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Mutuality

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TELL

HER

STORY

**Kay Smith: Mother of
the Jesus Movement**

By Michaela Farrell

**The Apostolic Life
of Walatta-Petros**

By Bridget Jack Jeffries

**Martyrdom and Motherhood:
Perpetua and Felicity**

By Kylie Polkinghorne

"Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19, NRSV).

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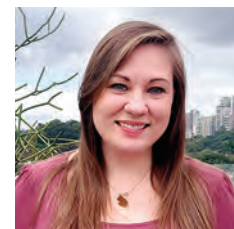
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Rediscovering Women's History

They say history is written by the winners. Whatever your understanding of “winners,” I think we can agree that whoever holds power at any given time has great influence over what is remembered or forgotten. Events and people alike have fallen victim to this careful curation of the past, whether because they were deemed unimportant or because they were too out-of-the-box for their time.

The church is not innocent when it comes to this. Despite the Bible's careful work restoring women as equal to men in capacity as well as calling, throughout church history women's contributions have been belittled, ignored, and reinterpreted. “Deborah was only a judge because no men would step up.” “Mary Magdalene was a prostitute that Jesus permitted to tag along.” “There were no female disciples.” “Junia is actually a man's name.” “Phoebe was a servant, not a deaconess.” No matter how weak the argument, time after time, the stories of women both in the Bible and out have been reinterpreted in such a way as to devalue them and their contributions to Christianity.

Thankfully this is not the end of the story. Where modern church narratives may say one thing, biblical exegesis and careful historical study show something else entirely. Though these stories have been covered up, they have not been lost.

It should be noted that not all who repeat this version of these women's stories do so maliciously; many simply repeat what they learned growing up. This is how Nijay K. Gupta describes his experience that eventually led to his becoming an egalitarian:

I took for granted that this is the way things should be in the church and that this reflects what is in the Bible—men are leaders, women are followers and supporters. . . . So, for about the first decade of my Christian faith, I was content with the assumption that the church is for everyone to attend and participate in, but should be led by men, because that's the way it has always been according to the Good Book. Then I went to seminary.¹

Gupta goes on to explain that his seminary education gave him the tools to study the Bible and what it says about these women for himself. What he found in the text was quite different from what had been taught and role modeled in his church.

Today Gupta and others like him are working to right this wrong, bringing to light the stories of courage, leadership, and wisdom of our foremothers. Books like *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (by Nijay Gupta), *Vindicating the Vixens* (by Sandra Glahn), and *Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter* (by Lindsay Hardin Freeman) are just a few examples of the many resources now available. The contributions of women both in the Bible and out are being unearthed, corrected, and shared, opening our eyes to the long history of women's work and encouraging us in our own.

In this issue of *Mutuality*, we set out to do just that. Each article tells the story of a woman (or women) who faithfully followed God's call on her life, with no regard for the obstacles or sacrifices involved. From ancient Carthage and Ethiopia to New Zealand timber camps, China, and North America, each woman found in these pages had a lasting impact on her community that ripples out to us today. Finally, we have a review of Nijay Gupta's book mentioned above, as well as information on CBE International's upcoming conference on this same theme, both titled *Tell Her Story*.

Stories play a powerful role in shaping how we view the world around us. As we celebrate Women's History Month, we hope the stories shared here will inspire you to look beyond faulty modern narratives and curated history to see the women who have been there all along.

Notes

1. Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), 2.

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MAY SMITH

MOTHER OF THE JESUS MOVEMENT

By Michaela Farrell



In early 2023, the box office hit *Jesus Revolution* told the story of the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The stories of charismatic preachers like Greg Laurie, Lonnie Frisbee, and Chuck Smith were highlighted particularly, shedding light on the lives of these important servants of God. One of the most significant figures of the movement, however, was mostly left out. Primarily known in the movie as “Chuck Smith’s wife,” Kay Smith (1927-2021) is more accurately considered the mother of the Jesus Movement. Kay’s ministry far exceeded its film portrayal, as she served as an advocate for the marginalized, a prophetic voice, and an incredible intercessor.¹

In 1927, seven-week-old Catheryn was handed over to Minnie and Oscar Johnson, who ran a home for found children. It would be another fourteen years before she learned that the people who raised her were not her biological parents. This traumatic revelation was just one layer of the dysfunction that marred what otherwise appeared to be a privileged childhood for Catheryn, known later as “Kay.” Minnie and Oscar were affluent members of Aimee Semple

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McPherson’s church, and they ostensibly provided Kay with everything she could need. Behind closed doors, however, Minnie abused Kay. While Kay’s physical needs were always provided for, the ongoing emotional neglect and cruelty inflicted upon her in her youth would impact, even haunt her, the rest of her life.²

After enrolling in L.I.F.E. Bible College, Kay met a young man named Charles “Chuck” Smith at a baseball game. The couple dated for only six weeks before marrying. Together, the Smiths launched into full-time ministry in Arizona, leading several churches through difficult seasons. Returning sometime later to California, they started an independent church, which rapidly grew in size and fellowship. Despite this growth, it was not long before Chuck felt called to leave this thriving church to help a struggling church in Costa Mesa. Kay initially resisted this move, having formed deep relationships with church members. Still, after much prayer, she went with Chuck to this new church, Calvary Chapel.

It was here that Kay’s unique ministry began. Calvary Chapel bloomed under Chuck’s leadership and was soon a thriving church. Even as Calvary grew, however, Kay came to recognize a mission field outside the church walls. She became captivated by the hippies who seemed to cover the beaches. Calling them God’s “lost children,” she began to pray fervently for them and to urge others to do the same.³ Where her husband saw “a threat to society,” people who were “disrupting things, challenging the status quo,” Kay saw young people desperately in need of the love of Christ.⁴ Despite her husband’s protests, Kay’s deep compassion for the hippies grew. She shared her heart with her women’s prayer group, and together they prayed that God would open a door for them to come to Christ.



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The answer to her prayers came in the form of her daughter Janette’s new boyfriend, John. He had spent a brief period as a hippie in Haight-Ashbury before surrendering his life to Christ through the influence of an early Jesus Movement commune. At Kay’s request, John brought a “real hippie” to their home—Lonnie Frisbee. Kay and Lonnie connected quickly, the two finding common ground in their painful pasts. Kay was taken by the way Lonnie was able to be both a hippie and a Christian, and immediately invited him to Calvary Chapel. Lonnie was impressed by the church and quickly moved his itinerant ministry under Calvary’s roof. Soon, the pews burst with hippies.

Young women in the church began to approach the woman they called “Mama Kay,” asking her to lead a home Bible study. This small Bible study quickly outgrew their home and soon, she and two friends turned this gathering into the Joyful Life Bible Study, which continued for over thirty years, at times having hundreds of women in attendance. This, coupled with the women’s prayer meetings she already held, formed a thriving women’s ministry. Kay continued to minister to women until early-onset dementia rendered her unable to continue. Preceded by Chuck, Kay died in 2021 at age ninety-four.

It is no surprise that Kay felt such intense compassion for the hippies. Like Kay, the majority of the hippies came from affluent families but experienced unsatisfying, even painful upbringings. In her book *Pleasing God*, Kay wrote of the way her family’s lifestyle left her disillusioned with spiritual things despite how badly she wanted to believe in God.⁵ Just as the hippies left the lives their parents had made for them in search of a more fulfilling path, Kay had left her affluent upbringing for the “alternative lifestyle” of full-time ministry. The “freedom, love, and peace” that the hippies sought was exactly what Kay had found in her faith.⁶

Kay’s attitude toward the hurting helped shape the direction of Calvary Chapel as well as the larger Jesus Movement. Following Kay’s death, her daughter Janette Manderson recalled how Kay was intuitively and intentionally loving, choosing to reach out to people and urging other women to do the same. Janette recalls “that she was filled with the Holy Spirit and that she walked in the Spirit, prompted by Him to live a life of love.”⁷ It was from this foundation of love that everything else flowed.

Along with her deep care and compassion for people, Kay was also known for being one who spoke prophetically and exhorted others. In his writings, Chuck repeatedly refers to his wife as a prophetess. Kay herself recounts a time when she felt that God “overrode [her] flesh” and “caused His words to begin flowing through [her].”⁸ Perhaps the most far-reaching of Kay’s prophecies occurred during a deep time of prayer. Lonnie recalled that the Holy Spirit came upon Kay with a prophecy for the Frisbees, saying, “Because of your praise and adoration before my throne tonight, I’m gonna bless the whole coast of California.”⁹ In this, the fulfillment of Kay’s hope for revival among the hippies was shown to her before it occurred.

