Discipleship as Accompaniment:
A Narrative-Critical Look at the Female Participation in Jesus’ Ministry described in Luke 8:1-3

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And this developed into Jesus himself going through city and village and so proclaiming the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and some women who had been healed from evil spirits and weaknesses – Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out, Joanna wife of Herod’s head steward Chuza, Susanna, and other women, who served them out of what belonged to them.

In the past forty years Luke 8:1-3 has emerged as a significant touchstone in understanding the role of women both in “Jesus’ itinerant ministry” and in Luke’s narrative account of it.1 The focus of this article is in understanding the latter, convinced that the former is, to a great extent, an unattainable goal. Such conviction is grounded in the basic assumption that there is a substantive difference between these two objectives and that this difference is realized by an understanding of the interested nature of history as necessarily narrated through interested human beings.2 History cannot be known except through an interchange between a narrator and his or her audience. Accordingly, it is this act of narration that is available for study and not an objective moment in the past to which we

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now have no direct access (if we ever did). In biblical studies this type of inquiry has taken the form of narrative criticism—a critical approach to the biblical texts as literature that places the center of authority, and thus meaning, within the text itself.  

Narrative critics ask a variety of questions of the individual episode and the larger narrative in which it resides in order to discern meaning from either how that narrative was constructed by the author or how it was perceived by the audiences, both ancient and new. For the purpose of this study, the primary questions deal with character and characterization: who are the women named in this summary and what do they reveal about Jesus’ ministry as it is narrated here? One answer from the text is that these women are among those “with Jesus.” This paper explores the warrants for and implications of this accompaniment through an examination of the context and placement of Luke 8:1-3 within Luke’s narrative, the grammatical structure of this text as a paratactical sentence, and the function and purpose of the summary genre through which it is conveyed.

**Context and Placement**

In order to understand Luke 8:1-3 from a literary perspective, it is necessary to understand its context and placement in the whole of Luke’s two volume narrative. Turid Karlsen Seim notes, “Events and persons receive their significance from their location and function in the sequence of the narrative.” Luke 8:1-3 is a summary description of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God with an emphasis on his companions—the ones σὺν αὐτῷ (“with him,”

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4 Seim, 7.
However, in order to understand what it means to “be with” Jesus in 8:1-3, it is necessary to understand what this means throughout the whole narrative in which συν αὐτῷ is used repeatedly to describe secondary characters accompanying Jesus.5

Beginning with the call of Simon, James, and John in 5:1-11 the reader is aware that there are men who have “left everything and followed” Jesus (5:11)—men who accompany him. These are the men whom the contemporary reader generally associates with disciples; however, the first reference to this group of companions as οἱ μαθηταὶ (“disciples”) does not occur until 5:30. Even then, the term comes not from Jesus, the disciples themselves, or even the trustworthy narrator. Instead, it is initially used by the Pharisees to compare Jesus’ companions to their own disciples and those of John the Baptist. Only after this point in the narrative is the designation of disciples picked up by the narrator (6:1). Throughout the rest of the narrative, the term disciple is used frequently, but not exclusively, to designate the large group of people accompanying Jesus in his ministry.6 That this group includes both men and women is made clear when Mary, Joanna, and the other women are said to have “remembered” (24:6-8) what Jesus said to the disciples in 9:18-22.7

