



# A Special Call as Female Practitioners & Leaders?

By **C. ANDERSON**

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If you dust off those mission history books, you will surely find references somewhere in one of them to E. Stanley Jones. This great statesman was an amazing missionary to India during the early 1900s. If you are not familiar with him, then you've definitely heard of Mahatma Gandhi. What you may not know, however, is that E. Stanley Jones' wife, Mabel Lossing Jones, influenced this history-changing man who was responsible for Indian independence in significant ways, corresponding with this powerful leader in the field of education. They wrote letters back and forth to one another for more than 20 years.

It's a tough reality that women in missions, though having a great impact, are often unsung heroes. This is true in the past and it is true in the present. It's also true in many aspects of missions, including

Note, all Scripture references are NIV.

Disciple Making Movements. But God is using women to expand His kingdom...and He will use us more.

## A Confession

Let me begin with a confession. The name I use on my books, articles, blogs, and courses is C. Anderson. Part of the reason for this is that when I started writing, I was going into many restricted-access nations. Not using my passport name was a buffer that helped me not be recognized as readily. There was another reason.

The world of Disciple Making Movements (DMMs) and Church Planting Movements (CPMs), my primary field, is male-dominated. There are only a handful of females who write, teach, and train in this area. By using the name C. Anderson, I figured some

people may begin to read and learn from what I had to say before realizing I was female. “This may remove a barrier that would be there if they knew I was a woman,” I thought to myself. As a missionary, I’m all about removing unnecessary barriers.

Once they learned from what I had to share, if they later learned I was a lady, perhaps they would no longer care. Or so was my thinking. Now, the name has stuck, and I just keep using it.

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Why the confession? I wasn’t trying to be deceptive by using a gender-neutral name. It was just being practical. The issues are real. It’s not easy to be female in a male-dominated world. At times our voices are discarded or dismissed simply because of gender. At other times, we are invited to “the table” as the token female. This is always a bit of a mixed bag as to how it feels.

How do we handle these issues with grace and wisdom? We need help, and we don’t always get it right. As females, we must help each other learn and grow in releasing our contributions with confidence, stepping into our God-appointed roles and callings faithfully. And, we need the support of men in our lives who open doors of opportunity for us, encourage, and affirm what they see we have to give, often before we’ve even given it.

Though I’ve come a long way on this journey of being a woman in ministry and leadership, I still have much to learn. Let me share, however, a few keys that have helped me thus far.

## Keys to Living Faithfully as a Woman in Missions and Leadership

### 1. *Let your identity be firmly rooted in Christ.*

Know who you are. Know who it is that called and appointed you to the task of reaching the lost. We must have an unshakeable understanding of our belovedness as a daughter of the King of Kings. Being chosen by God, to be His child, is the place from which we respond to accusations or questions as to our ability (or authority) to contribute in ministry roles. They questioned Peter because of his lack of education. So, if your identity comes from being recognized as a pastor or leader, you are already in trouble. Our source of identity must be in being His child, and in being chosen by God to be a royal priest who serves in His Kingdom (1 Pet. 2:9).

Ladies, be sure of your calling and commissioning as it is found in Matthew 28:18-20. Your appointment doesn’t come from any agency or denominational structure; it comes from Jesus himself. He told us as His disciples to go and make disciples, to baptize, and to train others to obey Him. And so, we do. It’s as simple as that.

Kathryn Hendershot wrote about Mabel Jones in the *Priscilla Papers*. “Confining herself to a ‘woman’s role’ ... was not necessary because she was secure in her identity as a servant of God. She was not out to make a name for herself or to compete with anyone.”<sup>1</sup> May God give us that same confidence today.

<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Reese Hendershot, “E. Stanley Jones Had a Wife: The Life and Mission of Mabel Lossing Jones” *Priscilla Papers*, Vol. 22, No. 2.

Remember that your gifts, both *natural* and *spiritual* ones, were given by God. He does not give us gifts and then tell us to put them in a closet or corner. Matthew 5 says, *You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven* (Matt. 5:14-16).

In this passage, Jesus instructs His disciples to let their light shine. The gifts and talents He has given you as a female need to shine, not be hidden away. Develop them and let them bring light to everyone around you.

## 2. *Simply do your work.*

As mentioned above, Mabel Lossing Jones had no interest in status or titles, she simply got busy doing what God had placed in her heart to do. She started a school for boys. She shared the Gospel with Hindu merchants. She did what was before her to do, and did it faithfully.

