

Intro:

Women have been a part of carrying the gospel where it's not for generations. And part of the legacy they've left can be found in the courage their stories inspire in an entirely new generation of women who would go. But that legacy can only be realized if their stories are told. Welcome to the Velvet Ashes Legacy Podcast.

Denise:

Hey everybody. Welcome back to the Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast. I'm Denise Beck, joined by Sarah Hilkemann and Laura Chavalier Beer to bring you this month's legacy podcast. Ladies, how are you doing?

Laura:

I'm doing well. Great to be here again.

Sarah:

I am good as well.

Denise:

I'm not joining you from a different country today, just just back in my house.

Sarah:

I know, you're back in America.

Denise:

And Laura is joining us from a new house. Just moved.

Laura:

Yes, but not very far from the old one. So <laugh>

Denise:

Still the same, but, um, today's a special podcast day. So this podcast marks the completion of one year of the Velvet Ashes legacy podcast. I can't, I can't believe that we have been doing this for one year. What, what do you guys think about that favorite moment, season one? What are your thoughts?

Sarah:

I love it. I love that so many of the women that we've covered were not super familiar to me. And so I just feel like I have gotten to learn, um, so many new things and it's kind of like opened up some new pockets of history too, of, you know, a different place or a different time period that maybe I didn't know a lot about. So I love that.

Laura:

Yeah. And I'm just so grateful for the opportunity to have joined you after you ladies had already started this, and were doing a fantastic job, by the way, even though you kept saying that you were experts, you could fooled me.

Denise:

We're so glad to have you, Laura.

Sarah:

Yes.

Denise:

Yes. Yeah. I feel like I have gotten to like, insert these little nuggets of information that I have learned through studying these women all year into, into different conversations, and it makes me sound a lot smarter than I really am to just like these, you know, random facts about these remote women in history that did these amazing things. And so and so, yeah, I, I loved that. I have loved what we have gotten to learn and share and how it shaped the way I think about things. So what, what a great thing to celebrate end of season one, Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast. So the end of season one, we are ending with an amazing story. So, Sarah, tell everybody who we're covering this month.

Sarah:

Yeah. So the woman that we are covering is Lillian Trasher. And I, I enjoyed learning about her. Um, she feels a little intimidating to me, but, uh, just in her personality, um, at least what I was reading. So yeah. But excited to, to learn more about her and get to share more of her story today.

Denise:

Yes. Laura, what can we learn about the life of Lillian Trasher?

Laura:

Yeah, so I'm just gonna start kind of in the middle of her story to give you an idea of some things that, uh, characterized her ministry and kind of what she faced. So on April 26th, 1921 at the district council meeting of the Assemblies of God in Egypt and Palestine, Lillian Trasher was reminded by a colleague that her work was "not strictly missionary work". She'd been running an orphanage in Assiut, Egypt for 10 years with hundreds of children coming through her doors. Her colleague was implying that evangelistic preaching was missionary in nature and the true missionary work as, as opposed to caring for children, which is what she did. Lillian reportedly told her colleague that she did not care if she was considered a missionary or not. She said she was working for God and her kiddies, God bless them. She then thanked the General Counsel of America for giving her missionary credentials.

Laura:

So this incident sidetracked the council for their, from their business as the rest of the missionaries felt that they should come to Lillian's defense. They viewed her work as missionary because it seemed to work, it brought in converts. For instance, they said some of the older children from the mission from the orphanage were actually members of the mission or the church. So this was actually not the first time or the only time that Lillian's Lillian's work was questioned or devalued for various reasons. When she first started the orphanage, other missionaries in the region discouraged her efforts. And over the course of her lifetime, there were plenty of other detractors. But Lillian continued to display a tenacity of faith in which she viewed her main accountability to be due to God. And she eventually became a legendary figure known across the world due to her work among the Egyptian children who were in need. So she became quite famous, um, within Egypt and around the world by people in the Assemblies

of God, or she was known by people in the Assemblies of God, but beyond that to people in other Christian traditions and other religions. And yeah, she was just someone who became revered eventually.

Denise:

And I think whether you have heard of her or not, we all can resonate with the struggle to help people understand the work that we're doing no matter where we are, because I think sometimes it doesn't feel productive to us. But yet living somewhere and doing the small things day to day are what add up and make the difference sometimes over a lifetime. And so, so yeah, I, I feel like, I don't know if you guys ever felt like that, that you like come home on furlough and it's like, how do I explain to you that a lot of my day is mundane and just doing these small things and you feel like it's still valuable because it's so hard?

Sarah:

Yeah. Well, and that layer of your fellow workers, your fellow missionaries, also not believing that what you're doing is true missionary work, I think that just feels really like complicated and hard and this extra layer. Um, but I love that word tenacity that you used Laura for her. Cuz I just feel like that's such a theme that I saw in Lillian's life through all that I was reading. And, and I think we'll see that come up. <laugh>.

