

# FIRESEEDS

## BORN IN PRAYER

By Vonette Bright

I graduated from college in 1948 and by summer's end was headed to California for a visit with my brother. But most of my thoughts about the trip had to do with my fiancé Bill Bright. More than once since proposing marriage, Bill had told me that God took first place in his life. Before I left for California to finalize wedding plans I confided to a friend, "I'm either going to rescue Bill from this religious fanaticism or come back without a ring."

Bill had left our Oklahoma hometown in 1944, to create a business in Los Angeles. He reluctantly accepted an invitation to church from his new landlords and accepted Jesus Christ the following year. In August of 1948 this man I loved was a growing Christian and active in the young adult group at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood. I arrived in California and off we went to Forest Home Christian Conference Center for a church-sponsored meeting of several hundred college and career students.

Dr. Henrietta Mears, Director of Christian Education, spoke at the conference. Bill suggested I speak privately with her about our differences. As she and I talked, Bill paced outside the cottage for 90 minutes, praying his heart out! The biblical thoughts she shared guided me into a prayer of receiving Christ, just as Bill had done a few years earlier. For the first time God became a living



Bill and Vonette in front of their first home.

reality to me. As the weeks passed, God added a new dimension to my life. I was becoming as enthusiastic as Bill and Dr. Mears – just as eager to share the good news of Jesus.

Oh yes, on the next-to-the last day of 1948, Bill and I were married! Now happily united and sharing a commitment to Christ, I was teaching in the L.A. schools and working on a Master's Degree. Bill was building his business while working toward a seminary degree. We loved our church and senior pastor Dr. Louis Evans, Sr. Together with our young friends we continued to grow. We were learning to rely daily on Christ. Our church reached out to jails, hospitals and rescue missions. Our schedules were pretty rigorous, but we enjoyed these volunteer ministries. Then, we arrived at one of those special points in time you always look back to.

At home in our Hollywood Hills cottage one Sunday afternoon in 1951, Bill and I were talking about our busy lives and our goals. We had been learning that our loving

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*igniting movements*

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Heavenly Father's will was better than our own. It was new and exciting! Materialistic goals that had driven us had lost their luster. We so much wanted our lives to count for eternity, pursuing goals in line with God's will.

We decided to separately make lists of the things most important to us and then talk more about our goals as a couple. I went to another room and asked the Lord to show me what He wanted me to do. I wrote down my ideas and came back to see what Bill had concluded.

As we compared notes and agreed on one list of several goals, we both sensed God leading us to make some sort of deeper commitment. My businessman husband asked, "What if we put what we've written in the form of a contract with the Lord, and surrender our lives, our goals, our material possessions, and our future completely to Him?" That expressed exactly what I wanted to do. Prayerfully we signed our names to our "contract with God."

Over the years we often referred back to our contract. What goals did we set? To what did we commit? Until Bill's passing in 2003, we often related many decisions to the irrevocable contract we signed together. It sounds a bit dramatic, but many circumstances changed from that day on...some right away.

A few months later, one night in the spring of Bill's seminary senior year, I went to bed, leaving him and a friend studying late for an exam. He began to share with his friend about the need to reach students for Christ. Suddenly, he sensed the indescribable presence of God. He was given an overwhelming vision of the gospel going to the entire world, beginning on college campuses. The timing of this vision from God was not lost on us. Recently we had given ourselves unconditionally to Him and His great cause in the world. And here He was, revealing this new focus for our lives! When I awakened the next morning Bill told me what he had just experienced. We praised God for His directing us so clearly and prayed for His grace and strength in whatever lay ahead.

Bill shared his vision the very next day with a favorite



seminary professor, Dr. Wilbur Smith. After praying overnight Dr. Smith told Bill that God had given him a name for what he had envisioned: "Campus Crusade for Christ." We asked the Lord to guide our steps in this new ministry on

the college campus. We prayed and asked friends to pray about what to do next.

The pieces of the ministry came together quickly that summer. God gave us a wonderful advisory board and official permission to work with students at UCLA, which many people considered an extra challenging environment. Bill and I had gone with church volunteers for about a year into fraternity and sorority houses to talk with students about Jesus. Some students were willing to talk with us, and we may have sown some spiritual seeds; however we did not see anyone come to Christ through those university meetings.

God was answering someone's prayers in all those critical happenings, the lives and situations that He was bringing together to form what would become a worldwide movement. Even as we made ready to be faithful to our calling to the UCLA campus that fall, we made certain this new ministry would be bathed in an incubator of continual prayer.

Bill and I recruited everyone we could think of to serve as prayer partners. Dividing each day into 96 segments of 15 minutes each, we worked to fill every slot and have around-the-clock prayer. We wanted to know that someone, somewhere was uniting in prayer for this ministry.

We knew that Scripture said to pray without ceasing. We were depending on the Holy Spirit to guide every step we took and work in students' lives, in response to prayer. Campus Crusade was born in prayer, and prayer will always be our lifeline.



**Vonette Bright**, Campus Crusade for Christ/Cru co-founder, continued her work as author, speaker, and leader in the arena of unified, strategic prayer, until the Lord took her home in 2015.