

Abiding Mission: Missiological Insights from the Spirituality of  
Lillian Trasher and Lillas Trotter

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Brief Biographies of Trasher and Trotter

Lillian Trasher

Lillian Hunt Trasher was born in 1886 in Jacksonville, Florida. She moved to Boston as a young girl and then again to Brunswick, Georgia. When Trasher was ten years old, she heard the salvation testimony of neighbor Ed Mason and it stirred her spiritual curiosity. In February 1887, coming home from school alone, she paused in the woods and cried, “Lord, I want to be your little girl.” She was quiet a while and then she blurted, “Lord, if ever I can do anything for You, just let me know and – and – I’ll do it” (Howell 1960, 22)!

Trasher studied one year at God’s Bible School in Cincinnati and also pastored for a short time in the college town of Dahlonga, Georgia, where she testifies that “God blessed my efforts there very much indeed” (Trasher 1983, 98). In 1909, Trasher went to work at the Faith Orphanage and Bible School outside of Asheville, North Carolina, under Mattie Perry. In May 1910, she became engaged to Tom Jordan. Ten days before the wedding, Trasher and Miss Marker went to hear a missionary from India and God called Trasher to be a foreign missionary. She told Jordan immediately and he replied that he would wait for her. She gently insisted that he could not wait, for what she was called to do would take decades; they must separate. “[God] let me have the privilege of giving up all for Him,” said Trasher (Trasher 1983, 99). God miraculously provided the finances and on October 8, 1910, she and her sister Jennie set sail for Egypt.

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Trasher arrived in Egypt on October 26, 1910 (Trasher 1983, 32) and made her way to Asyut where she was to assist Reverend Dunning in his work. In 1911, as a response to a need, she agreed to look after an unfortunate baby. Trasher was staying with an Egyptian host family. A baby, whose mother had died and whose father had planned to throw the baby into the Nile, was brought to the home. Trasher took the baby and cared for it that night. The malnourished infant cried most of the night and Trasher's host family protested<sup>1</sup> that the baby was too noisy and must leave. She replied, "If the child must go, then I will go too" (Christie 1997, 43).

With only three months experience in Egypt, Trasher rented her own room and kept the baby, and an orphanage was born. In 1915, she secured a modest property and by 1916 the orphanage family had increased to fifty boys and girls. By 1941, 2,700 meals per day were served, and in the 1960s the orphanage numbered 1,500 and served 4,500 meals per day on a campus comprised of more than eleven buildings (Christie 1997, 44). In 1981, George Assad wrote that the orphanage sat on twelve acres of land, consisted of "13 buildings, which include dormitories, a beautiful church, the primary school building, dining room, bakery, storerooms, clinic, offices, water tower, and an electric engine. We have workshops for carpentry, sewing, and knitting, and swimming pools and playgrounds for recreation" (Trasher 1983, 122).

As the orphanage grew, so did the needs, and Trasher made it a matter of principle never to turn anyone away. She solicited funds from local believers and merchants, she prayed for miraculous provision, she corresponded with supporters in America, and she worked very hard with her own hands. The orphanage went through trials of finances, disease (the cholera epidemic of 1947), and government intrusion, but always emerged victorious, largely because of her faith and courage. Trasher was often in "danger of being attacked by Arabs, who often spit at her and yelled obscenities in the streets," (Beatty 1939, 11) but her rather resolute spirit often carried her through the difficult times.

One night, there was a terrific fight as four hijackers attacked a hashish smuggler who, with his wife and baby, was going by donkey into the interior to peddle the dope. Miss Lillian leaped into the battle, scorning the flashing knives, kicking, whacking, yelling in Arabic. She chased the hijackers away, got the woman and her baby into the orphanage, called the police, who carted off the body of the

smuggler, who had been slashed to death in the fray. The woman and her child are still in the orphanage. (Beatty 1939, 11)

Many names were coined for Lillian Trasher. President Nassir called her “Nile Mother,” and others referred to her as “Lady on a donkey,” a reference to her circuit riding fundraising in the early years. Her most beloved name is “Mama Lillian.” Many of the current pastors of the Assemblies of God Church in Egypt are fruit of Lillian Trasher’s vision and legacy. After fifty years of faithful service, Lillian Trasher died in Egypt on December 17, 1961. She once said, “I feel sure that the next generation will be very different because all of those who have passed through our doors will know how to train and educate their children in the ways of the Lord” (Trasher 1983, 39). Trasher had a favorite fable that justly summarizes her life:

My work reminds me of a fable of a little boy who was crossing the desert alone. He became very thirsty so he was obliged to dig in the ground with bleeding fingers until he came to water. He drank and went on his weary way.

Each time he became thirsty he dug holes and his hands became more torn and bleeding. At last he reached the other side, exhausted and fainting, his clothes hanging in dusty rags.

Some months later he looked across the desert and saw a happy little boy coming with his hands full of fresh flowers. The child was coming the very same way which he had traveled. He looked at the strange sight in perfect amazement. When the little boy arrived, he asked him how it could be that he had crossed the awful desert and looked so fresh and cool. The child answered, saying, ‘Oh, the way is beautiful. There are many small wells out of which spring lovely, cool water, and around each of these wells there are flowers and shady bushes and soft green grass. I had no trouble at all in crossing!’