Laura:

Yes, that's definitely her, her character, her personality. If someone's gonna detract from her, she's, she's gonna stand up and defend herself, <laugh>. Um, but she also did it with some humility because she felt like she was accountable to God for what she was doing. So over the course of her quite long life, Lillian wrote letters prolifically. And many of those were published publicly, um, through different periodicals of the time. And in these letters she shared about her work with the world. And that's how she became famous is because people read about her and what she was doing and what was happening in the orphanage. So some of the sources that we're drawing on from today, um, are those letters that she wrote. They've actually been gathered into an edited collection, some of them in a book called Letters from Lillian. And you can also find many copies digitally of her letters, um, at the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center online.

Laura:

So they have tons of these periodicals that they've digitized and are free for the public to go and look at. So if you're interested in early Pentecostal, uh, history, um, in early in Christianity at the turn of the 20th century, this is a great place that you could go to.

Denise:

We can put those links in our show notes as well.

Laura:

Yeah, definitely. And some of what I'm sharing today too is also from my doctoral research, I was able to go to the Assemblies of God World Missions archives, um, a few years back. And so some of what I have, you'd have to go there, uh, to be able to find it. But if you're interested in, um, watching something like a video, there's also a documentary called The Nile Mother that they have free online as well, and we'll put that in the notes as well.

Laura:

And then there's been many biographies that are available and, uh, written about her. So there's lots of sources and lots of ways that you connect, can connect with her further if you're interested in that. So Lillian was born on September 27th, 1887 in Jacksonville, Florida. And as a young child, she was called Lily. She had an older sister named Jenny. And she was, um, then raised in Brunswick, Georgia, which is, um, a town in Georgia that's on the coast. So it's coastal. And so she spent much of her childhood there. And interestingly, her mother was raised as a Quaker, but then converted to Catholicism and raised her daughters in that tradition. But during her childhood, Lillian was exposed to evangelical faith. One day she encountered a bible at a friend's house for this first time, she had never like seen a Bible in person, and so she asked her mom if she could have one.

Laura:

Um, and her mom eventually did buy her one as a gift, and so she began reading it, but she didn't really know there was anything for her in it because she wasn't quite understanding what she was reading. A few months after that, on Christmas day, uh, a neighbor arrived and shared about his conversion, and Lillian was really intrigued by this. So she pestered his wife to tell her more about it, and she even volunteered to do some washing with this lady so that she would spend more time with her. Um, it was wash day and the woman was like, I, I don't have time. I've gotta do my chores. And Lillian's like, no, I'm gonna come and I'm gonna help you with them so you can tell me more. So she was an inquirer. She, she was trying to, to find more of God.

Laura:

Um, so through her neighbor's influence, she embraced an evangelical faith. And there's various sources that sort of place when that happened. She writes a letter where she says it was at age 16, um, but other sources say it was at nine or 10. So it was somewhere in that range between nine and 16 that this happened. So through that neighbor's influence, she embraced the faith, but she ended up praying out in the woods by herself and personally dedicating her life to Christ and, and told him that she desired to serve him, and if there was anything that she could do for him, let her know. Later after that, she was baptized by this, uh, Wesleyan minister. So she had quite a few, um, different Christian traditions kind of in her her past. Later on as she became older, um, in her later teens, she moved to Asheville, North Carolina, and lots of new connections opened up for her, her there.

Laura:

Um, she ended up moving to Cincinnati, Ohio for a year and attending God's Bible School. So she did some bible school to get some more training to potentially go out and minister. And then she had a, an encounter with a woman named Miss Maddie Perry. And Maddie Perry, um, was an influential figure in the holiness movement and in her own right, had a great influence across the United States. And the way that she and Lillian connected was that she invited Lillian to come and work at an orphanage that she had started, where there are about a hundred children there in North Carolina. And so Lillian decided that she was going to go and do that. And this particular orphanage was called a faith supported orphanage, meaning it had no promised funding, they just depended, uh, through faith that God would supply for their needs. And so Lillian went to this orphanage and learned to live in that way.

Laura:

And she also learned about how to make clothes, care for infants, teach children. And so this was kind of a precursor to the work that she ended up doing in Egypt and really taught her many of the things that

she needed later in her, her, um, work in Egypt. So something just to keep in mind, um, during this time in terms of missions, orphanages were really common ministries among evangelicals at the time. And faith run orphanages became more common in the 1890s as more independent missionaries started new works without the financial backing of established missionary boards. So people were starting to be more entrepreneurial in their mission and kind of just starting things. And so the theological thought was, okay, let's just trust God to back us and supply the funds that we need. Um, sometime in her early adulthood, she also became a Pentecostal in terms of her Christian beliefs and pastored a church and also traveled with some itinerant evangelists affiliated with the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee.

