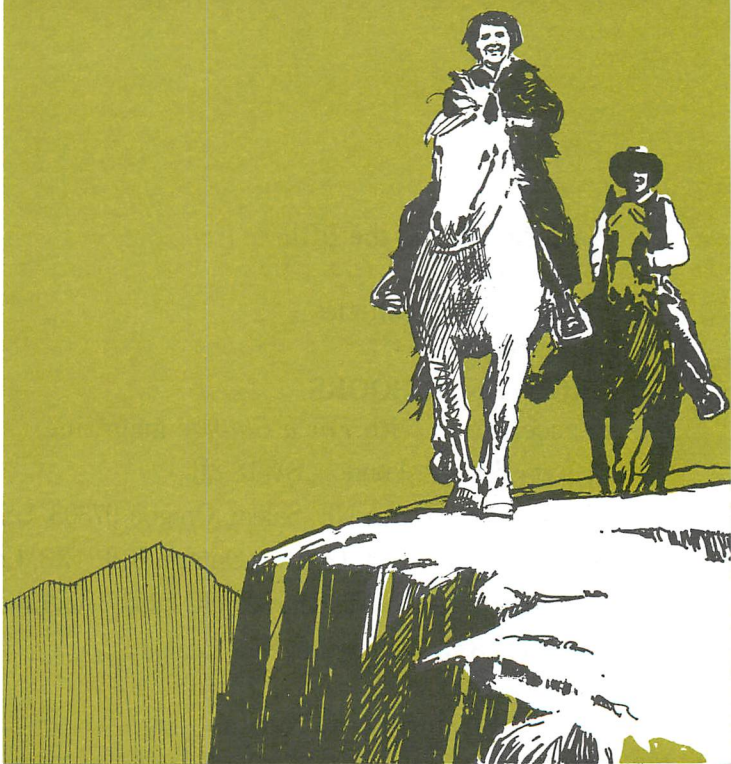


**I always
wanted
adventure**



ELEANOR FORDE NEWTON
describes her experiences
of the life of faith

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I always wanted adventure

by Eleanor Forde Newton

I always wanted adventure. I can remember walking along a street in Montreal when I was nine, struggling to decide whether to be a circus girl or a missionary. I had just been to the circus, and I could see myself in a spangled dress riding tiptoe on a white horse. The year was 1908.

Ten years later, my Aunt Annie took me to a Baptist Temple in New York. It was a beautiful spring evening. There were only a few other people in the congregation, and they looked poor. After a rousing sermon, the preacher asked if anyone wanted to come forward and make a decision to give their life to Christ.

I thought, 'Yes, I would like to do that. But to identify myself in a barn of a place like this, with poor people?' And then it seemed a voice said to me, 'If you are ashamed to stand by me because you are in a "poor place"— I was born in a barn, remember? — you'll never make a decision.' So I got up and went forward.

As I remember it now, I was the only one. But as Aunt Annie and I walked home, the stars were shining gloriously. It was a beautiful night — just marvellous. I

have never forgotten the wonder of it. I knew I had done something irrevocable. That decision has been the touchstone of my life.

I was born in 1899 in Montreal. My mother, Adelaide Napier, had grown up in New York, the daughter of a cultured Scottish-Irish family. We were raised with the motto of the Napier clan: '*Sans tache et sans reproche*' (without stain and without reproach).

Mother was a student of the artist Olin Warner, and his drawing of her is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When she married my father, Thomas Forde, she was 37 and he was a widower of 50, with three children. Three more followed – Roberta (1897), Milton (1901) and me (1899).

I had a happy childhood. We loved the Canadian winters – the sleighbells, the mountains to slide and ski on, the deep snowdrifts to leap into from the second-storey balcony of our house. At Easter we got beautiful new straw hats from Italy. In the summer Father took us to his fishing camp in the Quebec wilderness.

This natural paradise was shaken when we were still young by the storms in people's hearts. It is never easy for a first family to accept a stepmother, however hard she tries. There was much we did not and could not understand. But we watched with wonder the love and faith that carried Mother through 20 years of pain and loneliness, disappointment and at times despair.

My father's building business in Montreal collapsed with the outbreak of World War I, when all building efforts were re-channelled into munitions. He was in his seventies. Things became so bad financially that in 1918 my mother, brother and I went to live with her family in New York – Roberta was already married – while Father moved in with his son by his first

marriage, Oliver, who loved him dearly. He died two years later.