Kay also used her prophetic voice for exhortation. Chuck wrote of her, “After she speaks to and exhorts various groups, they’re ready to go out and challenge the world.”¹⁰ Kay was known as a gentle but firm force who corrected those who served under her without hesitation but with kindness. Scores of women she poured into, inspired by her exhortation, went on to significant ministries of their own.

In addition to, or perhaps because of, the childhood abuse and trauma that she had endured, Kay struggled with fits of deep depression. In these times, she retreated from people but not from God; her ministry became one of intense prayer at home. She would

*SHE ENCOURAGED THOSE
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intercede for hours at a time for those under her care, making even the most mundane of daily chores into opportunities for conversation with God.

Along with her personal prayer life, she encouraged those she mentored to start prayer ministries. Teaching women to “bathe everything in prayer” was a priority for her, one she taught by example.¹¹ During the early days of the Jesus Movement, she was described as saturating the air with prayers for the hippies, organizing prayer groups with her friends until it seemed like they were praying all the time.¹²

Through her attentive eyes for those around her, the prophetic nature of her ministry, and her commitment to prayer, Kay Smith served as the mother that the Jesus Movement needed to grow and thrive. Her personal story shaped her into a woman of deep understanding who saw hurting people for who they were—lost children in need of the healing love of God. Where a painful past and lifelong struggle with mental health issues could have created bitterness, in Kay it produced kindness and compassion for those suffering as she had. Thanks to her eyes for the lost and her obedience to God, thousands of women and men came to lifelong faith in Christ.

Notes

1. Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People in America* (Oxford: Oxford Theological Press, 2013), 1–2.
2. Jeanine Michaels, “Mama Kay: The Woman Behind the Jesus Movement,” *SheBelieves Magazine* 1 (2023), <https://shebelievesmagazine.com/2023/03/29/mama-kay-the-woman-behind-the-jesus-movement/>.
3. Michaels, “Mama Kay.”
4. Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 69–70.
5. Kay Smith, *Pleasing God* (Temecula, CA: The Word for Today), Kindle edition, ch. 14.
6. Nafisatul Lutfi, “The Hippies Identity in the 1960s and Its Aftermath” *Rubikon Journal of Transnational American Studies* 2:1 (2015), 51.
7. Christmas Beeler, “Kay Smith’s Legacy for the Lord, Part 4: Godly Comfort, Genuine Love” *Calvary Chapel Magazine*, 7 October 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220527060019/https://calvarychapelmagazine.org/index.php/calvary-chapel-articles/1046-kay-smith-s-legacy-part-4>.
8. Kay Smith, *The Privilege* (Costa Mesa: The Word for Today, 2010), Introduction.
9. J. J. Leutton, “‘Come, Holy Spirit’: Lonnie Frisbee’s Prayer and the Origins of the Vineyard,” (M.Div Project, Malyon College Brisbane, 2018), 79.
10. Chuck Smith, *Living Water* (Costa Mesa: The Word for Today, 2001), 54.
11. Christmas Beeler, “The Praying Wife Behind the Pastor’s Fruitful Ministry: Remembering Kay Smith” *Calvary Chapel Magazine* 89 (Fall 2021), <https://calvarychapelmagazine.org/articles/kay-smith-p2>.
12. Chuck Smith and Tal Brooke, *Harvest* (Temecula, CA: The Word for Today, 2000), 16.



Michaela Farrell A former CBE intern, Michaela is passionate about questioning historical assumptions regarding women in ministry. She began her research as an undergraduate at Evangel University and plans to more specifically explore the role of women in church history as a graduate student this fall.

*KAY SMITH SERVED AS THE MOTHER THAT THE JESUS
MOVEMENT NEEDED TO GROW AND THRIVE.*



JENNIE JOHNSON AND ORDAINED WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN CANADA

By Taylor Murray

MISS JENNIE JOHNSON.
Evangelist. Dresden, Ont.

While most Canadian denominations didn't earnestly consider the question of women's ordination until the mid-to-late twentieth century, there are stories of several ordained women in Canada before that time who laboured to spread the gospel. One of the country's earliest known ordained women was a Black preacher named Jennie Johnson (1868–1967), who ministered in a Baptist church almost forty years before any Baptist denomination in Canada officially approved women's ordination.¹ Although she faced adversity and her story remained untold for many years, she is an example of a woman who was faithful to God's calling and dedicated her life to pastoral ministry at a time when it was well outside the norm.

Early Life and Call

Jennie Johnson was born to Isaiah and Charlotte (née Butler) Johnson in 1868 in Chatham Township, southern Ontario. Due to its proximity to the United States border, this region had been a major terminus of the Underground Railroad, which had resulted in thousands of former slaves arriving and settling there, including Johnson's family. The story goes that when Johnson was born, her parents had expected her to be stillborn, but Johnson's mother rubbed her chest and "literally brought life to that stilled little heart."²

In this birth narrative, Johnson went from death to life—a change that had thematic resonance when she was "born again" at the age of sixteen and dedicated her life to the ministry. Indeed, soon after her conversion experience, she became active in her Baptist community and was baptized in the Sydenham River. Shortly thereafter, she began preaching revivalist sermons at Union Baptist Church, which were exceptionally well received. For Johnson, the positive reception to these early ministry activities affirmed her calling as a minister of the gospel.

With dreams of becoming a missionary to Africa, in 1892, Johnson enrolled at Wilberforce University, a historically Black institution in Xenia, Ohio. As a Methodist Episcopal school, it impressed on Johnson the doctrines of free will and open Communion. After two years at Wilberforce, Johnson left the program and returned to Canada. There are several details about Johnson's life during this period that are unclear. For example, we don't know with certainty why she left her educational program at this stage.³ Moreover, we don't know why she opted not to follow her dream of becoming a missionary. At the time, women interested in serving the church had few options. Most commonly, they took an active role in the missionary movement as

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administrators and missionaries. In the words of Kate Bowler, "Since the late nineteenth century, this had been the chief area in which Protestant women could wield genuine influence in their churches and have a real impact around the globe."⁴ Johnson, however, resolved to use her gift as a preacher in her local context, where she helped organize a body of believers in the Prince Albert district near Dresden, Ontario.

Ordained Ministry

Now engaged in professional ministry, the next step was ordination. The denomination in which she was raised, the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (today, the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec), didn't officially approve women's ordination until 1947. Instead, she looked across the border to the Michigan Association of Free Will Baptists, with whom she shared theological similarities—especially on the topics of human agency and Communion, which she had learned from her time at Wilberforce.⁵ Unlike her denomination, the Michigan Association had supported women's ordination since at least the mid-to-late nineteenth century. In October 1909, convinced of her calling, the Michigan Association ordained Johnson to the ministry.

In 1910, the group of believers she led in Ontario joined the Michigan Association and became known as the Prince Albert Baptist Church. Supported by the Michigan Association, Johnson breathed new life into her faith community. Johnson's contributions included the construction of a new church building. (Significantly, the cornerstone identified her assistant and successor, the Rev. James Browning, as the founding pastor—a clear

sign of the times.⁶⁾ Not everyone supported Johnson's ministry, and she experienced some opposition from inside and outside of her church due to her gender. Nevertheless, she remained steady on the path that she believed God had laid out ahead of her.

In the 1920s, Johnson shifted her ministry focus. With support again from the Michigan Association, in 1926, Johnson opened a downtown mission center for "colored people" in Flint, Michigan, where she provided relief for the disenfranchised amid the Depression. In her late fifties by the time the mission center opened, she continued to minister there for more than twenty years. The center operated as a settlement house and a church, through which Johnson provided for the material and spiritual needs of all those who entered. Finally, in her mid-eighties, she retired in the late 1940s.⁷

Although Johnson remained in Flint after her retirement, she kept in close contact with her friends and family north of the border, which included her denominational connections. Indeed, despite the limitations that had been imposed upon her earlier in her life, she continued to support her Baptist family in Canada by attending some of the annual convention gatherings and, later, keeping in contact with some of the denominational officials. In 1967, at the age of ninety-nine, Johnson passed away.⁸

Conclusion

Johnson's ministry was overlooked for many years, which was likely the result of the combination of her gender on one hand and her race on the other. In recent years, however, historians have recognized her as the trailblazer that she was. She led revivals and oversaw construction efforts, and she followed God's calling for her life at a time when women's ordination was not even a consideration for most Baptists in Canada. On each side of the border, Johnson personally encountered racism and sexism that limited the reach of her ministry, including which pulpits she could occupy. Nevertheless, she did not shrink from her calling. As Johnson's biographer, Nina Reid-Maroney, correctly observed: "In our time, her ordination still holds the potential to overturn long-accepted assumptions about women, Christianity, and race in North American history."⁹

Although Johnson penned two autobiographies during her lifetime (the first in 1928 and the second in 1951), she didn't leave behind a series of great works that readers can easily find today. Instead, she

left behind a witness—and an example for others to follow. Johnson made important contributions to the kingdom of God during her time, and her story remains a strong testimony today.

