

LIVING A LIFE

OF *fire*

Preview

REINHARD  
BONNKE

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

## Chapter 1

I SIT QUIETLY with an explosion building inside of me. I lean forward to the edge of my seat. My hands explore the cover of my preaching Bible as my foot taps a nervous dance on the platform. Every molecule of my body anticipates what is about to happen. I think you would feel the same if you were in my shoes.

It is a tropical night in Northern Nigeria. We are in the heart of Africa. The air is warm and moist and full of sound. A local gospel group performs a melody of praise accompanied by a snakeskin drum. A chorus of birds, frogs and insects joins them from the surrounding trees. The vast crowd standing in front of me radiates heat and expectancy. Nearly 700,000 tribesmen have walked for many miles to this site. Many of them are Muslims. Their upturned faces draw me like a moth to a flame. 2,400,000 will attend in five nights of preaching. More than 1.4 million will accept Jesus as Savior at the invitations. Follow-up teams will disciple each one.

Anticipation makes my heart race. What about yours? As you begin to read my story, I wonder, are you like me? Does the prospect of seeing the Great Commission of Christ fulfilled drive you day and night? If not, then I pray that the story of my life will light a fire in you. A fire that will change everything. A holy fire that will convince you that nothing is impossible with God.

I see that some in the crowd tonight are crippled. Some lie sick on pallets. Others lean on crutches. Not all will be healed, but some of these crippled will walk. I must tell you, when they walk, I will dance with them across this platform! Wouldn't you? Some are blind, and some of those blind will see. I cannot explain why, but in Muslim areas I see more blind eyes open. I wish everyone could be with me to see it. Chronic pains leave bodies, cancerous growths disappear. These are but a few of the signs that follow the preaching of the good news.

I feel a low vibration. It is almost audible. Generators are purring inside their insulated containers nearby, feeding kilowatts of electricity to our thirsty sound towers and stage lights. We have imported our own power grid to this remote region. We are far beyond the reach of Marriott, Hyatt, Hilton or even Motel 6. Our team has installed a small village of trailer houses to shelter us for the duration. Cell phones are worthless. Satellites keep us connected. Few have even heard of this place. Yet more than a half-million are here tonight!

My throat constricts at the realization of it. Hot tears seek the corners of my eyes. This is joy beyond any I have known.

I smile and tilt my head up, looking into a sky of ancient constellations. I feel the Creator of the Universe smiling down on this corner of the world tonight. I breathe deeply. The smoke of cooking fires paints the breeze and brings me back to earth. I am a thousand miles from anywhere normal, and this is where I feel most at home. We have found another forgotten state where few have heard the way of salvation. I am Reinhard Bonnke, an evangelist. Welcome to my destiny.

Tonight, events will unfold like a well-rehearsed dream. I will be introduced. My eyes will sweep the crowd knowing that we have all come for the same Jesus. My heart will open to the Holy Spirit and in my mind an image will appear. I call it “the shape of the gospel.” It is an outline that I will fill with an explosion of words that pour from my heart without rehearsal.

I must now make a confession. This has become an addiction for me. But it is an addiction I’d gladly share with you. Leading sinners to salvation en masse – or one by one – it is all the same. I eat it, I sleep it, I dream it, I speak it, I write it, I pray it, I weep it, I laugh it. It is my wish to die preaching this gospel. I am like a man starving until I can stand again with a microphone in my hand, looking across a sea of faces, shouting the words of His love into the darkness.

It is huge now. The results are huge. I am on my way to seeing 100 million respond to the gospel. More than 52 million have registered decisions since the year 2000. Without the decades of experience that brought my team to this

harvest, we would be overwhelmed by these numbers. But we are not slowing down, we are erecting more platforms like this one in places you've never heard of. After reading my story I hope and pray that you will join me on each of those future platforms, sharing my excitement. If you are unable to be there in person, then I hope you will be there in prayer, in faith, in spirit.

In truth, I have done nothing alone. God has called me and has been my pilot. The Holy Spirit has been my comforter, my guide, and my power source. As you will read in these pages, He brought to me the perfect wife. He gave us our beautiful children and extended family. And He has provided a team that has grown with me through decades of working together. Beyond that, He has brought thousands to stand with us. They have supported us in prayer and in partnership. Our rewards in Heaven will be equal.

Oh! Excuse me. I have to go now. I have been introduced and there is a microphone in my hand. I stand to my feet and leap forward, ready to preach with the fire that I always feel in my bones. But just before I open my mouth I feel a holy hush descend over me. It washes over the crowd as well, and I drop to my knees in humility and reverence, raising my face to the sky. For in the air above me I sense an invisible crowd that dwarfs the almost 700,000 Nigerians straining to hear my next word. I am speaking of Heaven's cloud of witnesses, a numberless throng upon whose shoulders I am carried. And from that heavenly crowd steps a man, a German evangelist who has gone before me. I know him by reputation. He is in many ways like these Nigerians, overlooked, except by Heaven. His life was sown in weakness and some say in defeat. Yet tonight, every soul born into the Kingdom will also be fruit of his ministry. The very words that I speak first poured from his heart.

