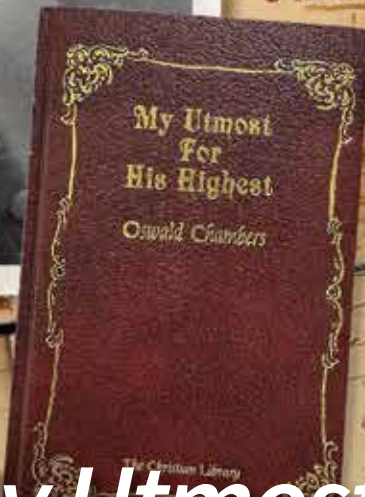
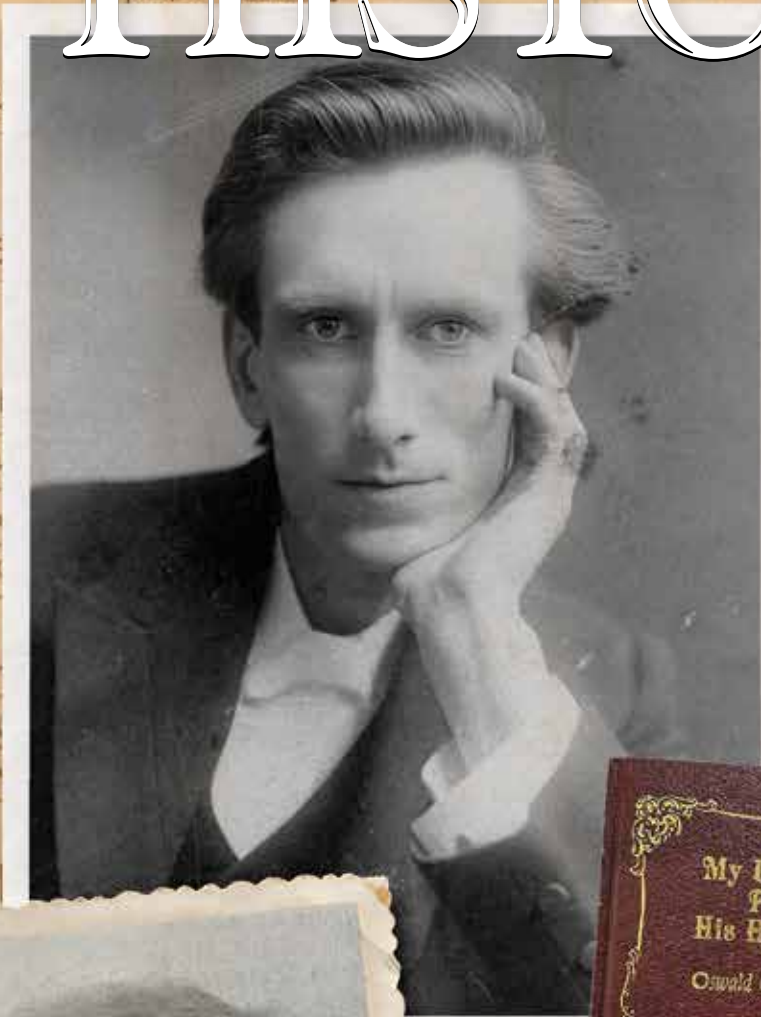


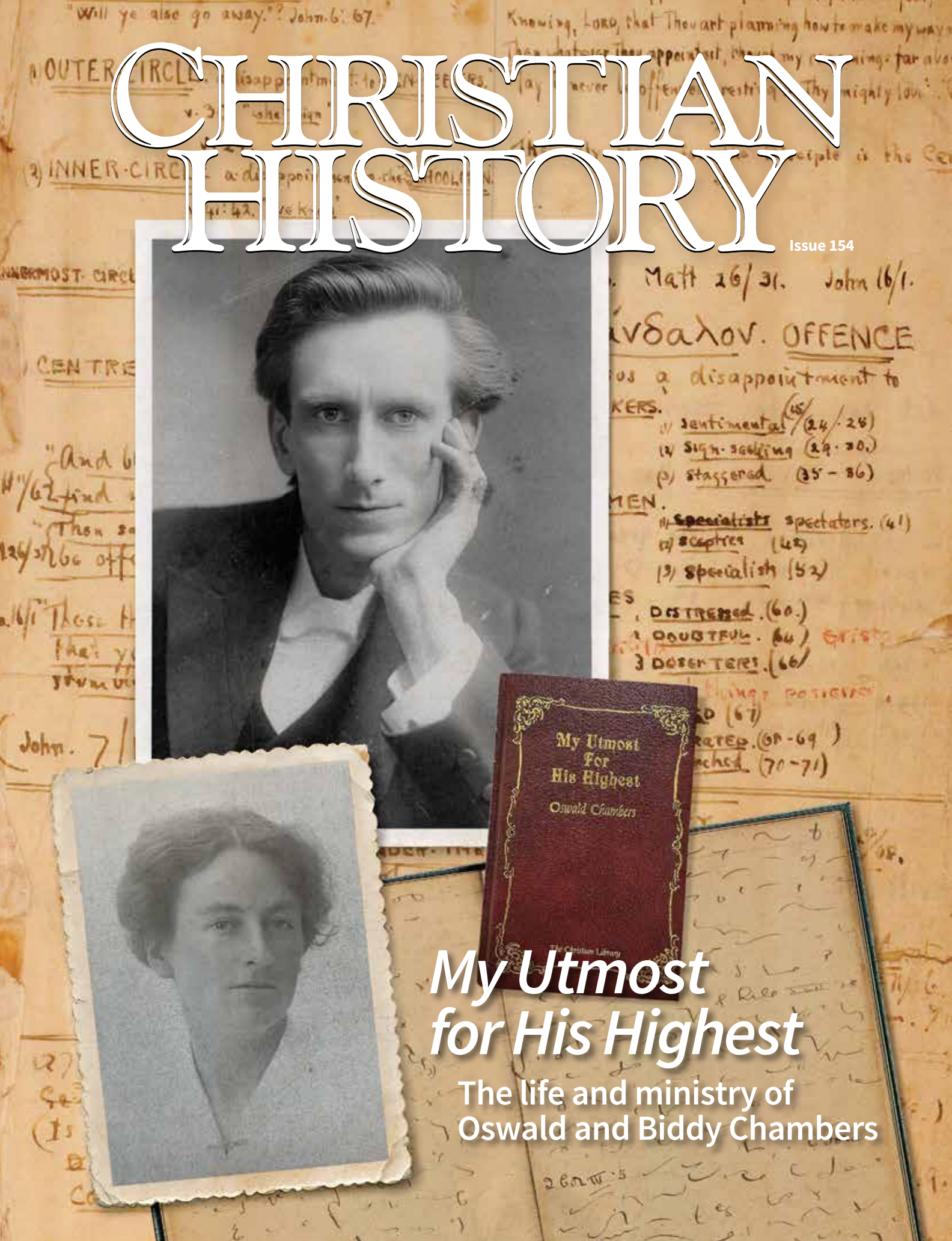
CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 154



My Utmost for His Highest

The life and ministry of
Oswald and Biddy Chambers





Did you know?

OSWALD, BIDDY, AND KATHLEEN CHAMBERS

FAITH AND FAMILY

Oswald Chambers was the son of a stern and practical Scottish Baptist pastor, Clarence Chambers, and of Hannah Chambers. Affable and warm Hannah had in many ways an opposite personality to Clarence. Kathleen Chambers, their granddaughter, described Hannah as “loving and gentle and very, very sweet.” Clarence, however, was “completely and utterly humorless ... a dour, dour Scot who preached hellfire.”

Oswald was the second youngest of their nine children, four boys (Arthur, Ernest, Franklin, and Oswald) and five girls (Bertha, Edith, Gertrude, Eva Mary, and Florence). He never knew Eva as she had died as an infant. Oswald was especially close to Gertrude. Like his oldest brother, Arthur, Oswald followed his father into preaching ministry.

OSWALD'S FIRST LOVE

At Rye Lane Chapel in London, teenaged Chambers became close to a young woman named Chrissie Brain and planned to marry her. However, his conviction to obey God's call and the subsequent spiritual battles he faced caused him to end their eight-year relationship. His “dark night of the soul” (see pp. 18–20) intensified before resolving, especially after a girl at church where he served accused him of impropriety (church authorities investigated the accusation and cleared

FAITHFUL HOUSEHOLD Oswald grew up surrounded by Christians (at *right*, brothers Ernest, Oswald, and Franklin pose for a portrait), but he truly became a believer himself at age 16 (*above*).

his name). Chrissie understood Oswald's struggle, later writing of his sacrificial obedience as “formative and wonderful years of ‘Genesis’ ... very real and human; not faultless, but blameless, a true knight of God, obedient to death, laying his ‘Isaac’ unquestioningly on the altar. To such is given the Crown of Life.”

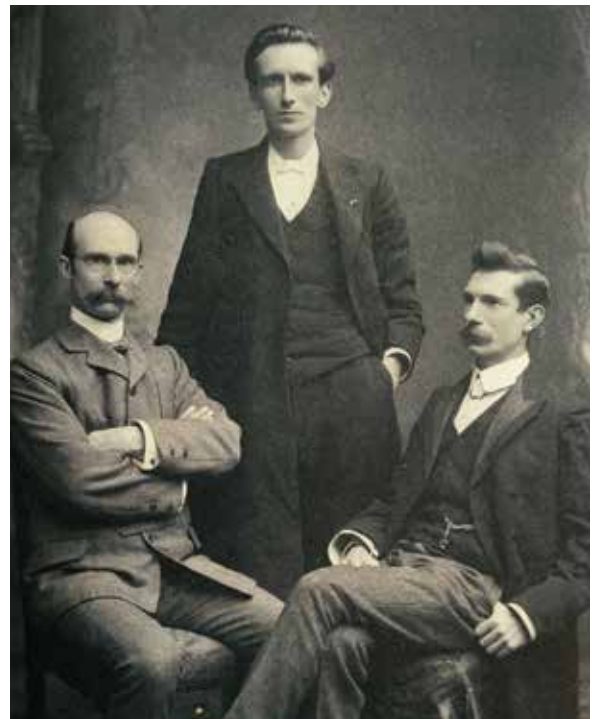
PRAYERFUL POET

Chambers wrote around 60 poems between 1892 and 1905. His works wrestle with heavy themes such as death, despondency, sin, and God, as well as the transcendence of art and nature. Chambers often left spiritual questions unresolved but hopeful, as this untitled work from 1895 displays:

Irritated, torn, and stung
By a madd'ning melancholy;
Peace and patience from us flung,
Restless yearnings have begun,
All is emptiness and folly.
O God! O God! These yearnings of the mind,
Craving vainly for what they cannot find,
Stay in their sad career.
Listen with patient ear,
O Thou Divine!

