

Chosen for Women's Ministries

By Dorothy Watts

Theme: God Has Chosen Us

Suggested Call to Worship: SDA Church Hymnal Reading #776, *Gifts of the Spirit* or #841, *The Plan of Salvation*

Primary Bible text : John 15:16

Opening Song: *Not I But Christ*, #570 SDA Church Hymnal

Closing Song: *Rescue the Perishing*, #367 SDA Church Hymnal or
I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go, #573

I am honored to stand before you who have been chosen by God to lead the women of this church.

Chosen by God? Ah, yes. A committee may have elected you, but it was God who chose you.... As He has called women through the centuries, so He has called you to a high calling, and a holy privilege to do a special work for Him.

As He called Sarah to leave her homeland...to become the mother of a great nation...so He has called you to become a mother to train other women to serve God....

As He chose Deborah to judge Israel and lead the army of Barak into battle...so God has chosen you to lead women in to glorious victories for Christ and His kingdom at this crucial time in earth's history....

As He called Esther to risk her life to save her people...so He has brought you to a position of influence for such a time as this...to take risks if necessary to save women in this land...to use all of your feminine skills for building up Christ's kingdom on earth....

As God chose Rahab to become a woman of faith and courage...so He has chosen you to become a woman of faith and courage...to stand up to committees if you have to ... to get done what needs to be done for the women of our churches.

As He called Abigail to be a peacemaker, He has called you to the role of peacemaker.

As God called young Mary to surrender herself so that Christ could come into this world through her, so He calls each of you to surrender yourself completely...to be His handmaiden...to allow the Holy Spirit do what He wills with your life...to use you how He chooses to bring Christ to those who know Him not.... Especially to the women of this land...

"God has a work for women as well as for men to do," Ellen White tells us...And God has chosen you—selected you—picked you out of the crowd—called you...to the position you hold today.... It is a sacred trust—a holy responsibility—one that you need to take seriously....

What has He called you to do? John 15:16

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you.

“I have chosen you,” Jesus says... “To go and bring forth fruit.” What fruit do you have to bring to Christ from your work of the past year? What have you accomplished for His cause? God has called you to be a woman of action.

“I have chosen you,” Jesus continues...”that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you.” Has God heard your prayers for the women under your care? What miracles has He wrought in answer to your prayers on their behalf? Do you care enough for the hurting, wounded, and broken women? helping them to find solutions for their problems? God has called you to be a woman of prayer.

God has called you to be His disciple—His leader—one of the chosen ones...to make things happen...to spend much time in prayer....

Who were these words spoken to? “I have chosen you?”... (Response)

Name the disciples... what? Only men?... Were there no women disciples?

Let us look at Luke 8:1-3 (NIV)

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases; Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

It is extraordinary that there were women traveling with the men from village to village.... Hebrew men and women were not supposed to worship in close proximity...But Jesus welcomed the women to His traveling evangelistic company...and it says they were women of wealth who used their money to minister to the needs of Jesus and the other disciples...women using what they had to help spread the gospel...women sharing...giving...caring...Arranging accommodations... meals...seeing to the laundry perhaps...encouraging the mothers with children.... making people welcome...Here is one illustration of what Women’s Ministries can do...seeing to the physical needs of people....

Let’s look at one of the women disciples, Mary Magdalene, a woman in torment until Jesus came and cast out the demons, a woman known as a sinner. Many think it was she who was the woman caught in adultery, that she was the sinner who brought the alabaster box of perfume to wash Jesus feet, that she was the wayward sister of Martha and Lazarus who loved to sit at Jesus feet. She was there at the tomb on Sunday morning (John 20:1). It was she who gave the first witness of the risen Lord. God entrusted a woman disciple with the wonderful news that He was alive (John

20:18).

In these various experiences of the disciple Mary, I see different aspects of Women's Ministries—
Women's Ministries then...and Women's Ministries now...