My mother's brother, Milton, was a bachelor and architect and lived in the old family home in Brooklyn with their widowed sister, Annie. We joined them there.

Even as a small child I had had a great love for Christ. My mother, grandmother, grandfather, uncle and aunt were all believers in the sense that their faith was in their lives, not just in their minds. Aunt Annie had wanted to be a missionary, but it hadn't worked out. In the evenings, sitting around the fireplace in Brooklyn, Aunt Annie and Uncle Milton would tell me, 'You have to make a decision. What are you going to do with your life? Are you going to try to run it yourself or give your life to Christ? Are you just going to go your own selfish way?' I would say, 'I don't see why you have to decide that.'

We used to go to the beautiful Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, with its two-storey-high Tiffany windows. We heard great sermons and lovely music. But nothing moved me to a decision until I went to that Baptist Temple with Aunt Annie.

After that night I knew I could not go on living as I had. What would I do? Should I join the Salvation Army or go and be a missionary among the poor in the Southern States? On the other hand, I knew Mother needed me. The move from Montreal had left her tired and discouraged, in spite of all the support of the family.

My aunt offered to send me to Vassar to finish the degree I had begun at McGill, Montreal. But I decided to get a job.

The first step was a secretarial course, run by a lovely lady called Mrs Young. Just as I was beginning

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to get the gist – and that’s all one could call it – she told me that she had found me a job with a lawyer on Wall Street. I protested that I was not ready, but agreed to try.

We struggled agonizingly for a week and then I told my mother that I had decided to resign. Armed with her support, I took the subway to Wall Street, firm of purpose. I don’t know to this day if I resigned or if my employer fired me, for we opened our mouths at the same moment. Then we laughed and shook hands, and I left, bearing my week’s wages of \$17.50.

Eventually I became the secretary to four professors at New York University. They had the endearing habit of finding urgent work which compelled them to be out of the office on Saturdays during the baseball season. I worked for them for five happy and exciting years, and was even engaged to one of them for a time.

I enjoyed life at the university. I took a couple of classes each year. One of them won me a scholarship to the Parsons School of Fine and Applied Art in Paris. Mother and I spent a magical summer there, being guided around the city by the great Professor Parsons himself. At about that time, I was mascot at the victory banquet when little Center College of Kentucky beat Harvard at football. And I have a vivid memory of a wonderful party, which I attended with a rich and handsome blind date from Yale. As we danced, I noticed a closed door and thought, ‘If Christ opened that door and beckoned to me, would I go – or stay?’ I said to myself, ‘I would go.’

Meanwhile I was still trying to decide what to do with my life. Dressed in a coonskin fur coat Roberta had given me and a cloche hat, I went to the office of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. The woman at the desk seemed surprised when I told her I wanted to

be a missionary and asked what country I was thinking of. 'China,' I said. It was the country I least wanted to go to, but I felt I should play straight with God.

The woman asked how long I planned to stay. I replied that I thought being a missionary was like enlisting in the army – you either got killed or stayed till the end. This seemed to convince the woman that I was sincere – but when she heard that my mother was a widow and needed my loving support, she advised me to keep on with my job and trust that God would let me know when I should do something different.

I wanted to live a real Christian life, but I didn't know how to do it. In our secretarial office there was an older woman who seemed to have worked out a sincere belief. One day I asked her, 'What *do* you believe?' She replied, 'My dear, it's a matter of infinite calculus.' As I had always had difficulty adding two and two, I decided that let me out.

On the Wednesday before Easter, 1922, I gave God an ultimatum – 'You must tell me what I am to do with my life, *today!*' The amazing thing is that he did. At a noontime service near the NYU campus a young man bounded up into the pulpit and began his brief talk with the words, 'Thy will be done'. In the course of it he said, 'There may be some young woman in this church today who has a job, or is a student, who is meant to give her life to God's will.'

Since both categories applied to me, I went to him after the service and said, 'I am the young woman you were referring to. Tell me what I am meant to do.' He said he didn't know, but that if I was willing, God would find a way of letting me know.

His name was Sam Shoemaker. Some years before, while on a two-year assignment in China from

Princeton, he had met a man called Frank Buchman. This encounter had led to a profound change in his life and he later became Rector of Calvary Church in New York.

I went to Calvary and linked up with a dynamic group of young people who called themselves 'A First Century Christian Fellowship'. They were committed to living by absolute moral standards – honesty, purity, unselfishness and love – and to actively seeking God's guidance for their lives daily.