Laura:

And that's, uh, in contrast to the other Church of God, um, that's based in Anderson, Indiana. So there's two different ones of them. This one in particular is a Pentecostal denomination. So, um, she had quite a lot going on and seemed to be really interested in, um, being involved in ministry for the Lord. And her desire to follow God actually caused her to leave some relationships behind. In 1910, just weeks before she was supposed to be married to a preacher, she broke off their, their engagement. It was actually like 10 days, I think, before they were supposed to be get married because she felt like she had a missionary call to go to Egypt. She had several encounters with different people, and it just felt like it was current, confirmed that she was supposed to go. And she shared that news with her fiance. He did not feel the same. And so she broke off that engagement. Mm.

Sarah:

Man, this part of Lillian's story really stuck out to me for different reasons, but I think in the Velvet Ashes community and just in general, I know I hear from a lot of single women, particularly who, you know, they wonder like, have I sacrificed marriage? Have I sacrificed motherhood, um, for the Lord because I am serving cross-culturally mm-hmm. <affirmative>, but it just, yeah, ending an engagement, you know, you're, you're so close to the wedding day, um, would be so hard. I just can't imagine. And I think I don't, you know, I don't know what Lillian was thinking, but I would be thinking like, did I hear God wrong in this? You know, am I hearing wrong? And, and my fiance is, is right, but what courage that took my goodness to say, I'm gonna obey God, even if it means not marrying this particular person. Or maybe not ever getting married for her to say that. Yeah.

Denise:

And Sarah, it wasn't, and Laura correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't this guy a pastor? Like, it wasn't like he was a pastor. Yeah. It wasn't like he was some random guy that this was, right. No, I'm making that both options would've maybe potentially had her in service to the Lord in some areas said like, yes, that was such, you know, discernment to, to be able to say, no, I'm called to serve the Lord in this way as opposed to this way. Do you know what I mean? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. I'm with you, Sarah.

Laura:

Yeah. But she was, she was convinced. So shortly after that, in 1910, she sailed to Egypt as an independent Pentecostal faith missionary, not supported by any denominational mission board. I mean, that's courage. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, she was 20, about 23 years old at the time. Um, and her sister Jenny went with her initially. She was kind of reluctant. She didn't really want Lillian to go, but then when she realized her sister was so determined, she's like, well, I'm gonna go with you <laugh> mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And she stayed, um, for a while, um, at the beginning of Lillian's ministry there. So in terms of just the, the setting that she went into, I just wanna talk a little bit about Egypt. So

during Lillian's lifetime and service in Egypt, um, the country was largely controlled by the British. Um, and it's got a complicated social sociopolitical history, but it's important to know that there was unrest due to the British dominance and Egyptian desire for independence and desire for sovereignty.

Laura:

So at some point, I think in the, uh, early 1920s, they did gain independence, but the British still had a lot of control in the area. And so there was a lot of, um, discontent with that situation. So Lillian was there during that time, and she was a foreigner, though not British background. So, but that was important, it's important to know that context. And she was also there during the two World Wars, and so British influence there, they're gonna be involved in the wars. So she was in, in, in the middle of some major world events there. In terms of the religious context, I'm sure most of you know that Egypt is majority Muslim population, but they also have a large minority Coptic presence. So Coptic Christianity is, um, a form of orthodox Christianity, and it's the Egyptian form. Um, and it's very ancient.

Laura:

It goes back to the early church. So that's kind of the, the context that she moved into. When she arrived, she connected with missionaries that she knew, and Assiut and began to study Arabic. And that's the location where the country's largest group of Christians, the Coptic or the Egyptian Orthodox community were concentrated. And that city is located South of Cairo, right on the Nile. Mm-hmm. So she's studying Arabic, and she's interested in ministering in some way. But very soon after her arrival, she is called to the bedside of a dying, um, woman. And this woman leaves her, her child as she's on her deathbed and says, take care of this child. And so Lillian decides to do that. The missionaries that she with don't like that idea, but then she's like, well, I should just start an orphanage. There's many needy children around. I'm gonna do this and trust God to supply the funds.

Laura:

So she went ahead, rented a little space and opened the doors in 1911. Um, so she's just moving forward with what she feels like God's calling her to do. And very soon she had dozens and then hundreds of children joining the orphanage, and she's having to expand the buildings and create more space for them. And she continued to operate this orphanage without any guaranteed funding. Um, she did have official connections with the Church of God. She was ordained with them, but then later in 1919, she became affiliated with the Assemblies of God. And so she had an official, um, appointment with them as a missionary, but again, no, um, guaranteed funding. So she continued to have to trust God and, and ask people to, to give towards the work. So the orphanage grew to include many buildings, dormitories, schools, a medical clinic, and even a church.

