

COMMON SENSE NOT NEEDED:
SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT AN UNAPPRECIATED WORK
AMONG NEGLECTED PEOPLE

by

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"Comfort the feebleminded."
I Thes. 5:14

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Introduction

Before World War II I started a work to bring the Gospel to feeble-minded people who were not in institutions. They were not able to go to church: they could not understand the sermon. But did they not need the Lord Jesus, just like you and I? We learn from the Bible that the Lord Jesus has a great love and concern for everyone who is in need. For He said, "Come unto me all..."

Everyone needs the Holy Spirit to understand spiritual truths. I found that when we taught the Gospel in an uncomplicated way the Holy Spirit did not need a high I.Q. to reveal Himself.

The feeble-minded whom I taught in the Bible class we had every Sunday afternoon called it their church. We tried to make it as "churchy" as we could to please them!

In this booklet I tell something of what I learned and experienced during the five years I carried on this small work. It was perhaps unimportant in the eyes of the world, but not worthless in God's eyes. No effort can be valueless when it is in obedience to the command of Jesus, "You must go out to the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15, Phillips).

I am sure that earthly values are different to heavenly ones. I believe that the joy among the angels of God is as great when a subnormal person is saved as when a V.I.P. gives his heart and life to the Lord. Possibly greater. One cannot tell.

A WASTE OF TIME?

Once, in a concentration camp, I was questioned by a Nazi officer. He asked me much about my life, about my work in the Underground, and about my spare time. I told him that I had given Bible lessons to subnormal people.

"Don't you regard that as a waste of time?" he asked. "Surely it is much better to convert a normal person than a subnormal one."

This was fully in accord with his Nazi way of thinking. So I told him about Jesus, who had always cared for all who were weak and despised, adding that it might well be possible that the officer and I were much less important in the sight of the Lord Jesus than one of these poor creatures. I was sent back to my cell.

The next morning the officer sent for me and said that he had slept badly. He had thought much about what I had said.

"You spoke about Jesus," he said, "I don't know anything about Him. Tell me what you know of Him."

I then spoke of the Lord Jesus as the Light of the World who can lighten our life, if we give ourselves to Him and receive Him as Savior and Lord. Three days I was questioned and three days I had the opportunity to speak about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A conversation about the feeble-minded had changed a most dangerous moment for a prisoner into a testimony to the glory of God.

THE OLD, OLD STORY

"How do you explain the things of the Bible to the feeble-minded?" I asked teachers at the American schools

where they really did their best to teach the Gospel.

"Oh, just as we do to normal children," they said, "only simplified, and repeating as often as necessary."

Is an adolescent or an adult with a low I.Q. similar to a young normal child? In the slums sometimes we find subnormal persons in their own surroundings. Are their problems the same as the problems of a child?

Yes, many have the same difficulties, but the subnormal often have many more. They have also many problems of normal adults. For instance, they are interested in a strike.

They do not comprehend; they do not have the solution; but at the same time they are called upon to share the struggle for life. Who will bring them the answer? Who will tell them that the One who can help them is Jesus, and Jesus alone? He knows the answer to every situation.

I know from experience, for I was in a concentration camp, where there was a concentrated mass of problems and misery--but Jesus gave the answer. In this dark place I discovered that demons flee at the name of Jesus; He is Victor. That is the message the world must know.

*

Kareltje was a little boy twelve years old. He had blue eyes and curly hair. He was one of a large, poor family, and his father was cruel to him because Kareltje was feeble-minded. He listened as I told the story of the disciples giving food to five thousand people. As the five loaves and two fishes passed from Jesus' hand to theirs, the bread and fish became sufficient to feed the multitude.

Suddenly Kareltje jumped up, and swinging his arms around him, cried, "There is enough! There is plenty, plenty for everyone! Just take, take as much as you like. There is enough. There is plenty!"

I wished every child of God rejoiced as Kareltje did about the plenty that we have, when taking all from Jesus' hands and passing on to others.

WHO IS CALLED?

Who should bring the Gospel to the subnormal? I asked this question in America of those who understood the need, and always the answer was, "Of course, the ministers."