On Easter Sunday I made a further commitment to God. I asked him not only to guide me each day, but also to use me to help other people find his plan for their lives. I realized that it wasn't a question of going off to China, but of living my faith on the job wherever I was.

That week in 1922 set off a lifelong process of growth and change. A few years later I wrote to my sister Roberta, describing another landmark:

'I used to be forever struggling with sin in myself. I thought God was asking victory of me, instead of his offering release. The day that thought dawned on me it shook me upside down. I saw that doubt of God's power to change me was a sin.

'I saw an empty table and God said, "Put everything there and I will keep it. It's mine. Every sin you ever committed in thought, word or deed – your fears, disappointments, every unfulfilled desire, right or wrong; your fear of what God might ask you to do; your defeats; your pride; your virtues; your family and worry for them; your nerves, your mind...." I came to a stop and said to myself, "Suppose I should forget something", and it came clearly, "Put yourself – everything that is Eleanor Forde".

'There was the command that I could never take

anything off that table again for myself. “But,” he said, “you can take anything off to help anyone else, only you must put it right back.”

‘I have never known anything like it for the sense of being free. No emotion – just peace, confidence, certainty.’ Among the things I laid on that table were the hurts and sorrows I had felt for my parents.

Not long after I joined Calvary Church, our little group went to meet Frank Buchman, who had just returned from India, in a small uptown restaurant. Sam had told him about my decision, but I had a feeling that he was wondering whether I was there for the message or for the boys. When I spoke about the steps I had been through and how this lady had said it was a matter of infinite calculus and how I couldn’t add up, he roared with laughter. He seemed to think that I was for real.

I saw quite a lot of Frank Buchman after that, as one of the young men and women he was training to help people. I can remember him telling me that I must always tell him when I thought he was wrong. I always did. And he was equally frank with me. It helped us both.

I gave up my work at the university and moved with Mother and Milton to a home in Naugatuck, Connecticut, which Roberta and her husband Harris Whittemore provided for us. For a year I worked on the staff of the local Congregational Church. Then Sam asked me to come back to New York, to take charge of the work with young women at Calvary and to organize ‘house party’ seminars. It was hard to leave Mother and Milton now that we were so happily settled, but I knew that it was what God wanted me to do.

In 1927, Frank Buchman wrote from England to invite

me to come and work with him in Oxford, helping young women who were looking for a new start in their lives.

Mother in her unselfish way encouraged me to go. I asked her later in life how she managed to be so undemanding. She told me that when I was a child she had asked God to use me in such a way that the world would be a better place. She did not feel that it was up to her to dictate how and where.

Over the next years I travelled a lot. Whenever it was possible Mother or Roberta joined me, and sometimes I was able to come home on a prolonged visit. When Mother became old and ill, Roberta and Harris took her into their home and gave her the most loving care. She died in 1948, aged 91.

I spent the last years of the 1920s in Britain and Europe, running training courses and trying to help people to find their way to God. Recently I had a letter from a woman who, as an 11-year-old, had listened in to a meeting in her aunt's home in Edinburgh. She had heard me say that at one time in my life I had three gods – brains, brawn and beauty – but that when I had given my life to Christ, I had found the one true God. My ambition now was to be used by God for the good of other people and the world. She had decided that she wanted to do the same thing and that decision had provided the compass for her life ever since.

During those years, at Frank Buchman's request, I wrote a booklet on the guidance of God, which is still in circulation today.

In 1929, I was part of a large group who visited South Africa (where we were dubbed 'The Oxford Group', which became our established name). The response was so great that people had to sit on the window sills in the crowded halls where we spoke. So

many wanted to talk personally after the meetings that we had to develop an appointment system. Over the years I have had countless letters from people who turned to God at that time. One couple wrote, 'Your coming helped to change our lives.'

We were not paid for our work, living completely on 'faith and prayer' and relying on people's gifts and hospitality. I can remember being without money in Johannesburg and kneeling down with a friend to pray about it. The next day I had word that there was money waiting for me at the bank. It came from a couple with whom I had spent my last afternoon in New York. Their marriage had been in difficulties, and I had found it a real sacrifice to spend that time with them, rather than with my mother, before leaving for months.

Each year, during the long summer vacation, we held an international house party at Oxford. Afterwards, we would plan where to focus our activities next. In 1931, I piped up with the suggestion that we should go to Canada – and Frank Buchman sent me back across the Atlantic to organize the campaign.

