

# Teaching Beyond Words

*{jcomments on}Joyce Meyer has built a global teaching ministry that now reaches two-thirds of the world every day. Yet her greatest legacy may be the massive outreach ministry she leads—and that few know about.*

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If you know Joyce Meyer, you know her voice—her strong, guttural delivery commands attention. If you’ve followed her teaching, you probably know her testimony of being sexually abused as a child and how God turned her mess into His message. And you may have seen her “What about me?” robot impression, heard her stories of returning grocery carts and been challenged by her candid transparency. Yet even among those who faithfully tune in to her daily *Enjoying Everyday Life* broadcast, many are unaware of just how far this fiery Fenton, Mo., Bible teacher’s reach extends when the recording lights turn off.

On the surface, it’s hard to imagine how Joyce’s ministry could expand more. Just a few months shy of 69 years old, she’s already authored more than 90 books, including many *New York Times* best-sellers. Her TV and radio broadcasts span the globe, reaching a staggering potential audience of 4.5 *billion* with the gospel—that’s two-thirds of the world—every day. What began more than 36 years ago as a simple Bible study has grown into a ministry that today employs almost 900 people around the world.

But since the beginning, Joyce has always considered her ministry vision to be twofold. “The call on my life is to teach,” she says confidently, adding that her central focus in teaching has always been “to help people mature and grow up so

they can have what Jesus died to give them.”

On that front, it’s difficult to measure the impact she’s made on maturing believers into a deeper walk with God. Undoubtedly, the spiritual fruit of her labor is evident in the hundreds of thousands who have received Christ through Joyce Meyer Ministries.

Yet having run in charismatic Christian circles since the early 1980s, Joyce is also deeply familiar with the “bless me” focus that can dominate and sour even the best teaching ministries. That’s why she’s always been intentional about her ministry extending beyond teaching into an active outreach and humanitarian aid.

Enter Hand of Hope, the missions arm of Joyce Meyer Ministries.

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## **Extending a Hand**

Led the past 20 years by Joyce’s eldest, David L. Meyer, Hand of Hope has been around since the overarching ministry first formed but was kept somewhat under wraps early on.

“I really felt in the beginning that God wanted me to do things in secret,” Joyce explains. “Then God began to show me that it really wasn’t fair to our partners not to let them know, and we should give people the opportunity to be involved.”

As time progressed, Hand of Hope became a more prominent part of the overall ministry, especially in the last decade. CEO David Meyer—not to be confused with Joyce’s husband of 45 years, Dave—and his wife, Shelly, now manage offices in 12 countries, including India, South Africa, Australia, Russia and the U.K. Of the nearly 365 international employees of

Joyce Meyer Ministries, most work on a campaign, project or ministry related to Hand of Hope.

“We’ve really discovered the great connection between preaching the gospel to people and meeting their practical needs,” Joyce says. “When you go to some of these places, people are hurting. Sometimes they are hurting so bad you have to first get past their pain by meeting their need.”

To accomplish this, Hand of Hope has continued to expand its reach while staying true to the overall goal of Joyce Meyer Ministries to “help hurting people.” Though that sounds short and simple, the extensive list of outreaches—from children’s homes to disaster relief to combating sex trafficking—is anything but. Among those included under the Hand of Hope umbrella are:

**Feeding programs.** These remain Hand of Hope’s top priority. The ministry supports 331 sites in 32 countries, serving people across the world through avenues such as food distribution centers, school meal programs and mobile feeding buses.

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“It’s always our desire to work with believers in the local community to bring food to children’s tummies and Jesus to their hearts,” says Shelly Meyer, the ministry’s international relations officer. “In each country and village, this can take on a different method, but improved health and hope are always the goal.”

The Hill tribes in Northern Thailand are a great example. This feeding program supports the Hmong people, who are originally from China. About 120 children are fed daily in a village in the Chiang Rai province. The outreach is run by Pastor Viroj

and his wife, who also oversee a Hand of Hope-supported orphanage that's home to 27 children.

At other feeding centers, such as the one in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, a daily serving of vitamin-enriched porridge gives many HIV-positive children enough nutrients to literally survive another day and, eventually, gain strength to live normally.

**Child care.** The ministry fully funds 37 children's homes that care for more than 1,100 children in places such as Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal and Myanmar. In Uganda, a home specifically for abandoned babies, Baby Watoto Gulu, celebrated its grand opening in April 2010 and now offers a new lease on life for more than 30 babies. Among those are Patricia and Joshua, twins abandoned in front of the Gulu police station. Thanks to donors who give \$33 a month—less than it costs to get cable TV—toward this outreach, the twins now receive food, shelter, tender care and education each day.

"Getting to share these children's stories is one of the highlights of my life," says Ginger Stache, Joyce Meyer Ministries' chief media officer. "They are so brave and the transformation in them after they come to us is simply beautiful."

**Fresh water wells.** Unsafe water and lack of basic sanitation cause 80 percent of disease and kill more people annually than all forms of violence. The mission, then, is simple: Express the love of God by supplying one of the most vital physical needs—fresh water. In India and Asia, a church is built next to each well. The provision of fresh water draws thousands of unbelievers, quenching their thirst and creating a wide-open door to share the gospel of Christ. As of February 2012, Hand of Hope had dug 501 wells in 17 countries.

