

URBAN CURRENT

God's mighty daughters

It was New Year's Eve. We were ready to break for the food portion of the evening. I had shared the gospel. I extended the invitation. I invited those who wanted a new life before the New Year to stay in their seats while others went to eat.

Betty stayed behind. Hardened by sin. Drunk years on end. And no particular affection for short, white preachers. (That would be me.) I heard later of the soul winner's interaction with her. I would hear from Betty's lips the story of her repentance, her faith in Christ, her cry to God for salvation.

Betty's transformation was dramatic. Immediate signs of genuine life. She grew, was baptized, joined the church, and desired to serve. It was clear early on she had the gift of evangelism. I encouraged her to consider living by faith and doing evangelism full time. She took that challenge.

We couldn't afford a new paid position. I created the unpaid role of staff evangelist.

Betty founded ARMS (Armitage Reaching Many Souls). Through women's and children's Bible studies, summer backyard Bible club, summer camp, holiday outreaches, Betty's influence has been nothing short of miraculous. She has evangelized thousands, won hundreds to Christ. Her disciples have moved to other cities beginning new ministries.

All this got me thinking of women who have served God in cities throughout church history. Rahab, and Esther, Mary Magdalene, and Lydia. Paul names women connected to his ministry. All the churches Paul started were urban, so these sisters were urbanites.

I'll never forget reading a biography of William Booth. His story cannot be written apart from the story of his wife, Catherine. She evangelized and served in slums, cutting a swath for God through the darkness, grime, bondage, and addictions of large cities in the 1800s. Her gifts and influence were easily equal to William. Together they were unstoppable.

Before Mary Slessor became the famous African missionary, she served Christ in the slums of Dundee, Scotland.

There was Susannah Spurgeon, who labored alongside of her world-famous husband raising chickens so she could sell eggs to buy books for poor preachers. She researched for him assisting in message preparation. She tended to her ailing Charles whose life surely would have been even shorter without her care.

D. L. Moody strongly supported women's work in urban evangelism. His wife was a great influence on him and ministry decisions. Emma Dryer was an evangelist in her own right and served parallel to D. L. Moody as he developed his Chicago work. She was influential in the formation of the Chicago Evangelization Society, later renamed Moody Bible Institute. She befriended various YWCA missionaries. She familiarized herself with Chicago's network of missions. She evangelized prostitutes. She believed Christian education could also bring about positive social change.

One of Dryer's strongest advocates was Nettie Fowler-McCormick, the widow of industrialist Cyrus McCormick, Sr. Thekla Ellen Joyner writes in *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism 1880-1920*: "Female urban missionaries like Dryer used the moral authority vested in women to establish careers that extended their authority into the city. Operating within their designated sphere of influence and armed with a gospel of domesticity, these workers undertook evangelistic programs aimed specifically at America's urban homes where female virtue would intentionally triumph over urban evil."

Think of all of the women in missions who not only supported their husbands' work but were powerful ministers in the truest New Testament sense. Adoniram Judson's wives Ann, Sarah, and Emily, William Carey's wife Dorothy, Hudson Taylor's wives Maria and Jane. Amanda Smith, former slave, was a powerful evangelist God used greatly in northern American cities

in the late 1800s. Mother Consuella York was a force for God here in Chi-Town at Cook County Jail for 40 years.

My wife has been an indispensable part of this 40-year adventure serving Armitage Baptist Church. Georgia claims she would not have chosen herself for the task of raising five children on the gritty streets of Chicago. I can't begin to tell you the innumerable roles she has filled, countless lives she has impacted directly or influenced indirectly. My ministry would be unthinkable without her as my partner.

God has used so many women in significant ways here at Armitage. Lillian Mante served as our children's director for many years. A young, single woman, she dedicated herself to leading, guiding, nurturing a burgeoning children's ministry. When she was mugged, she was undeterred. She loves Jesus and was faithful to his call in her life.

Jane Wilder served on our staff as director of women's ministries for a number of years. She was a critical part of our ministry team. She prayed with us, planned with us, served with us. She taught, counseled, disciplined. She organized even though she would say she was not an organizer. She administrated, even though she said she was not an administrator. Only when cancer and the need to care for aging parents emerged did she consider leaving her role with us.

We all know your typical church anywhere in the world would dry up and blow away in a few hours without God's mighty daughters.

Through the ages, a whole lot of God's best men in the city ... have been women.

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