

Introduction

In our Builder's Step group Sunday evening we talked about mentoring and the section about contemporary and historical models caught my attention. Both are considered passive mentors in that the person being mentored has little or no contact with the person. The difference between the two is whether the person is living (contemporary) or dead (historical).

Monday morning the Lord woke me up at 4 am. As I was considering what I would add to a message I had started, He began to remind me about someone whose life impacted me through a movie I had watched years ago. I was led to review several online biographies of this person's life and then was *compelled* to start capturing the story of this person's life in my own words. It soon became apparent that this was going to form the basis of a new message and that it is the one He wants me to give this week.

I was a little unnerved by this as I wasn't sure where He was headed, but as I was faithful to keep following His leading, He showed me how the person's story is connected to us here at Harvest Valley. So, let me begin by telling you the life story of a missionary named Gladys Aylward.

The Life Story of Gladys Aylward

Gladys Aylward was born in London, England in 1902. As a young child, Gladys heard God's call to go to China as a missionary. However, at the age of 26 she was told by the China Inland Mission that she didn't have the capacity to learn a "difficult language like Chinese". Gladys then heard of a missionary in China, a widow named Jennie Lawson, who was asking for someone to help. Gladys took hold of this opportunity by sending a letter to Jennie and then worked for a year as a maid until she had enough money to buy a train ticket.

Her journey on the Trans-Siberian railway was harrowing. She was accosted by a Russian official, nearly raped and almost prevented from leaving the country. Gladys arrived in Yangchen, joining Jennie in December of 1932. Yangchen is a city located south of Peking; now known as Beijing.

Their missionary strategy was to start an inn for those who travelled by mule caravans carrying goods and supplies across the country. They called it the Inn of

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the Eight Happinesses; a name given because eight is considered a highly auspicious (lucky) number by the Chinese and to reflect the virtues of love, virtue, gentleness, tolerance, loyalty, truth, beauty and devotion. Jennie and Gladys provided food and lodging for both the men and the mules. They told the travelers stories from the Bible about a man named Jesus. A few weeks later Jennie died.

Gladys then encounters the mandarin (chief magistrate), a man held in great honor, respect and even fear by the citizens. He asks her to become the “chief foot inspector” for the region. China had recently enacted a new law against the centuries-old custom of foot binding in which a woman’s foot was tightly wrapped in bandages from infancy to keep them from growing. These tiny feet resulted in a shuffled walk that was considered “extremely graceful”. A woman was needed to fill this role and it provided Gladys with a unique opportunity to spread the Gospel throughout the region.

In her second year of ministry, she is summoned by the mandarin to assist with quelling a riot that had broken out in the men’s prison. Several men had been killed and the prison guards were afraid to go in. The warden told her to go in and stop the rioting. She asked, “How can I do that?”. He replied, “You have been preaching that those who trust in Christ have nothing to fear.” She walked into the courtyard and shouted “Quiet!”. The bloodshed ended and the men returned to their cells. Gladys then advocated for changes in prison conditions and her efforts brought about significant reforms.

Gladys also took in orphans which increased in number as the World War II began to encroach on their region. Eventually the threat from the Japanese forces was so great that she was forced to flee to a city in western China. In a harrowing, 12-day journey across the country she led nearly 100 children to safety.

In 1947 Gladys returned to England for health reasons and then came back to the Orient in 1955 to start an orphanage in Taiwan. She remained there until her death in 1970.

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A movie was made of her life entitled *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* which starred Ingrid Bergman. Ingrid was so moved by her story that she attempted to visit Gladys who unfortunately died a few days before her arrival. However, Gladys's co-worker had the privilege of leading Ingrid to Christ.

During her time in Yangchen, the people of the city and the region called her Ai-Weh-Deh, a name which means "the virtuous one".

One day the mandarin invited her to a special dinner with other officials and wealthy guests in attendance. The mandarin gave this speech:

From the other side of the world Ai-Weh-Deh journeyed to China, owing allegiance only to her living God. She brought her Christianity to Yang-cheng. She had not sat hidden inside a temple contemplating how virtuous she was. She had unbound the feet of infants. She had helped the poor. She had visited the jails. She had taken orphans under her roof. She had nursed the wounded.

Her faith was alive. More than anyone the Mandarin had ever met, Ai-Weh-Deh demonstrated the power of love. She loved China so much she became a citizen...The Mandarin admitted he had debated with her the merits of her faith against the merits of his old Confucius ways, a hundred times. But Confucianism lives in my head, not in my heart, as Christianity does in Ai-Weh-Deh and her converts. [As a result] I wish to become a Christian!

So how does Gladys's story relate to us?

Gladys's life is one that exemplifies faith in the face of adversity. She saw beyond the obstacles and was not bullied by fear. Her faith and courage led to the transformation of an entire region.

Gladys literally influenced five of the seven mountains of culture – government (mandarin, foot binding and prison reforms), religion (Confucianism), family (many of the households visited as the chief foot inspector became house churches, orphanage), business (Inn) and arts and entertainment (stories told to the travelers, movie of her life, Ingrid's conversion).

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This is the impact of *one* person who heard God's call and was totally sold out to Jesus. Imagine for a minute what can be accomplished by an *entire* body of believers who hear God's call and give themselves fully to Him.

Go ahead imagine it.

Now, listen to what Jesus said in John 14:12 (NIV):

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Jesus is saying that what you are imagining right now is possible.

If you have taken the Next Step class, you know that we at HVWC believe our mission is to usher in the Kingdom of God through the complete transformation of this region as evidenced by the sustained elimination of systemic poverty in all its forms - relational, physical, emotional and motivational.

Think about it.

What would life be like here if we saw massive decreases in domestic violence, divorce, mental illness, addiction, suicide, unemployment, and underemployment as the result of a *body* of believers who live with the faith and courage of Gladys Aylward? What would life be like if this entire region embraced hope instead of fear and love instead of hate? What would life be like if community leaders looked to the church as the "go to resource" for solving issues of all kinds? What would life be like if the agenda of the Kingdom dominated the seven mountains of culture in this region - government, religion, family, education, business, media and arts and entertainment?

What would life be like if our region looked like a lot more like heaven? It is possible. *We pray it all the time.*

Matthew 6:10 (NIV)

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Do we believe it?

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To accomplish this, we will need to disciple, that is to equip and mentor, every person who comes through those doors and who is willing to accept the call of God on their lives and who are fully committed to Jesus. These people will be the influencers and catalysts in whatever mountains of culture they are called to serve.

Bear this in mind - “these people” include *both you and me*.

This mission will require both individual and corporate faith and courage. We will need the ability to see beyond the obstacles and the determination to not be bullied by fear. We will need to believe, to persist and to persevere. We will need to not give up nor give in.

We will need each other.

Gladys Aylward was only 4’10”. She was poor, uneducated, and untrained. God responded to her “Yes” and equipped her. She responded with faith and courage. Her life changed a region. Your life, our lives can too.

So...Are you in? Are you willing to say Yes? Are you willing take your next step?