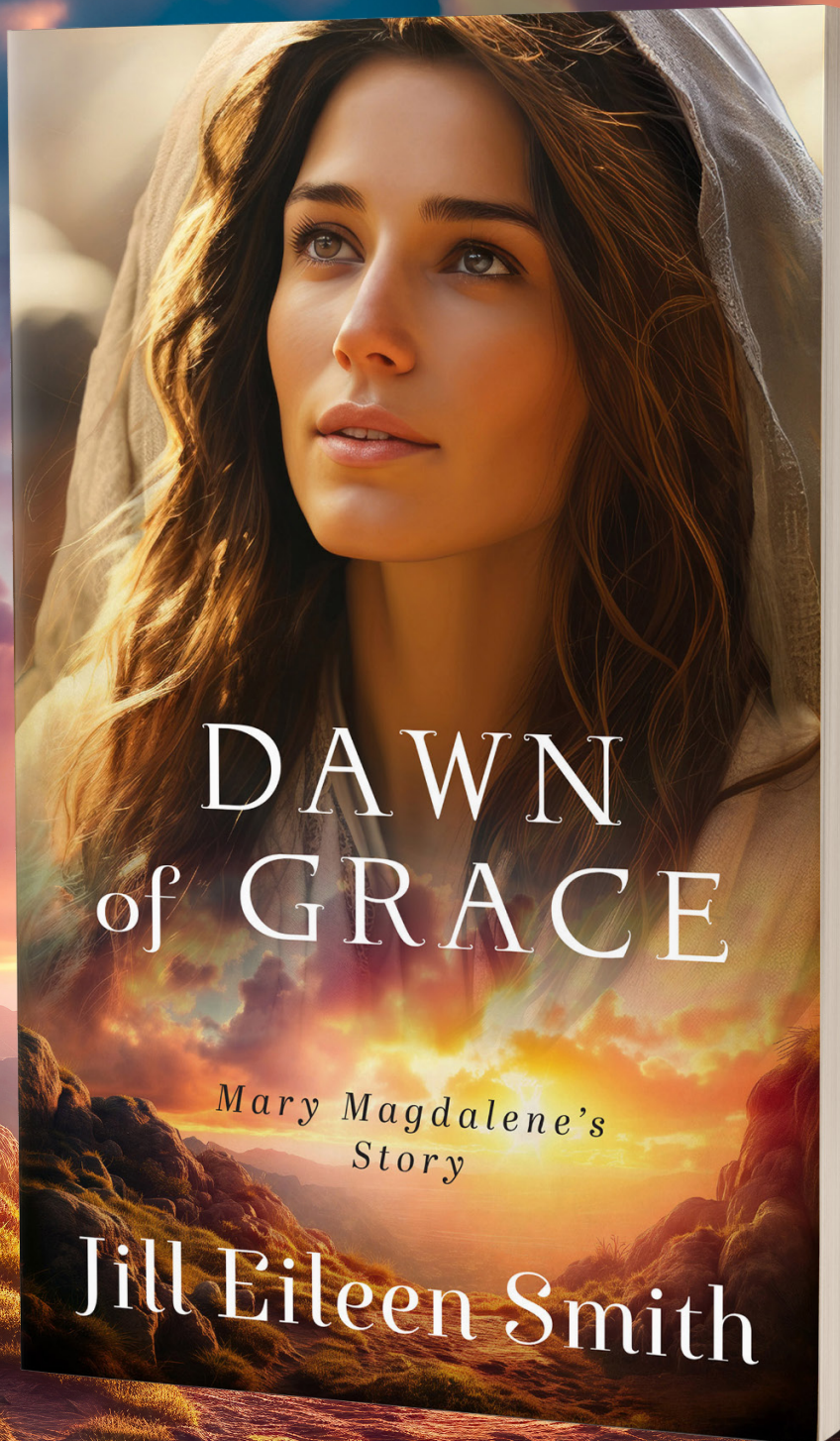


DAWN of GRACE

BOOK CLUB GUIDE



Dear Book Club Coordinator,

What an honor it is to have *Dawn of Grace: Mary Magdalene's Story* considered for your book club selection. Thank you! *Dawn of Grace* is my first venture into writing about the people in the New Testament. My career began and has continued exploring the men and women we read about in the Old Testament. The change was a challenging adventure.

Mary Magdalene is probably the best-known female disciple of Jesus, and there is a lot of controversy about her life. In order to get to know her, I had to delve into a world of demon possession, miraculous healing, and what it might have been like to walk with Jesus during His brief ministry on earth.

Some questions I had to explore were: How did Mary become possessed by demons, and what did that look like for her? What was it like to be among the few women who walked closest to Jesus throughout Judea and Galilee? How did she react when the religious leaders opposed and threatened Him? What was it like for her to see her Messiah, who had saved her physically and spiritually, be put to death on a brutal Roman cross? Why was it so hard for her to leave His side, even when she knew He was buried in a garden cave? How did she feel the moment He called her by name?

