

Touching The World From Her Own Backyard

MYRTLE AMUNDSON DISCOVERED THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY TO BE A MISSIONARY. GOD CAN BRING THE WORLD'S UNCHURCHED TO YOU.

Lord, cause me to hear Your prophetic Word for my life today. And lead me to places and peoples who need to receive that Word—even at the risk of being thought a fool.”

This prayer is tucked inside Myrtle Amundson’s Bible. It’s part of a list of prayers from *The Calling*, a book by Brother Andrew, founder of Open Doors ministry, and Myrtle has seen God answer it in her life. In fact, He’s given her an unusual calling that enables her to touch many countries of the world without leaving her own backyard.

For years she struggled to know what that calling was.

“I grew up in a strong evangelical church in Chicago with a large missions program and missions conferences every year,” Myrtle explains. “My heroes were not movie stars or rock stars, but missionaries who went to the ends of the world taking the gospel message to the unreached. I wanted to be just like them.”

Yet Myrtle never felt a “missionary call.” Instead, she became a school teacher.

“I never felt ‘called’ to be a teacher, either,” she says, “but at least I could serve God and help other people by loving and teaching my students.”

Myrtle’s teaching led her overseas, where she taught at international community schools in Iran, Algeria, Venezuela and Honduras. Eventually she returned to the United States and

relocated to Florida, where she joined First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, an evangelical church with a strong missions program.

When Myrtle wasn't teaching school, she became involved in her church's international student ministry, reaching out to foreign students who were studying at local colleges and universities. At first she helped out once a month, then once a week, and finally she became a regular—teaching English and occasionally a Bible study to students and wives of students.

Then in 1993 a new theme park opened in Orlando that hired more than 100 workers from the People's Republic of China—artists, musicians, dancers and acrobats. "We prayed about how we could serve these people and minister to them," Myrtle says.

She wondered if the employees might want to learn English and discussed the idea of teaching them with park officials who, to her surprise, agreed to her plan. At the first meeting, all 120 workers showed up ready to learn English.

Suddenly, Myrtle realized that every experience in her life had led her to this point. She had finally discovered her calling.

She loved teaching the Chinese workers how to speak English and quickly formed relationships with them, inviting them to her home for supper and helping them adjust to a new culture. "We told the park managers that the only book we knew of in English and Chinese was the New Testament," she says, "and we wanted to give it to the workers as a gift." Again, permission was granted.

Entertainers and other workers come to the park from China for periods of about six months. Although a handful have become Christians, for the most part Myrtle and the other teachers are simply planting seeds. "I'm just the latest link in the chain leading them to the Savior," Myrtle says. But when the

workers return home, they take their Bibles and other Christian literature back with them—perhaps to plant their own seeds in a communist nation where Christian activities are tightly controlled and evangelism is forbidden.

Myrtle now also works with entertainers from other theme parks in Orlando, including EPCOT Center and Cirque du Soleil, a multimedia extravaganza at Disney World. “I’ve had contact with entertainers from Poland, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and other countries,” she says.

Myrtle also teaches English and Bible studies to hotel workers from Haiti, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and throughout Central America. “We’ve spent many, many hours teaching English, visiting with our international friends, and just getting to know them,” she says. “People who’ve never heard that God loves them and that Jesus gave His life on the cross to save them are now hearing the gospel for the first time.”

Myrtle has also taught English in schools and universities in Russia. But her heart—and her calling—are in her own backyard.

“There are thousands of internationals in Orlando, including many from the 10/40 Window,” Myrtle says. The 10/40 Window is an imaginary rectangle on the globe between the 10th and 40th parallels, stretching from Morocco to Japan, where 95 percent of the world’s unreached and least evangelized people live. “God is sending them to us,” she adds, “and I have a real burden to reach them.”

“When we think of the unreached,” Myrtle continues, “we usually think of the Great Commission, in which Jesus told His disciples to ‘go into all the world.’ However, God has other ways of spreading the gospel. Many times He brings the unreached to us. They are now a part of our Jerusalems and Samarias and Judeas.”

Often Christians find it easier to send money to missionaries overseas than to make the effort to befriend their

international neighbors. But God challenges us to “assemble who is in [our] town, in order that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord [our] God” (Deut. 31:12, NASB). Do we see our “chance” encounter with the Muslim woman at the gas station or the Chinese waiter in our neighborhood restaurant as a nuisance—or as God’s opportunity? Myrtle wonders out loud.

“A few years ago, I read that a large percentage of the many tourist shops in this area are owned or managed by Muslims,” Myrtle says. “Most of these people will continue to live here and raise their families here. They have jobs, they have homes, and some have businesses, but they don’t have Jesus. Who is telling them about Jesus?”

Like Paul in the book of Acts, Myrtle feels “compelled by the Spirit” to testify to the entertainers and other internationals that Jesus is Lord. She works part time to support her ministry and even cashed in some of her retirement fund to live on while she raises other support.

“Reaching out to the unreached is not an option for the church or for individual Christians,” she says. “It’s a command.”

On the same piece of paper that Myrtle has tucked in her Bible is another quote from *The Calling*: “The real calling of God is not to a certain place or career, but to everyday [has] been using all of the events and experiences of our lives to prepare us for the kind of service He’s calling us to now. Whether our past was happy or sad, godly or sordid, God is building on that experience to make us into effective servants for Him.” Myrtle Amundson would have to agree.

Elisabeth Farrell writes frequently on women who are making a difference in the world.