

The Reach of Women's Ministry

Reaching Up: Reaching Women in the World

Jesus commands us to step out into the world, to go forth and make disciples of all the nations. We are told to go to the end of the earths sharing the gospel. In order to go out, we must reach up to God!

Spend time with anyone who is in foreign ministries and you will hear tales of miracles. Funding that comes in, divine protection in hostile areas, lives that are changed, people who are transformed... it is an incredible conversation for anyone looking to see the active hand of God. More of then than not there is no earthly explanation for what happens in the mission field, and every missionary will tell you that it is not in their strength but in God's that anything happens. Missions is a constant act of reaching up to God to direct your steps and provide for your needs.

People are called into countries they would have never expected, like the ones where spreading Christianity is a crime punishable by death! They have moved out of their comfortable homes in the suburbs of the average US town, and moved to villages in Africa and rural Nicaragua. To those who don't understand this call, they come off as crazy... but to those who understand it, they are stepping out in faith.

I've been blessed to witness this calling on a family from our church. They had friends who were serving in full time missions in Nicaragua. The friends invited them to come for two weeks to visit. The family decided they wanted to do some volunteering when they went, so they made some arrangements with local orphanages in the area. They began raising funds to go, collecting dresses, shorts, flip flops to bring with them for the children in the orphanage. It was really amazing to see how God would provide the things they needed for the trip.

When the family arrived home, they were changed. It was evident to all of us who knew them, this was no longer their home. They had left a piece of their hearts in Nicaragua. I have watched families from different churches rally around them through fundraising events. I have seen God give direct counsel to them from wise women and men in our community of believers. Their call was anointed. As I prepare this course, they are getting ready to head back to Nicaragua as part of the next phase, leading toward their eventual move. Once again, in this process, the Lord is working in ways we can't explain. Everyday they share a testimony with us about God's goodness and provision for the blessings yet to come in Nicaragua.

In another example, I have a friend who is a single woman preparing for a special missions trip into Haiti. She will be ministering to women who work in brothels and in the sex trade. God has moved mountains to get this woman equipped to step into the gap and minister to a group of women many want to avoid. She has a special gift and heart. A woman who is reaching up to God and reaching out a hand to the undesirables. Just like Jesus did.

Many people feel called into the mission field, but they worry they are not equipped for it. They are afraid of it, or afraid they won't do a good job. They have misconceptions about what the mission field is like. While we still have many areas in the world where the mission field is dangerous, and requires a specific very special calling... there are still many areas that simply are waiting for someone to show up, with open arms. Or, at least, with a lot less resistance and threat to safety. However, these mission field callings are still going to take women out of their comfort zone. It is a different culture, with different traditions and customs, particularly in regards to women.

I am by no means an expert when it comes to missions into areas that are dangerous for Christians. But, I have done missions work in areas that were accepting of our presence. Even though our lives are not at stake, there is still preparation to be made for these trips. We learn about the culture, we learn about how Christians are perceived there, and for women we also need to be aware of the role women play in their society.

In her contribution to the book, *Word-filled Women's Ministry*, Gloria Furman points out that there are some misconceptions when it comes to evangelism outside of the safety of our like minded communities, as we step out in faithful obedience to The Great Commission. We need to know the misconceptions in order to work beyond them.

1. We should utilize apologetics specific to their cultural or religious backgrounds.
2. Confusing or controversial doctrine should be watered down, in order to put Christianity's best foot forward.
3. Mature Christians can't grow in a study that also includes non-believers.
4. Inductive or Expository bible study is too hard for a non-believer, stay topical.
5. Invite non-believers to studies that center around The Gospels, the rest is too hard.
6. You must share the gospel at the end of every study session.
7. Non-believers must address their sin before they can benefit from the study.