5 This phrase is used 16 times in Luke-Acts. Of the 8 occurrences in Luke, 7 refer to those accompanying Jesus (including disciples, Moses and Elijah, and the two criminals with whom he was to be crucified), while the first refers to those with Peter in the boat when he was called (5:9). Similarly, 6 of the 8 occurrences in Acts refer to accompaniment in mission or understanding (e.g. those who traveled with Paul or agreed with the chief priest).
6 In contrast to Mark and Matthew, where the term disciple is applied to the Twelve and apostle is reserved for a point after Jesus’ resurrection, in Luke, as early as 6:13 the narrator clearly designates the difference between the Twelve, whom Jesus calls apostles, and the larger group from which they were called out of and with which they continue to interact—the disciples. This more expansive use is especially evident in 14:26-33; 19:37; and Jesus’ teaching in Luke 9:18-27 which Luke 24:6-8 confirms that the women in Luke 8:1-3 were privy to.
Esther de Boer reads this post-resurrection account to confirm “that not only the men but also the women following Jesus did so first and foremost to learn from him.”\(^8\) Indeed, it is easy to see how the term disciple is applicable to all those who are with Jesus—particularly in the broader sense of its use as “one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or particular set of views.”\(^9\) However, many of the experiences in which the disciples partake with Jesus are not purely pedagogical in nature. The prediction of Jesus’ suffering and death in 9:18-22 is an excellent example of this. Thus, while deBoer is correct in discerning a unified purpose in the narrative for all of the disciples, both male and female, that purpose remains centered around the description of these people as “with Jesus,” accompanying him in his proclamation (8:1) and in the whole of his ministry.\(^10\)

The designator “disciples” is not directly used in 8:1-3; however, it is applied in the context immediately following this summary—the parable of the sower and the disciple’s response in 8:9. The author generally uses summary statements about generalized events to introduce a related, but more specific account (see summary genre analysis below). Luke 8:1-3 describes Jesus teaching about the Kingdom of God. The parable of the sower is then

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\(^8\) deBoer, 145.


\(^10\) Rosalie Ryan, cites Brown “that the phrase *to be with him* is a technical expression for discipleship (8:38; 9:18; 22:56)” lays the foundation for this. However, such equivocation effectively subordinates the accompaniment expressed in 8:1 to the pedagogical functions of discipleship, whereas I argue that accompaniment is primary and thus the subordination works the other way around. Ryan, “The Women From Galilee and Discipleship in Luke” in Biblical Theology Bulletin, 15 no 2 (1985) 57. Cf. also E. Jane Via, “Women in the Gospel of Luke” in *Women in the world’s religions, past and present* (New York: Paragon House, 1987) 46.
described as a specific example of this teaching. Since the intermediate narration does not indicate that any of those with Jesus have left the scene, but rather that a greater crowd has gathered, there is no reason to assume that all of those mentioned in 8:1-3 are not present for this teaching. Consequently, the disciples described in 8:9 would most likely have included those accompanying Jesus in 8:1-3 given the narrative context.

Even more importantly than what designator is used for them, however, it is clear that the women companions of Jesus in Luke 8:1-3 gain their significance due to their accompaniment. Indeed, Ryan insists that to be “with Jesus” in these terms “means much more than physical presence.” Various interpreters have fleshed out the meaning of this “more” in different ways. For example, deBoer associates this accompaniment primarily with learning, as described above. Robert Tannehill describes the women in 8:1-3 in terms analogous to the men called in 5:11, 28 who “leave everything” to follow Jesus, setting this material abandonment as a key. Seim affirms this stating, “Both the epic and paraenetic material in the gospel and with especial emphasis in the first part of Acts, voices a demand/ideal of giving up possessions and realizing property for the benefit of the community (cf. Lk 12:13-14; 14:33; 18:18-30; 19:1-10; Acts 4:35-7; 5:1-11),” adding to this what she notes to be an otherwise unconnected but equally central Lucan theme of service

11 Ryan, 57.
12 Tannehill, 138. This analogy draws heavily upon the description of Joanna, the wife of a relatively successful steward in Herod’s course who is far from both husband and home. For doubts as to the resources Joanna might have had at her disposal cf. David Sim, “The Women Followers of Jesus: The Implications of Luke 8:1-3,” in Heythrop Journal, 30 no 1 (1989) 52-53. For a response to the suggestion that the women were not actually far from home, but ministered to Jesus during the day while still attending to their traditional responsibilities, cf. Bonnie Thurston, Women in the New Testament (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998) 107.
mentioned especially in 8:3. Thus accompaniment, in Luke's narrative, being "with Jesus" is the embodied experience of being on the road with Jesus—leaving everything behind, dedicating resources to the work of the ministry, following Jesus, learning from him, and serving him and one another.