The first boy looked down at his own scarred fingers and knew that it was his suffering which had made the desert bloom and had made the way easy for other little boys to cross. But no one would ever know to thank him or to ask who had dug the wells, but he knew and was satisfied. (Trasher 1983, 39)

### Lilias Trotter

Lilias Trotter was born in London in 1853 to Alexander and Isabella Trotter. Alexander Trotter was of Scottish decent, and Lilias was devoted to him. From an early age Alexander encouraged his children in both scientific and artistic pursuits (Stewart 1958, 13). Trotter had an obvious gift for art and in Venice in 1876, she first garnered the attention of famed art critic John Ruskin. She was only thirteen and Ruskin was fifty-five

but Ruskin agreed to tutor her and a pure and unusual friendship was inaugurated. In 1874, The Broadlands, one of England's stately homes, was the venue for one of the first conventions for "the deepening of spiritual life, the forerunner of the Brighton and Keswick Conventions" (Stewart 1958, 17). Trotter attended this meeting as she did the Moody meetings of 1875, and both meetings profoundly marked her. She no longer felt she could pursue a career in art, and she began to volunteer with the Young Women's Christian Association.

In 1876, Trotter went to Switzerland with her mother and sister, attended a convention (where she preached her first sermon in German) and toured Venice with Mr. Ruskin (Pigott 1930, 9). In 1879, Ruskin again volunteered to personally train her and open the world of art for her—a promise he was well positioned in society to fulfill. Art thrilled Trotter's soul and it was agonizing to lay down her unique talent and love for God's call. A voyage to Norway in 1880, an operation in 1884, and another visit by Ruskin in 1885, highlighted her ten-year service with the YMCA on Welbeck Street. Toward the end of this period two members of the YMCA expressed a desire to serve in foreign missions (one in India and another in China), but whenever Trotter prayed, "the words 'North Africa' sounded in her soul as though a voice were calling her" (Pigott 1930, 15). Trotter attended a meeting about another mission opportunity when "at the close someone stood up and asked, 'Is there anyone in this room whom God is calling for North Africa?' She rose quietly and said, 'He is calling me'" (Pigott 1930, 15).

On March 15, 1888, Trotter left for Algiers with three friends. Their days were spent studying Arabic, praying, reading, meeting with expatriates, and making friends in the Arab quarter. On May 15, Trotter received the stunning news of her sister's sudden death. Days were spent walking around town with Arabic and French evangelistic literature, ministering in visits to the ships in harbor, having meetings for expatriates, and even more Arabic study. Trotter returned to England in 1890 for a four-month rest and when she again arrived in Algiers in October she found a residence on Rue Du Croissant that became the base for her peripatetic mission activity for the next thirty-two years. With a base of ministry established in Algiers (the ranks of these brave ladies had grown to number five) Trotter dreamed of expanding the work south into the desert. In March 1894, together with Helen Freeman, she traveled over land to Biskra, Touggourt, and

ultimately Oued Souf, a small oasis town west of the Tunisian border (Rockness 2003, 134-5). Another five-month journey to the Southlands was undertaken in 1895, which both invigorated and depleted Trotter, and resulted in a well-deserved furlough in 1896.

When she returned to Algiers in 1896, she entered one of the most discouraging phases of her ministry. The French government had restricted their missionary activity and local sorcerers were attacking the new converts through curses and black magic (Rockness 2003, 160). Trotter organized outreaches for everyone from the young boys who ran in the streets and alleys to the Muslim ladies who visited the tombs of their relatives on weekends. In June 1897, Kate Smith (a missionary with North Africa Mission among the Kabyle in Djemaa Sahridj) experienced a filling of God's Spirit on the way back from a conference in Switzerland. She returned

With an overwhelming sense of power and joy. Upon arrival at Djemaa, she shared her joy with her fellow workers who likewise experience the same Spirit touch, praying and praising together until their hearts melted into one. Liliias later wrote that one after the other, mission workers, French helpers, and the four Kabyle lads living at the mission station "broke down, in confession and surrender, as the sweet breath of God's Spirit swept over them." (Rockness 2003, 162)

It was this filling of the Spirit that allowed the missionaries to press through the tough times to the victory that lay ahead.

Itinerant ministry to emerging stations took up much of 1900 to 1902, and 1903 saw setbacks that almost brought the work to a halt and were not overturned until March 1906, when an additional home was acquired in El Biar. A new mission station was opened in 1909 in the western province of Oran and ten new members joined the Algerian Mission Band (the name given to the collection of workers under Trotter's leadership) during 1911 and 1912. By 1913 (after 25 years of service by Trotter in Algeria) the Algerian Mission Band was quarterly conducting 1,422 meetings, 2,409 industrial trainings, 614 medical services, 1,486 hospitable hostings, 54 resident guests, 818 visits to station villages, 78 Scriptures distributed, and 381 tracts given out (Rockness 2003, 249).

WWI (1914-1918) hampered ministry to outlying stations in the south. In those years Trotter turned her attention to literature and translation. By 1913, Trotter had realized that the Nile Mission Press, based in Cairo, was strategic for Arabic and French

literature across North Africa. Traveling to Cairo<sup>2</sup> in November, Trotter and her companions were able to join a course being taught by Dr. Zwemer, Mr. Gairdner, and Mr. Swan. Zwemer taught on apologetics, Gairdner on phonetics, and Swan on Arab mystics. Swan’s teaching opened Trotter’s eyes to the possibility of reaching Sufis and influenced her interaction with them (Pigott 1930, 150).

