There is room to lament how stories are twisted to paint women as deserving of misconduct, whether in Scripture, our history books, or in our newsfeeds. The assumption that women somehow perpetuate or invite misconduct only halts any sympathy necessary for her healing. As you read of Bathsheba’s experience, allow yourself to lament how women have been subjugated, silenced, and then slandered for misconduct committed against them. The heart of God invites wholeness and restoration, goodness and mercy, after we’ve lamented what’s been broken and lost.

REFLECTION QUESTION: How have you seen dominant narratives silence or subjugate women?
DAY 4: Genesis 16

Surrogacy by servants within a household was not seen as culturally inappropriate in the days of Abraham, especially if infertility was an issue. However, Hagar’s forced surrogacy by Abram and the treatment she endured by Sarai make clear that Hagar had been dealt a hand that she likely wouldn’t have picked for herself. As she calls God “the God who sees me” we can see that although she was mistreated by Sarai and forced to carry a baby, she knew that the God of all intimately saw her, knew of her situation, and the angel of the Lord spoke over her future.

As we grapple with complex situations void of respect for women, we can be reminded that the divine, the God who hung the stars and arranged the planets, sees women. He sees their struggles, he is not blind to their afflictions, and he meets them where they are in life. He is near to the brokenhearted, and he won’t push us away. He is faithful and does not will for women to be harmed but for their potential to be unleashed for the advancement of the gospel.

REFLECTION QUESTION: Who has God been to you?
DAY 5: Esther 4:11–16

Even as a queen, Esther could not appear unannounced before her husband. When faced with the opportunity to speak truth to power, her life was on the line. In our modern day, when a woman has an unpopular truth to report, she may fear slander, threats against her, or loss of income, opportunity, or proximity to power. She’s often faced with choosing a commitment to her convictions or her commitment to those who’ve given her space to work or worship.

As followers of Jesus we have an opportunity to lend our strength to women—to stand by those bravely speaking up and to serve as allies to ensure all women are treated fairly. We can count the cost of bucking systems and employ our resources and voices to ensure women are valued, treated with respect, and that the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice, where it belongs. Esther did just that. Mordecai lent his strength, and we can too. Together we can right wrongs and stand with Jesus as all women take their place as ones who are beloved and valued.

REFLECTION QUESTION: In what ways can you ensure women are heard within your community?