As females in ministry, we must do the same. This is true for men as well. If our eyes are on titles and promotions and status, we're set up for failure. Humbly and graciously serve. Do the work of the ministry. As it says in James 4:10, *Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.* If a promotion, particular status, or title is needed, God will make sure you get it. Don't strive or stress over those things.

I am grateful to be a part of a denomination that ordains women in ministry and leadership (the Assemblies of God). Not all do. That's okay.

It's not necessary to have a Rev. title in front of your name to be a minister of the

kingdom. Do the work, and let God worry about the rest. Serve where you can. God will grow your influence. The fruit of your labors will make space for you more than fighting for your right to be recognized ever will.

## 3. *Be confident in a biblical basis for women in ministry for your own sake.*

Years ago, I read and studied passages about women in ministry and leadership. I devoured books on this topic. I searched the Scriptures diligently, wanting to know what God's Word said about my role in ministry as a female. After several years of pressing into God for clarity, I came to a place of peace and assurance on these topics. I no longer spend much time on this. I've settled this issue in my heart and have a solid biblical foundation for what I do as a female leader. This is important, for my own sake, as well as for the occasional times when I need to give a biblical "defense" of my ministry to someone who asks.

Search out Bible passages on this topic. Dive deep into Romans 16. Understand who Phoebe and Priscilla were, and what Paul said about them. Wrestle with Pauline passages like 1 Timothy. Study biblical leaders like Deborah. Read about historical women like Mabel Lossing Jones, or Henrietta Mears. Determine to settle this issue first in your own heart. Then, be at peace and follow God, regardless of whether or not you are acknowledged or affirmed by others.

## 4. *Be gracious & refuse to take offense.*

Determine ahead of time to refuse to take offense when you are slighted, overlooked, or unacknowledged for the contributions you make to the kingdom. There is nothing the enemy would love more than to

make women angry, bitter, and left churning inside toward men in our lives or circles. It does no good and much harm, particularly to us but also to God's mission, when we take offense over gender-discrimination issues.

Be kind. Be gracious. Be forgiving. Overlook a multitude of slights and sins. It's okay. Let God defend you. You don't have to fight for yourself. Keep your heart pure. *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it* (Prov. 4:23).

Let me close with a few final thoughts and a word to the men reading this.

## Making Space for Women Is Simply a Good Strategy

One of the fathers of DMMs and CPMs in India, Dr. Victor Choudhrie, said to me in a recent interview, "It's absolute foolishness to not utilize women in disciple-making! It cuts your workforce by more than 50%!" Many, many movements around the world that are growing rapidly are growing because of female disciple-makers and the release of women in leadership. China is only one, though it is a key example.

## A Word to the Men in Our Lives

My husband, Todd, has always been affirming of me as a woman in ministry and missions. That is not to say he has never struggled with feeling insecure or threatened when God used me in ministry in more public ways than God was using him. He wrestled through those issues with God and settled them in his own heart. The bottom line for Todd is this: "I never want to stand in the way of something God is releasing through my wife. I live with the fear of God upon me of the loss to His kingdom, if I were to do that." Not only does he not stand in the way but he also encourages and spurs me on to be all that God has called me to be. He believes in me, often more than I believe in myself, and for his being the humble, faithful champion of the kingdom and of me, I'm so thankful.

I also want to thank MF readers, who have created space at the table for women to share their contributions. Continue to do this. As Todd Johnson famously said about Global South leaders, "We need to not only

make room at the table, we need to make room in the kitchen as well." The same is true for women. And I don't mean the food-cooking kitchen! Make room for them in the kitchen where new strategies, innovations, and ideas are being "cooked up." Call it out and invite their voices.

Last, understand that it is not easy. As a man, you may not have any gender bias in your heart whatsoever. I've sat in rooms with men whom I know are fully supportive of female contributions and leadership. I still can feel awkward and hesitant, simply because I am in such a strong minority as a female. Call women forth and then affirm them for sharing. It's a man's world, especially when it comes to missions and the realm of Disciple Making Movements.

My thanks to the many men who have done this for me. I pray more will rise to make space for their wives, daughters, disciples, and friends to give what God has given them, freely and fruitfully.

And may God continue to help me, and all my fellow female journeyers, to walk this road with grace, our eyes on Jesus, the One we love, and the One who called us to be both His daughters and also His ambassadors here on earth. 🙏

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