I do not think so. Ministers know the language of grown-up people. We cannot expect them to speak the language of the normal and subnormal at the same time. There will be people with a special gift for speaking to the feeble-minded. There are special difficulties and

needs and problems in this peculiar mission. Sometimes I think I would prefer Kindergarten teachers. But they must understand that a grown-up feeble-minded person is different from a child of four. Once I heard a teacher speak to them in the same way that she would have done to her Kindergarten pupils. The women and men looked in my direction and laughed as if to say, "How silly!"

Children like to hear a story. These people like stories too, but after half an hour's talk about Jesus' love they will still be listening. They are grown-ups and they must be treated the same way as grown-ups. The language must be plain and clear--no dogmatic talk, no arguments, only the old, old story in plain language. The best way to reach them is by love. Love means understanding, and this love is available (Romans 5:5). God must lead, for without the Holy Spirit no one can bring the message to anybody, normal or abnormal. The human spirit fails, except when the Holy Spirit fills.

THE JOY OF BRINGING THEM THE GOSPEL

The feeble-minded lack common sense, but they also lack analytical criticism, which, like a brake, can be a hindrance to some normal people. When they trust a teacher (and they do that very soon) they believe everything told them. They just accept what is said.

Once Jake, a tramp, told me that he had seen lightning destroy a tree just in front of him. It was imagination, but I did not argue. I just said, "Jake, if the lightning had killed you, would you have been ready to die, ready to come before God?"

"No," he answered.

I looked at the other boys and asked, "And which of you boys would have been ready to die?"

Their heads went down, for feeble-minded people often express their feelings through their attitude. One boy said, "None of us is ready."

"Well, boys," said I, "we must seek the solution; for we all know that some day the moment will come when we must die."

Then I told a story, giving them examples, which is far better than arguing.

"Once there was a boy who had to die. He was not at all afraid, for he knew that Jesus loved him and had died for him on the Cross. He loved Jesus for that reason, and he knew that Jesus was preparing for him one of the many mansions in heaven. I am sorry that you do not know what that boy knew."

"But we do," protested one, and someone else added, "We are all ready to die, for we all know that Jesus loves us." The whole class was sitting upright at that moment and their faces beamed.

Is it so simple? I doubted it myself for a moment, and then the Holy Spirit said to me, "The jailer of St. Paul received the same answer: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'"

How simple is the Gospel!

CONFESSION OF GUILT

I had no experience when I started "church" for feeble-minded adults. There they were sitting before me. For some weeks we had had our weekly service. One Sunday Joan was sitting near to Jake. In the midst of my message I saw that Joan could not resist putting her arms around the dirty neck of Jake. She held her face close to the unshaven cheek of the tramp. What should I do? My assistant saw the embarrassing situation. With a serious face, she came to me and said, "I want to tell you something. This morning I was in a church, and I saw all the gentlemen sitting in their pews on one side and the ladies on the other side. We have a real church here, but why do ladies and gentlemen all sit together?" I answered quite seriously, "I had forgotten, but indeed we are going to have a real church service. Come, gentlemen and boys, you sit on the right side, the girls and ladies on the other side."

Everyone obeyed, and the love-sick couple were separated, but the problem was only solved for the moment. That week Jake and Joan went into the woods for mischief. Fortunately the director of social work found them there and told Jake that if he did this again he would be sent to prison. Joan was sent to the institute, where she was given daily work under good leadership.

The next Sunday, when I was preaching, Joan ran to me. Her whole face was excited. She had been into mischief, had been scolded for it, and was very upset. She broke into my sermon, and laid her arms around me and sobbed: "I have been so naughty. I went a walk with Jake and I will never, never do it again."

A person often has a big ego. My first thought was one of irritation at losing the thread of my message through the interruption. But then I understood that this demonstration was a very plain form of public confession of guilt.

My assistant helped me again. She took the hands of Joan, which I could not get loose, and said, "I'm glad, Joan, that you told this to Miss ten Boom. Let's go into the corridor and ask the Lord Jesus to forgive. Then we

can go and have a drink of water."

They left, and after a few moments I rediscovered the thread of my sermon.

WHO IS NORMAL?

It was winter. Holland was occupied by the Germans. We were sitting around the stove before the service began. A girl entered and said, "I hate all Germans, and my father does too."

"That is not right," said Herman.