*Now I can begin.*

## Chapter 2

As I BEGIN the story of God's work in my life, I am flooded with wonderful possibilities. Too many to ignore. So, I narrow my search. I think specifically of origins. Not of His calling and His many directions to me along the way. Nor of the road that led to Africa and a harvest of souls beyond my wildest dreams. No, I first look back to Ostpreussen, to a time and place that is no more.

As I look there I feel a mysterious weight in a place near my heart. *What is this weight?* I ask. And then I know. I know that I know. It is the debt I owe to a man who died years before I was born.

How easily I might forget him. He is unknown. His life and ministry uncelebrated. If I remain silent no one will think of his name in connection to mine. But I would know. And I must not fail to tell his story. Each time I step onto a platform and look across a sea of faces eager to hear the gospel, I feel his gaze upon me from heaven's cloud of witnesses. I could not stand ablaze with the Holy Spirit today if this forgotten brother had not carried the flame to the Bonnke family so long ago.



LUDWIG GRAF

I examine the weight that I feel, and I think it must be like the debt a great oak tree owes to the acorn from which it sprang. Or the debt of a giant spruce to the seed that fluttered to the ground and died that it might one day stand tall as a watchtower above the German forest. Yes, this is the debt that I feel. It is the weight of a debt I owe to a man named Luis Graf.

ONE DAY, when I was still a very young man, I studied a chart of our German family tree. It was then I discovered the general ungodliness of our clan. I became amazed that my grandfather and my father stood out as men of faith

in a spiritually barren landscape. I turned to my father, who was a Pentecostal preacher, and asked, “How did God break into the Bonnke family?”

My father’s answer has marked my life and ministry to this day. He told me the story of Luis Graf coming to our village in 1922, 18 years before I was born. Luis was a German-born gunsmith who had immigrated to America as a young man. There, he had amassed a personal fortune through hard work and self-discipline. Following retirement, he returned to his homeland in the power of the Holy Spirit, after experiencing a life-changing baptism with speaking in tongues.

The longer I live the more I see the divine connections between myself and Luis, though I never met the man. So, as I prepare to repeat my father’s story, will you please indulge me as I go beyond his words? I will share details that I have only recently learned about this servant of God.

The story of Luis Graf is more than a personal narrative. It is part of the history of an entire movement of which I am a second-generation preacher. The movement of which I speak is the Pentecostal Movement that began on the Day of Pentecost, blazed anew at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles in 1906, and then exploded across the entire world. Today it is the greatest modern force in Christendom, with more than 600,000,000 adherents in our time. To understand the story of Luis Graf, for me, is to understand this great movement more perfectly, and to see my place within it.

For these reasons I have done more than research. I have let myself enter a time machine. I have gone to a bygone era where I have entered the skin of another evangelist, probing his feelings and thoughts during a time and a place that are not my own. And I have been rewarded. I have come away believing that surely his story passes through the very eye of the needle. It is the first thread in the tapestry of God’s work in my life.

## Chapter 3

AN ARMY OF CLOUDS marched across the sky, dressed in shades of dismal gray. It was early spring in 1922, and the grip of a long winter was not ready to release the East Prussian landscape. A fine new Mercedes touring car eased along a carriage track through the forest. Its engine pattered like the cadence of a military drummer. Mud splattered its silver-white finish as it passed beneath the trees.

The car entered a large clearing. Across a field of deeply furrowed earth a farmer turned to stare. He leaned on his hoe beneath a cap of thick natural wool, his collar turned against the wind. The expression on his face was grim and hostile.

In this German enclave on the Baltic Sea an automobile was a rare sight after World War I. Russian armies had destroyed roads, factories, and cities before being driven back by the Prussian Army. The Great War and its subsequent inflation had depleted not only the bank accounts of the German people; it had gutted their very souls. More than 3,000,000 of Germany's best had perished in four years of fighting. The wounds of war were fresh and bleeding.

The Mercedes driver beneath his jaunty aviator's cap and goggles knew this full well. He was a German-born American recently returned to his homeland after the Great War. He understood that this poor farmer had nothing in common with someone who could afford to ride the countryside in a fancy touring car.

Still, the driver's heart remained tender toward the German people as he drove from one end of this war-torn land to the other. He gave a friendly wave to this farmer, hoping to at least spread some goodwill. Sadly, the man turned back to his hoeing as if he'd received an insult.