For this reason, it becomes all the more significant that when Jesus is lead away to the cross in 23:32, it is two criminals and not the apostles (or any of the disciples!) who are described as being “with him.” The disciples as a group are noticeably absent in Luke’s narrative from the moment of Jesus’ arrest until the women’s announcement of the resurrection. From among this group it is only Peter, who follows from afar, and the Galilean women (including those mentioned in 8:1-3), also observing from afar, who receive any mention at all. Distancing even these companions from the previous language of accompaniment, the narrator describes these women throughout the crucifixion and burial events in the perfect tense, which indicates completed action. They are described as having “followed with” (23:49) and “come with” (23:55) Jesus from Galilee and noted as being present for the events, but still are said to have been standing far away (23:49). Like Peter’s, their intimate accompaniment—at least for the moment—has ceased.

Yet, the significance of this contrast can only be understood in light of the embodied accompaniment that the women display up until this point. Until Jesus’ arrest, these women can be described as flat characters—characters who do not develop or change throughout the narrative, but whose consistent characterization sets them up as either foils

\[13\] Seim, 77, 80-81.
or, in this case, aids to understanding the development of the main character. Such characterization can be seen in the way in which the women followers of Jesus in Luke’s narrative are consistently described as faithful and diligent in their service—whatever form it may take (cf. 7:37-50; 8:3, 43-48; 10:38-42). However, while the act of serving is consistent it is important to note in contrast to limited definitions of this service that restrict the women to so-called traditional tasks, such as cooking, the use of διηκόνουν ("serving") is much more expansive here. Forms of this same word are also translated throughout Luke-Acts to indicate “ministry” and it is the root from which the modern terms, “Deacon” or “Diaconal Minister” come. After study of the use of διηκόνουν ("serving") in Luke-Acts, the New Testament, and the ancient world more generally, Witherington connects the service described in 8:3 with the role of a messenger, proclaiming Jesus’ gospel. Furthermore, that such service is assumed of Jesus’ followers and that it is consistent with this more expansive definition can be seen even without its explicit reference in 8:3 can be seen by a closer look at what it means to be “with Jesus.” The men and women who are described in this way are, indeed, accompanying Jesus in the tasks described. Furthering Witherington’s connection of service in 8:3 with proclamation, this means that those listed in 8:1-2 are already included in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom. This further supports this understanding of both women and men disciples as participants in the proclamation.

14 For a balanced narrative-critical response to the critique that Luke limits the role of women to domestic service and patronage roles, cf. Seim, 75-77.
15 Witherington, 244; cf. also Karris, 8; Seim, 76.
16 Ryan, 57. It is important to note that the grammatical analysis below will suggest an interpretation in which some of the women in 8:1-3 are described as “with Jesus” and others as “serving them.” Such a distinction does not take away from the proclamative function of each group, as their participation is substantiated through two separate clauses here. For those who interpret, with Witherington, these
In one sense the diligence ascribed to the women in this account continues when the women follow from a distance to observe Jesus’ crucifixion and burial; however, here for the first time in Luke’s narrative, this diligence is tempered with a palpable hesitancy and distance that momentarily severs their accompaniment. Although it may be tempting to paint the women as the only completely faithful followers of Jesus, the narrative description of their accompaniment (and here their striking failure to accompany) indicates at least some identification of the female followers of Jesus with the abandonment and denial traditionally attributed to the males. What sets these characters apart and what allows the narrative to proceed is not an unwavering faithfulness to their call to “be with” Jesus,” but rather a hesitant diligence that causes them to follow at a distance. Only after remembering Jesus’ words to them at the prompting of two men at the tomb do the women return to their expected role, returning to the others and proclaiming what it is that they saw and heard (24:4-9). While thus not painting the women in the most ideal light, this momentary shift in their characterization emphasizes both the complete human abandonment of Jesus at the time of his death as well as the need for and significance of accompaniment throughout the narrative. However, the women do not remain removed from Jesus for long. Through their proclamation to the other disciples, they are restored to their role as messengers who proclaim the good news of God’s Kingdom as it was established in 8:1-3, and so, implicitly to their accompaniment with Jesus who appears again with his followers in Emmaus (24:29). A solid understanding of the women in 8:1-3 as faithful servants and followers of Jesus in the broadest sense is therefore necessary in modifying clauses to refer to all of the women in the text, these separate explanations only further this evangelical role.
order to appreciate their deviation from and restoration to this role at the end of the narrative. Thus, the consistency of the women’s faithfulness and service described in 8:1-3 falters during the events of the passion, highlighting the importance of this theme throughout the narrative whole.

