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HOW THEY ENTERED CANAAN
(A Collection of Holiness Experience Accounts)
Compiled by Duane V. Maxey

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

MAY TIDWELL McKAY
(Nazarene)

May Tidwell was born near Chattanooga, Tennessee, of earnest Christian parents who reared her carefully in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Looking back over her early life years later she said, "I do not remember a time when God did not talk to my heart, even in the earliest years of my childhood." When she was only five years old she was converted so clearly and definitely that the influence of that early experience held through all her girlhood years, though at times she lost the joy of the Lord through childish disobedience.

When she was fourteen the Lord spoke to her again, this time with the unexpected question, "Will you go to India for me?" Her first reaction was the practical question, "What could I do there?" Since she had never felt any special urge or call toward preaching or teaching or even medical work and could not think of anything else in the way of missionary endeavor, she reached the apparently logical but mistaken conclusion, "No, Lord, I can't go, for what could I do for Thee in India even if I did go?" There she made the same mistake as have hundreds of older and wiser persons: the mistake of relying on her own necessarily limited judgment and wisdom instead of trusting God's infinite wisdom and love to direct her.

For the next five years she tried to push the whole matter of her call out of her mind. But in order to do this she had to banish as well all thoughts of Him who had called her and this of necessity resulted in spiritual darkness and misery and condemnation.

At last, when she was nineteen the Lord sent one of His children to her help. Mrs. Olive Rife, a Nazarene evangelist (now church missionary in Rev. W. M. Tidwell's church in Chattanooga, Tennessee) came to hold a meeting in Liberty Methodist Church in Chattanooga to which May Tidwell and her parents then belonged. May was away from home at the time and knew nothing of the meetings. One day, to her surprise, she had the sudden strong impression that she must go home at once. She went -- and found revival meetings just beginning. This profoundly moved her: she felt that the Lord had called her home expressly to talk to her and she had better listen.

Within a few days she had renewed her vows to God, and at once began to seek the blessing of entire sanctification. She went to the altar time after time but failed to "get through." At last it became plain that two things stood in her way: the first was the unsaved young man she had started "going with" while trying to get away from her call. The second was the same old question that had turned her aside five years before: what could she do for the Lord if she did go to India? She struggled on and finally disposed of the first obstacle, the young man; she gave him up. That left the second question, and here we surely see an illustration of the fact that the devil is the father of lies. May Tidwell McKay became one of the most effective missionaries we ever had in India -- she preached with burning zeal, and worked in all directions incessantly till other missionaries were almost worn out trying to keep up with her, and yet the devil held her in bondage for years over the question of what she would find to do if she went to India!

But the time of her deliverance was now at hand, and the Lord accomplished it once and for all through a simple illustration Mrs. Rife was led to use. Mrs. Rife was staying with May's parents half a mile out in the country and every night Mr. Tidwell lighted their way to the church with his lantern. One evening in preaching on the work of the Holy Spirit, Mrs. Rife used this illustration of the guidance of the Spirit:

Now here is Brother Tidwell who so faithfully lights our way to church every night with his lantern. But suppose he held it up one night and said, "Wife, I can't see the church a half a mile away with this lantern, so what shall we do? We might as well stay at home. for this will never light us there." No, you would all laugh at that; you know that Brother Tidwell fills, polishes and lights his little lantern every night, takes it in his hand and it lights our way to the church, not in one blinding flare of light, but step by step till the half mile is covered and we are safe at church.

With that simple, homely illustration the light broke into May's heart, and she saw that that was what the Holy Spirit was waiting to do for her -- light her way in India not in one dazzling flash, but step by step. She yielded her heart to the Spirit's guidance in absolute confidence..

Source: "Hazarded Lives" by Edith P. Goodnow

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