JUST LIKE HER FATHER

Chambers did not expect marriage to be part of God's plan for him, but everything changed when he and Gertrude Hobbs ended up on the same ship to America (see pp. 14–16). He and Hobbs, whom he called “Biddy,” were engaged and married shortly afterward. They traveled the world for ministry, finally landing in Egypt for Oswald's chaplaincy in the war.



BIBLICAL HUMOR Chambers loved G. K. Chesterton's subversive wit and writings, especially his essay on the book of Job, "Leviathan and the Hook." Chesterton drew this caricature of Job and leviathan (*below*).



The couple had one child: Kathleen. Oswald adored her. Kathleen was two when they arrived in Egypt, and she proved a key to the family's success with the soldiers. (Once she ordered the head of the YMCA to baptize a doll. He complied.)

While Kathleen had no personal memory of her father due to his early death, Biddy spoke of him so often, Kathleen recalled that "it was as if he'd only just gone upstairs."

As an adult Kathleen showed Biddy's signature hospitality and was also described as "behaving just as radical as her father." She died in 1997.

FIELD FRIENDS

Chambers was close with famous missionary Samuel Zwemer (1867–1952). Zwemer, known as the "Apostle to Islam," served in Egypt from 1913 to 1929 with his wife, Amy. When Oswald and Biddy arrived in Cairo in 1915, the two missionary couples became friends. After Oswald's death Amy and Samuel comforted and prayed with Biddy in their home close by. Samuel Zwemer spoke at the funeral.

THE SEARCH FOR OSWALD CHAMBERS

When David McCasland, author of *Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God*, began research on Chambers, very little information existed (see pp. 31–32). However, McCasland recounted several instances of "haphazard discoveries . . . engineered by the Holy Spirit":

With only a name and a 1968 address, for example, I sent a letter to two of Oswald's close friends. The letter found its way to their daughter, now in her seventies, who replied her parents were no longer living. "But," she added, "I might have some of my mother's notebooks from her years in Chambers's Bible college."

FIELD HOSPITALITY Biddy Chambers ministered to soldiers by hosting free teas and welcoming all into her home (see p. 17).



WHY WE FIGHT The presence of Kathleen Chambers (*above*) in Zeitoun brought hope to soldiers fighting in World War I and reminded them of home.

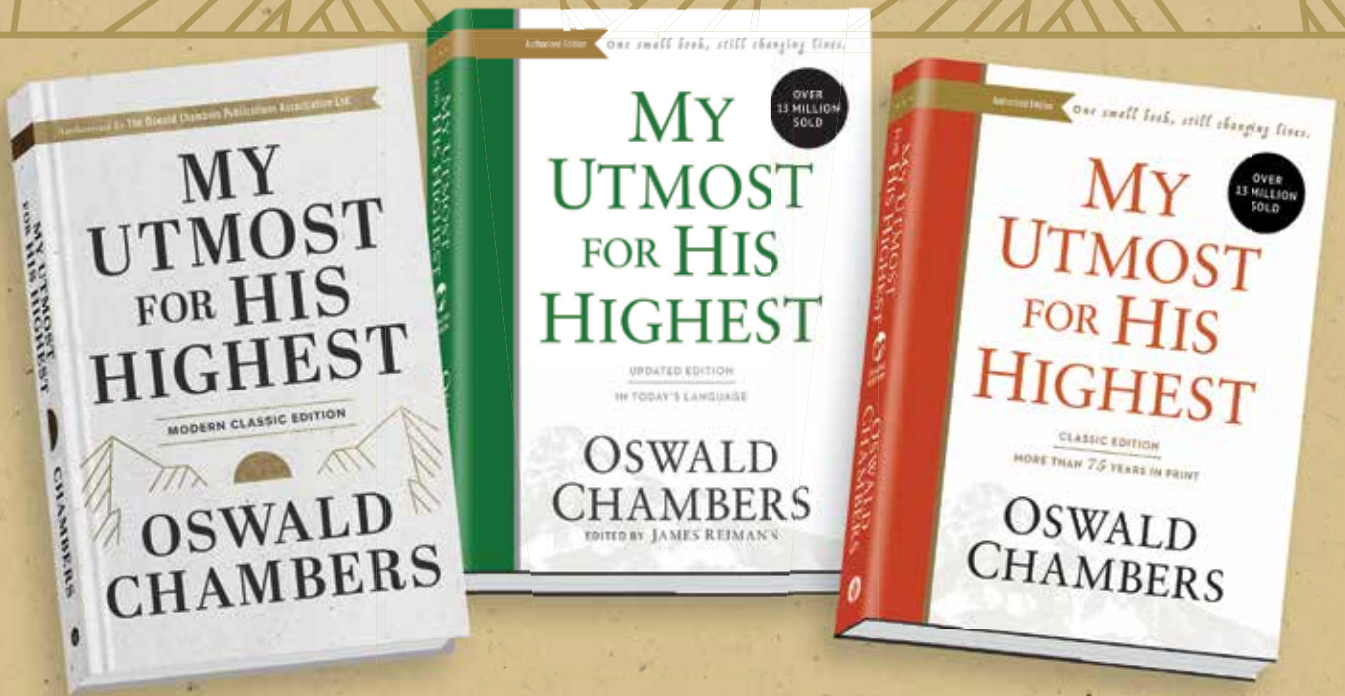
During a visit to her home, she produced a box containing her mother's notes from Chambers's lectures, her personal diaries, photographs, typed fragments of Chambers's Egypt diaries, and a book of his poems.

McCasland's search revealed a fuller picture of Chambers. He was deeply admired by those who knew him and remembered for his humorous and generous spirit. He was too generous, perhaps, according to his family and friends: one evening he was accosted by a drunken man asking for money. Chambers listened intently, then told him, "Man, I believe your story is all lies, but my Master tells me to give to everyone that asks, so here is my last shilling." **CH**

Editors. "The Search for Oswald Chambers" is adapted from Christianity Today. Michelle Ulle contributed to "Just Like Her Father."



Timeless Wisdom to Inspire Your Faith



Modern Classic edition, 2023:

- NIV Bible translation
- Preserved the original language and context, maintaining Chambers's message and voice, while bringing clarity and readability
- Adapted from the Classic by journalist Macy Halford

ISBN 9781640702554

Updated edition, 1992:

- NKJV Bible translation
- Translated for modern readers for accurate and readable edition
- Researched and edited by Rev. James Reimann

ISBN 9781627078764

Classic edition, 1935:

- KJV Bible translation
- Oswald's word-for-word original text
- Compiled by Oswald's wife, Gertrude "Biddy" Chambers

ISBN 9781627078788



Order yours
today



Our Daily Bread
Publishing™

Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

LEARNING TOGETHER

Thank you for the good work that goes into each magazine. The quality of information and authority is impressive and inspirational. God has blessed the Institute with talented folks. I appreciate the excellent foundational material that I can use in preaching and teaching God's Word. Historical context and perspective are so very important for proper current application. May the Lord richly bless you.—*David Rudd, Lacona, NY*

Christian History magazine has certainly affected my life in many ways, especially in terms of my own personal growth in faith and spirituality, and my growing knowledge and understanding of the Christian story. As a history buff and enthusiast, both secular and religious for many decades, it never ceases to amaze me that with every issue of *Christian History* I learn something new or get a different perspective or outlook on any one of the various aspects and dimensions of the Christian tradition and its legacy.—*Gary Torres, Poughkeepsie, NY*

I am also amazed at how much I learn with every issue. I am so grateful for the knowledgeable scholars who write for CH, our talented team that puts it all together, and our readers who continue to learn with us.—Kaylena Radcliff

MORE ON MACRINA

As a very long-standing reader and subscriber of your unique magazine, and owner of every issue (including #9), I'm aware that you receive many requests and suggestions for future issues. I've never written in with a suggestion of my own before, but recently became aware of the life and ministry of Macrina the Younger, sister of Gregory of Nyssa. . . . Maybe an issue that focuses on her, but also one that expands and revisits the story of the Cappadocian fathers in more detail would be a possibility? Issue #80 covered them within the broader context of early Bible teachers, but their influence on the theology of the church in later centuries and the Eastern Church in particular could surely deserve its own issue.—*Robert Clark, Leatherhead, UK*

Thanks for the suggestion, Robert! We'll keep it in mind. In the meantime be sure to read "Our single object and ambition was virtue" by Megan DeVore in CH #132. This article discusses Macrina and her relationship with the Cappadocian fathers.

REFLECTIONS ON OUTPOURINGS

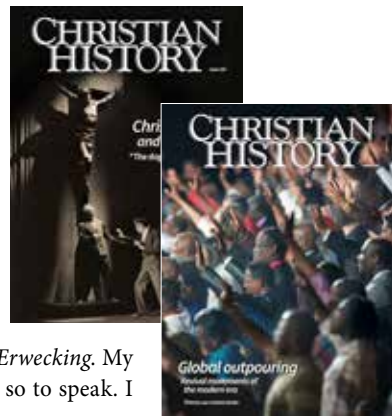
A friend loaned me a copy of the issue pertaining to revival movements in the modern era. It is truly spectacular. During the 1970s I wrote my doctoral dissertation on a little-known revival movement in Germany during the period of 1815–1848. It was called *die Erweckung*. My dissertation got out of hand, so to speak. I ended up with a 600-page tome.

During the 1960s I worked as an itinerant preacher in Germany during part of the great outpouring that followed World War II. I was able to observe and participate in that amazing revival. All of this is to say that I have studied, preached in, and prayed for revival for more than 70 years. It is my prayer that before the Lord takes me to glory, I shall yet experience a revival in the retirement community where I live. We have seen "flickers" of revival, but we still wait for the outpouring. Thank you for your magnificent work in reporting revival worldwide.

Praying for the Spirit to fall on us.—*Wayne Detzler*

I am a Bible school professor, minister, author, and reader of *CH* magazines for many years. Just wanted to let you know how blessed I am by this latest issue on global awakenings. . . . what a blessing it was to me to read the Todd Smith quote on what he termed "the product of revival." For so long I've heard so many who were so excited about so many genuine revivals and awakenings past and present not make this crucial distinction. In my words, their understanding of revival, while genuine and joyful, stops short of understanding what God is really after, what He longs to use revival to achieve—nothing short of a spiritually mature, deeply sanctified, thoroughly tested, distinctly transformed bride of Christ. . . . On another note, I'm thrilled to get the next issue. Oswald Chambers has been a powerful formative agent in my Christian walk for 50 years.

Bill, may you and the CHI staff have a most peaceful, loving, joyful, and as-commercial-free-as-possible celebration of our Lord's birth! Maranatha; HE comes! Soon! —*Greg Hinnant, High Point, NC CH*



Editor's note



What's a curiously common Christian experience from when you were young?

If you've grown up surrounded by the faith, you're sure to have at least one answer. Senior saints have often told me stories about camp revival meetings when they were kids, or how a bus drove around the community on Sunday mornings to round up all the town's children and take them to Sunday school. Members of my generation might talk about growing up watching and learning from *Veggie Tales*, the Donut Man, or Psalty the Singing Songbook.

