Revive Our Hearts"

(Un) remarkable

Volume 2

TEN (MORE) ORDINARY WOMEN WHO IMPACTED THEIR WORLD FOR CHRIST

foreword by





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TEN (MORE) ORDINARY WOMEN WHO IMPACTED THEIR WORLD FOR CHRIST

> foreword by DANNAH GRESH

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Scripture marked KJV is taken from the King James Version.

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Foreword

H ave you ever considered why God called Himself "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" (Ex. 3:16 and others)? Why did He include the names of individuals when identifying Himself? One reason, of course, is that He was tracing the covenant line between Him and His people. But let's look more closely. I want you to see something delightful.

Abraham, we know, was a "friend" of God (Isa. 41:8). Though he was not perfect, he inclined toward faithfulness. Jacob, we know, wrestled with God (Gen. 32:22–32). Though he did eventually follow God's ways, some of his life is marked by rebellion.

And then there's Isaac.

The pages of my Bible don't tell me he was overwhelmingly faithful or exceptionally wayward. Isaac was, in a word, unremarkable. And yet the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11 tells us that "by faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau" (v. 20). This son of Abraham was a critical link in the chain of blessings from one generation to another.

Do you, like me, feel unremarkable at times? Perhaps we all do, but how we feel is irrelevant. You and I must faithfully pass the baton of faith because God commands us in His Word to do just that:

One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. (Psalm 145:4)

Will you rise to the task of commending the great works of our God to the next generation?

Something that stirs my heart to fill my spot in the line of legacy is reading the stories of individuals who filled their own spot well. My library is home to books

that tell the tales of faithful saints like Amy Carmichael, one of the women you'll read about in this book.

If you ask me, Amy was an "Abraham"—fueled by faith, although she lived most of her life in obscurity. We still read about her today because of the many books she wrote late in life. The reason she wrote them? She was confined to bed after an injury and lived the last twenty years of her life physically incapacitated. Many would call her an invalid, but that did not stop her from obediently sharing all that God had done.

Don't let your setbacks invalidate the call of God on your life. You exist to declare His mighty acts and to commend His works to the next generation—*no matter how unremarkable you may feel.*

Dannah Gresh Cohost, *Revive Our Hearts* and Founder, True Girl



Introduction Ordinary Lives, Extraordinary God Erin Davis

Many sermons have been preached from Hebrews 11. Our hearts stir at the names of Abraham, Moses, David, and others whose portraits hang in that biblical "Hall of Faith." We long for what was said about the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith to also be said of us:

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (v. 10)

And . . .

Though he died, he still speaks. (v. 4)

While those whose portraits in the Hebrews 11 "Hall of Faith" are certainly worthy of our admiration, Scripture names other devoted followers as well. Romans 16:1–16, for example, supplies a second list of names, perhaps more modest but no less significant:

- Phoebe
- Prisca and Aquila
- Epaenetus
- Mary
- Andronicus and Junia
- Ampliatus
- Urbanus

- Stachys
- Apelles
- Aristobulus
- Herodion
- Tryphaena and Tryphosa
- Persis
- Rufus (and his unnamed mother)
- Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and "the brothers who are with them" (v. 14)
- Philologus, Julia, Nereus (and his sister)
- Olympas and "all the saints who are with them" (v. 15)

We'd be hard pressed to recall a single detail from the lives of most of the names on this list. (And aren't you glad Bible study doesn't require spelling tests?) If we tried to picture their portraits hanging in a long hallway, the images would be blurry at best. But this list is important because it is the *Gentile* Hall of Faith. Like many of us, the people named here can't trace their family roots back to the "stump of Jesse" (Isa. 11:1). There are no righteous kings or weeping prophets in their family line. Their names don't even sound Hebrew—because they *aren't* Hebrew. We can't trace them to well-loved stories about God's people in the Old Testament. But when Jesus came to bring the good news of salvation to *all people* (Luke 2:10), these individuals were among the many who surrendered their lives to Christ and got busy building and serving the Church so that the gospel could be proclaimed everywhere.

