



Opportunities for women in ministry

Georgie Dezius 2024

What does it look like to give up my life for God's mission as a woman?

Men and women, in God's great design, are created equal but different. In Genesis 1:27 both male and female are equally created in God's image. Yet New Testament passages like 1 Timothy 2 make it clear that men and women have God-given differences¹, and so serving God in ministry will look different. What is not different is our convictions to give all that we can to serve God as much as we can, with the gifts and opportunities that he has given us.

God gives different gifts (skills/abilities, see Rom 12:8, or life circumstances like singleness/marriage in 1 Cor 7:7) and opportunities to men and women, and he gives different women different gifts and opportunities at different stages of their life. To be a Christian is to give up your whole life to follow Jesus. Once we are convicted of this, we need wisdom to decide what it looks like, depending on what situation God has put us in and the gifts he's given us.

1 Corinthians 15:58 tells us to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, in light of the resurrection, because the work of the Lord is not in vain. The work of the Lord is gospel work that will last into eternity. This is work (unpaid or paid) that centres around bringing God's word to bear in the lives of people, to make lots of deep disciples. There is also important work that aids and assists but is not directly 'word' or 'gospel' work, for example church administration or serving food at church events. This work can still be considered gospel work, or making disciples, if it is connected to 'word' work (eg. running administration for a church will help to make disciples, running administration for a school will not).²³

¹ These differences are good and part of God's original design, which we know from the reference to Adam and Eve (1 Timothy 2:13-14). They are built into God's design for creation, rather than just being cultural differences which change over time.

² For more on women doing the work of the Lord, see Talk 3 at Lighthouse Church Women's Retreat 2024

<https://www.lighthouse.net.au/bible-talks-new/>

³ For an article explaining the 'work of the Lord' see

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/abounding-in-the-work-of-the-lord-1-cor-1558-everything-we-do-as-christians/>

Women have unique opportunities to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, yet we often feel confused as to where to start as we mainly see men in Bible-teaching ministry positions. We also have to consider the important God-given role of being mothers to children (Gen 1:26-28, 3:20) which reduces the amount of time or capacity for ministry outside the home for those who have kids.

As women, we must be convicted that 'the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few' (Matthew 9:37), and those workers include both men and women. There are millions of people needing to hear the gospel and be saved-across Australia and many more across the world. We need as many men and women as possible to be as effective as possible in bringing the great news of salvation to the world, for God's glory (2 Timothy 2:2).

Women may feel confused and hesitant about the Bible's teaching on men and women in ministry. However, the Bible upholds MANY ways that women can serve God and his people in gospel work. For example, leading teams and ministries in churches or para-church organisations, teaching the Bible to children, youth and other women; evangelising and following up both men and women (it is particularly helpful to have women who will do this for women); and training other women to be godly, mature leaders for the future. If you speak to any pastor at any church, they will be able to tell you of multiple ministry needs that could be filled by women. There are many listed at the end of this paper.

When considering how to serve God with our whole lives as women, we should start with questions like 'What is most effective for God's kingdom? What are kingdom needs and opportunities, and how could God use me?'

There is a great need across the world for full-time⁴ gospel workers who can teach the Bible and lead others to be saved and grown as deep disciples. These people (men and women) need to be of godly Character, Biblical Conviction, and have appropriate Competencies (the "three C's"). Women may feel like paid gospel ministry is mainly for men, but there is a great need and opportunity for women to be trained for and involved in this work. See the list at the end of this paper of gospel ministry jobs for women. However, women may have not considered full time gospel ministry for a number of reasons, which I will address below:

Reasons women may not have considered full-time ministry:

Do any of these apply to you?

