

Chapter 15

My Destiny Formed

During this time of being torn between the call to do the Lord's work and the fulfillment of my responsibilities to my husband, home and family, a friend called to ask me to go house hunting with her in our neighborhood. After we had unsuccessfully scoured the entire neighborhood, we thought we would investigate the Van Dyke area by taking a short cut down Nevada Avenue, which at that time was a very bumpy dirt street. The streetcars at that time made a turn just off Mt. Elliot, which was the end of the line. However, there was a little car which ran out to the city limits on Van Dyke every hour or so.

As we drove down Nevada Avenue, we noticed that the old Deaf Institute stood alone on the street except for a couple of small cottages, which had been there since this section of the city was known as Old Norris. As we drove a little farther along the street, we came past a red brick store building with flats above it on the corner of Nevada and School Avenues. As our car moved opposite this building, I felt a great presence of God come over me, and an irresistible consciousness that the Lord wanted me to have that building for His work. I did not mention a word of this to my friend in the car because down deep in my heart that was the last thing I wanted.

I loved my home, my family, and my husband, and the thought of anything else that would take me from them was most distasteful to me. Yet, I also loved the Lord and remembered the vows I had made to Him when He delivered me from my grievous illness in Ann Arbor, and when He gave me the peace that He did when He saved me. So I returned home from that ride with many conflicting thoughts and emotions racing through my heart and mind.

It is never religion, never Christianity, or doing the will of God that rends people asunder, but the conflict that precedes the full surrender of one's life, heart, mind, strength, and finances to the perfect will of God for the Kingdom's sake. I pity very deeply those people who live in the

constant turmoil of a call of God upon their lives without having the grace to make complete surrender. This was the place in which Jonah found himself, when God called him to go to Nineveh, but instead he decided he would go to Tarshish. With that choice “he bought a ticket and he paid the fare thereof.” Anyone who goes away from the presence of God, pays and pays and pays, and is overwhelmed with turmoil and regret.

Jonah, too, went through many hard places until at last, down in the belly of the whale in the bottom of the ocean, he found himself at the end of all creatures’ help and strength, knowing beyond the shadow of a doubt that no one or nothing could save him. It was there that a great revelation came to him: “Salvation is of the Lord.”

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For days after the experience of driving by this building, I went around in circles. I knew only too well “Salvation is of the Lord,” and I also knew the need for others to have such a revelation in this world of storm and stress. I knew many had been swallowed by terrible things and needed release - that someone had to throw them the lifeline. And I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that that someone was me! I could not escape the conviction that sooner or later I would have to do the things which God was calling me to do, though it apparently made no sense when I considered myself, my husband, my family, and my home.

A second day, my friend called asking again that I would accompany her in her search for a home and again I went. As we drove down Nevada Avenue once more to enter the Van Dyke district, we passed the same red brick building at Nevada and School Avenues. Again, I felt the presence of God bringing me the understanding that He willed me to have that building. Still the conflict within me would not permit me to impart this knowledge to anyone, even my friend who was with me. So again I went home to more tears, more prayer, more agony of spirit.

Some short time later, my friend called again. She had not yet found a home. So once again I went out with her, along with another lady who thought she knew of a place my friend might like. As we rode down the bumpy dirt surface of Nevada Avenue, once more I felt the presence of the Lord. As I looked out the window, I found we were again in front of the same building. By now I was becoming more confident that this was the will of God for me. However, I had at this time no aspirations or desires for the preaching ministry. I felt perhaps I could placate God by gathering up children who were not able to go to Sunday School

because of the lack of traveling facilities. I thought this building could also be used for a day of prayer and to sew for the poor. It was then that I finally told these ladies what I had been feeling concerning this building each of the times we had passed this way.

One of the ladies replied, "But how can this be? The building must surely be rented. There are curtains in the windows, and it looks occupied."