Notes

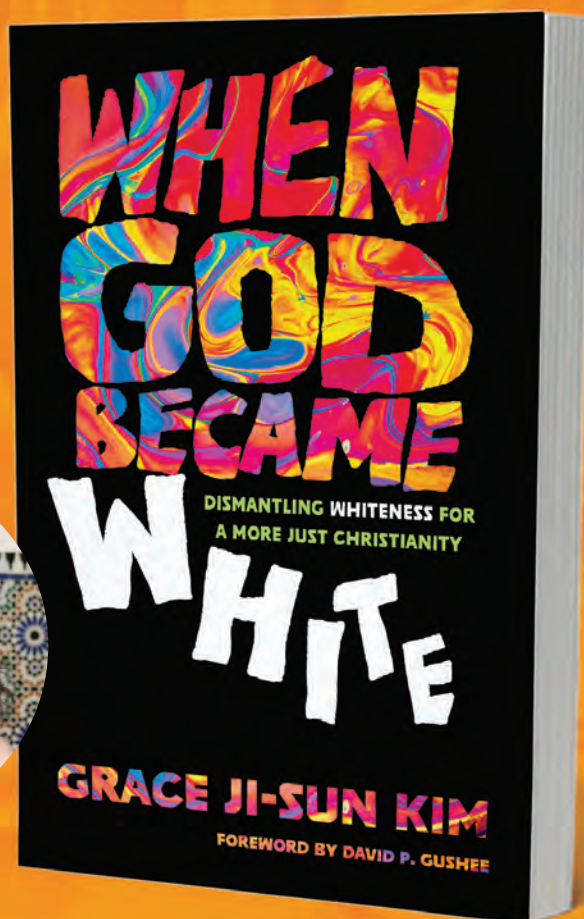
1. For a fuller retelling of Johnson's life, see Nina Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History, 1868–1967* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013) and Wendy J. Porter, "A Quartet and an Anonymous Choir: The Remarkable Lives and Ministries of Four Black Baptist Women in Late Nineteenth-Century Ontario," in *Canadian Baptist Women*, ed. Sharon M. Bowler (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 89–112.
2. Jennie Johnson, *My Life* (Dresden, ON: np., 1951), 3.
3. One early twentieth-century author speculates that it was because she had experienced ill health. As quoted in Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 80.
4. Kate Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 84.
5. Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History*, 86.
6. Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History*, 97–98.
7. Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History*, 104–25.
8. Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History*, 133. On her enduring connection to the BCOQ, see p. 126.
9. Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History*, xi.

HER ORDINATION STILL
HOLDS THE POTENTIAL
TO OVERTURN
LONG-ACCEPTED
ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT
WOMEN, CHRISTIANITY,
AND RACE IN NORTH
AMERICAN HISTORY.



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LIBERATING CHRISTIANITY FROM A WHITE MALE GOD



“I read everything I can by Grace Ji-Sun Kim, but I especially needed this book. As a white man who inherited a white male God, I am grateful for this Korean-born theologian who gently, clearly, and firmly guides readers like me into a bigger, deeper, more awesome and just understanding of the Holy One.”

– BRIAN D. MCLAREN,
author of *Do I Stay Christian?*



The Apostolic Life of Walatta- Petros

By Bridget
Jack Jeffries

In the year 1591, in the east African empire of Ethiopia—a place that had practiced a form of Orthodox Christianity since antiquity (cf. Acts 8:26–40)—a monk approached the nobleman Bahir-Saggad to prophesy the birth of a daughter. The monk told him:

I have seen a great vision, with a bright sun dwelling in the womb of your wife Kristos-Ebayaa: A beautiful daughter who will shine like the sun to the ends of the world will be born to you. She will be a guide for the blind of heart, and the kings of the earth and the bishops will bow to her. From the four corners of the world, many people will assemble around her and become one community—people pleasing God.¹

The next year, a daughter was indeed born to Bahir-Saggad and Kristos-Ebayaa, a daughter who would grow up to lead a successful resistance against the attempted colonization and conversion of Ethiopia by Portuguese and Spanish Jesuits. Her story, recorded just thirty years after her death by her hagiographer Galawdewos, is one that powerfully addresses the challenges faced by women who set out to serve the Lord with their whole hearts. These challenges included imprisonment for the Gospel, sexual assault, friction between familial expectations and the call of God (Luke 14:26), and conflict with men in authority who refused to accept that God calls women. Her account is the earliest known biography of an African woman and the only one from this era to be written



Her account
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woman.

from an African perspective. Her name was Walatta-Petros (1592–1642), and this is her story.

The name “Walatta-Petros” means “daughter of Peter,” and as translator Wendy Laura Belcher explains, just as we would not shorten the name “Peterson” to “Peter” or “Son,” her name should not be abbreviated to “Walatta” or “Petros.”² Her hagiographer exulted, “She truly was worthy of this name of Walatta-Petros since the son of a king becomes a king and the son of a priest becomes a priest; and just as Peter became the head of the apostles, she likewise became the head of all religious teachers.”³ Elsewhere he surmised, “As the Lord said three times to Peter, ‘Tend my sheep,’ so to her likewise he conferred the tending of his sheep in the pasture of meritorious spiritual struggle.”⁴ These are just a few of the many places where Galawdewos likens Walatta-Petros to a prophet or apostle. Curiously, his comparisons are always to male prophets and apostles; female biblical figures in these roles such as Miriam, Deborah, and Junia are never invoked.⁵

Like many young noblewomen, Walatta-Petros had an arranged marriage in her teens to the king’s right-hand man, Malkiya-Kristos, with whom she had three children. But while many modern-day churches teach women that their primary spiritual calling in life is to become wives and bear and raise children, Walatta-Petros is one of many women in church history who expressed complicated feelings about maternity. However, her three children did not survive; as a result, Walatta-Petros accepted her maternal fate and pursued God’s further calling on her life through other means.

Around this time, King Susinyos, emperor of Ethiopia, converted to what Galawdewos repeatedly called “the filthy faith of the Europeans”—Roman Catholicism—and her husband, Malkiya-Kristos, converted with him. Belcher explains that while most Ethiopian court members converted to Catholicism for political reasons, their wives refused to submit to them and clung to Orthodox Christianity, so that Ethiopian resistance to European colonization was ultimately female-led.⁶ So it was that while Malkiya-Kristos was away on a military campaign, twenty-four-year-old Walatta-Petros ran away from home to become a nun. When he heard of her betrayal, Malkiya-Kristos pursued her.

Upon realizing that her husband would soon overtake her, Walatta-Petros used scriptural texts to liken her distressing situation to marital rape. She referred to Sarah’s false marriages to the kings of Egypt and Gerar,

as well as the apocryphal Susanna's plight before the lecherous elders. "God's will be done! He can save me; to him nothing is impossible. He who saved Sarah from the hands of Pharoah, the king of Egypt, and from the hands of Abimelech, king of Gerara, he will also save me. He who saved Susanna from the hands of the old men, he will also save me."⁷ Malkiya-Kristos treated Walatta-Petros abusively when he caught up to her, and she was forced to reconcile with him, but this did not last. After Malkiya-Kristos was involved in the murder of an Orthodox patriarch, Walatta-Petros left him to become a nun again. This time her husband relented and let her depart. This account certainly raises complicated questions about the appropriateness of separation and divorce in response to spousal abuse.



Walatta-Petros
effectively became
a resistance leader,
one who caused
the king much
consternation.

In 1622, Susinyos made Roman Catholicism the official religion of the Ethiopian empire, and from this point in the narrative, Walatta-Petros effectively became a resistance leader, one who caused the king much consternation. Like other apostles, she received a visit from Jesus Christ, who foretold the imprisonment she was about to endure and the mighty works she would accomplish. Yet the suggestion of becoming a leader of others terrified the nun. "How will I be able to save others, I who cannot save myself?" she asked. "Am I not mud, and a pit of filthy sludge?" Jesus reportedly responded, "Even mud, when it is mixed with straw, becomes strong and enduring and can hold grain. You, too, I will make likewise strong."⁸

Before long, Walatta-Petros was captured and imprisoned by the king. While imprisoned, she suffered forced attempts at conversion. She was made to listen to the preaching and teaching of Jesuit theologians, but according to Galawdewos, "She argued with them, defeated them, and embarrassed them. . . Rather, she laughed and made fun of them."⁹ Elsewhere, her hagiographer explained that Walatta-Petros was beautiful, but "the outer beauty of her appearance was surpassed by the inner beauty of her mind."¹⁰ Refuting conventional expectations of feminine beauty, Galawdewos urged readers to seek out godliness rather than beauty. He pointed out that Rachel was beautiful while Leah was "ugly," but God chose Leah and favored her in the bearing of children and the "birth of Judah from whose seed Christ was born."¹¹ This female-empowering reading of the Jacob-Rachel-Leah triangle likely originates with the teaching of Walatta-Petros herself.