The years 1920 to 1922 ushered in a period of freedom unrealized to this point and coincided of the growth of the mission band and the local converts. The year 1923 marked 35 years of ministry for Trotter in Algeria and she concentrated the next years on administering her mission and personally reaching out to Sufi mystics, an unusual thing for a woman but possible because of her advanced age and sterling reputation among the Arabs. On August 27, 1928, Lilius Trotter passed away. Members of the mission band were gathered around her bed singing “Jesus Lover of My Soul” when Trotter

... looked out the window and said, ‘A chariot and six horses!’ ‘You are seeing beautiful things?’ asked Helen Freeman. Lilius looked up and spoke her last words: ‘Yes, many, many, beautiful things.’ She stretched out her arms as though she would hold them all in her embrace, then slowly lifted her hands in prayer. Almost immediately she became unconscious, and in perfect calm she drew her last breath and went Home.” (Rockness 2003, 324)

When Trotter died, the Algiers Mission Band numbered thirty missionaries in fifteen mission stations or outposts. She was, according to Dr. Christy Wilson, “one hundred years ahead of her time” (Rockness 2003, 327). In 1964, the Algerian Missions Band merged with North African Ministries; North African Ministries became in turn Arab World Ministries, which merged with Pioneers in 2011. Lilius Trotter was one of the greatest pioneers of mission to the Muslim world.

#### A Definition of Abiding

John 15:1-17 provides a definition for abiding. This definition can be summarized through the acrostic ABIDES.<sup>3</sup>

“A” stands for “Always” and refers to abiding as continual communion with Jesus day and night, and the journey involved in the intimacy derived from lavishing daily extravagant time on Jesus.

“B” stands for “Blocks of Time” and refers to the daily, fixed appointments that disciples make with Jesus, the destination aspect of fixed moments, concrete answers, definitive arrival points, and the regular times of solitude and retreat that contribute to abiding.

“I” stands for “In the Word and Prayer” and indicates that the central disciplines for abiding are the Bible and speaking with Jesus through prayer, as well as the reciprocal nature of Jesus abiding in disciples as they abide in Him.

“D” stands for “Disciplined.” Abiding includes a disciplined intentionality that results in joy, even if the route is sometimes difficult and includes suffering.

“E” stands for “Everyone.” Abiding has corporate implications. There are times when disciples lavish time on Jesus together. At the same time, abiding is idiosyncratic, with individuals communing with the Creator in their own ways, informed by their current season of life. Abiding is also transcultural, with contextual factors influencing how and when one undertakes abiding while retaining the common practices of the overall theory.

“S” stands for “Strategic.” Abiding helps disciples do less that God might do more. Abiding is the source of disciple making, and abiding informs strategy.

A definition of abiding, then, can be summed up by ABIDES: All day, Blocks of time, In the Word and prayer, Disciplined, Everyone, and Strategic.

#### ‘Abiding’ in Lillian Trasher

##### All Day

In 1933, funds were so tight at the orphanage that Lillian Trasher called all the children into the courtyard and informed them that some would have to be sent away. She no longer had means to feed them. A little boy fell to his knees saying, “Lord, Lord,” and then more loudly, “Lord, Lord, LORD!” He began to cry and other children fell to their knees. Soon the whole courtyard was full of orphans kneeling and praying earnestly. “With great depth it came to Mama that her hundreds of children were doing only what they had seen her do, both in times of plenty and in times of stress. They knew she prayed without ceasing” (Howell 1960, 175).

This was the legacy of Lillian Trasher and her orphanage, a life constantly dependent and in constant communion with God. David Irwin, one of the last missionaries to work with Lillian before she died testified, "The simple act of patting a little boys' head was like a benediction. Gentle hands" (Trasher 1983, 5-6). Even Lillian's physical acts of love were as prayers.

Impossible needs arose over and over again, and Trasher simply spoke with Jesus about them. Simple prayers from a simple, uncluttered, and unpretentious relationship. One day at the orphanage, Lillian was unable to meet the payroll (at that time \$225/month). Fize Fam, a former orphan and the bookkeeper at the time, heard her pray:

Please Lord, surely if I do the work here You can take care of the money. Please send us \$200 today.' 'Why not ask abundantly?' said Fize, 'We need lentils and beans and clothing for the boys.' 'Lord,' Miss Lillian amended her prayer, 'Please send \$300.' Fize brought her hat and coat. 'Why not 500?' he suggested. 'Well, Lord, You do whatever you think is right.' On her way to town she met the mailman. There was a letter from an American, containing a check for \$1,000. (Beatty n.d., 20)

This warm and comfortable interchange was the backbone of Lillian's spirituality. Walking with Jesus was not formal for her. Abiding with Jesus was relational and constant. Weary of long donkey trips (at age 73) to solicit funds, she made a deal with God. "Lord, you furnish the bread, and I'll care for the children" (Trasher 1983, 7). God was delighted to comply and Trasher testified: "As we pray, God sends us what we need" (Trasher 1983, 7).

### Blocks of Time

On April 4, 1927, revival broke out in the orphanage. On April 7, 1927, Trasher wrote in her diary,

This afternoon I thought the children had better not have a night meeting; they had been praying and crying for hours, so I said that everyone was to go to bed early. I went to my room early also, but soon I heard such a noise coming from all sides that I sent a girl to see if a funeral was passing by. She returned and said it was the children praying everywhere. I went first to the widows' and blind girls' department and found they were crying and praying. I went to the big girls' room; they were all on their faces crying to God or shouting.

But the most wonderful sight I ever saw in my life was when I followed the noise up to the housetop. There were dozens and dozens of little girls shouting, crying, talking in tongues, rejoicing, preaching, singing – well, just everything you can think of – praising God! Several of the children saw visions .... It is as if a mighty fire has struck us. Nothing can stop it ... the children pray in the fields, on the canal banks, and in all the rooms. The house and grounds have become ‘a house of God’. (Trasher 1983, 17-18)

The children were following the model of Trasher who spent hours in prayer, a set pattern that led to this move of God in their midst.

