

What fears or uncertainties hold you back from sharing your story of how Jesus has changed your life, and how might preparation help you overcome those hesitations?

How does Jesus' counter-cultural inclusion of women in His ministry challenge us to examine who we might be overlooking or undervaluing in our own faith communities today?

Mary Magdalene's entire backstory is summarized in less than one sentence, yet her freedom became her testimony. What does this teach us about the power of simplicity when sharing our faith?

In what ways might our modern Western culture's focus on the physical and secular cause us to overlook genuine spiritual battles or bondage in our lives or the lives of others?

The sermon distinguishes between spiritual oppression and physical or mental illness while affirming both require God's help. How can the church better support those who need both spiritual prayer and clinical care without suggesting one approach shows stronger faith?

Mary Magdalene experienced complete darkness through demonic possession before complete freedom in Christ. What areas of partial freedom in your life might Jesus be calling you to surrender for complete healing?

Mary stayed with Jesus through His arrest, crucifixion, and burial when others walked away. What does her faithfulness in darkness teach us about discipleship during our own seasons of confusion or loss?

Jesus called Mary by name in the garden when she couldn't recognize Him through her grief. When have you been so consumed by pain that you failed to recognize Jesus' presence, and how did He reveal Himself to you?

Why is it significant that Jesus entrusted a woman with a dark past to be the first witness of His resurrection, and what does this reveal about who God chooses to carry His greatest messages?

If you were to write your three-part story (before Jesus, meeting Jesus, life after Jesus), what would each section include, and who in your life needs to hear it?

## Small Group Guide: This Is My Story - Mary Magdalene

### Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to receive what God wants to teach through Mary's story.

### Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Question: If you had 60 seconds in a parking lot conversation to tell someone how Jesus changed your life, what would you say? What makes that feel easy or difficult for you?

### Key Takeaways from the Sermon

Everyone has a story worth telling - Most Christians struggle not because they don't have a story, but because they've never learned how to tell it.

Jesus dignifies the overlooked - In a culture that marginalized women, Jesus invited them to be disciples and learn from him.

Mary's story shows complete deliverance - From seven demons (complete bondage) to complete freedom in Christ.

Darkness is still real today - While not always demonic, bondage shows up as anxiety, depression, addiction, grief, and other struggles.

Freedom is the source of our testimony - When Jesus sets you free, He gives you a story to tell.

## Discussion Questions

### Understanding Mary's Story

1. What stood out to you most about Mary Magdalene's story? Why do you think the Gospel writers mention her so frequently despite giving so few details about her past?
2. The sermon mentioned that Mary's story is "one that you see before you hear." What does this mean? How did Mary's life demonstrate her freedom before she had to explain it?
3. Read Luke 8:1-3. Why is it significant that Jesus included women among his disciples? How does this challenge cultural norms then and now?

### Recognizing Darkness and Bondage

4. The pastor distinguished between demonic possession and other forms of darkness (mental health struggles, addiction, etc.). Why is this distinction important? How can we take both the spiritual and physical aspects of our struggles seriously?
5. The sermon described Mary's seven demons as representing "complete bondage." What does bondage look like in our modern context? What are some areas where people today feel "not fully in control"?
6. Discuss this statement: "You can be this close to Jesus and still not see him clearly through your pain." Have you experienced this? What helps us recognize Jesus in our darkest moments?

### Finding Freedom in Christ

7. Read John 8:36. What's the difference between partial freedom and being "free indeed"? Share examples of what complete freedom in Christ looks like.

8. The sermon mentioned that freedom can be both a "significant moment" and a "sacred journey." Which has been more true in your experience? How does understanding this help us support others in their freedom journey?

9. Mary didn't find Jesus—Jesus found her. How does this truth change the way we think about our own salvation story?

### Telling Your Story

10. The pastor gave a simple framework: "There was a time in my life... Then I met Jesus... Now my life is not the same." Practice sharing your story using this framework with your group (2-3 minutes each).

11. What fears or hesitations keep you from sharing your story with others? How can this group help you overcome those barriers?

12. Read John 20:17-18. Why do you think Jesus chose Mary—a woman with such a dark past—to be the first witness of the resurrection? What does this tell us about who God uses to tell His story?

### Personal Reflection (5-10 minutes)

Take a few quiet moments to consider:

Is there an area of my life where I'm still living in bondage rather than freedom?

Have I fully embraced the freedom Christ offers, or am I settling for partial freedom?

Who in my life needs to hear my story of freedom in Christ?

What next step is God calling me to take?

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Choose one (or more) of the following:

Write Your Story - Use the framework from the sermon to write out your testimony in 200-300 words. Practice telling it in 60 seconds or less.

Share Your Story - Post your story on social media using #thisismystory, or share it with one person this week who needs to hear it.

Pray for Freedom - Identify one area where you're struggling with bondage. Share it with a trusted friend or this group and commit to praying together for freedom.

Support Someone's Journey - Reach out to someone you know who's struggling and offer to walk alongside them, whether through prayer, counseling, or simply being present.