"Why not?" she replied. "They are our enemies! They have taken away our food! They have taken my brother to Germany! They have..." and a list of crimes followed.

"Hate is not right," repeated Herman. "Jesus says, 'You must love your enemies.'"

"I can't," said the girl.

"Jesus does, and He can teach you," said the boy.

That same evening I was at a dinner-party with many normal Christians, and the conversation was about the Germans.

"We are not only allowed to hate," said the leader of the dinner party. "We MUST hate."

Who is normal, and who subnormal?

HYPNOSIS?

"Your work among the feeble-minded is nothing more than hypnosis," people told me. "They have no common sense, and no criticism. They just believe whatever you tell them."

"I believe in the Holy Spirit," I answered.

*

During the war, bombs were falling on Haarlem. One fell on a house, near where Jo was living. Jo was a girl of thirty-two, a poor creature, nervous and fearful. The next Sunday she came to church and told me what had happened.

"The bomb fell and all the windows broke and there was a terrible noise, and..."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I was so frightened, but I just thought of one thing."

I understood what she meant by "one thing". "One thing" meant prayer.

"What happened then?"

"Jesus took all my fear away!"

How many normal people thought at a moment when bombs were falling, of praying? There was no one there to put this idea into Jo's mind by suggestion, or hypnosis.

No human being, yes, but Jesus was there.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Once the father of a backward girl spoke to me.

"Why can my daughter never partake of Communion? Is the Lord's Supper only meant for strong-minded people?"

"Pray about it!" I answered. "I'll do the same."

That week I discussed the matter with a minister. God showed us that it was His will for them to receive the Lord's Supper as well as Baptism. About fifteen people I knew who loved the Lord were baptized and received the Lord's Supper. Never have I received such a blessing from the Sacraments. There was earnestness and joy.

A boy continued to kneel and would not rise. I took his hand and brought him back to his chair, but he kept his eyes closed. In this way he wanted to preserve the blessing and joy of that moment!

*

We in Holland have a long, imposing formulary for the Holy Communion. Before we all went to the Lord's Supper, I translated the dignified words into their language.

"He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

I explained the text in the following story:

"Once there was a lady who went to the Lord's Supper. But she did not believe that Jesus had suffered on the Cross for her, and she did not love Him at all. What do you think about that?"

"That is terrible," they responded.

"Yes, I think so too," said I, "and the most serious thing is that God also thinks it is terrible, and He says: `It is far better NOT TO GO AT ALL than to take the bread

and wine without loving Christ. For if one does so, I must punish him.' If you don't believe, don't go."

They understood.

CONFESSION OF SIN

We were together in our church room and I spoke about the meaning of "sin".

"Do you all know what the word `sin' means?"

They told me they surely knew. It was disobedience, bad words, and ugly thoughts. It was lying, killing, beating, swearing, unbelief in Jesus Christ.

"Have you ever sinned?" I asked.

"Never," was the unexpected answer from Marie, a poor imbecile woman.

Her whole face was radiant with pride. I tried to argue, but could not convince her. Then I spoke of the love of Christ and she told me:

"I know that Jesus loves me so, that He died on the Cross for me. I love Jesus and tell Him everything." Her whole face was beaming with joy.

I knew that Marie had only some months to live. She had cancer. I was not afraid that she was not ready to appear before God's throne. Why Jesus died on the Cross she did not understand, but she was thankful for His love--perhaps more thankful and glad than many good, normal Christians, who have a sound theology but whose eyes do not sparkle as do Marie's eyes, when one speaks of Jesus' love.

PROPHETS AND PRIESTS

Some subnormals can understand at times more than one would expect. For the sake of experiment, I taught them the star constellations. After some practice, they were able to lay white beans on the table to represent Orion and the Big Dipper. Later, I took them for a walk in the evening and showed them the real Orion. In excitement, they shouted, "Look, it is just like our white beans."

I found that they had not understood at all what I had meant by the white beans.

To teach them spiritual truths was far more successful, for here we experienced the Holy Spirit working with their spirits. Common sense was not needed.

I had told them about the difference between priests and prophets. I asked Marie if she had understood it.

"Oh yes; that is very easy. Both are messengers between God and men. A priest stands with his face to God. A prophet has his back to God and his face toward men."