**Grammatical Structure**

While the consistent characterization of the women in Luke 8:1-3 is important to the narrative, it is also important to note that differences remain between the women described. The women described in this passage are not so flat as to necessitate a condensation of Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and all of the other women into a single group. However, this is what most translations of and commentaries on the passage do. Given the complex structure of this passage with multiple clauses strung together with no direct indicator of relationship, such readings are both valid and understandable; however, they are not the only option. Furthermore, in the presence of an alternative reading, such a flattening translation ought to be rejected due to its contribution to oppressive structures traditionally placed upon Christian women. Such a rejection should be seen as in line with and in response to scholarly resistance to the characterization of women in Luke 8:1-3 (and Luke’s narrative as a whole) among many feminists on account of such oppressions.17

Doing just this, deBoer counters the dominant reading of the text, arguing, “Lk 8:1-3 is not about males and females as such, but about specific men and women: the twelve apostles, some named women, and many unnamed women.”18 While contemporary readers often

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17 Cf. Karris, 3-4.
18 deBoer, 143.
bring gender-oriented questions to the text, the narrative is not constructed so much to answer these questions as it is to describe specific men and women who accompany Jesus. These individuals, both men and women, participate in his ministry and his proclamation of the good news in a variety of different ways. The contrast with which Mary and Martha are described as receiving and responding to Jesus in 10:38-42 exemplifies this use of individual rather than gender-oriented roles in Luke’s narrative. The narrative point is not so much that these characters are women, but rather that they are individual people who accompany Jesus in his ministry.

Such possibility for distinctions between the characters in 8:1-3 can most readily be seen through a grammatical analysis of the text. Although the above translation breaks the passage into two separate sentences for the sake of clarity, the Greek is actually a single long sentence made up of multiple clauses. Consequently, Robert Karris draws the reader’s attention to the fact that this sentence is “constructed paratactically”—with multiple possible meanings.\(^19\) Due to the ambiguous relationship of the clauses to one another, Karris observes that despite relative homogeneity in the major English translations, there is more than one way to read the text. In most contemporary scholarship, it has become commonplace to assume that all of the women in 8:1-3 were healed and consequently served Jesus out of their resources. Such a reading readily sets the women up in contrast and subservient to the twelve men in 8:1, who began their accompaniment with Jesus being called rather than healed and whom these indebted women are thus said to serve.\(^20\) It is this sort of dichotomizing of men and women along androcentric traditional lines that

\(^{19}\) Karris, 9.
\(^{20}\) D’Angelo, 117.
rightly causes feminists to resist such readings. However, as Karris notes, “Luke 8:1-3 does not spell out the relationship between the Twelve and the women as a hypotactic sentence would. It is left for us, the readers, to do this.”21 Thus, the women do not need to be read as subservient to the men, nor should they all necessarily be assumed to be with Jesus only account of his actions (healing or casting out demons) for them.

Instead, deBoer offers an equally valid and plausible interpretation that is counter to the androcentric norm. She observes,

> The long sentence construction of Lk 8:1-3…can also be interpreted as an inclusion: providing the frame are Jesus and the unnamed women, each with their own active verbs; enclosed are the Twelve and the named women, who have no active verbs of their own but are said to be ‘with him.’ The unnamed women in this configuration provide for Jesus and the twelve as well as for Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna.22

This reading thus places its emphasis on the smaller groupings of both men and women within the larger multitude of disciples. In so doing, the theme of accompaniment is emphasized due to the intensified status of those who among Jesus’ companions—Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and the twelve—who are specifically said to be “with him” in 8:1-3. Such emphasis also provides the opportunity for greater specialization of the specific individuals who are described as being “with Jesus” in terms of what it means for them to live into and embody their discipleship role.