George Ewing, the father of my best friend from university days, helped me to find dignitaries from different parts of the country to sign an invitation for Frank Buchman and a team of colleagues to come to Canada, and the campaign began. After one of our first meetings, a press magnate decided to pay \$12,200 in undeclared customs duties to the National Revenue Department. The story was in many of the national newspapers, and interest in the Oxford Group spread. In the next years we crossed the country twice. On one Sunday in 1933, according to *The Vancouver News*, 30,000 people came to hear Oxford Group speakers in different churches and halls in Vancouver.

One woman I met at that time was home on leave

from India, where she had worked as a doctor in a missionary hospital for seven years. Her sister and brother-in-law had been taking part in our campaign, and she was eager to find the new joy and sense of destiny she saw in them.

She told me about some episodes in India of which she was deeply ashamed and we prayed together. Then I asked her whether she had told these things to her mother, who ran a popular Bible Study course in one of the largest churches. 'Oh no, I couldn't,' she said. 'It would kill her.' I suggested she should ask God to tell her what to do. After a few moments of quiet, she said she knew that she must talk to her mother. She did, and was amazed by the response. She returned to India a different person, and worked there for another 15 years. Today, aged 92, she still helps people around her to grow towards faith.

In the late 1930s I returned to New York, and was based at Calvary House, at that time the US headquarters of the Oxford Group (known today as Moral Re-Armament). One day a young colleague called Jim Newton came into my office. He was a friend of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford and had been right-hand man to Harvey Firestone, President of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, before working full-time with the Oxford Group.

'You're going out to lunch on Wednesday with Mrs Edison,' Jim announced. 'Who said?' I asked. 'I said,' replied Jim. I laughed and went. Mrs Edison and I had a wonderful time.

Soon after the outbreak of World War II, MRA organized a campaign in different cities across the United States. Mrs Edison was invited to take part, and it was arranged that I would accompany her on the

train journey from New Jersey to California.

When I went to pick her up at her home in West Orange, New Jersey, her daughter was waiting for me. It was ridiculous, she said, for her mother to go on a trip like this at her age. 'She wants to go,' I said. 'I know she wants to go,' she said. I promised that I would bring her straight back if she became unwell, tired or wanted to come home. Her daughter seemed satisfied.

Before we got to Chicago, Mrs Edison was sick. I got her off the train, put her to bed in a hotel and went in search of a doctor. But it was Independence Day weekend and no doctors seemed to be answering their phones. I rang the only friend in Chicago I could think of, on the off-chance that she would be in town. She was on her way to a dinner party and promised to speak to a doctor who was going to be there.

Sure enough, about 9.00 that night, the bell rang. I opened the door and there was a young man in a white tie looking very annoyed. He went in to see Mrs Edison and emerged 15 minutes later, laughing.

'Should I take her home?' I asked.

'Oh no,' he replied, 'don't do that. She and I see things through the same lens. I'm Scotch Presbyterian and she is a staunch Methodist. We feel that if you put your hand to the plough and turn back you *will* be sick.' So we went on to California.

Mrs Edison spoke eloquently at breakfasts, luncheons, teas and dinners all the way down the coast to Los Angeles where Louis B Mayer gave a luncheon for her and 200 guests. Throughout she was encouraged and supported by Jim Newton, who took care of all our travel arrangements.

The culmination of the campaign was a huge meeting in the Hollywood Bowl. It was packed with 30,000 people and the newspapers reported that 15,000 had

been unable to get in. Many found a new direction for their lives, which affected their communities and even nations.

In 1943 I married Jim Newton. By then he was an army officer. Our small wedding took place during his weekend leave. My sister Roberta was my matron of honour and the famous aviator, Charles Lindbergh, was Jim's best man.

We were both independent people, in our late 30s and early 40s, for whom marriage meant a considerable change of life. There were inevitable tensions. We set up home in a small apartment in Petersburg, Virginia, where Jim was in charge of weapons training for the army base and under immense pressure. In addition, he felt torn between his commitments to his family and those to his new wife, while I felt cut off from the satisfying relationships I was accustomed to. There was a conflict of interests.

One Sunday morning, in a moment of despair, I said to God, 'Who is right and who is wrong?' Just one thought came to me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' I said to myself, 'I didn't ask for a text from the Bible.'

I asked again, 'Who is right and who is wrong?' Back the thought came, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' And again I said, 'What I want is an answer to my question.' But the same thought returned. Then I realized that that was the answer which God was giving me. And with that all the demands in my heart disappeared.