It was a rather good answer, but I was not sure that she had really understood, so I asked:

"What was I today when I gave you the Bible lesson?"

"A prophet," she replied, "for you brought God's message to us. But you were also a priest when you prayed together with us and asked the Lord to make our hearts ready for His love."

PRAYER

What is prayer? Normal people understand and know, but how may we make the feeble-minded understand?

A class of children was sitting before me. Their ages ranged from sixteen to forty-seven. Children? Yes: the woman in the first seat had the mentality of an eight-year-old, although she was born in 1906.

That evening when I stopped explaining, I knew that I had failed. Nobody understood what praying meant. The next week the girls came to the class, quite excited. They had heard over the radio how our little Princess was baptized. They had a lot of questions to ask.

"Why did the Princess cry?" "Does baptizing hurt?"

Some described the Princess lying on a beautiful pillow which the Queen had embroidered, for the feeble-minded have great imaginations.

I tried always to combine my lessons with the subject that occupied them, so I let them tell all they knew and then I asked:

"What do you think about Prince Bernhard? When the little Princess learns to talk and tries to tell her papa about her experiences as a little child, will the Prince take time to listen?"

"Yes, of course," they answered.

"Surely not. Would such a great Prince listen to a conversation about broken dolls and gathering flowers?"

"Oh yes, he will," they shouted.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because he loves his baby-Princess!"

"Yes, I believe that too," I said. "And you know, that is why Jesus will listen when people tell Him everything. It is because He loves you and me."

"Me too?" asked a poor woman, with a new light in her eyes.

"He loves you too! And what if the little Princess would never talk to her father? The Prince would be very unhappy. The same way Jesus is unhappy when you do not talk to Him. He is happy when you tell Him about your needs, your joy, your hunger, your pain, your fears. He will listen, just as the Prince will listen to Princess Beatrix when she wants to tell about a new pair of shoes, a sore little finger, a piece of chocolate, or being scared of a big dog. Telling Jesus everything, that's prayer."

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Before a dignified assembly of theologians and other important people, I told about bringing the Gospel to subnormal people and the possibility of giving them the blessing of the Sacraments.

"But what about church discipline?" they asked.

*

We had the Lord's Supper in the magnificent cathedral of Haarlem. About a hundred normal Christians joined us in order to let our people know that there was a congregation accepting them. When communicants went to the Table, Jantje left the pew and wanted to join them. I stopped him and said, "No, Jantje, you are not permitted to go; you know that." Then Jantje took his hat and left the church. His eyes were dark with anger.

Next week I asked: "Jantje, do you know why Willem was allowed to go to the Lord's Supper? He had told me that he loved Jesus! Do you love Jesus too, Jantje?"

"No, I don't." was his answer.

"Do you know," I asked, "why Annie was allowed to partake? She prays every day and tells Jesus all she needs and all she enjoys. Do you pray, Jantje?"

"No, I never do."

"You see, Jantje, that is why you were not allowed to go to the Lord's Supper. But from now on you too must pray and love Jesus, then the next time you may join us. Won't you ask Jesus to come into your heart?"

Jantje did. And from that moment he began to pray, and when we talked about Jesus' love, his eyes sparkled with joy.

Yes, we had church discipline, but of a special order.

ANOTHER WORLD WAR?

Although their minds have not developed, often physically the feeble-minded can be just as strong as normal people.

Jan and Henk were fighting before the church service. It took rather a strong effort to separate the wrestling men. I got Jan outside the building. Henk was allowed to join the church service. But I was not surprised when after church I found Jan outside the door, and he told me that he had made up his mind to break a chair on the guilty head of Henk.

I prayed for wisdom and the Lord gave it.

"Listen, boys," I said; "do you know that this is the way the war started? Two men quarrelled, and some took the side of one and some the side of the other. This grew and grew till two countries were fighting a war. Then other countries joined in, and now we have a World War."

Jan and Henk looked very worried. They knew perfectly well what a World War meant. We were in the very midst of one. The faces of all the feeble-minded people around looked anxious. What were they to do? One World War was bad enough, and now Jan and Henk had perhaps started another.

"I wish I knew someone who could help us," I said with a deep sigh.

Henk suddenly got an idea.