The jailer of Walatta-Petros also tortured her, attempted to seduce her, and made up his mind to sexually assault her after she rejected him. She was divinely protected from his advances and soon made him one of her converts. Between this account and Walatta-Petros's take on her convoluted marital situation, the story of Walatta-Petros is refreshingly frank about the prevalence of women's experiences with sexual assault, giving voice to that which many women throughout history have suffered in silence.

After her release, Walatta-Petros began to travel the lands of Ethiopia, founding monasteries for both monks and nuns and presiding over them. Galawdewos repeatedly records her confidently performing miracles and having her prayers answered, much like the biblical apostles. The king soon converted back to Ethiopian Orthodoxy and the European Catholic incursion was driven back.

Today, Ethiopia stands as one of the few non-European countries to have never been a colony of Europe, something that can be partially traced back to Walatta-Petros's leadership and resistance.

Throughout her life, male religious leaders repeatedly challenged Walatta-Petros's authority. On one such occasion, some "resentful theologians arose. . . giving vent to their resentment against our Holy Mother Walatta-Petros with satanic zeal when they saw that all the world followed her, that she was greater than and superior to them, and that they ranked below her. . . Therefore, they said to her, 'Is there a verse in the scriptures that states that a woman. . . can be a religious leader and teacher? This is something that scripture forbids to a woman [in 1 Tim 2:12].'"¹² Many modern women who are preachers, pastors, and teachers may empathize with such challenges to their ministries from "resentful theologians."

Surprisingly, Walatta-Petros was defended by Father Fatla-Sillasé, a great theologian described as "the teacher of the entire world." Father Fatla Sillasé said to them: "Did God not raise her up for our chastisement because we have become corrupt, so that God appointed her and gave our leadership role to her, while dismissing us?"¹³ This defense is similar to that which many male headship advocates offer for Deborah's leadership and authority (Judges 4:4): she was only called due to a lack of worthy and able men. Yet in this case, Father Fatla-Sillasé understood this explanation as supporting her ministry, rather than as being a reason to deter it.

At age fifty, sensing that she would pass away soon, Walatta-Petros appointed another woman—her friend and close confidante Eheta-Kristos—as her successor, an act that her hagiographer likened to Elijah appointing Elisha. Galawdewos recorded that twenty-seven miracles followed the approximately forty days from her death in November to the end of that year. Today, Ethiopia stands as one of the few non-European countries to have never been a colony of Europe, something that can be partially traced back to Walatta-Petros's leadership and resistance.

The hagiographical account of Walatta-Petros tells the story of an inspiring but complicated woman. Some may balk at her apparent callousness towards the deaths of her children or question whether it was biblical to abandon her marriage to become a nun. Yet her message is one that most Christians can grasp: our sinful flaws may make us mud and filth, but Jesus will mix straw with us and make us strong and enduring. In this way, may we all come to see Walatta-Petros as our mother.

Notes

1. Galawdewos, *The Life of Walatta-Petros: A Seventeenth Century Biography of an African Woman, Concise Edition*, translated and edited by Wendy Laura Belcher and Michael Kleiner, Kindle edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 6.
2. Wendy Laura Belcher, "Introduction," in Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, x.
3. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 9.
4. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 9.
5. Miriam is mentioned, but not in comparison to Walatta-Petros. Rather, a male leader who spoke out against Walatta-Petros is compared to Miriam and Aaron speaking out against Moses. See Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 83.
6. Belcher, "Introduction," ix.
7. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 17.
8. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 45–46.
9. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 53.
10. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 9.
11. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 10.
12. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 110.
13. Galawdewos, *Life of Walatta-Petros*, 110.



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One of six children in a farming family, Elinor Thornton (née Wilson) was born in Ireland and moved with her family to New Zealand in 1875 at the age of eight.¹ She loved to learn Scripture and often recounted a time when she was twelve that she was deeply disappointed to learn she would have to plant potatoes at home instead of attending a Scripture exam. To her surprise and delight, the examiner was unable to attend as planned because of a flooded river and forced to reschedule the exam. Elinor was able to participate in the rescheduled exam and won the competition. She was “strangely moved” at confirmation at fourteen, but still longed for more of God, whom she did not yet know as her Saviour.

An avid reader, she became a schoolteacher at fifteen years old. One day, on the six-mile ride to the school where she taught, her horse startled and galloped. She was thrown from the saddle with her foot still in the stirrup and dragged half a mile until she finally fell, bruised and lacerated. In her autobiographical book, *Reminiscences*, she notes, “I did not think of death. . . . I realised the seriousness of my position, but thought only of the grief of my loved ones if what seemed inevitable actually happened. But though I was not troubled by the thought of death, I was troubled by a strange restlessness.”² Thankfully, she got up and made her way home with no serious results.

Elinor next taught in the gold-mining town of Thames but continued to feel restless and incomplete. Touched by the testimony shared by a Salvation Army friend, she read the Bible for herself and found the Saviour. At a public meeting, she stood and admitted to trusting Christ and soon started a small weekly meeting in the town and another in the school at the end of the school day. The first convert from these meetings was a boy of eighteen who would go on to serve as a missionary in Africa.

Soon she moved to a favoured school in Remuera, Auckland, where the headmaster, also a Christian, helped her to meet other Christians. She taught Bible class and helped with Christian Endeavour classes and the Sailors’ Mission for three years before finding “a great door and effectual” opened for mission work “in the heart of the New Zealand bush.”³ For his lumber camp, Mr. Ewen McGregor invited Elinor to teach school for forty children, teach Sunday school, and to lead a service every Sunday evening.



ELINOR THORNTON

BUSH CAMP PREACHER





By Beulah Wood

“Mr. and Mrs. McGregor were as astonished as I when a girl was suggested. But I prayed over the matter for a month or two, then realised that the call was from God,” she wrote.⁴

Elinor left the desirable Remuera position, accepted the job, and set out, taking a “few odds and ends of furniture” and her “theological library, consisting of the Bible, a book of Bible readings by D. L. Moody, and half a dozen of F. B. Meyer’s shilling booklets.” The journey was arduous. After the train, she continued by buggy and finally “a cage running on a wire rope and worked by an engine”⁵ to cross the river.

Elinor taught school daily, studied her Bible, taught a Sunday School class, and led a service each Sunday attended by practically the whole settlement. Women and men were led powerfully to Christ. She described one such event:

On the wettest, darkest nights in winter, men, women, and children could be seen carrying storm lanterns, coming in every direction down the rough bush tracks, wending their way to the schoolhouse. I sought to preach Christ in my own very simple fashion hardly, however, looking for or expecting any definite or immediate results—for I knew nothing of evangelistic methods—when one evening, as I was about to close the meeting in the usual way by announcing a hymn and pronouncing the benediction, a member of the congregation rose to his feet and asked if he might say something.

He was a Mr. Alexander, the clerk and manager (of the timber mill), a man of thirty-five, a splendid character, greatly respected by everyone. I feel still the tense silence, the feeling of expectancy in the meeting as I said we would be glad to hear what he had to say. Then we listened to words something like these: “I want to say that until I began to attend these services a few months ago, I never realised that it was *for me* that Christ had died. Now I know it—I want everybody else to know it, and I am so glad to acknowledge myself His follower. By His grace I will follow Him and serve Him as long as I live.”

The effect of this open declaration was electric. No sooner had Mr. Alexander sat down than there jumped to his feet the young Scotch engineer who worked the engine that ran the cage across



THE BLESSING CONTINUED UNTIL, IN ALMOST EVERY HOME, THERE WERE THOSE WHO OPENLY IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES WITH CHRIST.

the river, Mr. Robertson. . . saying “I am ashamed to say I have never taken my stand as a Christian, and I must do so tonight.”

