

In this book you'll encounter—through words and images—the uplifting story of George and Hilda Sweeting. You'll discern the providence of God as He brings the Sweetings' lives full circle. And as you read, ask yourself, "Lord, how do you want to bring my life full circle as well?"

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CONTENTS

Introduction	11
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PART ONE: LIVES WELL LIVED

1. God's Hurry	19
2. Early Days	27
3. Doers of the Word	39
4. Moody Student Days	49
5. This Hospital Bed Is My Altar	59
6. Gordon College and New England	67
7. Wedding Bells	75
8. The Importance and Joy of Family	83
9. Churches We Have Served	97
10. Open Doors of Evangelism	111
11. Moody Institute of Science Worldwide	123
12. Thank You, Billy	129

PART TWO: SERVING WITH MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

13. MBI President and Chancellor	139
14. "One Thing I Ask from the Lord"	167

PART THREE: A FRUITFUL LEGACY

15. Unforgettable Quotations and Life-Changing Essays	177
16. Thoughts from Dr. James M. Gray	195
17. A Sampling of Books	199
18. Follow the Way of Love	203

Acknowledgments	213
-----------------	-----

Credits	215
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Stained glass copy of *The Sower* by François Millet

GOD'S HURRY



Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.

—HABAKKUK 2:2

Have you ever thought of God as being in a hurry? Probably not. Too often we think of God as having little or no concern with the passing of time. And yet the message of urgency runs throughout the entire Bible.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He gave an illustration that tells of God's concern for those who have gone astray. While speaking to a crowd of religious leaders, Jesus told the story of a prodigal son (Luke 15). This particular son rebelled against his father, just as we rebel against God, the heavenly Father. The prodigal son insisted on his own way of living. Ultimately, the parable tells how the son wasted his inheritance, recognized his sin, and returned to his father and home.

The father is a picture of God the Father waiting compassionately for His child's return. The Bible tells us that while the son "was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (v. 20).

The father was in a hurry to welcome his son home again!

Luke 15:22–23 abounds with urgency. “The father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.’”

In the same way, God’s call is *urgent*.

On another occasion Jesus said, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4). Even though Jesus is God, He is aware of the limitations of time. Consider these examples from the New Testament.

Although Jesus repeatedly told His disciples of His coming resurrection, they were unprepared. On the resurrection morning, God’s angel appeared and spoke to the women at the tomb. “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead’” (Matt. 28:6–7).

How were the women to go? They were to go “quickly”! Mary Magdalene and the other women told Peter and John, and they ran together to the sepulcher (John 20:4).

When the angel of the Lord directed Philip to witness to the Ethiopian eunuch, “Philip *ran* to him” (see Acts 8:30). Paul urges all Christians to make “the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16). He also encouraged Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you” (2 Tim. 1:6).

In the last book of the Bible, the apostle John calls for urgency, revealing Jesus’ warning: “I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (Rev. 3:11).

In his classic *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer pointedly comments, “Whatever we may believe about election, the fact remains that [all] without Christ are lost, and going to hell. ‘Except you repent,’ said our Lord to the crowd, ‘ye shall all perish.’ And we who

are Christ's are sent to tell them of the One—the only One—who can save them from perishing. Is not their need urgent? If it is, does that not make evangelism a matter of urgency for us?”¹

The words of instruction and warning in Revelation 3:11 are followed with an illustration of a church that had lost its urgency. An alarm is sounded. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:15–16).

Jesus is saying, “Wake up! And warm up!”

A Sober Reminder

As teenagers, Hilda and I loved attending the annual missionary rally in the famous Carnegie Hall. The event was sponsored by Nyack Missionary College in Nyack, New York. The occasion was presented each February 15.

The program was informative, colorful, and exciting. The theme was “Reaching the Whole World with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Students would dress in the clothing of countries all around the world. The music included great missionary gospel songs. Testimonies conveyed passion and urgency. The service finished with attendees singing the gospel hymn “O Zion, Haste.” This hymn challenged us to give ourselves fully to world evangelization.