The driver turned his attention back to the road. It disappeared over a ridge ahead of him at the far end of the clearing. At that vanishing point, he saw great arms of sailcloth turning against the horizon. As his car topped the ridge,

he could see that the flailing arms belonged to a large windmill working to extract power from the sky. At the base of the windmill sat a flour mill. Beside the flour mill, a large stucco bakery with white smoke rising from brick oven stacks.

The driver salivated. He had a kilometer to cover yet, but he could already taste the tortes, strudels, and hausbrot taken warm from the ovens. He might even stop to stock up on salted pretzels for the road. These, he recalled from childhood, were always folded carefully in a triad representing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. He chuckled to himself. *I'm not in America anymore. I'm in the land where religion has twisted Scripture into a pretzel.*

As he came closer he could see a small village of a dozen or so houses. They lined both sides of the road on the far side of the bakery where the forest bordered the clearing. He figured this small village would provide a welcome stop for a cold traveler who had lost his way. He imagined a warm fire. Perhaps he would pay for a bed for the night. The day was far spent.

He slowed the car and stopped near the bakery door, pulling the hand brake and cutting the engine. Immediately the aroma of fresh bread blessed his senses. He removed his driving gloves and opened the car door. Stepping out, he pulled off his goggles and leather cap. He stood for a while brushing flecks of mud from his cheeks and chin.

Globs of mire fell to the ground from the car's wooden spokes and pneumatic rubber tires. The stylized elegance of the Mercedes' fenders swept away from the main body of the vehicle like the wings of a swan in flight. But this swan had been grounded by the primitive roads of East Prussia.

A number of villagers stepped curiously from their houses to peek at the new arrival and his fancy automobile. The driver wore a fleece-lined leather coat with leather pants and boots. He was cleanly shaven, a distinguished-looking gentleman with wispy gray hair containing stubborn streaks of brown. A man perhaps in his fifties or sixties.

Meanwhile, a perfectly bald man with a full handlebar mustache emerged from the bakery wiping his hands on his apron. He watched the driver, who had now removed his neck scarf and was using it to wipe mud from the door panel. As he worked at it, a hand-painted sign on the metal surface could be seen emerging from beneath the mess. It read: *Jesus is coming soon. Are you ready?* The driver turned, noticing the baker for the first time.

“A good day to you, sir,” he said, extending his hand with an energetic smile. “I am Luis Graf, a servant of God.”

The baker slowly wiped his hands on his apron before taking Luis’ hand. He spoke in a cautious tone.

“I am Gerhard, and we are all Lutherans here.”

“Lutherans will do. Lutherans need Jesus. I was baptized Lutheran myself, but I have since met the Lord and received the second Pentecost. Have you received the second Pentecost?”

The man shook his head. He had no reason to know of such a thing.

“Well, I must tell you about that, because there is nothing more important to the times in which we live, my friend. But first ... I was on my way to Königsberg, and it appears I have lost my way. Can you tell me what village I have found?”

“This is Trunz.”

“Trunz. I’m not sure I’ve heard of it.” He chuckled good-naturedly. “I’m more lost than I knew. But that’s not a problem. I am sure the Lord has led me here to preach the gospel. Hallelujah!”

“I told you we are Lutherans,” the man replied coldly.

In the meantime, a young man on a bicycle had ridden up and was now

inspecting the Mercedes with awe and curiosity. Luis felt a trembling excitement in his chest. He often felt this vibration when the Holy Spirit spoke to his heart. A still small voice told him that bondages would soon be broken in this place. He nodded to the baker.

“I can see that my preaching here will have to wait until you have been made ready to hear it. These are the last days, Gerhard. Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Tell me, is anyone sick in this village?”

“Sick? Are you a doctor, too?”

“No, I am a preacher. But I represent the Great Physician. Let me ask you something, Gerhard. If I pray for someone who is sick and you see them healed, will you believe that I have been sent here to preach the gospel? Will you listen to me?”

Slowly, the baker began to smile and nod.

“Yes. Yes, I would listen.” The baker knew something that Luis could not have known. Everyone in Trunz knew there was someone horribly sick there. And Gerhard was smiling because this naïve American was about to leave the village in utter defeat. He would never have to endure listening to his gospel sermon. “In fact there is someone sick here,” he said. “Someone very sick. Listen.” He pointed toward the village and then cupped his hands behind his ears.

Luis did the same. At first he could hear nothing but the sighing of the wind driving the arms of the windmill above him. Then, after a few moments he heard it.

“AaaaaaAAAAAAArrgh!!”

He felt the hair rise at the back of his neck. The sound came from the far end of the village. It was something he might have imagined on a moonless night in the darkest wood. Perhaps a sound of demonic origin.