The truth is that we do not need to change or alter the presentation of the Gospel, or God's Word, to fit their culture. We know that Christianity is counter cultural, even within the US. We can approach them with the scriptures, in tact, while recognizing their backgrounds and experiences differ from ours. Just because we speak a different language or share different traditions, doesn't mean that those we encounter can't fully understand the power of the Gospel. We don't need to water down the word for their comprehension, but instead to treat these people with respect for their intelligence. Particularly the women, who in many areas are considered less intelligent or even completely incapable of understanding. We show those women that they are capable, we believe in them. We can teach them direct study methods, they don't need a bunch of books from a bunch of well know authors (unless we are providing resources for Pastors and leadership of local church bodies in the mission field). We also accept these people as they are, their doubts and concerns, their resistance and curiosity. Our job in the mission field is to plant seeds. Let God worry about the harvest.

Part of preparing for our step into the mission field is making sure that we are already securely grounded in the Word. Depending on what country God calls you to, you will face more opposition in some than others. The benefit for intensifying our study, is that when we are being nourished by God's Word, we will not only want to share it, but we will know how to do so. The Great Commission becomes a natural response to our passion.

The United States, which is recognized by most nations as a Christian country... or at least a country that is predominately Christian, surprisingly has missionaries coming INTO our borders to preach the gospel! You wouldn't think that would be a necessity, but it is. Even with our unlimited access to the Word, with churches in every city (and sometimes every street corner), libraries and bookstores, and the vast internet... we still have people who need to be reached by the gospel. It isn't foreign to their ears, they understand Christianity exists, but it is foreign to their hearts. God moves people, the right person, into place to reach the lost. Some will be called to go to the ends of the earth, others will be called to simply go out their own front doors.

The best thing about God ordained missions is that while God is preparing our hearts to leave, He is

preparing their hearts to receive. God will prepare them to hear the Gospel, God will gift them the ability to understand. Remember, we are delivering HIS message, to the lost people He holds in HIS hands. Global evangelism is done in His power, not our own. When we recognize that we too are sinners, and we learn and grow from the gospel; it makes it easier to share the gospel with others. Because, they are *fellow sinners*, going through struggles and fighting temptations. They may not be aware that their actions are sinful, but God will convict their hearts as we introduce them to His Word. When we, as women, present God's word in His authority, with the knowledge of His Word through our own study and education, we challenge those who think women are not capable. We don't argue, debate, or even demand it. We model it, and we say to them if I can, so can she.

I encountered a woman who was deeply interested in starting women's bible studies in her church, hoping to start a movement of women directly ministering to other women. The Pastor was in resistance due to the position of women in their area. She prayed over it, approached him, and simply asked him to speak with some other Pastors about the subject. He looked into the scriptures himself, made a few phone calls, and found out that many of his colleagues had women teaching studies to other women. He called her into his office and gave her permission to do so, but with limitations. He approved only of certain materials that were being used in his colleagues churches. It was a start, that would build momentum. Victories in mission often start small, and take time to build. Missions is very personal, because the whole focus is about introducing people to Jesus and letting lives be transformed.

As we reach out in to the world, sharing the entire story of God, through His word.... we are saying to each person we encounter that they too are part of the story. God's message is for everyone, to all the ends of the earth. We are all people who play a part in the unfolding of history to the very day the Lord comes back, because His story isn't finished yet. We know the victory belongs to Christ, but we are living the in the days that build up to that point.

What is very interesting is that the global ministry to women isn't that different than the local ministry, we are encouraging women to be saturated in the word, have clarity about the gospel, and connect with the local church (the body of believers). What makes the difference is the methods we use to achieve those points. In a country like the United States, a women's brunch with a respected speaker is a valuable method in reaching the community. But, I assure you, in Ghana where women and their children are suffering from the devastation of HIV in their community, priorities are a bit different. In the United States we can walk through a neighborhood passing out invitation cards to our neighbors, inviting them to our church or bible studies, and taking a moment to share the good news with them. You won't see that happening in a country where any attempt to convert a person is punishable by death.

It is important, as we go forth into the nations, that we have an understanding of where we are going. What is the culture and climate like there, what are the laws, how are Christians perceived, and what is their opinion of women. What are the immediate needs, and how does the Gospel meet them?