Not being aware of the needs, opportunities and your own gifts:

⁴ Or 'vocational' gospel workers - that is, doing gospel work as your vocation/job though it may be less than 5 days per week

Full time gospel ministry isn't for everyone, but would you be willing to give up your current life plans if it turned out that God has gifted you for this work? It would be worth:

- Asking the question 'why wouldn't I do full time gospel ministry?' Examine your reasons. Are they good reasons that the Bible holds up?
 - Eg. There are good reasons not to do full-time gospel ministry, such as if you have worked out that you are not gifted for *teaching* and *leadership* (see 1 Tim 3:2 - teach, 3:4 - manage/lead).
 - There are also bad reasons, some of which are listed below. Eg. are insecurities, fear, or the influence of the world stopping you?
- Reading 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. These describe the qualifications for leaders in God's church, particularly related to character, which is key. Reflect on if you hold these qualities, or if you could grow into them, and what it would take to grow and develop them. Note as well that 1 Tim 3:1 mentions the aspect of 'desire' for this 'noble task.' People often downplay this but ministry is a great job, a noble task, and if it is something that you want to do, that is a good thing!
- Talk to a gospel worker or high level volunteer especially if they know you well or have led you in ministry. Ask them if they think you could be appropriate for full time gospel ministry, and what steps they suggest you take to explore that. If they give you feedback about things you could grow in, take this onboard and set goals to work on these things.
- Be open to leaders identifying gifts and qualities in you that might make you suitable for full time ministry. Leaders are discerning and if they point these things out in you and encourage you in this direction, have an open mind to explore that opportunity seriously.
- Consider attending MTS Recruit conference, Reach Australia Conference, or other events recommended by a gospel worker.
- Consider if God may have gifted you uniquely to reach a unique group of people. Are you from a particular cultural background? Do you speak a language other than English? Do you have a passport that allows you to live and work in a country that some missionaries couldn't? Did you grow up a Christian, or has God given you a testimony that may help you to reach a certain group of people that others might not?
- If you are not married or do not yet have kids, it could be worth considering the timing of getting ministry training and experience before potentially having kids, as your capacity for this will change if and when you have kids, and it may be beneficial for some women to consider something like a ministry apprenticeship earlier than men for this reason.

If you work out that it would not be most wise to pursue full time gospel ministry, there are plenty of other options for serving God as effectively as you can with as much time and capacity as you are able to sacrifice for his kingdom. Remember, full-time or not, paid or not, this work is not in vain, and lasts into eternity! You are not a second-rate Christian if you don't end up going into full-time ministry.

How could you prioritise serving God as much as possible in your current phase of life? At the end of this paper are some examples to consider for different life stages. You might like to discuss them with a mature Christian friend, a gospel worker or mature woman at church. And if you are married, discuss them with your spouse.

Financial/material needs and the desire for comfort

We need to think wisely about how God wants us to use the money that he has given us. Our current society sets a very high standard of material comfort for living, which may lead us to give more time and energy to paid employment than unpaid or lower-pay gospel work, because we want to live comfortably. We might consider taking cheaper holidays, spending less on house renovations, or sending our kids to a public school, for the sake of needing to work less and being more available to serve in gospel ministry (including the ministry of raising our kids in Christ). Each family will need to make their own choices, and we have the freedom to do so, but it is worth acknowledging the pull of worldly comfort and materialism that may lead us to use our time and energy on the temporary things of this world, rather than eternal gospel things.⁵

Lack of visible female role models or mentors

When women think of ministry workers, they often think of men and it's hard to see what it looks like to be a woman in full time ministry. Often we see men in up front roles and there's a perception that those up the front are more important. But there are more women in ministry than you realise! Have you tried to find a mentor or role model at church, or elsewhere? If you are interested, try attending conferences like Reach Australia or MTS Recruit, or asking staff at church if you could meet with a more mature woman to grow in ministry leadership.

Lack of confidence

Ask yourself, where does this come from? Explore your lack of confidence and remind yourself of your identity and worth in Christ. Perhaps even see a counsellor or psychologist if you think there are deeper issues at play. Take baby steps to get out of your comfort zone. Often women don't want to fail or do something badly, but the reality is we learn through failure and we can get a whole lot more done if we can accept things being done at 80% good enough, not always 100% perfect.⁶ It's also very normal to feel a lack of confidence and some nervousness when starting something new, but confidence often increases with time and experience.