While the larger group of disciples are sometimes described as with Jesus in a general sense, a narrowing of the term to a smaller group, such as deBoer describes, is also seen in

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21 Karris, 9.  
22 deBoer, 144.
Luke-Acts. For example, Peter, James, and John are described as “with Jesus” apart from the rest of the disciples in 8:49 and 9:32; the term is used again in reference to the twelve apostles as a distinct group among the disciples in 22:14. Due to both the specific reference to the twelve and the intentional separation of Mary, Joanna, and Susanna from the rest of the women by recording their names, it seems likely that such a specialized use of σὺν αὐτῷ is intended in 8:1-3. Bolstering this point, Francois Bovon cites the frequent use of parallelism throughout Luke-Acts as evidence that “the respective numbers of men and women are...not accidental: the three women here recall the inner group of the circle of the twelve.”

Just as an inner group of three men are described as being with Jesus at later points in the narrative, so here an inner group of three women is named. Looking ahead again to the resurrection account, this focus on the three women, particularly Mary and Joanna who are present in both accounts, is further confirmed with the naming of these women in 24:10 as the ones who witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and burial. By using their names rather than the previously general description of a number of women, the narrator here again emphasizes the restoration of Mary and Joanna to their distinct discipleship role of accompanying Jesus in his ministry and proclamation.

Furthermore, in addition to emphasizing Mary, Joanna, and Susanna’s accompaniment with Jesus, this differentiating reading offers the benefit of countering feminist concerns that female service is necessarily linked with healing from disease or demons in Luke and that

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24 Karris describes this in literary critical terms as a “completing analepsis,” which is, “the narration of an even *after* its ordinary chronological order in the narrative world; a flashback” (10).
women disciples are categorically assigned to a subordinating role of service. First, addressing the manner of call described in 8:1-3 deBoer explains,

If the words *eteroi pollai* are to be interpreted as grammatically subordinate to *gunaikes tines* and are read in one breath with the three named women, the implication is that both the named and unnamed women would have been healed. However, *kai eterai pollai* may also be interpreted as coordinative to *gunaikes tines*, Jesus and the Twelve, meaning that only the three named women were healed. I opt for the latter interpretation, since the idea that *some* women would consist of three named persons together with *many* others is unlikely.\(^25\)

Thus, the response of most of the women described in 8:1-3 is not conditioned by Jesus’ initial benefaction to them, or at least there is nothing in the text to assume that this is so.\(^26\)

Indeed, by leaving their motives unnamed, Luke leaves it open for the reader to infer that these women have responded to Jesus as a result of his teaching, his miracles, or spontaneous calling in ways analogous to other responses to Jesus by his followers described in the rest of the narrative.

Next, this reading addresses the assumption of a generalized subservience of women to men that can be ascribed to this passage through an inclusive reading of διηκόνων αὐτοῖς as referring to all of the women both named and unnamed in the sentence.\(^27\) In deBoer’s reading it is only the unnamed women who are modified by the participle διηκόνων.

\(^{25}\) deBoer, 146.
\(^{27}\) Note that here I follow the majority reading of διηκόνων αὐτοῖς in Luke 8:3. If one understands διηκόνων to refer to all of the women with Jesus this becomes a question of immediate feminist concern; however, if one reads the participle in the more limited sense suggested above then the question of which variant to use becomes less gender charged. I choose to retain the majority decision presented in the Nestle-Aland edition of the New Testament out of convenience more than anything else. Both Karris and Ricci make a convincing case for reading the textual variant αὐτῷ instead, with which I would also have no quarrel (Karris, 6-7; Ricci, 25-26).
Given undisputed interpretations of the preceding dependent clauses as describing the individuals who precede them, specifically Mary and Joanna, the narrative structure of the sentence makes more sense if one reads this final dependent clause also as describing the object that precedes it—in this case, the many unnamed women. By reading 8:1-3 as separating the function of the named and unnamed women in this way, the named women—Mary, Joanna, and Susanna—are immediately liberated from this assumed role of subservience. It is important to note here that subservience is not the same thing as service, which, as we have already seen, can mean much more than simply providing money of performing traditional women’s work. Indeed, Luke’s narrative emphasizes the importance of some type of service for both the women and men who accompany Jesus in his ministry (cf. 1:74; 4:8, 39; 12:37; 16:13; 17:10; 22:26-27). Furthermore, for the women who are described as serving the others in 8:3, a reading that groups Mary, Joanna, and Susanna among those who are served makes clear that their service is an instance of this broader discipleship value. Rather than a sign of these women’s subordination, this service is their contribution to the ministry in which they all share. This shift is possible because the issue of gender subservience is no longer primary with the inclusion of Jesus’ inner group of women among the group whom the others are said to serve.