"I know someone," he shouted. "The Lord Jesus."

"Sure He can help us. Let us ask Him!"

We closed our eyes, and I asked the Lord Jesus to forgive Henk and Jan and to give them love instead of hatred in their hearts. All went home satisfied.

That same evening, while I was pulling the curtains to prepare for the black-out, I saw Henk and Jan walking before the house arm-in-arm. Both smiled at me and seemed to say, "All is well now. There won't be another World War!"

PUSHING AWAY

I had spoken to our boys about prayer. Jake, the tramp, accompanied me home. (My friends often said, "Such dignified friends you walk around with!") First he had told me how he had set up in business. He had taken the

door off his room and chopped it up into small pieces to make firewood. He had sold the wood, going from door to door. This was good business in Holland during the war. Cost: not one cent. Profit: enough money for many weeks. It was not easy to persuade Jake that what he did meant stealing.

"Jake, do you know what prayer is?" I asked.

At first he was silent.

"Do you mean like this?" Jake asked hesitatingly. "Often I feel something I can't push away."

"That's it, Jake! Praying is asking Jesus to push away what you cannot push yourself. Jesus can do everything, and He loves you so much that He wants to push away the bad things in your life."

Next day I had something I could not "push away". I was down-hearted and the spirit of worry was in my heart. Then I remembered the conversation with Jake and I asked, "Lord Jesus, will You push away the worry?"

And He did.

BEHOLD THOU ART THERE

Apart from running a church for the feeble-minded, I had clubs and classes for them. One of the most faithful members was a man named Roel.

Roel had a strong inferiority complex and tried to compensate for it by boasting of all his abilities. He was a broad-shouldered man of twenty-eight years.

"My, the police were happy that I was so active," he told me. "A very bad man went into a bush with a little girl. I told a policeman, 'Go into that bush; there is a job for you to do.' Later he said, 'Thank you, Roel, for having warned me just in time.'"

I knew Roel long enough to understand what that story meant. Roel himself had committed the crime and was found by the police. The feeble-minded often told of a sin that burdened their heart but attributed it to someone else. They were always the imaginary hero who had discovered the crime!

"Roel," I said, "don't you know that God is angry when you do such things?"

I spoke about God's judgment of sins that evening. When next I had a talk with Roel, a minister who visited the class was present. I could see that Roel was afraid.

"Is God here?" he asked.

"Sure He is."

"Then I will go home as quickly as I can."

"But He is everywhere. At your home too."

The minister tried to explain God's omnipresence.

"Roel," he said, "the sun shines here, the sun shines at home too. It is the same sun. There is air here and air at home. It is the same air. God is everywhere at the same time!"

Roel had always shown little respect for logical talking, a safe attitude to cover his absolute lack of common sense. He smiled and said, "The sun is not God. The air is not God. I am going home, for God is here."

"Roel, listen," I said, "Whether you like it or not, God IS in your home and He sees everything, even what you did in the bushes. Roel, God is angry with you, and there is no escape. The only thing is to tell Him that you are sorry and ask His forgiveness in Jesus' name. And then ask Jesus to come into your heart again. He will make you strong and good."

And Roel did.

MONGOLOIDS

I like Mongoloids. Often they are such loveable people. Why does God allow them to be born to quite healthy parents, who neither drank nor committed those sins which so often cause the birth of subnormal children? I don't know. Mongoloids are sometimes as sweet as very little children. Their I.Q. is exceedingly low.

Anton was a Mongoloid. He could neither speak nor walk along. He was for a very short time in my class. He listened to my Bible stories, but when I spoke too long to suit him, he yawned like a monkey. I did not know how much Anton understood really.

Once I took his hand and touched his five fingers one after another and said, "Jesus loves Anton so much." The next week, immediately Anton saw me, he took my hand and with his fingers outspread he just looked at me with a face full of longing. "Jesus loves Anton so much," I repeated, touching a finger at every word. Then I taught him to do it himself. After that, every week, Anton showed me with his fingers how much Jesus loved him. The last time I saw him, I told him while he touched his left fingers with his right hand, "Jesus loves Anton so much. How thankful I am for that! You too, Anton?"

"Yes," said Anton, as his face lit up.