Unclear what the Bible says about women in ministry

Godly women don't want to sin, and if we are confused about what the Bible says about women in ministry, we may avoid teaching or leadership roles because we don't know if we

⁵ For an introduction to thinking Biblically about money, see 'Christians and Money' article on Lighthouse Church website <https://www.lighthouse.net.au/articles/> To dig deeper, read "*Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*" by Craig Blomberg

⁶ See training video on 'Minimal Effective Dose' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ6Zhpm-t88>

would be going against what the Bible says by doing them. This issue may feel daunting and emotional to explore, but we need to remember that the Bible is God's word and what it says really is clear and good for all of us. There are excellent resources available to read, listen to and discuss on this topic⁷. Have an open mind for God to teach you. And know that there are a multitude of ways that women can and should be involved in gospel ministry. Reach out to a gospel worker or trusted mature Christian to discuss and work through this issue.

What could it look like for me?

Some thoughts on giving your whole life for the gospel at different life stages:

- Young adult
 - Typically you will have more time available to serve God in a variety of ways, especially if you live with your parents. Consider if/how much you need to work in paid employment (especially if you're at uni/tafe and expecting to earn a higher wage upon graduation), and how much time you could give to volunteer at church or in campus ministry. There are loads of opportunities to grow in your convictions, character and competencies at this time eg. attending uni conferences, serving on summer mission, reading theologically, seeking out training opportunities and mentoring, serving in weekly ministries others often don't have time or energy for like kids and youth ministries, which also give you an opportunity to teach the Bible. Take up opportunities to be trained for leadership. There is unlikely to be another time in your life when you will have as much time and energy to engage in all of these things (even if you don't feel like it now!).
 - Now is also an important time to consider singleness and marriage and how they impact on your opportunities to serve God. 1 Corinthians 7 upholds the value of singleness in that it means you do not need to consider another person in your decision making of how you will use your time, money and energy. You are more free to give more of yourself to gospel work. What a great thing! If you do want to marry, think about the kind of man you would marry, and the kind of wife you would be. Are you looking for a man who has the same convictions about his whole life being submitted to Christ, who will make this a priority in your marriage and your family? This is important to work out in dating, as you are very unlikely to see someone change their core convictions in years to come. While there may be real, legitimate grief in staying single long term for those who wish to be married, it would be better to remain single than to marry

⁷ Read the book "*God's Good Design*" by Claire Smith. And/or you may like to ask your church/ministry leadership for a paper or discussion on these issues specific to your context. For one example in one church context, see see 'Men and Women in Ministry Together' article on Lighthouse Church website <https://www.lighthouse.net.au/articles/>

someone who would take you away from a growing, flourishing relationship with Jesus.⁸

- Consider what job you will choose and the impact this will have on your ability to serve God and grow in him. Now is a great time to consider if you should pursue gospel ministry in the future, even if you decide to study or start another vocation first. At this life stage you will usually have more freedom (eg. no kids, mortgage, older parents to care for) to change vocations, and it may be harder to pursue full time ministry and training at other life stages. As you consider different vocations, think about: Will your job take you to a location that does not have a solid, Bible teaching church? Will your job be too demanding or too time-consuming to give you any time to grow in your relationship with Jesus and serve him? Will there be a worldly work culture that will be too tempting for you to participate in? Life is not all about having your dream job and it would be better to have a less-ideal job that doesn't take you away from a flourishing relationship with Jesus. Think about your job in 10 years time - will it give you flexibility to serve in church, or to parent well if you were to have kids?⁹
- Consider using this time to step away from study or work to be trained in ministry formation through a ministry apprenticeship¹⁰
- Evangelistic opportunities - particularly if you are at uni, tafe or have started working, this is a life stage when people are considering and learning about the world, and may be more open to changing their worldview. Young adults are thinking about life and what they believe for the first time as an adult. Make the most of these opportunities to share the gospel and encourage your peers to reconsider whatever spiritual upbringing they may have had, and consider Jesus. Try doing some walk-up evangelism.
- Full time worker, no kids
 - This may be a busier season of life, and different if you are married or single, or if you have other family members you are responsible for. You may be earning more and therefore able to give more to gospel work, but the temptation will also be to spend more on yourself, or save more and find your security in finances rather than God. One thing to consider is whether you need to work full-time, or if you could give up one or more days a week to do more ministry. This is a good option to consider if you have certain gifts for gospel work or to help gospel work, like leadership, teaching or administrative gifts, but you are not going to do full time ministry (at least not at this stage). Examples could be teaching school scripture, being involved in evangelism at an evangelistic series