We are given only a few details of these believers' lives, and what we are given can feel relatively insignificant:

- Phoebe was "a patron of many." (Rom. 16:2)
- Mary and Persis were hard workers. (vv. 6, 12)
- Rufus's mom adopted Paul as her own. (v. 13)

Giving generously. Working diligently. Treating fellow believers like family. All admirable, of course, but still basically *unremarkable*. And the accomplishments of most of the individuals named aren't even listed. Yet their names are seared into the inspired and eternal Word of God. And that should give us great hope because *God still uses unremarkable people to accomplish remarkable things*.

In the pages of this little book, you'll find snapshots of the lives of ten ordinary women. Some of them are likely familiar to you. Perhaps you learned in grade school that Florence Nightingale was the founder of modern nursing, or you had your heart stirred by the writings of Elisabeth Elliot as a young adult. Others may be new to you, but the details of their lives are no less inspiring and their stories no less worthy of retelling. The thread that stitches all their lives together weaves in and out of your life too. Each woman was created to give God glory, and she did so in a thousand ordinary ways.

In the hands of a good God, your most ordinary activities become

extraordinary, for He can use it all (Rom. 8:28). You can give generously today by using your time, energy, and resources to bless others in Jesus' name. Whether your workstation is a desk or a laundry room, you can give God glory through your diligence and hard work. And whether it's your own children or someone in your church going through a rough time, you can bless the family of God by loving them like your own.

Perhaps living a life that matters isn't as complicated as we tend to think. The women in this book will remind you that all you have to do is **use your days, no matter how unremarkable they seem, to point to the Remarkable One, Jesus Christ.**





"I am so weak! But I am Your sheep so I must obey and follow You."

—Esther Ahn Kim

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Esther Ahn Kim Suffering Well for Christ

Leslie Ludy



CHAPTER 1: ESTHER AHN KIM

E sther Ahn Kim walked slowly up the hill to the shrine, her students following silently behind her. The young music teacher knew that when she arrived at the place of worship she would be forced to make a life-altering choice.¹

The Japanese, who had taken control of her native Korea when Esther was just two years old,² were now forcing all Korean citizens to bow at the shrine of their "sun goddess." The punishment for refusing was imprisonment, torture, and possibly death.

Esther had already made up her mind. Even though many other Korean Christians had decided that outwardly bowing to the idol was acceptable as long as they continued to worship Christ in their hearts, she could make no such compromise. Esther would not bow to anything other than the one true God. So, defying the Japanese warlords—and her own fears—she determined that she would offer her life *fully* to Jesus Christ. As she walked, she silently prayed,

Today on the mountain, before the large crowd, I will proclaim that there is no other God beside You.³

Esther's group was the last to arrive at the shrine. A crowd had gathered, standing in straight lines, afraid to move because of the cruel gazes of the Japanese policemen. Esther's heart pounded with dread for what she was about to do. She silently repeated the Lord's Prayer over and over.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread,

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and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matt. 6:9–13)

Then she added a prayer of her own:

I am so weak! But I am Your sheep so I must obey and follow You. Lord, watch over me.4

"Attention!" came the commanding voice of one of the officials. The crowd stood in silent submission. "Our profoundest bow to Amaterasu Omikami!"⁵ As he shouted the words, the entire group bent the upper half of their bodies, bowing solemnly before the shrine. Esther was the only one who remained standing, looking up at the sky. The fear and uncertainty that had gripped her just moments before had vanished. She had done what she knew God wanted her to do.

On the long walk back, Esther had to face the life-changing implications of what she had done. She admitted to herself,

I am dead. [Esther Ahn Kim] died today.6

But even in this stark realization she held on to her faith, praying,

Lord, You have been leading me. I leave everything in Your hands.7

Four detectives greeted Esther when she and her students arrived back at the school. Years of intense suffering for her Lord were about to begin. But something had happened to Esther at the shrine, something that changed her forever. She was no longer afraid of what other people could do to her. Her life was only a tool in the hands of her Lord.

A FRESH BOLDNESS

That moment also marked the beginning of months of faithful, diligent preparation. Although Esther managed to escape the authorities and go into hiding, she knew it was only a matter of time before she was found and imprisoned for the stand she had taken. So she decided to prepare her heart and body to suffer for Christ.⁸ "I knew it would be impossible for me to keep my faith in my own power," she wrote later. "God would have to work through me if I was to stand firm."⁹

To prepare herself for what was to come, Esther practiced fasting for days at a time and sleeping in the cold. She memorized Scripture and hymns, and she prayed tirelessly.¹⁰ And this training to endure harsh conditions transformed Esther from a weak, frail, faltering young woman into a bold and confident ambassador for Christ. Instead of cowering in fear over what her future held, she now prepared to face it with bold confidence in the power and grace of God.

