

## **Ministry to Women and Children in the Congregation** by Helen Jensen

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Those who minister to women and children in the congregation are important gospel workers – whether they are involved full-time, part-time, are paid or are volunteers.

In the suburbs and in the community at large women are the transmitters of culture, passing on so many of the traditions, ideals and ideas of the world in which we all live.

We live in a changing world which is very different to the one our grandmothers lived in and yet humanity has not changed and the need to tell of the great news of salvation in Jesus is still of vital importance.

I want to make four points from the Scriptures about the work those of us do who work in ministry to women and children in the congregation.

(1) Those who take on this task in some part, take on a noble cause. It may not be applauded as those who want to save the whale or the rainforest – remember I am a geographer so I am interested in what happens to our rainforests - but it is so much more important as it lasts into eternity.

- 1 Corinthians 15:58 tells us

*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.*

- And 1 Thessalonians 2:19 - 20

*For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.*

(2) We also have the Scriptures guiding us to see that the passing on of the knowledge of our God from one generation to another is what pleases Him.

- From the time of the wanderings in the wilderness these were God's instructions – Deuteronomy 6:6-9

*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts on your house and on your gates.*

The importance of the knowledge of God being passed on to future generations is stressed again in various Psalms.

- See, for instance, Psalm 78:1-8

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;*

*Incline you ears to the words of my mouth!*

*I will open my mouth in a parable;*

*I will utter dark sayings from of old,*

*Things that we have heard and known,*

*That our fathers have told us,  
 We will not hide them from their children,  
 But tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD,  
 and his might,  
 And the wonders that he has done.  
 He established a testimony in Jacob  
 And appointed a law in Israel,  
 Which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children,  
 That the next generation might know them,  
 The children yet unborn,  
 And arise and tell them to their children,  
 So that they should set their hope in God  
 And not forget the works of God,  
 But keep his commandments;  
 And that they should not be like their fathers.  
 A stubborn and rebellious generation,  
 A generation whose heart was not steadfast,  
 Whose spirit was not faithful to God.*

- Or Psalm 89:1  
*I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;  
 With my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.*
- Or Psalm 102:18  
*Let this be recorded for a generation to come,  
 So that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD.*
- Or Psalm 145:4  
*One generation shall commend your works to another,  
 And shall declare your mighty acts.*
- Or Ephesians 6:4  
*Fathers do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the  
 discipline and instruction of the Lord.*
- Or 2 Timothy 2:2  
*And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses  
 entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*

(3) The task of teaching women and children is just that – one of teaching and we should make that our goal. It is easy to be distracted from this important, hard and often thankless task, as many other good activities crowd into our calendar but it is what we are to do, regardless. We are to make it our highest priority. Our beloved apostle, Paul, gave these instructions to his disciple, Timothy, and we do well to keep them in the back of our minds always.

- 2 Timothy 4:1-5  
*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the  
 living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the  
 word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort,  
 with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people  
 will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will  
 accumulate for themselves teachers who suit their own passions, and will  
 turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you,*

*always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.*

Now you may have other women unhappy with this quote as they feel they are not allowed to 'preach' but I am accepting the idea that 'preaching' here is teaching in a formal way to perhaps a larger group. It is not my place here to discuss the practice of some women who want to deny the injunction of the Scriptures that women should not teach men (as preaching to a mixed group or to a group of men would be) but to notice, with you, the number of times the word 'teaching/teachers' is used in this passage so that we can all understand the importance of getting on with the task. Teaching women and children in the congregation can take many forms – formally in

- Scripture classes in schools,
- Sunday school,
- Crèche,
- Women's Bible study groups,
- one to one studies,
- addressing larger groups in special women's events like Gingerbread House making.

And informally in conversation

- after church,
- over coffee or tea,
- at a meal,
- as we read to our children, grandchildren, visiting children, our nephews and nieces,
- as we approach strangers to tell them the gospel because we are with a group who decide to evangelize in the street,
- as we converse with women in the normal interchange of life – shopping, exercising, queuing up to attend some cultural function or sports event.

(4) When we speak the Word of God to women and children we are always to remember (and we do know this but have to keep reminding ourselves of it when discouragement comes) that it is God who does His work of bringing people to Himself through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not us who do the work of conversion. It is God's work. John 3:8 reminds us of this when Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus says,

*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*

Teaching God's Word may result in times when you will be told things which you would have preferred not to know – like women telling you of the abortions they have had, or the child they had when they were unmarried and gave up for adoption, or the abuse of their childhood, or the mistreatment they suffer at the hands of their husband, but that is part of their sharing with you and of their concern usually so you really know them. It can be their attempt to show you how much they trust you; it can be their attempt to show you what guilt or shame they carry with them; it can be their attempt to get help – prayer for

forgiveness or counseling. Or it can be an attempt to gain attention. You must discern which it is. It can be something which they have never told anyone else. This is a time for prayer and reassurance about God's love for them with some wisdom in what you say and teach, but unless you are a qualified counselor you cannot do much else. They may need professional counseling – so we may need to know where to send these women who need help other than prayer and reassurance and teaching.

Keeping ourselves fit for ministry is always a trick. We need to keep ourselves up to date with our reading and preparation. This may involve further training and there are lots of courses about which could help us with this. What are we reading? What are we working on ourselves to develop ourselves further and better for the ministry we are involved in? Are we being imaginative in our approaches to how and what we are teaching? How is our planning going? What are we like at delegation and committee work? Are we good at keeping sane about our own needs for rest and recreation? What about keeping up with family and friends? What about leisure time? These all have to be kept in balance.

But the joys of seeing women and children come to understand of what Jesus was doing on the cross and why, and growing in this understanding and commitment, are so uplifting that they bring us to our knees to praise and thank our heavenly Father and His Son in the power of the Holy Spirit and cannot be measured. So keep at it and God be with you in all you do.