So, before we take those steps out our door, hop on the airplane, and enter the unknown... we must prepare.

We prepare in bible study, making sure we have a firm understanding of our beliefs. We don't have to know everything off the top of our head, but we do need to understand how to find the answers we are going to be asked. Trevin Wax points out in the book *Gospel Centered Teaching* that the reason we need to have bible literacy is because the Bible is the narrative of the world, from creation to revelation,

giving us not just commands and prohibitions, but a whole world view.

We prepare in culture study, understanding how society works in the places we are being called to. Some areas may be made up various culture groups, it's important to understand the ways they are alike, and the ways they differ. What are their common bonds?

Jesus understood the differences in those He spoke to, which is why he used parables about fishing, farming and vineyards. He didn't change the message, but he did use terms and illustrations that the people could understand. He made the message plain without taking away from it's power. We are blessed today, that we are translating the Bible into more and more languages each year. Until we get them all, we need to understand how to talk to the people in a way they can relate to without watering down the Word. Parables are still a very strong tool, because in many of the countries we will visit... things like farming and fishing are still central ways that communities survive.

We also have to recognize, in some countries, Christianity has been sold to the general population as something contrary and dangerous. We may have to build long term relationships, proving that we can be trusted, and only then can we begin to share. We let them see we are not what they expected, and their curiosity will grow. In the United States we can stand boldly at an intersection with a bullhorn proclaiming the Word of God. In other countries, you may only be able to live out your life and wait for someone to ask you questions. Our speech and actions shout out to the people SHE IS DIFFERENT, and they will become curious as to why.

It is with curiosity that the questions will come. And when the questions come, we answer it with patient conversation, and pointing toward the scriptures.

Occasionally, The Great Commission comes to you. If you live in a country where people immigrate to, you may find yourself encountering a person from another country right in your own back door. I live in a neighborhood that is very diverse. In one direction, I have neighbors from Haiti, in another direction they family is from the Dominican Republic. Across the street is a single mother from the Philippines, and on the corner is a woman from Italy. When I walk my dog down the street, I encounter the man from Germany, a few houses down is a family from India. As I round the block, there is a couple from Mexico. Every day I have the opportunity to encounter people from different cultures, just by getting the mail or walking my dog. These are people with different experiences, different cultural backgrounds, and different religious beliefs.

When my last child was still an infant, I encountered a mother from the Bahamas. She didn't have a lot of friends in the area, and our personalities were very similar. After meeting for coffee a few times, I learned that her husband was an atheist. Her mother had bounced from protestantism to Catholicism. Her father, was a believer in talk, but not walk. She shared that she really felt like there was a "god" but she just wasn't sure if it was the Christian God, and she shared her thoughts that maybe we all shared the same god just by a different name. I spent a little more time getting to know her, and her family, building a level of trust with her. Then, I invited her to our local MOPS group. She had a great time meeting women, participated in a few discussions, she even signed her kids up for VBS that year.

When I reached out to her, here in my own city, it has a ripple effect all the way back to the Bahamas. And, I recently learned, even further as I began to learn more about her family and how they are spread out all over the globe.

We share God with other women in many ways, besides sharing the Gospel, or tending to their physical needs through service (like medicine, food, etc). We also point to God as we share our testimony. Sometimes we don't think women in other countries or cultures can relate to our testimony. How does our struggle in a 1st world country compare to what they go through in a developing nation? Many of our stories, regardless of the specifics, share in universal truths. We are broken. We need healing. We need restoration. We need Hope.

Women suffer from infertility, miscarriages, and infant death ... in all nations and tribes.

Women suffer from grief over the loss of loved ones ... in all nations and tribes.

Women suffer from disease, personally or relationally ... in all nations and tribes.

Women suffer from persecution, poverty, and abuse ... in all nations and tribes.

Women suffer. In all nations. In all tribes.

When you suffer, you have compassion for those who suffer.

When you share that you suffer, women relate to each other in that suffering.

When you share hope that transcends that suffering, women believe if you can overcome, so can they.