

How One Woman Learned to Live 'By Faith'

I could hardly contain myself. I had been obsessed with this iconic sporting event for years, and now I was in Sydney, Australia, as a reporter and a spectator! I had one week to soak in all the sights and sounds, so rest was not an option.

What a thrill to be among all the visitors representing different nations and cultures. I loved it. Everyone was so friendly! People were wearing the colors of their flags. The locals could be heard chanting the famous "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie! Oi, oi, oi!"

My time in Sydney was truly a dream come true, but it wasn't perfect.

I couldn't explain or stop what was going on in my small family, but I didn't want anything to do with their new faith.

Now I see that as I packed my bags and boarded the plane to Sydney, God was sending the Holy Spirit to chase me down all the way in Australia.

During that wonderful week in Sydney, I started having a few strange thoughts. Back then, I was proud of the trivia I knew about my favorite athletes. But in Sydney, I thought, *Wow, so you know all these stats and figures about these athletes, but you don't know any of God's promises for you in the Bible.* Bible? Why was I thinking about the Bible at this grand sporting competition?

One of the things I really wanted to do while in Sydney was to go see the koalas being fed. The only time I could go was on a Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m. No problem, except when I had this thought, *So you can wake up early on a Sunday morning to go to the zoo to see the koalas being fed, but when you're home you*

can't wake up early and go to church. Church? Why was I thinking about church?

Surrendering It All

The day finally came for me to visit the official broadcasting center where all the top media outlets were located. When I arrived outside the massive building I had been passing by all week, I called my acquaintance. To my horror she said she couldn't give me a tour because she was on deadline.

I was devastated.

My Road to Damascus

Up until this point, my life back home was pretty good on the outside. I was accomplishing my journalism career goals in a short time frame, but I was still far from the Lord. I loved God, but He was more of an afterthought. I felt like I had outgrown the need for the church and the Bible.

I prayed for God's protection while embarking on this trip, but there was a barrier between Him and me, and I didn't know how to fix it. I was afraid following God would remove all the fun from my life. I wasn't ready to change my ways, but I couldn't deny how He was working in my family.

By then, my mom and sister were following Jesus.

This was my last full day in Sydney, and I stood right outside the main press center and I couldn't get inside. It was now or never for this part of my dream, and the doors were shut tight.

I slowly walked away from the building, found a spot on the grass in the surrounding park, sat down and burst into tears. I was heartbroken and disappointed.

My identity was tied to what I achieved and accomplished.

At that moment, I felt like such a failure.

And then I started having more thoughts.

I came to myself and wondered why I was crying at this premier sporting event. My dream had come true. I had gotten myself all the way to Australia and had experienced this phenomenal week, and it still wasn't enough.

That's when I realized I still had a void in my heart. I realized I had come to the end of myself. I had gotten myself as far as I could in my own strength, but it wasn't enough.

I started to think about how I had ignored God all those years, and yet He had allowed me to accomplish so many of my dreams. I knew I didn't deserve it. He had seen all the nonsense I was up to. He knew about all my sins. It was a humbling and sobering experience. I couldn't hide from God.

I was so overwhelmed by God's love, grace and mercy that right there by myself in this world-famous park, without a pastor or evangelist next to me, I said out loud toward the beautiful open sky, "God, I can't do anything else but serve You the rest of my life!"

This one simple yet profound yes to God changed the course of my life. I would go on to lay down my journalism career and answer the call of evangelism on my life. I traveled on short-term mission trips to Brazil, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras and Peru and went on evangelistic outreaches throughout New York City.

The Wilderness

After seeing God doing amazing things in five countries and on the streets of New York, I was no longer the same person. God had increased my faith in Him more than a hundredfold.

I wanted to step out of the boat and walk on water. I wanted to continue seeing the hand of God move in miraculous ways.

There had been so many beautiful words prophesied over me, and

I wanted to see them come to pass. I wanted to do so much for God, but nothing seemed to be happening. It was as if the Lord were saying, "I know you have all these dreams and desires. I put those dreams and desires in you, and you will get to do them, but for now I need you to be still."

I found myself in a waiting season I couldn't escape. God wanted me to spend time praying, reading the Bible, leaning on Him and listening to His voice.

God was doing a beautiful work in me. I just didn't quite see it. I would fuss, and complain, and think of ways to rebel, but God lovingly constrained me and reminded me to "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). There would be a time to do all the good works He had ordained for me, but this was a time of abiding in Him. He was molding me into His masterpiece and forming my character to be more like Christ.

During this time, my writing ramped up.

After I'd returned from Ethiopia, a pastor had prophesied over me and said, "Write your sermons and your books." I had tucked that idea away.

Now I couldn't ignore the feeling that just as God had asked me to lay down journalism so many years before, He was asking me to pick up my pen to write for His glory.

God wanted to give me a crown of beauty instead of ashes (Isa. 61:3). And it would include threading words together to tell of His marvelous ways. {eoa}

Nancy Gavilanes is an author, speaker, life coach and evangelist who has a passion to encourage people to live their God-given dreams. She is the author of *By Faith, Waiting on God Well, Abounding Faith and Crossing Your Jordan River*. Nancy has a master's degree in journalism from New York University, has been on short-term missions trips to five countries and has spoken to various groups, including to

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