Nevertheless, I asked them to stop. We went to the door and knocked. Receiving no answer, I went around to the side entrance and met a man who was engaged in vulcanizing tires. I asked him where I might contact the people who owned the building. He informed me that the man was upstairs directing some plumbing installation, and that he would call him.

The gentleman in question came down. I asked if the building was available and would he rent it for use as a Sunday School and a meeting place for prayer and sewing for the poor. He said he guessed he would. Then I told him we had no money, but asked if he could hold the building for us until the first of the month. Then if I had the money for the rent, I would take it as a sign from God that we were to have the building for this purpose. Suddenly, I realized how foolish this thought must seem to a business man. So I said to him, "I am sure you think I am foolish."

He replied, "Well, if I didn't have a mother just like you in Germany, I might think you are foolish. But I understand something about these things." So he promised to hold the building unrented until the first of the month.

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After the landlord told us he would hold the building, I began to wonder if I had lost my mind. We never take a step forward for God without wondering if we are doing the right thing. Our hearts begin to fail us for fear. We quake inwardly with anxiety and misgiving. But in those moments, an inner strength whelms up within, and we know that all is well. Such was my dilemma.

Here was a mother of three small children contemplating the opening of a church. Of all my ventures, my husband and friends thought this was the most foolish. And I agreed. Why God would ever call me to such a task, I knew not. But I knew that He had called me. I could do nothing but obey. The six women who met and prayed with me every week also knew God had called me. We all agreed that we

would save what we could from our grocery money every week and put it aside. When we met to pray, we would put our money together in a jar that we had chosen for a bank. If this preposterous plan of ours was truly God ordained, then we would have the required \$30.00 at the time we needed it. If we fell far short of our goal, we would give up the idea altogether.

With this thought in mind we all set our minds to planning economical dishes for our families. There were many meals that consisted of beans or sauerkraut or some other inexpensive dish. Daily we watched our pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters mount up. When we met each week our money was pooled together, but because we had agreed not to count it until the end of the month, we had no idea how much money we had. When it came time to give the landlord the money or tell him that we were not interested in taking the building, we stood around the woman we had elected treasurer and held our breath as the change was counted. The amount we had saved came to \$30.12. God had again proven Himself to me!

The three weeks that followed were full of activity. Because the red brick storefront building had been used to vulcanize tires, it was badly in need of cleaning. Stout heartedly we washed the walls, scrubbed the floors, and polished the windows. It took many days of scrubbing before the building began to look like a suitable place for a church meeting.

On Saturday, June 13, 1934, three women and myself and my two oldest children went down to give everything the final touch. When we finished our polishing and dusting, we stood and looked at our clean but empty building. We had not one chair, song-book or piano. My heart was in my throat as I locked the door and walked home. What I would do for the service that we scheduled for the next day, I knew not. I had no money to buy the necessary equipment. There was no one that I could turn to for aid. My dependency was in God alone.

June 14, 1934 is a day I shall never forget. It was a beautiful, warm spring day. I arose that morning full of anxiety and hope. I knew I was doing what God had told me to do, but still the problem of an empty building had haunted me all through the night. My husband, who thought I had lost all good sense and reason, looked at me and in an amused manner said, "What do you intend to do down there this afternoon?"

I replied, "Well, the floor is clean, and I am taking plenty of newspapers along with me. When they get tired of standing, they can sit on the floor."

He grinned, shook his head, and walked outside.

Realizing what I had said, I hurried off to my room to pray for strength. No sooner had my knees touched the floor when a peace that passes all understanding flooded my soul. I knew that everything was going to be all right. I dressed the three children and myself nervously. After saying goodbye to my husband, we started walking toward the little red brick building a mile away. Patricia was eleven, James was nine, and Harry just three years old.

Daddy stood on the porch and watched us until we were out of sight. I could still see him in the distance, and my heart pounded. "Dear God, help me!" I cried as I hastened my pace. What the future held I knew not, but my fate was set. My destiny was formed.