

Daystar Network Poised for Growth

Marcus and Joni Lamb say their mission is to reach the lost through Christian television

God-given destiny." Joni Lamb uses those words often.

On her award-winning TV show, Joni, she tells men trapped in the homosexual lifestyle that God has a destiny for them. Your sin, she says, is the roadblock keeping you from being all you were meant to be.

She tells women with unplanned pregnancies that God has a destiny for every child. Please don't take that life and thwart that purpose, she pleads.

And she and her husband, Marcus, are, she feels, living out the destiny God has for them in reaching the world with the gospel through their Daystar Television Network. "It's far beyond what I ever could have imagined," she said.

Daystar is the world's second-largest Christian TV network. "We are actually all over the world," Joni Lamb said. "We're in 150 countries. We're on over 50 stations in the United States."

Television has been a part of the Lambs' lives since the early days of their nearly 22-year-long marriage. For Marcus Lamb, the ministry started even before that. He began preaching at the age of 15. By the time he was 19, he had graduated summa cum laude from Lee College in Cleveland, Tenn.

He was preaching an evangelistic meeting at Joni's home church in Greenville, S.C., when he met his wife-to-be. Joni Lamb was saved at the age of 6 and filled with the Holy Spirit at 13. When she met Marcus, she was ready to serve and traveled with him all over the United States during the first two years of their marriage.

Then in 1983, Marcus Lamb says he felt the Lord leading him to start a Christian TV station. He says he didn't understand why God would call him to leave a thriving evangelistic ministry, since he didn't know how to build a TV station—"and I didn't have \$1 million."

But on Oct. 12, 1985, WMCF TV-45 went on the air in Montgomery, first Christian TV station in the area. At the age of 27, Marcus Lamb became the youngest person ever to establish a TV station in the United States.

A few years later the Lambs said they again felt the Lord leading them to venture into unfamiliar territory. They sold the Alabama station and moved to the Dallas-Fort Worth area in 1990. By 1997 they were ready to launch the Daystar Television Network.

"The Daystar Television Network's mission is to use television to reach as many people as possible with the Good News," Marcus Lamb wrote on the Daystar Web site. "Daystar is committed to building and operating Christian television stations to refresh the lives of our viewers and help bring a spiritual awakening in the world."

Now the network is second only to Trinity Broadcasting Network

in size. Marcus Lamb said he hopes to change that in the future and overtake the broadcasting giant.

“The bottom line to me is souls,” Lamb told Charisma. “If I’m able to fulfill the Great Commission—to go into all the world and preach the gospel—it would make us No. 1.”

He said the network has received testimonies from as far away as Saudi Arabia. Viewers have written in, saying, “We can’t go to church, but we can watch Daystar.”

Getting to their current point of success—with some 120 million viewers domestically and potentially millions abroad via satellite and the Internet—hasn’t been without challenges. The most recent came in the form of a dispute with Sky Angel, a Christian-owned satellite company that sued Colorado-based EchoStar to drop Daystar and the Southern Baptist FamilyNet from its subsidiary Dish Network.

Sky Angel claimed an earlier agreement with EchoStar gave them exclusive rights to provide Christian programming on Dish Network. In January, EchoStar won the dispute and is still broadcasting Daystar.

“This is a great victory for the Lord and for the Gospel,” Marcus Lamb said in a statement at the time. “We wanted to stay on the Dish Network in order to reach more people and win more souls.”

Besides owning the network, the Lambs also host a show, Celebration, which tackles a wide range of issues from finances and politics to parenting and relationships. Marcus Lamb said he and Joni try not to be too traditional or

religious in the way they talk, and they seek to offer well-thought-out answers to life's problems.

"We try to address these issues in a very relevant, down-to-earth way," Marcus Lamb told Charisma. "Since these are relevant subjects, even people who are not Christians will listen to the solutions."

He said creating quality programming is the biggest need for Christian television. "We've got to do programming that thinks outside the box and meets people's needs," Lamb said. "The methods will change, and that will enable us to expand, and our influence and impact will grow. We've got the greatest story ever told. Our packaging just needs to be improved."

Joni Lamb also hosts her own show, Joni, which recently won the prestigious Best Christian Talk Show of the Year award from the National Religious Broadcasters. "I really kind of had to be pushed into it," she said. "I felt so inadequate. The bottom line is that the Lord began to really speak to me about the opportunity that I have. Am I ready to step up to the plate with the opportunity that is before me?"

She said the next step will probably be putting Joni in syndication. But while her three children—ages 12, 14 and 18—are still at home, she isn't interested in expanding her ministry too far. "I would rather stop where we are now and have our family intact and see our children serving the Lord than to gain the whole world and to lose them," she said.

The studio is just a seven-minute drive from their home in Euless, Texas. She can film her show and still be home when the kids get home from school. "They are the most important

job I have, next to being Marcus' wife," she said.

But the Lambs leave no doubt that spreading the gospel through their network is their destiny. "The best part is to see people's lives changed," Joni Lamb said. "To see people given hope. To see people saved, delivered, restored, healed. That is the greatest blessing of all—to see people come to know Christ."

Suzanne Jordan Brown in Dallas