Laura:

So it was kind of its own little community right there. And children were trained in faith and in practical trades so that they'd be able to support themselves once they left the orphanage. Eventually she expanded the ministry to include a ministry to the blind, um, who were often overlooked in society. And then over time, the orphanage also accepted widows who provided important services for the home. So for many widows, kind of like in Bible times, they didn't have many options of how they could support themselves. And so they would see going to the orphanage and serving and working there as a great opportunity for them to be able to be provided for, and have a place to live and things to eat. So the widows, um, contributed to the operation of the orphanage, cooking, baking, cleaning, doing laundry,

milking cows. And without the widows, it would've been very difficult for the orphanage to provide these services.

Laura:

And some of these widows were mothers who had children that would come with them. And so they saw this as a means to provide for their children as well, and allowed them to stay in proximity to their children. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And it's important to point out too, that Lillian wasn't doing all this work alone with these destitute widows. She had local Christians who came beside her and came alongside her to support her. And some of them served as pastors, as matrons directors of certain departments of the institution. And then she also had missionaries that would come and work and serve in the orphanage. So for Lillian, she was, she was known as Mama Lillian, or the mother of the Nile, that's what people called her. It was bestowed, that title was bestowed on her by the local community. So that means that they really respected her and saw what she was doing was an important service for the community.

Laura:

But it's also important to keep in mind that for her, it also meant that she was ultimately in charge of what happened. In some ways that was really special. She took interest in the babies and personally oversaw their feeding. She taught in the schools and wrote original curriculum, but she also was very, uh, serious about controlling certain things, like who the kids could marry and, um, what was going on and how things went down at the orphanage. And so when you read about her and hear about her, some of what you see, there's definitely some paternalism in that approach where kinda looking down on some of the, the, um, local knowledge, um, and considering like Western culture and western ways is superior, um, which was very typical of her time. So it's important to, to acknowledge that now at our point in history. But her deep love for the children is so evident in the writing, in the pictures and in the documentary of her life.

Laura:

So she absolutely loved the children, she loved the Egyptian people, and in many ways highly respected them. So Lillian's kind of orphanage is probably not as common anymore. Maybe in certain parts of the world you still see that, but it's, today, often very different models are used in mission circles for orphan care. There's more of an emphasis on keeping children with extended families and supporting those families with the children, staying with, with their extended family. But at the time, what Lillian was living, it was a kind of social service where there were few other options. Um, so it's, it's important to keep that in mind, that context of like, at the time, people saw this as a very, very good thing. And in, in, in reality, many children probably lived and thrived because they had an option of a place to get schooled and fed and housed. So yeah, it's, I just want us to make sure that we understand kind of, this is a point in history where this was very common.

Sarah:

And I think that's so important, Laura, to remember, you know, we can, we can look back and sometimes with judgment maybe. Um, but yeah, one thing I, I think we've said multiple times on the podcast is so often people were operating in what they thought was best. Like they were doing the best that they could with the knowledge or the resources that they had. And we can, we can learn from that. And, you know, I, I have seen orphan care done differently in, in maybe more current context, um, and am grateful for the things that we have learned along the way. But, but also all of what you

acknowledged is so important of this was what they had at the time, and just doing the best that they could.

Denise:

I think in so many ways too, she, she's acting like the mom, she is mm-hmm. <affirmative> the mom to these kids. And Sarah, in light of, you know, everything that you talked about struggling with choosing this life sometimes means choosing to say, I will never be the mom. And I, I feel like she was given this gift back, you know, this was something she sacrificed at one point in her life, and it was given back to her hundred fold in her role here. You know, even amongst opposition, you know, she was still receiving a blessing, um, from the Lord through this.

Laura:

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. And she really did view these children as her children. And then when they would come back to the orphanage to visit, she'd wanna see her grandchildren. Um, and so she had thousands of, of children around Egypt, and she, she stayed for her lifetime, committed to this institution. And these children, you do see in the historical record that many missionaries would start orphanages and then eventually go home. And so mm-hmm. That, that could have been really traumatic for children who saw them as, as their parents, as mom, or their adopted parents mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, but for Lillian, that that was never an option, really. And for her, the fact that the work got off the ground and prospered, despite all those opposition were signs that the divine hand was in it. Later looking back, she told people who are reading her letters, how she received no support when she began the orphanage, and how fellow missionary Brother Post could not see that it was God's place for me.

Laura:

However, she shared how she trusted God and how God moved the work forward little by little through small donations, she declared the Lord always gave me just enough. And then in 1920, after noting that some critics had told her not to take in more children, she expressed her faith. "I have found out that our God is able to supply all our needs according to riches, his riches and glory. And even though I don't know where it's coming from, and new children keep coming in, yet God has never failed us once. Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it". And throughout her letters, you see her sharing stories of kind of miraculous provision of funds coming in for building projects that she wanted to get off the ground, for more beds for her children because they were overflowing the ones that they had, for food for the children when they were running out and had no more.