His first instinct was to leap into his car and accelerate toward another village. But he held his ground, rebuking the impulse of spiritual cowardice. The cry could be nothing if not the voice of a man. A sick man. Suffering as a man would suffer on a torturer's bench.

“Who is that?”

“His name is August Bonnke,” Gerhard replied quietly. “He is the *Müllermeister* here. He owns this mill and bakery and is the leading man in Trunz. A great man who has been struck down by a terrible disease. Gout or rheumatism or some such thing. No one knows what it truly is. He has suffered for years, and the doctors can do nothing. He cries out in pain night and day.”

“AaaaaaAAAAAAArrgh!”

The terrible cry sounded again, but this time Luis heard it through ears of compassion. The elements of pain, desperation, and rage coming from the man in the house at the far end of the village were sounds translated in his heart by the Holy Spirit. Here was a soul trapped by Satan. A soul Christ had died to set free. Here was a desperate cry to God for deliverance. The kind of cry that would not be held back by pride or stoicism or German will power. This was the kind of cry God never refused. Luis immediately understood that God had arranged for him to become lost on his way to Königsberg for this divine appointment in Trunz.

“I would like very much to pray for Herr Bonnke,” Luis said. “Do you think he would allow me to pray for him?”

The baker shrugged. He turned and called to the young man who was still enthralled with the automobile. “Hermann, come here.”

The young man picked up his bicycle and walked it to where both men stood. “Yes, Gerhard.”

“Hermann, tell your father that a preacher is here to pray for him.”

Hermann looked in puzzlement from one man to the other, obviously surprised, not understanding what was going on. The baker turned again to Luis. “What kind of preacher should we say that you are, Reverend Graf? A Lutheran? A Catholic? Evangelical?”

Luis thought for a moment. “Have you heard of Azusa Street? The revival in America? In Los Angeles?”

Gerhard and the young man shook their heads. They had never heard of it.

“It does not matter. Tell Herr Bonnke that I am a man filled with the Holy Ghost. When I pray for him it will not be like when a priest prays for him. I will pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and his body will be healed. Tell him that.”

The baker turned to young Hermann and nodded that he should go and tell his father these things. The young man jumped on his bicycle and began to ride quickly toward the house at the far end of the village.

THAT YOUNG MAN on the bicycle was Hermann Bonnke, my father, just 17 years of age at the time. The sick man, August Bonnke, was my grandfather.

The Bonnke clan lived in an isolated area of Germany called *Ostpreussen*, or East Prussia. Our enclave had been created by international treaty at the end of World War I. It had been artificially cut off from the rest of Germany, and it faced the Baltic States and the Russian Empire to the east. Along our western border something called a “Polish Corridor” extended from modern Poland to the port city of Danzig on the Baltic Sea. Today, Ostpreussen no longer exists. Following World War II, all Germans were ethnically cleansed from this region.

In this isolated, cold, damp, and forested land in the spring of 1922, however, the flaming torch of the Holy Spirit would soon be passed. Luis Graf carried that fire, the fire of Pentecost that would eventually consume my life.

## Chapter 4

LUIS GRAF ENTERED August Bonnke's household like a blazing lantern in a dismal cavern. Cobwebs of religious doubt and stagnation were swept aside as he moved toward the bed where the *Müllermeister*, "the best man in Trunz," lay writhing in agony. He proclaimed liberty to the downtrodden, healing to the sick, and salvation to the poor needy sinner – Lutheran or otherwise.

He announced that the Holy Spirit had been sent for a demonstration of the power of God that could make all things new. Divine healings were signs and wonders to confirm the preaching of the gospel. He took the sick man by the hand and commanded that he rise and be made whole in the name of Jesus.

August felt a jolt of heaven's power surge through his body. He leapt from his sickbed and stood trembling like a criminal around whom the walls of a prison had just fallen. He looked at his arms and legs as if iron chains had just been struck from them. He felt his once swollen and inflamed joints, and they were renewed to a supple and youthful state. His wife, Marie, who had been at his bedside for years, began to weep.

He began to walk, then to run, then to leap, then to shout. He grabbed his wife and embraced her with tears running freely down his face. A moment ago he had been unable to endure the slightest touch on his skin. Now, he was a man set free of pain. He was free indeed. He could embrace life again. And embrace it he did! A new life of health and vigor had been given to a man condemned by an evil and tormenting disease. August Bonnke would never be the same and would never, until the day he died, fail to testify of what God had done for him that day in Trunz.