This began what I can only describe as a revival. We experienced continually days of the right hand of the Most High. . . The blessing continued—it seemed only a natural thing that it should—until, in almost every home, there were those who openly identified themselves with Christ.⁶

On another occasion, Elinor was invited to take a service at a cook-house near which a number of men were building the main north-to-south railway line. She and the elderly Mr. McDonald walked several miles and found awaiting them a large number of men. They sang a hymn, “God Loved the World for Sinners Lost.” Elinor commented on the personal love of Christ in the hymn, and the men listened to the service with rapt attention. On the way back, McDonald told her with tears streaming down his face, “I did not know until today, when you spoke about the ‘me’ in the hymn that Christ had actually died for me. . . ”⁷

After two years, Mr. McGregor encouraged Elinor to give up teaching and devote all her time to evangelism. She commenced work in the tiny settlement of Mangaweka, which was then the terminus of the rail line. In her diary, she noted ninety-eight people whom

she had visited, among whom she held prayer meetings for six weeks. She rented the town hall, put up notices of meetings and sermon subjects, distributed handbills, and held a week’s mission. All sorts of people attended, and she was amazed at the results. She gave a second series of meetings, continuing for about two years, travelling and preaching.

In 1902, Elinor married Rev. Guy D. Thornton. They would have two daughters, Lilian Ruth (Platt) and Marjery McGregor (Bradley). The couple joined in itinerant mission work and held brief pastorates at Otahuhu Baptist Church (1905) and Sydenham, Christchurch (1906–8). They began a Baptist mission at Ohakune (1909–12), working among railway workers, sawmillers, and bushmen in the backblocks. Short pastorates followed at Morrinsville (1912–13) and Whangarei (1914).⁸

Rev. Ayson Clifford wrote of Ohakune, which was hemmed in by forest, 1,700 feet above sea level, rough and raw and overshadowed by Mt. Ruapehu.

Rev. Guy Thornton. . . brought his wife and family to Ohakune. At first they lived in a cold shanty. There was no church building. A billiard saloon was sometimes the only place where a service could be held. There were few supporting Christians. . . His health suffered. There were weeks when he

AFTER TWO YEARS, MCGREGOR ENCOURAGED ELINOR TO GIVE UP TEACHING AND DEVOTE ALL HER TIME TO EVANGELISM.



was laid up. But he had a remarkable wife in Elinor. She was a person of great saintliness and a fine preacher. She could maintain his work when he was out of action.⁹

When Guy left for service during World War I, Elinor kept preaching. Over some months she accepted successive invitations for series of services in Whangarei, Invercargill, and Riccarton. Then Guy, ill in hospital in London, cabled her to come to him. On the sea voyage to England, Elinor's daughter told some passengers her mother could preach, so the captain arranged a service attended by nearly all the women and children in the steerage of the ship. (On the return trip she took services for both men and women, with wonderful response.)

For a while, Guy and Elinor served as missionaries in England under the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Elinor conducted the afternoon Bible readings at each mission and spoke at some of the evening gatherings in places like Sunderland, Leicester, High Wycombe, Edinburgh, York, Manchester, Tiverton, Doncaster, and Wales.

At one stage in Woolwich, Elinor and Guy chose not to include her evening sermon because it was a large venue, and they thought her voice might not carry. The minister of the church, saying people would be disappointed, urged her to preach and himself

checked she could be distinctly heard. She then spoke several times, resulting in more conversions.

Elinor returned to New Zealand before Guy and started services in Lyall Bay, Wellington, again a task she was very happy in. Thornton followed in 1920, and in 1922 he became pastor of the South Dunedin Baptist Church. However, recurring poor health forced his early retirement in 1926. He died in Auckland in June 1934.¹⁰

Elinor's love of words continued with five published booklets. The first, *Soul Secrets*, she wrote before leaving England. Others were *A Fragrant Life*, *Guy D. Thornton, Peace: Is It Possible?* and, when she was in her sixties, *Reminiscences*. She died in 1946 and is buried in the Hillsborough cemetery, Auckland.

The story of Elinor Thornton's ministry was passed down in my family, as it resulted in both my parents being brought into the family of God. The Mr. Alexander mentioned above was my grandfather.

Elinor Thornton was an unstoppable woman who courageously accepted some of the limitations of her day and found ways to preach for God in many places. She didn't even talk much about the obstacles—more about acceptance. God used her powerfully to reach hundreds of women and men, a ripple effect that reaches us here today.

[SHE] WAS AN UNSTOPPABLE WOMAN WHO COURAGEOUSLY ACCEPTED THE LIMITATIONS OF HER DAY AND FOUND WAYS TO PREACH FOR GOD IN MANY PLACES.

Notes

1. All biographical information in this article comes from the following source unless otherwise noted:
Elinor Thornton, *Reminiscences* (Auckland: Wright & Jaques Ltd., 1943), 9–44.
2. Thornton, 11.
3. Thornton, 21.
4. Thornton, 22.
5. Thornton, 22.
6. Thornton, 23–24.
7. Thornton, 25.
8. Angus MacLeod, "Thornton, Guy Dynevor," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, (Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New

Zealand, 1998), <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3t35/thornton-guy-dynevor> (accessed 27 February 2020).

9. Ayson Clifford, *A Handful of Grain*, Vol 2, (N.Z. Baptist Historical Society, 1982), 74.
10. Angus MacLeod. "Thornton, Guy Dynevor," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*



Beulah Wood (BD, DMin) is retired from work as a writer and lecturer in preaching and theology of family at South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies in Bangalore, India. She continues to write for India and teaches preaching for Baptist women in Auckland, New Zealand.

Martyrdom and Motherhood: Perpetua and Felicity

By Kylie Polkinghorne

After a false start the day before, my husband and I drove to hospital early in the morning, eagerly anticipating the birth of our first child. With an induction, growing contractions, and intensifying pain, our son was born just after midnight. He was placed on my chest as I lay in an exhausted yet empowered daze. Those first few hours of our new baby's life were a blur of hormones, love, and fear of the unknown. I wondered what I was meant to do now with this tiny human. The experience profoundly and overwhelmingly changed my life from living as an independent, married woman, free to spend my days however I chose, to suddenly being responsible for the wellbeing of a baby whose life depended on me. In that moment, my deepest identity undertook its own death and re-birthed into something new.

Gather a group of mothers together and you will find the conversation inevitably turns to birth stories. There is a solidarity found in the life-changing experience of childbirth. The discovery of one's new identity and the many sacrifices made as mothers unites women from all spectrums of life.

Perpetua

Perpetua was one such mother in very early Christian history. She was approximately twenty-two years of age and lived a noblewoman's life in Carthage (in modern-day Tunisia in North Africa) with her husband and newborn son in early 200 AD. Although the birth story of her child is not recorded, she kept a journal that detailed her experience as a mother under arrest because of her faith, which eventually led to her death. These diary entries, now called *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*,¹ were read annually in Carthage's churches for centuries, and her strength of faith through martyrdom is celebrated as inspirational. The church Father Augustine (354–430 AD) wrote about her in his sermons hundreds of years later. Perpetua's powerful example of faith in God is a story that needs to be shared so we today continue to be inspired.

Perpetua's journal records how she, along with her slave Felicity and four others from her household, became catechumens, preparing for baptism into the Christian faith. At that time, Roman rule considered Christianity a threat to the well-being of the Roman Empire, and the baptism candidates found themselves under investigation. They refused to denounce their faith in Jesus and would not make an offering to Caesar. For this they were thrown into prison and

sentenced to death by wild animals in the public arena. Perpetua shares her experience as a woman of faith struggling not only with being in prison, but also with being a mother removed from her newborn. She describes the pain in her breasts from the engorgement of milk and her request that her son be brought to her so she could breastfeed. Her request was granted—a momentary reprieve.

Adding to this heartache, she writes next of her father's repeated pleas for her to think of her family and renounce her Christianity so she could be released. It saddened him greatly when she would not agree. "My daughter, have pity on my grey hair!" he cried.² Perpetua was steadfast in her commitment to Christ and was prepared to sacrifice her life to follow Jesus. She tried to comfort her father saying, "Know that we are no longer in our own power, but in God's."³ but it did not convince him. Heartbreakingly, she gave her son into the care of her family, trusting that God would take care of him through them.

Perpetua served as a source of encouragement to her fellow prisoners. She records four visions while in prison, which she shared with her companions, reminding them that God was with them and would receive them into his presence after they died.

