

THE WORLD MORE BEAUTIFUL SERVING CHRIST IN SECRET PLACES

Sharon Yoder came to Faith Builders in 1999 to teach elementary students and train teacher apprentices. In the 20 years since then, she invested generously in the school and local community, wrote a book for single women, and mentored dozens of young women. She returned to Indiana this summer to resume teaching grades 5 & 6. This article is based on a talk Sharon gave at REACH 2017. It reflects her goals and the way she lives. We are deeply indebted to Sharon for all the visible and invisible ways she has shared her life with us.

Occasionally, I pull from my bookshelf a delightful children's book entitled *Miss Rumphius*, by Barbara Cooney. In this story, Grandfather mentors his granddaughter Alice by precept and example. Often Alice sits on his lap in his house by the sea while listening to his stories of faraway places. Other days she works beside Grandfather in his shop. One day Alice declares that she too plans to visit faraway places and live in a house by the sea. Grandfather wisely replies all that is very well, but she must do yet a third thing: she must make the world more beautiful.

Alice grows up and becomes Miss Rumphius, the librarian. She buys a cottage by the sea and travels to many places. On one of her journeys, she injures her back. While recuperating, she remembers that she has not yet fulfilled her third goal. An idea comes to her as she takes walks during her recovery. She begins freely scattering, by the handfuls, lupine seeds wherever she walks up and down the pathways. First, people call her That Crazy Old Lady, but later as lupines dot the countryside, she becomes known as the Lupine Lady who made the world more beautiful.

This reminds me of another woman in the first century church who made the world more beautiful as she generously scattered hope and love. She lived in Joppa, along the Mediterranean coast below Caesarea. She worked among

the widows and orphans of this fishing town, which frequently experienced the death clutches of a vicious sea that captured their loved ones. These destitute women and children depended on the charities of such people as Dorcas.

We know little about Dorcas's background. We do not know how she became a clothing designer. We also do not know whether she was widowed or unmarried. Perhaps we can glean a few ideas about her life from the short passage found in Acts 9:36-42. Dorcas's name means "gazelle." Her gentleness and compassion touched the lives of the poor as she generously sewed garments for them. Dorcas lived in community and for community.

Dorcas also was called a disciple. She had become a follower of Jesus. We do not know her educational background, but certainly, she was on a quest. Disciples ask questions and make personal applications while modeling their teacher. As a disciple, Dorcas appropriated love, kindness, mercy, and compassion. Undoubtedly, she trained her mind to know Scripture and actively listened to the Holy Spirit's promptings. Her domestic duties did not interfere with her spiritual growth and maturity.

Thirdly, Dorcas's reputable character describes her as "full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36 ESV).

What a summary of a woman known for her lifestyle of sacrificial giving! The passage refers to her benevolent works, charitable and kind acts, not an occasional good deed here and there, but a way of life in constantly giving as needs arose. Undoubtedly, her work had little payback in monetary terms, for she surrounded herself with the poorest of the poor.

A person's dedication and sacrifice always touches other lives. One day Dorcas became ill and died. Whatever the cause of her death, it caused much grief. When Peter arrived, the weeping widows held out the garments she had made. Her love and kindness had deeply touched their lives. Peter saw the widows' deep grief, not because Dorcas could no longer make clothes, but because they loved the woman who had sacrificed lavishly.

God was merciful. The miracle of Dorcas's resurrection became news of the day, which resulted in many believing on the Lord. Is her resurrection the point of the story? Hardly. There have been many faithful men and women who given their life for the service of the kingdom, and yet have not been resurrected in this world. Rather, her resurrection imparted hope because they believed in the Resurrected One who has made the world more beautiful. I believe that after Dorcas's restoration, she went

right on being who she was—a woman of God, a disciple, a sacrificial servant with a needle in her hand.

Like Dorcas, we too have a calling on our lives that constitutes sacrifice. Many of us desire to know the calling, but we get edgy about the idea of sacrifice. Sacrifice costs. However, there is no other recourse for a Jesus-follower. Jesus clearly states the prerequisites for being His follower. Three things are required. We need to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow Him (Mark 8:34). The call rests not on what we want or do not want, nor on who we are or who we are not.

Centering life on me negates sacrificial living and discipleship. Discipleship leaves no room for self-centered agendas. How vastly different were our world if seeds of love and humility were scattered wherever we went!

In God's kingdom, sacrificial living works most often in the back corners and alleyways of our world. The Holy Spirit issues the King's commands for these places with quiet, insistent directives. How might that look? Perhaps a father takes his family fishing instead of going to the coffee shop. It might mean choosing to wash dishes during an event rather than serving up front in the food line. It could be

as insignificant as silently picking up clutter from the floor, smiling at a clerk, or praying for someone in town. Dr. Egeler once said, "Quiet acts of honor make a difference." I would like to add that they make the world more beautiful.

I think of two more examples of people who have lived sacrificially and thus changed their world. Gladys Aylward did not set out to become a famous missionary. No mission board accepted her, but that did not stop her burning desire to answer God's call on her life. Gladys traveled alone to China while encountering many obstacles. She ministered to many Chinese people. During Japan's attack on China, she fled across the mountain with more than a hundred orphans to bring them to safety. Exhausted after such a feat, she collapsed. The trip weakened Gladys's health in general, and she died at the age of sixty-eight on foreign soil. Aylward's legacy lives on in the name the Chinese chose for her as the "Virtuous One." Her love and service brought hope and beauty to a war-torn country.

Another woman that comes to mind is currently of our Anabaptist heritage. Gertie Troyer was born in 1949 in Plain City, Ohio. At age twenty-one, she went to live in Kenilworth, an area of

Washington, D. C. She heard the call for her life and joined a mission that reached out to people in the concrete jungle. When the mission closed its doors, Gertie chose to stay in the Kenilworth community. The baking business in her kitchen turned into a mission of its own. She has become a bridge builder of relationships in the city. This woman, now nearly reaching seven decades of her life, left the comforts of her Anabaptist community many years ago, but she brought the beautiful presence of Jesus with her to the city.

Where sacrifices are made, love reigns. We might not be called to scatter seeds as the Lupine Lady did, nor hold a needle in our hand as Dorcas did, neither cross a mountain with orphans, nor use the kitchen as our ministry. However, Jesus calls all of us to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow Him. If we choose sacrificial discipleship as His followers, we truly will make the world more beautiful.

Sharon Yoder



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FAITH BUILDERS NEWSLETTER The Faith Builders newsletter is published quarterly and serves to inform, inspire, and equip its readers. Subscription is free upon request.

WELCOME!

- » Twenty-four new students began their two-year studies in August. They joined 18 returning students.
- » Six volunteers joined us to serve in maintenance, kitchen, bookstore, and housekeeping responsibilities. We wish them a year of rich blessings!
- » We welcome three new staff: Julene Bender as FBCS secretary, Marilyn Martin as Grades 5 & 6 teacher, and Jaran Miller as Resource Group Assistant.

FAREWELL

- » The graduates of 2019 demonstrated commitment and grace. We bless their desire to build the Kingdom!
- » We are deeply grateful for the volunteers who served us generously during the last year. May God reward them!
- » We bless Emily Byler, FBCS secretary for four years, as she leaves to serve in Iraq.