Esther eventually felt God calling her to come out of hiding and boldly proclaim the truth of the gospel among the Japanese. She knew this would likely lead to her death, but she was determined to follow Jesus wherever He led her.

Esther even traveled to Tokyo, publicly calling for the Japanese government to withdraw from Korea, repent, and turn to Christ. She was arrested almost immediately.¹¹

Her courageous stand for Christ led to six harrowing years in Japanese prisons.¹² During that time, though her body grew weak with suffering, she shone with supernatural love toward her persecutors and fellow prisoners. Even when tortured, Esther refused to deny the name of Christ. Her astounding example of suffering hardship "as a good soldier of Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3) inspired many to see Jesus through fresh eyes and to surrender their own lives to Him.

While in prison, Esther reportedly gave up her meager food for several days to sneak it to a woman who was filthy, insane, and sentenced to death for murdering her husband. Instead of being repulsed by the woman, as the other prisoners were, Esther prayed for her, sacrificing her own comforts to reach the woman's heart. Over time Esther's acts of sacrificial kindness made an impact. The woman is said to have died in her right mind, knowing Jesus Christ.¹³

In 1945 Esther was finally released from prison. She moved to the United States, married, and officially changed her Korean name (Ahn Ei Sook) to Esther Ahn Kim. She and her husband, Don Kim, spent many years ministering in Los Angeles.¹⁴ And the story of her imprisonment and unwavering faith, *If I Perish*, became the all-time religious bestseller in Korea,¹⁵ inspiring countless thousands to stand strong in their faith.

Esther Ahn Kim counted the cost of following Jesus—not only on the day when she refused to bow at the shrine but every day thereafter. Esther's life was no longer her own, and every subsequent decision she made reflected that reality. This world needs more women like Esther Ahn Kim—women who unreservedly take up their crosses and follow Him, no matter the cost. May it be our greatest desire to follow such a path and joyfully suffer any hardship for the One who gave everything for us.

Take It Home, Make It Personal

- Walking away from the shrine, Esther told the Lord, "I am dead. [Esther Ahn Kim] died today.... I leave everything in Your hands." Is there a time in your life when you have prayed a similar prayer? Write about it below.
- 2. Esther's story of suffering has brought encouragement and strength to many other believers. In what ways could the Lord use the difficult times you've faced to encourage others?
- 3. Esther chose to obey the Lord even when the consequences were severe. Are there any areas in your life where you need to choose painful obedience? Write them down and then spend a few minutes asking the Lord to help you obey Him.



"We may not leave this jungle alive, but we can leave this world serving the Lord 'with gladness.'"

—Gracia Burnham

CHAPTER 2



Gracia Burnham Held Captive by God's Love

Katie Laitkep



CHAPTER 2: GRACIA BURNHAM

Martin, were on a southern island in the Philippines, where they had served as missionaries for seventeen years. They had taken the night off to celebrate their wedding anniversary. Suddenly they heard banging at the door. Before Martin could answer, three men broke down the door and forced the couple at gunpoint from their room and into a waiting speedboat.

As other hostages filled the boat, the engines powered up, and they pulled away into the darkness. The audacious way the captors yelled out, "*Allah akbar*" made it clear to the Burnhams that they were dealing with the dreaded Abu Sayyaf terrorist group. Gracia turned to Martin. "We are in big trouble," she said.

"Yeah, we are," he quietly agreed.1

TEARFUL SURRENDER

When Gracia read missionary biographies as a child, she gave no thought to becoming one herself. But the stories of Mary Slessor's bravery and Amy Carmichael's compassion for prostituted children planted seeds that would eventually cause Gracia to surrender her own plans to God and accept His calling to go to the mission field herself.

