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The mother-daughter duo is shaping the face of cross-generational ministry

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Covering the Earth with the Word

BY AMY HAMMOND HAGBERG

When God told Dr. Marilyn Hickey to cover the earth with His Word in 1976, she had no idea He meant it literally. Now a spritely 78, Dr. Hickey is still jet-setting around the globe winning people for Christ. Today, she is the President and founder of Marilyn Hickey Ministries (MHM), and spreads the Gospel through a variety of means. Her miracle healing meetings, overseas ministry trips, ministry training schools, leadership conferences, and humanitarian aid have touched the lives of millions in 124 countries. With 1,500 teaching cassettes, videos, CDs, and DVDs—and more than 100 books—Dr. Hickey has firmly established a legacy not only for her daughter and ministerial partner, Sarah Bowling, but also for many modern-day Christian women.

[Please Turn the Page]
A Career Curveball
Marilyn Hickey never dreamed she would be in ministry. As a young woman, she had a propensity for foreign languages. Her plan was to get her Master’s Degree and then serve as an ambassador to a foreign nation. International politics was her aim. “I knew where I was going to go educationally and then God broke in on it,” she says. “I never anticipated ministry at all.”

In fact, Dr. Hickey’s husband, Wallace, got the “call” first. Dr. Hickey was afraid, and both she and her husband lacked ministerial training. The couple, however, obediently started to hold meetings at a small Assembly of God church. Wally preached at night and Dr. Hickey evangelized door-to-door. After a year, the couple served as assistant pastors at a church in Amarillo, Texas. It was there that Dr. Hickey got her first taste of Bible teaching. “They asked me to teach Sunday school for young married couples. I really saw what the Bible would do in people’s lives, and I got very turned on to teaching the Bible.”

Eighteen months later Hickey and her husband moved to Denver, Colorado and started the Full Gospel Chapel. Pioneering the church with 25 members in 1960, the congregation grew to more than 2,000 by the mid-1980s. The rapidly expanding church plant was eventually renamed Happy Church and became one of America’s leading centers of Charismatic Christianity.

At the age of 42, Hickey heard the Lord calling her to a higher place in ministry. “God said, ‘I want you to cover the earth with the Word,’” she remembers. “I said, ‘Lord, I’m a woman,’ but He replied, ‘That is not your problem. That is My problem. Your problem is to have faith.’”

– Marilyn Hickey
long, Dr. Hickey was facilitating twenty-two home Bible studies. Her studies became so popular that the church suggested she go on the radio. Her five minute broadcast eventually turned into a daily, nationally syndicated television program. “I didn’t anticipate that. I didn’t even speak at our church. I taught Sunday school.”

In 1983, Hickey’s ministry took a pivotal turn. She read in the newspaper that there was a famine in Ethiopia and brought Bibles and $20,000 worth of food to the communist country. “It was very hard working with that government. It was real repressive. They watched you. They guarded you. They took my video equipment away from me,” she says. When Dr. Hickey asked the local leaders if she could hold a healing meeting they said, “Well, of course you can’t do that. We don’t even believe in God.” Initially discouraged, Marilyn gave up on Ethiopia. “Sometimes it just doesn’t happen right away,” she shares. “With Ethiopia, frankly, I gave up. My daughter said, ‘Mom, you never talk about Ethiopia. Have you given it up? So that really brought me to my knees.’ In 2002, over twenty years later, Marilyn Hickey Ministries finally held a healing meeting in Ethiopia with 40,000 people in attendance.

That was the beginning of a ministerial journey that has carried the Gospel into scores of nations including Pakistan, Italy, Morocco, Ethiopia, Sudan, Russia, Panama, Australia, China, Germany, India, The United Kingdom, Vietnam, and more—totaling approximately 100 nations.

Ministry to Muslims
Dr. Hickey’s ministry has been followed with signs and wonders even in the most radical Muslim countries. During her recent visit to Sudan, 37,000 people attended the first night, 45,000 the second, 54,000 the third, and over 60,000 the final night. In the midst, there were countless healing miracles reported. “One woman,” says Hickey, “had been deaf in both ears and now hears properly.” In addition, during the visit to Sudan, it...
was reported that tumors shrunk, chronic pain instantaneously subsided, people born deaf received their hearing, blind eyes were opened, knees and backs were healed, and demon-possessed people were set free.