Understanding the paratactical nature of the sentence in 8:1-3 thus opens up a new interpretive option that allows the women disciples to be seen for their individual service. Such individuation is not only consistent with the rest of the narrative (esp. Mary and Martha in 10:38-42), but it also accentuates the way in which all of the women participate
in the acts of both service and accompaniment, which are characteristic of discipleship in Luke-Acts.

**Summary Genre as a Literary Device**

This amplification of the accompaniment embodied by Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and the twelve in Luke 8:1-3 can be further seen when one understands the narrative role of this passage as a summary statement. Summaries can often be overlooked as brief pockets of condensed information useful to convey information but unnecessary to move the plot along. However, as early as 1965 Martin Dibelius insists that the summary statements contained in the Acts narrative are more than this. Noting the way in which the summaries are “interposed between the various scenes and narratives,” Dibelius observes that these statements “provide links and elaborations” that are necessary to the flow of the narrative.\(^\text{28}\) Indeed, more than necessary, by “giving generalized descriptions of typical circumstances,” the general nature of the summaries is utilized by the author both “to show that they were typical” and to introduce the sections of narrative that follow.\(^\text{29}\) Dibelius notes the intentional use of summary statements in this way in Acts by the author.

Given the scholarly consensus that has emerged during the last half century that Luke and Acts are two parts of the same narrative, it is unsurprising that such intentionality can also be seen in Luke. The transitional phrase καὶ ἐγέρθησαν (“and this developed,” or “so it happened”), which begins Luke 8:1-3, occurs in Luke-Acts an impressive 35 times, often


\(^{29}\) Dibelius, 9.
either introducing or directly following a summary through which the story is made to progress. In this way, summary statements are used to move the story along.

Maria Anicia Co expands upon this function of summaries within the narrative progression by recognizing the summary’s contribution to the story’s tempo. Tempo has long been recognized as a significant feature in literary analysis, with particular attention paid in New Testament studies to the way in which the detailed account of the passion narrative slows the story down. Fastidious attention to detail in the last chapters of Luke slows the narrative down so that the reader experiences the last few days of Jesus’ life with vividness and clarity. The narrative tempo makes it clear that something important and, perhaps, unusual is happening. By contrast, summary statements, which are typically very brief, can represent weeks, months, or even years of narrative time. This paucity of details drastically speeds up the tempo of the narrative and analogously affects the way in which it conveys its point. Co describes this “in terms of compression and expansion,” which allows “events which take longer to happen in real-world time to be presented in a relatively short narrative or reading time.”30 In the case of Luke 8:1-3, Jesus’ travel and proclamation, which at other points in the narrative take anywhere from one to several days to complete in each city, are condensed into just one sentence. However, much more than treating this device as a mere expedient, Co builds upon Dibelius’ observation of the generalizing nature

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of the summary, noting that it may also “provide an enlargement of participants, a broadening of time frame, the space of the action or of the action itself.”

In this way, rather than diminishing the role of women as companions of Jesus in Luke’s narrative, the summary genre enlarges these characters through its casual and assumed treatment of their presence. This also increases the women’s significance and felt presence throughout the rest of the narrative, since the summary assumes that they would have been there. An individual story of a woman’s discipleship or faithfulness (such as the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10 or the woman who anoints Jesus in Luke 7, immediately preceding the summary account) only has the power to go so far. It can be dismissed as an isolated anomaly. However, the inclusion of Mary, Joanna, and Susanna among those “with Jesus” in the generalizing summary of 8:1-3 elevates these individual instances to the status of universal practice. Their gender is sped by because that is not the point. Rather, in this broad summary statement, the women’s participation in the narrative as companions of Jesus is both assumed and affirmed.