In college she met Martin Burnham, a missionary kid who had grown up in the Philippines. During an annual missions-centered chapel service, she watched Martin act out the life of William Carey, the first modern-era missionary. On another occasion Gracia watched a cast of college students perform the stage version of Elisabeth Elliott's *Through Gates of Splendor*, which told the story of five missionaries who were martyred in Ecuador. Gracia later wrote,

I stood up to leave the chapel that day, unable to say a word. Will the Lord ever require me to do what those men did? To go through

what they went through? I was stunned. I slowly headed out the door, tears streaming down my face.²

It eventually became clear that not only was the Lord calling both Gracia and Martin to mission work, He was also calling them to life together. What began as a first date, with Gracia in a yellow dress and Martin in cowboy boots, became a family of five and almost two decades of ministry in the Philippines. Martin served as a jungle pilot while Gracia homeschooled their three children, provided radio flight support, and hosted a constant stream of houseguests.³

It was a busy and fulfilling life—until Martin and Gracia were taken captive. From that moment they were plunged into a year of horror—running through the jungle, drinking dirty river water, and simply trying to stay alive.

CRYING IN CAPTIVITY

As the sun went down on their first few days of captivity, one of the hostages asked Martin to pray for the group:

"Lord, all of this doesn't surprise you," he began in a calming voice as we all bowed our heads. "You know where we are, even though we don't. We know that people are worried about us. But you hold us in your hands. Give us the grace to go through this trial. We're depending on you. Amen."⁴

That prayer became a battle cry as week after week passed, bringing no hope of release. Gracia found her mental state beginning to deteriorate. "It was like I could hear Satan laughing at me, saying, 'You trust in the Lord—but you're still here."⁵

She had not entirely given up her faith, she told Martin, but she could not believe the part about God loving her. "It seems to me that either you believe it all, or else you don't believe at all," Martin replied.⁶ Soon she realized she had a choice: she could give in to resentment or choose to believe that what God's Word said was true:

This was a turning point for me. It was as if God were saying to me, "If you're going to believe that I died for you, why not believe that I love you? Why don't you let me put my arms around you and love you?" And I did. I simply gave in and handed all my pain and anger over to the Lord right then and there. She spent more and more time singing to the Lord. "How Great Thou Art" became a favorite hymn to cry out in the jungle under the open sky. "Maybe," Martin told her, "God has us here just to praise him in this very dark place."⁷

A VIOLENT GOODBYE

Over a year had passed since their abduction. On the afternoon of June 7, 2002, as they watched the rain move in, Martin said to her:

"I really don't know why this has happened to us. I've been thinking a lot lately about Psalm 100—what it says about serving the Lord with gladness. This may not seem much like serving the Lord, but that's what we're doing, you know. We may not leave this jungle alive, but we can leave this world serving the Lord 'with gladness'; we can 'come before his presence with singing' [Psalm 100:2 KJV]."⁸

They decided to lie down for a nap, but just as they closed their eyes, "a fearsome barrage of gunfire cut loose from the crest of the hill." After sixteen previous battles, Gracia's instincts told her what to do: *drop immediately*. Before she hit the ground, she felt a bullet slam through her right leg.⁹ She slid down a steep hill, resting beside Martin. She looked over and saw he was bleeding from his chest.

The battle raged. The pain in my leg was not as severe as the terror in my heart. I forced myself to keep lying still. Several minutes passed. Then without warning I felt Martin's body become heavy.... The man I loved more than anyone in the world was gone.¹⁰

LIVING IN GOD'S EMBRACE

After Gracia was rescued, before she could leave the Philippines and return to her children, she was moved into the embassy in Manila. One morning, she found a Bible on the nightstand and began to pray:

Oh, Lord, thank you so much for my getting out... Thank you for the joy of having your Word in my hands once again. Please go with me through these next difficult days, and make my life a blessing.¹¹ Gracia returned home under a national spotlight. In the years since her captivity, she has become an author, speaker, and "Lola" to her grandchildren.¹² In all areas of her life she has resolved "to keep living in the embrace of God's gladness and love for as long as He gives me breath."¹³ She carries the message of Psalm 100:2, words she and Martin focused on in his final days, words which model to the world how to praise God—even in a very dark place.

Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

Take It Home, Make It Personal

- 1. Gracia never thought that she would become a missionary, but the Lord had different plans for her. How have you seen the Lord exchange your plans for your life for His perfect plans?
- 2. During their captivity, Gracia's husband remarked to her, "Maybe God has us here just to praise him in this very dark place." The next time you are in a dark place, ask the Lord to help you praise Him.
- 3. Gracia was relieved when she was able to hold God's Word in her hands again after her captivity. When was the last time that you were excited and relieved to open God's Word?



