

Her Heart's Desire: Africa for Christ



By Ruth Ashwell

When she surrendered her ambitions to God, she found that His plan far surpassed anything she had ever dreamed possible.

We hear the words to the song, "May all who come behind us find us faithful."
I want to be sure that anyone who follows me will find me faithful.

I had a wonderful Christian heritage. My mother and father were both saved and sanctified before I was born. They taught us children not only from the Word of God, but also by example. I wanted to be a Christian too. The ways of the world had no interest for me. However, I was just a happy-go-lucky youngster, and when I prayed, it seemed I could not pray through to an experience of salvation.

When I was seventeen years of age, I was kneeling in prayer after a church service, waiting for my parents. The Spirit of God dealt with me, and I feared He would never do so again. I prayed with all my heart that I might be saved, and the Lord made a wonderful change. It was not a great outward transformation, for I had not gone into deep sin, but inside I had the assurance: "I know He has redeemed me." Later, the Lord sanctified me and then baptized me with the Holy Spirit.

My ambitions or God's plan?

Even though I had received these three basic experiences, I still had my own plans about what I wanted to do with my life. My brothers and sisters and I had a cousin, George Hughes, whose main topic of conversation was consecration. Again and again he would tell us, "Give your life to the Lord. Let the Lord choose everything you do." As he continued to encourage us, a hunger for the things of God filled my heart. However, I was afraid if I completely surrendered my life to the Lord, my own plans might never materialize. My desires were not sinful, but they were not God's plan for me. I would begin to surrender my plans to the Lord and then draw back. The battle warred inside me for over a year.

Finally, one Sunday I knew I had to make a decision. I found a place to be alone with God. The conflict raged between my ambitions and the deep feeling in my heart that I must do God's will. Then the Lord showed me two paths. One was sunny and sheltered with trees, had lovely homes and children playing, and the Lord stood at the end of it. The other was rutted and muddy. It was unprotected and hard, and the Lord stood at the end of that path also. I realized I could have my ambitions and still make Heaven, but I also knew that the Lord wanted me to take the difficult path.

I wondered if I could ever live my life the Lord's way. Then He reminded me of the verses in Luke 18:29 and 30, "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." Weeping, I told the Lord I would take His way. I laid down all my plans and said I would follow Him whatever the cost. The decision came from the depths of my heart, and I meant to keep it. Only God knows how hard it was, but I have never been sorry.

The path God chose for me far surpassed any ambitions or dreams I ever had. Not long after, I began working at the headquarters office of our church. That meant sacrificing the salary I could make elsewhere and living by faith. I was afraid, but the Lord helped me to trust Him. That was over sixty years ago, and I have never suffered a lack of anything I needed.

The Africa challenge

The cousin who so influenced my life went to Africa as a missionary. He wrote of the many wonderful ways God was working there, and it interested me a great deal. I thought it would be great to be a missionary, but I really wasn't thinking about being a missionary to Africa. While my cousin was gone, the Lord began to talk to me again. The hunger came back, and I had the feeling that I wasn't doing everything God wanted me to do, even though I was working full-time in the publishing office of our church. I prayed and consecrated again. I wrote to my cousin about it, and he responded, "I think the Lord is calling you to something more than you are doing."

Don't push any doors open, but be faithful and let the Lord work it out. Just pray and consecrate. If God is calling you for something, He is able to make that come about in His way." I did my best to follow that advice.

The years went by, and my cousin made another trip to Africa. He never came home from that trip. He suffered a heart attack on the airplane on his way home, and was buried in Liberia. My heart was grieving, and I wondered who would take up the burden for his work and all the correspondence it entailed. One day the head of our organization asked me to come into his office. He said, "Ruth, the Lord has showed me that you should take up George's work." I was astounded. I felt had no ability, but God had called me. I knew He would need to give me the strength and the power. In the years since then, as I tried to fulfill that responsibility, countless times I asked the Lord for wisdom in responding to the correspondence that crossed my desk. The Lord blessed me and gave me a love that I can't describe for the people I tried to help through letters. Twice I was privileged to visit Africa, and there I met many of those I had corresponded with.

The Lord gave me a wonderful husband, who was also working fulltime for God, and we served the Lord together for many years before God took him to Heaven. I have a comfortable home and many of the lovely things of life. Oh, trials have come and it has not always been easy, but the Lord has always been there.

Many times I think, Why me? I had no abilities or talents to recommend me to God. Once I asked a minister about this, and he said, "The Lord calls everyone, but not everyone responds." I am so grateful the Lord kept dealing with me until I was willing to say, "You choose the path, Lord, and I will walk in it."

Answered prayers

There have been many miracles in my life since the day I yielded myself to God. A number of years ago, my aunt came to live with us. The very last words my mother spoke to me were, "My only hope of my sister ever making Heaven is if she is in your home." My aunt was eighty years old, and she didn't believe in God. Many times when I prayed for her, the Lord would say to me, "The things which are impossible with man are possible with God." One night I thought my aunt was dying. She had a bad heart, and the doctor had said she could go at any moment. That night she couldn't breathe, and I thought she would not live. I kept praying, "Lord, don't let her go until she is saved." All of a sudden she relaxed, and the peace of Heaven came into the room. God saved my aunt. She lived two more years and showed the fruits of salvation in her life. My mother had prayed for her for years, and God answered! Often I think, We can pray and pray and it may seem as if the heavens are brass, but it pays to keep on praying.

Years later the Lord answered prayer for my own sister. She had been backslidden for about forty years. One time when I went to visit her, I tried to tell her that the Lord was coming soon, and I couldn't believe the bitterness that came out of her heart. The enemy told me there was no hope, but a few months later she called and said, "The Lord saved me." Shortly after that she came to a service at our church in Portland. She said, "I have been trying to get sanctified. I thought if I could get here, I could pray through." That was a Friday night, and the Lord answered her prayer that evening. The next Sunday morning she received the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

A short time later that sister had a stroke. She was a widow and neither of her daughters could care for her, so she came to live with us. She said, "If I had to lose the use of my right hand to be here in Portland, it is worth it." She lived many years in our home, and then the Lord took her to Heaven. Thank God, it is worth it to keep holding on.

Am I sorry I gave my all to God? Not in the least! I wouldn't exchange what God has done in my life for anything in the world. It will take all eternity to thank Him for everything He has done for me."

Ruth Ashwell began working at the Apostolic Faith headquarters office on September 15, 1936. In 1953, she was asked to assume the responsibility of directing the Africa correspondence department and she faithfully labored in that position until her retirement in December, 1999. Ruth was a spiritual mentor and mother in the Lord to many in the continent of Africa. Her loving and encouraging letters played a vital role in the establishment and growth of the Apostolic Faith work there. In October of 2001, she was called into the presence of the God she loved and served.