Some experiences cross those generational lines. For instance, whatever generation you belong to, it's likely that someone, at some early point in your Christian journey, gave you a copy of a certain devotional: *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers.

I don't remember who gave me my first copy or even when—it may have simply materialized when I rededicated my life to Christ at summer camp (another common Christian experience of my generation)—but I do remember reading it. I read it often—and to be frank—I don't think I really got it. My first copy of *My Utmost* got forgotten and lost in the shuffle of adolescence.

Twenty-some years later, preparing for this issue, I received another copy of *My Utmost*. When I opened it this time, however, something clicked. The entries resonated, ringing with truth and a hope I didn't even know I needed. And as I read on each day, slowly turning the words of that day's reading over in my mind, I became curious about the man who wrote them.

THE MAN (AND WOMAN) BEHIND MY UTMOST

Who was Oswald Chambers, after all? As David McCasland, Chambers's biographer, shows in this issue (pp. 31–32), his experience with the devotional was similar to my own. When he picked up *My Utmost* as a more seasoned Christian, dealing with difficult circumstances

and spiritual uncertainties, Chambers's words became “a major source of encouragement and guidance for living life in the Spirit.”

His renewed interest in *My Utmost* also sparked a deep curiosity in the man behind it. McCasland uncovered the fascinating and untold story of Chambers, which you'll read about in the following pages. A Scottish poet, artist, intellectual, and minister, Chambers possessed an approachable and sincere faith that allowed him to speak effectively to the spiritual challenges of the modern world. His unique abilities took him to the United States, Japan, and even to the Egyptian warfront of World War I.

You'll also discover an unsung hero: Oswald's wife, Gertrude “Biddy” Chambers. Without her work, *My Utmost for His Highest* would never have existed. Gifted with unique abilities of her own—a talented stenographer, typist, administrator, and teacher—she preserved and presented her husband's wisdom to audiences worldwide and launched the most beloved devotional of all time.

MY UTMOST FOR TODAY

The story of Oswald and Biddy Chambers is a dynamic one, full of adventure and romance; struggle and tragedy; new life and new hope. Indeed it is truly a story of two people who gave their utmost for his highest. As you read I hope you will come away with a new appreciation for that old devotional on your bookshelf, or perhaps bring home a new copy for fresh reflection. And maybe you'll continue that curiously common Christian experience of giving *My*

Utmost to that bright-eyed young believer in your life.

She may not get it yet, but one day, it just might change her life. **CH**



Kaylena Radcliff
Managing editor

Find *Christian History* on Facebook as ChristianHistoryMagazine, or visit www.christianhistorymagazine.org. Read daily stories at www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/today. For X (formerly Twitter), use @christiaHistory, and for Instagram, @christianhistorymagazine.

Our next issue #155 will explore the Mercersburg Movement.

CH thanks Carol Holquist, Our Daily Bread Ministries, and the Oswald Chambers Publications Association, Ltd., for their generous support in publishing this issue. *CH* also thanks the Wheaton College archive for the use of many of the images in this issue.

We also thank our readers who support this ministry, making it possible for us to provide *Christian History* in print. Please visit www.ChristianHistoryMagazine.org to donate or to begin a subscription to *Christian History*.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY



The life of Oswald Chambers

6 Abandoned to God

Oswald Chambers's life and ministry
Paul K. Muckley

10 God's Bible School

Radical holiness and Chambers
David Bundy

11 "Music, Poetry, Art, through which God breathes"

Christ's "aesthetic kingdom"
Kevin Belmonte

14 "Beloved Disciple"

The life and ministry of Gertrude "Biddy" Chambers
Michelle Ule

17 Serving God here and "Beyond"

Oswald and Biddy's ministry in Egypt
Annalise DeVries

18 Oswald Chambers at war

Chambers's sincere and frank faith brought soldiers to Christ
Michelle Ule

21 *Baffled to Fight Better*

Chambers on Job and suffering

24 Making *My Utmost*

Biddy Chambers and the unexpected best-selling devotional
Amy Boucher Pye

27 *My Utmost for His Highest*

Wisdom from Chambers's best-known work

28 From typewriter girl to publishing powerhouse

"Women's work" and Biddy's ministry
Katherine Goodwin Lindgren

31 My search for Oswald Chambers

Discovering the man behind *My Utmost for His Highest*
David C. McCasland

33 Faithful legacies

Preachers who influenced Chambers
Jennifer A. Boardman

37 "Obedience the goal"

The legacy of Oswald and Biddy Chambers
Amy Boucher Pye

39 Utmost ongoing

An interview with Macy Halford

Also: • Did you know?, inside front cover

- Letters, p. 3 • Editor's note, p. 4
- Timeline, p. 22
- Recommended resources, p. 42
- Reflection questions, p. 44

Founder
A. K. Curtis

Executive Editor
Bill Curtis

Senior Editors
Chris Armstrong
Jennifer Woodruff Tait

Managing Editor
Kaylena Radcliff

Advisory Editor, CH 154
Carol Holquist

Contributing Editor
Edwin Woodruff Tait

Design Editor
Doug Johnson

Proofreader
Meg Moss

Layout
Dan Graves

Image Researcher
Max Pointner

Editorial Coordinator
Melody Belk

Editorial Assistant
Grace Bert

Circulation
Sara Campbell
Karen Kopp

Print Coordinator
Deb Landis

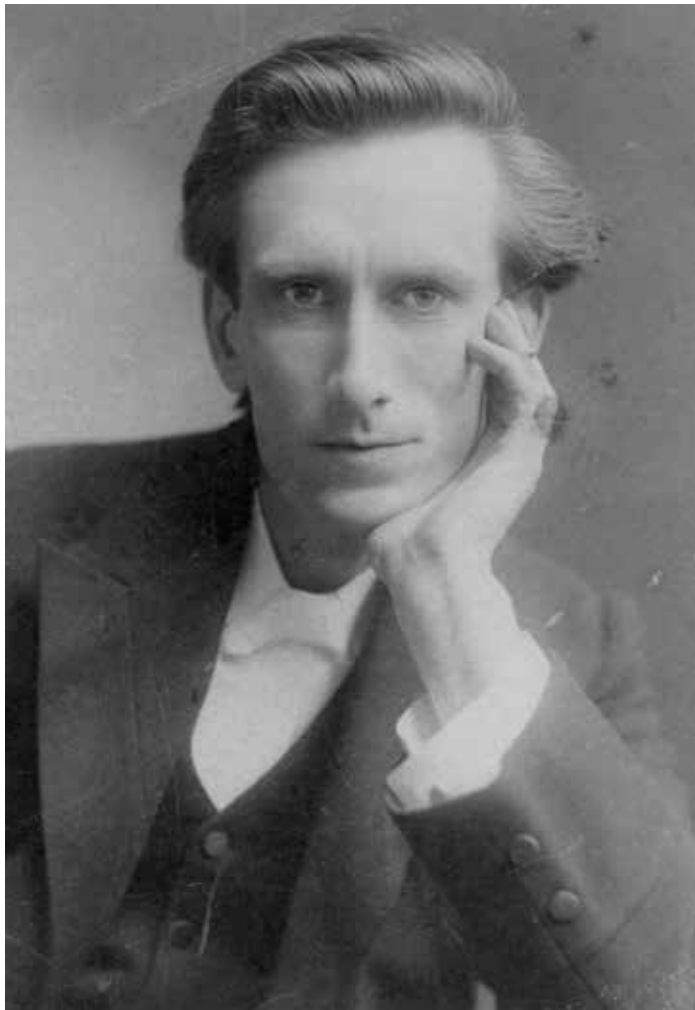
©2025 Christian History Institute. Cover: *Oswald Chambers, Sitting with Book*, 1906; Biddy Chambers; sermon outline of Oswald Chambers; sermon notes of Biddy Chambers—Used with permission of the Oswald Chambers Publications Association, Ltd. / images courtesy of Wheaton Archives & Special Collections, Wheaton College, IL; Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, 1987—Barbour Publishing, Incorporated
Christian History is published by Christian History Institute, P. O. Box 540, Worcester, PA, 19490 and is indexed in *Christian Periodical Index*, ISSN 0891-9666. Subscriptions are available on a donation basis. Letters to the editor may be sent to editor@ChristianHistoryInstitute.org and permissions requests to info@ChristianHistoryInstitute.org. Credits: We make every effort to obtain proper permission to reproduce images. If you have information about an image source that is not credited, please let us know.

www.ChristianHistoryMagazine.org • 1-800-468-0458

Abandoned to God

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF OSWALD CHAMBERS

Paul K. Muckley



“He is the personification of the Sherlock Holmes of fiction,” a former student declared of Oswald Chambers (1874–1917), “tall, erect, virile, with clean-cut face, framing a pair of piercing bright eyes. One feels instinctively that here is a detective of the soul, one who has been in intimate fellowship with the unseen and can now speak with calm assurance of eternal things.”

To speak of eternal things was Chambers’s passion. He began to share as a teenager in his home church in London and continued through young manhood as a traveling “missioner” with the revival-oriented League of Prayer and as principal of the Bible Training College he organized with his wife. He continued into middle age as a YMCA chaplain to British Empire troops during World War I. And in ways that even the foresighted Chambers couldn’t imagine, he continues to speak of eternal things.

“DETECTIVE OF THE SOUL” Those who knew Oswald Chambers often described him as having a piercing, discerning gaze, as this portrait exemplifies. His spiritual writings are similarly discerning.

He was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, on July 24, 1874. The eighth of nine children (an older sister had died as a baby), Oswald grew up in the home of an intense Baptist preacher, Clarence Chambers (c. 1837–1925) and a sweet, saintly mother, Hannah (1840–1921). Both of his parents were baptized by famed British pastor Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), and the “Prince of Preachers” later prompted the 15-year-old Oswald’s conversion after his family’s move to London. Returning home from a Spurgeon service, the young man told his father that, given the opportunity, he would have dedicated his life to the Lord that evening. Clarence quickly replied, “You can do it now, my boy.”

“Then and there,” his brother Franklin recalled, Chambers “gave himself to God.” He was soon baptized and working in Rye Lane Baptist Church, which his family had joined. Chambers taught Sunday school and engaged in lodging-house work with “the down-and-out,” as a fellow worker recalled. “These men appealed to him, and perhaps gave him a deeper insight into the power of sin to degrade, and also the greater power of the grace of God to break the power of cancelled sin and redeem men to Himself.”

REDEEMING THE AESTHETIC KINGDOM

As a young man talented in poetry, music, and art, Chambers believed his life’s work would be “the redemption of the aesthetic kingdom . . . or rather the proving of Christ’s redemption of it” (see pp. 11–13). In his teens he attended art school, though he ultimately refused a scholarship to visit “the famous art centres abroad,” Franklin reported, “having seen men come back from their travels moral and physical wrecks.”