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| 1. Traveling with Jesus | Ministering to the physical needs of people |
| 2. Sitting at Jesus feet | The devotional life, spending time with God and His word...Talking to Him in prayer... |
| 3. Washing Jesus feet with perfume | Giving of ourselves in love...expressing appreciation
Through gifts of love giving encouragement... |
| 4. Standing at the cross | Being there with others in times of crisis—
death...sickness...childbirth...accident...
famine...disaster...pain...depression...discourage m
ent... just being there... |
| 5. Telling the resurrection story... | Christ entrusted the proclamation of His good news
to a woman...and He still is doing the same...part of
Women's Ministries is sharing the gospel with those
who have never heard...through literacy programs,
...Bible studies...evangelistic meetings. |

This, then, is Women's Ministries in a nutshell! Service, devotion, encouragement, support, and proclamation.

You have come here because God has chosen you.

You have come here to learn how to lead your women to better service in the community, how to become women of the word, women of a deeper devotional experience, women of prayer.

You have come here to learn how women can use their talents to build up the church through encouragement and support of their sisters in the church and the women in the community. You have come to learn how to lead your women into doing something significant for others in times of crisis.

You have come to learn how women can be disciples in every aspect of the term. Entrusted with the proclamation of the good news, women are winning thousands of souls through cottage meetings and public evangelistic efforts in South America, Inter-America, Africa, Indonesia, Philippines, Russia, India and other parts of the world.

The need to educate, train, and mentor women for service is great. This is why God has chosen you...This is your job... to train, encourage and mentor women in your sphere of influence to be all God wants them to be...

(Note to presenter: It is best to present the story of a woman from our part of the world. If you do not know of stories, check past issues of Mosaic or use the story as listed here).

When I think of what marvelous things happen when God chooses a woman...and that woman accepts His call and follows where He leads...I think of Pandita Ramabai...Revered by many as India's greatest woman of the century...she died in 1922 but her work lives on in Mukti Mission, at Kedgoan, Poona District.

The Bible that she spent fifteen years translating into Mrathi was revised in 1958, the centenary of her birth; the women at Mukti helped to revise, set in type, print and bind the new edition. In the history of the church there has probably never been another Bible that is entirely the work of women, and as far as I know Pandita Ramabai is the only woman who has translated the entire Scripture into another language.

The mission is a beehive of activity...800 people live and work there...Besides the teaching and administrative staff there are unwanted babies, the blind, child boarders, unmarried mothers, crippled children, sick and destitute women, widows with nowhere else to turn, prostitutes who want to start a new life, and women who have suffered violence.

They are fed, clothed, taught skills—helped to find a new way of life. They are educated...and learn about Jesus and His Word.

They have over one hundred eighty acres of farm land with irrigation. They have cows, goats, buffaloes for milk. They grow their own vegetables and grains. By bullock tonga, by car and by foot, Mukti missionaries, Bible women, nurses, and teachers go into the surrounding villages with the good news of the Christian gospel.

1. Pandita Ramabai was a woman of action.

In the room Pandita Ramabai used you can still see her low tables and chairs. The bed and covers show her simplicity of life. Like Mother Theresa, she owned little except a few cotton sarees and some chapples. Her open Bible with pages worn and marked, and with long prayer lists containing hundreds of names of those for whom she prayed individually, are there. This was the secret of her greatness. She was a devoted student of the Bible and a great woman of prayer. Like Mary she loved to sit at Jesus feet.

2. Women's Ministries must start with our being great women of prayer and devoted students of the Word.

In 1899 Pandita built a large cross shaped church out of stone that seats 2,000. The women themselves helped to built it, hauling the stones and mortar.

There was seldom enough in the bank account for more than one month's expenses but in the many decades of Mukti's history money has never failed...and the mission has no debts.

How did this all happen? How was it that God called Ramabai? Let me tell you the story:

Pandita's father, a Brahmin priest, scholar, and reformer, was a forty-four year old widower when he married her mother, the nine-year-old daughter of a Brahmin pilgrim. He took his child bride to his home in Mangalore and decided to educate her so that she could recite the puranas. However, his mother was very much opposed to her daughter in law getting educated, so he took his wife into the forest of Gungamul, on a remote plateau in Southern India. He built a house there and educated his wife. And there Ramabai was born in 1858.

She was a bright girl and the father decided to teach her as well. By the time she was 12 years old she had committed to memory 18,000 Sanskrit verses with all of their rich stores of wisdom and knowledge. She learned to read and write Marathi, Kanares, Hindi, and Bengali, and four other languages.

