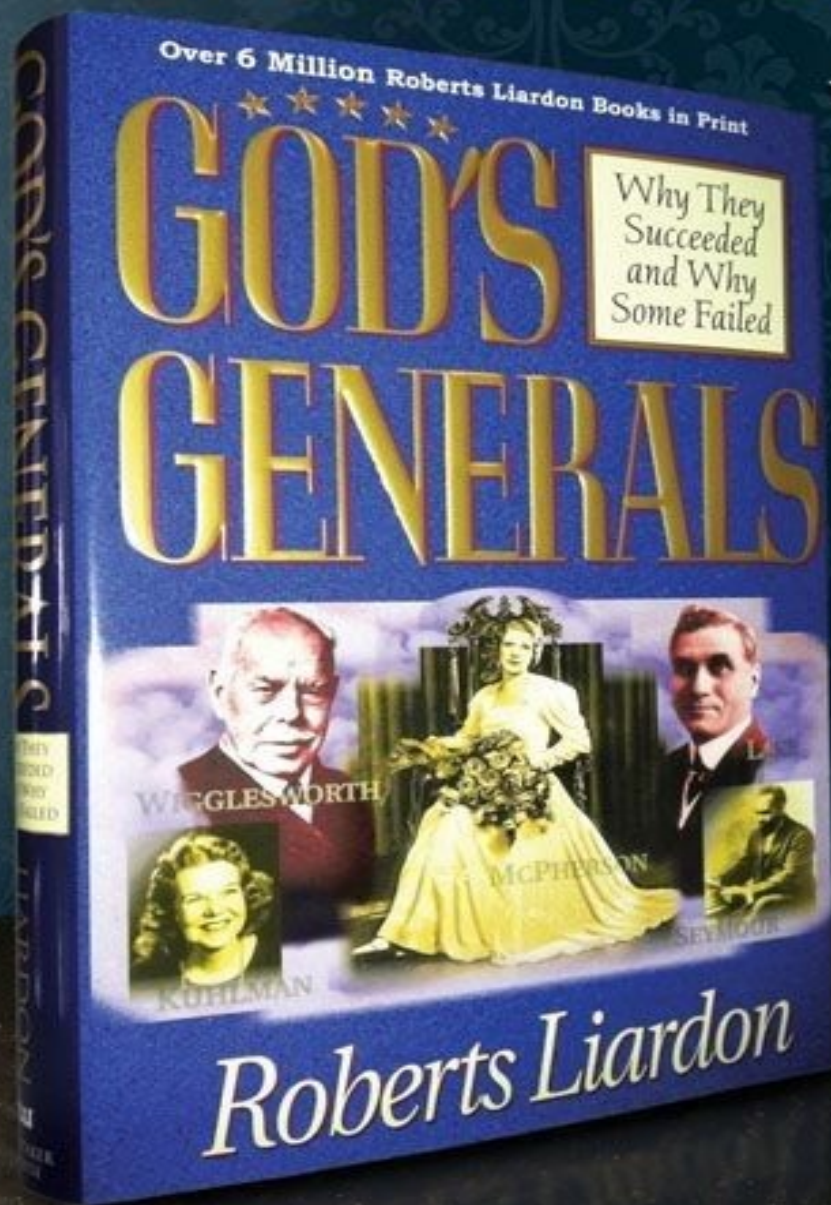


GOD'S GENERALS



MARIA
WOODWORTH-ETTER

ROBERTS LIARDON

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WHITAKER
HOUSE

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God's Generals: Maria Woodworth-Etter
Excerpted from God's Generals: Why They Succeeded and Why Some Failed

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Introduction

When I was almost twelve years old, the Lord appeared to me in a vision. In this vision, He told me to study the lives of the great preachers—to learn of their successes and their failures. From that day on, I gave a large portion of my life to the study of church history.

When prominent people in the secular world die, people begin to look at their natural accomplishments. But when leaders in the body of Christ die, I believe Jesus would have us look at not only what was accomplished in the natural world through their lives, but at what they also accomplished within the body of Christ. The purpose of their remembrance is not to praise or criticize the leaders, but to see him or her as an example for our own lives.

The “Generals” that are written of in this book were human. Their stories represent a collaboration of the way life is. I have not made anyone out to be superhuman or bionic. I have told of their tears, their laughter, their successes, and their failures. They were all persecuted, lied to, betrayed, slandered, as well as honored, adored, and supported.

But most importantly, I have attempted to reveal the secrets of the power in their individual calls to the ministry—how they operated, what they believed, and what motivated them to change each of their generations for God.

The failures that took place in the lives of these great men and women will attempt to take place again. But their successes also challenge us and are waiting to be grasped again. There is nothing new under the sun. If there is something new to you, it is because you are new under the sun.

It takes more than a desire to fulfill the will of God. It takes spiritual strength. As you read these chapters, allow the Spirit of God to take you on a journey that points out the areas in your life which need to be focused or subdued. Then, determine that your life and ministry will be a spiritual success in this generation that will bless the nations of the earth to the glory of God.

—Roberts Liardon

Maria Woodworth-Etter

“Demonstrator of the Spirit”

“The Lord has given me a special mission to bring about a spirit of unity and love.... God is raising up people in every land who are reaching out after more of God and saying, ‘Come and help us. We want the spirit of love. We want signs and wonders.’”¹

There hasn’t been a greater demonstrator of God’s Spirit since the book of Acts in Pentecostal history than Maria Woodworth-Etter. She was an incredible woman of vision and spiritual strength who stood in the face of fierce opposition, lifted her tiny hand, and allowed the Holy Spirit to spread His fire. Sister Etter lived in the realm of the spirit as a powerful vessel of God’s divine leading and His supernatural manifestations. She was a faithful friend of heaven, choosing to lose her earthly reputation to gain a spiritual one.

Maria (pronounced “Ma-rye-ah,” not “Ma-ree-ah”) was born in 1844 on a Lisbon, Ohio, farm. She was born again at the beginning of the Third Great Awakening at the age of thirteen. The preacher who led her to the Lord prayed that her life “might be a shining light.”² But little did he realize that this little girl he had just prayed for would become the grandmother of the Pentecostal movement that would spread throughout the world.

Maria immediately heard the call of God and dedicated her life to the Lord. Of her calling she would later write, “I heard the voice of Jesus calling me to go out in the highways and hedges and gather in the lost sheep.”³ But one thing stopped her—she was a woman, and at that time, women were not allowed to preach. In the mid-nineteenth century, women couldn’t even vote in a national election, so to be a woman preacher was definitely frowned upon. And to be a single woman in the ministry was out of the question. Therefore, Maria pondered the things the Lord told her, and decided she would have to marry a missionary to fulfill her call. So she planned to continue her education, then enter a formal college to make herself ready.