IN 1922, LUIS GRAF did not see the great harvest he had hoped to see after the dramatic healing of August Bonnke. Spiritually, Germany was hard and bitter soil. Just two accepted Christ as Savior that day; August and his grateful wife, Marie. Luis led them in the sinner's prayer. Then he laid his hands on them,

## Chapter 5

PEACE AND SAFETY then sudden destruction. It was 1945 in Stablack, East Prussia. World War II was drawing to a close and Hitler's armies were beginning to collapse.

My comfortable childhood was shattered with the scream of artillery shells, explosions, and the drone of Russian planes. I had no idea what had changed. I ran to the window and looked out. The night sky flickered and glowed with the light of burning buildings. To my five-year-old mind, they seemed no more sinister than embers in a fireplace. No more dangerous than candles in a stained-glass window. Searchlights swept the clouds, and tracer bullets flew at the cross-winged silhouettes in the sky.

My mother, Meta, gathered all six of us children around her and began to pray. I snuggled together with Martin, the oldest at eleven years of age, with Gerhard, who was nine, and the twins – Jürgen and Peter – who were six. Mother held little Felicitas on her lap. She was not yet three years old.



Bonnke family 1941

Suddenly the door burst open. A soldier stood there. He was a foot soldier who had been sent by our father, Hermann Bonnke, an officer in the German *Wehrmacht*.

“Why are you still here, Meta?!” he shouted. “It may be too late. Hermann says you must take the children and run! Run now! Run for it!”

Mother sat on the stool of her beloved harmonium, her arms around us. She knew that she had waited too long. Day after day she had longed to see

her husband again. She did not want to leave the secure nest they had made together in the military camp of Stablack. She simply did not want to accept that the end was so near for Germany. Hoping against hope, she had stayed in spite of the menace that grew each day. And now – this!

“Yes, tell Hermann we will go now,” she said, nodding to the soldier.

He turned and disappeared into the night, leaving the door ajar.

“Dear Jesus, preserve us!” Mother whispered.

WEEKS EARLIER, quietly, out of earshot of the children, Hermann Bonnke had told his wife that the war was lost. “World War II will go down as horribly as World War I for Germany. The Allies are invading from the west. Here in the east, Stablack is surrounded. We will make a final stand, but Russia has built an overwhelming force, and they will prevail. We don’t know when they will begin the attack but it could come at any moment.”

He told her that he would have to stay with the troops. He might not be able to return home from the garrison to see her before the end. The army would make a final stand in an effort to allow refugees to flee. When all was lost he would be ordered to pull back to surrender to the British or French in the west, rather than fall into the hands of the hated Soviets.

He instructed her to sew backpacks for all of the children. We would use them to carry food and clothing. We would have to pack now and be prepared to flee at a moment’s notice. It was early spring and we would have to endure temperatures below freezing, day and night.

“You must take the road toward Königsberg then turn south. The road to Danzig is cut off. You will have to cross the Haff. It is the only way.”

The Haff was a frozen bay on the Baltic coast. Even though it was now February, desperate refugees were crossing the melting ice to reach Danzig.

Mother's parents, Ernst and Minna Scheffler, had moved to Danzig soon after the war began. It was a German stronghold in Poland, on the southwestern border of East Prussia. It had an ice-free port to the Baltic Sea.

Hermann knew that the German High Command had begun the rescue operation code-named *Hannibal*.<sup>1</sup> Key military personnel and civilians were being evacuated from Danzig. The newly built German passenger ship, *Wilhelm Gustloff*, was currently in port loading for a voyage to the German city of Kiel.

"This will be your very best escape," he said. "If you can make it to Danzig then your father can book passage for you."

Before leaving that morning, he took Meta's hands in his and together they prayed for our safety. Many times as they prayed my father could be heard speaking in other tongues, pouring his heart out to God in this desperate hour. Then they embraced and said a tearful goodbye. Mother knew this could be the last time any of us ever saw Father alive.

MOTHER HAD NOT ONLY SEWN PACKS for each of us boys, she had made them for each of the children of our neighbor. As the final Russian assault began, and after the warning by the soldier, she quickly called the neighbors to come join us. The time had come to bundle up for a long trip to Grandpa and Grandma's house in Danzig, she said.

Like most Germans, we owned no automobile. We would have to go to the road and try to find a ride on a farmer's wagon. There were eleven children and two mothers in our little refugee group. It was still the dark of night. We could not imagine the fears our mothers were dealing with on this journey. For us boys it sounded like a fun adventure. Something like a winter hayride.

Outside, we hurried toward the main road. In the distance we could see that the way was clogged with wagons, military lorries, and thousands of people on foot, all streaming west toward Königsberg. We joined ourselves to the stream.

Soon Felicitas grew tired. She began to cry. Mother bundled her in a blanket and carried her. In the darkness we did not manage to find a farmer's wagon that had room for our entire group. So we continued to walk until daylight.