**Medical and dental missions.** Hand of Hope supports 12 ongoing medical outreaches and three full-time clinics. It also holds

10 to 12 short-term medical/dental trips each year. To date, it has built and fully funds two hospitals—one in Pursat, Cambodia, which treated 31,246 people in 2011; and one in Chandrakal, India, which treated more than 29,738 people in 2011.

“People come to our mobile clinics and receive medical care,” Joyce adds. “Then they have the gospel shared with them before they leave. We have thousands accept Christ.”

In June 2010, medical teams visited Zimbabwe, where the average life expectancy is 34 years for women and 37 years for men, and people are more likely to die of HIV/AIDS than of natural causes. That trip alone provided care for 3,216 patients. More than 5,300 people came to know Christ as their personal Savior through the 2010 medical outreaches.

“The medical outreaches are truly the most pure form of helping people,” says Shawn Wall, a partner and participant in one of Hand of Hope’s recent trips to Calcutta, India. This year volunteer physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists and other medical professionals will continue the missions work in nations such as Sri Lanka, Haiti, Ethiopia and Uganda.

**Disaster relief.** From the great tsunami that hit India and parts of Asia in December 2004 to the massive earthquakes that rocked Haiti, China and Chile in 2010 to the unprecedented outbreak of tornadoes that ripped through Joplin, Mo., and the southern U.S. in 2011, Hand of Hope has played a key role in providing water, food, shelter and manpower to put lives and communities back together.

Partnering with several organizations such as Service International and Convoy of Hope, volunteers and provisions are quickly assembled and dispatched. To date, more than \$10.9 million has been donated and designated for disaster relief.

**Human trafficking rescue.** “Human trafficking has personally gripped my heart in recent years,” David says. That’s part of

the reason why rescuing as many of its estimated 27 million victims as they possibly can has become an ongoing ministry in nine countries, including the U.S., Ethiopia and Cambodia. Hand of Hope provides financial support to existing ministries such as A21 Campaign in Greece and operates their own healing centers, such as Gabrielle House in Thailand and Prem Kiran Transformation Center in Mumbai, India. Along with spiritual and emotional restoration, women are taught a trade and helped to find a new job.

**Prison ministry.** “Many of the prisoners we meet will never again walk the streets as free individuals,” says prison ministry supervisor Roy Lormis. Yet through this aspect of Hand of Hope, those incarcerated men and women are being introduced to the hope of Jesus. Others, such as Frank (last name withheld) in Plainfield, Ind., are being reintroduced: “It’s because of ministries like Joyce Meyer Ministries, as well as the support of my family, that I rededicated my life to the Lord. I’m finally back on the right road.”

The prison ministry is no small feat. For 14-plus years, team members have visited more than 2.2 million inmates, delivering a free hygiene bag filled with a bar of soap, a bottle of shampoo, one of Joyce’s books and an encouraging letter. So far, more than 100,000 prisoners have accepted Christ as personal Savior through the ministry’s efforts.

### **Dreaming Bigger With Partners**

The growth of Hand of Hope’s prison ministry isn’t just another success story; it’s emblematic of Joyce’s general attitude toward going places with the Good News where others cannot. In 1998 Hand of Hope—which at that point had no prison ministry—set an ambitious goal of taking its gift bags into every prison in the state of Missouri. The mindset among Joyce, David and other ministry leaders was simply: *Why not?*

After securing permission in every Missouri county and

completing the project by Christmas, they soon established another ambitious goal of reaching every state prison in every state. And again, the question was: *Why not?*

Sure enough, by 2007 Hand of Hope had reached all 50 states and a total of 1,785 prisons. It's since expanded into 2,700 prisons in 35 countries.

"Where Joyce sees a need, her first thought is: *How can we help them?*" Shelly says. "And that sets the tone for all of us. Our mindset is: *Why can't we? We can!*"

Obviously, not every ministry has the financial backing to do all that Hand of Hope can. According to 2010 financial reports, more than \$30 million of Joyce Meyer Ministries' budget went to the missions operation. Yet the key is less about finances than it is partnering with other ministries.

"I would never say that we're different or better than any other organization," David emphasizes. "We're just doing our part. The world needs all of us. That's why we believe so strongly in partnership."

Daniel Meyer, the Meyers' youngest son who has served as CEO of Joyce Meyer Ministries' U.S. operations since 2004, echoes this sentiment: "We love having relationships and key partnerships with other organizations and ministries so God can use our unique differences together to make an even bigger impact than we could alone. We can always do more when we work together."

Joyce Meyer Ministries financially supports more than 40 independent organizations and ministries. These include well-known ministries such as Convoy of Hope, Mercy Ministries and the Los Angeles Dream Center, as well as lesser-known outreaches such as House of Mercy in Russia, Loaves and Fishes in Australia, Project Amazon in Brazil and International Crisis Aid in Ethiopia.