But tragedy struck her close-knit family. Her father was killed while working in the fields of their farm, and she immediately returned home to help support her family. Now, her hopes of a formal education were shattered, so she settled

into what she thought was a normal Christian lifestyle.

“ANGELS CAME INTO MY ROOM...”

During the Civil War, Maria met P. H. Woodworth, who had returned home from the conflict after being discharged with a head injury. She had a whirlwind courtship with the former soldier and soon married him. They took up farming, but nothing ever came of their labors. It seemed as if everything was failing.

Over the years, Maria became the mother of six children. So she tried to settle into a normal family home life while the Lord continued to call her. But Maria, exasperated in her role as a wife and mother, couldn't answer the call. She was married to a man with no desire for ministry, she had six children to raise, and she was sickly herself. Then real tragedy struck their home. The Woodworths lost five of their six children to disease. Maria was able to pull herself together after this horrible episode, but her husband never recovered from the loss. She did her best to help him while raising their only daughter. Through all these situations she never grew bitter against God, nor did she harden her heart as a result of the loss.

But Maria needed answers for the nagging heartache that oppressed her because of the calamity that struck her family. Refusing to give up, she began to search the Word of God. And as she read, she saw how women were repeatedly used by God throughout the Bible. She read Joel's prophecy predicting that the Spirit of God would be poured out upon men and women. But Maria would look to heaven and say, "Lord, I can't preach. I don't know what to say and I don't have any education." Still, she continued to read and find truth in the Word of God while she struggled with her call. She would later write, "The more I investigated, the more I found to condemn me."⁴

Then Maria had a great vision. Angels came into her room. They took her to the West, over prairies, lakes, forests, and rivers where she saw a long, wide field of waving golden grain. As the view unfolded she began to preach and saw the grains begin to fall like sheaves. Then Jesus told her that, "just as the grain fell, so people would fall" as she preached.⁵ Finally Maria realized that she would never be happy until she yielded to the call. In response to this great vision from God, she humbly answered yes to His call upon her life and asked Him to anoint her with great power.

“W-O-M-A-N” DOES NOT SPELL W-E-A-K”

Many women reading this book are called of God to preach. You have had visions and unctions from God's Spirit to go and set people free. God has spoken to you in the area of divine healing, deliverance, and freedom of the Spirit. So never allow a religious spirit to silence what the Lord has spoken to you. Religion likes to suppress women and their ministries, especially young ones. You need to learn to obey God without question. If Maria had answered from her youth, possibly her children wouldn't have died. I'm not saying that God killed her children. But I am saying that when we directly disobey God, our actions open the door to the works of the devil. His work is to destroy. God's work is to bring life. So learn to obey God with boldness. Boldness brings the power of God and will leave your accusers speechless in your presence. Also find some strong women with solid ministries from whom you can learn. And allow these words of Sister Etter to stir you in your heart:

“My dear sister in Christ, as you hear these words may the Spirit of Christ come upon you, and make you willing to do the work the Lord has assigned to you. It is high time for women to let their lights shine; to bring out their talents that have been hidden away rusting; and use them for the glory of God, and do with their might what their hands find to do, trusting God for strength, Who has said, ‘I will never leave you.’ Let us not plead weakness; God will use the weak things of the world to confound the wise. We are sons and daughters of the Most High God. Should we not honor our high calling and do all we can to save those who sit in the valley and shadow of death? Did He not send Moses, Aaron—Miriam to be your leaders? Barak dared not meet the enemy unless Deborah led the van. The Lord raised up men, women, and children of His own choosing—Hannah, Hulda, Ana, Phoebe, Narcissus, Tryphena, Persis, Julia, the Marys and the sisters who co-labored with Paul. Is it less becoming for women to labor in Christ's kingdom and vineyard now than it was then?”⁶

Seek the Spirit of God for yourself. If you are called, you will have to answer for it. Obey God without question. He will handle the details.

THEY WEPT THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE

Maria first launched her ministry into her own community. She had no idea of what she would say, but God told her to go and that He would put the words in her mouth.⁷ And God fulfilled His Word. As Maria stood before her first crowd, most of them relatives, she opened her mouth, and the crowd began to weep and

fall to the floor. Some got up and ran out in tears. After this Maria was highly sought throughout her community. Several churches asked her to come and revive their congregations. Soon she expanded her ministry westward and had held nine revivals, preached two hundred sermons, and started two churches with Sunday school memberships of over a hundred people. God honored Maria and made up for her lost years in a short amount of time.

One particular meeting was held in a town called Devils Den. No minister had ever been successful there, and people came to mock her. They were looking to see the female evangelist who would soon run out of town shattered and defeated. But they received the surprise of their lives! Sister Etter might have been a woman, but she was not one to be taken lightly. She knew the key to spiritual warfare, and the fervency of prayer that unlocked heaven.

For three days, Maria preached and sang. No one moved. Finally, on the fourth day, she exercised her spiritual authority through intercession and tore down the demonic principality that ruled over Devils Den. She prayed that God would show a great display of His power to break the people's stiff formality. That night, people throughout the meeting cried and repented to God. It was the greatest manifestation of the presence of God the town had ever witnessed.

THE DEMOLITION DERBY FORCE

We are not called to give up. We are called to obey God at whatever cost and to let success answer our critics. If it seems you have hit a hard place in your life or ministry, don't whine and complain. Don't offer your reasons for it. Pray! Explanations and excuses rob us of strength and power. Don't shake your head and run. Use the authority that has been given you through Jesus and overthrow the demonic powers that blind the people. Through prayer, take authority and make a clear path for the Spirit of God to minister to the hearts of the people. Sister Etter groomed her spirit through prayer producing invincible strength. She was known as a revivalist who could break towns open.

THEY CAME SCREAMING FOR MERCY

Sister Etter pioneered the way for the Pentecostal manifestations that are so common in the movement today. It was not until she preached at a church in western Ohio that had lost God's power, that the meaning of her vision about the sheaves of wheat became clear.⁸ It was at this church where the people fell into "trances." This was the one spiritual manifestation that marked her ministry

highly, but brought fierce persecution.

Up to this point, this manifestation had not been known in the church the way it is known today. In her own account she wrote:

“Fifteen came to the altar screaming for mercy. Men and women fell and lay like dead. I had never seen anything like this. I felt it was the work of God, but did not know how to explain it, or what to say.”⁹

After lying on the floor for some time, these people sprang to their feet with shining faces while shouting the praises of God. Sister Etter said that she had never seen such bright conversions. The ministers and elder saints wept and praised the Lord for His “Pentecost Power.” And from that meeting on, Sister Etter’s ministry would be marked by this particular manifestation that always followed her preaching with hundreds coming to Christ.