### In the Word and Prayer

Responsible for the spirits and bodies of hundreds of young Egyptian children, Trasher ensured that the Bible and prayer were the foundations of orphanage discipleship. She recognized this process would take time and wrote in a January 11, 1953 letter: “[The children] are getting the Word of God, and sometime, somewhere it will spring up and bear fruit, if not in them, then in their children. The Word of God is alive and will not die. We were not asked to give the results; that is for God to do” (Letters 1983, 88). One year before her death Trotter wrote,

Years ago I got the idea that it would be rather wonderful that, if in the future the buildings should be destroyed, people digging in the ruins would find a glass jar with a Bible in it. So from that day to this, our ‘cornerstone’ is the Word of God. We build our foundation on some part of the Bible .... it feels warm and loving that even the walls of our new building will continually be before Him. (Trasher 1983, 113)

This dedication to the Bible and prayer was learned in the early years of struggle and disappointment. Just before Trasher and her sister sailed from New York for their first trip to Egypt, some friends prayed with them and encouraged her to ask the Lord for a Scripture promise. “She opened her Bible and her eyes fell on Acts 7:34: I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come. I will send thee into Egypt” (Trasher 1983, 12). In 1911, there were four children in the orphanage: Leah, John, Faheema, and Zackie. Zackie got sick with the plague, and John and Faheema got the measles. The government had to step in, hospitalize the children, and quarantine the orphanage. Trasher herself collapsed and had to be carried to the American hospital. She said, “But

what about my orphanage? I would start again! Would I fail again? I had no money. Was God in it? What should I do? There was nothing I could do but read my Bible and pray" (Trasher 1983, 117). The dependency Trasher learned on the Bible and prayer carried her through the years. On July 1, 1942, during World War II, word came that the Germans had entered Alexandria. All the other Americans left Alexandria. When Lillian asked the Lord for a promise, her Bible fell open at Exodus 14:13,14: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Trasher 1983, 15).

This dedication to the Word of God sustained Lillian through the difficult times. Commenting on the revival that broke out after long years of little results she wrote,

Seventeen years (and very dry years, too) of planting the seeds, then all at once to have such a wonderful harvest as this! If I had never seen the real results, I knew that the Word of God was being given to them day after day and year after year, and I knew it would spring up sometime, somewhere. (Trasher 1983, 18)

Her dependency and sustenance from the Word was what she most longed to pass on to the children who grew up and graduated from her orphanage. She responded with the following when asked what she wanted prayer for,

Pray that the older boys may feel a call to the Lord's work. Pray that the girls may take a greater interest in the housework, and that the seeds which are being planted during my lifetime may go on growing until Jesus comes. Pray that the children will not only be Christian men and women, but that they will also take the Word of Life to others. Pray that the Lord will take out those who should not be in the home, and help us to never refuse any whom He would have us accept." (Trasher 1983 33)

## Disciplined

Trasher's easy walk with Jesus was possible as it was established on a lifestyle of labor and unrelenting effort. On October 20, 1934, after twenty-four years of service in Egypt, she wrote, "Sometimes it takes a long time to see any results but God told us to plant and He would give the increase, so we go on planting and watering the young plants and someday the Lord will bring forth fruit" (Trasher 1983, 27). She agonized over the spiritual life of her children. Troubled about the condition of her girls (more so than the boys), she called a special meeting for them:

I told them how brokenhearted I was over their condition. I was so broken I could hardly talk. The Lord was with us. The girls saw their condition and began to weep and cry. Oh it was a wonderful sight ... As I was leaving the church last night, one of the most difficult girls I have come up to me and said, "Mamma, I am going to start a Prayer Army among the girls and I shall put my name the very first on the list." (Trasher 1983, 37)

Trasher, the disciplined prayer warrior, was able to raise up an army of intercessors. This mobilization came at a cost. Labor and suffering were required. She would work sixteen-hour days well into old age. In 1947, cholera epidemic hit; in 1933, all the children from religious families were taken away (a costly tithe—70 of 700 were forcibly removed by the government). This was heartbreaking for the children, Trasher and the staff. In 1919, when her family numbered 100, an Arab uprising against the British created a reign of terror. She called her children together to pray and then took them to an old brick kiln for safety.<sup>4</sup> For three days bullets fell around the orphanage. The terrorists planned to kill Trasher and ransack the orphanage, but a neighboring farmer (who was a Muslim) protected the empty house. "‘For shame!’ he told the marauders. ‘These are our own Egyptian children for whom this woman has given her life.’ Nearby houses were looted and burned, but the orphanage was untouched (Trasher 1983, 15).”

On December 12, 1933, after a long two-month illness, she wrote, "This illness was the best lesson I have ever had in my life" (Trasher 1983, 23). She felt that God had used sickness to discipline her, bring her into closer communion with Him, and show her where she should spend her time and energy. Her best effort and her lasting legacy was to teach the children to abide in Jesus. Speaking of the children in the orphanage (and prophetically of her role), Trasher said, "Here they are taught to live, how to die, how to be ready to meet life, and how to prepare for eternity. We are really trying our best to give them the *lasting* things" (Trasher 1983, 105).

Everyone

Prayer, worship, and Bible reading for Lillian Trasher were never purely individual duties. She always involved and mobilized others<sup>5</sup> to engage the presence of Jesus.

