

General Programs

2013

Authored By:

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# **Easter: Biblical Witnesses to Resurrection Hope**

## Purpose:

The purpose of this program is to help women recall various resurrection accounts in the Biblical record, to hear again our Biblical sisters in their own words and voices, and learn how their experiences can give lessons for our lives. Specifically, we will examine the stories women who loss loved ones and how they handled grief and despair and how those were turned to joy and hope.

## Suggestions for Leaders:

- Ask five women to participate in the Easter program. Give each their scripture and script. Ask them to read their scripture from various versions of the Bible and to study their script. Encourage them to study and pray about their character. Encourage them add their own insights to their presentations. They may want to wear an outfit or carry an item that helps them to identify with their character. Some women may also research on the Internet to learn more about her Biblical sister. Each is to tell her story as if she were the woman. She can explain where and when she lived; whether she was married or widowed at the time of her story; whether her life was comfortable or difficult; whether she was wealthy or poor; whether she had servants or was a servant; was she a friend of a prophet or Jesus; and what their relationship was. Assign or allow each woman volunteer to tell a Biblical sister's story:

- o The sister from Zarephath: 1 Kings 17:17-24
- o The sister from Shunem: 2 Kings 4:8-37
- o The sister from Nain: Luke 7:11-17
- o The sister from Galilee: 8:40-42, 49-56
- o The sister from Magdalene: Matthew 28:1-10

Other options:

- o Martha of Bethany: John 11 (see Luke 10:38-42 to learn more about her character)
- o Mary of Bethany: John 11 (see Luke 10:38-42 to learn more about her character)
- o Tabitha of Joppa: Acts 9:36-42

Each woman is to prepare a two to five minute talk or she can use the printed script.

- Prepare the Worship Center with various scarves or beautiful materials; a Blessing Box; a potted plant; and an open Bible. Arrange on the table randomly but beautifully.
- Before the meeting arrange for someone to lead music or use a recording.
- Set up stations for women to talk and share their thoughts. If this is at tables, place a Blessing Box in the center of each small group area.

## Introduction:

The woman who is the sister from Magdalene is the hostess of the session. She will greet each woman (modern and Biblical) as she enters the meeting space. When the women are seated and it is time for the session:

**Narrator:** Hello sisters I am Mary of Magdalene and it is my pleasure to introduce you to some special guests who have come to visit. Each Biblical sister will share her story of resurrection. I have invited them because we are people who need two or three witnesses in order for us to believe. I pray that you will be attentive and welcome them to our group. Please join me in welcoming our sister from Zarephath.

**Sister from Zarephath:** Hello sisters, let me tell you my resurrection story. I live in Zarephath and I am the mistress of the house. It was the time of a great famine in the land and the woman who works for me brought home a prophet – a miracle worker. The famine had been great and I told my servant woman that she and her child would have to leave. I could no longer pay her. I gave her a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I wished I could have given more but I had to feed my own son. Shortly she came back with Elijah and the more she cooked the more we had – no matter how many cakes she made with the oil and meal, there was always more the next day.

After some time my son became ill. It was so severe that there was no breath left in him. I said to Elijah: “what do you have against me? I know you are a man of God. You have come to remind me of all my sins of selfishness and thoughtlessness – and caused my son to die as a result of my sins!” But rather than condemn me, he told me to give him my dead son. He took my son from my arms – carried my son into the upstairs room where the prophet had been staying and laid my son on his bed. Elijah prayed to his God asking why this calamity had fallen on me. Then he stretched himself on my son three times and cried out that God would restore my son’s life. The Lord listened and gave life back to my child! Elijah brought me my son – alive! God restored my joy and my hope! My son was my only child and my husband was already dead – so I would have no more children. All I could say in my hour of joy was: “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord is in your mouth!”

**Narrator:** Thank you so much sister from Zarephath. That must have been a time of both despair and joy! Now, please help me in welcoming our next guest: our sister from Shunem.

**Sister from Shunem:** Hello sisters, I am from Shunem and let me tell you my resurrection story. I am a woman of wealth – from my family and from my husband’s family and we have been able to prosper in this world’s goods. One day I met a man, a prophet of God named Elisha and I invited him to our house for a meal. Afterwards, whenever he came through our town he would come by for a meal. After a while I suggested to my husband that we should build on a little room so he and his servant would have a place to rest or spend the night on their journeys. Because Elisha was so godly and kind my husband agreed.

