

Making women's ministries more effective.

**1. Recognize that women are not all the same.** Those who are called to women's ministry have their work cut out for them. It's not an easy job to minister to such a diverse group of people. But anyone who wants to appeal to women in general must recognize that women come in many different shapes and must create programs that appeal to more than one type. This is the same for any demographic group in the church, but perhaps most of all for women. Our lifestyles, circumstances, and preferences are so diverse. Not everything has to appeal to every woman - but if NOTHING about a church's women's ministry program appeals to a particular woman, she'll quickly get the message that she's not OK and not wanted.

**2. Respect women's intellectual abilities.** Too often, we seem to buy into the world's lie that we are purely emotional beings, at the whim of fantasy and hormones, and not smart enough to go deep. God created us to feel and to think. Our souls hunger not only for the presence of God, but also for knowledge of his truth. Ministries that focus only on women's emotional needs or that stay on a shallow level are doing a disservice to their women and to the larger body of Christ. And they're failing to reach many women, who will never be engaged by a ministry that does not challenge their intellect.

**3. Recognize that women are not just wives and mothers.** Women aren't required to fill these roles in order to see God's purpose for their lives. I'm both a wife and a mother, but if I were neither, God's calling on my life would not go away. It's pointless to ignore the importance of these roles in the lives of many women, but we must acknowledge that women are unmarried, childless, divorced, single, struggling with infertility, focused on their careers, and everything in between. They're all important to God, and none of them should have the impression that God's plans don't include them.

**4. Make it safe to talk about real life.** In my experience, most topics are off the "approved" list at women's ministry gatherings. This is a systemic problem in many churches, so I don't think it's fair to blame it on women's ministries. But if a women's ministry program were able to make it safe to talk honestly and biblically about our experiences with spiritual doubt, depression, injustice, loneliness, temptation, abuse, regrets, sex, career success, insecurities, need to achieve, perfectionism, financial worries, sexual harassment, boredom, anxiety, exhaustion, great books, compulsive eating, addictions, and things that keep us awake at night, that ministry would produce some powerful life change.

**5. Affirm real women.** We should not walk out feeling worse about our potential in Christ than we did when we walked in. Many women feel torn down and devalued by the church - simply because they are women or they are the sort of women God has made them to be. And while some have commented that I seem to be whining about my own experiences, or feeling sorry for myself, I'm actually not too worried about myself. My commitment to Christ and to the church is intact and independent of what I experience in women's ministry. I am truly concerned about those women who have written off the church, and by association Christ, because of what they have heard the church telling them about their own worth. Any women's ministry program must everyday women feel like they belong.

**6. Challenge women.** Besides the nursery, women's ministry may be the only place where many of our ministries seem designed only to make us comfortable.

I realize these ideas aren't very specific. So here are a couple more specific thoughts:

? I belonged to one church that had a sports ministry for women.

? In a response to an earlier comment, someone mentioned a book club.

? How about get-togethers that don't require mothers to leave their children behind? Moms who work outside their homes aren't looking for more time away from their kids, so they might be more likely to attend events that welcome their children.

? How about helping women to form intentional mentoring relationships with each other? Many women are looking for mentors but don't know how to ask for one, get started, or keep it going.

? Hold a lunchtime Bible study for women who work outside their homes, in a location convenient to their work.

? Ask women to share their stories, or to teach each other about something they're passionate about.

? Get women together to do some powerful service in your community - and welcome families to participate as well.

? What if interested women ran a business together and used the proceeds to help other women get on their feet?

So how about your ideas? How can we do women's ministry differently to appeal to wider audience of women? What have you seen work well? What do you wish more churches would do in their ministries to women?