Laura:

Um, I also appreciated the stories that she shared about the child that were starting to appropriate this practical approach to faith, like, take God seriously. She tells the story of her matron, a native woman who she calls "a diamond taken from the rough" saying to her one morning, miss Lily, do you know what the girls do when they want something? And Lily responded, no. She said, well, they just pray for it. When I ask one of the girls if she needs a dress or a pair of stocking, she says, why? Yes, auntie Zakaya, I just prayed for that last night. On another occasion, the children asked the cook for meat for their meal. The cook said no, because they did not have any. But the children said Yes. And sure enough, about three o'clock a man came and brought us half a sheep as a gift. I love that.

Sarah:



Yeah. I just think that can be a good challenge <laugh>, um, for me, for us. And I also love that it was this example that Lillian was setting for the children, you know, it was, it was not in like a top down, trickle down sort of way. Mm-hmm. But, but it was, you know, she was living it out and then setting that example and, and then they were following, and yeah, I just love that how they were also just growing in faith and believing God and asking God for specific things and, and the gift of seeing him answer.

Laura:

Yeah. And Lillian faced many challenges as I said before, but she kept resolute in that faith. As I mentioned before, one of the biggest challenges she faced was this questioning of her work, whether it was true missionary work. And even though orphan care had a lengthy prior record in the history of Christian missions, Lillian found that her work raising children was sometime assigned secondary status after evangelistic preaching and questioned and devalued by some. So her approach was rarely to directly challenge those definitions of what constituted mission. Instead, she would carve out her missionary space by flipping typical mission hierarchies that placed male evangelists at a higher level than female teachers or caregivers. She actually believed that traditional woman's work had a high status based on her experience in working with children. For instance, in a 1919 sermon, she stated that she had been involved in both preaching the gospel and raising children, but had found that raising children was much harder work. It was much easier to preach a sermon and then go about life as one pleased. But when you deal with children, it is your life that preaches mm-hmm. <affirmative> and one must walk right and stray at all times. So it was this focus, Lillian's focus on raising children that really seemed to positively resonate with people as they read about her. And as you can see in what she stated, she, she didn't say, oh, I'm preaching the gospel. She was like, no, I'm doing what's harder,

Denise:

<laugh>. Yes. And,

Laura:

And clearly she's saying, oh, I'm preaching the gospel too. But a lot of, a lot of people who would write in this time were very much about like, oh, you have to go out and, you know, go on the corner and, and preach to the masses, and that's what mission is. And she's saying, well, no, I'm, I'm preaching every day with my life and how I'm training and raising these children.

Denise:

Well, and sometimes wasn't there a precedent of men actually leaving their children? And, you know, there were other instances of people we have covered where it's like their children weren't with them, and they just, you know, the evangelistic work. So I, I feel like this is, you know, her saying, pushing back even against that a little bit

Laura:

Yeah. Saying children matter, like Yeah, they're actually conversion there, as we know today is actually easier than with adults.

Denise:

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Laura:

So she wrote countless letters sharing about the work of the or orphanage, and ultimately gained many supporters. However, the strain of running the orphanage, especially in those early years, was quite, quite large. Um, when she had a few resources to work with, she actually suffered along with the children not knowing where food would come from day to day. And she counted that suffering worth it, because her work enabled the children in her mind to be cared, be cared for, and to have a life, life filled with knowledge of God and well developed, developed minds and bodies. So her actions actually formed a bond with the children and the surrounding community who saw her self-sacrifice. And Lillian rarely returned to the US as I mentioned, because the children in her care had become her life. Looking back on her life, she remarked that the earliest days of the orphanage were the hardest, but they were the best because that's when she had to really rely on God so much.

Laura:

So, despite the fact that she, um, was relying on, on God and is subscribing to this principle, um, based on George Mueller's, um, example of believing in the faith that God would supply for one's needs through prayer, she actually did end up riding around in the local community asking for material assistance. So through this practice, she became known as the lady on the donkey <laugh>. So that's, that's kind of how, how tough it was. Yeah. Like she wasn't at the beginning just having things show up at her doorsteps, like you kind of heard about before. She had to kind of go out and make, make it known that there was a need. And the surrounding community was largely Muslim, largely Coptic. And in those religious traditions, it's very important to participate in alms giving. And so for them to give to, to this woman who's taking care of children in the community was considered a good thing for them.