Because of family debt and misfortune, the father had to sell off all of their property and the family set forth on a pilgrimage, visiting shrines, temples, and sacred rivers. Then famine came and priests at the shrines welcomed them as long as they had money, but when that ran out they were sent away with cold and empty words. They wandered about often hungry and in distress. It was during this time that Ramabai witnessed the suffering among child widows and women and felt her first call to serving these women, although she had no idea how she would ever do it.

Her father died of starvation first, then soon after her mother and her older sister. Only her brother was left. With him she wandered more than 4,000 miles on a pilgrimage to many famous temples and shrines across the land of India, often living on grain soaked in water and seasoned with a little salt. She writes:

“We had no blankets or thick garments to cover ourselves and when traveling we had to walk barefoot without umbrellas and to rest in the night, either under the trees on the roadside or the arches of bridges, or lie down on the ground in the open air.

“Once on the banks of the Jhelum, a river in the Punjab, we were obliged to rest at night in the open air, and tried to keep off the intense cold by digging two grave-like pits, and putting ourselves into them and covering our bodies except our heads with dry sand of the river bank. Sometimes the demands of hunger were so great that we would satisfy our empty stomachs by eating a handful of wild berries.”

During those wanderings, faith in her father's idols were shaken. While in Calcutta she was introduced to Christ who knew no cast and who she was told gave neither man nor woman dominion over the other—who loved all people of all nations. This aspect of Christ appealed to Ramabai because at that time in India, women had few opportunities and she saw in Christianity some hope for the education of women in her land.

By this time she had determined to devote her life to raising the standards of women. She wrote, “Child widows have no place in the abode of the gods, and no hope of getting liberation, except perchance that they might be born among the higher class after having gone through millions of reincarnations.” She had seen women turned out of their homes, and often sacrificed on the funeral pyre with their dead husbands. She saw in Christianity some answer for these problems women

faced.

About this time her brother died and she married his friend Bipin Bihari Medhavi, a graduate of Calcutta University and a practicing advocate. They went to Silchar in Assam. It was while here she found a copy of the Gospel of Luke in her husband's library and then she got a copy of the Sanskrit Bible. More and more she felt drawn to Christ. She met a Baptist missionary who also encouraged her.

Then her husband died of cholera, leaving her with a baby girl, Manarama, "Heart's joy." She was now one of India's 23 million widows and felt their plight even deeper. In her grief she found she came nearer to God.

About this time she decided to go to England to study further. There she came to know some women who ran a home for unwed mothers. "What makes you love them so much?" she asked. One of the women opened the Bible and read to her the story of the woman at the well.

There in that story of Christ and the woman who had five husbands, and the way He treated her with such respect, she found the God for whom she had been searching. She was baptized while in England and became a devote Christian. She wrote, "I began to think that there was a real difference between Hinduism and Christianity. I realized, after reading the fourth chapter of St. John, Gospel 1, that Christ was truly the divine Savior He claimed to be and no one but He could transform and uplift the downtrodden womanhood of India and every land.

After two years in England she went to America to visit a friend Anandibai Joshi, the first woman from India to receive the Doctor of Medicine degree from Women's Medical College in Philadelphia. Ramabai had planned to stay only a few weeks but ended up staying three years. She wrote a book, "The High Cast Hindu Woman" and told about the plight of the child widows in India. When it was published she got many speaking appointments and money began to flow in for her work for the women in India.

In May 1888 she sailed for Bombay. When she arrived at Bombay, she said, "I fell on my knees, committed myself to the care of a loving Heavenly Father." Six weeks later she opened a widows home in Bombay. Within three weeks she had 22 students. Among those she cared for was the daughter of a temple harlot, and when she learned that unfortunate widows were often obliged to become temple prostitutes to survive, she disguised herself as a religious beggar and went from place to place to find out for herself. She was appalled at what she found.

Although Ramabai kept her school nonsectarian, she did invite any who wished to share in her private Bible studies. More and more began to join her and soon a good number of them had become Christians. This caused vicious rumors and newspaper stories and attacks made about the conversions in her school. It became dangerous for her to remain in Bombay so she went to Pune and eventually bought the land at Kadgaon for the home for homeless women and girls.

