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Hyveth Williams

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Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9). When God spoke those words to Joshua, I think He had me in mind. He knew that as a trailblazer and trendsetter in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I would need double doses of courage, tenacity and gumption. I have had the distinction of being the first to accomplish many things within the Adventist Church. I was the first black female pastor, and the first female pastor period, to be officially hired by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I then went on to become the first female senior pastor in the denomination and later became the first female professor of homiletics at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. To crown the “firsts” within the denomination, I have authored the first homiletics textbook that features how to preach—“Nothing but the Best”—which is now available online and will be in bookstores shortly.

I have not always been known, though, for spiritual accolades. As a young woman, I pursued fame and fortune with passionate intensity. I was the victim of childhood sexual abuse, and in my young mind I could not reconcile that a good God would allow a little girl to suffer as I had. Consequently, I embraced atheism. In an effort to ease the pain of my past, I submerged myself in a world of power and politics, drugs, the occult, broken relationships, pain and emptiness until there was nothing about me to suggest a divine destiny. Like Paul, I had my Damascus road experience and could not resist the irresistible God. With divine urgency, the Father sought His lost child. He had left a longing that only He could fill in the heart of this cigar-smoking, hard-drinking, profane woman. He fanned the spark of unconditional love that would not let me go. I believe that no matter how dark or how brilliant our past, no matter how great or how humble our present, we have this hope: to be eternally united in Christ in heavenly places, if only we trust and obey!

Unbeknownst to me, God was always preparing me for a life of public ministry. My earliest childhood memories, on the island of Jamaica, are of reading and reciting poetry on public stages for officials and dignitaries, such as the island’s governor. Additionally, my mother would have me read newspapers to the villagers who could not read. I did not grow up with televisions or radios (yes, there was a time when there was no TV). I found the most joy in simply reading the dictionary, imagining words as pictures. Only God is capable of such orchestration.

True to the meaning of my name, Hyveth, which comes from two Hebrew words meaning “life” and “house” (“house of life”), I have been able to provide influence around the world. For almost 14 years, I served as the senior pastor of Campus Hill Church in Loma Linda, California; eight years at Boston Temple, Massachusetts; three years as associate pastor at Sligo Church, Takoma Park, Maryland; and three years as pastoral intern at All Nations Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan. On February 16, 2013, I established a community church plant, The Grace Place, in South Bend, Indiana, where people from the surrounding community now number more than the weekly Adventist attendees. The Grace Place—God’s place of grace for so many—is my place to stay fresh, stay connected and give back! As a professor, I can’t teach preaching by pulling stuff out of the freezer.

Hyveth Williams