One year ... when finances were very low Lillian explained to her children that she could not go into debt. They earnestly prayed that God would meet their need. The next morning Lillian received a check for \$100. Another time when Lillian was away, the 4- and 5-year-olds told the cook they could no longer eat just lentils and asked for meat. "Darlings," the cook said, "I have no meat. You must ask God to give it to you." While these tots were praying in the nursery someone appeared at the door with half a beef. "My Children," Lillian said, "are receiving lessons in faith." (Trasher 1983, 13)

Teaching the children to pray, call on Jesus, feed on His Word, and commune with Him was the great call of Trasher's life. On March 12, 1938, she wrote,

Last Sunday afternoon there was a great outpouring of the Spirit of God at our church and the children prayed for nearly 3 hours. Dark came but the lights were not turned on at once. I was kneeling on the platform and when I looked up I could see hundreds of little forms with raised hands, calling out to God in one volume of prayer ... I don't think I ever had seen before what my call really meant. All the wonder of it was shown to me in a new way; all of the sacrifices of the past years and the hardship seemed to melt into nothing as the glory of the call of God was shown me. He has allowed me to be the one to open this home of light and comfort for such a great mass of praying children. Nothing life could have given me could have compared to this!' (Trasher 1983, 48)

Toward the end of her life, she humbly acknowledged that "there is one thing for sure: every child raised in the orphanage knows how to call upon God" (Trasher 1983, 79). Trasher led her children to know what it meant to collectively in the presence of the Lord.

### Strategic

Lillian Trasher devoted fifty years of her life to Egypt. Two years before she died, she said,

After 48 years in Egypt, I have found the hardest days were the first days...I was young, untried, full of zeal and energy, but I had not been tested. I first had to learn how to trust God for a stamp, a railway ticket, a suitcase, all such small things. (Trasher 1983, 109)

Trasher learned that she must depend on God for the smallest, practical task. Prayer and reliance on God were not only for the tasks of the ministry; abiding in Jesus was essential

for survival and abiding in Jesus was survival. On June 23, 1933, she wrote, “I am very much in need of the prayers of all the Lord’s children as there is a great stir among all of the Muslims against the missionaries here” (Trasher 1983, 20). Pressures from the Muslim community came in waves and fruit in the ministry came painfully slowly. For the first sixteen years Trasher worked with and prayed for her children with little apparent results. Then in April 1927, she wrote, “I have witnessed the greatest revival I have ever seen. Scores have been saved. Many have been filled with the Holy Spirit. I sent for the big boys who have left the orphanage and are living nearby. We prayed together and all twenty five dedicated their lives to God” (Trasher 1983, 15). A life of prayer had led Lillian to realize that strategically her children must have the same passion for Jesus she did for the ultimate work must be done by them.

While standing over the grave of one of the orphans with some of the boys from the orphanage, one of the boys looked across the valley and saw all of the villages: “Mamma,” he said, “God will require all of these villages of you.” “I said, ‘No, son, not of me but of you boys; this is your work.’ He is now the leader of this new village work” (Trasher 1983, 20). Two months before she died, Trasher affirmed the validity of a life lived in the presence of Jesus, a life lived in pursuit of equipping others to abide in Him and carry on the work: “It wasn’t just a matter of riding donkeys or spending sleepless nights because of the heat. There was the joy of repairing crushed lives, of loving dying babies back to life, of spending my youth for God. No, it was not a lost youth. Never!” (Trasher 1983, 119). Lillian Trasher bequeathed her youth to subsequent generations, and she gave them the example (abiding with Jesus), she left them the charge—reaching Egypt would be their work.

### ‘Abiding’ in Liliias Trotter

#### All Day

Liliias Trotter lived a life of constant communion with Jesus. For Trotter there was no dichotomy between the sacred and secular. Jesus was with her and she with Him always, even in periods of dormancy. She wrote, “When we let our souls go down into quiescence it should be that even in their ‘sleep’ they should ‘live together with Him’”

(Padwick 1938, 158). Intimacy with Jesus resulted in a union of thought and hope that manifested in prayer. Liliás explains, “A strange new tide of prayer has been gathering these last few days for the setting free of a great Moslem host – the kind of prayer that prays itself, so to speak, without an effort on our part. And one knows that God is in it” (Padwick 1938, 162). In 1913, Trotter went to a missionary convention in Zurich where she heard Samuel Zwemer speak. His message inspired this July 31 diary musing:

All the tenor of helplessness and failure over it is only meant to make way for the prayer life of Christ in us, and in fellowship with Him in it which will ‘make all things new’ – no longer a weary wrestling to get access and answers, but catching His thought and swiftly asking alongside His Name – His the upper tone, ours the undertone so to fill in the harmony. (Rockness 2003, 251)

This harmony, the “prayer life of Christ in us,” Trotter realized flowed from a daily abiding intimacy with God. Ongoing communion with Christ empowers prayer. She wrote in her diary on March 21, 1926,

It has come these days with a new light and power, that the first thing we have to see to, as we draw near to God day by day, is that ‘our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.’ If we can listen in stillness, till our souls begin to vibrate to the thing He is thinking and feeling about the matter in question, whether it concerns ourselves or others, we can from that moment begin praying downwards from His throne, instead of praying upwards toward Him. (Rockness 2003, 305-306)

### Blocks of Time

Liliás Trotter was remarkable for her ability to lead and organize, especially as a single woman serving at the end of the male-dominated nineteenth century. Her pace and scope was possible because she learned the secret of spending extravagant daily time with Jesus:

Liliás was a ‘Mary’ more than a ‘Martha’, in spite of the demands of her work. How inspiring to note that this pioneer’s lifestyle carved out ‘a quiet place near to the heart of God.’ Whether retreating to Fortification Woods in Algiers [with her Bible] every morning from 7:15-8:30, drawing strength from hearing God speak in the solitude of the Sahara Desert, retiring to a rooftop room or *melja*, or on her intentionalized ‘two weeks alone with God’ every summer in England or Switzerland, Liliás knew what the one thing needful was. (Rockness 2003, 15)

Trotter said of these early morning times in her May 1889 diary: “It is so delicious in these hot spring mornings. And God rests one through it for the whole day, and speaks so through all the living things” (Rockness 2003, 119). These morning times were crucial as Trotter would be tested and stretched beyond her natural capacity. “Yet alone with God, Liliias was given the strength and the sight to hurdle seemingly insurmountable obstacles and to scale stone walls that would have deterred a less intrepid traveler” (Rockness 2003, 119). She wrote *The South Land* for colleagues who worked with Muslims as she was concerned about them (and herself) breaking down under the oppression (both spiritual and physical). “The solution she believed, was to seek avidly times of daily refreshment with God, and – she would gradually come to realize – to secure times of retreat within terms of service” (Rockness 2003, 153).