Take a Next Step - If you identified an area where you need help (counseling, pastoral care, medical support), make an appointment this week.

Group Prayer Time (10-15 minutes)

Prayer Focus Areas:

Confession: Acknowledge areas where we're living in bondage rather than freedom

Intercession: Pray for group members struggling with specific strongholds (anxiety, depression, addiction, grief, etc.)

Thanksgiving: Thank God for the freedom He's already brought to our lives

Boldness: Ask God for courage to share our stories with others

Healing: Pray for both spiritual and physical/mental healing for those who need it

Consider: Following the sermon's invitation, have group members who need prayer come to the center of the room while others surround them and pray.

### Closing Thought

"When Jesus sets you free, He doesn't just change your life. He gives you a story to tell."

Your story—no matter how messy, incomplete, or ordinary it may seem—has the power to point someone else to Jesus. Don't wait until it's perfect. Tell it now.

### Looking Ahead

Continue writing and refining your story this week

Be ready to share testimonies of how God used your story next time you meet

Consider inviting someone new to the group who needs to hear stories of freedom in Christ

### Additional Resources

For Mental Health Support: Encourage group members to seek Christian counseling if needed

For Addiction Recovery: Research local Christian recovery programs (Celebrate Recovery, etc.)

For Spiritual Warfare: Recommend books on spiritual freedom and identity in Christ

For Testimony Training: Consider doing a group workshop on sharing your faith story effectively

## This Is My Story: A 5-Day Devotional Journey

### Day 1: When Jesus Calls Your Name

Reading: John 20:11-18

Devotional: Mary Magdalene stood weeping in the garden, unable to recognize Jesus through her tears of grief. Then He spoke one word: "Mary." Instantly, darkness gave way to light. Her Savior wasn't lost—He was risen! Sometimes our pain blinds us to Jesus' presence, even when He's standing right beside us. We search desperately for answers while He waits to speak our name. Today, pause and listen. Jesus knows your name. He sees your tears. He hasn't abandoned you in your darkness. The same voice that called Mary from death to life is calling you right now. Will you recognize Him when He speaks?

### Day 2: Freedom from Complete Bondage

Reading: Luke 8:1-3; Mark 5:1-20

Devotional: Mary Magdalene had seven demons—complete bondage, total darkness controlling every part of her life. Yet Jesus set her completely free. Perhaps you're not demon-possessed, but you know what bondage feels like: anxiety that never quiets, addiction you can't break, depression that steals your joy, or shame that won't release its grip. Jesus doesn't offer partial freedom or temporary relief. He promises, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Your struggle may be spiritual, mental, or physical, but the source of freedom remains the same. Jesus meets you in your darkness and leads you into light. Freedom may come in a moment or through a journey, but it always comes through Him.

### Day 3: Dignified, Included, and Valued

Reading: Luke 8:1-3; Galatians 3:26-29

Devotional: In a culture that marginalized women, Jesus did something radically counter-cultural: He welcomed them as disciples. He dignified Mary Magdalene and other women, inviting them to learn from Him, travel with Him, and support His ministry. If you've ever felt overlooked, undervalued, or pushed to the margins, hear this truth: Jesus sees you. He includes you. Your testimony matters. Your story has weight. The same Savior who entrusted the greatest news in human history—the resurrection—to a woman with a dark past is entrusting His gospel to you today. You are not defined by what others think or how society values you. You are chosen, called, and commissioned by Christ Himself.

#### Day 4: The Story You're Afraid to Tell

Reading: Mark 5:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Devotional: Mary's entire story fits in half a sentence: "Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out." That's it. No elaborate details, no dramatic retelling—just the simple truth of what Jesus did. Yet that simple testimony was powerful enough to change lives. You may think your story isn't dramatic enough, polished enough, or theological enough to share. But stories don't need to be long to bring people to Jesus. They just need to be true. "There was a time in my life... then I met Jesus... and now my life is different." That's enough. Your story doesn't have to be finished to be told. It just needs to point others to the One who sets captives free.

#### Day 5: Staying When Others Walk Away

Reading: John 19:25-27; John 20:1-2, 11-18

Devotional: When crowds disappeared, Mary stayed. When disciples fled, Mary remained. At the cross, at the tomb, in the darkness—she was there. Freedom in Christ isn't just a moment of deliverance; it's a lifetime of devotion. Mary didn't follow Jesus because it was convenient or popular. She followed because He had given her life back. Her loyalty wasn't rooted in what she could get from Jesus, but in gratitude for what He had already done.

Where are you when following Jesus gets hard? When others walk away, will you stay? True discipleship is tested not in the miracle moments, but in the waiting, the suffering, the uncertainty. Mary's devotion teaches us that those Jesus sets free become those who follow Him faithfully—no matter the cost.

As you complete this devotional journey, take time to write your own story. Share it with someone this week. Use the simple framework: There was a time in my life... then I met Jesus... and now my life is different. Your story matters. Tell it.