**Like Mother Like Daughter**

Although Dr. Hickey’s miracle crusades have faced the judgment of skeptics and critics alike, there is no denying the impact, power, and influence that follows her. Without question, Marilyn Hickey’s influence is matriarchal and intergenerational. And her daughter, Sarah Bowling, is helping her shape a lasting legacy.

Like her mother, Sarah never planned on being in ministry. Admittedly, she was rather turned off by the idea. “I found it to be fairly repulsive … to be real honest … I’ve just been around it all my life, and it had no allure at all to me.” Everything changed the week before Sarah got married. While attending a revival meeting with her mother, she had a radical encounter with God. “At that time I was very analytical and kind of skeptical,” she says. “Being around Christianity as a [pastor’s kid], you see the real and you see the fake.”

Skeptical, Sarah went to the first night of the revival looking for heresy. Instead she found the true, unadulterated presence of God. The second night, she had what she calls a “knock me on the floor, take my breath away experience with God.” Reflecting on the encounter, she shares: “The whole time I was basically on the floor talking, having this conversation with God. He was dealing with me … speaking to me … challenging me.” When Dr.
Hickey heard the details of her daughter’s experience with God, she was thunder-struck. “God called her with the same words He called me: ‘Cover the earth with the Word.’”

Sarah joined the staff of Marilyn Hickey Ministries in 1995. Blazing her own pastoral trail, she currently pastors Orchard Road Christian Center (formerly Happy Church) with her husband Reece. Partnered with Dr. Hickey, she is a part of a dynamic mother-daughter duo; hosting a daily Bible teaching broadcast called Today with Marilyn & Sarah. The program is broadcast into more than 1.5 billion homes on every major continent.

**Her Own Woman**

Living up to her mother’s legacy hasn’t always been easy. “Some days are better than others. It depends on when you ask. … At the end of the day, I make it my goal to please God. … I don’t have to please people. … God’s will and ways are not always in direct overlap and compliance, so to speak, with what people expect from me. … I have to be more loyal to God with my identity, [rather] than to somebody else’s expectations.”

Not all mothers and daughters gel, but Marilyn and Sarah make a great team.

“**At the end of the day, I make it my goal to please God. … I don’t have to please people. … I have to be more loyal to God with my identity…**”

– Sarah Bowling

What’s their secret? “Honesty and love,” says Sarah. “I know she really loves me, and not for what I can do. She loves me. She thinks I hung the moon.”

That’s not to say their relationship is always a walk in the park. Like every family, there are inharmonious moments. “We’re both very strong individuals and have very strong opinions. We definitely have conflict,” Sarah concedes. “But we resolve our conflict in private conversations; they’re not for public entertainment. And the conversations we have are honest.”

Dr. Hickey attributes much of their relationship success to listening—a lesson she learned when Sarah was in high school. “She went to a Lutheran school and there was a lot of drinking. I was very concerned that she would get into that.” Her worst fears were realized one day when she found an empty beer can in her daughter’s car. When she was confronted, Sarah said, “Mom, you don’t know the pressure. You don’t know how hard it is.” When Marilyn asked her why she didn’t come to her for help, her daughter’s answer brought her to her knees: “Mom, you don’t listen to me, you preach to me.” Now Marilyn reflects, “I think learning to listen has been a big, big thing in our relationship.”

**Not Done Yet**

She might be edging toward her eighties, but Dr. Marilyn Hickey is not entertaining the possibility of “traditional” retirement; and Sarah Bowling is carrying her mother’s torch to a new generation. “I am retiring,” explains Dr. Hickey. “Retirement means doing what you like. I’m doing what I like. And I think God energizes me for it. I do work hard, but if you really love what you do, it’s not like work. … This is a passion for me. God’s number one passion is souls. If that’s God’s top priority, it ought to be mine.”