The entire event was unforgettable, and the message of urgency remained with us for a lifetime.

A serious problem facing the church today is the number of Christians who rarely share their faith. At times, it seems as though some have a mild case of Christianity, as though they've been vaccinated against the real thing! In a world on fire, being lukewarm is an offense to God.

1. J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 98.

O Zion, Haste

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Isa. 52:7; Mt. 28:19-20

1. O Zi - on, haste, thy mis - sion high ful - fill - ing, To tell to all the
 2. Be - hold how man - y thou - sands still are ly - ing, Bound in the dark - some
 3. Pro - claim to eve - ry peo - ple, tongue, and na - tion That God, in whom they
 4. Give of thy sons to bear the mes - sage glo - rious; Give of thy wealth to

world that God is light; That He who made all na - tions is not will - ing
 pris - on house of sin; With none to tell them of the Sav - ior's dy - ing.
 live and move, is love; Tell how He stooped to save His lost cre - a - tion;
 speed them on their way; Pour out thy soul for them in prayer vic - tor - ious;

One soul should per - ish, lost in shades of night.
 Or of the life He died for them to win. Pub - lish glad tid - ings,
 And died on earth that we might live a - bove.
 And all thou spend - est Je - sus will re - pay.

tid - ings of peace; Tid - ings of Je - sus, re - demp - tion and re - lease.

WORDS: Mary A. Thompson, 1868; *ref.*, 1871; *alt.* MUSIC: "Tidings"; James Walch, 1875. Public Domain.

What happened 1,200 years ago to the church in Africa? It failed to be a mission force and became a mission field. What happened to the church in Russia a century ago? Saltless and lightless, it became useless. Having no urgency, the church drifted toward death.

An assessment is made. The problem with the church of Laodicea is found in two phrases: "You say" and "you do not realize" (Rev. 3:17). Those are not pretty words, and there's no way to make them attractive. "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and

naked.” That’s not an opinion of an individual or a committee, but the assessment of the all-knowing God!

Action is required. “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (Rev. 3:19–20).

“Be earnest.” *Earnest* means fervent, passionate, warm, and spirit-directed.

“You lack urgency,” Jesus is saying, “You show little compassion. It’s time to repent!”

Commenting on the word “repent,” the nineteenth-century Scottish clergyman Alexander MacLaren told his congregation that in repentance “there must be a lowly consciousness of sin, a clear vision of my past shortcomings, an abhorrence of these, and, joined with that, a resolute act of mind and heart beginning a new course [and] a change of purpose.”²

In other words, repentance means more than just feeling bad about the past; real repentance *leads to a new commitment*.

Here’s an apt quote attributed to Archbishop William Temple: “When people complain that the church should do something, they often mean that the pastor should say something.” Our sin is that we talk too much, and do too little.

It’s time that we who are the church of Jesus convey a spirit of urgency!



These stairs in the original building at 153 Institute Place led past the stained-glass depiction of François Millet’s *The Sower*. D. L. Moody likely selected this painting because it calls for urgency.

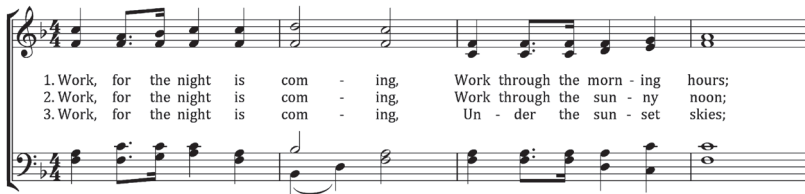
2. Alexander MacLaren, *Alexander MacLaren’s Expositions of Holy Scripture*, “Commentary on Revelation 3,” public domain, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/mac/revelation-3.html>. Alexander MacLaren lived from 1826–1910.

I fondly remember when the circus came to town when I was a child. I would be excited by the sights and sounds. The clowns made me laugh, and the animals caused my heart to skip a beat.