"He has been enough."

—Amy Carmichael





Amy Carmichael

Unconditionally Surrendered to Her Beloved King

Jani Ortlund



CHAPTER 3: AMY CARMICHAEL

A my Carmichael was born into a wealthy Presbyterian family in Northern Ireland. The oldest of seven children, she enjoyed a happy childhood in her secure and loving, albeit strict, home. Her family experienced financial hardship during her teen years, forcing Amy to leave boarding school and come home to help. At seventeen, her father's death along with her own chronic nerve pain led her more deeply into God's Word.

Amy spent her early twenties serving in home mission work among the poor. But in 1887, after hearing a talk by Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, she became convinced of her calling to foreign mission work.

Although Amy initially served in Japan, China, and Ceylon, her most impactful ministry occurred in the southern tip of India. There, despite almost insurmountable hardships—political threats, the caste system, a new language, tropical heat, physical ailments, coworker defections, financial shortages, and an overwhelming workload—she founded and managed the Dohnavur Fellowship, a community for children in danger of being enslaved at local shrines and temples. These Hindu temple children were primarily young girls who were dedicated to the gods and then forced into prostitution to earn money for the priests. Over five decades, Amy helped rescue and raise more than a thousand children.

COUNTING THE COST AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

Amy served in India for more than fifty years without a furlough. Many sought her advice about mission work. Her response? "To any whom the Hand Divine is beckoning: count the cost, for He tells us to, *but take your slate to the foot of the Cross and add up the figures there.*"¹

When someone asked to join her team, Amy would tell them, "Do not come unless you can say to your Lord and to us, *The cross is the attraction*."² Although she did not intend to make her life look hard, she never avoided talk of heat, isolation, primitive conditions, disease, and death. She took wounds and scars for granted.

Amy's only means of communication was handwritten letters; how slowly the responses from home seemed to come! She wrote in her later years, "My life, on the human side, was broken, and it never was mended again. But *He has been enough.*"³ She believed and found comfort in the knowledge that "we shall all be together soon in the Father's Country."⁴

With so many to care for—both workers and children—Amy's faith was often tested. Questions came from all sides, but she had Someone to take those questions to, and she spent much time in prayer seeking His answers. She believed God led His children in three ways: through the Word, through the inward leading of the Spirit, and (often, but not always) through circumstance. "*If the voice is God's all three will agree.*"⁵ When and where He led, she followed, trusting Him to guide and provide. She found she didn't mind any adversity nearly as much as she had feared she might. God always supplied His promised grace.

HER LIFE STILL SPEAKS

Amy Carmichael left us many godly examples of how to love Christ, His Body, and our mission field. Here are a few principles we can apply:

- Never around, always to. Amy led Dohnavur as a family, not an institution. She asked her workers to have deep loyalty toward one another. If there was a problem, workers knew they were to go directly to—not around—each other. No gossip or backbiting was tolerated. They were all expected to protect and defend their unity.
- Love to live, live to love. Amy governed her own life by asking not how little but how much love she could give. She studied, as she put it, "the brave and burning souls of every age who had left torches"⁶ to light the way of discipleship. All at Dohnavur were called to a settled happiness in the Lord, where promotion meant not more honor but more and harder work, with Amy leading the way.

• Give up your right to yourself, take up the cross, and follow. This was a lesson that Amy reviewed many times. She found it especially difficult when a beloved and much-needed teammate would leave unexpectedly or dysentery would spread through the nurseries, draining life from tiny bodies newly rescued. One of my favorite poems of hers demonstrates this principle:

From prayer that asks that I may be Sheltered from winds that beat on Thee, From fearing when I should aspire, From faltering when I should climb higher, From silken self, O Captain, free Thy soldier who would follow Thee.

From subtle love of softening things, From easy choices, weakenings, (Not thus are spirits fortified, Not this way went the Crucified,) From all that dims Thy Calvary, O Lamb of God, deliver me.