At 21 Chambers enrolled in the arts program at Edinburgh University in his native Scotland. The ancient university’s renowned professors challenged his intellect. But Alexander Whyte (1836–1921) of Free St. George’s Church, Scotland’s leading preacher at the time, nourished his spirit. Whyte expounded the Christian life to hundreds of young men after his Sunday evening services and taught them an appreciation for classic spiritual writings. Whyte’s passion for these works undoubtedly influenced Chambers, who would later call his own favorite books “silent, wealthy, loyal lovers.”

But Edinburgh also brought challenges: financial shortfalls created a stress that Chambers couldn’t ignore. By causing his freelance art projects to dry up, God nudged the



FAMILY PORTRAIT Here Clarence and Hannah Chambers (*center*) are pictured with their eight children (Oswald at *bottom right*).

young man away from the “aesthetic kingdom” and toward the preaching and teaching of Scripture. Chambers had once told a friend, “I shall never go into the ministry until God takes me by the scruff of the neck and throws me in.” But one day Chambers was “astounded” by another friend’s pious father, who looked him over and declared that he would be a minister. Suddenly Chambers could think of little else.

CALLED TO DUNOON

On an extinct volcano overlooking Edinburgh, Chambers devoted an evening to prayer. From this hill called Arthur’s Seat, he sensed a definite calling from God. In fact Chambers heard the Lord distinctly say, “I want you in My service—but I can do without you.” Unsure of what to do next, Chambers returned to his lodging. There he found a packet of information from a small theological training school in Dunoon, Scotland, 80 miles west on the Firth of Clyde.

The material had been sent anonymously, though it was later revealed that his father, after meeting the school’s principal, had mailed it. Whatever the case, Chambers was intrigued. He applied, was accepted, and spent nearly a

decade in Dunoon as student, protégé, and friend of Rev. Duncan MacGregor (1842–1913).

A Baptist pastor who had led churches in England, Wales, and Chicago, Illinois, MacGregor was “noble, unselfish, and holy,” in Chambers’s estimation, possessing “character, character, character!” Old enough to be his father, MacGregor took on a fatherly role in the younger man’s life. “I never loved a man as I love him,” Chambers told a friend.

Though MacGregor also pastored Dunoon’s Baptist church at the time, his leadership of the Gospel Training College most powerfully affected Chambers’s life and ministry. Some 15 years after his death, Chambers’s widow, Biddy (pp. 15–16), wrote, “If [he] had been asked which were the most important years in his early life, unquestionably he would have replied, ‘The years at Dunoon.’” There, Chambers drank in MacGregor’s philosophy of ministry training, which featured personal, daily involvement in the learners’ lives. Chambers would later implement this idea in his own ministry at the Bible Training College in London



CITY CHAMBERS, COUNTRY CHAMBERS The Aberdeen, Scotland (*right*), that Chambers knew looked a lot like the snapshot here. Though accustomed to city life, Chambers loved the rugged countryside, finding peace and spiritual clarity in places like Arthur’s Seat (*below*).





(1911–1915) and among soldiers in the British military camps of Egypt (1915–1917).

LONG-HAIRED, SWEARIN' PASTOR

But from early 1897 until late 1906, Dunoon was Chambers's home base, training ground, and mission field. Upon Chambers's arrival, MacGregor's son Esdaile recalled, "he took a dominating position in the college and soon became marked as the most striking personality we had ever had as a student." Noted both for his thin build and long hair, Chambers was often seen walking his dog on the hills surrounding Dunoon. He quickly began tutoring in the school and promoting arts in the community. And he filled the pulpits of nearby churches—to mixed reviews, due to his confrontational preaching style.

The younger MacGregor remembered Chamber's "intensity and vehemence" (likely reflecting Clarence Chambers's preaching), which "seemed to create a fear of God, in the sense of terror . . . rather than of confidence and love." When the leaders of one church asked the school for pulpit supply, they specified, "Dinna send us yon lang-haired swearin' parson." Chambers mellowed after coming to know Dinsdale Young (1861–1938), an eminent Methodist preacher from Edinburgh who often visited Dunoon. It was Young's example, Esdaile MacGregor suggested, that persuaded Chambers "there was work for him in preaching a simpler and friendlier gospel."

A personal crisis, which Chambers described as "hell on earth," undoubtedly also influenced that change in approach. Another prominent visitor to Dunoon was Dr. F. B. Meyer (1847–1929), pastor of London's Christ Church, who spoke on the Holy Spirit. In his own words, Chambers "determined to have all that was going," asking God "simply and definitely for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, whatever that meant." For the next four years, Chambers's communion with the Lord dried up, leaving only a sense of his own depravity. "Nothing but the overruling grace of God and the kindness of friends kept me out of an asylum," he later said.



WRESTLING WITH GOD It was in charming Dunoon, Scotland (left), that Chambers experienced his greatest spiritual crisis. But from his struggle there came an impressive and insightful body of work that would probably not have existed otherwise (above).

Ultimately Jesus's words in Luke 11:13 changed everything for Chambers: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Chambers realized that he needed to claim the gift of the Spirit on the authority of Jesus, risking that "God will make it known to those who know you best how bad you are in heart." But in desperation, he pressed on.

Though he felt "as dry and empty as ever," Chambers preached at a meeting where 40 people came forward in response. Confused and afraid, Chambers quickly found Duncan MacGregor, who said, "Don't you remember claiming the Holy Spirit as a gift on the word of Jesus, and that He said: 'Ye shall receive power. . .?' This is the power from on high."

Chambers finally realized his mistake. He had been trying to say, "Look what I have got by putting my all on the altar." D. W. Lambert, who wrote a brief biography of Chambers 50 years after his death, quoted him saying, "The teaching that presents consecration as giving to God our gifts, our possessions, our comrades, is a profound error. These are all abandoned, and we give up for ever *our right to ourselves.*"

"RADIANT EMANCIPATION"

Oswald Chambers left no autobiography and rarely spoke of himself. But in one recorded testimony, he said, "When you know what God has done for you—the power and the tyranny of sin is gone, and the radiant, unspeakable emancipation of the indwelling Christ has come, and when you see men and women who should be princes and princesses with God bound up in a show of things—oh, you begin to



FROM LONDON TO GIZA Chambers founded the Bible Training College (*left*) to equip Christian men and women to serve God everywhere. His training model came with him to Egypt (holding Kathleen *above*, 2nd from left), where he reached British soldiers during the war (see pp. 18–20).

understand what the apostle meant when he said he wished himself were accursed from Christ that men might be saved!”

With “the last aching abyss of the human heart . . . filled to overflowing with the love of God,” Chambers was ready for an even wider ministry. He would serve many years with the League of Prayer, traveling throughout Great Britain to urge Christians on to greater holiness. He would join a Japanese evangelist, Juji Nakada (1870–1939), for an around-the-world tour that led to an ongoing relationship with God’s Bible School in Cincinnati, Ohio. And he would marry Gertrude Hobbs (1884–1966), who would expand his ministry exponentially (see pp. 14–16).

Chambers, who often bestowed nicknames on friends and acquaintances, called Gertrude “Biddy.” She established the ministry for which Chambers is most known today—“the work of the books,” in her words (see pp. 24–26).

As a teen Biddy had learned stenography, also known as shorthand—an abbreviated writing method that made it possible to record dictation efficiently. During their 18-month engagement, Chambers recognized the possibilities of marrying their skills for a “literary and itinerating work” for God.

It was a prophetic idea, though Oswald would see only a tiny fraction of its fulfillment. Biddy took shorthand notes of almost every lesson Chambers taught during their marriage, from May 1910 to his death in November 1917. She compiled a “wealth of notes,” especially from the Bible Training College they organized and oversaw for the five years leading up to the war, then during his teaching sessions with soldiers in the Egyptian desert (see pp. 18–20). In late summer 1917,

Chambers reviewed printer’s proofs of *Baffled to Fight Better*, a study of Job that he and Biddy developed together.

Complications from an appendectomy soon ended Chambers’s earthly life at age 43. When God requisitioned “the O. C.” (a nickname and wordplay combining his initials and those of “officer in charge”), his ministry shifted fully to the printed page.

THE WORK CONTINUES

Within weeks of his death, a friend and coworker suggested creating a pamphlet of an article Oswald and Biddy had developed together on their honeymoon in New York state. Distributed to soldiers “far and wide” for Christmas, this teaching on Psalm 121:1–2 inaugurated a decades-long work of Chambers’s uniquely qualified widow. Biddy’s dedication—to God and to her husband’s teaching—would ultimately yield some four dozen books, most notably the daily devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*. With her help Chambers reached more people after death than he had in his extraordinary life.

“I think if I have an ambition,” he once said, “it is that I might have honourable mention in anyone’s personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.” As he enjoys his second century in heaven, Oswald Chambers’s ambition continues to unfold on earth. **GI**

Paul K. Muckley is the senior acquisitions editor at Barbour Publishing and author of Oswald Chambers: A Life in Pictures under the pseudonym Paul Kent.



COMMITTED TO HOLINESS God's Bible School was central to the growing holiness movement in the United States. By the time Chambers visited, the school had over 200 students. His experience of revival and Christian unity among different races greatly affected him. Chambers later modeled his own Bible school after GBS.

God's Bible School

Radical holiness and Oswald Chambers

Though Chambers visited the United States multiple times, the only institution with which he maintained a long-term relationship was God's Bible School (GBS) in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was introduced to GBS by Juji Nakada, cofounder of the Oriental Missionary Society (see pp. 33–36) and founder of the Tokyo Bible Institute (TBI), which was modeled after and supported by GBS. Both Nakada and Chambers were members of the Pentecostal League of Prayer, a UK radical holiness network founded by Richard Reader Harris (1847–1909). Chambers decided to travel with Nakada via the United States to Japan; together, they made stops throughout the States so Nakada could maintain contact with his supporters.

TRUE CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM

Already well known, Nakada served as warrantor for Chambers during the first contacts in the United States. In late December 1906, they arrived at GBS where Nakada was scheduled to speak and Chambers was drafted as a speaker at a convention and city mission meetings.

He was impressed with what he found at GBS. Women were prominent in leadership, the institution being far more egalitarian than most. Worship was vibrant. Faculty, staff, students, and volunteers ministered to the physical and social needs of the poor and marginalized of the city, while calling for personal and social transformation.

They addressed structural and exploitative sins of the city. They fed the hungry; they prayed for healing of the sick. They provided a rescue home for young women trafficked or otherwise engaged in the sex trade,

giving them space and security to begin life anew. Resources, time, tears, and joys were shared; identities, including gender, class, race, regional origin, and denomination, did not limit service. GBS founder Martin Wells Knapp (1853–1901) had insisted that “accumulation of

property for self is absolutely prohibited.” Chambers observed, “This is truly Christian socialism.”

Chambers was invited to “stay until July and teach and write some books.” He taught, receiving a \$500 stipend that paid for his onward trip to Japan. Chambers's first monographs were published, initially as a series of articles in the *GBS Revivalist* and subsequently as books by Revivalist Press. Chambers returned annually to GBS from 1907 to 1910, apologizing in 1911 that obligations at his London-based Bible Training College (modeled after GBS and TBI) made a visit impossible. But close contact with GBS continued. He contributed articles to the *Revivalist* for the rest of his life and received students at BTC recommended by GBS.