Laura:

And so that probably helped, helped her along the way. In 1918, she told her readers of her letters that the monthly cost to run the orphanage was \$250. At that time she said that nearly every bit of it comes from Egypt, see how great our God is. He has said, ask and you shall receive. Your Heavenly Father know if what things you have need of mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So for the first chunk of her her time, she's really relying on the local community. It wasn't until later that she started writing letters that were getting published to a wider Christian community around the world that more people started being involved in, in, and contributing. Now, Lillian faced criticism again for accepting donations from local orthodox Christians and Muslims. Um, reporting on her work in 1919, she noted that some thought she had compromised by letting local people who were not Pentecostals help her. She disagreed stating, quote, the people of Egypt helped me because I trained and cared for their little waves.

Laura:

They, this touched their hearts and it touched their pocketbooks. I think it is good thing, a good thing for them to help me. So many of the locals really got behind her in that. But the dynamics of the wider Egyptian context were kind of challenging too. Um, as I said before, the British Empire was maintaining its domination even after Egypt's independence in 1922. So the majority Muslim population increasingly sought to resist any kind of foreign control. Around that time Lillian experienced the impact of this Islamic political influence when government officials actually came into the orphanage and physically removed Muslim background children from the orphanage. And that was very traumatic for her. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, because she considered them to be her children. But she persevered, um, and she was the only foreign missionary who chose to remain in the country throughout the hardships of World Wars 1 and 2.

Laura:

Then by the 1950s, government officials, including the president of Egypt, visited the orphanage in friendship. Local leaders had listed it as a tourist site in their paperwork that they distributed, and reporters wrote positive reviews in their newspapers. In 1954, she was able to boast that about 50% of the support needed to run the orphanage was still originating from Egyptians. So she maintained those relationships and mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, mm-hmm. <affirmative> was a witness to the surrounding community so that they saw that she was doing good and really respected that, and believed, believed it was a good thing. So much so that the Egyptian authorities allowed her to stay during the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956 when other Americans were asked to evacuate.

Denise:

You say, this just reminds me, so many of the women that we covered this year have been women that have chosen to stay during times of difficulty in trial, and how much that means to the community. But I just, I have to circle back to when you were talking about, you know, the struggle that she faced, um, and judgment from people who were questioning her taking money from, from other places. And, and I feel like that's really a tricky, a tricky thing. You know, like I was, even as we were studying about this, thinking about, you know, the context in scripture, the precedents in scripture for, you know, for all of that. And because we deal so much with funding and fundraising, even, even as I work with other leaders of organizations and what they're doing is so motivating to people of all types of belief backgrounds, and when funding comes to them from something outside of their denomination or even outside of the faith, that's like, is it a compromising for us to take this money to do work that we feel like God has called us to do? And I don't know, what do you guys think about that?

Sarah:

Yeah, I think it can feel complicated, but at the same time, what opportunities might come from that, that invitation of inviting these other people who maybe don't share our faith background or, um, the same, you know, church background or whatever, and what doors might it open, what opportunities for conversation might it open, you know, these people that were able to see what Lillian was doing, and, and then also like maybe get to see the way that God provided for her mm-hmm. And for these children. And yeah. I just was thinking, you know, how, what doors might the invitation open, um, for God to work.

Denise:

Yeah. And like, when you think about, I, I definitely don't wanna take scripture out of context, but like, where your treasure is there, your heart will be, and if the, the place you're putting your treasure is something that has God all over it, and it is his heart for the lost, the widow, the, you know, the least of these, you know, you have to just feel like there's some sort of, you know, reconciliation to him that can happen through where we put our finances. And so, yeah. I, I tend to lean with Lillian in this, you know mm-hmm. <affirmative> about, about her, where she landed with taking support from other places.

Laura:

Yeah. And I think, uh, like Sarah said, she saw it as opportunity, um, to, to introduce people who might otherwise not be engaged in a conversation to, in invite them into her space and to be like, Hey, come and see what we're doing. And we're overtly Christian in a Muslim context.

Denise:

Absolutely.

Sarah:

But it's a different sort of conversation starter perhaps than, you know, just straight up sharing the gospel with someone, or, you know, like, it, it might open a door that you wouldn't necessarily be able to open with someone because it's just a different approach to the conversation.

Laura:

Yeah. And I think it also ministered to the Orthodox Christians as well, the Coptics there who saw a foreign woman caring for their children, perhaps in a way greater than they were doing themselves. And some of the scholars that have done research on her kind of say that, like, they kind of gave over this work to Lillian because she was doing it well, according to, to their estimation. Mm-hmm.

Denise:

<affirmative>. Mm-hmm.

Laura:

<affirmative>, Just to move on here, like, there, there's so many things we could share about Lillian, um, sh but one of the things I wanted to highlight for, for this audience was that she had a talent for writing and for, um, giving her readers word pictures of, uh, kind of analogies to describe how she envisioned, um, the work happening. And I, I call this her, her lived missiology. This is, this is how she, um, did, did mission and understood mission for, uh, understood mission with God. So she envisioned how her small works of mercy and kindness through the power of Christ might affect spiritual change in Egypt. She delighted in the slow seed planting nature of investing in children as they grew up forming Christian families of their own, raising her grandchildren. She pictured them as lights across Egypt and other parts of Africa. Together, they represented the people of God in that region.