Then famine came. Disguised as a Hindu pilgrim, Ramabai set out to find impoverished widows and bring them back to the mission. She came back with six hundred widows who had been used as temple prostitutes and then in the famine caste out into the streets to fend for themselves and to

die. Hundreds more appeared from all over the country. Every day these women came for prayers, and although none were required, hundreds of them accepted Christ. On one occasion Ramabai observed 17 cartloads of new believers being taken to be baptized in the Bheema River as their joyous choruses of praise filled the air.

She called her mission “Mukti Sadan” house of Salvation. She wrote, “Many hundreds of the girls and young women who have come to my home ever since its doors were opened for them have found Christ as I have. They are capable of thinking for themselves. They have had their eyes opened by reading the Word of God, and many of them have been truly converted and saved, to the praise and glory of God.

In 1900 another famine hit. She had 2,000 people under her care—1,400 of these were young girls under the age of 20.

On one day 200 starving people showed up at her gate. She had no work and no food for them, but she invited them into the campus and took them to the barn to pray. They prayed for food and she assured them that God could provide for hundreds as He could for 2 or 20. Funds came for food just in time and she could put them all to work and feed them all. Each day was a miracle in answer to prayer.

She bought more land and built the house of mercy, a home for single mothers, abused women, and youth offenders. She took in blind and orphans and crippled and her work expanded more and more. She taught skills and began small cottage industries and the making of handicrafts, then set up a store for selling the things they made. She had a weaving school, blacksmith shop, tinshop, tannery, shoemaking and carpentry shops. She set up a print shop and book bindery and it was here that thousands of copies of the Marathi Bible she translated were printed and bound.

On one occasion former Brahmin friends threatened to destroy her place, but God gave Ramabai the promise, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.” Sometimes the treasury was empty. Storms came and fire broke out, but she knew that God answers prayers in famine, fire, and storm.

In the last 15 years of her life Pandita Ramabai learned Greek and Hebrew and translated the entire Bible into Marathi. In the last months of her life she spent long hours in proof reading and the first pages of the 50,000 copies of the Bible were already being printed by her girls. Then she became ill and she realized her time was drawing near to die. She prayed, “God, please grant me ten more days, just ten more days, and I’ll have this proof reading done and the Bible can be printed. Ten days later when the last page proof was read, she lay down to sleep and never woke again.

Pandita Ramabai was one woman God chose. What glorious results followed her acceptance of the call to Women’s Ministries.

God called Pandita Ramabai. He chose her and ordained her that she should go and bring forth fruit, and that her fruit should remain, and it does to this day. And whatsoever she should ask of the Father in His name, He would give it to her, and hundreds of stories are in her biographies—stories of God’s miracles in answer to her prayers.

We could name other women God has called... Amy Carmichael who established Donavur Fellowship for abandoned girl and child prostitutes and orphan in Tinnevely District of Tamil Nadu. Amy Carmichael has died, but her fruit remains; her books are still in circulation telling of hundreds of answered prayers in her work for women's ministries as God had called her.

Mother Theresa is a woman God called to show His love and compassion to the destitute on the streets of Calcutta and what a fruit of her labor still remains.

And now God has called you. He has chosen you to be a woman of action and a woman of prayer... a woman reaching out to help others with love and compassion, walking in the footsteps of such women as Mother Theresa, Amy Carmichael and Pandita Ramabai.

I believe you are here because you have accepted His call. May God bless you as you learn how to lead the women in your sphere of influence to do mighty things for God. I pray that you will bear much fruit and that whatever you ask of God He will give you. I pray that you will be a woman of action and a woman of prayer.

Biographical Information on Sermon Writer:

Dorothy Eaton Watts is an administrator for her church headquarters in India. She was a missionary in India for 25 years, founded an orphanage, and taught elementary school. She was director of Women's Ministries for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists December 1996 to October 1997, then returned to India to serve when her husband was elected president of the Southern Asia Division.

Dorothy is also a freelance writer (having written more than 20 books), editor, and speaker. Her hobbies include gardening, hiking, and birding (with over 1,400 in her world total).