CRITIQUING AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

Chambers was never a passive participant in life and spoke often of the need for informed critical thinking. While impressed by the enthusiastic worship at GBS, Chambers seems to have understood it as an American cultural expression of worship. He also noticed things in US radical holiness and Pentecostal networks and at GBS that he found concerning.

A kind critic who did not name names, he spoke against making any religious experience, whether conversion, entire sanctification, baptism of the Holy Spirit, glossolalia (speaking in tongues), or self-focused motive, including the desire to be “used by God,” the goal of religious commitment.

For Chambers religious experiences were not instant cures for the problems of human will; conformity to the will of God ought to be an ongoing daily project. This conviction, lived out in his own life, positioned Chambers as an ecumenical and effective evangelist to many. —David Bundy, *coeditor of Studies in the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements and interim director of the Manchester Wesley Research Centre*

“Music, Poetry, Art, through which God breathes”

OSWALD CHAMBERS DESIRED TO SERVE CHRIST’S “AESTHETIC KINGDOM”

Kevin Belmonte

May 1997. A young recording artist, in London for sessions at Abbey Road Studios, knocked at the door of a private London home. An elderly lady of grace and poise opened the door. As she welcomed him inside, he told her how meaningful their visit was: “This, you have to know, is the highlight of my journey here.”

Smiling at her guest, the woman replied: “Oh, I’m very pleased. It’s lovely to meet you.”

This was how Steven Curtis Chapman, famed contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, remembers his meeting of Kathleen Chambers (1913–1997), then 83, the daughter of Oswald Chambers. And as he shared in this remarkable story, the visit would open a unique window into the artistry of her father.

Chapman and Chambers walked into her living room, where he saw something wholly unexpected: several fine seascapes and a framed charcoal portrait.

“That’s Beethoven,” Chambers said, “which [my father] did when he was 19. He set a mark on there. If you look, you’ll see it—on the right-hand side.” So Chapman saw the artist’s emblem Oswald Chambers created: the letters OC, set together, much like a mariner’s compass.

“It was incredible,” Chapman remembers, continuing:

I had no idea what I was going to experience. It was world-class artwork. It literally took my breath away. This was so important for me—this man who inspired me so much, and inspired millions with his life and his writings. I was seeing something that he created himself. For me, it was sort of like looking at the Mona Lisa.

So one storied hour unfolded, in moments of hospitality and memory, over English tea. Then, as Chapman recalls, we said our goodbyes, and I went back to the work that I was doing there. We were doing some recording at Abbey Road Studios, which everybody in the music world would know, where The Beatles made records. But for me, it was like—

“Yeah, that’s cool—but you know what’s really cool, I met Oswald Chambers’s daughter.”

That visit became all the more meaningful as just 10 days later, Kathleen Chambers passed away.

“I was able to capture that little moment right at the end of her earthly journey, to remember her father, and the amazing work that God did through him, and through her.”



CLINICAL ART The famed National Art Training School (later the Royal College of Art) where Chambers studied approached art in a way that left him spiritually troubled.

And what is more, Chapman had the chance to tell her: “I’m one who uses the arts to communicate the gospel message. And it’s so influenced by your father’s writing.”

On canvas and with the pen, Oswald Chambers’s gifts speak across the years.

REDEEMING ART

Early on Chambers’s artistic abilities flourished. He played piano with considerable skill, and his performances (though not as frequent as those who knew him wished) were memorable. Esdaile MacGregor, a friend of Chambers, said he was known “for his love of walks among the hills,” but also

for his interest in literature, and appreciation and knowledge of good music. I especially remember one night, which for me was epoch-making, when he played to me the Slow Movement of Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*, and then read Tennyson’s *Maud*.

But while all this was true, it was Chambers’s great ability as an artist that family and friends remembered most. To develop his gift, he attended the Art School in South Kensington, England, and after, the University of Edinburgh.

At 18 Chambers obtained an “Art Master’s Certificate, enabling him to teach and illustrate and thus earn a



SKETCHES AND STILLS Chambers completed the Beethoven charcoal drawing (above) around age 19, but the seascapes (left) came after he left art school. All three pieces hung on Kathleen's wall.

livelihood.” His time at the easel then, painting and drawing, let his gift take wing. He “won a scholarship for two years’ travel to the famous art centres abroad.”

Yet telling as this was, he declined the honor held before him. From personal experience he’d seen and heard of others who had self-destructed during their studies.

Decadence and profligacy were common in the European art world of the 1890s. Chambers once said in a letter, “the spirit of art is to so sad an extent, the spirit of immorality.” As a person of deep faith with a love of the arts, Chambers cared greatly about “proving Christ’s redemption for the aesthetic kingdom.” It was, one might say, his credo, or the *raison d’être* for his art.

He knew of many great artists who were devout in faith, and prior to following a call to pastoral ministry, he wished to be an artist in the tradition of *solī Deo gloria* (glory to God alone), as Bach wrote so often upon the manuscripts of his music. Chambers saw profound meaning in art, writing once of “Music, Poetry, Art, through which God breathes / His Spirit of Peace into the soul.”

Moreover, Chambers drew inspiration for artistic guides from his reading. In *Shade of His Hand*, Chambers wrote:

In Shakespeare’s writings there is an under-current of faith, which makes him the peculiarly valuable writer he is; and makes him more at home to those who understand the Bible point of view. . . .

But of all the poets Chambers read, Robert Browning (1812–1889) was the one he read most. It’s here Chambers is most clearly Victorian: in literary sensibility and indebtedness. At Dunoon College, training for pastoral ministry, Chambers did that most Victorian of things: he “started a

Browning Society, and got students and some of the town folk to become enthusiastic readers of Browning’s poetry.”

“Robert Browning,” he wrote, was a “grand manly thinker.” And in a letter from Dunoon he said:

You will be glad to know that I have all Browning’s *Works*. . . They were a kind of payment for a portrait I did . . . they are indeed a treasure to me.

Another Victorian writer Chambers read continually was his fellow Scot, novelist and poet George MacDonald (1824–1905). “I am reading Geo. MacDonald’s *There and Back*,” he wrote in 1907. “[He] appeals to my bias. I love that writer.” A second passage echoed this, but with a dash of Chambers’s infectious, gently subversive wit, that had a Dickensian flavor to it: “[T]here is a passage in Geo. MacDonald’s *Marquis of Lossie* that gives me pure chuckles of joy, it is such a ‘wipe out’ of the sounding piousness of humbug.”

Chambers continually referenced poetry to convey his points. In one 1912 booklet, *The Discipline of Suffering*, just 47 pages long, he cites poems of four lines or more 22 times.

Poetry was an artistic staple of Chambers’s teaching, and he often included “prose poems” from his own pen. Two passages, set as if in verse, show this—

(1) His cross
is the centre of Time and Eternity;
the answer to all the enigmas of both.

(2) . . . the old song,
from the ancient pilgrim’s song book,
has this thorn
at the heart of its suffering. . . .



KINDRED SPIRITS Chambers owed his main poetic inspiration to Robert Browning (*above left*), but also credited contemporaries G. K. Chesterton (*middle*) and George MacDonald (*above right*) for their literary influences.

Then too, if Chambers was thoroughly Victorian in his great love for Browning’s verse, his admiration for G. K. Chesterton’s (1874–1936) 1905 essay on the Book of Job, “Leviathan and the Hook,” showed Chambers was also Edwardian in outlook and sentiment, like Chesterton. Fascinatingly, both Chesterton and Chambers were born in the same year, indeed within two months of each other—Chambers on July 24, 1874, and Chesterton on the 29th of May. With appreciation Chambers read his contemporary’s books, memorably describing him as “that insurgent modern writer, Mr. G. K. Chesterton.”

COMFORTED WITH CONUNDRUMS

In *The Discipline of Suffering*, Chambers moved beyond Victorian conventional thinking when he praised Chesterton’s innovation, distinctiveness, and helpfully subversive way of writing in “Leviathan and the Hook.” He appreciated Chesterton’s approach that made it easier to see a classic text with new eyes, writing:

G. K. Chesterton in his individual, sufficient way, writing on Job, says—

“But God comforts Job with indecipherable mystery, and for the first time Job is comforted. Eliphaz gives one answer, Job gives another answer, and the question still remains an open wound. God simply refuses to answer, and somehow the question is answered. Job flings at God one riddle, God flings back at Job a hundred riddles, and Job is at peace. He is comforted with conundrums.”

Reading this, one might well think it is a reflection from Chambers, set within the pages of *My Utmost For His Highest*; but that it is Chesterton, cited with approval from Chambers, shows the kindred thought of both men.



POET, ARTIST, AND TEACHER At Dunoon, Chambers tutored students in logic, psychology, and moral philosophy. He wrote this guide (*above*) to make philosophy more accessible. His classes were very popular.

Of all the recollections of Oswald Chambers that survive, perhaps the most discerning is this, written by Mrs. Duncan MacGregor, wife of the principal at Dunoon College:

How can Oswald Chambers be condensed into anything like a readable reminiscence? He was not one man, but many men. There is no label that one can attach to him and be satisfied—artist, poet, philosopher, preacher and teacher... [But] I see him first as artist.

There is much truth here. And indeed, it was an artist who spoke these words, “There are many ways in which a man’s life may be suddenly struck by an immortal moment...” **GH**

Kevin Belmonte is the author of many biographies on figures in Christian history, including Defiant Joy: The Remarkable Life & Impact of G. K. Chesterton.

“Beloved Disciple”

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF GERTRUDE “BIDDY” CHAMBERS

Michelle Ule



With only \$16 in her purse, 24-year-old Gertrude Annie Hobbs (1883–1966) boarded the SS *Baltic*, setting sail from Liverpool, England, for New York City. The ambitious and gifted stenographer sought both adventure and a job opportunity in the United States.

Hobbs was ready, but her mother felt less enthusiastic about her solo transatlantic journey. Thankfully, someone the family knew would also be aboard the SS *Baltic*: itinerant preacher Oswald Chambers, brother of their pastor, Arthur Chambers.

This “coincidence” would change the young woman’s life forever.

FROM TRUDA TO “BD”

Born in Woolwich, England, Gertrude “Truda” Hobbs grew up the youngest child in a middle-class household south of

WHO WAS BIDDY CHAMBERS? Gertrude Hobbs was an adventurous and ambitious young woman, known also for her quick wit, generous hospitality, love of animals and books, and “infectious chuckle.”

the Thames River. She relished a happy childhood of tennis, piano playing, books, and tea parties.

All that ended at the age of 15 when chronic bronchitis, exacerbated by London’s black fog, ended her education. Six months later, her father’s death plunged the family into financial hardship. While her older siblings went to work, Truda languished until she took a shorthand correspondence course. Determined to contribute to the family’s livelihood, she practiced diligently and eventually could “take down” dictation at the astounding rate of 250 words per minute.