It was the only word I ever heard from Anton. It is the most worthwhile word that any normal or subnormal person can speak to the Lord Jesus.

THE OCEAN OF LOVE

I shall never forget what a minister told me about a feeble-minded boy, Toontje by name, who attended his church services regularly and was always seated in the first pew.

"I wonder if Toontje understands one word of what I say," he sometimes said to his wife.

Once he preached about the abundant love of God that passes all understanding. Suddenly he saw a look of great joy upon Toontje's face. The minister almost forgot the rest of the congregation, and spoke as if to the poor boy alone about the ocean of God's love in Jesus Christ.

Next morning he said to his wife, "I cannot forget Toontje's happy face; I am sure that he has grasped something of the joy of God's love. I am going to visit him this morning."

When he arrived at the home, the door was opened by Toontje's mother. "This morning," she told him, "we found that Toontje had died in his sleep."

The minister saw on the face of the dead boy a look of heavenly joy as he grasped so much of the love of God.

Do we not all need the Holy Spirit to enlarge our hearts to contain only a little more of the joy unspeakable and full of glory, God's abundant love in us, otherwise our hearts would burst with happiness?

JOY IN HEAVEN

Bringing the Gospel to subnormal people is not popular work in the eyes of the world. To convert a "big shot" is more important than to change a subnormal person who cannot organize a mission, cannot start a drive to collect money, cannot write books, and cannot do what splendid, gifted Christians can.

Does heaven have the same standards as on earth? I do not think so.

I know that the last words of Jesus, before going to heaven, were, "Go ye--and preach the Gospel to EVERY creature." And I think that the subnormal have received a special grace to enable them to understand the Gospel.

I believe that the joy before the angels of God when a subnormal person is converted is as great as when a "big shot" gives his heart and life to Jesus. It is possible

that the joy is greater; heaven is different from earth.
One can never tell.

"FINALLY, BRETHREN----!"

My experiences in four years' work in Haarlem brought me into contact with only a handful of the many subnormal people of the world. I reached only a few of the feeble-minded in one town in one small country. Besides this, there are all the psychopaths, the shell-shocked and the insane. What difficult problems are these that I have not touched upon!

The woman with the seven demons was a difficult problem? And did not Jesus succeed?

Bringing the Gospel is not OUR work. It is God's work. He will use us who are ready to obey.

God's kingdom will come. It is great to fight in a war knowing beforehand that your King is the Victor.

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CORRIE TEN BOOM PAPERBACKS

(FROM SPIRE BOOKS:)

THE HIDING PLACE

Miss ten Boom's experiences of God's faithfulness in German-occupied Holland during World War II while hiding Jews in her family's home, and while imprisoned in a German concentration camp.

(FROM CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE:)

COMMON SENSE NOT NEEDED

A very helpful book for those who work among mentally retarded people.

A PRISONER AND YET

This book is another footnote to the Acts of the Apostles. Miracles were the norm during the dark days in the concentration camp where the author's father and sister died while they were imprisoned there. Here Miss ten Boom shows how the power and grace of God are sufficient to surmount every adverse circumstance.

AMAZING LOVE

Despite the horrors even of the concentration camp, it is possible to find victory in Christ. Corrie ten Boom paints vivid word-pictures of her first-hand experiences in camps and jails, with actresses and students, the sophisticated and the illiterate.

DEFEATED ENEMIES

Christians ought to realize that the victory has already been won and the enemy of our souls has been

defeated in God's timeless eternity. Out of the depth of her own spiritual experiences, the author shares with her readers how God works.

MARCHING ORDERS FOR THE END BATTLE

Everything is heading towards the great and final battle which John describes in the Book of Revelation, and that battle has started already. But we know:

Jesus was victor. Jesus is victor. Jesus will be victor. --From the Preface

NOT GOOD IF DETACHED

Fruit grows in profusion on the branch that has known much training and pruning. Dependence on God, produced by the fires of affliction, coupled with a daily walk with the Lord Jesus, is the explanation of that which seems just "to happen." This book reveals the secret of abiding in Him.

PLENTY FOR EVERYONE

Well known for her prison experiences in Germany during World War III, this worldwide traveler relates some very interesting accounts of those whose lives have been transformed by Christ. You will enjoy this readable book.

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