

FOREWORD

In 1989, 120 young people sat cross-legged, covering nearly every square inch of our living and dining rooms. They had accepted our invitation to anyone who thought missions might be in his or her future.

As Helen Roseveare stood by our fireplace and looked into their faces, she reached back toward the mantel and eased a long-stemmed red rose bud from its vase. While she spoke, she used a small knife to remove thorns, leaves, petals, the green outer layer of stem—every element that makes a rose a rose. What remained was a sleek, straight shaft. The pieces that lay on the floor were not bad things. But, she explained, they had to be removed if she were going to make an arrow. God does this, she said. He cuts away everything—even innocent, good things—that hinders us from being arrows that he will shoot for his purposes at his intended target.

Outwardly, Helen Roseveare's life may be different than ours. She served for twenty years as a medical doctor and missionary in war-torn Congo. But her inner battles were similar to ours. And as we know, inner battles don't stay in. They may spill over, injuring even the people that we care about most. The three books in this volume give us a window into a great and embattled soul.

Seeing another's battles gives us perspective on our own struggles. For one thing, there is seldom only one cause.

We realise how tangled the causes of spiritual dryness are as Helen describes a period during medical training:

The joy and excitement of the first three years suddenly seemed to drain away. . . . Work began to get on top of me; unhappiness, loneliness, fear, inferiority, all began to be acutely present. At the same time Bible study and prayer became perfunctory instead of joyous Witness continued, but with no real faith or expectation of seeing results. Looking back it is easy to realise that at least part of the explanation lies in the fact that ... I was suffering from overwork and strain resulting from a very full programme ... I ... thought this exhaustion meant spiritual failure.¹

She felt like a spiritual failure. She forced herself to her Bible and prayer. It seemed pointless to talk about Christ. But that deadness didn't come from nowhere. She was working and studying too many hours in a day, not getting enough sleep. Her vulnerability to "unhappiness, loneliness, fear, inferiority" came from two directions: her physical exhaustion and her spiritual depletion. Her spiritual life dragged because she was exhausted, and she was exhausted because her spiritual life dragged—a tangled circle.

That is a good lesson. Given a choice, we need wise decisions about sleeping, eating, and other things that affect our health, so we don't open ourselves to sin that undermines spiritual well-being. From the spiritual side, we must work to keep our connection with God strong through his Word and prayer, so we have eyes to see when we are sliding into bad attitudes and glossing over our sin.

God often uses other people to retrieve us when we're easing into sin that flourishes in spiritual dryness. It's humbling when others point out our weaknesses, our *sins*. It was especially encouraging to see Helen turning to her

1 See later in this volume: *Give Me This Mountain*, pp. 72-73.

African pastor and co-workers and receiving their correction. It can be hard to believe that someone from another culture understands or has the right to admonish us.

It is a gift when God gives a mind and heart to know and feel that brothers and sisters come in every ethnicity—that “in Christ Jesus [we] are all sons of God, through faith ... one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26-28 ESV). That realization was a gift and a lesson Helen received with thanks and humble wonder. To think, she wrote later, “I had gone out to them as the missionary-teacher!”²

When things were going badly at Nebobongo, Helen knew she needed a change: “Suddenly I knew that I had to get away from it all *and sort myself out and seek God’s forgiveness and restoration*, if I was to continue in the work.”³ When things are bad, we do try to take a break and relax. But is relaxing all we do? Taking a break will do little good unless it turns us toward God. She learned this truth so well that her ministry extended years beyond her crises.

One deep personal factor in Helen’s early struggles was her felt need to do and be her very best. But God called her to Africa where the “best” often looked very different than back home. At every turn, there were unforeseen challenges: learning to treat malaria by symptoms rather than with prescribed lab tests, needing to do surgery without having the training, having to make bricks rather than working with patients. Perhaps some of us struggle with the reality that God has called us to less than what we believe is our best. That can happen in any setting. Maybe our problem is that we think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

2 *Living Sacrifice: Willing to be Whittled as an Arrow* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2007), p. 48.

3 *Living Holiness: Willing to be the Legs of a Galloping Horse* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2008), p. 67 (emphasis added).

Helen Roseveare was humbled by her Savior. She was cut down from a rose stem to a sharp and penetrating arrow in the hand of her Master. She learned that no one is too great to be spared such humbling. If anyone was too good to die, it was Jesus. If anyone should have done greater things than walking dusty roads and talking with people too dense to understand, it was Jesus. In Philippians 3, the passage that headlines Helen's story, is verse 10: "... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (ESV). When God called Helen to less than she expected, he was helping her become like Christ, rather than becoming like the best doctor or missionary she knew. Not surprisingly, as we learned from Jesus, this humbling catapulted Helen Roseveare into a life of global fruitfulness that was not "less than she expected" but rather exceeded all her dreams. We are thrilled to see the impact of her life and ministry carried forward with this publication of her work.