Felicity

Perpetua also writes of Felicity, describing her as an example of faith through martyrdom. Heavily pregnant at the time, Felicity was committed to suffering for her faith alongside the others. She asked the group to pray that she would go into labour early so they would all be sentenced together. This indeed happened, and she gave birth to her daughter at eight months pregnant. Perpetua describes the guard watching over them, commenting how Felicity suffered greatly during childbirth and that being thrown to the wild animals would be too much for her. Felicity replied, “Now alone I suffer what I am suffering, but then there will be another inside me, who will suffer for me, because I am going to suffer for him,”⁴ speaking of her understanding that Christ’s Spirit would strengthen her. Heart-wrenchingly, the baby was given up for adoption, and Felicity was martyred alongside Perpetua.

In the early church, martyrdom was seen as an honourable expression of one’s commitment to Christian faith. “Martyr” in its original context meant “witness,” and it developed into an ideal of voluntary suffering and ultimately death. For the church fathers, martyrdom became a completion of Christian witness. The belief grew that the most admirable way to die was through suffering and death, just like Jesus. To deny oneself, take up the cross and follow Jesus became motivation towards such suffering. In this early Christian era, the example of such suffering and courage in the face of death contributed to an emerging respect for Christianity from the wider population. Many people who witnessed such courage became believers in God because of the martyrs’ devotion to Jesus and inexplicable joy in suffering.

The Honour of Sacrifice

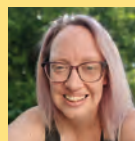
Perpetua and Felicity are thus honoured in the memory of the early church, not just as women who voluntarily suffered for their faith, but as mothers who did so. Their devotion to Christ is perhaps amplified in their maternal longings and is something which mothers (and all parents) can relate to. Both women were devoted to their children, but not at the expense of their faith in Jesus. Their love for God, demonstrated by their willingness to give up everything they held dear, is testament to how their identity in God changed their priorities in life and their attitude towards suffering.

In the post-Christian West, we rarely experience such dramatic suffering, but we can relate to feelings of deep struggle, grief and loss, and the tension of divided loyalties. How does a woman, a mother, prioritise herself, her commitments, and her purpose in light of Christ’s call to deny herself and take up her cross to follow him? In childbirth, there is a death and rebirth of a mother’s identity. This can be extremely challenging work as she learns to set aside the longings of her former self and move into her new life as a mother. Her priorities must shift as she follows the call to put the needs of her child above her own. This may require sacrifices related to her career, bodily independence, financial freedom, and emotional energy, at least for a time.

These sacrifices that a mother or a parent make for their child, whilst not to the same degree as Perpetua and Felicity, are nevertheless a type of “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). I remember holding my son to my chest on the first day of his life, and concurrently my own new life unfolded before me. The continued process of giving up what I think is important for God’s calling on my life is something I continue to be challenged by and grow in, as God helps me to see what needs to be sacrificed and what truly bears witness to his love for those around me. I am encouraged by Perpetua’s words as she faced death in the arena: “Stand fast in the faith, and love one another, all of you, and be not offended at my sufferings.”⁵

Notes

1. Thomas, J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
2. Heffernan, *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*, V.2.
3. Heffernan, *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*, V.6.
4. Heffernan, *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*, XV.6.
5. Heffernan, *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*, XX.10.



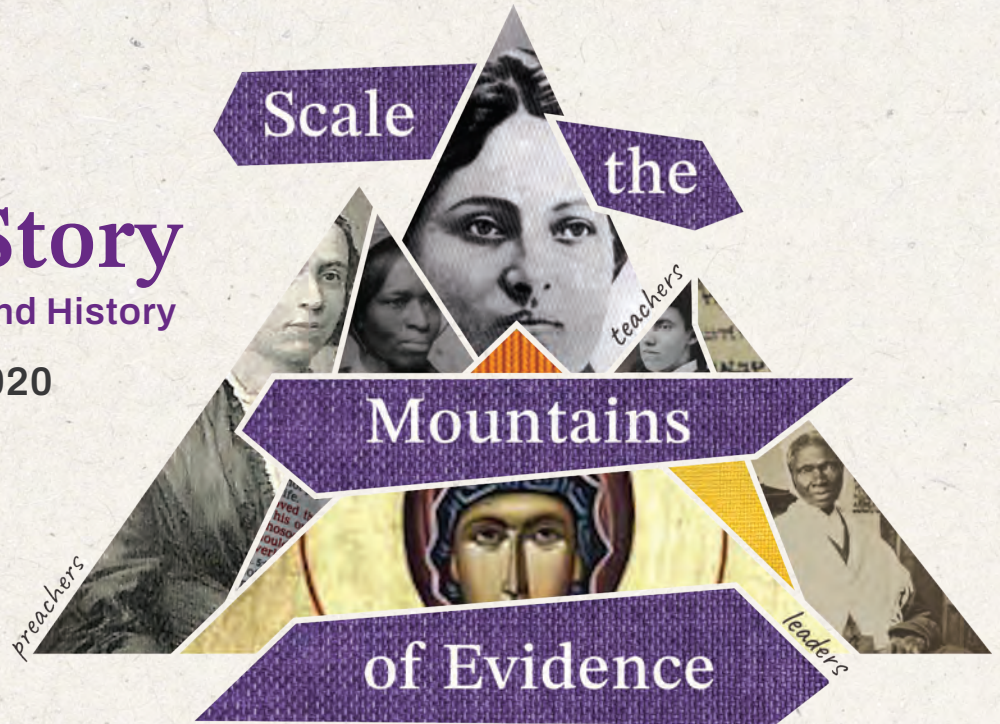
Kylie Polkinghorne is an Australian woman working in ministry as a community and families minister in an egalitarian Anglican church in regional NSW. She loves studying God’s word, particularly highlighting where God has empowered and used women to further Kingdom and gospel work. She is married to Jeremy and parent of two wonderful primary-school-aged boys.



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Book Review

Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church

By Brianna Cortez



Whereas most books on women in ministry primarily focus on contested Bible verses used to restrict women's leadership, Nijay K. Gupta's *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* takes a different approach. Gupta studies women throughout the Old and New Testament first, as if to say, *these* are the stories we need to

shape our view of women—the ones that depict what women did, how they served, and what the Spirit enabled them to do.

Part One: Before the Women of the Early Churches

When asked the question, “What can women do?” Gupta responds by asking, “What *did* they do?” He sets out to answer this question right from the beginning by highlighting one of the most interesting leaders from the Old Testament—Deborah. When Israel lacked direct and sustained leadership,¹ God used Deborah, a strong and wise prophet-judge, to deliver them.² No stone is left unturned here. Gupta spends a lot of time exploring the book of Judges, helping readers understand what a judge is, comparing Deborah to other judges of the Bible, and much more. Gupta expertly pushes back against common arguments that downplay Deborah's impact, such as, “There were no suitable men available.” He responds, “If we look at judges as a whole, especially Gideon and Samson, it is clear that they were not chosen for their virtue or strong faith. In fact, Deborah appears to be the most faithful, the most prophetically tuned into God, and the wisest of them all.”³ So when people say, “Women can't,” Gupta responds, “Deborah did!”⁴

Gupta also tackles Genesis 1–3. Long-time egalitarians will find themselves nodding along with most of the exegesis in this chapter, but those new to the subject will find a well-argued, non-hierarchical view of Genesis 1–2. According to Gupta, Adam and Eve are both made in the image of God, they were both given the task of ruling over the earth,⁵ and Eve was not Adam's subordinate helper but

his strong counterpart in accomplishing their God-given mission.⁶ Gupta describes the fall as an “unraveling” in which Adam and Eve's relationship with each other, God, and the garden falls apart.⁷ As such, patriarchy—men ruling over women—was not a part of God's initial plan but a symptom of this undoing.

It should be noted, however, that the implications of the word *teshuqah* (longing, desire) in Genesis 3:16 are highly debated by Bible scholars. Gupta briefly considers the word and seems to lean toward understanding the woman's longing as putting her at odds with the man, resulting in a struggle of wills rather than harmony.⁸ That said, it remains unclear where he lands on the issue, which may cause some readers to pause. Overall, though, readers will find the chapter on Genesis to be effective and concise.