“TRANCE” TALK

The trances became the talk of the day. Hundreds flocked to taste of this outpouring, while others went to observe or ridicule. At one meeting, fifteen doctors came from different cities to investigate the trances. One of the doctors was a world-class leader in his field. Sister Etter wrote of it this way:

“He did not want to admit the power was of God. He would have been glad if they could prove it was something else. He came to investigate... but was called to another part of the house. He went, expecting to find something new. To his surprise he found his son at the altar and wanted his father to pray for him. He could not pray. God showed him what he was, and what he was doing. He began to pray for himself. While praying he fell into a trance, and saw the horrors of hell. He was falling in. After a terrible struggle God saved him. He went to work to win souls for Christ.”¹⁰

Sister Etter also wrote of a party that several young women attended at which they thought they would have fun and act out a trance. But they were immediately gripped by the power of God, and their mocking turned into loud cries to God for mercy.¹¹

Once an elderly man who had traveled the world was visiting an area where Maria was ministering. He was a religious man, so he decided to attend one of her meetings out of curiosity. As he witnessed the meeting, he made some joking

remark to his friends concerning the display of power. Filled with pride, the man boldly headed for the platform to investigate. But before he reached the pulpit, he was “struck to the floor by the power of God” and lay there for over two hours. While in this state, God showed him a vision of heaven and hell. Realizing he had to choose, he immediately chose God and was born again. Then he came to, praising God.

The only thing this man could say once he came out of the trance was that he regretted having spent sixty years lost in religion, never knowing Jesus Christ personally.¹² Still, newspapers and unbelieving ministers warned others to stay away from the meetings. They said they “would make a person insane.” Nevertheless, thousands were saved, many being “struck down, laying as dead men” even on their way home. It is said that many people also fell under the power in their homes, miles away from the meetings.

What are “trances”? They are one of the four ways God manifests in a vision. The first type of vision is an “inner vision.” The picture you see in your inner man, or spirit man, will benefit you greatly if you heed it. Secondly, there is the “open vision.” This vision comes when your eyes are wide open. It’s like watching a movie screen open up in front of you as it displays a scene God wants to show you. Thirdly is the night vision. This is when God gives a dream to make you aware of a certain thing. The last type of vision is the “trance vision.” In this vision, natural abilities are frozen so God can minister whatever is needed. When people came up from a trance vision in Sister Etter’s meetings, they told of seeing both heaven and hell.

Sister Etter’s style was, to say the least, “different” from the ministers of her day. She never prohibited the audience from participating. Unlike the stoic church order of the late 1800s, Maria believed in shouting, dancing, singing, and preaching. She believed that emotional displays were important, as long as they were in order. And she believed that a lack of physical manifestation was a sign of apostasy.

FRENZY OR FULFILLMENT?

I believe God is upset with some of the churches today because they refuse to allow the people to openly and freely express themselves to Him. If people can’t express themselves to God, then God can’t move upon them. Some people are afraid of emotions in the church. They have no problem with them at home, or at a sporting event. But for some religious reason, they think the church should be

quiet and serene. But let me tell you something: heaven isn't quiet and serene! Some people are in for a rude awakening when they die and go to heaven. They are going to have to learn how to rejoice along with the rest of us—because heaven is full of life and energy! We have a lot to shout about—both here and there!

Our churches must have a fresh move of God. And like it or not, a move of God affects the emotions. “Well, Roberts, I just don't believe God is in all that shouting and dancing.” The shouting and dancing isn't God. It is simply an unconstrained response to His power. Listen, have you ever put your finger in a light socket and remained still? How much more when you touch God! When God touches you, you will react! If you say, “Well, what about the extremes?” I say, “Why are we so concerned about the ditch when we should be looking at the highway?”

Focus on the true, and the false will fade away. When the power of God comes upon you, you will enjoy it! And when you enjoy something, you show it. So learn the truth of what God loves in His worshippers, then do it.

Now you say, “Well, people will talk about us.” I say, “So what?” The truth outlives a lie. What people don't understand, they persecute. They lied about Jesus, but He still lives today. When those people experience the true touch of God, they will change their minds.

“What if we lose money?” Well, is money your god? Let me remind you that monetary currency can't save souls. The Spirit of God is what draws mankind to Jesus. By obeying the Spirit, we lift up Jesus. There are no payoffs or shortcuts. If you are a church leader, you are commanded by God to obey the Holy Spirit and learn His ways. The Bible says it is those who are led by the Spirit that are the sons of God. (See Romans 8:14.) So let Him lead!

If you are led by the Spirit, visions will increase in the church. We must be spiritually mature to deal with any problems or evil spirits. New Age religions have dug so deeply into the wrong spirit realm that they've made the church afraid to pursue the true manifestations of God's Spirit. The realm of the spirit holds both God and the demonic, and if the Holy Spirit is not your Guide when you enter, you are subject to the demonic. But New Agers don't enter the spirit realm with Jesus Christ. They come of their own will. And this is one place where they are deceived. We are nothing without the blood of Jesus. Some are afraid that if they pursue God supernaturally, they will be accused of being

involved with the New Age. If you are following God's Spirit, He will keep you pure.

So open your church to the move of God, and learn from those who have gone on before you. Where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty, and yes, order. But I'm not talking about the fearful restraints of control or denominational suppression. People are hungry to see God and to be free. Some will travel across the continent to hear someone who truly knows God and the manifestations of His Spirit.

“SHE KNOCKS 'EM SILLY”

By the time Sister Etter reached age forty, she was a national phenomenon. Various denominations recognized her ability to stir dead churches, bring in the unconverted, and cheer on a deeper spiritual walk with God. Doctors, lawyers, drunkards, and adulterers—people from all walks of life—were gloriously saved and filled with the Holy Spirit in her meetings. Because of one of her meetings in 1885, the police said they had never seen such a change in their city. The city had been so cleaned up that they had nothing to do!¹³

One newspaper reporter wrote of Sister Etter:

“She goes at it like a footpad tackles his prey. By some supernatural power she just knocks 'em silly when they are not looking for it, and while they are down she applies the hydraulic pressure and pumps the grace of God into them by the bucketful.”¹⁴

Eventually the Lord led Maria to begin praying for the sick. At first, she was reluctant, feeling it would take away from her evangelistic call. But God continued to make His will clear, and she agreed. She studied the Word and began preaching His divine will in healing. It didn't take long to see that evangelism and healing went hand in hand as thousands were won to Christ as a result of seeing others healed.

Maria preached that the strong manifestations of the Spirit were “nothing new; they were just something the church had lost.”¹⁵ And she refused to get caught up in the pet doctrines of the day, desiring only for the Holy Spirit to do His works.