One day Elisha asked his servant to ask me what he could do for me. I think he wanted to repay of for our hospitality. The servant suggested that the prophet could speak to the army officials or the king to take care of any “problem” we might be having. I explained that I lived a comfortable and peaceful life with my kinfolks and neighbors and had no need for such services.

Elisha called me again and said in a year I would have a son. I told him not to tease me as my husband was old and we had not been blessed with children. But I did conceive and was blessed with the most beautiful son your have ever seen!

One day my son went out to the fields to be with his father while they were harvesting. He complained of a severe headache so my husband sent him home with one of our laborers. I cradled and rocked my son on my lap – but at noon he died. I laid him on Elisha’s bed and closed the door. I sent word to my husband to send a servant and a donkey so that I could find Elisha. My husband questioned me, thinking that I wanted to invite Elisha to our home for a festival, not knowing that our son was died. I told him all would be well because I didn’t want to alarm him – our son was the apple of his eye!

I told the servant that we must hurry. I found Elisha at Mount Carmel. Elisha’s servant questioned me but I was determined to only speak to the man of God. I told him I didn’t ask for a child – I even told you not to tease me – but to have a child and lose him was more cruel than the shame of being barren.

Elisha sent his servant ahead to my dead child and when he returned he told his master that there were no signs of life in my child. I accompanied Elisha to the house and the room where my son’s lifeless body lay. Elisha closed the door and I didn’t see

his actions, but I heard his prayers to the Lord. I also heard my son sneeze seven times. The servant called me and when I came my son was given back to me alive! I fell at Elisha's feet, bowing to the ground. I took my son – alive and well – and I was filled with joy and praise to God!

**Narrator:** Thank you so much sister from Shunem. I can't imagine the joy of having a child after waiting so long and the agony of losing him. You are most blessed to have your son restored to life! Now sisters, please help me to welcome our next guest: our sister from Nain.

**Sister from Nain:** Hello sisters, let me tell you my resurrection story. It was the worse and best day of my life. I live in the city of Nain with my only child, my son. On the day I met Jesus he, his disciples and a large crowd of people were entering the city. As they approached the city gates I was exiting with my mourners as we were carrying my son to the cemetery. He was my only son and my husband was already died. I would be alone and destitute. He had died that very day and I was surrounded by those that had gathered to help me in my time of great grief.

When Jesus saw me in my tears he stopped and looked at me with loving eyes. He said, "Do not weep." My thoughts were that it is fine for you to tell me not to weep – but how can I help weeping when all hope is lose. Even my reason for living is gone! To my surprise Jesus went over to the bier and touched it. Those carrying my son's body stood still. Then Jesus said to my son; "Young man, rise!" And my son sat up and began to speak. Then Jesus presented my son to me! Among us there was fear and joy, amazement and laughter. For me there was only relief and joy! My son who was dead was now alive. My fears of the future were gone! Hope was restored. My son and I know that a great prophet was among us and that God had looked favorably upon his people! God had looked with favor on me and my son!

**Narrator:** Yes sister from Nain, God did indeed look upon you with favor! Now sister, please help me to welcome our next guest: our sister from Galilee.

**Sister from Galilee:** Hello sisters, let me tell you my resurrection story. I am married to Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. We have a twelve year-old daughter who was having some medical problems. You know some girls have severe pains and

headaches as their hormones change, but we had no idea that the process would make her so ill. It got so bad that my husband said he would get Jesus to see if he could heal her. While he went our daughter died. I sent word to my husband that he need not bother Jesus as it was too late. The people of the synagogue and the professional mourner arrived immediately. There was great wailing and crying.

You can imagine my surprise when my husband arrived home with Jesus and his disciples in tow. Jesus took charge. He did not allow anyone to enter our daughter's room but my husband and me; his disciples Peter, John and James; and himself. I had joined in the weeping and wailing for my daughter so I didn't understand this action. But he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." The mourners laughed at him, because if it is one thing that we knew for sure it was that she was indeed dead. But when Jesus had closed the door he took her by the hand and called "child, get up!" My daughter's spirit returned and she got up as if had not been ill. Jesus told us to feed her.

