



Cambodian street seller, Haylee Freudigmann

READY AND WILLING

As those who lived through the devastating bushfires in Victoria on February 2009 will know, there is amazing destructive power in the spreading flame of an Australian bushfire. It can change lives forever and impact generations to come. The book of Acts records for us a series of stories of another spreading flame. But for the spreading flame in Acts the consequences were very positive, life-transforming and also impacting for generations to come. Acts has often been called the Acts of the Apostles. It would be a mouthful, but it could more helpfully be called ...

‘The Acts of the Holy Spirit through ordinary people who were ready and willing for God to use them.’

In Acts 8, 9 and 10 we find three stories in which there is evidence of a **‘Gracious God’**, a **‘seeking soul’** and a **‘willing worker’**. When the willing worker is alert and ready to respond to the prompting of God, who is always gracious, there is a really helpful interaction with a seeking soul who is trying to make sense of life and explore what it means to have faith in God. More than that, we find doors opening to places such as Africa and Europe and to people who had previously not known about Jesus.

Check the stories ...

In **Acts 8:26-38**, an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in the service of the Queen of Ethiopia, is returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship God. He had been able to access a copy of the scroll of Isaiah and he is reading for more understanding. He is a seeking soul in whom the Spirit of Gracious God had already been working. Gracious God loves to respond to those who authentically seek and worship Him and He often looks for a worker who is ready and willing. Philip fits the description of a willing worker and a ‘tap on the shoulder’ or a prompting of God’s Spirit sends Philip across to the desert road to connect with the Ethiopian. The willing worker needs to be ready to step

out of his comfort zone and into the zone of the unknown, where God often does his greatest work! Philip listened and asked a good question. At the Ethiopian’s invitation, Philip sat with him, started with what he was reading and shared the good news of Jesus... and the door to Africa opened to the Gospel forever!

In **Acts 9:1-19** Saul, ‘a seeking soul’, although it was hard to tell, was on the road to Damascus when Gracious God ‘zapped’ him. Saul asked two great questions: ‘Who are you, Lord?’ and ‘What do you want me to do?’ (see also Acts 22:9,10). Gracious God looked for a willing worker and Ananias, after a lively and honest dialogue with God, was ready and willing to step out of his comfort zone and go across the road to Straight Street. He greeted Saul as ‘Brother Saul’ and shared the good news of Jesus. Saul was converted, his eyes opened to new perspectives and his life filled with the Spirit of God... and the apostle to the Gentile nations, to their kings and to the people of Israel was on his way! Note he was helped on his way by another willing worker, named Barnabas (see Acts 9:27), who also had to step out of his comfort zone. That is when God is often able to do his greatest work.

In Acts **10:1-48**, Cornelius and his family are devout God-fearers – a family of seeking souls. Cornelius is a centurion in a Roman regiment. He was in charge of 100 soldiers, probably fiercely loyal and a good leader. His generosity and regular prayers were offerings that Gracious God accepted and to which he was pleased to respond. In this story the seeking soul had a vision. As well, Peter who became the willing worker also had a vision. In his vision, Peter dialogues with God about what is ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’. Gracious God delights to use surprising ways to encourage, spark or mobilise us out of our traditional, religious and racial comfort zones to move across regions. When Peter and Cornelius met, Peter made sure that there was



Fields of Thailand, Chris Barnden

an understanding that they were fellow travellers and briefly confessed to his own journey. He then gently invites Cornelius to share his journey which issues in a request for Peter to share the good news of Jesus.

Gracious God is always gracious! He is not willing that anybody should miss out on life! There are always people who are seeking to know God or even if there is a God. God's Spirit is always at work in the world and in the lives of men and women and young people to convict and convince them of the need for a relationship with God and a life purpose sourced and fuelled by him. God's promise is that if people seek him with all their heart they will find him (see Jeremiah 29:13). God is always gracious and there are always seeking souls. Therefore Gracious God is always on the lookout for willing workers whose hearts are completely His, whose radars are alert to His prompting and who are willing to step out of their comfort zones. He is on the lookout for those willing to cross the road, the region, the world to connect and travel with seeking souls. On the journey the workers have the privilege of loving them into taking Jesus seriously, asking good questions, sharing some of their own journey and, when appropriate, sharing the good news of Jesus. God often does His best work when we are out of comfort zones and needing to trust Him.

What is it that helps us to be willing workers?

- Let God know you are available... i.e. "Lord, the answer will always be 'Yes' even though I may need some clarity about the details."
- Listen to the Spirit's prompting each day.
- Deal with fears and be willing to walk across a room, a street, a city, a nation or the world.
- Build friendships, show hospitality, serve, care, listen to the stories of others.
- Live a credible life.
- Be willing to share your story and/or introduce Jesus' story, but do it respectfully and gently.

May our response be like Isaiah: 'Here am I Lord. Send me.' And like Mary: 'I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.'

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