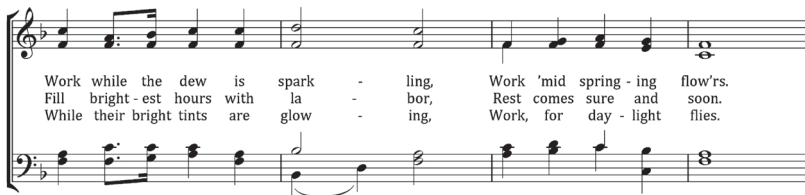
Every circus had a person who was called “a barker.” The barker was the one who “barked out” as loudly as possible what each sideshow had to offer. Energetically, he’d call out, “Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!” as he led the attenders to a ringside seat.

Work, for the Night Is Coming

As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. John 9:4 (NIV)



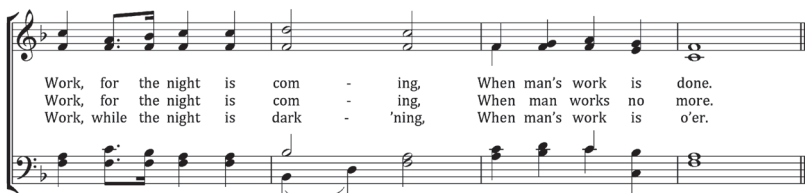
1. Work, for the night is com - ing, Work through the morn - ing hours;
 2. Work, for the night is com - ing, Work through the sun - ny noon;
 3. Work, for the night is com - ing, Un - der the sun - set skies;



Work while the dew is spark - ling, Work 'mid spring - ing flow'rs.
 Fill bright - est hours with la - bor, Rest comes sure and soon.
 While their bright tints are glow - ing, Work, for day - light flies.



Work when the day grows bright - er, Work in the glow - ing sun;
 Give eve - ry fly - ing min - ute Some - thing to keep in store;
 Work till the last beam fad - eth, Fad - eth to shine no more;



Work, for the night is com - ing, When man's work is done.
 Work, for the night is com - ing, When man works no more.
 Work, while the night is dark - 'ning, When man's work is o'er.

WORDS: Anna L. Coghill, 1854; alt. by Lowell Mason, 1864. MUSIC: "Work Song"; L. M., 1864. Public Domain.

At times on a sleepless night, after quoting favorite Bible verses and spending time in prayer, I hear God calling, “Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! There’s a harvest to reap and souls to save!” The call is urgent—not to a passing sideshow, but to life’s main event!

Right now, the Spirit of God is calling, “Stir up your gift! Redeem the time! Work while it is still day!”

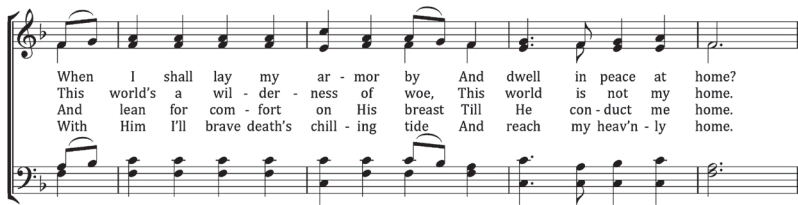
Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!

We'll Work till Jesus Comes

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Gal. 6:9 (NIV)



1. O land of rest, for thee I sigh! When will the mo - ment come
 2. No tran - quil joys on earth I know, No peace - ful, shel - t'ring dome;
 3. To Je - sus Christ I fled for rest; He bade me cease to roam;
 4. I sought at once my Sav - ior's side; No more my steps shall roam;



When I shall lay my ar - mor by And dwell in peace at home?
 This world's a wil - der - ness on woe, This world is not my home.
 And lean for com - fort on His breast Till He con - duct me home.
 With Him I'll brave death's chill - ing tide And reach my heav'n - ly home.

Refrain



We'll work We'll work till Je - sus comes, We'll work We'll work till Je - sus comes,



We'll work We'll work till Je - sus comes, And we'll be gath - ered home.