Laura:

She wrote at one point, I have no large reports to send in as my kind of work, don't make much show now, but I trust when Jesus comes, he will find me. So doing for, he said, in as much as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me. Lillian always thanked her readers for helping, and she would say, helping her to feed and clothe my babies. At another time she wrote, I will never be able to do any great thing in life. So I'm trying to do as many little things as well as I possibly can. Perhaps when they're all put together, they'll mount to something and perhaps the Lord may use some of the boys and girls to do the work that I never could have done. Love

Denise:

Love that.

Laura:

Yeah. It just shows her humility of like, this is what I can do. I will do what I can do. And God may be able to multiply it and do something even greater through other people.

Denise:

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Laura:

Her hope for the children was that they would, um, become useful in their lives. And she said, as they grow to manhood and womanhood, and someday many of them will be leaders among their people, I believe the training they have received in our orphanage will be the greatest benefit. And so one of the things that she struggled with and then that other people questioned her about was that her orphanage didn't produce enough evangelists. But in, at the end of the day, what it did produce was a lot of new Christian families who then would go out into the community and raise, raise their families, and be part of the Christian presence where they were. And so it's kind of like, okay, maybe you didn't have lots of those people going out and preaching, but you had a lot of people going out, living and multiplying.

Laura:

And so the Christian community grew. She really valued her supporters, um, who contributed to what she, um, was doing. She saw their current contributions as a God provision and answers to her prayers and that of the children, one of my favorite quotes of hers, um, she's talking about how she see the, saw these supporters and envisioned, um, their work in her life and in the life of, of the ministry. She says, as I sat down to write you this morning, and thank you for your gift, I was not seeing your money at all. All I could see was a very strong rope drawing a ship loaded with children. This rope was made up of thousands of little weak threads and fibers all twisted and woven together some long and some short, some weak and some strong. Not one of these weak fibers could move such a large, heavy ship as it crosses the dark sea of life.

Laura:

But all the threads together are safely taking hundreds of helpless ones safely to adult adulthood. Christ is at the head safely holding the rope while he lets us sit among the children and do what we can to make them safe and happy. We must always remember we could never guide this great ship without him. And so she emphasizes quite a bit in that, um, quote, just the safety that she wants for these children, both physically and materially. And she talks about how God lets her sit among the children. And so that really is a picture of the, the faith that she had, a childlike faith to trust him for provision.

Sarah:

I love that picture of the, um, the rope, you know, with the weak threads and fibers and all of that just fitting together and just that picture of community, you know, for, for her work that it wasn't like she was saying, oh, I am just alone doing this amazing work with these children, but also how that can be a picture for us of community and how we need one another. And the beauty of our supporters, the people that financially come alongside of us, or that pray for us, or even just, you know, um, women who are serving cross-culturally, having that connection and that bond. And like we're, we're working toward seeing, you know, God glorified together.

Denise:

I wonder like how many of us are listening to this who have a newsletter they're getting ready to write because there you go. You can just use that analogy from, from her, you know, because that, that is so good. It's applicable to today, to today, but it also makes me think of my middle school youth minister, because he was great at captivating children's attention by these word pictures, by using these analogies. And it's just like, this is why she was good at it is because she was ministering to children all the time. And, you know, coming up with things that would stick with them that they could remember, that they could wrap their minds around. And so I love that she's using that, um, pouring out of the overflow of just the life she's, she lived in general, you know?

Laura:

Yeah. And her life was pretty incredible. I mean, she, she lived and worked in Egypt for the rest of her life since, um, since she left in 1910. So from 1910 to 1961 when she passed away, she spent, I think the majority of that time in Egypt. I think she left for the United States one time during that whole whole time. So her work in Egypt spanned 51 years and two world Wars. She was revered and regarded as the Nile mother by Christians and Muslims alike. And despite the difficulties, through the support of the surrounding community and other friends, the orphanage eventually grew to care for over 8,000 children in her lifetime. And as of 2021, it had served over 25,000 children. All of the children that passed through the doors were introduced to Christ and many established Christian families and became Christian workers.

Laura:

And it contributed to the growth of Pentecostalism in Egypt and many former orphans make up the Christian community in Egypt today. Mm. The orphanage is now called the Lillian Trasher Memorial Orphanage. And it still exists today. As I said, it's run and operated by the Egyptian Assemblies of God with support from various Christian denominations and other friends. And I'm sure there are things that they do differently now. It's not exactly the same as when she was there, but it's still priority is serving children who are in material need. Um, whether, um, because they're orphaned or because they have some other other need that's arisen in their life. And her story continues to inspire missionaries around the world, Christian workers and believers today, just with the magnitude of what she was able to accomplish. But doing it through just these small daily acts of caring for children. And any mother out there, um, I think would recognize that that can be very mundane from day to day. Um, you know, you're cleaning up spit up and you're, um, <laugh> wiping baby's bottoms and you're making sure kids are doing their schoolwork, and it's things like that. But through it all, she was, she was sharing the love of Christ with the children and with the community.

