

SHARON JAYNES  
Proverbs 31 Ministries

BUILDING  
*an*  
EFFECTIVE  
WOMEN'S  
MINISTRY



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## **BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE WOMEN'S MINISTRY**

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———— PART ONE ————  
*Understanding  
the Need*

When a builder constructs a house, he has two options—a “spec” house or a custom home. A “spec” (speculative) house is one in which the *builder* selects the plan, chooses the materials, and designs the interior to his liking. When the project is complete, he puts up a For Sale sign in the hope that someone will fall in love with the house, put their name on the mailbox, and take over the mortgage payments. On the other hand, a custom home is one built especially for the person or persons who will be living there. The *family* chooses a plan that will suit their specific needs, selects the materials that fit within their budget, and designs the interior with each family member in mind.

There is little to no risk in building a custom home because the family who will be living there has been involved in the process all along. However, there is great risk in a spec house. Just because the builder thinks his plan is a good one does not mean that it is. I have known builders who have gone bankrupt because they did not do the proper research to build according to a community’s need, but plowed ahead with what they thought would sell.

Likewise we have two options when building a women’s ministry—a spec ministry or a custom ministry. The first option is very risky and may leave women spiritually bankrupt, but the second option promises a ministry that women will be glad to call “home.” Before we begin, let’s answer two important questions: Why do we need women’s ministry? What is the purpose of women’s ministry?





# Why Do We Need Women's Ministry?

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I was flipping through my local newspaper one day and noticed a calendar of events for the week. For the first time I perused the list to see what was happening in my fair city. Then a stark reality hit me and I began to count. In that one week, there were 146 support group meetings scheduled. There was everything from Alcoholics Anonymous to Codependents Anonymous to Recovery from Food Addiction. Then over to the side a note read, "If you're looking for a support group not listed here, call..." Once again I was struck with how desperately people need encouragement and support, and how they will go just about anywhere to get it.

Women need encouragement as never before. Because of the trends in our society, women feel isolated, disconnected, and stressed. They no longer have the family support and sense of community support prevalent just a few generations ago. Each year, 44 million people relocate. That's 20 percent of the population. We once sang, "Over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we go." But because we live in such a transient and mobile society, Grandmother's house, in many incidences, is no longer *over the river and through the woods*, but across several state lines. And when you get to Grandma's house, she's probably not at home, but out with her Rollerblading club, on an Alaskan cruise, or at a water



aerobics class. Grandmothers today live very busy and active lives of their own.

Not only do women not have the support of family readily available as in times past, they many times do not have the support of neighbors, nor do they feel a sense of community where they live. Where we once had a welcome mat at our front door, we now have a warning sticker alerting those who approach that we have an alarm system. We've moved from welcome to warning, and many of us don't even know our neighbors right next door.

In his book *Come Before Winter and Share My Hope*, Chuck Swindoll tells of a time in America's history when men and women discovered the necessity of joining together.

It occurred when "Go west, young man!" was the challenge of America...when squatter's rights seemed the most advantageous way to pry families loose and dare them to brave the elements via the covered wagon.

So out they came, exchanging the crowded, soot-choked industrial cities back East for the open plains, clear skies, and fertile, albeit rugged, farmland of the West. Predictably, those early settlers built their cabins or sod huts smack dab in the middle of their homestead, acres (often miles) from the nearest family. Strong, sturdy fences marked property lines as pride of ownership became the badge of courage. Words, like independence and private property, were common table talk as the young were taught how to fight for survival.

But as time passed all that began to change. When photographers returned from those lonely houses, they showed pictures of wild-eyed women, stooped, gaunt, prematurely old men, and haunted-looking children. Life was hard making it on their own, especially through the bitter winters, fighting off disease and starvation.

More and more settlers learned that they had a better chance of making it if they would build their houses near

each other, in the corner of their property rather than in the center. Four families could survive much easier if they loosened their grip on independence, built a gate in their fence, and relinquished their overstated emphasis on privacy. Enduring winter's blast or a lengthy illness wasn't nearly so frightful if you had three other families within walking distance. It proved to be much more fun coming together instead of living lonely, separate, touch-me-not lives of isolation...

Those old settlers learned what we seem to have forgotten today: pulling closer together is better than existing so far apart. Sharing is still to be preferred to staying aloof. The risks and periodic hassles notwithstanding, four in the corner are better than one in the middle.<sup>1</sup>

Never before in the history of man do people have such ready access to others. We have e-mail, instant messaging, call-waiting, call forwarding, caller ID, and call return. We clip on beepers, tote cell phones, and even wear headphones so as not to miss a single call while driving or working. And yet women feel more isolated and alone than ever before. It seems we've forgotten to put the gates in the fences around our hearts and opted for independence over community. The result has been devastating.

I think this inborn need to know others and be known is the pull of such TV programs as *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Many people spend five hours a week with Oprah when they may not spend five minutes getting to know the person right next door. The person next door may be more interesting, but getting to know your neighbor is a lot of work, and TV is easy.

Women today lead very different lives from the homemakers of the '60s. Almost 70 percent of Christian women work outside the home, either full-time or part-time. Forty percent of those have preschoolers, and 36 percent are single.<sup>2</sup> Today's woman is being pulled in several directions at the same time and typically feels guilty

that she is letting someone down—that someone or something is not getting the proper amount of her attention.

At the dawn of the feminist movement, Helen Reddy sang, “I am woman, hear me roar in numbers too big to ignore.” However, today’s woman would be more likely to resonate with the bumper sticker that reads “I am woman. I am invincible. I am tired.”

This cultural pull on women to do it all and have it all—all at the same time—is causing insurmountable stress. We can all agree that stress haunts every woman to some degree. Yet how she deals with that stress varies. “It is estimated that seventy percent of all physician office visits are for stress-related illnesses.”<sup>3</sup> “It is not the stress in itself that damages us, but unrelenting stress... It is our failure to regularly retreat from the front lines that creates trouble.”<sup>4</sup>

Throughout Scripture we see how God placed women together in relationships to encourage one another and provide a place of retreat. Just as God sent Mary to Elizabeth and Ruth to Naomi, He continues to place women together for mutual support, accountability, and friendship. That’s why we need women’s ministry in our churches today. Women are the very heartbeat of the home, community, and church, and many are in desperate need of resuscitation!

I remember what I read once about the draw of the local bar:

The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give His church. It’s an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality, but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets and they usually don’t tell others or even want to. The bar flourished not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers.<sup>5</sup>

We can do better than the neighborhood bar! Jesus has what people are truly longing for. Many can't define the longing or who put it there. We know—and we have a privilege of telling them!

Bill Hybels, author of *Courageous Leadership*, notes:

There is nothing like the local church when it's working right. Its beauty is indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. Its potential is unlimited. It comforts the grieving and heals the broken in the context of community. It builds bridges to seekers and offers truth to the confused. It provides resources for those in need and opens its arms to the forgotten, the downtrodden, the disillusioned. It breaks the chains of addictions, frees the oppressed, and offers belonging to the marginalized of this world. Whatever the capacity for human suffering, the church has a greater capacity for healing and wholeness.<sup>6</sup>

As women ministering to other women, we offer an “indescribable beauty” of our own. To borrow from Hybels' words, God's power working through us is breathtaking, God's potential working in us is unlimited, and God's love spilling over from us knows no bounds.