

Marilyn Hickey: She Makes the Bible Come Alive

Her greatest love is the Word of God, and she is on a one-woman campaign to get one million Christians in 1979 to read their Bibles this year as never before.

Marilyn Hickey's special gift is getting people to understand the Word of God. She can relate difficult passages to 20th-century life.

It is this gift that has catapulted her from being an average pastor's wife to the national teaching ministry she has today—Life for Laymen in Denver, Colorado—in seminars around the nation and over scores of radio stations.

Marilyn, 47, is a thin, almost frail-looking woman who looks the part of the high school foreign language teacher she used to be rather than the part of a lady preacher.

She is humble, unassuming and when she is home in Denver, she plays second fiddle to her preacher husband, Wally, who pastors The Happy Church. She says she'd rather be at home in the kitchen than jetting to North Carolina to be on the PTL Club, or to the West Coast for one of her "Word Power Seminars."

She is not the dynamo in the pulpit Frances Hunter is nor is she as well-known as Ruth Carter Stapleton. Yet two-and-a-half years ago when Tom Snyder invited a panel of "lady preachers" to be guests on his "Tomorrow Show," he invited Frances Hunter, Ruth Carter Stapleton... and Marilyn Hickey.

In just a few short years, her ministry has grown to include a daily radio program on 60 stations; about 100 educational television stations carry a weekly 30-minute program in which she teaches the Old Testament; her monthly publication goes to

100,000 homes; she has written four books; appeared on all major Christian television shows; started a Bible correspondence course and spoken at countless conferences and seminars.

She explains that she's in the ministry not because it appeals to her, but because she was "called." And God has given her a special burden to get people to read, study and meditate on the Word of God.

Several years ago the Lord made real to her the truth in Isaiah 11:9: "For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (NIV)

She has made this scripture the theme of her ministry, and she is dedicated to getting people to saturate their lives in the Word. Her goal is to get one million people reading and memorizing the Word during 1979.

She believes the Bible is not a spiritual law book that should be deciphered by only a select group of professional clergymen, but that the scriptures should be explained in such a way that they can be applied in daily life. When she teaches, she aims what she says at the layman, hence the name of her ministry: Life for Laymen.

Marilyn makes the Bible come alive, says Thomas Reid, pastor of the Full Gospel Tabernacle in West Seneca, New York. She is especially good at taking Old Testament stories and explaining them in a way contemporary man can understand. His church is stronger each time she comes to teach, he says.

Said an associate of Marilyn's: "It's obvious by the reaction of the American public we get in our office that she is breathing fresh air on some stale concepts concerning the compatibility and relativity of the Bible to modern man."

Wrote a listener from Minneapolis: "Only God knows how many times your words over the radio have helped in counseling and

encouraging me! You always seem to have just the right message for each day's situation!"

Marilyn's main teaching vehicle is the radio. Five days a week she encourages listeners to read the Bible. She first tried to get them to meditate on the Word, but found that many Christians weren't even reading their Bibles regularly. You can't meditate on the Bible unless you read it, so she changed the priority of her teaching ministry to just getting people to read the Word of God.

She backs up the radio program—Life for Laymen—with a monthly publication which takes readers through the Bible chronologically with a reading for each day and a brief comment. The publication, called "Time With Him," is sent free of charge to 100,000 people.

Each reading takes about 15 minutes. At that pace, you can finish the Bible in a year. She calls each passage "today's Workable Truths," and like everything else she does, she aims it at the layman.

For example, she recently wrote the following on the day the assigned reading was I Peter 3:5:

"Many of us at one time or another have had trouble understanding the word humility, and have had an equally hard time exhibiting this noble virtue. However, the Apostle Paul exhorts us in I Peter 5:5, that we should all be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. We find that 'humility' really means 'casting our cares upon the Lord,' being free from worry and anxiety!