Provision was also made for corporate prayer. “At Dar Naama, the drawing room was set apart one day a week for prayer between the hours of nine and three – ‘when our Lord hung on the Cross that Islam dishonors’ – for workers to come and go as household duties allowed. A morning of prayer was designated for the outpost workers on the same day” (Rockness 2003, 306).

### In the Word and Prayer

When Trotter communed with God, she did so through nature, art, the Bible, and prayer. In her diary entry of August 25, 1900, she wrote, “Oh so endlessly beautiful the days are – and they go so quickly – God has so many things to say and one can sit by the hour on the heather with one’s Bible and listen” (Rockness 2003, 177). Spending daily time in the Word and prayer was so crucial that Trotter made it her central priority.

Liliias put the highest priority on spending time completely alone with God, studying his word with a heart open and receptive to His voice – an activity requiring utmost commitment from her, given the many demands on her time. Just as she had found, in the early years, a quiet spot in a nearby woods, later she made sure a place of prayer was prepared in a rooftop room. (Rockness 2003, 187)

She often merged prayer and Scripture. She prayed intercessory prayers by praying the Scripture over Arab Muslim friends (Rockness 2003, 306). Yet, though the Bible and prayer were the base of her daily communion, Trotter was created artistic by

God and thus God's Word would often come to Liliias through His created world. In 1901, she wrote, "The word of the Lord came unto me this morning through a dandelion." A simple dandelion would have far reaching implications, for "Helen Lemmel inspired by the devotional challenge [of the dandelion] to 'Turn full your soul's vision to Jesus, and look and look at Him,' wrote the hymn 'Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus', which later became the theme of the 1924 Keswick Convention" (Rockness 2003, 308).

From these times in the Word and prayer (often best enjoyed by Trotter outside in God's nature) came the inspiration and the vision to lead. On Trotter's passing Samuel Zwemer said, "My best impression of her life could best be expressed in two words – it was a life of Vision and a life of Prayer" (Rockness 2003, 326). Trotter in her essay "The Glory of the Impossible" wrote, "Years ago, at Keswick, Campbell gave us this rendering of John xv.7: 'If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, *ye shall demand that for which ye are inclined, and it shall be generated for you.*' 'Generated for you' – oh the depth of the 'possible with God' that lies in these words!" (Rockness 2003, 338) For Trotter, daily abiding was the key. From the intimate place of extravagant daily time with Jesus came all the desires of the heart and ministry.

### Disciplined

Though a free spirit, Trotter was a determined and disciplined one. Her artistic and creative side was supported by her attention to detail and her fixed devotions. "Prayer had always been an essential spiritual discipline for Liliias. She was convinced the band could not survive the hostile spiritual atmosphere, much less succeed in their mission, without the divine guiding and empowering that comes from intimate fellowship with God" (Rockness 2003, 15). This intimate fellowship with Jesus was the admitted source of her power and her desire. She did not feel adequate and yearned for depth in the secret spiritual life. In her essay "Vibrations" Trotter wrote, "Can we not begin to see the working of the Spirit in the cry that is going up from the hearts of so many of us to learn the secret of a life of prayer?" (Rockness 2003, 343)

Several difficult experiences aided Trotter in her search for secret spiritual depth. Her beloved father died when she was only twelve. God used this suffering to draw her to

himself and Trotter's sister writes of her in this period, "She simply shed a constant light over her home through the 'very hardest thing in her life' God brought her 'soul into blossom'" (Rockness 2003, 50). In 1888, her sister Jacqueline would also die, adding to her sorrow. These painful losses drew Trotter closer to Jesus and disciplined her to trust only in Him.

Everyone

As leader of the missionary band, Lilius Trotter recognized the necessity of union in prayer and cooperation in seeking after the Lord and His purposes. Speaking of the prayer of cooperation she exhorted, "If we hold together – hold on long enough – a vibration of power will be set up that will end in shaking to pieces the seemingly immovable mass-opposition around us" (Padwick 1938, 162). On October 16, 1896, Trotter wrote in her diary (in the midst of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit):

The days go by one after another so full of the light of his presence – it is just Jesus, Jesus, and one only has to stand aside and watch him deal with souls ... I don't believe the full showers will come down until we are all 'of one accord in one place' but there *are* drops. We had our first holiness meetings with the Arabs yesterday and the prayers were so different (St. John 1990, 77).

The corporate lingering in the presence of Jesus was powerful and treasured by Trotter and her colleagues. Importantly, a colleague in North Africa Mission had a life-changing encounter with the Holy Spirit. Tired and burdened missionaries from across North Africa began to gather, hungry for more, yet guarded. Trotter recounts,

The first days of meeting were for the workers among Arabs and God knit that little inner circle together very closely and gave us times of great power and blessing, but when it came to the general meetings, then it was evident that the devil meant to fight it out. There were those who had travelled long distances, longing for blessing, yet had not known that God must break down before he can build up and they began by resisting.

We watched their faces stiffen and harden over the first three days... we carried on. Then the melting and the thawing and breaking down began and there is no describing the meetings. God was there and he did what needed to be done. The meetings were perfectly free and spontaneous with the liberty of the Spirit of God. They mostly lasted three hours each, but the time went before ever one knew it.