We were astounded and filled with joy. The day we thought our world had ended was the day we saw God do a miracle in our lives! Now we believe him with all our hearts!

**Narrator:** Thank you sisters for sharing your resurrection stories. Do any have additional questions for any of our sisters? (Allow time for 2 to 5 minutes of questions and answers.)

Now please get into groups of three or four and take ten minutes to discuss the following question:

1. What do you see in common in each of these stories of resurrection?
2. How had they been blessed by God before this situation in the story?
3. How were they blessed as a result of the resurrection?
4. Have you had a situation in your life where you felt that all was lost and there was no hope?
5. How and when has God given resurrection power in your life?

*After 10 minutes:*

Sisters I suggest that you pray for the women that were in your discussion group from now until our next gathering. Now let us gather for worship.

## **Worship:**

### **Call to Worship**

**Leader:** On that first Easter morning, as the sun was dawning, Jesus rose triumphantly from the dead. The earth shook as the angel rolled the stone away.

**People:** No grave could hold his body down. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

**Leader:** As Mary Magdalene and the other Mary looked on in fear, the Risen Lord revealed himself to them, and they departed with great joy.

**People:** Rejoice! And again I say rejoice! For Christ Jesus has broken the curse of death and destroyed the power that it once had over us.

**Leader:** Give glory to God, who humbled himself, even to death on a cross. Give glory to the exalted Christ!

**People:** The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is given to each of us and to all those who believe on him.

**Leader:** Let us receive this spiritual power and use it wisely for the liberation of all God's people.

**People:** Let us make a joyful noise unto the Lord. For there is none like him who can break the chain of oppression, evil, and the grave. He is risen and is seated at the right hand of God.

**All:** The Risen Christ! The Resurrected One! Praise him! Praise his Holy Name.

**Hymn:** He Lives! *Chalice Hymnal*, 226 or *African American Heritage Hymnal*, 275 or hymn of your choice.

**Prayer:**

Gracious and Loving God, we are so thankful for all that you do for us. You have given us life and the good earth. You have given us resurrection stories so that we might have faith and believe in your wonderful grace and love. Lord, give us eyes to see all the wonderful things that you provide. For your holy word and the ability to read and understand we give you thanks. For your blessings of salvation and a wholesome relationship with you, we give you thanks. Amen.

**Our witness:**

**Narrator:** Now let me tell you my story. I know you have heard it many times, but I never get tired of telling it. I am one of the women that ministered to Jesus and his disciples during his earthly ministry. I was also there the day that Jesus was crucified by the Romans. That was the day we lost all hope. The most precious, kind, loving, compassionate person that we had ever met was lied about in an illegal trial and sentenced to without due process.

My sisters and I felt there was one last act of devotion that we could give to our beloved friend and teacher. We rose before dawn on the first day of the week to anoint Jesus' body. We felt a great earthquake. We saw the angel of the Lord sitting on the stone. The angel's appearance was like lightening and his clothes were as white as snow. The angel said: "Do not be afraid, I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him. This is my message for you.'" We left the tomb with fear and joy and ran told the disciples. Then Jesus met us and said, "Greetings!" We fell at his feet and worshiped him. Jesus told us not to be afraid but tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee.

I now know that Jesus' resurrection has given us eternal life. He is our great high priest and his once for all sacrifice has given us eternal life. Now we remember weekly as we share in communion God's great love for us.

**Closing Hymn:** Christ the Lord is Risen Today, *Chalice Hymnal*, 216 or *African American Heritage Hymnal*, 282 or hymn of your choice.

**Benediction:**

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

**Potential Service Project:**

- Volunteer to tutor for children or adults at a local literacy program – this will change a life.
- Volunteer at a feeding program or homeless shelter – change a life.
- Volunteer to do grocery shopping for a member of your congregation.
- Purchase or make hats, scarves and gloves for a children's program.
- Offer to be a prayer partner for someone you know has a high stressed life.
- Visit someone who lives in a nursing home or assisted living facility.
- Pray for the women in your discussion group.

**References:**

*All of the Women of the Bible* by Edith Deen, Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, 1955