Skipping forward in time, chapter three sets the scene of the ancient Greco-Roman world. What did it look like for women to live in a patriarchal society? Gupta acknowledges that the ancient Greco-Roman world was not a safe or ideal place for women. Women were looked down upon as gullible, easily tempted, and incapable of reason, and they rarely held positions of power.⁹ At the same time, Gupta points out that women (especially wealthy women) could break away from these social restraints.¹⁰ He speaks out against common misconceptions, such as the home being merely a private space, and shares a vast wealth of knowledge on social status, households, and patronage that all readers will appreciate.¹¹

Gupta ends Part One by briefly considering women throughout Jesus's ministry, including Mary (the mother of Jesus), Mary Magdalene, Elizabeth, Anna, the Samaritan woman, and others. Through these Bible women, he shows that women's voices can teach us about God,¹² that God gives women divine insight,¹³ and how women can be disciples.¹⁴

Part Two: Women in the Early Church

Part Two is the pinnacle of *Tell Her Story*. Gupta's expertise shines here as he helps readers take off their culture-tinted glasses. He impactfully shows that leadership in the early

church was different from the Greco-Roman culture as it “deviated from cultural tendencies to establish a power and status hierarchy.”¹⁵ This part also delves into Paul’s co-workers and their job descriptions. To Gupta’s best knowledge, *diakonoi* were “ministry providers” and leaders who served people,¹⁶ and the title *episkopos* was a more formal leadership position meaning “overseer.”¹⁷ He notes that although no one, woman or man, is named as an overseer, it would be natural for householders to be overseers.¹⁸ Therefore, the rare woman householder could have been an overseer as well. For elders, Gupta suggests that a group of older figures in the community were sought for their wisdom.¹⁹ Readers looking for answers to how the early church was structured will appreciate this section and, whether they ultimately agree or disagree, Gupta makes a compelling case.

While the previous chapters were powerful, the portions dedicated to specific women were captivating. This book is called *Tell Her Story*, after all! Among the women with their own chapters are Phoebe, Prisca, and Junia. Gupta also discusses a great host of other women throughout Paul’s letters (many of whom served as ministry leaders and overseers), including Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Julia, Nereus’s sister, Rufus’s mother, Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche, Apphia, and Nympha, and so many others. Women were serving and leading everywhere that men were.²⁰ As for Phoebe, Prisca, and Junia, Gupta is careful to let readers know what is speculative and what can be backed with evidence. For example, he is uncertain whether Phoebe read Paul’s letter out loud, though he finds it plausible. She was likely Paul’s trusted ministry agent who served the church on his behalf as a ministry provider.²¹ He argues that Prisca was more active in ministry than Aquila²² and the primary teacher of Apollos.²³ And lastly, for Junia, Gupta reveals that she was indeed an apostle and a woman.²⁴ These chapters are all rich with biblical and historical insights on these female leaders that readers will eagerly soak in.

What About. . . ?

Even though the book does not focus on “limiting” Bible verses, readers searching for answers to contested verses will not be completely disappointed. Gupta sheds light on 1 Timothy 2 and the household codes in Colossians 3 in his “What About. . . ?” section. Here, he shows that a fuller view of women in Scripture is not only desired but also essential to interpret and apply passages that appear to limit women’s leadership.

Overall, *Tell Her Story* brings the narratives of prominent women throughout God’s Word front and center, causing our misconceptions to fade into the background—a mere blip in the overarching story. From this vantage point, readers will soon realize that women leading alongside men was not a rare happenstance but common in God’s newly created order. So, can women lead the church? Gupta concludes that women in the early church certainly did.²⁵

Notes

1. Nijay Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2023), 13.
2. Gupta, 14.
3. Gupta, 15–16.
4. Gupta, 136.
5. Gupta, 23.
6. Gupta, 25.
7. Gupta, 27.
8. See pages 28–29.
9. Gupta, 31.
10. Gupta, 33.
11. Gupta, 39.
12. Gupta, 49.
13. Gupta, 54.
14. Gupta, 59.
15. Gupta, 71.
16. Gupta, 76.
17. Gupta, 76.
18. Gupta, 77.
19. Gupta, 78.
20. Gupta, 175.
21. Gupta, 102.
22. Gupta, 116.
23. Gupta, 120–21.
24. Gupta, 128–131.
25. Gupta, 175.

Brianna Cortez works for CBE International as the Educational Engagement Associate. She holds an MA in Intercultural Studies from Lincoln Christian University and has worked for churches, schools, and nonprofits in the United States and abroad. She is passionate about understanding how God calls women and men to imitate Christ and helping organizations create inclusive, Christ-centered, and sustainable ministries. Brianna currently lives with her husband, Cristian, in Wisconsin and enjoys reading lots of books.





Tell Her Story Well

As Christians, we are informed as much by the past as we are by the events of each day. While each generation faces new challenges, we can look to the courage and wisdom of Christians over the centuries, as the Scottish theologian John Baillie (1886–1960) reminds us. He thanked God that the

Christian way whereon I walk is no untried or uncharted road, but a road beaten hard by the footsteps of saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs. I thank thee for the finger-posts and danger-signals with which it was marked at every turning and which may be known to me through the study of the Bible, and of all history, and of all the great literature of the world.¹

Yet within the church and culture more broadly, a disinterest in history persists, especially concerning an accurate telling of women's achievements. You may be familiar with the African American chemist, Alice Ball (1892–1916), whose discovery and development of a treatment for leprosy were attributed instead to a male colleague. Likewise, the chemist Rosalind Franklin (1920–1958) first documented the double-helix structure of DNA but was not widely recognized for her work until more recently. The achievements of ancient and modern women are too often obscured, devalued, and usurped by assumptions that men alone are real leaders in areas like science and, sadly, even the church. The more profound a woman's success, the more likely her history is to be at risk—as in the case of Lottie Moon (1840–1912).

A Southern Baptist missionary from Virginia, Moon's evangelistic leadership in China pioneered the first key initiative of the Foreign Mission Board at the very *first* Southern Baptist Convention in 1849.² The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, today's International Mission Board (IMB), celebrates Lottie Moon as the "namesake of Southern Baptists' international missions offering. . . [since] she was like today's missionaries. She labored tirelessly so her people group could know Jesus."³ For Lottie, there was "no greater joy than that of saving souls."⁴ Without ordination, Moon could not *officially* lead the churches filled with the believers she evangelized, so she invested her efforts in training pastors who, several

decades later, baptized more than 2,000 Christians in Pintu. An example to aspiring women evangelists, Moon recruited many women missionaries.

As her church in Pintu was ravished by famine, Lottie shared her food and refused to eat while others were starving. She died of starvation on Christmas Day, 1912. She is celebrated among SBC Christians today as "the best man among our missionaries,"⁵ and ever since the year after her death, a Lottie Moon missionary offering has been held on Christmas Eve in Southern Baptist churches.⁶

Lottie's history includes her fearless challenge to Southern Baptists to treat women missionaries as equals to men. She said, "What women want who come to China is free opportunity to do the largest possible work. . . What women have a right to demand is perfect equality."⁷ Insisting that women missionaries receive equal voting privileges beside their male coworkers, Moon said, "Simple justice demands that women should have equal rights with men in mission meetings and in the conduct of their work."⁸ Inevitably, Moon confronted her field director on the scope and location of her work with a stated willingness to part ways and "go it alone." Stunningly, Moon's work in Pintu was viewed "as the 'greatest evangelistic center' among the Southern Baptists 'in all China.'"⁹

The history the IMB paints today is one colored by its own complementarian ideology. Raising funds on Moon's legacy since 1913, would the IMB tolerate women like Lottie Moon today—women who expect an equal voice beside their male coworkers and who challenge male field directors as she did? Thankfully, Moon's legacy has inspired countless women missionaries in the SBC and beyond. As complementarians gained control of the SBC in the 1990s, women leaders (and their male allies) were forced out of the IMB when they refused to sign the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, which restricted leadership to men.¹⁰ CBE honored many of these individuals at our 2001 and 2003 international conferences.¹¹ Yet, year after year, the legacy of Lottie Moon funds a male-led missionary agency at odds with the values and legacy of a woman who preached, married, buried, planted churches, and trained the next generation of pastors. Furthermore, the

example of Lottie Moon challenges the distorted history of complementarians who argue that egalitarianism is the product of secular feminist ideology, such as in the book by Wayne Grudem entitled *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* As George Orwell wrote: “Who controls the past. . . controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.”¹²

Notes

1. John Baillie, *A Diary of Private Prayer* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 25.
2. “Who Was Lottie Moon?” History, International Mission Board, last accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.imb.org/history/>.
3. International Mission Board, “Who Was Lottie Moon?”
4. International Mission Board, “Who Was Lottie Moon?”
5. International Mission Board, “Who Was Lottie Moon?”
6. “Lottie Moon Christmas Offering,” International Mission Board, last accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.imb.org/generosity/lottie-moon-christmas-offering/>.
7. Ruth Tucker, “Lottie Moon: ‘Saint’ of the Southern Baptists,” *Mission Frontiers*, 1999, <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/lottie-moon-saint-of-the-southern-baptists>.
8. Tucker, “Lottie Moon.”
9. Tucker, “Lottie Moon.”
10. Mark Wingfield, “13 Southern Baptist Missionaries Fired for Refusal to Affirm Faith Statement,” *Good Faith Media*, May 12, 2003, <https://goodfaithmedia.org/13-southern-baptist-missionaries-fired-for-refusal-to-affirm-faith-statement-cms-2546/>.
11. CBE honored SBC missionaries who refused to sign the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 with the Priscilla and Aquila Award, which recognizes those who have made sacrifices for the sake of biblical equality for women, just as Priscilla and Aquila “risked their lives” (Rom. 16:4) for the sake of the gospel. The first Priscilla and Aquila Award was awarded at CBE’s first conference in 1989. See Priscilla and Aquila Award Recipients, CBE International, https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/priscilla-and-aquila-award-recipients/.
12. George Orwell, *1984* (Planet e-Book, 2020 [1949]), 44, <https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/1984.pdf>.