Once in a meeting, a crowd rushed to the platform and cried out, “What shall we do?” Maria finishes the story:

“They went down by the mighty wind power of the Holy Ghost. He sat upon the children of God till their faces shone like Stephen’s when his enemies said he looked like an angel. Many received gifts; some for ministry, some as evangelists, some of healing, and hundreds of sinners received the gift of eternal life.¹⁶

In another meeting, over twenty-five thousand people crowded in to hear Sister Etter. And remember, in those days, there were no public address systems! Maria wrote that before she even finished preaching, the power of God fell on the multitude and took control of about five hundred as they fell to the ground.¹⁷

THE WILD, WILD WEST

Of course, Sister Etter’s life was marked with great persecution. There were problems around every corner, not to mention the pressures that came from leading such huge masses of people who were experiencing their first manifestations of the Spirit. In addition to all of this, she was a woman in ministry who was married to an unfaithful man.

While ministering in her controversial crusade in Oakland, California, P. H. Woodworth’s infidelity was revealed. Sister Etter stayed in separate quarters, choosing to leave him. Finally, after twenty-six stormy years of marriage, in January 1891, they were divorced. Then, in less than a year and a half, P. H. Woodworth remarried and publicly slandered Maria’s character and ministry. He died not long after on June 21, 1892, of typhoid fever.

Despite her stormy relationship with this man, Maria took time from her ministry schedule to travel to his funeral. It is said that she not only attended the funeral, but also took part in the memorial service.

Etter’s greatest trials came while on the West Coast. She believed the West could be won to God, just as it occurred in the Midwest. So in 1889, she arrived in Oakland and purchased an eight-thousand seat tent. And soon, the tent was jammed with onlookers coming to see the trances, hear of the visions, and watch all the other manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

But heavy persecution also visited Maria on the West Coast. Hoodlums, or gangs as we call them today, started harassing her meetings. Several times these men hid explosives in the wood stoves—miraculously, no one was ever injured. Once a windstorm even ripped the canvas of the tent apart during a meeting. Death threats were sent to her weekly, newspapers slandered her relentlessly, and

ministers divided against her. Mischievous people would bring the mentally disturbed to her meetings, knowing they would cause a great emotional scene. This was done so many times, that many naive people thought it was Maria's meetings that drove these people to insanity! And because many misunderstood her theology, the citizens called for the authorities daily to shut her meetings down. Nevertheless, Maria refused to leave Oakland until she felt God was finished.

When it seemed the gangs began to get the upper hand in her meetings, the Oakland Police Department deputized "bouncers" to protect the services. But this got out of hand because the bouncers were inexperienced both in character and common sense.

Then there was the wild prophecy that came from Maria saying disaster would hit the coast and destroy it. After she spoke this, the newspapers terrorized Sister Etter and made her out to be a common criminal. They misquoted and hyped up the prophecy to such a degree that it was not accurately known what was actually said. Then as could be expected, other men and women operating in the counterfeits to the gifts of the Spirit jumped on the prophecy bandwagon. Deceived by the enemy, these people prophesied more doom Coast, causing great controversy.

Sister Etter had a slew of prominent ministers both for and against her. One was John Alexander Dowie. While she was on the West Coast, he joined her critics and publicly blasted her "trance evangelism," calling it a great delusion.¹⁸ No other minister but Etter matched his own ministry in the area of healing and publicity, so he often referred to her when he spoke of the abuses. Only once did Sister Etter even publicly defend herself against Dowie. She did so with these words:

"After stating in our meeting before thousands, that he never saw such power of God, and so wonderfully manifested, and after advising all his people to stand by me, he went up and down the coast preaching against me and the meetings, until he broke up all his missions. His only objection was that some were struck down by the power of God in our meetings.

"He lectured against me two or three times in San Francisco, and said I was in line with Satan. Many went to hear him...but his talk was such that many people left in disgust while he was talking. I told the people

that I had been his friend and had treated him like a brother, and that he was not fighting me, but the Lord and His Word. I always told the people that I would leave him in the hands of God and that I would go right on with the Master.

“I told them to watch and see how we would come out, and they would see that he would go down in disgrace, and that I would be living when he was dead.”¹⁹

Sister Etter outlived John Alexander Dowie by seventeen years.

It can be said that Sister Etter did make some mistakes in her Oakland Crusade. And it isn't any wonder with all the attacks that were plotted against her. However, it should be remembered that in 1906, San Francisco did experience the most devastating earthquake in American history, and Sister Etter's prophecy came forth in 1890.

Sister Etter also made several good friends while there, one being Carrie Judd Montgomery. Montgomery had come from the East Coast to conduct meetings in California. The two met and developed a lifelong friendship. Carrie and her husband, George, were instrumental in the Pentecostal movement and founded the Home of Peace in Oakland. The couple remained strong supporters of Sister Etter throughout their ministry.

“GIFT FROM GOD”

During this phase of Sister Etter's life, there were also some refreshing highlights. Besides the friendships she made, God didn't want her to carry the ministry mantle alone. It took some time, but ten years after her divorce, Maria met a wonderful man from Hot Springs, Arkansas, named Samuel Etter. God sent her the perfect mate. The two were married in 1902. Sister Etter had great respect for this gentleman and often referred to him as her “gift from God.” Later she would write of him:

“He stood bravely with me in the hottest battle, and since the day we were married has never shrank. He will defend the Word and all the gifts, and operations of the Holy Ghost, but does not want any fanaticism, or foolishness. It makes no difference what I call on him to do. He will pray, and preach, and sing, and is very good around the altar. The Lord knew what I needed, and it was all brought about by the Lord, through His love and care for me and the work.”²⁰

Three years after her marriage to Samuel Etter, Maria disappeared from public ministry and remained silent for the next seven years. No reason has ever been given for this long silence. But when she emerged seven years later, she was just as powerful as before, and now had the loving support of a wonderful husband. Samuel Etter faithfully loved and cared for Maria. He managed her meetings inside and out, and took care of all of her writings and book distribution. In fact, Sister Etter's ministry published several books:

1. Life, Work, and Experience of Maria Beula Woodworth, Evangelist
2. Marvels and Miracles God Wrought in the Ministry of Mrs. M. B. Woodworth-Etter for Forty Years
3. Signs and Wonders God Wrought in the Ministry of Mrs. M B. Woodworth-Etter for Forty Years
4. Song Books
5. Questions and Answers on Divine Healing
6. Acts of the Holy Ghost (later published as A Diary of Signs and Wonders)

Some of Sister Etter's books were reprinted into several editions, and some were translated into foreign languages. Although we have a large selection of Christian books on the market today, Sister Etter's books are still very rare. I have personally been offered thousands of dollars for my private collection, which I have refused. In my opinion, no amount of money could buy what Sister Etter has written.

