

A Lamp For Every Corner

By: Mary James

It is understandably difficult for many of us to accept menial duties for any prolonged period of time, even when we know that the common or even lowly tasks before us come through the hand of God. Many of the Lord's children labor dutifully and painstakingly for interminably long periods in bleak, dismal and lonely places. They nurse the sick, feed the impoverished, and bring loving care to the disadvantaged. Yet they cast the bright light of God's love and grace in wretched corners and darkened pathways. And they manage to do all this with joy in their hearts, laughter in their spirits, and determination in their missions, regardless of their seeming insignificance and often with no requirements for compensation or recognition.

Many corners go unlighted. The message, the angelic chord, the loving touch do not reach these places. The huddled masses, hungry for inspiration, go neglected. Why do we fail to reach these forgotten souls?

We do not want to look into the dark corners. We yearn to boast about all that God is doing in our lives and the obvious favor that WE have received from the Creator (and, of course, from man). We seek crowds to please, audiences jumping to their feet in applause and immediate gratification. When we receive it, we believe we have carried the message and fulfilled our missions. But the dark corners still remain unlighted.

When I attended my first Inspirational Country Music Week and awards show in 2005, my heart and mind were full of anticipation and excitement. That year, the show was at the historic Ryman auditorium in Nashville, and like a child at Disneyland, I was awestruck. Deep down inside, I had long dreamed of being one of those artists on the stage, singin' on TV for Jesus!

But the Lord clearly had a different plan for me, and more importantly, for my character. Object lesson after object lesson was presented as I embarked on this path known as "music ministry."

Several years before that first ICM week, the Lord had placed me on a worship team at a mega church, where we led the congregation in worship each weekend. Never did we tell anyone our names from the stage. Drawing any attention to individual performers was verboten among that particular congregation of worshippers. Their devotion was totally focused on Jesus.

In retrospect, those were some of the most precious times of my ministry. I had no agenda. At the same time, a struggle had begun deep within me between selfishness and selflessness. I often wondered if a line was drawn somewhere in

the sand that would tell me if I was crossing from truly abandoned, selfless service to Christ and moving into a realm of selfish ambition and pridefulness.

In His faithfulness, God led me through door after door. Sometimes the stages were large; sometimes tiny. In embarrassing honesty, I often dreaded the small settings where I would miss the grandeur of a big stage, great sound and dynamic lighting. It was easy to boast when I had a wealth of prestigious engagements, but I cringed inside when I was forced to mention events that were less than notable.

I began to experience a practice of "counting" that sometimes occurs among ministry professionals. How many people were there? How many accepted Jesus? How many CDs did I sell? How big was the offering? And the counting continued. My little bubble of serving for the sheer sake of artistry and love burst with a loud POW!

During one particular season of discouragement, I received an unexpected note from a friend. In it were these words: "When John was in the wilderness, he preached every day, even when no one was there, yet God brought the people to the wilderness to hear the message. This now I pray for you: sing wherever you find yourself and light up with passion for the loving Savior of your soul. No matter what, whether people come to the wilderness to hear you or He places you on the greatest stage, sing because of love."

Whether our audience involves one or five thousand, it is important for us to keep our perspective and realize that we have been destined by our Creator to fulfill roles that have an eternal impact and reach far beyond anything we can measure. God will place each of us exactly where He wants us at the right time and place. Although we may believe that we can help speed up the process, we will inevitably find that conditions will not be ideal until our Lord paves the way for our ministries.

You are precious and beloved by the Lord. Remember to trust the hand of the Creator and to be faithful in your unique assignment. This following passage from F.B Meyer's *The Directory Of The Devout Life* is one that I pass on to my friends from time to time. I pray that it ministers to you as it has to me.

"With infinite care and forethought, God has chosen the very place in which you can do your best work for the world. You may be lonely, but you have no more right to complain than the lamp has, which has been placed in a niche to illuminate a dark landing or a flight of dangerous stone steps. The Master of the house may have put you in a very small corner, and on a very humble stand; but it is enough if it be His blessed will. Some day He will pass by, and you shall light His steps as He goes forth to seek and save that which is lost; or you shall kindle some great light that shall shine like a beacon over the storm-swept ocean. Thus the obscure Andrew was the means of igniting his brother Peter, when he brought him to Jesus."

