

A Man Named Gus

By Jennifer Klitzke

From a naked boy born in the bush of Africa to a highly decorated ambassador of goodwill, God can do abundantly more than we can ask or even imagine when we surrender our life to Him. Meet this man named Gus who lives life to the full and blesses everyone along the way. Thousands of smiling faces will one day celebrate in eternity with Gus – thanks to his faithfulness to God.

Here I am a white, middle-class woman from the suburbs sitting around a table of four listening intently to a joyful, 77-year-old black man from Liberia as he talked about life. His name is Gus. Many refer to him as Bishop Augustus Marweih. Both names describe him well. He is highly educated with a PhD, world-renown in his ministry of reconciliation, and is a pastor, dignitary, ambassador of goodwill, and peacemaker. But I am overcome by his humble and meek demeanor — it seems to overshadow his esteemed accomplishments. Gus strikes me as a living, breathing, modern-day manifestation of the Beatitudes that Jesus taught us in Matthew 5.

In 1925, his life begins stark naked out of the bush of a native African village where his mother gave birth to him in a field where she worked. As he grew up, his mother referred to this little black boy as the “white sheep” of her family — a hopelessly incorrigible child. So rambunctious and rebellious, not even the anguishing punishment of pinning him down to pour pepper soup into his nose, which burned for hours, could change his defiant ways.

Then one day, 12-year-old Gus overheard a villager speak of his travels to the coast where he met Christians “who talked to God and God talked back”. Intrigued with such a notion, Gus departed into the jungle to converse with God each day.

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Making a joyful noise

Two years later, Gus move to another village with his cousin’s family and was elated to learn that Christians lived there. He remembered the day he overheard the story about people “who talked to God and God talked back”. It was in this village where Gus met Christians firsthand and they couldn’t stop talking about Jesus.

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At 14 years of age, Gus joyfully opened wide his heart and surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. What years of pepper soup could not do, Christ did in an instant! Gus became infused with the supernatural love

and life of God. That power transformed him from a naughty, naked boy from the bush into a promising young man with an unrelenting zeal to learn, live freely, and love richly.

Spiritual mentor

Soon after, Gus met Mother Eliza Davis-George — an inspiring American missionary who journeyed through the jungles of Africa to befriend tribal people. Mother George took Gus under her wing and encouraged him to pursue God at all cost. She lived that way herself. Mother George was the child of a slave family who found her freedom in Christ. She didn’t keep this freedom for herself but gave sacrificially. She counted the cost before surrendering her life to Christ and chose to store her treasures in heaven. Years later Mother George designated Gus as heir to her ministry.

When Gus was 15 years of age, he longed to go to school but was required to wear clothes — something he never owned. His cousin found a booba (a woman’s blouse) and gave it to Gus as cover. He didn’t mind wearing a woman’s blouse because the opportunity to learn crowded out any notion of what others might think. After all, this booba was all it took for him to begin his education and ignite his passion for learning.

Fervent prayers

On one trip back to America, Mother George took three African girls with her to go to school. An education in America was something reserved for the elite of the elite — certainly not a poor black boy from the bush. But Gus didn’t let that discourage him. He brought his request to God in prayer for the opportunity to travel to America for an education. He tightly held this prayer between himself and God. He didn’t breathe a word of it to anyone because he believed, with everything in him, that God would answer this prayer. Gus included this request in his daily dialogue with God. Soon a year passed. Two years passed. Three years passed. Four years passed. Gus continued to tug on the robe of his Father in Heaven. He persevered in prayer for the opportunity to go to America for an education.

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Bishop Augustus “Gus” Marweih

“When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. Then He began to speak, and taught them, saying: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’”

—Matthew 5

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Four and a half years passed and Mother George announced that she would be taking a boy back with her for an education in America — only it wasn't Gus. She chose a fine, young man from an elite family. "A well deserved choice," Gus even agreed.

What happened next was nothing short of a miracle. The congregation gathered for a prayer meeting and God moved in the hearts of the members with a strong impression to recommend Gus go to America in place of the other young man. Plucked out of Africa by the hand of God, this poor, black boy from the bush was on his way to America for an education.

Years later, Gus graduated from Simpson College with a Bachelor's Degree and Golden Gate Seminary, and then he met Othelia through Mother George. Gus and Othelia dated for one month and then married. Today, they celebrate nearly 50 years of marriage and have raised 38 children, 32 of which are adopted.