Jim's father, a doctor, and his mother ran the Beach Hotel in Fort Myers Beach, Florida. Later that day Jim got a long-distance call from them. I could hear him saying, 'No, no, I don't think so.' His mother, he explained, wondered if I would accompany his cousin and her new baby on the long train journey south from

Philadelphia to visit the family in Florida. Her husband was on a submarine in the Pacific.

It was anything but a casual decision, as Jim was about to be sent to the South Pacific any day, but because of my experience that morning I said, 'I'll take her.'

'*Would* you?' he asked.

'Of course I will,' I said.

I had a wonderful two weeks with his family and then Jim called to say that he was coming down on a two-week leave before going to the South Pacific. His parents and I went to meet him at the airport in the old station wagon. On previous visits I had secretly resented the fact that one of his parents always sat in the front of the car with him as he drove home, while I sat in the back. This time, to my surprise, he asked me to sit with him – and, even more surprisingly, I was completely happy to stay in the back!

That night we took a walk on the beach. 'Ellie, I've got something to tell you,' said Jim. 'I realized after you left that I haven't been easy to live with and that I've hurt you very much.' He was so changed, so loving and undemanding, that I burst into tears.

'All right, Ellie, this is crying time,' he said. 'You cry as long as you like. It'll be all right.' A great healing happened and a new life began for us. It was a watershed.

Jim returned home from his war service in the Philippines and Okinawa with an inner ear injury and generally impaired health. We were staying with his parents at the Beach Hotel. At times Jim had severe vertigo, but he wanted to go off on a sailing trip. His physician father said it would probably be all right, as long as he wore a life jacket and was tied to the

mast with a long rope at all times.

The two of us set out in the late afternoon to sail down the west coast of Florida. As we left, his sister Mary called, 'Don't fall overboard, Jim. We don't want to have to go sailing around Cape Horn looking for Ellie!' I had absolutely no sailing experience.

Our charts proved to be almost useless because a hurricane had gone through recently and changed everything. The very first night we tried to enter a bay, but found the entrance blocked by a newly-formed sandbank. As we sat there helpless, at midnight, we knew there was nothing to do but pray. Suddenly, the lights of a fishing boat came towards us. We hailed them and they showed us the new route into the bay.

When we set out I expected to be gone for about five days, but it turned out to be five weeks. We explored down through the Everglades, up Shark River and along the Atlantic reefs off the Florida Keys, as Jim had done on earlier sailing trips with Charles and Anne Lindbergh.

We took another memorable trip while Jim was still trying to recover his health. Friends had recommended a place in Colorado, high in the Rocky Mountains, and we found a little log cabin with a potbelly stove and a glorious view, part of a ranch where they had horses to ride.

For the first three weeks I kept house, wrote letters and read to my heart's content. Jim began to feel better and was riding more and more every day. He wanted me to join him, but I wasn't keen. I was happy reading. 'I'm 50,' I said to myself. 'I shouldn't be asked to do this.'

However, I agreed to go with him. The next day as we rode across the valley, I seemed to hear a voice saying, 'You never need to grow old.' So I never have. I began to

realize that staying young meant accepting new and unexplored experiences. I soon graduated to all-day rides in the mountains with Jim.

On the second of these all-day rides I suddenly saw how the resistance in my spirit created a hidden negative pressure on Jim. This was a new thought to me. I had seen so clearly the effect Jim's positive pressures had on me, and was so grateful he had changed. Now it was my turn. As I rode along, the pressure in me dissolved into joy and freedom.

One glorious day we climbed all morning up a steep trail to a little lake, where we had lunch. Then all the inexperienced riders, except one who refused, went back with a cowboy to the ranch, while the rest of us climbed on up past the timberline to the top of the Continental Divide, 13,000 feet above sea level. We sat on our horses looking down on a sheer, 3,000-foot drop to the valley below.

At this point the inexperienced rider jumped off her horse and threw herself on the ground in hysterics. The cowboy asked me if I could help and agreed to hold my horse so that I could dismount and go to her. The only thing that came to me to say was, 'Get up! God is just as much at the top of the mountains as he is down in the valley.' She was so shocked she got back on her horse.

On another occasion we lost the dim trail near the top of a mountain and started on the precipitous descent. There was no trail to follow. Sometimes we had to jump over great fallen logs. It took three hours.

At last, after a long descent, we stood 1,000 feet above our own valley. It looked as if we were at the edge of a precipice. The feet of our cowboy's horse seemed to be falling into space. The cowboy thought a minute and looked at the footprints on the ground ahead. Then he said reassuringly, before plunging on, 'I

guess we'll make it. I see an elk got through here.' This became a family proverb with Jim and me. Whenever a difficulty arises we remind each other, 'An elk got through here.'

