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Bishop of Coudersport

THE LETTER THAT MORNING IN JULY 1943 started Evelyn and me on an exciting journey with God. We did not know it then, but there would be wonderful surprises, bushels of joy, some disappointments and just enough heart-aches for God to weave His beautiful pattern of victory and blessing into our lives.

Just weeks before, I had graduated from A.B. Simpson's Missionary Training Institute (now Nyack College) with a major in Missions. My fiancée, Evelyn Watson, who had graduated the year before, was already putting theory into practice at the Eighth Avenue Day Nursery in Newark, New Jersey. Remuneration was minimal but the provision of room and board made it an attractive place for young women to fulfill the requirements of The Christian and Missionary Alliance for home service prior to going overseas. The rigors of city life, coupled with the stern discipline of Miss Edith Morgan, the director of the nursery, soon weeded out all who maintained only a romanticized view of missions.

I am still not sure whether Edith Morgan was prepared for Evelyn's arrival! The dinner hour

was customarily a somber occasion with minimal scintillating conversation—that is, until Evelyn arrived. It wasn't long until "Miss Irrepressible" had everything rolling in high gear, and fun and laughter took over. Even Edith Morgan seemed to welcome this intrusion into the tranquility of her home, for months later she not only insisted that we use the nursery facilities for our wedding reception, but she and her staff also did the decorating. In fact, until her death, Edith Morgan was a faithful prayer partner while we served in China.

I hastily tore open the envelope to see what Rev. E.C. Anderson, superintendent of the Western Pennsylvania District, had to say in reply to my application for a pastorate. Only 21 years of age, I had been entertaining visions of a beautiful church building with a sizable congregation. Surely there was some challenging place for me to begin making use of all the knowledge of homiletics and theology I'd gained at Nyack.

"I am sorry to say there are no vacant churches for you to candidate in at this time." I could hardly believe my eyes. No place to serve? Why then had he encouraged me to apply to his district when he spoke in chapel at Nyack only a few months earlier? I laid the letter down.

"Read on. Finish the letter," God seemed to say. "Maybe you've jumped to a wrong conclusion." Reading further, I came to the second surprise—no churches were open, but the district was planning to begin new churches in several

towns in the northeastern sector. I could have a whole town! I could be the "Bishop of Couder-sport!"

The next three days were spent in fasting and prayer, my first experience at discovering God's will in this way. During those three days, God impressed Scripture after Scripture upon my mind. Mr. Anderson had promised \$25 a month subsidy for one year for the rent of a storefront meeting place. My personal needs would be God's part, he said, and if God was directing the move, then He would supply all my needs. As an afterthought he added, "Good soldiers are willing to endure hardness for Jesus' sake!"

That sounded like a challenge to me. With mounting enthusiasm and a firm conviction that God had opened a door of service to me, I did what was to become a lifelong pattern: I accepted the challenge. Flushed with excitement, I wrote Evelyn a letter and asked her to set our wedding date for August since I would start the new church in September.

An eternity passed as I waited for her response. Would she agree to go to Coudersport with no assurance of a roof over her head and no money for support? Would she give up the spartan security of the nursery for the biggest mountain we had ever dreamed of climbing?

When her reply finally arrived, it was a big "Yes." And she added, "If you know God is leading you to do this, then I will trust Him, too. I will go anywhere He leads."

We were married in the Alliance church in Newark, New Jersey on August 14, 1943. One week later, we got off the Greyhound bus at 5 p.m. in Coudersport with two suitcases, \$200 and an enormous amount of confidence in the God who had called us to plant a church.

Rev. James Steele, a pastor from neighboring Emporium, was there to meet us. Standing on the corner, we could see all of Coudersport's business district—two blocks of stores in each direction. Pastor Steele led us to a vacant store and said, "I think this will make a good location for the church. It's the best available place in town. We'll come back on Monday to make rental arrangements."

As we were climbing into his car a woman approached us. Jim Steele beamed from ear to ear as he introduced us as the new pastor and wife of the Alliance church in Coudersport. "Where are you going to live?" she asked.

"We don't know yet; God hasn't told us."

The lady's eyes sparkled as she replied, "How would you like to rent my home for the next two months while I am in Florida? You can have it fully furnished for \$10 a month." Would we like to! We hadn't been in Coudersport more than 30 minutes and God had already provided a home for us.

Monday we moved in.