JOHN & NOËL PIPER
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INTRODUCTION

I don't remember how old I was when I first heard of Helen Roseveare, but I'll never forget the story my childhood pastor told in a sermon. It was the sort of story that will make a young girl's ears prick up!

In an African mission hospital, a mother died in childbirth, leaving behind a premature baby and a two-year-old daughter. The hospital had no incubator or even electricity to keep the baby warm. A midwife warmed water on the fire and filled up a hot water bottle to warm the baby, but to her great dismay, it burst. There was no other hot water bottle in the hospital, and nowhere to buy one. The best they could do to warm the baby was to let it sleep close to the fire.

The next day, the hospital's missionary doctor, Helen Roseveare, met to pray with the children living at the mission orphanage. She told them about the burst hot water bottle, the tiny baby, and the two-year-old sister who was missing her mother. Although she asked the children to pray, she was unsettled by the boldness of ten-year-old Ruth's prayer: "Please God, send us a hot water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby'll be dead; so please send it this afternoon. And while you are at it, would you please send a dolly for the little girl, so she'll know you really love her?"¹

1 Helen Roseveare, *Living Faith* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2016), p. 56–58.

Helen considered this request impossible. She thought to herself, "The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa almost four years at that time, and I had never, never received a parcel from home; anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator."

To Helen's great surprise, a large package from England—the first she had ever received—arrived on her doorstep that very afternoon. She called to her the orphans who had prayed that morning, and they opened the box together. Carefully, she untied the string and removed the paper while the children's anticipation grew.

The parcel contained colourful knitted jerseys and bandages for hospital patients. There was soap and a box of raisins. Then Helen reached in and pulled out a hot water bottle. She couldn't help crying as she realised how small her faith had been. Little Ruth immediately announced, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly too!" Sure enough, the last thing in the box was a beautiful baby doll.

The package had been on its way for five months before Ruth prayed her prayer. This was not the first time that God surprised Helen Roseveare, and it would not be the last.

* * *

Helen Roseveare was born in 1925 in Hertfordshire, England, the second of Martin and Edith Roseveare's five children. The family was nominally religious and well-educated, but not especially well-off. Martin bounced around between teaching and civil service jobs. Helen and her siblings were sent to excellent British boarding schools, but she often found herself without adequate pocket money to enjoy the amusements her fellow classmates took for granted.

In 1939, when Helen was fourteen years old, Great Britain declared war on Germany. The Roseveare family was fully involved in the war effort. Bob, Helen's older brother, worked as a codebreaker at Bletchley Park. Her father, Martin, worked for the Ministry of Food, where he played a key role in developing and implementing the fraud-proof ration system. (In fact, he was later knighted by the Crown for his wartime service.)

In 1944, Helen matriculated at Cambridge University. Although she had long been religious, while at college she was truly converted through the ministry of some Christian students. Helen worked hard and qualified as a doctor via an accelerated wartime course, but, by the time she finished her studies, the war was over.

Helen chose to become a medical missionary by joining the World Evangelization Crusade (WEC), a missions agency founded in 1913 by missionary C. T. Studd. Although Studd had started the WEC mission in the Congo thirty years before Helen arrived, it still had no doctor. After spending time in Belgium learning French, Helen Roseveare set sail for Africa on February 13, 1953.

Helen's mission work in the Congo took place against a backdrop of great political and civil unrest. The country that is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo was a Belgian colony from 1908 until 1960. The Belgian government resisted giving the people of Congo any form of self-governance until 1960, at which point the international and internal pressure became too great. Independence didn't end Belgian or Western interference; it merely rerouted it through back channels.

The new republic lacked a stable chain of command. In the first year as an independent nation, the president, Joseph Kasavubu, and the prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, each tried to fire the other. The country's wealthiest province,

Katanga, tried to secede under a third leader. The army chief of staff, Joseph Mobutu (later known as Mobutu Sese Seko), staged a coup d'état. And Lumumba was brutally assassinated barely six months after taking office.

