

The Abandoned Life

Amy Carmichael

Amy Carmichael's life is a model of selfless dedication to the Savior, a life of discipleship and abandonment. She lived for one reason, and that was to make God's love known to those trapped in utter darkness. She was born in northern Ireland in 1867 and was the oldest of seven children. Her father's early death when she was eighteen had a profound effect on her, leading her to think seriously about her future and God's plan for her life.

Years before she became a missionary, God gave her a glimpse of the work she would one day do. His first prompting came on a wintry Sunday morning as the family returned home from church. Amy and her brothers spotted an old woman carrying a huge bundle.

She writes that they felt an overwhelming urge to help but also a feeling of embarrassment. "This meant facing all the respectable people who were, like ourselves, on their way home. It was a horrid moment. We were only two boys and a girl, and not at all exalted Christians. We hated doing it. Crimson all over (at least we felt crimson, soul and body of us) we plodded on, a wet wind blows in about us, and blowing, too, the rags of that poor old woman, till she seemed like a bundle of feathers and we unhappily mixed up with them."

As they passed a beautiful Victorian fountain, she heard the words of 1 Corinthians 3:12-14 in her spirit: "Gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble--every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be declared by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide."

She turned to see who was there, but there was no one--just the sound of the fountain's water and the laughter of a few passers-by. Before this time Carmichael admitted to a preoccupation with her social life. However, now it appeared that God was calling her to "settle some things with Him."

The Hand of God

In September 1886 the Carmichael family had traveled to Glasgow, England, to attend a conference in Keswick, in England's Lake District. It was there that Carmichael felt God's hand on her life.

The purpose for the conference was the promotion of holiness or the "higher Christian life." Carmichael writes: "The hall was full of a sort of gray mist, very dull and chilly. I came to that meeting half hoping, half fearing. Would there be anything for me? . . . The fog in the Hall seemed to soak into me. My soul was in a fog. Then the chairman rose for the last prayer . . . 'O Lord, we know Thou art able to keep us from falling.' Those words found me. It was as if they were alight. And they shone for me."

Amy Carmichael realized nothing could be more important than living her life for Jesus Christ who, with nothing of worldly possessions, had given His very life for her. She knew He was calling her to do the same and give all of herself to Him. This meant she must become "dead to the world and its applause, to all its customs, fashions, and laws."

In 1895, she was commissioned by the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society to go to Dohnavur, India, where she served fifty-six years as God's devoted servant without a furlough. A major part of her work there was devoted to rescuing children who had been dedicated by their families to be temple prostitutes.

Amy Carmichael often recalled the image of the old woman carrying her heavy bundle alone. She realized God had given her a love for those in the world deemed unlovely. The overflow of this love God used to start the Dohnavur Fellowship in India that became a place of safety and refuge for temple children.

More than a thousand children were rescued from neglect and abuse during Amy's lifetime. To them she was known as "Amma," which means mother in the Tamil language. The world often was dangerous and stressful. Yet she never forgot God's promise to "keep them in all things."

"There were days when the sky turned black for me because of what I heard and knew was true . . . Sometimes it was as if I saw the Lord Jesus Christ kneeling alone, as He knelt long ago under the olive trees . . . And the only thing that one who cared could do, was to go softly and kneel down beside Him, so that He would not be alone in His sorrow over the little children."

She was a prolific writer with thirty-five books published to her credit. Even as a young girl, Carmichael had showed talent as a writer. However, after a tragic accident in 1931, much of her time was spent in confinement in the Dohnavur Fellowship's compound.

Obedience, total commitment, and selflessness were the marks of Amy Carmichael's life. In a world where the thought of living one's life for Jesus Christ above all else is rapidly fading, she remains a bright and ever burning example of one whose sole existence was devoted to her beloved Lord and Savior.

God may or may not take you, as He did Amy Carmichael, to some far away land. However, He does have a plan for your life--to use you as His light of eternal hope and forgiveness to others. Ask Him to make His will perfectly clear. The rewards of God are not based on human achievements or financial success. They are given, instead, to those who "settle some things with Him" and commit themselves to Christ through a life of obedience and selfless devotion.