⁸ Read "Water for my Camels" by Paul Grimmond, or see <https://ccl.moore.edu.au/resources/podcast-episode-069/> for a podcast and other resources.

⁹ For a series of talks see 'Why do we work?' at <https://www.lighthouse.net.au/bible-talks-new/>. OR read *How to choose your next job* article by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-choose-your-next-job> OR read "Revolutionary Work" by William Taylor

¹⁰ <https://mts.com.au/>

or playgroup, leading a mid-week Bible study, leading at Kids Club or youth, or serving at services on Sundays in a variety of roles, leading a team or ministry area or non-word roles like media and administration.

- Raising kids of various ages

Every family is different, and every mum is different in her capacity. Some things to consider at this life stage are:

- Going back to work after having babies - do you financially need to do this, or can your family make it work so you can use the time where you were working, to train and serve in gospel ministry? Even if that means working 1-2 days less than before. Be aware of the temptation to find your identity in what you do and the impact of our society in judging us by this. People may see you as 'just a mum,' but remember your identity is in Christ.
- Consider using your time while the kids are at school to be trained in ministry through a part-time ministry apprenticeship
- Evangelistic opportunities with kids - as a young mum, you might be in a mother's group or a playgroup, as your kids get older, they may join sports teams or make friends with other kids at school. How can you maximise the unique gospel opportunities you have at this stage of life? Bringing your kids and their friends to Kids Club and youth is a great way to encourage them in their own evangelism, and create opportunities to talk to their friends' parents about church.
- There will always exist a tension between raising your kids as deep disciples, and making deep disciples outside your immediate family. Both are important, and there may be times when one will be sacrificed more for the other, even week to week. These roles will fluctuate and change through different life stages. You will also be supporting and ministering to your husband as a wife, and you as a team will need to work out what it looks like for you both to serve God at various stages. Sometimes this may mean you look after the kids to allow him to serve, and vice-versa. Try to play to each others' strengths and both be involved in serving throughout your family life. This is an important model to your kids.¹¹

- Adult kids/retirement

- As with every life stage, the grief of change will be felt in this season. But there are particular griefs and challenges that come in this season, whether it be your children moving out or the physical and emotional challenges of menopause. Some women have a sense of losing confidence as a result of this, but there are also great opportunities that come with this season of life.
- The temptation of the world will be to spend this season indulging yourself with holidays and material comforts. Or returning to work to earn more money for these things. But all those things are temporary. With the increased time you have once your kids are independent (whether they're living with you or not),

¹¹ To think through this more, read Chapter 13 'Your family matters' from *Wisdom in Leadership* by Craig Hamilton.

you could seek new opportunities to serve God and his church. For example, instead of returning to work after the kids have moved out consider using the time to be trained and involved in ministry more, for example: leading women's Bible studies, evangelism, theology training, meeting with women 1:1, leading teams at church, or being trained and equipped to lead God's people through a 'Prime Time' ministry apprenticeship. There are many other ways you can serve in this season that don't involve leadership if that is not what you are gifted in, the main thing is to do as much work of the Lord as you can with the gifts he's given you.