When I began writing biblical fiction many years ago, my goal was to help readers see that these people in Scripture were real historical figures. Most of them, particularly the women, have very little said about them, so I research and imagine how things might have been. I want to know what it was like to walk in their skin, to feel what they might have felt, to understand their motives. I hope you can relate to Mary and the other followers of Jesus as you step into first-century Israel. She has much to teach us.

I would love to join your book club on a virtual call. If that interests you, please fill out our "Request an Author Call" form on the Open Book website [here](#).

I hope you enjoy reading this story as much as I did writing it.

In His Grace,

~Jill~

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Cut Scene from *Dawn of Grace*'s first draft

The following day, Mary's restlessness could not be contained in the house or gardens.

"Can I get you something, mistress?" Darrah appeared in the house entryway where Mary paced. "I need to go to the market for some things for Shabbat. Can I bring anything for you?" She extended a worn arm toward Mary, though she also kept her distance.

Mary looked her up and down, desperately trying to ignore the quiet rumbling of the voices. "Why do you stay, Darrah? Why are you kind to me when you know what I am? What I'm like?" To ask such a question seemed foolish, even to her. What would she do if this loyal servant chose to leave?

Darrah lowered her arm, her expression filled with compassion. "You are your father's only child, mistress. I promised to look after you all of my days, and I intend to keep that promise."

She has nowhere else to go. She doesn't stay because she wants to.

Mary shook her head. "That's not true," she told the voice of her "mother."

"Of course it's true, Mary," Darrah said softly. "I've been with you since you were born."

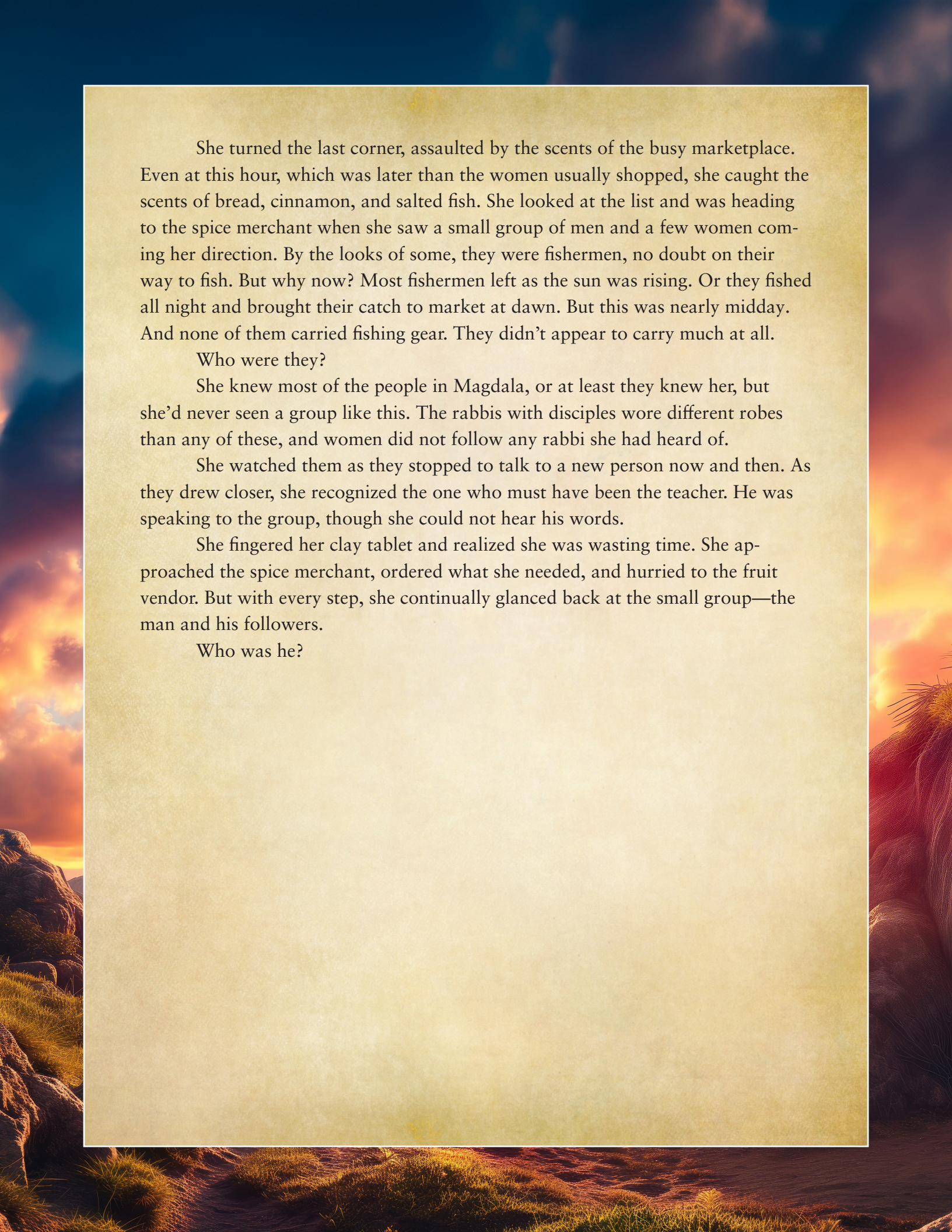
Mary closed her eyes tight, then slowly opened them, relieved when she could see clearly. "I wasn't talking to you. That is, I know what you meant. Let me pick up what you need at the market today. I need to get out of this house."

