

## Forgotten Followers from Broken to Bold

### Group Discussion Questions

1. *Forgotten Followers* portrays women as followers, eyewitnesses, disciples, patrons, and apostles of Jesus. How have you thought about women of the gospels up to now?
2. What experiences shaped Mara to have low self-esteem, to doubt, fear, and lack of trust in others? What readers would relate to Mara? As depression, worries, and negative self-talk return to attack Mara, what actions does she learn to address them? How can we have healthy self-esteem without being either self-effacing or proud? How can we increase the self-esteem and confidence of those around us?
3. Compare how Maria of Nazareth is portrayed historically vs in the novel. Circle any characteristics you see in Maria: meek, bold, afraid, confident, submissive, authoritative, proactive, wise, liar, faithful, adulterer, teacher, obedient, brave, assertive, or honourable.
4. Did the novel portray the woman at the well, Photini, in a new light? Compare her story to that of Nicodemus. Contrast John 3:16 to John 4:13. Circle descriptions of Photini as shown in John 4:1-4: condemned, immoral, unclean, foreigner, divorced, sinner, adulterer, knowledgeable about Scriptures, shunned by apostles, seeking spiritual understanding, faithful believer, respected by her community, ignored by her community, brought others to Jesus, provided hospitality.
5. Joanna hides her Greek side because she is afraid her family or community will exclude her. Why do dominant cultures suppress the beliefs, language, and traditions of minorities? When was a time you had to hide a side of yourself? Joanna feels her experience qualifies her to speak about racial equality. What have you experienced that qualifies you to speak on that topic?
6. Compare the portrayal of Mary Magdalene in the novel to the traditional view. Which of the following are true based on the eight biblical references to her (Luke 8:2-3, Matthew 27:55-61, Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 15:40-47, Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-11, John 19:25, John 20:1-18) Is she: a prostitute, Jesus's romantic interest, unmarried, sinful, healed of demons, a devoted disciple, financial patron of Jesus, sinful woman who anointed Jesus's feet in Luke 7, woman who anointed Jesus's head in John 12, sister of Martha/Lazarus, present at Jesus's death and burial, first witness to risen Jesus, authorized as an apostle by Jesus.
7. Mara's teacher called her a daughter of Eve and accused her of tempting him to lust by her appearance, clothing, and behaviour. Why is being like Eve a derogatory term? Who is at fault that the teacher abused Mara? When do we blame and shame women today?
8. Discuss what is true/untrue about the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50 (Keket in the novel). Does Jesus condemn or commend her? Who does Jesus instruct and correct in this passage?
9. How does Jesus react when a woman blesses the womb and breast of Jesus's mother (Luke 11:27-28)? What does Jesus teach her about her value, purpose, and which women God blesses?

10. Why is Maria hurt when Jesus says that whoever hears God's word and follows it is his mother, brother, and sister? What is the risk of Maria deriving self-worth from giving birth to Jesus? What sources of self-worth might be a risk for women today?
11. Jesus says he came for the children of Israel and refers to a Canaanite woman as a dog (Matthew 15:21-28). What reasons might Jesus have had for first ignoring her request and later healing her daughter? What groups in our memory have been treated like dogs or other animals? What reasons through history have Christians used for marginalizing groups?
12. Jesus frees Galia from stoning after she is caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). All those who wanted to stone her were also guilty of sin. Why don't we focus on how they also escape punishment for their sins?
13. Jesus frees Rena from being in Satan's bondage for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17). What is the significance of calling her a daughter of Abraham? Do you feel like you are an equal heir to God's promises? When have you felt unworthy or undeserving?
14. Does Jesus criticize Martha for her worry or her priorities (Luke 10:41-42)? Does Jesus judge Martha or free her? Are the sisters simply good hostesses, or does Miriam anoint Jesus as a prophet and Martha serve as a minister?
15. Martha declares her faith (John 11:17-27), as does Peter (Matthew 16:13, Mark 8:27, Luke 9:18). How does it matter that the Bible includes male/female faith declarations? Why is one more well known?
16. Over the centuries, Mary the sister of Martha has been conflated with Mary Magdalene and with the sinful woman who washes Jesus's feet in Luke 7 (Keket). How has this merging of women impacted our view of Mary Magdalene? How has it impacted our view of Mary, the sister of Martha?
17. The novel shows women at the last supper. How does having women at the Last Supper impact how much you feel valued by Jesus? Why have many images of the last supper portrayed only men?
18. The risen Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), the women on the path (Matthew 28:8-10), and Clopas and companion [Mara] (Mark 16:12, Luke 24:35). Why might God have chosen to have women be the first witnesses? Why are women missing from the list of first witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8? Why was Peter's name added as the first witness on this list?
19. Throughout the novel, Mara wants to be chosen. When Mara's walls of anxiety dissolve, she finds she has a gift to encourage others. What makes it hard for us to know and use our gifts? What do you feel God has gifted or chosen you to do?
20. Forgotten Followers may be read as a parable, an earthly story revealing a spiritual truth. What truth does it reveal? Does Jesus authorize both men and women to go and make disciples, baptize new believers, and teach others what he has told them? What is your main take-away from the novel?