

Don't Quit Now

BECAUSE I HAD A BLACK MOTHER AND A WHITE FATHER, I WAS EJECTED AND CALLED A HALF-BREED BY BOTH RACES. NEVERTHELESS, GOD HAD A REMARKABLE PLAN.

Most of us have learned of many men and women throughout history who dared to go forward when all the odds were against them. They gave meaning to the phrase, "Winners never quit, and quitters never win."

The Scriptures tell us the story of one such man—blind Bartimaeus, who would not take "no" for an answer. Despite his being harshly rebuked by the people around him, Bartimaeus repeatedly cried out to Jesus until He received his healing (see Mark 10:46-52).

As Christians we can learn a lesson in persistence from blind Bartimaeus. No matter how difficult the situation we find ourselves in, we must continue to press in until we receive the answer we are seeking.

Jesus said, "'I have told you these things so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace and confidence. In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world.'" (John 16:33, The Amplified Bible).

When I look back over my life, I realize there were many reasons for me to give up. As a young girl I learned early on about cruelty and abuse. Being born in the '50s to a black woman and a white man was not a popular thing. As a result, I suffered tremendous physical and mental abuse that lasted for years.

School was a nightmare for me. I looked different from the other children in my inner-city neighborhood, and my fair complexion made me a target of their derision and violence. I was beaten and had my hair pulled out nearly every day.

The pain, guilt and shame in my life were so intense that I sometimes wanted my life to end. I often asked myself, "Why was I born?" Little did I know that one day that question would be answered.

CHILDHOOD SCARS I believe that long before we are born a blueprint is already laid out in heaven concerning our lives. Although my childhood was very traumatic, God was still there.

I remember talking to God at the age of 5—even though I was not reared in a Christian home. God began speaking to me about living water and eternal life when I was still very young, though I did not know I was hearing His voice at the time.

Home was not a haven for me. My mother loved me, but she had struggles of her own after having lost her mother at an early age. She just wasn't ready to raise me and my five siblings.

I've never met my father, but I know he was a Jewish man. One of my mother's sisters hated white people and, therefore, she hated me. She even went so far as to tell my mother, in my presence, that if she "put that half-white child away, [she] could have a better life."

Whenever I was left in the care of this aunt, she'd beat me, force me to do strenuous chores and exploit me for the entertainment of the drunken customers who frequented the speakeasy she ran.

Despite all this, I know God had a plan. In the midst of heartache and despair, He had a purpose for me, and He knew how to encourage me along the way.

SEEKING ANSWERS It was another one of my aunts, Mae, who

showed me kindness and sometimes took me with her for the weekend. She encouraged me, telling me that I could have a better life and make a difference.

As a teen-ager I began wanting to know my purpose. Since suicide had been a constant thought during my early years, I was desperate to find something to live for.

I recall getting ready to take a handful of pills once when I heard a voice saying, "Stop! Don't do this! Don't give up hope!" It startled me, and I put the pills back in the bottle.

Looking to fill the void in my life, I attended several churches. I had no knowledge then that I was longing for God.

During my search, I discovered "religion." Though I joined and became actively involved in a church, it wasn't until several years later that I truly began my walk with God.

The void was finally filled. I completely gave my life to Jesus and started living for Him from that day forward.

Shortly thereafter, I was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Life began to take on new meaning for me.

I began studying God's Word and learning wonderful truths about victorious living. God was telling me that I was a new creation, more than able to do and overcome all things (see Phil. 4:13). He was also beginning to reveal specific things to me regarding my future.

WORD OF THE LORD In July 1979 I attended a tent revival hosted by my home church in Philadelphia. Richard D. Henton of Chicago was the evening's speaker.

I remember that night as though it were yesterday. Six thousand people were packed under the tent, and my mother and I arrived too late to sit up front. I was disappointed because I was hoping to receive a prophetic word, and I thought if I sat in back that would be impossible.

At the time I was six months pregnant, depressed and sure God had forgotten about me. I had received many prophecies about the great ministry God had for me, but things were looking bleak.

I had asked God how I would be able to fulfill this great call on my life with all the responsibilities of being a wife and mother of small children. In the midst of what I thought was a hopeless situation, God spoke to me.

Henton stopped in the middle of his message, pointed in my direction and said: "Daughter in the back, you will be more than a mother. You are the handmaiden of the Lord. God has a great work for you. Prepare your heart."

When I heard those words, my heart began to beat extremely fast. Despite my distance from him, I knew he was talking directly to me.

Immediately, all fear and doubt began to leave me. God had once and for all settled the issue in my heart.

I thought to myself, If God could stop a man in the middle of preaching to 6,000 people, surely He has my circumstances under control. That word from God has carried me for more than 20 years and helped me break free from the pain of my childhood.

NO LONGER A CAPTIVE You don't have to be a prisoner of your past. No matter where you are in life or how hopeless your situation may appear to be, don't quit.

I was rejected and called half-breed most of my life—by blacks because I was not "black" enough and by whites because I was "too black." Satan did everything he could to destroy me. But what appeared to work against me then, God intended to use for His glory.

God has allowed me to minister in both predominantly white and

predominantly black congregations and conferences. I've gone into places where blacks or women previously were not welcome. Now I am convinced that God made me the way He did because He knew the call He had placed upon my life and the people to whom He would send me.

God has healed me of all the abuse, shame and low self-esteem. With His help I'm focusing on what is ahead rather than on what is behind.

I want those who feel victimized to know that even though they may have fallen through the cracks of life, they can get up again. I call them out of religion into relationship with almighty God, and I tell them to keep going no matter how horrible the past has been.

The Bible says that our life is but a vapor; it quickly goes. We must be about our Father's business, making the most of every opportunity. The hour is late, and now is not the time to quit!

Read a companion devotional.

Olivia Mitchell is the former executive director of Sound the Trumpet Ministries. She is an evangelist and a frequent speaker with Women of the Word conferences.