Returning to Liberia

Gus realized that what God had blessed him with wasn't meant for him to keep for himself but to share with others. His heart was pierced for his people in Liberia to know God, grow in God, and become educated for a better life.

In December of 1960, Gus left America and returned to Liberia to share the Good News with the people of the remote villages in Africa. At the same time, he was approached by Dr. William R. Tolbet, the Vice President of Liberia, and asked to serve as the Principal of the first accredited college in Monrovia. Perplexed with what to do — serve God on the mission field or honor the Vice President's request — Gus consorted with Mother George. She urged Gus to accept Dr. Tolbet's request. So this college grad and newlywed became the first Principal of Rich University.

Four and a half years passed. Gus was promoted to Dean of the college, which surely provided a good salary and benefits to raise his growing family. He rubbed shoulders with the well-to-do and was surrounded with the comforts of a modern city.

"How much better can life get?" I wondered. "God has surely blessed his life."

It all seemed so perfect. Then one night, as Gus was peacefully sleeping in a comfortable bed, God



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abruptly woke him up and asked him to leave his job as Dean and return to the remote villages in Africa and share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Without hesitation, Gus said, "yes, of course," and danced with jubilation.

Early the next morning, Gus met with Dr. Tolbet to announce his resignation. The Vice President said firmly, "If God has called you to bring the Gospel to the remote villages of Liberia, who am I to stop you."

Gus walked away from a steady paycheck, the comforts of a modern city, and walked 150 miles through the jungle. He walked with a heavy load carried on his head, joy in his heart, and a song of praise on his lips.

"Wow, his unwavering obedience to God is uncanny," I thought. "Coming into this world with nothing, then having it all — an education in America, a high-profile job with good pay and benefits, rubbing shoulders with the elite-of-the-elite, then walking away from it all without a second thought to honor God. How amazing!"

I wondered, "If I were in his shoes, would I have done that?" If I knew for certain it was God asking such a thing, I would have. But I most likely wouldn't dance with jubilation, rather tremble with trepidation.

Then it occurred to me, "If God can transform a naughty, naked boy from the bush of Africa, what might God do through my life?" I thought about the many ways God has blessed my life and wondered how could I extend these blessings

to others: my talents, the things I love to do, those people God has placed in my path. In noticing how meaningful and enriching Gus's life is, earthly treasures that rust away certainly pale in comparison to pouring the juices of my life into loving richly and living to store up treasures in heaven for eternity.

To God, Gus chose the best possible life.

For seventeen years, he planted over 100 churches in the jungles of Liberia. He founded the Association of the Independent Churches of Africa (AICA), a group of 170 indigenous churches in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Guinea. He also founded the Ministry of Hope, which leads people to Christ and encourages them to lead richer, more productive and wholesome lives. What God gave Gus, he has faithfully shared with everyone along the way.

Civil War

In 1988 when Civil War broke out in Liberia, Gus was a neutral national figure. He prayed with anyone who asked — including high-profile leaders in Liberia during the war. This willingness to pray with certain individuals was viewed by some as an affiliation and put him and his family at great risk. They were urged to move to America in 1990.

Since in America, Gus continues to work with Liberians back home by running the Agency for Holistic Evangelism And Development (AHEAD). It operates various programs to empower Liberian refugees in economic development, self-sustainability, education, healthcare, and Christian evangelism. AHEAD includes the West Africa College of Sustainable Development and the Child Feeding Center on the Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana. When the Liberian refugees return to their country, the education they received will help them develop self-sustained communities.

This man named Gus carries his humble beginnings with him even today as a highly decorated dignitary that sits on some of the highest councils in the world. His heart for the people of Liberia is recognized world-wide: his deep commitment to the social, cultural and economic liberation of his people is the trademark of the mission God has called him to.

After meeting Gus, now I know what Dallas Willard and Todd Hunter mean when they say surrendering our lives to God is "the best possible life". Gus chose the best possible life. ■

Bishop Augustus "Gus" Marweih is one of the indigenous partners Open Door has sponsored for the last 15 years. Meet other missionaries at upcoming Global Gatherings. See page 7 for details.

To learn more about Bishop Augustus Marweih's work with AHEAD, see www.ahead-ori.org



Gus, pictured in the center, with Liberians in West Africa