Give me the love that leads the way, The faith that nothing can dismay The hope no disappointments tire The passion that will burn like fire, Let me not sink to be a clod: Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.⁷



• Live every day until you die. Despite the ever-expanding ministry she led, the books she wrote, the money she raised, the children she mothered as "Amma" (Tamil for "mother"), Amy faced devastating bereavements, insomnia, heart trouble, hypertension, and other emotional and physical trials that only proved "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

One evening in October 1931, Amy was touring a deserted house in a nearby village, thought by the locals to be haunted. She hoped to acquire it as an inroad into this yet unbelieving area. As she went out back to use the primitive outdoor "facility," she fell across the opening of the narrow pit, breaking her leg, twisting her spine, and dislocating her ankle.

She never fully recovered. When home from the hospital, her world was limited to short steps around her bedroom, sitting room, and study. She saw herself like Paul: "a prisoner of the Lord,"⁸ having paid a price for beginning a witness in a closed town. Her loved ones installed a proper bed instead of a mat on the tile floor, and she learned to accept this luxury, along with flowers and trinkets from her beloved children. Many hoped and prayed for her recovery, but it never came.

SAVED TO SERVE OTHERS

For almost twenty years, "Amma" mothered from her bed or chair, seeing different family members every half hour despite her almost constant pain. All decisions were referred to her, but like any wise leader she tried her best to prepare people for her departure. "When decisions have to be made, don't look back and wonder what I would have done. Look up, and light will come to do what our Lord and Master would have you do."⁹

During this time as an invalid, Amy wrote fourteen books, thousands of personal letters, and hundreds of songs and poems. A constant theme ran throughout all her writing: we are saved to serve. She lived out that theme until her death in January 1951. Although many grieved, they did so against her will, for she had written, "When you hear I have gone, jump for joy!"¹⁰



Chapter 3: Amy Carmichael 27

Take It Home, Make It Personal

- When Amy reflected on her life, she said "My life, on the human side, was broken, and it never was mended again. But He has been enough." In what ways have you seen the Lord be enough in your own life?
- 2. Amy did all of her work "as unto the Lord." How does working as unto the Lord change the way that we should work?
- 3. Four principles from Amy's life are listed. Which of the four is hardest for you to apply? Ask the Lord to help you grow in this area.

CHAPTER 4



Betsey Stockton The Impact of Spiritual Freedom

Katie Laitkep



CHAPTER 4: BETSEY STOCKTON

For years, if you wandered into Lakewood Cemetery in Cooperstown, New York, you would have missed the tombstone of Betsey Stockton. The stone had fallen over, making it difficult to see the inscription that captured her life story in just three words: "honored and beloved."

EMANCIPATED FROM SPIRITUAL SLAVERY

These words would not have described the early decades of Betsey's life. Born into slavery in Princeton, New Jersey, she started life without a birth certificate or a last name. Her full name first appeared years later in the records of Princeton's First Presbyterian church as Betsey Stockton—a surname she likely gave herself.

At six years old, Betsey was sent away from her mother to labor as a domestic servant, cooking, cleaning, and caring for the wife of Pastor Ashbel Green. Although she was under their authority, the Greens did not know what to do with her. "Betsey gave no evidence of piety," Green wrote. "She was, at least till the age of thirteen or fourteen, wild and thoughtless, if not vicious."¹

At eighteen years of age, Betsey experienced a spiritual transformation. "This woman," wrote Pastor Green, "as I hope and she believes, met with a saving change of heart."² About the same time that Betsey experienced spiritual freedom through Christ, she also experienced a change in her status as a slave; she was emancipated. Though she continued working for Green and his family, she was paid for her service.³

When Betsey was not engaged in work, she spent her spare time in Green's study. One of his sons helped her study, and she did far more than learn to read. A Princeton Theological Seminary student later noted, "Few pious young ladies of her age can be found to equal her in knowledge of the Bible and general theology."⁴ Her passion for what she learned could not be contained. The lonely little girl who had never been to school would soon teach others across the globe.