So, Samuel Etter—the husband, friend, editor, manager, and minister of helps —“gift from God”—found peace in his position as a support in his wife's ministry. His ability showed a rare and notable character as a man. As a result, he was a vital part of her ministry in almost every capacity until his death twelve years later.

PERSECUTION, PROBLEMS, AND JAIL TRIALS

Maria was the only leading evangelist of the Holiness movement who embraced the Pentecostal experience of speaking in tongues. Today, we would have called her a “Pentecostal Holiness” preacher. She embraced the Holiness doctrine as well as the Pentecostal doctrine of speaking in tongues. Many

ministers didn't understand the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, nor did they understand her doctrine about it. And Maria so rarely defended herself in public, that it was highly noted whenever she did. She would usually tell the people that she was not called to defend herself, but that she was called to lead others to Jesus Christ.

Sister Etter showed an invincible strength to carry on in the face of opposition. When harassed with life-threatening situations, she would refuse to leave a town until she was finished. And she was never afraid of unknown perils because she knew the Lord would fight for her. Many times, rowdy men would find their way into her meetings to disrupt them because of being paid to do so. Others came on their own volition. She once wrote:

“I have been in great dangers; many times not knowing when I would be shot down, either in the pulpit, or going to and from meetings...But I said I would never run, nor compromise. The Lord would always put His mighty power on me, so that He took all fear away, and made me like a giant...If in any way they had tried to shoot, or kill me, He would have struck them dead, and I sometimes told them so.”²¹

One such man came to her meeting determined to break it up. He marched within ten feet of the platform and let out a stream of vulgarity and cursing. Then suddenly, his tongue refused to obey him as a “strange power seemed to grip his vocal chords.” Totally protected by the Spirit of God, Maria seemed oblivious to the man's presence! Questioned later about the experience by two major newspapers, the shaken man replied, “Go up yourself and find out.”²²

Maria was arrested four times during her ministry, but three of the citations never made it to court. New England was the only place where she was arrested and actually taken to court. Her trial in Framingham, Massachusetts, was based on charges that she practiced medicine without a license and hypnotized people with trances. It was a grand spectacle for the cause of Christ. Many people testified on her behalf, retelling their personal testimonies that could be likened to stories in the book of Acts. The great author and founder of Bethel Bible School, E. W. Kenyon, was among those who testified. Kenyon would go on to later have a great healing and teaching ministry. He was a prolific author. Many of his books are used in Bible schools throughout the world.

The love Maria had for different cultures also caused racial persecution. She loved the African American and Native American communities just as she loved

white people. She preached many times for the black churches, helped their preachers, and supported their revivals. She also went to an Indian reservation, staying for weeks at her own expense. All social classes were welcome in her home—rich and poor alike. Sister Etter loved them all.

“NOTHING SHORT OF A CIRCUS”

There is no one volume book that can describe all the acts in the ministry of Maria Woodworth-Etter. She was a humble spiritual powerhouse who looked “just like your grandmother, but exercised tremendous spiritual authority over sin, disease, and demons.”²³ Sister Etter couldn’t answer all the invitations she received to minister. And the ones she did accept created a national stir that has never been silenced.

One such meeting was planned by the then young pastor, F. F. Bosworth in Dallas, Texas. His writings of the spectacular meeting that lasted from July through December shook the world. As a result, Dallas became a hub of the Pentecostal revival.

One night three very dignified ministers walked into the meeting. Since there was no place left to sit, the platform preachers gave up their seats for the men. Reluctantly, the “dignified” took their seats. The service got well underway, with the power of God as strong as usual. Then suddenly, one of the starchy preachers tumbled off his chair and fell into the sawdust, motionless. The other two tried to ignore their friend on the ground. But in just a few minutes, the second minister joined his friend, falling helplessly into the sawdust. Then the third fell off the platform and lay motionless with them. The three lay under the power of God for more than three hours. Then finally, one by one, each got up, brushed himself off, and walked in a daze to the exit!²⁴

Thousands came to Dallas, some from over two thousand miles away, bringing the sick and afflicted for healing. One man had three broken ribs from a fall. He could hardly stand because of the pain. Sister Etter laid her hands on him and offered the prayer of faith, and instantly, the bones that were turned inward came into place. At first, he flinched when she touched him, but he ended up pounding his ribs realizing the pain and swelling were gone. Another man was brought in on a cot, suffering from tuberculosis. His condition was hopeless, being also plagued with a fistula, an open sore that had left a deep hole in his body. But when Maria prayed, the power of God hit the man. He jumped off his cot and ran up and down in front of the crowd. Then he rode home sitting up

with the others and gained four pounds a day from that day on.

Cancer had eaten the entire side of one man's face and neck. The cancer was so painful, he had to be taken from the first meeting. But when Sister Etter laid hands on him and prayed, the power of God hit him. The pain, stiffness, and burning left immediately. He was suddenly able to turn his neck from side to side, then he got up on the altar and preached to the people.

One night, three people that had been deaf and dumb, all strangers to one another, stood at the altar, weeping, hugging and shouting because God had opened their ears and given them their speech. Many others looked on and wept, making their way to the altar to know God and be saved. One of the three formerly deaf and dumb went on to testify:

“When Sister Etter put her finger in my mouth at the root of my tongue and then in my ears, commanding a ‘deaf and dumb’ spirit to come out, God instantly opened my ears and gave me my voice.”²⁵

One woman had a double affliction of cancer and tuberculosis. She was like a living skeleton. All the best physicians of Dallas had given up on her. She was brought in on a cot, and many thought she would die before Sister Etter got to her. When prayed for, she was instantly healed and jumped up from the cot shouting! Then she came to the rest of the meetings every night and sat with the others. Though she was still very thin, all who knew the woman said that she was gaining weight and improving daily.

The great healing evangelist and pastor F. F. Bosworth wrote of the Dallas meetings:

“Night after night, as soon as the invitation was given, all the available space around the fifty-foot altar would be filled with so many suffering with diseases and afflictions and others seeking salvation and the baptism in the Holy Ghost, that it was difficult to get in and out among the seekers.”²⁶

At every meeting she held, there was a demonstration of the power of the Spirit as never seen in our generation. One reporter from Indiana wrote, “Vehicles of all sorts began pouring into the city at an early hour...nothing short of a circus or a political rally ever before brought in so large a crowd.”²⁷ Another wrote that it was the first time that his Iowa community could remember a religious gathering that had “driven out a good show.” He wrote that

members booked at the opera house went over to the camp meeting to see what had taken their crowds.”²⁸

THE SPLITTING ISSUE

A well-established Christian businessman from Los Angeles, Mr. R. J. Scott, visited Dallas during these meetings. He and his wife had been baptized in the Holy Spirit at the Azusa Street revival. But by this time, most of the Azusa revivalists had scattered. Scott was searching for a way to bring a unified, supernatural work back into Los Angeles. He had heard of the miraculous healings and had come to see if they were true and if Maria’s doctrine matched his own. Elated by what he experienced, he determined to ask Maria to come to Los Angeles and hold what he thought would be a “dream camp meeting.” He felt she had the power that Los Angeles needed. So Sister Etter agreed to come.