Darrah's round face held uncertainty. "I am just picking up some things that I need for Shabbat dinner tomorrow. I would need you to bring them right back so I can prepare before sundown."

Mary straightened. Why should Darrah trust her? "I will return right away." She would. The spirits had better let her. "What do you need?"

Darrah gave her a clay tablet with a list of things she had jotted down. Mary had learned to read years ago at the hands of her father's tutors and quickly read each thing. "I will hurry," she said, suddenly feeling as though even a small purpose in life was a good thing. Why couldn't she always find purpose in living?

She left the house, her gait lighter than it had been in years, and wound her way through the streets to the market. No one ever bothered her on these streets. No doubt anyone intending evil recognized the spirits within her. Didn't all of those so afflicted notice when someone else had the same affliction?



She turned the last corner, assaulted by the scents of the busy marketplace. Even at this hour, which was later than the women usually shopped, she caught the scents of bread, cinnamon, and salted fish. She looked at the list and was heading to the spice merchant when she saw a small group of men and a few women coming her direction. By the looks of some, they were fishermen, no doubt on their way to fish. But why now? Most fishermen left as the sun was rising. Or they fished all night and brought their catch to market at dawn. But this was nearly midday. And none of them carried fishing gear. They didn't appear to carry much at all.

Who were they?

She knew most of the people in Magdala, or at least they knew her, but she'd never seen a group like this. The rabbis with disciples wore different robes than any of these, and women did not follow any rabbi she had heard of.

She watched them as they stopped to talk to a new person now and then. As they drew closer, she recognized the one who must have been the teacher. He was speaking to the group, though she could not hear his words.

She fingered her clay tablet and realized she was wasting time. She approached the spice merchant, ordered what she needed, and hurried to the fruit vendor. But with every step, she continually glanced back at the small group—the man and his followers.

Who was he?

Discussion Questions

1. Mary is a child at the start of the story when her best friend, Susanna, becomes obsessed with an idol. Mary knows idol worship is wrong, but after Susanna invites the spirits to live within her, she eventually convinces Mary to do the same. Why do you think Mary gave in to Susanna's promptings? Do you think a child can become possessed by demons?
2. Once Mary loses her self-control to the spirit world, her life grows darker instead of lighter. She longs to be free but is powerless to help herself. Have you ever faced a situation, an addiction, or an emotional stronghold that made you feel helpless? How would you counsel someone in such a situation?
3. Mary finally finds relief and freedom when Jesus casts the demons out of her. She becomes His devoted follower, never wanting to leave His side. I imagined part of her devotion was related to fear of the demons returning. Have you ever overcome a difficulty or been set free from an abusive situation and then feared the same thing happening to you again? What might you do to be free of the fear? Do you believe that Jesus can truly set us free?
4. Mary follows Jesus and His disciples throughout Judea and Galilee, and she is one of the few women named who stayed with Him all the way to the cross. She doesn't leave when He dies and waits to see what will be done with His body. Why do you think it was so hard for her to leave Him when all hope seemed lost? Do you think the idea of resurrection even crossed her mind?
5. The first day of the week, after Shabbat, Mary is the first one to the tomb. Scripture indicates that she might have gone three times in search of answers. No doubt seeing the angels confused her, though perhaps her experience with the spirit world did not cause her to fear them. Most people who saw angels did fear them, but Mary is too lost in her grief to pay much attention to them. And then Jesus calls her name. How did that make her feel according to Scripture, which is quoted in the story? Why do you think she clung to Jesus? Can you imagine her relief? Have you ever spiritually heard Jesus call your name? How did it make you feel?
6. Jesus gives Mary instructions to tell His disciples to meet Him in Galilee. She rushes to do His bidding and tells them, "I have seen the Lord!" Does it surprise you that after His resurrection, Jesus revealed Himself first to a woman? Considering how marginalized women were in His day, do you find it remarkable that Jesus not only included them in His ministry but often singled them out for a special blessing? Why do you think He did that?

An Open Book

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