

You Don't Have to Be in the Spotlight to Impact Thousands for the Kingdom

One of the most selfless, humblest individuals I have ever known is my wife's aunt Marie. At the young age of 14, Marie Johnsrud accepted Jesus' call to be a missionary. She spent the next several years training and preparing herself for the mission field. She went to business college and learned to use a typewriter. She learned to play the piano, accordion and organ so she could bring worship music to those she served. She diligently studied the Bible and attended Bible college in Seattle. And she did all of this while serving her local church.

Finally, in the fall of 1945, she departed for mission work in Africa. For the next 35 years, she served the people of Upper Volta (now called Burkina Faso), part of French West Africa. Marie traveled 7,000 miles to reach her new home. When she first arrived, she worked with the Bible translation team and cared for the children of other missionaries. She lived at times in the bush and at times in the city, quickly adapting to the culture and the African way of life. It wasn't long before her team produced the first translation of the Bible into the language of the Mossi, the largest ethnic group in the area.

During her years in Africa, Marie ministered to and nurtured a broken generation. She left with reluctance after she completed her 35th year but felt God was leading her to return home to Tacoma, Washington, and her family. When her sister picked her up at the airport, she asked, "Marie, where is your luggage?"

Marie answered in her typical, pragmatic way: "Well, I don't

have any luggage. I have everything I need right here.” Marie was carrying two brown paper sacks that contained everything she owned. She had given everything else away to the people she served in Africa.

Her youngest sister, Lorraine, had worked hard to set up a fully furnished apartment for Marie in a seniors’ facility, and so Marie settled into retirement. For her that meant on Mondays she taught English classes to immigrants, on Tuesdays she worked in the church offices doing anything she was asked, on Wednesdays she attended noon prayer meetings at the church and took care of little boys after school, on Thursdays she went to the mission to serve food to the hungry and on Fridays she helped elderly people in countless ways. Serving others was a part of who she was. She honored everyone she met with her service.

Years passed, and Marie received an invitation to return to Africa for an event to commemorate her missionary service. When she arrived at the venue, Marie was convinced she and her sisters had misunderstood the event details. The building was not a church as she had expected; it was a stadium filled with thousands of people. When Marie went up to the platform, thousands of Africans jumped to their feet, all of them chanting, “Mother! Mama!” Marie had never had a husband or children of her own. She never owned property or had a bank account. Yet she had impacted thousands because she served and honored the people of what is now Burkina Faso.

That stadium full of people testified of Marie’s 35 years of ministry, her selflessness, her open home and her open heart. Marie had mothered, nursed and nurtured God’s hidden gold, and because she chose to honor them, the lives of thousands of people were transformed. During my time with Marie, I eagerly listened to the stories she told of God’s provision and of the precious people she served. Never once do I remember her being the center of the story. She always spoke about how God worked and how she saw Him shining through the faces of those she

served.

Marie willingly gave up everything she had to serve others. If she had extra money, she would use it to bless others—she would never use it for herself. I have met many wonderful people of God who give their all to serve others. And in each case, they are the most blessed people I know. Then I look at the other side of the equation—people who are living large and getting their name out there. They are “the greatest” and know no god but the money they earn, but their lives are hollow. They do not know what it means to serve others. Like the rich man in Luke 16, they will never know what it is to walk with Abraham and sit at the feet of Jesus. {eoa}

*This article is adapted from I Choose Honor: The Key to Relationships, Faith, and Life (Charisma House, 2019) by **Rich Wilkerson Sr.** Wilkerson is the founder of Peacemakers and the senior pastor of Trinity Church in Miami, Florida. He is also an evangelist and author. Since 1973, Wilkerson has ministered to youths and families through evangelism and local church ministry. His humorous style and power-packed speaking have been the keys to seeing thousands turn to Christ. More than 1.5 million students have attended his presentations on over 1600 public school campuses throughout the United States and Canada. The Wilkersons also serve as chancellors at North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Wilkerson and his wife, Robyn, are ministering in the heart of Miami and continue to be committed to the local community through cutting-edge ministry outreaches. The Wilkerson's have been married for over 40 years and have four sons, three daughters-in-law and five grandchildren.*