One after another nearly all of those gathered put away all hindrance and unbelief, often with broken-down confession before God and man and, through the grave and gate of death, went out into a new world of deliverance and downright sanctification. On the last day there was a sweep of the Spirit through the room...and, one after another the last strands of unbelief gave way in soul after soul. We could only wonder and praise. It was the Lord’s doing.” (St. John 1990, 79)

Trotter always had a communal orientation. She wrote in her work *Parables of the Cross*,<sup>6</sup> “A flower that stops short of its flowering misses its purpose. We were created for more than our own spiritual development; reproduction, not mere development, is the goal of the matured being – reproduction in the lives of others” (Rockness 2003, 62).

### Strategic

For all of Lilius Trotter’s organizational genius and visionary capacity, she remained devoted to a singular idea—the idea that the life of Jesus and abiding in Him was the way to reach Muslims. “He has begun to show me,” she wrote, “how He has called us to share the life of Jesus in intercession, how men are to be reached by prayer in the Holy Ghost – prayer which fights through and prevails; how then, and only then, can the windows of heaven open on the barren land” (Padwick 1938, 157). Prayer being the key, Trotter affirmed that it had to be sourced in Jesus, not in man or woman. The difficulties of life in North Africa necessitated the Spirit pray through His people. She explained, “At the lowest point when there seems no power left for even putting prayer into definite petition one can only give oneself to the Spirit for His dumb groaning and His own interpretation” (Padwick 1938, 160). One of her biographers noted, “[She] believed supremely in the ultimate triumph of prayer and those Spirit prompted prayers, uttered in such weakness and such faith, are still vital and powerful” (St. John 1990, 220).

Dependence on the Spirit helped Trotter recognize that she and her team must do less so that God could do more. It was with weakness that God did His greatest work.

Trotter wrote in her diary on August 22, 1901,

I am seeing more and more that we begin to learn what it is to walk by faith, when we learn to spread out all that is against us. All our physical weakness – loss of mental power – spiritual inability – all that is against us inwardly and outwardly, as sails to the wind and expect them to be vehicles for the power of Christ to rest

upon us. It is simple and self evident – but so long in the learning. (Rockness 2003, 186-187)

Toward the end of her life, those who had know Trotter for a long time observed a great calm and joyous peace. Blance Pigott said to her, “‘Lily, you seem so rested in soul.’ She answered, ‘Yes, because I have no strength left and am living entirely by the power of the divine inflowing’” (Rockness 2003, 295). As Lilius Trotter lay on her deathbed, important questions about the strategic direction of the mission band (whether or not to press into the vast unreached areas of interior Algeria) came into question. There was a difference of opinion, so the missionaries took the matter to prayer. Trotter’s explanation serves as a capstone for how she lived her life and how she strategically led her mission band. She wrote, “Again and again we held on for the heavenly solution and again and again the moot questions vanished into clear agreement and we hardly knew how except God was in it” (Rockness 2003, 321). For Lilius Trotter and the Algerian Mission Band, strategic direction flowed out of communal abiding in Jesus.

### The Impact of Abiding on Mission

A definition of abiding can be summed up by ABIDES (as noted above): All day, Blocks of time, In the Word and prayer, Disciplined, Everyone, and Strategic. The personal and corporate abiding praxis of Lillian Trasher, and Lilius Trotter had a profound impact on their mission service.

Always

The lives of Trasher and Trotter demonstrated an ongoing communion with Jesus. Neither of them regulated their walk with Christ to fixed times. Both experienced intimacy all day and all night; they were ever in the presence of God. This experience had implications on their mission praxis.

Whether it was intensity of focus in service or breadth of influence in mission, the source of the power was these women in constant communion with Jesus; they were always with Him. For both Trasher and Trotter (as noted above), continually being in the presence of God was both ongoing and a necessity.

For these women of mission, the starting point of their abiding was an unbroken communion with Jesus. They loved to be with Him. Jesus was their best friend and their constant companion, and they never left His presence. They were so intimate with Jesus that they usually did not have to belabor decisions or responses; they knew what to do and how to speak. They spoke from the place that they never abandoned, the simple and glorious presence of Jesus.

### Blocks of Time

Trasher and Trotter could be considered mystics. It is also true that they scheduled daily time with God and modeled an abiding praxis that started with "always communion" with Jesus and was fortified by daily blocks of concentrated time with Him.

The daily devotion of these women had a profound impact on mission. First, as influential leaders, they modeled what was most important to their followers. Trasher raised an army of intercessors who were grounded in the Scripture and dedicated large portions of their day to God. Trotter led an entire mission into the life-giving rhythm of daily and seasonal resting in Christ. The praxis of these giants of faith was observed and emulated by those that they influenced. The ripple effect on mission underlined the most important activity a missionary could take up: to lay down his/her schedule and revel in the presence of Jesus.

### In the Word and Prayer

Examining how these daily blocks of time with Jesus were spent reveals that the two most common elements were the Word of God and prayer. This focus on Scripture and prayer impacted their mission in important ways. Trasher's methodology centered on a dissemination of the Word from which she daily fed. Trasher felt that the Bible was the power and her mission aim was to get the Bible into the hearts of her children. Likewise, Trotter's personal prioritization of daily time in the word and prayer informed all her decision making.

The devotion of these women to daily times in the Word of God and prayer impacted mission in three ways. First, it provided for them the ongoing content of their prayers, preaching, teaching, and writing. Second, it provided the sensitivity and

discernment for the numerous small decisions that they were required to make on a daily basis and the occasional momentous one. Third, faithful daily time in the word and prayer renewed them in the Holy Spirit and gave them repeated power, passion, and energy for the task at hand.