"God does not want us groveling on the ground—in fact, He wants us exalted! The Father does not want us to 'exalt' ourselves, for He wants to do the exalting! We all must be able to release our anxieties by refusing to take on worry, and to 'Humble ourselves therefore under the hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time: casting ALL our care upon Him;

for He careth for YOU and ME!'"

Marilyn practices what she preaches. She spends much more than 15 minutes a day studying the Bible. On a day when she isn't traveling, she spends five hours reading, studying and memorizing.

"I can tell she spends hours in the Word even if no one told me, just because of the insight she has," a pastor commented recently.

As she gets people to read the Word, then she begins encouraging them to memorize, then confess the scripture they read. Only as they confess the Word will they get total victory in their lives.

Every day Marilyn confesses several favorite scriptures. For example, she confesses that God has given her a spirit of wisdom and revelation from Ephesians 1:17-19:

"...God of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling... and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe..."

Or, I Corinthians 2:16, about having the mind of Christ: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

She believes in turning biblical promises into prayers. Each day she prays for the thousands who are reading through the Bible with her by quoting the scripture found in Psalm 119:18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (KJV).

She also quotes these scriptures and applies them to each member of her family:

- Proverbs 11:21: “The seed of the righteous shall be delivered.”
- Proverbs 10:1: “A wise son maketh a glad father.”
- Proverbs 13:1: “A wise son heareth his father’s instruction.”

Despite the time pressures placed on her by her ministry, Marilyn is very devoted to her family. Her son, Michael, 18, is on the Life for Laymen staff; her daughter, Sarah, 11, travels with her several times a year. Her husband, Wally, is very active in her ministry as a member of the Life for Laymen board. Everything she does in the ministry, she does not only with her husband’s approval, but with his encouragement.

Wally, a former soloist in Charles Blair’s church—Calvary Temple in Denver—was the first one in the family to become Spirit filled. He felt a call to the ministry, began to prepare for it and accepted an associate pastorate in Texas. Marilyn wasn’t too sure back then if she liked being in the ministry, but she went along.

Eighteen years ago Wally returned to Denver to start the Full Gospel Chapel (Assemblies of God). The congregation has grown to about 800 and recently purchased a 1,200-seat auditorium from a Baptist congregation. Several years ago the church began flowing in the charismatic renewal and newly Spirit-filled believers who began attending—mostly Roman Catholics—were so impressed with the happy atmosphere, they began calling it The Happy Church. The name stuck.

For many years Marilyn filled the normal functions of a Pentecostal preacher’s wife—she did a little of everything, most of it behind the scenes. She never sits on the platform during services, even today. She has preached in the church no more than 10 times during those 18 years.

About 10 years ago, however, Marilyn began teaching a young couples’ home Bible study. She had been a public school

teacher and had known for years that she had a gift for teaching. Something special began to take place in that Bible class. The young couples began to experience spiritual growth as they responded to Marilyn's teaching.

The home group sponsored a local radio program. That led to a weekly 30-minute local television program co-hosted by Wally and Marilyn. About two years ago one of the managers of the Denver educational television channel became saved and so excited about Marilyn's ability to teach the Bible that she convinced the station to produce a 13-week program in which Marilyn taught the Old Testament.

The program, which became known as "The Bible, The Source," became the most popular program produced on the local educational channel, and the station extended the series to 52 weeks. Because it was a secular educational station, the management insisted that Marilyn not "preach," but only teach the Old Testament.

So Marilyn merely tells stories from the Old Testament and makes them contemporary. For example, she entitles her talk about Rahab, "Hope for Broads." Her talk about Gideon is geared around his inferiority complex, and so forth. The station now syndicates the show to about 100 other educational stations.

"God supernaturally opened the door for us," Marilyn says. "I believe it is a fulfillment of the scripture Isaiah 11:9 which says that the 'knowledge of the Lord shall cover the world.'"

The radio program was her first major public ministry outside the church. It led to other open doors. Each time a door opened, Wally and Marilyn prayed about it and proceeded only if they both agreed it was right.