We boys soon realized that this trip would be nothing like a hayride. All around people were talking of the atrocities. Russian tanks were coming along the road behind us, and they were running over people. Soldiers were shooting women and children.

“And those are the lucky ones,” an old farmer said grimly, wagging his head as we quickened our pace. We heard the roar of an engine on the road behind us. Mother screamed at us to run into the ditch. All of the people scattered from the roadway.

But it was not a Russian tank. It was a military truck speeding past. A truck loaded with German soldiers from the battle front. They were fleeing for their lives, leaving us to fend for ourselves.

“Where are the Russians?!” screamed a refugee, as the truck rumbled on.

“They have taken Stablack!” shouted a soldier. “Run through the forest! Hide yourselves!”

“We cannot take these children through the forest,” my mother said, as she looked at her frightened neighbor and friend. “A farmer's wagon is no match for the speed of a military tank. What are we to do?”

Another truck came by, and another. My mother was deeply distressed that she had not taken to the road much sooner. She now understood that she had made the danger greater for us by waiting until the last minute. Chaos was the order of the day. The possibility that we could be run over or gunned down by the Russian army was now her first concern.

“The next German troop truck will stop for our children,” Mother said resolutely. “They will see that I am a German mother. They will have mercy.”

The next time a truck sped toward us my mother stood on the side of the roadway hailing the driver. The truck swerved in order to go past. Mother leapt in front of it, and the truck slid to a stop in the mud. The driver cursed angrily.

“We have children! You must give us a ride!” she screamed.

“Frau, this truck is overloaded. I cannot stop.”

With that, the driver put the truck in motion again, leaving us huddled beside the road.

“Someone will stop,” Mother said with determination. “Dear Jesus, move the hearts of these men to take us to safety.”

She attempted to stop the next truck and the next. They did not even slow down in their headlong rush to save their own lives. Mud splattered over us from their spinning tires as they sped past.

As we walked on, Mother hatched another plan. This time she would have our neighbor stand apart with us children. We would remain 15 feet or so behind Mother’s position. If she managed to stop another truck and engage the driver, our neighbor would not wait for his answer. She would begin to toss children one by one into the back of the truck. We would land like eleven sacks of potatoes among the soldiers. Last of all, the women would beg the men to make room also for the children’s mothers, expecting that they would not want to have to care for the children by themselves.

This plan worked. Once inside the troop carrier the soldiers made room for us where formerly there was none. It was standing room only, but they pushed against each other to make a small circle in their midst. Finally, they pulled our mothers into the truck and deposited them on the floor beside us.

The truck revved its engines and began to roll on toward the Haff. Mother sobbed and hugged us, thanking the soldiers again and again for their help. But they refused to look at her. The proud Prussian military had failed to

protect its homeland. All had been lost, and now it was every man for himself. Their eyes darted left and right searching for any sign of Russian troops on the move.

Not long after, the men began to scream and pound their fists against the cab. Someone had spotted a plane approaching. The truck lurched to a stop, and the soldiers spilled out like scrambling ants. Hitting the ground, they raced for cover in a nearby grove of trees.

Mother grabbed her boys and Felicitas as a fighter plane swooped low over the truck and then pitched up into the sky to position itself for a bombing attack. We had no time to leap from the truck or catch up to the soldiers. We were a sitting target.

Mother took us like a mother hen hovering over her chicks. She put us under her body, spreading her coat over us and began to pray.

“Heavenly Father, protect these children. Give us Your angels for a shield. Let no weapon prosper. These are Your children, Lord. Keep them safe, in Jesus’ name.”

She continued to pray as the hum of ballistic shrapnel filled the air, arriving faster than the speed of sound. This was immediately followed by the roar of the fighter’s cannons drowning all other sounds and thoughts.

The truck leapt and shook with the deep impact – *thump! thump! thump!* – of bombs pounding the earth in rapid succession. Explosions of soil burst over us as the plane banked toward the east from whence it had come. We could hear small-arms fire from the grove of trees where the soldiers were hiding. The sound of the plane’s engine died in the distance. Nothing had hit the truck. Nothing at all.

We looked up. Mother shook soil from her cloak. “Thank You, Jesus,” she whispered.