The political instability of the Congo brought with it ever-changing, ever-complexifying systems and regulations. Throughout her life, Helen Roseveare believed that missionary doctors in Africa had an obligation to train Africans in medical work. Her call to medical missions was thus also a call to a teaching ministry, and, over the course of her career, Helen started two hospitals and established numerous training programs and clinics. This work meant Helen developed an unwanted side ministry of bureaucratic slogging.

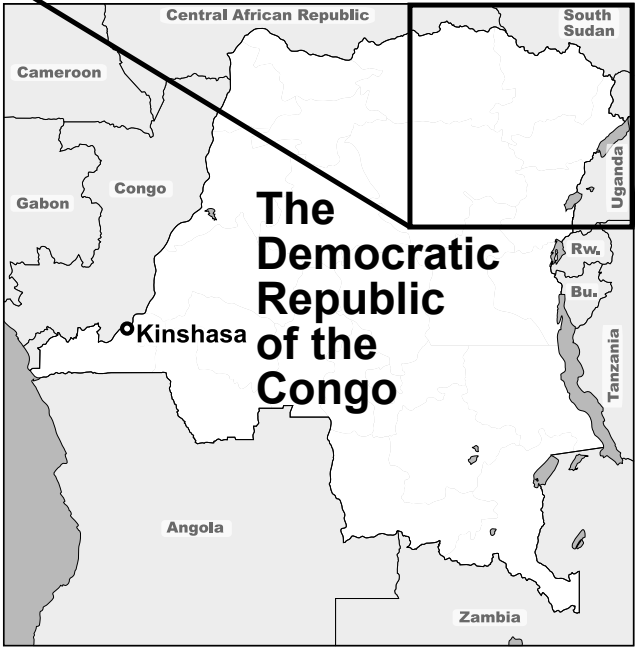
Helen loathed spending precious time filling in forms and writing reports that might never be read, but she accepted that her time was the Lord's. She could have moved on to a country where medical ministry involved more medicine and less placation of low-level government officials, but she didn't. Because of Helen's perseverance, her medical ministry didn't end when she left Africa. She left behind institutions and training programs that exist to this day.

In her later life, Helen developed an illustration she called "the stripping of the rose." As she spoke about what God requires of his servants, she would hold a rose and cut off thorns, branches, and leaves. She would even remove the beautiful petals and talk about how the good things in our life can keep us from usefulness if they are not surrendered to the Lord. After she had a bare stem in her hand, she used a knife to strip away the bark until she had a smooth, polished shaft, ready to be used as an arrow.

As you will see, this illustration came out of Helen's own experience. God stripped her of everything that interfered with his purposes. Over and over again, she was stripped of

her pride. This was no less painful for Helen than it is for any one of us. But she willingly submitted again and again to God's sanctifying work, and consequently was used mightily for his kingdom.

—BETSY CHILDS HOWARD



A TIMELINE OF HELEN ROSEVEARE'S LIFE

- 1925 Born at Haileybury, Herts, England.
- 1931 Primary and secondary school education.
- 1944 Left school and began studying medicine at Cambridge.
- 1945 Converted while a medical student at Newnham College, Cambridge.
- 1951 Became a missionary candidate with the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (WEC).
- 1953 Sailed to Africa under the auspices of WEC to the Belgian Congo. Spent eighteen months establishing medical services at Ibambi, NE Congo.
- 1955 Moved seven miles to establish WEC medical centre at Nebobongo, comprising: 100-bed hospital and maternity services; leprosy-care centre and children's home; 48 rural health clinics in immediate vicinity; training school for national paramedical workers, that is, male and female assistant nurses and midwives.
- 1958 Two years of furlough with further medical training in UK.
- 1960 Independence: formation of the Republic of Congo.

- 1964 Rebellion and Simba uprising (civil war): spent five months in captivity.
- 1965 Rescued by National Army: one year's furlough in the UK.
- 1966 Returned to Africa, under the auspices of WEC to Congo/Zaire, to give seven years' service in an inter-mission (comprising five missions and churches) medical project at the Evangelical Medical Centre of Nyan-kunde, NE Zaire.
- He Gave Me This Mountain* first published.
- 1973 Home to the UK after twenty years of African service.
- 1976 Spoke at a missionary conference in the United States of America.
- 1977 *He Gave Us A Valley* first published.
- 1988 Returned to Nebobongo to make a video for missionary societies.
- 1989 Life is portrayed in the film *Mama Luka Comes Home*.
- 2004 Returned to Nebobongo to open a new surgical unit.
- 2005 *Digging Ditches* first published.
- 2007 Worldwide speaking and teaching ministry continued while settling in Northern Ireland.
- 2016 Died at 91 in Northern Ireland.