"Wally was my biggest supporter," Marilyn says. "If at any point he had objected to my continuing the ministry, I would have gotten out. I'd have taken it as a word from the Lord."

For eight years Wally shared the television ministry with her. He now hosts Word Power Seminars in Denver, serves on the board of Life for Laymen and provides spiritual oversight. But several years ago when it was obvious that Marilyn's influence and ministry would extend beyond the four walls of The Happy Church in a significant way, Wally encouraged her to branch out and set up her own ministry.

The ministry, Wally said, would be under the spiritual covering of The Happy Church, but it would have to stand on its own financially.

Wally says that he decided his gift was pastoring, not teaching. Teaching was Marilyn's gift, and he wanted to do anything he could to support her.

Since the decision was made for Marilyn to branch out as the Lord opened doors, both Wally and Marilyn say they have had no problems between themselves over her being in the ministry. Each is secure in his/her own place. Marilyn runs the ministry on a daily basis through her staff of 12. She is at home most of the time, traveling only about six days a month. Wally runs The Happy Church.

While Wally and Marilyn are satisfied about Marilyn's teaching ministry there are some who are not.

Marilyn recently shared on her Life for Laymen program a painful experience about when a young male evangelist friend blamed her for a spiritual trial Wally was going through at the time. This young evangelist believed a woman's place was only in the home. He wouldn't even allow his wife to work in the children's ministry in the church. She stayed at home to serve his needs.

When Wally shared confidentially with this young man that he (Wally) was spiritually dry, the young man went straight to Marilyn (without telling Wally) and told her it was her fault. He said Wally resented her ministry and that was causing the

problem. Marilyn took what he said to heart and considered laying down her ministry. She finally talked it over with Wally and was reassured that he supported her ministry. After about three months Wally snapped out of his depression which he recognized as an attack from Satan.



To order Travis Johnson's book, [Un]Embarrassed of Jesus, visit .

Later, this young evangelist's marriage almost broke up because he so totally dominated his wife. He had to learn to allow her to be a person in her own right. Several years later, he left the evangelistic field to take a position on the faculty of a Christian college. The irony to this story: the president of the college is a woman.

Another male minister who resented Marilyn's ministry was a charismatic Lutheran pastor in Denver. He went so far as to say that women should wear veils in church, so it's natural that he felt Marilyn was out of place ministering publicly. He told members of his congregation to boycott her books.

She and Wally felt that the way to respond to this type of criticism was to simply love the man. Later Marilyn was invited to speak at a charismatic Lutheran conference in Denver. She was seated on the platform next to this man! Little-by-little he changed his attitude toward her, as he began to see there was an anointing on her ministry. Finally he apologized for his critical spirit and has since invited her to speak four times at his church. Wally has, in turn, asked him to speak at The Happy Church.

If some reject Marilyn, however, others love her.

Frances Hunter says Marilyn is her closest friend, and Marilyn has close relationships with several other national charismatic teachers.

Frances says she and Marilyn became fast friends the first time they met though each has a different personality and there is a difference in their ages.

"Marilyn is just one of those people who you meet and fall in love with," Frances said recently. "What is so special about Marilyn is the love she has for the Lord. Whenever we're together, all we talk about is the Lord."

The criticisms of a woman teaching are based on I Timothy 2:12 in which Paul says "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

So how does Marilyn reconcile this scripture with the fact she teaches men?

The scripture relates to a husband-wife relationship, she says. Verse 15 refers to childbearing, which is clearly a part of the wife-mother role a woman has.

"It's not my place to teach Wally in the home," Marilyn says. "Sometimes when I'm studying the Word at home, I'll share a thought the Lord has given me, and Wally is totally bored with what I'm saying. I can share the same thought in a seminar the next day and he'll come home and tell me how inspired he was. He won't even recall that I told him about it at home."

The criticism of her ministry by some doesn't bother her, she says.

"I've found my place. I'm settled in the Word.

"I'm where God wants me and I'm secure."

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