MISSION ACROSS THE SEA

As Betsey experienced the love of God, she wanted to share it with the world. In 1822 she left for Connecticut, where she boarded a whaling ship. The crew set sail for the Sandwich Islands (modern-day Hawaii), and Betsey made history as the first single woman and the first Black woman to travel there. Even though seasickness left her "so weak that I was almost unable to help myself," Betsey was captivated by the ocean: "The scene that presented itself was, to me, the most sublime that I ever witnessed."⁵

Not long after setting sail, she struggled with doubts, and yet she wrote, "My heart was still rejoicing in the strength of my God."⁶ The young mariners on her ship noticed her courage. "By sharing their suffering, [Betsey] proved herself worthy of their esteem."⁷

When they finally arrived, Betsey was shocked at the sight of the nearly naked Hawaiians. "My own soul sickened within me, and every nerve trembled. Are these, thought I, the beings with whom I must spend the remainder of my life?" She reminded herself of her purpose: "They are men and have souls."⁸

A DIFFICULT DECISION

Betsey built relationships with Hawaiian royalty as well as ordinary people. In 1823 she began a school for the lower class. She was committed to her task, noting that God had conferred on her a great privilege. "Woe," she wrote, "if I am unfaithful."⁹

As she undertook this laborious work, Betsey longed for "some Christian friend in whom I could confide."¹⁰ She drew close to missionary couple Charles and Harriett Stewart who welcomed her as a member of their family.¹¹ This unconventional unit would serve side-by-side for two years and then leave Hawaii together in 1825. Betsey's time as a missionary had led to spiritual transformation that God used to prepare her for the future, but the transition forced one of her most difficult decisions yet: to remain with the Stewarts, a family she loved, or to follow the calling God had placed on her life.

Betsey chose to obey God despite the personal cost. She became the lead teacher in a challenging and innovative educational program. But Betsey soon resigned her charge. Her dear friend Harriet Stewart had passed away, and Betsey stepped away from her flourishing career to care for the three children of the family she considered her own.

Eventually Charles Stewart remarried, leaving Betsey alone in Princeton. She never married. "Even though she had become a visible figure in the church and community, she lived on her own—and that could sometimes leave her lonely."¹² In October 1845 Betsey wrote a letter lamenting the "bitter anguish and silent grief of one who knows that they have not on earth one single friend to whom they could disclose the deep sorrows of their hearts."¹³ Yet she persisted, hoping to "try to do all the good I can to those around me."¹⁴

HONORED AND BELOVED

The last three decades of her life, Betsey was "the sole resident of her house on Quarry Street, around the corner from her church and school."¹⁵ She poured herself into teaching until the fall of 1865. Her obituary later recorded that observers "found no school better trained, better instructed, or with evidences of greater success than hers."¹⁶

Betsey lived a life of firsts, all in service to other people. Her students donated a stained-glass window to her historic church with a sign declaring how she enriched the lives of members of her local community.¹⁷ When Betsey was buried, her tombstone links her to those she loved; she is listed as the "Family of Rev. C. S. Stewart."

Today her tombstone—no longer fallen—tells the story of Christ's redemption, how He instilled a woman born in slavery with God-given purpose and a place to belong.

Of African blood and born in slavery, she became fitted by education and divine grace, for a life of great usefulness.... honored and beloved by a large circle of Christian Friends.¹⁸

Take It Home, Make It Personal

- 1. When Betsey experienced the life-changing love of God, she yearned to share it with others. What are some ways that you can share God's love with someone this week?
- 2. In Hawaii Betsey longed for Christian community. How important is community for believers? How can *you* foster Christian community?
- 3. Betsey lived a life of firsts but always sought to bring renown to Christ rather than herself. How can you seek to glorify the Lord in your accomplishments?





"Oh God, here's the Bible about which I long to tell others, here's my Daily Light that every day will give me a new promise."

-Gladys Aylward



CHAPTER 5



Gladys Aylward The Power of Childlike Faith

Leslie Ludy

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CHAPTER 5: GLADYS AYLWARD

A biography that has come to mean a lot to me as I've sought to live obediently surrendered to God is the story of Gladys Aylward—an uneducated, poor, and seemingly ill-equipped missionary whom God used to transform many lives in the country of China. Time and time again, she chose to trust her God amid impossible circumstances. Her story demonstrates what is possible when we simply walk forward with childlike faith and choose to take God at His Word.

There are spiritual characteristics that Gladys demonstrated in her life that have had a profound impact upon me, pushing me out of my comfort zone and inspiring me to trust God even in my own seemingly impossible circumstances.

SEEING BEYOND THE OBSTACLES

Born into a working-class family in 1902, Gladys had very little education and no real opportunities to become successful in life. She became a parlor maid at the age of fourteen. At eighteen she encountered Christ and began to feel a burden for the lost around the world—especially the millions of people in China who had never heard the gospel.