- In addition to all the opportunities to serve mentioned above, being an older woman, this may be a particular opportunity to serve younger women by discipling them (Titus 2:3-5). It would be good to consider as you head towards this life stage - am I spiritually and relationally mature so that I will be well positioned to disciple younger women? How can I grow in these things? Who are the older women I look up to as models of who I want to be when I'm older? You might be able to do some training or access some mentoring yourself to develop in these areas.
- Some older people experience loneliness and are looking for connection. Are you involved in any community groups where you are meeting non-Christians who you can befriend and invite to know Christ and join his loving community of the church?
- As you continue to age, this is a life stage that is often marked with suffering, frailty and eventually death (of those around you, and then your own). You may become physically less able, but have more time for prayer and to encourage others. You may become a widow, which is a huge life change as you will be single again. Through the hardships, there is an opportunity to witness to the hope of the gospel in these circumstances. Remember, you are teaching those younger than you what it looks like to trust and honour Jesus amidst suffering and death, and the gospel work you have done and are doing is not in vain. Are you spiritually prepared to encounter suffering, or do you need to invest time preparing for the doubts and questions that may arise?

The big picture...

God is great, holy and majestic. He is worthy of all praise and glory and we want to see him glorified by millions of people around the world. He is saving and growing people and he is using women of all ages, cultures and abilities in this great, eternal work! This is a joyful and eternally fruitful way to use the time, energy, money, skills and opportunities he's given us as women in the short time we will spend on earth. May we do so, to God's glory!

What could it look like to serve God with your whole life?

Here is a list of gospel opportunities for women that you may not have thought of:

Church-based ministries

- Teach scripture in schools/run a school lunchtime group
- Make videos of people's salvation stories
- Make meals for Kids Club
- Help run an evangelistic course or follow up course
- Creche ministry
- Learn to lead a growth group
- Learn to write a bible study
- Meet with women 1-2-1
- Use time for planning/meetings as a Team Leader of a Sunday ministry team
- Study theology eg. certificate or diploma level study through a Bible college
- Help organise a Women's retreat / other events
- Lead a book club for women in church
- Organise outreach events
- Make promotional material for events/media team
- Summer mission roles (eg. serving coffee/food, hosting, team leading, kids, youth)
- Spend more time praying intentionally for people and ministries
- Attend sports/social groups specifically to form intentional relationships to invite to church/events

- Lead a retiree social group
- Admin for ministry team
- Organise storage for church
- Join the Care Team with assistance you can offer

Paid gospel-work jobs (full or part time)

- Church based Children's/Youth Ministry
- Music Ministry
- Women's Pastor
- School Chaplain
- Scripture Teacher or Coordinator (Primary or High School)
- Christian Studies Teacher (Christian School)
- Uni-student/International Student/Post-grad / Staff Ministry
- Uni College Chaplaincy
- Theological Education
- Itinerant Ministry
- Evangelist
- Prison Chaplaincy
- Hospital/Aged Care Chaplaincy
- Sports Chaplain
- Police / Emergency Services Chaplain
- Defence Force Chaplain (they are specifically seeking females)
- City Business Network Ministry
- Christian Resources/Book Writing/Editing/Publishing

- Christian Advertising / Posters / Website & Graphic design
- Web based Ministry
- Ministry Training Consultant / Leadership Development
- Radio Ministry / TV Ministry
- Cult Rescue Ministry
- Retreat / Camp based Ministry / Training
- Bible Translation
- Mentoring & Pastoring Pastors / Wives
- Marriage Education Ministries
- TAFE Ministry
- Cross-Cultural Evangelist
- Children's Evangelist / Entertainer
- Puppet Ministry
- Medical / Welfare Missionaries
- Missionary / Mission School Teacher / Mission Society Leadership
- Part-time or Self-funded Pastoral Work
- Ministry Apprentice Training Pastor
- Women's Muslim Ministry Evangelist
- Church plant core team
- ESL ministry
- rural /regional church ministry
- Christian counselling/psychology
- Para-church ministry eg. Reach Australia