As could be imagined, thousands poured into the Los Angeles area for the camp meeting. The meetings ran all day and most of the night, and thousands came from all sections of North America. Tents were erected and people stayed on the grounds. In fact, there were so many tents that tentative “streets” were established, with names such as “Praise Avenue,” “Hallelujah Lane,” and “Glory Avenue.” This made the location of someone’s tent much easier to find!

Although the results of the meeting were phenomenal, this 1913 Los Angeles Worldwide Camp Meeting (Azusa/Arroyo Seco Meeting) was also known to birth the issue that split the early Pentecostal movement. It produced the debate surrounding the “Jesus Only,” “Oneness,” or “New Issue” doctrine. The teaching originated from John G. Scheppe, a man who had spent a night in prayer during the meetings. Scheppe believed he had seen something new about using the name of Jesus and ran through the camp sharing it with others. As a result, people on the West Coast began to baptize in “Jesus’ name” only, and were told if they were baptized in the Trinity they would have to be re-baptized. The teaching split the Pentecostal movement. R. J. Scott’s “dream camp meeting” was designed to promote unity within the body of Christ. Instead, it produced one of the greatest divisions known in this generation.²⁹

Soon the Pentecostal movement broke into a number of other groups that emphasized a variety of doctrines. Sister Etter did her best to stay clear of these issues. She believed the most important issue was to warn sinners that Jesus was coming soon through the preaching of His Word with signs and wonders.

She said it best in a sermon entitled “Neglect Not the Gift That Is Within Thee.” In this message, she said:

“His ambassadors must stop all the contention, all hair-splitting theories must be dropped; this hobby and that hobby with continual harping on finished work or sanctification that antagonizes the saints must be put away. Paul says preaching has to be with demonstration of the Spirit and of power.... Let the Word go forth in demonstration and power so people can see what God has for them.”³⁰

Sister Etter soon developed a policy of preaching in meetings at which no “hair-splitting” doctrines were spoken of. Years later she called the “Oneness” position “the biggest delusion the devil ever invented.”³¹

“ELECTRIFIED US ALL”

Understandably, Sister Etter had mixed emotions regarding the Los Angeles meeting. She was advertised as the main speaker, and thousands drove from all parts of America to be in her meetings. But because of the political controversy, the male ministers took control, and Sister Etter was forced to minister only in the mornings. The men took over the afternoons and evenings to primarily expound on the new “Oneness” doctrine. She was pressured to cut her meetings short so the afternoon speaker could begin. And in spite of it all, hundreds were miraculously healed. It was reported that when her scheduled time would come to a close, Sister Etter would just raise her hands toward heaven as she was leaving the tent, and at that moment, many were healed. A young boy remembered, “She raised her small hands and the power of the Holy Spirit electrified us all.”³²

Invalids walked from their sick beds, the deaf heard, the blind saw, arthritis was instantly healed, tumors destroyed, dropsy eliminated. In short, every manner of sickness and disease that dared to show itself at Sister Etter’s meetings, bowed its knee to Jesus Christ and was disintegrated by the fire of the Spirit. And all of this in spite of the doctrinal divisions. Elizabeth Waters remembered these meetings like this:

“I remember like yesterday, my girlfriend and I rolled my mother in a wheelchair about six or seven long blocks.... Two big men carried the wheelchair in front of the round pulpit as it was already lined up with wheelchairs. It was so hot, my mother begged to be taken home, but I

insisted on staying. Praise the Lord, she was pointed out to be put up on the pulpit, where that beautiful little lady I won't ever forget, spoke to my mother. I saw her reply by shaking her head and then she [Sister Etter] hit her on the chest (it looked hard to me). It was like a bolt of lightning struck her, she leaped to her feet and flew around, jumping for joy. All the people yelled and screamed, I doubt if they had ever seen anything like it before. Many more miracles were seen. We almost had to tie my mother in the chair coming home. She wanted to walk, but she was weak as she had been bedfast for two years. When we got home, my grandmother and more neighbors were waiting for us. My mother stepped out of the wheelchair and walked up the stairs. They all yelled and cried. From that day on my mother was completely healed, healthy, fat, and loved the Lord.”³³

Because of her Dallas and Los Angeles meetings, Sister Etter would remain a leading evangelist for the rest of her life. And though she loved the itinerant lifestyle, God had yet another plan for her. He wasn't finished writing the pages of history.

TABERNACLE TALES

After forty-five years of ministry and preaching thousands of sermons from coast to coast, God spoke to Maria about building a tabernacle in west Indianapolis. Many had asked her to build a permanent location where they could come at any time to receive from her ministry. All parts of America had offered their region, but she chose Indiana because of its central location. True to the style of Sister Etter, the Tabernacle was a model for the Pentecostal churches of today. She built the church next door to her home, and ministered there for the last six years of her life.

At the time, there were few large churches. So in 1918, when Sister Etter raised the five-hundred seat building, it was no small task. Throughout her ministry, Maria never put pressure on the people to give financially. But in building this Tabernacle, she sent out letters for financial help. The money came in and the building went up. It was dedicated on May 19, 1918, and to date, only one other woman has ever surpassed her “church-building” ability. That woman was the female evangelist who emulated much of Etter's style, Aimee Semple McPherson.

Sister Etter used the Tabernacle as her home base. She had a special insight

for choosing associates who would contribute to the revival.

As a result, the church remains today—though in a different location—affiliated with the Assemblies of God. People flocked from around America to be in her church, and many remained as faithful members. One man remembered that “people would move toward the altar and fall on the floor before they got there.” He said he never saw pre-suggestions or people ever being pushed over —“It was God. Nothing phony about Sister Etter.”³⁴

One incredible Tabernacle story involved a Romanian family. Their daughter suffered from tuberculosis and two Pentecostal women had come to their house to pray for her. Discovering that their daughter had been healed after the prayer, the family searched for a Pentecostal church and found the Tabernacle. During their first service, a lady who had been miraculously healed from cancer, stood and delivered a message in tongues for twenty-eight minutes. Some wondered why Sister Etter allowed her to continue so freely in the Spirit for such a length of time. But their questions were answered the next Sunday when it was learned that this woman was speaking Romanian, a language she had never heard nor learned.