It was completely impractical for a girl like Gladys to even think of becoming a missionary to China. She didn't have the resources, training, education, or connections to succeed in such a bold venture. Not to mention that China at the time was a war-torn country full of danger for a single woman. Family, friends, and mission boards told her to put the thought out of her mind.

Yet God told her something different. After a mission board rejected her, Gladys turned to the Bible for direction, and the book of Nehemiah stood out to her. As she read about the prophet's obedience to go where God called him, something in her heart shifted. She later wrote, That settled everything for me. I believed these were my marching orders. I put my Bible on the bed, beside it my copy of Daily Light and, at the side of that, all the money I had—[a small handful of coins]. What a ridiculous little collection it seemed, but I said simply, "Oh God, here's the Bible about which I long to tell others, here's my Daily Light that every day will give me a new promise, and here is [all the money I have]. If you want me, I am going to China with these."¹

Over the next year Gladys managed to scrape enough together for a train ticket to China. She was advised not to travel there by train because there was violent fighting along the long route and no guarantee she would get through. Yet she saw beyond all the obstacles because she kept her eyes fixed upon the enormity and faithfulness of her God—just as Nehemiah had done.

DON'T BE BULLIED BY FEAR

When Gladys was on her way to China, the enemy must have known how powerful her ministry would be, because he tried to thwart her before she even arrived. In Russia she was detained by corrupt government officials. As she sat in a hotel room, thinking about a way to escape, an officer tried to force his way in. She told him,

"You are not coming in here."

"Why not?"

"Because this is my bedroom."

"I am the master; I can do with you what I wish!"

"Oh, no, you cannot. You may not believe in God, but He is here. Touch me and see. Between you and me God has put a barrier. Go!"

The man stared at Gladys, shivered, and without another word turned and left.²

Years later, after Gladys had lived and served in the village of Yangchen, she was summoned by the governor to intervene in a riot that had broken out in the men's prison. When she arrived, she found that the inmates were rampaging through the prison courtyard and that several had been killed. The soldiers were afraid to intervene.

The warden of the prison told Gladys to go into the courtyard and stop the fighting. "I must go in there and stop them?" she asked. He reasoned that she was always telling everyone that the living God was within her, thus she couldn't be killed.

That settled it. "As soon as the gate was open wide enough, the governor pushed Gladys inside."³ She asked God for strength and protection as the gate loudly shut behind her. She commanded the men to return to their cells and, incredibly, they obeyed. She then advocated on behalf of bettering the prisoners' conditions, and soon the prison was transformed.

The people began to call Gladys *Ai-weh-deh*, which means "virtuous one." During her many years in China, she accomplished feats that are usually only heard of in action movies or spy novels, sometimes narrowly escaping death—as shown by the bullet holes that riddled her clothing. **This small, uneducated woman who simply dared to trust her God possessed more courage than twenty strong men put together.**

SPENT AND BROKEN FOR GOD'S GLORY

While many Christians succumb to spiritual apathy because of physical weakness, tiredness, and lack of stamina, Gladys Aylward did the opposite. She knew that God had called her to perform mighty exploits for His kingdom and that He would provide every bit of strength and stamina needed for the task. She did not allow physical weakness to control her decisions. Time and time again she pushed herself, relying on the supernatural strength of God to carry her through.

When war broke out in her village, Gladys took more than one hundred displaced children on a six-week journey over mountain passes—with no food or provisions—to get them to a safe location. The journey took such a toll upon her physically that she fell unconscious when it was over, suffering from pneumonia, typhus, and other serious illnesses. She willingly allowed her body to be spent and broken for the glory of God.

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Because Gladys dared to trust God and take Him at His Word, she lived one of the most victorious lives this world has ever seen. To impact this world for eternity, we don't need a long list of human qualifications. As Gladys Aylward's life proves, we simply need an immovable, unshakable, rock-solid faith in our amazing God.

Take It Home, Make It Personal

- 1. How can having a clear view of who God is help you see beyond the obstacles in your life as Gladys did?
- 2. How can Gladys's example of not succumbing to spiritual apathy because of physical weakness, tiredness, and lack of stamina encourage you in your walk with the Lord?
- 3. What are some areas of your own life where you need to dare to trust God?



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