When Jim was well again we resumed our full-time voluntary work with Moral Re-Armament. We spent two years in the Caribbean and a year in Pakistan and India. Between these and other missions we would return to the MRA conference centres at Mackinac Island, Michigan, and at Caux in Switzerland, bringing delegates with us.

In the mid-1960s, we woke up to the fact that we were entering an unpopular human condition known as 'advancing years'. We had given ourselves unreservedly to God's work of 'remaking the world' without salary. Now we remembered the example of Paul, who made tents while spreading the good news, so as not to be a burden to the younger people who were carrying the faith forward. So we returned to Fort Myers Beach, where Jim had worked in property development as a young man. Roberta and Harris, generous as ever, helped us to build a small home on the Gulf of Mexico and we set up a small real estate business.

Over the next years, our area suddenly exploded into one of the fastest-growing in the country. Jim's philosophy was 'real estate is people, not only property'. While he was still working out of a cubby-hole with no office, equipment, files or secretary, Jim was asked to be President and a State Director of our Board of Realtors.

One by one, people came and asked if they could work with the company because, they said, they liked the way he cared for people. Within five years we had grown into a team of 20 associates with four branch

offices; eventually we had 130 associates and 15 offices. I got my real estate license at the age of 71, so that I could help too. Because of Jim's work in the development of Fort Myers in the 1920s, and his friendship with Thomas Edison and his neighbour Henry Ford, he is regarded today as one of the City Fathers.

Alongside the business, we carried on doing our best for each of the people God sent our way. One day a young business associate came and told me that she was so unhappy that she wanted to leave her husband. 'Before you do that, let's get on our knees and pray,' I said. She committed her life to God, in the faith that he would give her a new marriage. Today they are one of the most trusted couples in our community.

Not long after the business took off Jim had a serious automobile accident and was in intensive care for many days, with his life hanging in the balance. Many of our friends around the world were praying for us. I often thought of the way Frank Buchman would pray, 'Jesus, stand among us in thy risen power.' One critical night, as I stood beside him, Jim roused himself. He nearly threw his doctor into apoplexy when, with tubes here and there and struggling to speak, he announced: 'Three points! One, I'm not going to lie here and pine away. Two, I'm not going to lie here and be a fuddy-duddy. Three, Monday, to work!' After a long convalescence he was able to be as active as ever.

My story began with my decision, aged 19, to give my life to Christ. Some years ago, I had another experience which has been a 'touchstone' for my life.

I was greatly troubled at the time because of a deep division which had developed between some of my closest friends and colleagues. There was bitterness in

my heart: I had prayed about it, but it was still there.

Jim and I had just arrived in Rome, after a business trip to France, when he was called back to the United States on urgent business. I elected to stay on in Rome and continue exploring.

I was particularly keen to see the Scala Santa, the marble steps brought to Rome from the Tower of Antonio in Jerusalem by the mother of the first Christian emperor, Constantine. It is said that Christ walked up these steps to meet Pilate.

I found that the original steps had been worn away by centuries of use by Popes, beggars, kings – people of all sorts from all lands – and were now protected with wooden treads. I climbed them, praying, on my knees, as they had all done.

It dawned on me with dissolving poignancy that Jesus had climbed those steps not to judge but to be judged: that it was the sin of judgment and pride-of-knowing in men that had brought him there; that he was there for all people, not to take sides, but to have his arms stretched out to take in all the world. So I went up on my knees and I cried. I gave him my bitterness and asked him to forgive me. And, as I stood there where Jesus had stood, God took it all away.

‘Behold, how these brothers love one another’ is the age-old evidence of his life among men. Black and white, young and old, all nations, sinners and saints. This love between Christ’s brothers, spreading to the world, is the irrefutable proof of his leadership in our divided, angry age. How we do it and where and with whom is also the work of Christ.

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What does a life of faith mean in practice? Eleanor Forde Newton was 19 when she asked Christ into her life. 'I knew I had done something irrevocable,' she writes.



While many search for meaning in life, others can feel that life has passed them by. In this booklet Mrs Newton looks back at the growth points in her life – as a child in Montreal, Canada; a secretary in 1920s New York; a Christian worker in North America, Europe and South Africa; as a wife and businesswoman. When a child, she couldn't decide whether to be a circus girl or a missionary. Now she has found that in an unforgiving world there is adventure in asking God to use her wherever she is.