### Disciplined

Conjoined to the daily practice of Bible reading and prayer is the discipline and organization needed to maintain such ambition. Trasher and Trotter understood that intimacy with Jesus included faithful waiting on Him, enduring times of silence, and maintaining a schedule and a regime even in the absence of emotion and feeling. The busier that these mission leaders became, the more responsibility given them, the more demanding and pressing the need, the more careful they were to discipline themselves to daily rendezvous with Jesus. As a result of their determined discipline, these women had profound influence on their organizations and even broader mission philosophy.

There is another aspect of discipline common to these pioneer missionaries. They all experienced personal suffering. In that suffering they realized an intimacy with Jesus that was sweet and sustaining. Trasher was no stranger to pain. She was forced to call off her marriage ten days before she walked down the aisle, seventy of her children were forcibly taken from her, and returned to Muslim homes, and she occasionally became deathly sick. Her telling response to grave sickness was, “This illness was the best lesson I have ever had in my life” (Trasher 1983, 23). Lilius Trotter’s father died when she was twelve. During that period of grief, Trotter’s sister wrote about her, “She simply shed a constant light over her home” through the “very hardest thing in her life” God brought her “soul into blossom” (Rockness 2003, 50). In 1888, her sister Jacqueline would also die.

These revered missionaries faced tragic loss, and emerged from tragedy sweeter. This sweetness—wrung from the bitterness of suffering—was possible Trasher and Trotter disciplined themselves to daily commune with Jesus. Fixed times of meeting with Jesus prepared them for times of darkness and seasons of silence. The end result of their discipline was sweetness of soul and the capacity to minister to others (both lost Muslim and found missionary).

## Everyone

Missionaries differ in personality, capacity, and spirituality. To affirm that everyone abides is to acknowledge that, while corporate abiding must have conformity in order to have purpose, individual abiding must be idiosyncratic if it is to be nutritional.

Missions contexts, especially severe ones such as the Islamic world, demand a corporate multi-lateral approach to prayer and service. Lillian Trasher discovered that teaching others to communally abide in Christ was one of her greatest works. Trasher's young praying community was both her legacy and her reward. Likewise a highlight for Liliias Trotter was the breakthrough of the Holy Spirit in a meeting attended by all the mission agencies in Algeria (as noted above).

Trasher and Trotter personally learned to abide in Jesus. They also led their communities into the presence of Jesus. As these missional communities spent time in the presence of Jesus together, they deepened precious unity, found new strength, and received fresh vision. These missionaries sharpened one another by seeking Jesus together and the sum effect on mission efforts is immeasurably positive.

## Strategic

The most striking finding in a review of Trasher and Trotter's abiding distinctive is their conception of the nature of prayer. They did not consider prayer as preparation or empowerment for missions, they considered prayer as the primary work of mission. It took some time to realize that prayer was the strategy, and that it did not only reveal and empower the strategy.

Only after Trasher realized that the primary work was done in prayer through trust was she able to sustain the pace and load of her responsibilities. She learned how to do more by doing less. As she focused primary energy on prayer, God took care of numerous issues and she was able to achieve what He left for her to do. Liliias Trotter came to the same understanding. Trotter understood that prayer did not just help her reach men and women for Christ; prayer was the actual activity by which men were converted. Prayer not only reveals and empowers strategy, but prayer is the primary strategy and activity of mission.

## Conclusion

The spirituality of Lillian Trasher and Liliias Trotter support and embody the definition of abiding derived from John 15:1-17. Trasher and Trotter communed with Jesus all the time. They dedicated blocks of time to lavish extravagant attention on Jesus. They spent the majority of those blocks of time in the word and prayer. They disciplined themselves and their followers to spend time with Jesus (and experienced suffering in the process). They engaged others in a communal celebration and interaction with Jesus, They found time with Jesus to be the strategy, not just to empower the strategy. As a result, Trasher and Trotter produced disciples, and their disciples in turn reproduced. History attests to their lasting impact on mission; an impact that can be seen to this very day.

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<sup>1</sup> In defense of the Egyptians it should be noted that in the early years the majority of all funds for the orphanage came from Egyptian contributions as it does today (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Trotter said of Cairo, "One feels Cairo is the power house of forward movements" (Pigott 1930, 150).

<sup>3</sup> An in-depth exegesis of John 15:1-17 is provided for in this author's doctoral dissertation and can be found at "Abiding Missiology: Spirituality and Disciple Making among the Muslim Peoples of Egypt and Northern Sudan" (Ph.D. diss., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Biographer Beth Prim Howell shares the drama of that night, which included an older girl tripping over a dead British soldier on the way to the kiln and Mamma Lillian returning to the dormitory to rescue two young toddlers. With toddlers in arms she hurried to the kiln only to be shot at and have to fall in the ditch next to the dead British soldier. As the Muslim insurgents searched for her, one of them actually stepped on her shoulder but assumed in the darkness it was the dead Brit. A bullet hit inches from Lillians face and showered dirt on her, but in the end she made it safely to the shelter of the kiln with the toddlers. (Howell 1960, 142-146)

<sup>5</sup> Lillian was unashamed to ask others to pray for her and the needs. Her April 26, 1935, letter praises: "Ever since I sent out the call for prayer I have not had to worry once where the day's food was coming from" (Trasher 1983, 29).

<sup>6</sup> In Liliias Trotter's journal there are "repeated references to the 'dying to live' theme that is the thesis of Parables of the Cross; Via Crucis, Via Lucis – 'Death is the Gate of Life'" (Rockness 2003, 151). Trotter wrote in her diary, "'Give me a death in which there shall be no life, and a life in which there shall be no death' – That was a prayer of the Arab saint, Abed-El-Kader – I came upon it again the other day – is it not wonderful?" (Rockness 2003, 151)