Joyce is fully aware of the unique position her ministry—which has more than 2.1 million people supporting it through prayer or financial gifts—is in to bless other ministries.

“People are called to lots of different kinds of ministries,” she says. “I happen to be called to the kind of ministry where I have people sitting in front of me that can give an offering and help support what we’re doing. But there are a lot of people who are called to do things like prison ministries, mission outreaches and street ministries who don’t have anyone to give them an offering. So if churches and ministries don’t support those people, it kind of short-circuits what God is trying to do.”

Ask the nearly 500 staffers at the ministry’s St. Louis-area headquarters, and most will affirm that when it comes to giving, Joyce isn’t just talk.

“My mom and dad are always trying to look and listen for people they can be generous to and needs they can help meet for others,” Daniel says. “The thing that I respect the most about my parents is that they practice what they preach and they strive to always have integrity, even in the small things.”

## **A Season Under Scrutiny**

It’s this emphasis on giving and integrity that made the high-profile “Grassley Investigation”—in which Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley launched a three-year public investigation in 2007 into the financial oversight of six Christian TV ministries, including the Meyers’—all the more hurtful for Joyce.

“At first, it was extremely hard for me, and I found myself trying to defend myself,” says Joyce, who’s weathered other accusations in the past, including vitriolic attacks from fellow Christian leaders. “But you’ve just got to get over it. Jesus said, ‘They hated Me, and they’re going to hate you.’ It’s just part of it.”



Of the six ministries targeted, Joyce Meyer Ministries was the first to comply with Grassley's requests and offer financial transparency—including documentation of Joyce's salary, which was one of the key points of contention for the senator and other critics. Grassley actually commended the ministry for engaging in "open and honest dialogue" during the process, and for providing "information over and above what was requested." Though Joyce says the investigation did little to change how the ministry, which is 100 percent debt free, handles its finances—"We just try to be more transparent now"—she does credit God for using the negative attention to bring about a positive.

"The devil really shoots himself in the foot—our ministry actually grew through all that stuff," she says. "What [the critics] really end up doing is they stir up an interest. People who normally wouldn't stop to watch me on television are now curious and they watch. Consequently, people hear the gospel, some of them get saved and many begin to support the ministry.

"The church is not going to have any impact on the world if all we do is fight and divide and in the process do nothing. The greatest need for the church today is to really learn how to reach out in their communities, their cities and to people in their own congregation. God has not called us to in-reach; He's called us to outreach. If we will live to make somebody else happy, in the process we get happy. I think that's spiritual warfare."

### **'Granny Meyer' Comes to Town**

With Joyce nearing 70, some have wondered how long she can continue fighting spiritual battles from the public platform. Though she has scaled back slightly on her travel in recent years, she still maintains a schedule that rivals any 30-year-old frequent flyer. In the early 2000s, she began an organizational transition by handing over day-to-day

operations of her ministry to her two sons. (Her two daughters, Sandra McCollom and Laura Holtzmann, are full-time mothers who provide behind-the-scenes support.) Still, the question of Joyce's retirement looms large over this megaministry, yet it's one the Meyer family seems content to trust God with.

"If the time comes when we need to do less traveling, we'll trust God to show us how to handle that and continue getting the Word out," says Dave, who serves as the ministry's vice president and oversees the strategic placement of Joyce's TV and radio programming.

"My plan," Joyce says, "is to keep doing what I am doing. I can't see myself ever doing anything other than preaching, unless I get to the point where I can't. I've teasingly said that I can talk even if I have to lie down to do it. I hope someday they send out a little flyer saying, 'Granny Meyer is coming to your town!'"

Joking aside, Joyce and Dave show no signs of needing to slow down, nor has their passion for being used by God dwindled.

"My parents are in great health and just as excited to help people as ever," David assures. "So we don't see an immediate adjustment. As I often say, 'We got here by God's grace, and that will be the answer for the future.' "

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**Vincent M. Newfield** is a speaker, freelance writer and author of *Real Life Answers*. His new book, about helping men escape the prison of porn, will release this year. For more information, visit .

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At-a-glance stats on the Hand of Hope's ever-expanding global impact:

- **136 million** meals served in the U.S. and around the world (more than 31 million in 2011 alone)
  - **23 million** books given away free of charge to people around the world
  - **\$10.9 million** donated and designated for disaster relief
  - **2.2 million+** prisoners visited
  - **501** fresh water wells dug in 17 countries
  - **331** feeding sites established in 32 countries, providing 70,000 meals daily (In 2011, the 100 millionth meal was served)
  - **40+** ministry partners supported around the world
  - **39** children's homes built, providing care for more than 1,100 orphans
  - **12** ongoing medical outreaches, 10 to 12 short-term medical/dental trips annually, three established clinics and two hospitals built
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## Where in the World Is Joyce?

Beyond her broadcast ministry, Joyce Meyer has personally ministered in numerous countries outside the United States, including ...



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## **Within the Sound of Her Voice**

Just how far-reaching is Joyce Meyer's teaching ministry? Consider that her daily program, *Enjoying Everyday Life*, is broadcast on ...