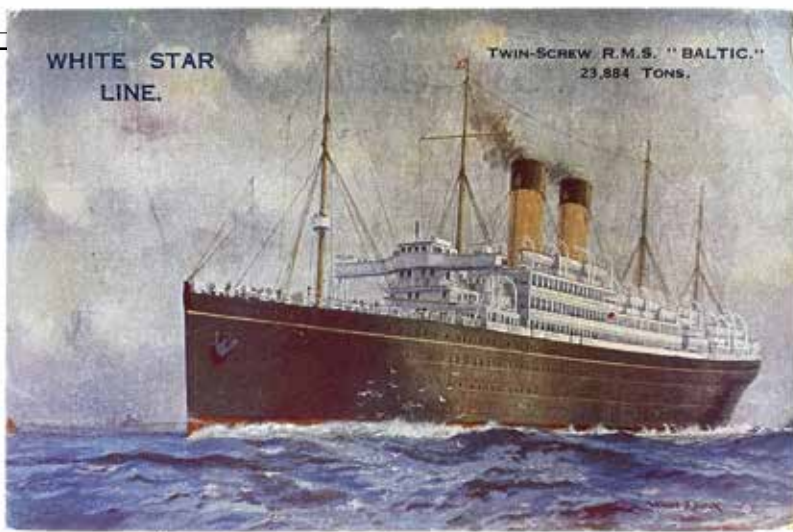
Hired by the nearby Woolwich Arsenal, Hobbs set her sights on someday becoming secretary to the prime minister of England. In 1908 she spread her wings and headed for New York City. Before she sailed her mother wrote to Oswald Chambers, traveling on the same ship, asking him to look in on her. Though he liked to read while voyaging, the amiable bachelor agreed to help. Chambers already knew Hobbs, having visited her family’s home for tea after filling the pulpit for Arthur. But during this trip, Chambers saw her with new eyes. Lovely, intelligent, and well-read, the young woman nine years his junior impressed him with her ambition and ability as a stenographer.

Unfortunately she shared a name with his favorite sister. As Chambers loved nicknames, he rechristened Truda “Beloved Disciple.” “Beloved Disciple” soon became too unwieldy, so he shortened it to “BD,” and thence to “Biddy,” which is what everyone called her for the rest of her life. They were in love by the time they reached New York.

The two parted ways when the voyage ended, but they struck up a relationship over letters. Oswald knew that Biddy and he were a perfect match in life and work, but he had no money. His proposal in 1908 was to the point: “I have nothing to offer you but my love and steady lavish service for Him.” He explained their home would be meager with their lives “going heart and soul into literary and itinerating work for Him. It will be hard and glorious, and arduous.”

She said yes.

After their marriage in 1910, the two opened the Bible Training College (BTC) in Clapham Common, London. Oswald served as principal, Biddy as superintendent. While he taught, Biddy sat in the back row and took down everything he said. She also managed the correspondence and



ALL ABOARD Oswald traveled often on the *Baltic* (above left) during his League of Prayer days, with Biddy becoming his travel partner after they married (wedding portrait, left). The two spent a lot of time at sea; here Oswald sits on the *Adriatic's* deck on the return trip from their honeymoon (above).

The couple realized the soldiers' lives teetered on eternity. Oswald preached the gospel daily; the rest of the Zeitoun YMCA personnel demonstrated it. When several former BTC students joined them to help, Biddy and Oswald arranged for the camp to become a respite for struggling soldiers. They even provided free Sunday afternoon teas (see p. 17).

Biddy prayed and cared for both Oswald and the camp while he traveled among other YMCA camps as far as the Suez Canal. At every opportunity, Biddy wrote down his words. By summer 1917 Oswald wrote a friend, "I hope to send you a book on Job soon (at least Biddy does, I take no more responsibility after having spoken my mind)."

He reviewed the book proofs before preparing to "embed" with Zeitoun Light Horse units leaving to take Jerusalem. He'd arranged for Biddy to run the camp during his absence. But Oswald Chambers never joined his unit. He fell ill and died of complications from appendicitis on November 15, 1917, at Gizeh Red Cross Hospital.

It was, as Kathleen Chambers later recalled, the first time she had ever seen her mother cry. The shocked and grieving Biddy sent a simple cable message home to family and close friends: "Oswald in His Presence."

THE MINISTRY OF THE BOOKS

Despite the tragic and overwhelming loss, Biddy persevered in the work she and her husband had started. The YMCA asked Biddy to run Zeitoun for the duration of the war. She led morning services and taught two classes a week using her notes from Oswald's teachings. In addition she compiled these teachings into pamphlet form, sending them out each month by popular request.

In 1918 the YMCA took over the monthly printing and distribution and sent 10,000 copies a month to camps

organization, answered the mail and telephone, and ran the school—whenever she didn't stop to pray or drink tea with whomever needed her attention.

Eventually she turned her shorthand notes into two books published by the Revivalist Press: *Biblical Psychology* (1912) and *Studies in The Sermon on the Mount* (1915). In 1913 Biddy gave birth to their only child, Kathleen. With their daughter, the school, and the students, the Chambers family was content.

And then World War I began.

FRONT-LINE MINISTRY

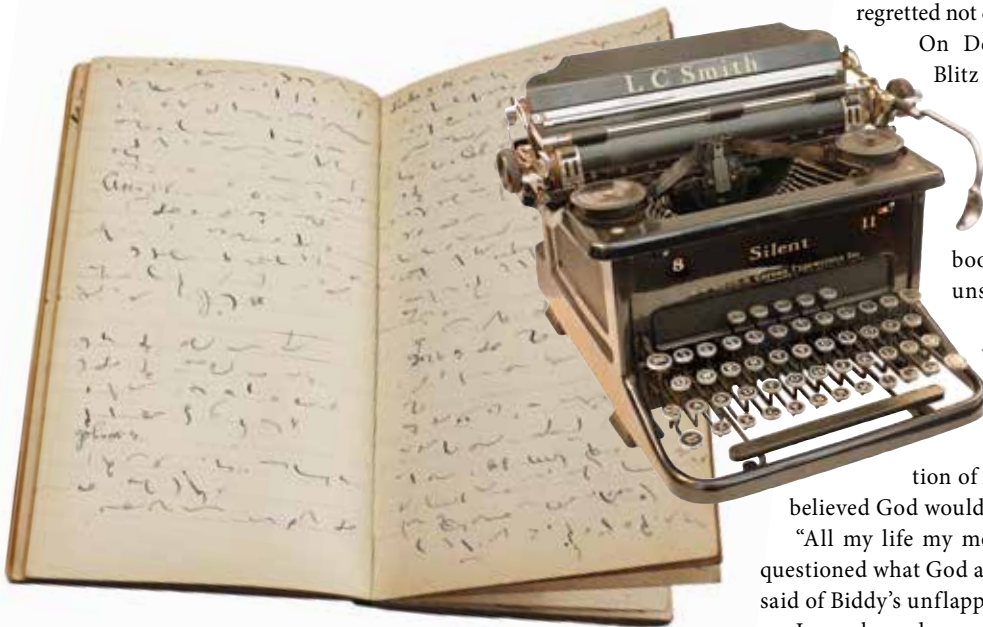
Oswald felt stirred to help and after much prayer, volunteered to be a chaplain with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Egypt. He arrived in October 1915. He did not decide alone. As he wrote his parents, "Biddy is just keen on the thing, and will never do anything but back me up, no matter what it costs her."

Oswald asked to bring his wife and toddler with him to the Zeitoun desert camp. The surprised YMCA agreed. Biddy, Kathleen, and friend Mary Riley arrived three months later. Biddy's welcoming touches soon appeared: tea for visitors, walks under the desert stars, and a seat at Oswald's YMCA talks with notebook in hand. She left behind a trunk full of BTC notes in London and added to her collection in Egypt.



THROUGH THICK AND THIN (left) Biddy joyfully went where Oswald did, even to the war front in Egypt.

TYPEWRITER GIRL Exceptionally gifted at shorthand (below left), Biddy could take dictation faster than people could speak. She spent years transcribing notes of Oswald's talks on this typewriter (below).



manage the Chambers books. They advised and encouraged her. As chairman, Biddy insisted she be able to give away all the books she wanted. She took no salary beyond basic expenses.

During World War II's "phony war" (the brief, quiet period before Allied forces faced open hostilities), OCPAL voted, "in accordance with the teaching of the books," not to insure the Chambers canon, nor file a claim if they later regretted not doing so.

On December 29, 1940, the German Blitz dropped 100,000 incendiary bombs on the booksellers' storehouses surrounding St. Paul's Cathedral. Called the "crematories of the city's book world," one million books burned—including all the unsold Chambers stock.

Biddy maintained a simple attitude throughout the calamity. If God wanted the work to continue, it would. If this was his way of ending production of the Oswald Chambers books, she believed God would direct her to do something else.

"All my life my mother . . . never for half a second questioned what God allowed to happen, ever," Kathleen said of Biddy's unflappable faith.

In nooks and crannies, printing houses, and obscure bookstores, eventually enough books and book printing plates turned up. By the war's end, Oswald Chambers's books were available for sale once more.

GIVING HER UTMOST

Biddy survived her husband by 49 years. Eventually living in London's Muswell Hill, hers was a life of hospitality, prayer, shorthand notes, typing, and books. If someone rang the doorbell looking for Oswald Chambers—listed as the author on the book covers—she invited them in for tea.

Faith sustained, kept, and encouraged Biddy Chambers her entire life. She died after a lengthy illness on January 15, 1966. As Rev. Stephen Pulford wrote about Biddy and Oswald: "of no two saints may it more truthfully be said, 'their works do follow them.'" **GH**

Michelle Ule is the author of Mrs. Oswald Chambers and A Poppy in Remembrance, a WWI novel featuring Oswald Chambers.

throughout the world. Still readers asked for more. So Biddy compiled Oswald's pithy daily Zeitoun quips into *The Seed Thoughts Calendar*. As Kathleen later observed, "She never was hurried, she was relaxed, and often said, 'Let's see what God does next.'"

Biddy and Kathleen repatriated to England in 1919. Without a pension, savings, or insurance, all Biddy had to support them were two trunks full of shorthand notes. Biddy believed Oswald was a man "to whose teaching men will return." She devoted the rest of her life to turning his words into what became over 40 books.

She saw the book publications as a ministry—and took no payment for herself. All royalties earned went into preparing the next book compiled from her notes. She and Kathleen lived on the generosity of friends during those early years. Biddy compiled *My Utmost for His Highest* while running a boarding house in Oxford (see pp. 24–26).