Co nuances this understanding of a summary statement, especially as this genre is employed in Acts, defining it as a relatively independent and concise narrative statement that describes a prolonged situation or portrays an event as happening repeatedly within an indefinite period of time.

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31 Ibid.
33 Co, 57.
The prolonged situation, as it relates to the female characters in Luke 8:1-3 is, of course, their respective accompaniment with and service to Jesus and their companions in ministry. Being the first to apply this understanding of the genre to this passage, Karris therefore notes that “Co’s narrative definition of a Lucan ‘summary’ has vast implications,” suggesting, “The women of Luke 8:1-3 are present with Jesus and are his messengers even when they are not mentioned specifically in the Lucan text.”34 While this implication is also seen to be implicit through a contextual survey of the narrative, as shown above, it serves to further confirm the presence of the women with Jesus throughout. More importantly, in despite suggestions that this brief mention is an attempt to diminish the role of women through the narrative account, the use of the summary genre serves to emphasize the women’s presence through the use of a generalizing and universalizing technique.

An understanding of the function of summary statements in Luke’s narrative therefore strengthens the reader’s understanding of the women’s accompaniment with Jesus by universalizing it throughout his ministry, in opposition to the thieves in Jerusalem who accompany him only on the cross. This serves both to bolster an understanding of female discipleship within Luke-Acts as a whole and to make the momentary abandonment of Jesus described in the passion narrative all the more shocking. In any case, the use of this tempo-setting device elevates both the women and their role as companions with Jesus throughout the narrative.

34 Karris, 10.
Conclusions

Commenting on the role of characters in the narrative framework of Luke-Acts, Luke Timothy Johnson maintains, “In Luke-Acts, there are really no sub-plots; the secondary characters do not lead lives of their own, or have their own stories, but are important solely as they are drawn into contact with the central characters.”35 The central character in Luke 8:1-3 and, arguably, in the narrative as a whole is of course Jesus. As the main subject of an otherwise long and complicated sentence, Jesus’ action is clear—he travels, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God (8:1). The secondary characters—the twelve, Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and the other women—are to be understood only in relation to Jesus.

While it is true that some of these women were healed or otherwise relieved of weaknesses and demons by Jesus, this is ancillary to their role in the narrative. The mention of such healings in a generalizing summary genre as it has been described is more likely to have served the purpose of highlighting the power of Jesus, who is repeatedly described in the narrative as performing such deeds, than to have said much about his relationship with the women one way or another. The characterization of the women begins, rather, in their own deeds and response to Jesus in light of both his proclamation and his power. Johnson notes, “It is...as representatives of particular modes of response that their importance for the story is found.”36 Such response is readily seen through Mary, Joanna, and Susanna’s accompaniment “with Jesus” and the service, or more accurately, ministry that the other women perform for the group. Contextual, grammatical, and genre-oriented analysis have all shown the centrality of this accompaniment both to the characters described and for the

35 Johnson, 24.
36 Ibid.
progression of the plot. The narrative climax of the solitude of Jesus on the cross can only be understood in the context of the assumed, multifaceted accompaniment of these women at every other point in his ministry. That Jesus was accompanied, instead, at that crucial point only by two criminals who were forced by their own limited circumstances further illustrates this theme. However, Luke’s narrative does not end with Jesus on the cross. If there was any doubt as to the role of the women with Jesus before, it is confirmed when they are the first to rejoin him and his ministry of proclamation, witnessing the empty tomb and proclaiming the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy to the rest of his followers. In this way, the embodied ministry of presence that is central to both Jesus’ proclamation and to the early church is reclaimed. The women in Luke 8:1-3, especially Mary, Joanna, and Susanna, while relatively flat and undeveloped individually in the narrative, are therefore crucial to an understanding of the progression and importance of the narrative as a whole. Through their embodied example, readers are able to experience what it is like to “be with” Jesus and are also encouraged to join in the broadly understood service that this ministry entails.