WORDS: Elizabeth K. Mills, pub.1837. MUSIC: "O Land of Rest"; William Miller, pub.1859. Public Domain.



left to right: Margaret Hilda, Mother Schnell, Father Schnell, Louise, Betty

EARLY DAYS



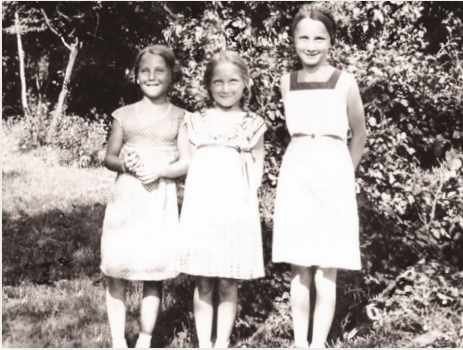
He took the children in his arms, placed his hands
on them and blessed them.

—MARK 10:16

Hilda and I were both blessed with loving families and happy childhoods.



The Schnell's home and bakery, Fair Lawn, New Jersey, in the 1930s



The three beautiful Schnell sisters

My wife's first name is Margaret. Her birth certificate reads Margaret Hildagard Schnell. However, when she was born, a cousin from Germany was living with the Schnell family, and her name was Margaret. Because of this, my wife was called by Hilda, her middle name. She actually prefers Margaret, though. Occasionally when broadcasting, I would speak of my wife, Hilda, and at other times I would speak of my wife, Margaret. That is, until a listener asked if I had two wives. I quickly corrected that!



Margaret Hilda



This quaint building was Hilda's first school, where she attended grades 1 through 4.



Hilda and some friends

Hilda liked school. The school where she went for the first four grades was tastefully equipped, and the teachers were like extended family, especially “Miss Ada.” The outside grounds included a maypole, swings, and green lawns. It was a place of peaceful and happy memories. Hilda remembers May Day and going around the maypole with the other girls, “dressed in our pretty dresses, waving streamers, and dancing.”

Hilda and her friends enjoyed playing pick-up sticks, double Dutch jump rope, playing tiddlywinks (which she still has!), jacks, and lotto. They played Flinch, the only card game allowed. In the summer, the town

would block off a street for a few nights, allowing the kids to roller skate in the street without cars.

Hilda and her sisters enjoyed their pet canary. In the bakery attached to their house, their father kept cats, but they were more working cats to keep the bakery free



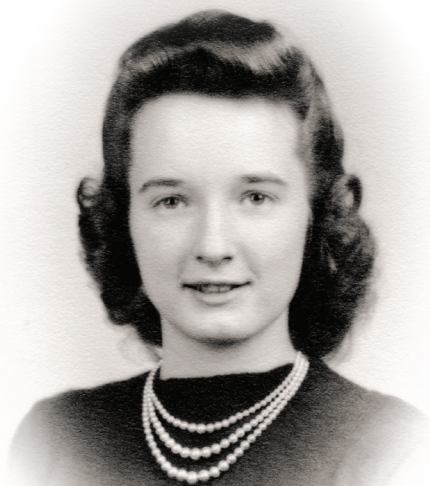
Mom and Dad Schnell

of pests than pets. However, their neighbor had pet rabbits, which Hilda named. It was tough when these rabbits ended up in the stew pot!

“I grew up in a close, loving, Christian family,” Hilda says. “It is not possible to convey all my love and gratitude for both my father and mother. They consistently did all they could do to encourage us to follow the Lord Jesus.”