This little Romanian family heard a message from God in their own language as they sat listening, completely overwhelmed. The father was the only one who could speak English. It has been said that Maria and the Tabernacle members “learned to expect such experiences as much as some congregations expect to sing the doxology at the end of their services.”³⁵

Another Tabernacle tale involved the healing of a young boy. He had tuberculosis and developed a tumor the size of a fist. When his mother took him to Maria, she said, “We’ll just cut it out with the Sword of the Spirit.” With that, Sister Etter took her Bible and “whacked” him on the neck, and the boy was healed.³⁶

GREAT MEETS GREAT

One of my favorite Tabernacle stories is the one that tells about the meeting of Maria Woodworth-Etter and Aimee Semple McPherson. At that time, Aimee was still a traveling evangelist. She truly loved Sister Etter, and eagerly desired to meet with Maria and sit in one of her meetings. In my personal opinion, I believe Aimee devoured all she could read about Sister Etter, and strengthened her own calling from the courage Maria showed.

There had been an influenza ban on the city of Indianapolis until Aimee's "Gospel Car" pulled in. The ban was finally lifted the night she arrived, and Aimee attributed it to an act of God. She writes from her diary, dated October 31, 1918:

"For years I have been longing to meet Sister Etter, and have been talking more about it in recent months. I have longed to hear her preach and be in her meetings.... Tomorrow Mrs. Etter's tabernacle will be open and I will have the desire of my heart. Glory!"

Following their meeting, Aimee wrote:

"We rejoiced and praised the Lord together. The power of God fell... showering His blessings upon us."³⁷

Sister McPherson left Indianapolis the next day, no doubt rejoicing on the way to her own divine destination—California. We can only imagine the memories she cherished from meeting with Maria.

While there is no public statement from Sister Etter on what she thought of Aimee, her traveling companion Bertha Schneider, did make a comment. On one occasion, Sister Etter and Aimee were in the same city. It was their night off, so Sister Etter's group attended one of Aimee's services. But Maria chose not to go. The reason Mrs. Schneider gave for this was, "Sister Etter expressed concern over the direction Aimee's ministry was going—theatrical performances and other popular attractions."³⁸ I personally feel with Sister Etter being from the Holiness background, that her concern was genuine, not critical.

Many great speakers of the day visited the Tabernacle. Though it was never recorded that Sister Etter met the legendary British evangelist, Smith Wigglesworth, many feel he was a disciple of her ministry. It is believed that Wigglesworth picked up several of his mottos from Sister Etter.³⁹ And Wigglesworth did conduct a series of meetings in the Tabernacle after her death in 1925.

To some of you, these stories may be intimidating. Understand that God is restoring the supernatural to the church today. Some of you reading this book are afraid of it. God has told some of you to pray for the sick in your churches, and you haven't done it. Maybe you don't know much about God's will for healing. Maybe you feel confused. It is God's will for man to be free. He came to destroy the works of the devil, not to tolerate or live through them. The church today

must learn to deal with the destroyer and bring life to the people.

Too many of us remain inside the confines of a “comfortable” doctrine or a “pick and choose” theology. God wants the whole counsel of His Word to be preached and demonstrated to the people. That’s why Jesus gave us His blood. Begin to read the book of Acts, and you will learn of the demonstrators of His Spirit and the opposition they aroused. Like the apostles, Sister Etter remained true to the whole counsel of God all the days of her life—despite the pressure and persecution—and we must do the same. She is one who has passed the torch, and we must be faithful to carry it.

THE TRAILBLAZER

The summer of 1924 was difficult for Maria. At the age of eighty, with failing health from gastritis and dropsy, she received heart-breaking news. Her only daughter, Lizzie, age sixty, was killed in a streetcar accident. Now all of Maria’s immediate family had gone to be with the Lord. And though her health was frail, she was still able to summon enough strength to stand in the pulpit to conduct the funeral. When she did, she exhorted the people to have faith in God and look to the heavens—not into the grave.⁴⁰

During that year, there were times when Sister Etter was so weak she could not walk. But it didn’t stop her from preaching. If she couldn’t walk, she appointed someone to carry her in and place her behind the pulpit. Eventually, the Tabernacle presented a large wooden chair as a gift to Maria. Then, when she seemed too weak to walk, a few strong men would carry the wooden chair from the church to her house, place her in it, and carry her back. The minute her feet hit the platform, the Spirit of God would quicken her, and she would walk up and down the platform, preaching and ministering in the supernatural power of God. Hundreds witnessed how weak she seemed, then how incredibly strong she became. At the end of the service, the men would put her back in the chair and carry her home.

Sister Etter’s faith caused her to continue when many others would have given up. Remember, by now, Sister Etter had reached her eighties. There were no airplanes and very few luxuries in her time. There was no air-conditioning or other modern conveniences. She had traveled across the nation in buggies and trains, many times sleeping in a tent when money was scarce or no room was provided. But it didn’t matter to Etter.

Three weeks before she died, the Lord revealed to Maria that “it was only a matter of days before she would leave” to go to her reward. During this time, a lady brought her flowers, to which Sister Etter replied, “I will soon be where the flowers will bloom forever.”⁴¹ A number of times, she would even preach sermons to those who visited her at home.

Of her death, an associate, August Feich, wrote:

“A few days before she passed away, she called me to her side and took my hand and said, ‘Brother Feich, do you realize that I am going the way of all flesh?’ The answer came, ‘I do, mother,’ to which she replied, ‘You have been very faithful in your ministry with me for these many years. Now I trust that God’s blessing may continue to rest upon you; soon you will have me no more to help you.’”

Maria Woodworth-Etter’s end came without a struggle as she sank away slowly into a deep sleep:

“Her eyesight was good for a person of her age. Her mental powers were keen to the very end. There was not a single moment during all her sickness but what she could freely converse with you on any topic that came up. The saints around her came in freely at all times to see her and have council with her. Some came as they were led by the Spirit to pray for her; others again to be prayed for by her. She laid hands on the sick and prayed for those who were in need. This she did ‘til the very end. She did this while at the same time she knew that her own strength was rapidly slipping away. She has repeatedly said during her ministry that she would sooner wear out for Jesus than rust out.”⁴²

Before Sister Etter went home to be with the Lord at age eighty, she had buried all six of her children and two husbands; preached thousands of sermons from coast-to-coast; remained the victor over hoodlums and vicious ministers; blazed the trail for women in ministry; and unflinchingly displayed the power of the Holy Spirit with mighty signs and wonders following.