## Chapter 19

I HAD A DREAM that changed everything. I saw a map of Africa. Not South Africa, not Lesotho, not Johannesburg, but the entire continent. In my dream the map began to be splashed and covered with blood. I became alarmed. I thought surely this meant some kind of apocalyptic violence was coming – perhaps a bloody Communist revolution. But the Spirit whispered to me that this was the blood of Jesus that I saw. The terrible violence that spilled His blood happened 2,000 years ago on a cross. Then I heard the words, *Africa shall be saved.*

When I woke up I had a problem. My mind filled with new thoughts that made me uncomfortable. Before going to sleep I had been happy to see 50,000 people enrolled in our correspondence course in Lesotho and further afield. After this dream I could not be happy with that number. I am a German who had struggled with math as a boy. But even I could do these calculations. I had learned that the continent was home to 478,000,000 souls. If it had taken me five years to reach 50 people in Maseru, plus another 50,000 beyond the walls of my church through correspondence, that pace would average 10,010 souls per year. There is nothing wrong with that number but I would have to live to be at least 47,752 years old to see a blood-washed Africa! I thought I had done well. In light of this dream I could see that I was far behind God's agenda.

In my mind I began to discount the dream. Perhaps I had simply eaten bad bananas. The next night the same dream returned. And the next night. And the next. There were not that many bad bananas in all of Maseru. After this fourth night I said to my wife: "Anni, I think that God is trying to tell me something". He now had my full attention. Would I take seriously what He was saying to me? Or would I deny Him? Would I choose to believe God's math? Or would I believe my own?

God had brought me to another crossroad that would define the future. Never mind that I could not compute it. Never mind that my progress so far was a mere drop in the ocean. God had said, *Africa shall be saved.* Would I repeat

His words? Would I begin to speak in faith what I had seen in my dream? Or would I retreat into silence like another corpse in the missionary bone yard?

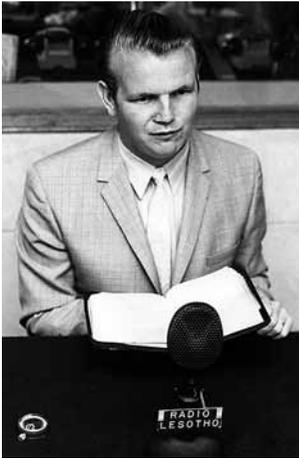
I knew one thing that would keep me silent. It was the fear of what others would say or think. I could hear my critics: “Who are you to say, *Africa shall be saved?*” they would say. This is the cutting question Satan throws at God’s servants in order to silence them – “Who do you think you are?”

I wondered, will some people say again that I am ego-driven if I speak this dream? Yes, they will. Will my words make some people uncomfortable? Absolutely. I sensed that these words would mark me as surely as Joseph’s coat of many colors marked him in the eyes of his jealous brothers. It would be like painting a target on my chest. But then I asked myself, is that a reason to be quiet when God has spoken? No. A thousand times no.

It was not about me. It was about God and His call. Since I was a boy I had obeyed His voice. I was one of His sheep. The Bible tells us that all of His sheep know His voice. But some teach themselves to ignore it. He calls, and they conclude it is bad bananas. This we must not do.

Whenever God spoke to me, even as a child, I made my mind fit His words, not the other way around. God had given me the dream of the blood-washed Africa. Then I would begin to speak it because of who God is, not because of who I am. All that I am, I am by the grace of God. So I have nothing to lose by obeying Him. Rather, I have everything to gain.

I decided that I would begin to say, *Africa shall be saved*, at every opportunity. More than anything else to date, these words began to separate me from my fellow missionaries. Going back to that small tool shed in the garden at the Bible school in Wales, when I had failed at homiletics, it was then I had received from the Lord the calling of an evangelist. Perhaps being directed by the dictates of a missionary board had clouded the full scope of my calling for the past five years. I was not a missionary in the way they had conceived it. As I began to speak His vision everywhere – “Africa shall be saved” – my role was redefined, both in my own eyes and in the eyes of my colleagues. I was no longer a missionary but a missionary-evangelist.



Thrilled to be on radio in Lesotho

I BELIEVE SO STRONGLY that God is the worker of miracles for his people. I believe the signs that followed Jesus as He walked the earth could – and should – be true in our lives today. Jesus said to His disciples, *He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*<sup>49</sup> But I was not seeing miracles in Maseru and it distressed me. In fact, I often confessed to Anni in those days, “My church is a miracle-free zone. What is wrong?”

No matter what I tried, or how I prayed and fasted, the situation did not improve. As time went by, in my heart, I began to blame the people for their lack of faith. If only they had faith, I thought, they would experience wonderful miracles like those seen in the Book of Acts. God had some work to do in my heart. First, He used Richard Ngidi to open my eyes.

Richard was a Zulu evangelist well known in AFM churches throughout South Africa. After preaching he would minister to the people in individual prayer and the miraculous power of God would always manifest. The lame walked, the blind saw, cancers disappeared. If you longed to see the miraculous power of God on display – or so the prevailing wisdom went – book meetings with Richard Ngidi. And so, I did. I had come to know him from attending AFM conferences in South Africa. One day I invited him to minister at my church in Maseru. He accepted and I secretly felt sorry for him. I imagined that the faithless people of my “miracle-free” congregation would ruin his reputation.