After the 1927 publication of *My Utmost for His Highest*, a group of friends formed the Oswald Chambers Publications Association, Ltd. (OCPAL) to help her

OSWALD CHAMBERS, KATHLEEN, AND BIDDY IN FRONT OF KATHLEEN'S HUT, 1914 TO 1918—OSWALD CHAMBERS PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATION, LTD. / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
BIDDY'S SHORTHAND OF SERMON NOTES—PHOTO BY MAX POINTNER / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
BIDDY'S TYPEWRITER—PHOTO BY MAX POINTNER / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Serving God here and “Beyond”

Oswald and Biddy’s transformational ministry in Egypt

In October 1915 Oswald Chambers sailed across the Mediterranean, bound for Cairo after shutting down the Bible Training College (BTC) in London. In Egypt he would serve as part of the YMCA’s support for Allied soldiers. Aboard the ship Chambers reflected on his decision to leave. He wrote in his diary that the move was “something of the nature of an earthquake.” In a letter to a friend, he compared shuttering the BTC to Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac. He continued, with more hope, “I am sure we will be back and the BTC will go on again more blessedly than ever.”

THE “CRIME OF CRIMES”

In Cairo Chambers encountered a city transformed into a military staging grounds for the British war against the Ottomans. The British had envisioned a swift victory against the Ottomans in the Gallipoli campaign, an attack at the narrow Dardanelles Strait that would eventually give them access to Istanbul. As with so many Great War plans, the campaign ended in violent miscalculation. The Allied powers (Britain, France, and Russia) retreated by January 1916.

Chambers did not shy away from the larger theological implications of supporting the war effort, pondering the supernatural forces behind such choices. But he recognized that in wartime, men had to confront reality and the concerns of the soul. “Don’t misunderstand me,” he wrote to a friend. “I am not inhuman, the ghastly crimes of war are unspeakable, but they certainly are no worse than *sin*, that is the crime of crimes.” [emphasis in original]

For the two years that followed, Chambers continued to reflect on the “unreality” of prewar life and the freedom from it that came during the war. He saw men battered at Gallipoli as they returned to Cairo to convalesce. He met still others who asked for spiritual guidance, two of whom, after praying to receive the Holy Spirit, were unexpectedly called to the front the following morning.

Soon after Chambers arrived in Egypt, Biddy, Kathleen, and several former BTC students joined him to assist in the YMCA huts, providing entertainment, letter writing, and other services to the soldiers. Chambers’s camp in Zeitoun added a devotional hut that became a center of Christian teaching. In this way the practices of the BTC continued—a rebuilding after the “earthquake,” now in a transformed landscape. Chambers referred to this new ministry as the “BTC Expeditionary Force.”

His lessons included topics such as Christian ethics, psychology, and the triumph of redemption over rationalism. While the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) infamously frequented brothels in Cairo, Chambers’s YMCA huts were a source of edification.



SERVING AT THE FRONT Both Oswald and Biddy dedicated themselves to troop ministry during the war.

After the retreat from Gallipoli, Oswald was often called away to teach in other parts of Egypt. Biddy kept the Zeitoun camp running, sometimes stepping in to teach.

But just as important to both Oswald and Biddy as teaching was their ministry of hospitality. This included opening up their home, the “Bungalow,” for small groups, one-on-one ministry, dinners, and lavish free Sunday teas. The Bungalow became a spiritual and emotional oasis to thousands of men, providing the comfort of home in the midst of a demanding desert war. Biddy gave herself fully and tirelessly to this work. Oswald never took her for granted, writing:

When I consider how completely and nobly you have foregone all quiet civilized influences that other women have, and have been living a literal hand to mouth existence all transfigured by your great love for me and Him, I must bow my head in dedication and say God bless thee!

CHAMBERS STILL SPEAKS

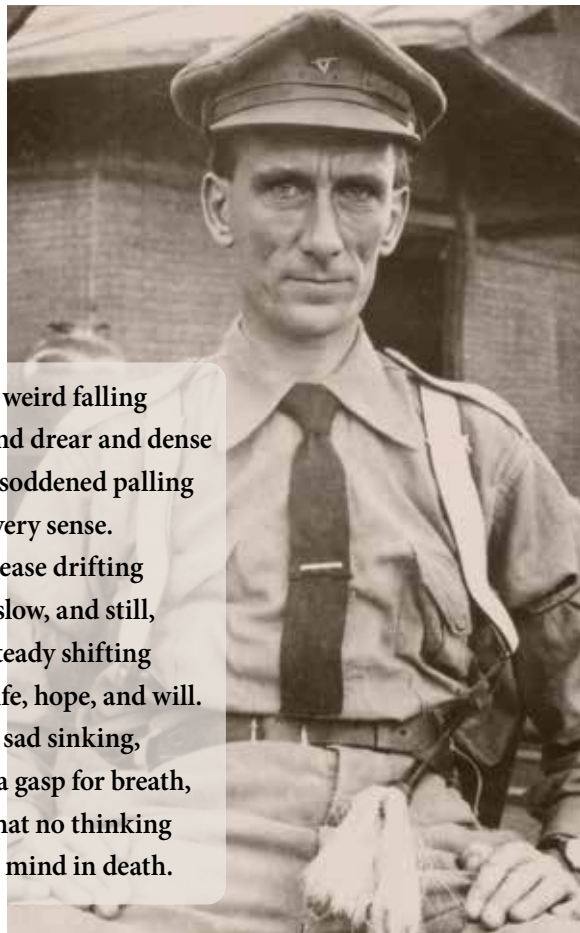
Throughout their time in Egypt, Chambers never forgot his earlier vision for renewing the BTC after the war. His diary regularly reflected on the teachings he planned for the college’s future. Though he died before seeing it, even his death would mark a continuation of his ministry. Mrs. William Jessop, wife of the YMCA general secretary, wrote of Chambers’s death, “With his great gifts he is serving God in a much wider sphere in the Beyond: while here, though absent in body, he yet speaks through the notes taken by his devoted wife, and through the lives of those whom he taught.”

—Annalise DeVries, associate professor of history at Samford University

Oswald Chambers at war

CHAMBERS'S SINCERE AND FRANK FAITH BROUGHT SOLDIERS TO CHRIST

Michelle Ule



A grey, weird falling
Dark and drear and dense
With a soddened palling
Over every sense.
In dull ease drifting
Silent, slow, and still,
Just a steady shifting
From life, hope, and will.
A sure, sad sinking,
Scarce a gasp for breath,
After that no thinking
But the mind in death.

In September of 1896, Oswald Chambers penned these words while studying at Edinburgh University. “Hopeless” is just one of a handful of poems that Chambers wrote during his studies there and at Dunoon Bible College reflecting on a personal “dark night of the soul.” He struggled with inner emptiness as his hopes and dreams died. His overwhelming conviction of sins and false accusations from others plagued him (see inside front cover), and he couldn’t find peace with God.

Yet this dark night of his own soul had a purpose. It would prepare Chambers for the dark nights of thousands of others: soldiers entering the deadliest war the modern world had ever known.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

While at Dunoon Chambers regularly ministered with the Pentecostal League of Prayer, and yet he was also facing a complete breakdown. That all changed at a meeting in 1901:

I got up again and said, “I got up for no one’s sake, I got up for my own sake; either Christianity is a downright

LIVING SACRIFICE Two years of ministering to soldiers in harsh war and desert conditions aged Chambers beyond his years. Here he is only 42.

fraud, or I have not got hold of the right end of the stick.” And then and there I claimed the gift of the Holy Spirit in dogged committal on Luke 11:13.

I was as dry and empty as ever, no power or realization of God, no witness of the Holy Spirit. Two days later I was asked to speak at a meeting, and forty souls came out to the front. . . . and [I] went to Mr. MacGregor and told him what happened. He said, “Don’t you remember claiming the Holy Spirit as a gift?” . . . And like a flash something happened inside me.

During the 1904 Welsh Revival, Chambers realized the gospel transcended denominational and social lines. He took Jesus’s words as a personal clarion call: “Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations.”

Over the next decade as a League of Prayer speaker, Chambers taught, lived, and directed others into a living relationship with God. Through his travels, especially while visiting the Tokyo Bible Institute, he recognized the need for educating and spiritually training missionaries.

Chambers’s time spent in a dark night of the soul taught him the need to grow close to God and become a workman who was not ashamed of the gospel. With Bidy he established the Bible Training College (BTC) in 1911 to provide missionary training that drew others to Jesus.

As he wrote in *So Send I You*, “unless the life of a missionary is hid with Christ in God before he begins his work, that life will become exclusive and narrow. It will never become the servant of all men, it will never wash the feet of others.”

Chambers’s opportunity to apply spiritual convictions to the secular world came in 1914.

SIN IS WORSE THAN WAR

A month after World War I began, he wrote in *Tongues of Fire* magazine:

Is war of the devil or of God? It is of neither. It is of man, though God and the devil are both behind it. War is a conflict of wills either in individuals or in nations . . . Jesus Christ did not say: “you will understand why the war has come,” but, do not be scared, do not be in a panic. There is one thing worse than war, and that is sin.

At the BTC that fall, soldiers flocked to classes, friends went to war, maimed soldiers appeared on the streets. Oswald watched, prayed with Bidy, and by Christmas wrote, “the great war and the desperate spiritual need of our soldiers have been keenly present with us night and day since war began.”

MIGHTY MEETINGS Soldiers loved Chambers (*below*) for his sense of humor, earnest faith, and head-on approach to hard spiritual questions (*right*). His ministry centered at the Zeitoun camp (*bottom*). Eventually, the devotional hut where he taught (*bottom right*) was no longer large enough to hold the troops who came to listen.



Despite being 40 years old and thus exempt from military duty, Chambers closed the BTC in May 1915. He offered himself to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) as a chaplain for "first aid spirituality." As he wrote to his mother,

I have a strong impression that work with the YMCA will be the next thing. . . . He knows and I know He will forget, so I just go steadily on as I have always done and He will engineer the circumstances.

Chambers traveled several months ahead of his family to the YMCA's camp at Zeitoun. The "rough" camp boasted a large canvas tent and little else. The ministry involved providing morale opportunities for troops, primarily the 4th and 12th Australian Light Horse Brigades.

When Chambers announced a prayer meeting in the tent on his first night, everyone left. He preached anyway, and before long men began to join him. His practical and no-nonsense teaching worked in the hearts of men recently returned from Gallipoli. Needing hope and encouragement, they appreciated Chambers's concerns for them.

Once Bidy, Kathleen, and BTC friend Mary Riley arrived, soldiers turned out in droves to drink tea, play with the toddler, and stay for prayer and teaching in the

evenings. Many soldiers came to faith. Indeed, "it was almost worth enlisting to hear Oswald Chambers speak," wrote one. Teaching straight from the Bible, Chambers preached the gospel. He wanted to ensure the troops understood who God was and why Jesus died for them before they faced eternity on the battlefield. Bidy took down everything he said during those meetings. She eventually turned the notes from Chambers's study of Job into a book titled *Baffled to Fight Better* (see p. 21).

He didn't shy away from difficult topics. One evening Chambers spoke on "Religious Problems Raised by the War." On another he questioned, "What's the Good of Prayer?" As a YMCA official wrote, "He was bubbling over with humor, a quality so essential in those war days, and his presence meant cheerfulness."