She wasn’t well educated. She didn’t care about seminary classes and didn’t take the time to explain how God worked. She preached a very simple gospel, offered herself completely to God, and believed for signs and wonders. Maria’s one passion was for the gospel to come alive and for people to be led by the Spirit. She preached many times with tears streaming down her face, begging

those who heard to come to Christ. Her meetings and teachings paved the way for the founding of many Pentecostal denominations, including the Assemblies of God and Foursquare.

ETTER'S FAMILY TODAY

Etter's immediate heritage was not heard from again until 1977. Her great-great-great grandson, Tom Slevin, had an interest in researching his family tree. Surprisingly to him, he discovered that an immediate relative of his was a "little pioneer-preacher" named Maria Woodworth-Etter, otherwise known as Grandma Etter. She had been a famous evangelist and founder of a church not far from his home. He inquired of her to his mother, Mary, but she could tell him little, as much information had been lost. Mr. Slevin refused to give up. He researched the Etter books and sermons, reading them continuously.

Soon, his own life was influenced by this woman's sermons, some preached over eighty years prior.

Slevin said, "When I first read her books. I thought they might have been blown out of proportion with all the tremendous miracles. So I went to other towns and researched through the microfilms. I read the old newspapers and discovered a wonderful thing. I found the stories in her books were absolutely true, and it was the newspapers that had left a lot of miracles out!"

Slevin and his mother became so curious about the life of Etter that they went to hear an evangelist who had sat under Sister Etter's ministry as a young boy. This evangelist, Roscoe Russell, had been the boy who, when "whacked" in the neck with a Bible by Sister Etter, was miraculously healed. When Slevin's mother went forth for prayer, the evangelist said to her, "The same God that answered the prayers of your grandmother is here today. He will answer your prayers just the same." Afterwards, Slevin's mother was baptized in the church affiliated with Etter's ministry.

Slevin likes to compare his grandmother Etter's ministry to that of Smith Wigglesworth's. He feels their relationship with God was very similar, especially in the areas of faith. Though he has many favorite stories, Slevin pointed out that John G. Lake met Etter in 1913. After that meeting, it is said that Lake told his people to "pray like Mother Etter."

From his research, Slevin gained an insight into the character of his great-great-great-grandmother. "The thing that impressed me the most," he

remembered, “was how completely her life was sold out to God. She was unlike so many today. She went wherever God told her to go; whether they had twenty people or a thousand people. Her time belonged to God. She was never ‘too busy’ to do what He said. Everyone was important to her, because they were important to God. That is why she knew God so well. That is why she could ‘punch someone in the stomach’ or ‘whack them on the neck.’ She knew God and she knew He would heal them.”⁴³ It is no doubt that through the Slevin family, the spiritual heritage of Sister Etter will continue.

A PERSONAL VIEW

In my own personal observations, the ministry that Sister Etter carried has passed down and is still in the earth today. Every ministry should have signs and wonders following it. If not, the ministers are just playing with the ministry. If your ministry is following the commands of Jesus, then signs and wonders will follow you.

Styles of ministry and methods of ministry will vary from person to person. No one person will operate in the same way, because we are all individuals and there are different generations to reach.

But when a ministry operates in the same magnitude as one that has gone on before it, I sometimes refer to that operation as the “mantle” that has been passed down. A mantle is a spiritual term that can be described in the natural, like a coat or a shawl. When we “wear” the mantle, we operate similar to the ministry we received it from.

From this personal point of view, it seems that Aimee Semple McPherson carried on where Etter left off, through great signs, wonders, and exploits. I believe she received Maria’s mantle. From McPherson, a similar mantle seemed to pass on to Kathryn Kuhlman. Kuhlman was also known for the great magnitude of miracles in her ministry and or her hunger for fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Today, it seems to me that a similar healing mantle has passed from Kuhlman to healing evangelist Benny Hinn, though Hinn doesn’t like for that to be said of him. Hinn feels he has his own mantle from God, not someone else’s.

DON’T RUST OUT

Maria Woodworth-Etter reached untold thousands from around America with the liberating message of Jesus Christ. These words were written of her:

“Glory to God and the Lord Jesus for calling her, enduing her with power, keeping her, and making her a ‘Mother in Israel’ to us. The same love that watched over her is ours today. Amen.”⁴⁴

Mighty signs and wonders are in the earth again. So cultivate the godly treasures within you by experience and the Word, then bring them to the surface by prayer and obedience. Believe God for signs and wonders to come through you. Determine to be used in this hour and press on to the fullness that God has for you. Don’t allow setbacks to frustrate or hinder you. Call for the Spirit of might and finish your course in complete victory. Adopt these words of Sister Etter: “It’s better to wear out for Jesus Christ than to rust out.” Then, don’t stop until you are finished. The world is searching for the answer within you.

1 “Neglect Not the Gift That Is in Thee,” Etter sermon included in Wayne E. Warner, *The Woman Evangelist* (Metuchen, NJ, and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1986), 307, Appendix C.

2 Ibid., 6.

3 Ibid., 7.

4 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 8.

5 Ibid., 10.

6 Maria Woodworth-Etter, “A Sermon for Women,” in *A Diary of Signs & Wonders* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, reprinted from 1916 ed.), 215–216; 30–31.

7 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 14.

8 Ibid., 21.

9 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 22.

10 Woodworth-Etter, *Diary of Signs*, 67–68.

11 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 41.

12 Woodworth-Etter, *Diary of Signs*, 111.

13 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 42.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 148.

16 Ibid., 146.

17 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 146.

18 Ibid., 81.

19 Maria Woodworth-Etter, *Life & Testimony of Mrs. M. B. Woodworth-Etter*, 12.

20 Woodworth-Etter, *Diary of Signs*, 151.

21 Woodworth-Etter, *Diary of Signs*, 184.

22 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 41.

23 Ibid., 213.

24 Ibid., 167.

25 Woodworth-Etter, *Diary of Signs*, 166.

26 Ibid., 173.

27 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 201.

28 Ibid., 202–203.

29 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 172.

30 Article from *The Latter Rain Evangel* (August 1913).

31 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 188.

32 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 169.

33 Personal letter from Elizabeth Waters to Thomas Slevin, great-great-great-grandson of Sister Etter.

34 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 268, footnote 21.

35 Ibid., 256–257; 267, footnote 13.

36 Ibid., 256.

37 Aimee Semple McPherson, *This Is That* (Los Angeles, CA: Echo Park Evangelistic Assoc., Inc., 1923), 149–150.

38 Warner, *Woman Evangelist*, 294, footnote 11.

39 Ibid., 287.

40 Ibid., 290.

41 Woodworth-Etter, *Life & Testimony*, 123.

42 Ibid., 124.

43 Personal interview with Tom Slevin, great-great-great-grandson of Maria Woodworth-Etter.

44 Woodworth-Etter, *Life & Testimony*, 138.