Denise:

So I, I mean, I just feel like there's so many things we could take away from her story. I know, I know for me, one of the things that I, um, I smile about when I was reading about her was there was a story early on where she was, um, actually with Ms. Perry, that very first orphanage, you know, and how God uses things in our lives to prepare us for other things. But when she was there, her shoes got worn out, and there was a donation of clothes that had men's shoes in it, and she just put those on. And I read that the children just made fun of her and drew pictures of her with these, you know, shoes that looked ridiculous. And, and she did not care. I mean, because literally she only cared about was she doing what the Lord asked her to do.

Denise:

And that was evident, you know, from the very beginning. It was evident from whenever she was, you know, even by current missionaries that served near and around her, like being questioned, you know, she didn't let that affect her as long as she knew she was doing what the Lord asked her to do. She just motored on and she continued, you know, to operate in that service. And I, I just love taking that away, you know, where, where do I find my fulfillment, my joy, my, you know, satisfaction and it's in what the Lord thinks of me. And I think that that's, you know, one of the things that I'll take away from, from the story.

Sarah:

Yeah. I think that was one of the threads that in some ways was kind of surprising to me. Like how much opposition she encountered. Yes. And just how much she persevered and kept going and, and pushed through that. And, and I think I am the type of person that if someone disagrees with what I'm doing, I'm like, oh, okay, obviously I have made the wrong decision, <laugh>, like I'll just, you know, um, change what I'm doing to fit what, what other people think I should be doing. And just the, the discernment that she had to have, you know, because I think sometimes someone can push back on what we're doing and we need to hear it, you know? Mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, we need their wisdom. We need to maybe make a change. And yet how much discernment she had to have to say, no, this is what God has called me too, and I'm gonna keep walking in this direction even though, you know, you don't, you disagree with what I'm doing, or you don't think it counts as mission work or you know, all the different things that, that she had to deal with.

Sarah:

And yeah. That has made me think a lot about whose voice are we listening to, and really having to trust the Holy Spirit for that discernment of when do I need to listen to the people around me, um, and the wisdom that they might be speaking, and when do I need to just say, I'm not gonna put weight in what others are saying, and I'm gonna listen to the Lord.

Laura:

One thing that I, I think really stands out is that she kind of knew her lane. Mm-hmm. She knew where, where God had gifted her and where there was a need and where they aligned. And she could look at someone else and say, I know that this is not their lane, that's their lane over there. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, but this is mine. And eventually, most of those missionaries that had like questioned her at the beginning came around to see that it, it was true. Like this was the calling that God had for her. And ironically, the one that I started with at the beginning, who publicly like, was like, you're not really a missionary. He and his wife ended up doing work with children eventually because, that was what was needed in the context, and that was actually what was working. So they ended up starting a school as well.

Denise:

Well, and I, I was actually gonna say like adversely, like maybe people that are listening are the people that are looking at someone else in their team or in their circles going, you're crazy. You're not doing what I think you should do. That is so unorthodox the way that you're going about this. And you feel like maybe you're working with a Lillian, who is totally not doing things the way you would do it. And just like having that moment to say, is God asking you to reevaluate and pray and be like, no, it's okay. I'm, I am with her even though this looks totally weird and wrong and outside of the box, you know? And so just trust me and let her do what I've asked her to do. You know, cuz maybe that's what we're being asked to do is mm-hmm. <affirmative> stop judging, stop trying to stop what, what you, what the Lord is actually in and what he is doing.

Denise:

But Laura, thank you so much for, for bringing us this story, this the story of hope as we wrap up season one. And, and we do wanna talk a little bit about that. There are gonna be some changes coming in season two that we're excited about. We're not gonna go into the changes right now, but we wanna encourage you to stay tuned for a trailer for season two because we are gonna be bringing you more stories, more ways to bring you courage, more opportunities to influence the legacy that you leave, um,

be influenced by other legacies that are happening around the world. So stay tuned for a season two trailer with more information about that. Um, but, but we just, we wanna wrap up season one. We wanna thank you for being a part of one year of the Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast. We hope you've been blessed by the stories. We hope you've learned something. We hope that sometimes when you're going through your day, something comes to mind that you have heard, that it inspires you to maybe keep going, to have courage for that next step because someday your story might inspire someone else to keep going. So we'll meet you back here next month, season two. Thanks for joining us. Thank you so much, Sarah. Thank you so much, Laura. We'll see you guys back here next month.