Hilda, grade school graduation, Roosevelt School, Fair Lawn, New Jersey



Hilda, Eastside High School, 1944

Hilda and I met in our local church, Hawthorne Gospel Church, during our early teens. Yes, we were young! Our dating was primarily church-related. However, I admit to sometimes cutting my last class—chemistry—in high school to meet Hilda. Who could blame me? Our mode of transportation in the 1940s



Hilda and George hanging out at a Sunday school picnic

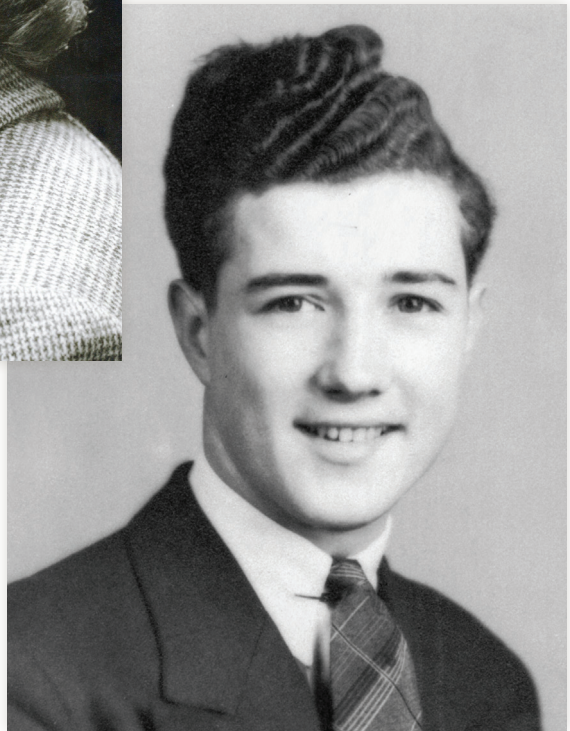
was primarily the bus. Both of us were committed to Jesus and a life of Christian service.

When asked her first impressions of her future husband, Hilda said, “I was attracted to him because of his smile, I liked the twinkle in his eyes, and I liked his curly hair. But the main thing was that I knew

his one goal before anything else was to serve the Lord in any and everything he did. We have been blessed to serve the Lord and the Lord’s people all these years of our marriage.”



Hilda



“I wish I had that hair now!”

My father and Hilda's father both served and fought in World War I, though on opposite sides of the conflict. Hilda's father served in the German army, and mine in the British army. Both of our fathers fought in Ypres and Lille in Belgium. Shortly after the war, our fathers both became followers of Christ. Both families immigrated to the United States in 1923. Both families settled in the northern section of New Jersey, three miles apart. And eventually, both families decided to worship at the same church.



Hilda's father in the German army



George's father with Scotland's Royal Engineers



In the European tradition, Mr. and Mrs. William Sweeting let young George's hair grow until he was approximately four years old.



George's father and mother on their wedding day, 1921

"We had a lot of picnics," Hilda remembers. "At the picnics we often had a swing tied to a limb on a great big, strong tree. We raced with potato sacks. We continued the tradition of picnics throughout our whole lives, hosting a Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day picnic each summer for over 50 years. We gathered friends and family for games, swimming, a cookout, and fellowship together."



"How do you like my car?"

Hilda remembers, “Twice as a child, I went on a ship with my mother to visit my grandmother, then in her late 80s, in Germany. I’d sit and have breakfast with her every morning. It was a sweet blessing to spend time with her. Our granddaughter Julianna Margaret is named after her.”



George, Norman, Anna, Mary, Bill



George's father's family in Scotland: front row: Grandma, Bob, Jean, Grandfather. Top row: John, Polly, George's father, Martha, Edward



1908-1909: George's mother is in the white blouse in center of the third row. Students were never absent, never late to school.



The Sweeting family, 1940: back row: Norman, William, Anne, George. Front row: Martha, Mrs. Mary Sweeting, Mr. William Sweeting, Mary



George's birth home and school, 1924



103 Church Street, Haledon, New Jersey

My childhood home was located in Haledon, New Jersey, a suburban town of a few thousand people. I lived on Church Street from the age of one to seventeen, when I left home to be a student at Moody.

Our home bordered on the woods, a stream, and a lake, which exposed us to the joys of nature. We picked wild berries each summer, mimicked the bird calls, and played with crawfish. We loved God's creation!



Mary Irving Sweeting



William Sweeting

"My dad played the concertina.
He often played at churches, missions,
events, and other Christian gatherings."



George's mother Mary; his sisters Ann, Mary, Martha

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