Although overlooking or even obscuring the achievements of women is part of the church’s failures, women gifted and called to leadership and through the Spirit’s power have been leaders in their respective fields since the very beginning. It is high time we honor these women and God’s gifts that equip them to serve our world!

Giving Opportunities

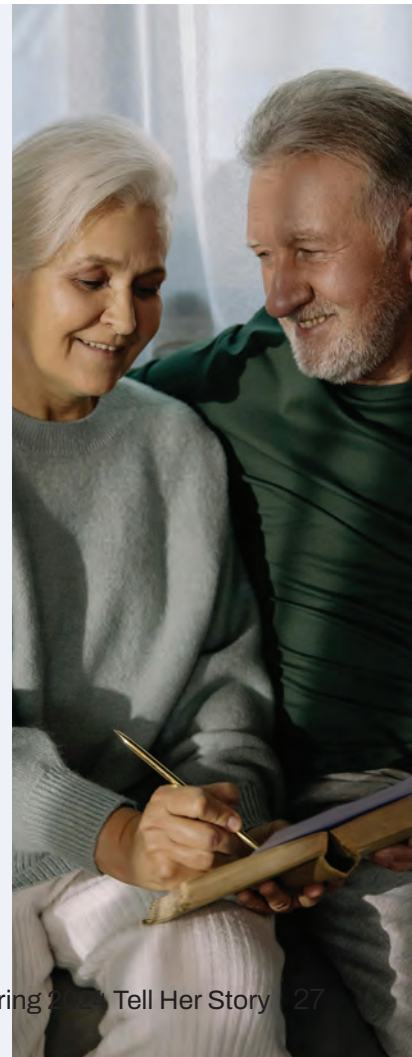
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I give to Christians for Biblical Equality, a nonprofit ministry with its principal offices located at 122 W. Franklin Ave., Suite 610, Minneapolis, MN [the sum of \$ ____] OR [____% of the residue of my estate], to be used [for its general purposes] OR [designated purpose]. If, in its opinion, the need for funds for the designated purpose no longer exists, CBE is authorized to use these funds for a similar purpose.



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Women in Pastoral Ministry

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- Learn how to advocate for the women pastors and leaders of today.

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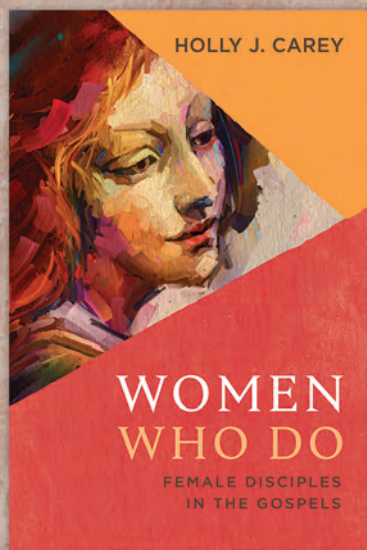


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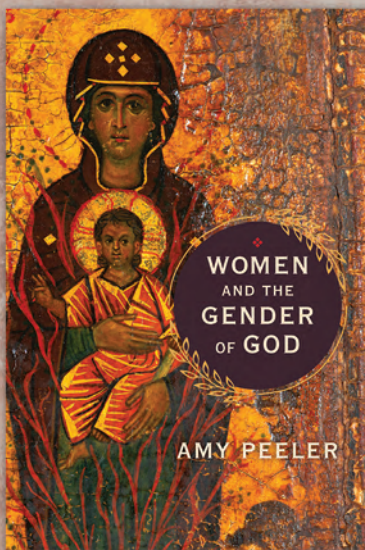
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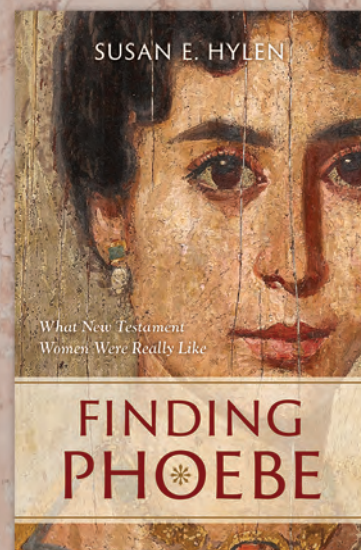
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Praise and Prayer

Praise

- The impact of CBE's Spanish and national Christian radio spots and for the thousands who visit our radio landing page for additional resources.
- Donors who support CBE in our Giving Tuesday and End of Year Giving campaigns.
- A new eLearning course based on the evaluation tool, *Nurturing Women's Equality*.
- Further impact that was made by Mimi Haddad's lectures and visit to Baylor University's George W. Truitt Seminary in Waco, Texas, in February 2024.

Prayer

- CBE's 2024 International Conference in Denver, Colorado, as we work with a new venue to hold "Tell Her Story: Women in Scripture and History."
- Wisdom and discernment as we plan strategies and fundraising activities in 2024.
- The growth of CBE's membership and subscription programs to reach and provide biblical education where most needed.
- Continued growth in our chapter and church and organization membership programs.
- CBE's audience as they grow and learn from our resources that women and men are called to equal partnership and authority in the home, church, and world.

Would you be willing to pray regularly on behalf of CBE? Join our prayer team to receive a full list of prayer needs on a quarterly basis, plus occasional urgent prayer needs. Please email us at cbe@cbeinternational.org to sign up.



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CBE International (CBE) is a nonprofit organization of Christian women and men who believe that the Bible, properly translated and interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of women and men of all racial and ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all ages, based on the teachings of Scriptures such as Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (NIV 2011).

MISSION STATEMENT CBE exists to promote the biblical message that God calls women and men of all cultures, races, and classes to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world. CBE’s mission is to eliminate the power imbalance between men and women resulting from theological patriarchy.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

- We *believe* in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons equal in power and glory.
- We *believe* in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We *believe* that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We *believe* the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We *believe* the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We *believe* that women and men are equally created in God’s image and given equal authority and stewardship of God’s creation.
- We *believe* that women and men are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.
- Therefore, we *lament* that the sins of sexism and racism have been used to historically oppress and silence women throughout the life of the church.
- We *resolve* to value and listen to the voices and lived experiences of women throughout the world who have been impacted by the sins of sexism and racism.



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- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin that manifests itself personally, relationally, and structurally.
- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from women and girls what God has given them: their dignity, freedom, and leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects a patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy as God’s standard for human relationships.
- Christ’s redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
- God’s design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a woman and a man, celibate singleness, and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women’s gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel worldwide.
- Followers of Christ are to advance human flourishing by opposing injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that demean, diminish, marginalize, dominate, abuse, enslave, or exploit women, or restrict women’s access to leadership in the home, church, and world.

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Hope of a Nation, Heart
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Sharon Linnea

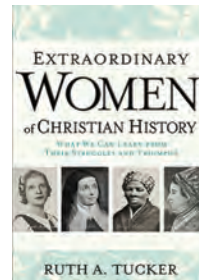
This biography tells the fascinating—and little-known—story of Princess Ka'iulani's life and courageous fight for Hawaiian independence. Using many newly translated journals and letters, Sharon Linnéa introduces young readers to the most beloved figure in Hawaiian history, and one of America's most overlooked Christian heroines.



Daughters of Deliverance

Lorry Lutz

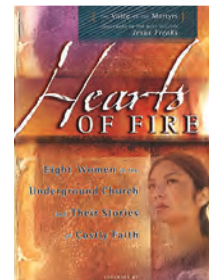
In 1886, thirty-one-year-old Katharine Bushnell gives up her medical practice to work with women living on Hell's Half Acre in Chicago and in the brutal lumber camps of Wisconsin. Motivated by her passion to see women released from bondage, Kate prepares a report on her findings of the women's trials and torments. When she defends her report to the state legislature, will they *believe her or brand her a liar?*



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