In fact the opposite was true. When he ministered in Maseru I saw the power of God as never before. The blind saw, the lame walked, and diseases disappeared. Richard Ngidi trusted the Lord no matter what he faced. He was bold in the face of great problems and he had what I called a reckless faith. In his very loud, deep voice and confident manner he commanded disease and sickness to go from God’s people. It was as if blindfolds dropped from my eyes watching him. I was almost in a state of shock.

I said to Anni, “When God speaks it is not for us to ask questions but to obey the prompting of His voice. His word is above all else. I can see it now! I can see it now! Anni, God’s word is not a question mark, it is an exclamation point! I have been too timid.”



Richard Ngidi and I

My eyes were now open but the truth did not fully possess my heart. After seeing a breakthrough in Maseru with Richard Ngidi I was still timid. Perhaps, I thought, I did not have a gift of faith, or a gift of the working of miracles as described in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

I decided to invite another notable evangelist who had that reputation. I invited a man named John Bosman to come. He was a remarkable Dutch Reformed minister from Pretoria and he was seeing miracles everywhere he preached. Perhaps having another exposure to the miraculous power of God would push me into the place of believing. I ordered our team to begin advertising.

Meanwhile, our printing press in Maseru had become quite busy. Sponsors had stepped forward and helped us build the structure that housed it. In effect, we had our own little publishing company. After getting into trouble for naming it the AFM Press, I asked God what He would have me call it. He dropped the name into my heart that would define the rest of my ministry: Christ for all Nations. Our printing press became CfaN Press. Bernd Wenzel, our professional printer who had joined us earlier, cranked up the CfaN Press to fill all of Maseru with the announcement of John Bosman’s meeting at our church. We were able to coordinate local radio promotion for the meeting as well. We announced to the people that they should come expecting to see the miraculous power of God to heal the sick. Excitement was building.

When the weekend finally arrived our church building was packed out. People were crowded around the outside of the building. Many sick, lame, and blind had been brought because of John’s reputation for healing miracles. We had

never seen this level of excitement for the work of the Lord in Maseru. I sensed that it would be the start of something big. A breakthrough. Bosman's ministry would burst the bonds of religious stagnation and satanic power that seemed to grip the region.

With great pride and pleasure, I introduced John to the crowd. He came to the pulpit and preached. I was not especially impressed with his preaching. Like most of the people there I had come expecting to see him demonstrate his gift of healing. But then something happened that shook me to my toes. After preaching only a modest sermon he turned to me and said, "Close the service."

I gasped. "But not now. All these people have come expecting you to pray for the sick. I cannot possibly close the service."

"Close it."

I was absolutely flattened. "John, how can we do this? I will dismiss the people, but you must promise to return tomorrow and pray for them. Will you let me make that promise?"

"Tell them the sick will be prayed for tomorrow."

With a great deal of confusion I did as he asked me to do. I closed the service, announcing that John would return in the morning to pray for the sick. When I turned, he had already gone to his hotel room.

I slept hardly a wink that night, praying and seeking God in confusion about what John had done. The next morning I got up early and went to pick him up for the meeting. Passing by the church I could not believe my eyes. The house was packed to capacity. Even more people were lined up outside, hoping to get in. The word had gone out that John would pray for the sick. Many more sick had been brought to the meeting site.

I went to the hotel. When I arrived, John was loading his suitcases into a waiting car.

“What is going on?” I asked in total confusion. “Where are you going?”

“Home,” he said.

He could not have done more damage if he had taken a baseball bat and swung it to my midsection. I could hardly breathe. “What do you mean you are going home? I just went by the church. It is already packed with people who have come. You promised to pray for the sick. That is why they have come.”

“I promised that the sick would be prayed for. You promised that I would do the praying.”

“Stay, John. I’ll do the preaching. That’s what I do best. You pray for the sick. That is what you do best. We’ll do this together.”

“Reinhard, the Holy Spirit told me I must go.”



African Messenger in print

With that he got into the car. The driver put it in motion and drove away down the street and then out of my sight. I stood there hoping that this was some kind of joke. I felt like my best friend had just deserted me. I had so looked forward to sharing ministry with him. But when he said the Holy Spirit had told him to go, I had no comeback. That was the entire point of everything. We were to do what the Holy Spirit commanded no matter how it went against our natural senses. I got into my car and drove toward that packed out church of people who had come expecting miracles.

Suddenly faith rose up inside of me, along with what I would call a “holy wrath.” Behind that steering wheel I cried out to the God, “Lord, I am not a big-time evangelist, but I am Your servant also. Now I will go and do the preaching and praying for the sick and You will do the miracles.”