

**Florence Muindi** was propelled into leadership when she encountered the poorest of the poor



# GROWING TO FULL POTENTIAL

## key points

- When we trust in and surrender to God's will, he will take us in surprising directions.
- Poor communities need transformation through hope for the future, not just medicine alone.
- Spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible reading must go hand-in-hand with practical training and experience.

I recall when I committed my life to Christ. I was in third grade. A fellow third grader introduced me to the simple message of salvation, prayed with me and I received Christ as Lord and saviour. At that age and in a church environment, there was little immediate change in do's and don'ts. But, growing up in rural Kenya, one thing that surprised me was my reaction to my fellow poor neighbours. Passing by their house and seeing their torn bedding hanging out to dry would keep me awake at night, praying that God would somehow meet their needs.

After his conversion, Paul said he no longer lived, but Christ lived in him.<sup>1</sup> After our commitment to Christ, we begin a race *marked out for us*. I remember struggling with that, wanting to run the race my way. Not willing to die to the plans I had for me so I could surrender to his good and perfect will. I am so thankful that by God's grace I trusted in his plan and surrendered to his good and perfect will.

After a time of soul-searching while graduating

from high school, it became clear that the underlying purpose of life is to glorify God. With that realisation – I asked the Lord to own me. To take all that I was and all that I will ever be. I wanted to live in obedience and yield totally to his will. It has been 34 years since I took this step.

### Following God's path

Soon, the Lord began to reveal his plan for me, step by step. He made a way for me to enrol at medical school. He guided me into public health. The path led on to disaster management training and civil defence. I went to Switzerland, Belgium and Pakistan for training. When it was time to move to the next stage, the Lord opened a door for me, my husband Festus, and our two children (babies then) to go as missionaries among the Maasai of Kenya. That was for two years. Then in a very clear way, he guided us to Ethiopia as cross-cultural missionaries, the country whose suffering had been on my heart all through medical school.

## Serving the rejected and oppressed

During our language learning in Ethiopia, we connected with people affected by leprosy in an urban slum, and we began to serve them. As I served with this rejected and oppressed community where most were dependent on begging, I knew this was where God wanted me.

Clinical medicine cannot help much in this situation. We saw many children with several active infections. One child would have worms, skin disease, ear infection, pneumonia, typhoid. After a prescription, they would soon be back with the same infections over and over. This destitute community needed the sick treating, yes, but they also needed interventions to prevent them getting sick and to meeting their hygiene, nutrition, water and other basic needs. It needed empowering and instilling with hope for a better tomorrow. But it was not going to be dependent on me or my family alone. It was going to be done in such a way that:

- Local churches are involved and the body of Christ is exalted.
- The poor participate and own their development.
- The impact is God-glorifying and not leading to us being praised as heroes.

Our aim was not only to meet their temporal needs but most importantly their spiritual needs. This strategy involves transformational development that empowers the church to serve the urban and rural poor. We serve alongside local churches to empower them to become the agents of change and graduate that process every three years. We started as a family of four in 1994. After a time of piloting, amazing favour and expansion into other urban poor communities in Ethiopia, a ministry organization was born, Life in Abundance International (LIA).

## An international mission

LIA served initially in Ethiopia, then as we followed God's leading, we got involved with displaced people in war-torn Sudan. It then expanded into the slums in Kenya, targeting the poor in the slums and marginalised situations. In each community, LIA is meeting felt priority needs in a designed programme so that transformation can come. This is the mission of Jesus as spelt out in Isaiah 61. It includes medical camps, clinics, health education, poverty alleviation strategies in partnership with local churches, sharing the gospel with the poor and the vulnerable. It has been an awesome 20 years in this service.

Today, LIA is established in eight countries in Africa, and two countries in the Caribbean – Haiti and Jamaica. To date, almost 50 destitute communities, with an average population of 20,000, have been transformed and graduated. LIA has a staff team of about 160, serving in communities and clinics. We run seven clinics in these nations and have two training bases, equipping the church to serve. Over the next three years, LIA will reach a

quarter of a million people in the ten countries where we currently work, and expand to serve in four others. We plan to graduate 226 communities, releasing the poor to worship God.

I tell this story to encourage you. The Lord has a good plan for you, beyond what you can think of. You can confidently trade in your well-crafted plans for his.

## What does it take?

*Prayer* is vital. Wherever I find myself, I seek a prayer partner to fast and pray with, to hear God together, to hold me to account. Prayer unlocks resources, allows God to speak to us and gives us the direction. For LIA we take time each Monday to fast and pray. This has been our greatest investment.

It takes *obedience* without compromise or rationalisation. This must become a lifestyle and a desired discipline. We must meditate on *Scripture*. God said to Joshua, 'Keep this book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.'<sup>2</sup>

*Do not conform to the ways of this world.* This includes the opinions and expectations of family and friends who may mean well. It is contrary to human wisdom. Sometimes I pray that God will protect me from myself. There also needs to be *sacrifice*. We must count much as loss for the sake of the call, purpose and obedience. Sometimes it will make you uncomfortably different, it will demand of you and it will cost.

*Training and equipping* are essential too. God will not entrust much to us, unless we have developed our character and we will develop that through a close walk with him, becoming his likeness.

But above all, we need to surrender. It may take a long time to completely yield, but until then, we remain alone, as a seed not willing to die to grow and produce a hundredfold. If I could go back to medical school, to the time of internship or post graduate and have the opportunity to choose again, this is still the path I would take.

This is the race that Christ invites us to run, that only ends with death. A lifestyle of growth, not arriving, to a full potential because so long as we have life, we have room for greater potential. It's progressive.

Let us invest in this race 'until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ'.<sup>3</sup> I pray that the location of your commissioning, whether it's your home, hospital, clinic or the nations, will be impacted, that because Christ has you, he will be worshipped and glorified in the place you occupy. I pray that as you give an account of your days on earth, you will hear the words 'well done' from your Father in heaven.

*Florence Muindi is a medical doctor and founder and CEO of Life in Abundance.*

Life in Abundance is an indigenous mission movement, training and equipping churches in Africa and the Caribbean to restore health, renew hope and inspire lasting transformation for the world's most vulnerable families.

It aims to:

- Promote health and prevent disease
- Empower the poor with economic opportunities
- Equip the vulnerable to break the cycle of powerlessness
- Educate the marginalised

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## references

1. Galatians 2:20
2. Joshua 1:8
3. Ephesians 4:13