

Why Literacy Is Important for Women's Ministries

Of the one billion adults who cannot read, the majority are women, somewhere around 650,000,000. Since writing began, women have had less access to reading and writing than men. It is still true today in many areas of the world (see Appendix B, page 30). In some countries the situation is becoming worse, however, rather than better. In fact, the number of illiterate women in the world will continue to grow until sometime in the next two decades when efforts to expand access to primary school can provide an education to most children. These women are a natural group for whom Women's Ministries can work and witness. When a woman learns to read, her whole family has a better chance of becoming literate. As reading is taught, these women can be introduced to material teaching Christian parenting, health, life style, and philosophy. "When you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family."

The majority of these women live in what Global Missions describes as the "10-40 Window," or that part of the world ten degrees north and 40 degrees south of the equator, the focus of much of our Global Mission work. The bulk of these women are Muslim. Not only is this a difficult group of people with whom to work, but it is almost impossible for a man to work with any of these women. Therefore, it is an important work that women can undertake.

Although Women's Ministries literacy programs will be run by women, it would be a disservice to exclude men who may also want to be involved, or to limit our classes just to women. Some studies show that both men and women learn better when both are involved in the classes. In other societies, women do not want to be in classes with men.

The days are coming, declares the Sovereign Lord, When I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

—Amos 8:11

Christian Literacy ...

1. Is a tool for the evangelist—providing an ideal climate for conversion and church planting;
2. Opens the pages of the Bible and other Christian literature to both non-Christian and growing convert;
3. Is a door into nations and parts of nations where other types of missions are unwelcome;
4. Provides a satisfying activity for local Christians who are eager to help lift up their own people to a better life;
5. Expresses compassion, demonstrating that Christians are still in the Samaritan business.



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If they can't
read
they can't read
the Bible

- ☞ In the United States, one in five parents cannot read a bedtime story or Sabbath School lesson to their children.
- ☞ In the world today there are over one billion adults who cannot read. Over 650,000 of that number are women.
- ☞ The world population is over 6 billion. The complete Bible is now available to 90% of these people in their mother tongue. Yet 45-55% of these people cannot read. Non-readers comprise the vast majority of the peoples yet to be reached with the Gospel.
- ☞ Non-readers are captive:
 - they cannot fill out job applications
 - they cannot open a checking account
 - they cannot use a phone book
 - they cannot read any Christian literature or the Bible
- ☞ Pastor Samson Phiri of Zambia says, “Dictators love an illiterate electorate; illiterates will believe anything they are told.”
- ☞ Literacy Volunteers of America defines a literate person as one who is able to use printed and written information to function in society, achieve her goals, and develop her knowledge and potential. This may apply to a second language as well—the language of commerce.
- ☞ Where 50% or more of the population cannot read, teaching literacy is the best way to plant churches.
- ☞ The following are the grade levels for some popular English Bibles:
 - King James Version of the Bible 12
 - New American Standard Version..... 11.3
 - New Revised Standard Version 10.4
 - New King James Version 9.1
 - Living Bible8.3
 - New International Version 7.8
 - Good News Bible.....7.3

International Children’s Version5.4
 New International Readers Version2.9

Think about this when asking someone who is not a good reader!

—*from Literacy Volunteers of America*

How to get involved: What the church can do

- Read to yourself
- Read to a child
- Read to a shut-in
- Create a literacy awareness in your congregation
- Find out about literacy programs in your area
- Assess what type of program is still needed.
- Make a financial contribution to a literacy program
- Set up a program
- Provide tutoring space in your church
- Become a tutor
- Direct a program
- Drive a student to class
- Provide baby sitting service during the tutoring session
- Give a gift for reading materials
- Get involved in your community’s education system
- Be knowledgeable about your local board of education
- Advocate for equal education for all

Some of the benefits to women from a literacy program include:

- ▶ lower birthrates (smaller families)
- ▶ with lower birthrates, the parents are better able to provide Christian education
- ▶ the children have improved educational abilities
- ▶ decrease in maternal mortality
- ▶ later marriages
- ▶ overall improvement in family health
- ▶ decrease in infant mortality
- ▶ a greater sense of personal self-worth
- ▶ an ability to read Scripture
- ▶ an ability to assume responsibility for personal spiritual choices
- ▶ an expanded influence in teaching children spiritual values
- ▶ an ability to become involved in the church’s mission
- ▶ a greater possibility of becoming financially stable
- ▶ increased employment choices and productivity
- ▶ the ability to provide financial support to the church
- ▶ more involvement in community development