Chambers recounted a conversation when a soldier said he couldn't stand religious people. Chambers laughed. "Neither can I," he said, and explained that spiritual reality meant everything to him. He wasn't interested in religious "humbug."

Just as Chambers knew from his dark night of the soul, soldiers needed to know about the radiant love God had for each of them. Many soldiers gathered to hear him. As a YMCA worker wrote about the evening Bible classes, "Mr.

CHAMBERS WITH SOLDIERS—OSWALD CHAMBERS PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATION, LTD. / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
 CHAMBERS SITTING ON THE HUT—OSWALD CHAMBERS PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATION, LTD. / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
 CHAMBERS SITTING ON THE HUT—OSWALD CHAMBERS PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATION, LTD. / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
 OSWALD SITTING ON WALL IN FRONT OF Y.M.C.A. HUT—OSWALD CHAMBERS PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATION, LTD. / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
 POSTCARD: DEVOTIONAL HUT, ZEITOUN. INTERIOR—OSWALD CHAMBERS PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATION, LTD. / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



HONORING OSWALD Chambers’s ministry left such a mark on the forces stationed in Egypt that he received a full military burial (left). One hundred soldiers escorted him to his final resting place (above left) at Old Cairo Cemetery (above).

Chambers talked to them of spiritual things. They frequently crowded out the hut and stood outside to listen.”

Some nights the men spontaneously sang and shared testimonies. “It was an inspiration of the Spirit of God to listen to them,” Chambers wrote. Men often wanted to confess and receive absolution. He’d take them into the desert and kneel in the sand to pray with each one.

“One never gets used to the unspeakable wonder of a soul entering consciously in the Kingdom of Our Lord,” Chambers said. “A great joy.” YMCA director William Jessop appreciated Chambers:

His ceaseless activity, his wonderful insight into the real mind of the soldier... he desired to get to grips with each individual in the very heart of the battlefield—their own will.

Chambers saw Zeitoun as “an oasis of God.” He prayed through a lengthy list of soldiers’ names each day, often while watching the sun rise over the desert sands. When the soldiers headed “up the line,” into potential battle, they took Chambers’s ideas with them. They banded together into small groups to read and study the Bible in their tents at night.

AMONG THE SOLDIERS

In fall 1917 the army prepared to advance into the desert with hopes of taking Beersheba and then Jerusalem. Expecting many casualties, the army asked the YMCA to assign a chaplain to each unit.

Chambers was excited to go, purchased his needed supplies, and instructed Biddy on how to run the camp in his absence—including how to lead his classes. Right before departure, however, he fell ill with what he thought was a common stomach ailment. Chambers refused to visit the hospital, unwilling to take a bed from a wounded soldier. The delay in treatment cost him his life—he died at age 43 from

complications after his appendix ruptured on November 17, 1917 (see pp. 11–13).

In the Middle East at that time, burials took place the same day. But the army, appreciating Chambers’s work with the troops, asked for a delay. They wanted to honor him with a military funeral. The following day 100 soldiers accompanied Chambers’s flag-covered casket on a gun carriage to the Old Cairo Cemetery. They carried their rifles pointing down as a sign of respect. He lies among the soldiers in a soldier’s grave to this day. The YMCA held a memorial service at Zeitoun. A thousand people crammed into the YMCA hut to remember Oswald Chambers. As a YMCA official wrote:

The realization came afresh with overpowering knowledge and conviction, even with our loss, that God was with us yet. Words of real testimony were given by different ones how, when groping in the dark, Mr. Chambers had guided them to Jesus Christ. Their testimonies were only a sample of what might be given by thousands of our fighting men.

Oswald Chambers knew about dark nights, troubled souls, and uncertain faith. He understood the hearts of soldiers trapped in circumstances they couldn’t change. He knew the only answer was found in the God who loved them.

Before he died Chambers reflected on the changes in his life. “My inner career at the beginning was heavy and strong. Now it is merging into a joy which is truly the receiving of a hundredfold more.”

As BTC student Katherine Ashe wrote, “He laid down his life finally because of the sheer exhaustion of all his physical powers” to make sure soldiers knew their God.

Well done, good and faithful servant Oswald Chambers. **GA**

Michelle Ule is the author of Mrs. Oswald Chambers and a contributor to Utmost Ongoing.

Baffled to Fight Better

During the spring of 1917, Chambers spoke nightly on the book of Job at classes in Zeitoun. He recognized Job's power to speak to soldiers after his own personal study:

I feel growingly sure that Job is the book of consolation for the sorrow-tossed and bereaved and broken by the war, for not only is the voice of human suffering expressed here better than anywhere, but the very breath is drawn in fear of the Lord, and the heart is strong in the hope that grades higher than faith.

Biddy compiled these talks into a book, *Baffled to Fight Better* (now titled *Our Ultimate Refuge*). Here are a few excerpts.

THE UNSEEN UNIVERSE (JOB 1:1-12)

Today there is in our midst a crop of juvenile sceptics, men who up to the time of the war had had no tension in their lives, and as soon as turmoil embroiled them they flung over their faith and became cheap and easy sceptics. The man who knows that there are problems and difficulties in life is not so easily moved. Most of us get touchy with God and desert Him when He does not back up our creed (cf. John 6:60, 66). Many a man through this war has lost his form of belief in God and imagines that he has thereby lost God, whereas he is in the throes of a conflict which ought to give birth to a realisation of God more fundamental than any statement of belief....

God never once makes His way clear to Job. Job struggles with problem after problem, and Providence brings more problems all the time, and in the end Job says, "... now mine eye seeth Thee." He saw that all he had hung in to in the darkness was true, and that God was all he had believed Him to be, loving and just and honourable....

Will I trust the revelation given of God by Jesus Christ when everything in my personal experience flatly contradicts it?

DAZED AND AMAZED (JOB 1:13-2:13)

Satan had been allowed to attack Job's possessions; now his power is increased, and he is free to attack Job's personal inheritance direct. When a man is hit by undeserved destruction, the immediate result is a slander against God—"Why should God allow this thing to happen?"

There are people today who are going through an onslaught of destruction that paralyses all our platitudes and preaching; the only thing that will bring relief is the consolations of Christ. It is a good thing to feel our own powerlessness in the face of destruction, it makes us know how much we depend upon God. In these days the outstanding marvel is the way mothers and wives have gone through sorrow, not callously, but with an extraordinary sense of hopefulness. One thing the war has done is to knock on the head all such shallow



BINDING UP THE BROKEN A nurse tends to a Scottish WWI soldier in a hospital full of the wounded. Chambers preached Christ's hope in response to the Great War.

optimism as telling people to "look on the bright side of things"; or that "every cloud has a silver lining": there are some clouds that are black all through.

DE PROFUNDIS (JOB 6,7)

Whether we like it or not, God will burn us in His fire until we are as pure as He is, and it is during the process that we cry, as Job did, "I wish You would leave me alone." God is the only Being who can afford to be misunderstood; we cannot, Job could not, but God can. If we are misunderstood we "get about" the man as soon as we can. St. Augustine prayed, "O Lord, deliver me from this lust of always vindicating myself." God never vindicates Himself, He deliberately stands aside and lets all sorts of slanders heap on Him, yet He is not in any hurry.

DISGUISE OF THE ACTUAL (JOB 42:7-17)

A man will stick to his religious categories of men until he receives a shaking up from Eternal Reality, as these men did. Eliphaz and the others maintained the conception that unless a man held to the particular shibboleth of their religious creed, he was lost. The one thing that will cause the conceit that we know men to disappear is the surgery of events, the Eternal Reality of God shaking the nonsense out of us. This has happened in many a life through the cataclysm of war, and men find they have a different and a broader way of looking at things. There is no room for veneer and pretence in camp life.—*Oswald Chambers, Baffled to Fight Better / Our Ultimate Refuge*

In His presence

The life and work of Oswald Chambers

July 24, 1874 Oswald Chambers is born in Aberdeen, Scotland.

1877 Clarence Chambers leaves his pastorate at Crown Terrace Baptist. The Chambers family moves to Stoke-on-Trent, England, where he pastors a small church.

1881 Clarence moves his family to Perth, Scotland, where he founds the Baptist Chapel.

July 13, 1883 Gertrude “Biddy” Hobbs is born.

1889 Clarence Chambers resigns his pastorate in Perth. The family moves a final time to the London suburb of Peckham.



Martin Wells Knapp (1853-1901)

December 2, 1890 Oswald Chambers is baptized and joins Rye Lane Baptist Chapel.

1895 Chambers receives an Art Master’s Certificate and a scholarship offer. Later this year he decides to enroll in a two-year arts course at University of Edinburgh.

1896 Chambers experiences financial difficulties. He senses a call to the ministry and receives information about Dunoon College.

1897 Chambers leaves for Dunoon and becomes a tutor there. He experiences intense spiritual struggles.

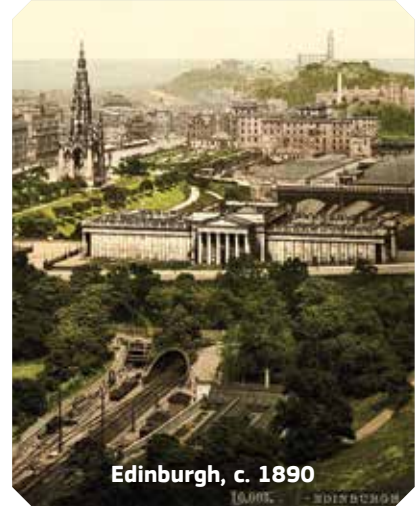
1899 Chambers is ordained to the ministry at Dunoon Baptist Church.

1901 Chambers becomes involved with the League of Prayer. He experiences an awakening that concludes his season of spiritual struggle.

1905 Chambers preachers at Arthur Chambers’s church, where he meets Biddy for the first time.

1906 Chambers meets Juji Nakada. Together they speak at League of Prayer meetings, visit churches, and eventually set sail for the United States.

1907 Chambers begins teaching at God’s Bible School. He travels around



Edinburgh, c. 1890

the United States, visits Japan, and eventually returns to the United Kingdom on league business.

1908 Oswald returns to America on the SS *Baltic*, along with Biddy. They are engaged later that year.

1910 Oswald and Biddy marry in London.

1911 The Bible Training College (BTC) opens in London with Oswald as principal and Biddy as “Lady Superintendent.” Oswald teaches biblical psychology in three cities while leading BTC.



Oswald and sister Gertrude, c. 1875



Tokyo Bible Training School, c. 1903

PHOTOGRAPH OF M. W. KNAPP IN A HERO OF FAITH AND PRAYER BY REV. A. M. HILLS, 1902—PUBLIC DOMAIN, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / INTERNET ARCHIVE
 EDINBURGH FROM THE CASTLE, SCOTLAND, DETROIT PUBLISHING CO. 1890S. PHOTOGRAPH PRINT—PUBLIC DOMAIN, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.
 OSWALD AND GERTRUDE IMAGE IN PAUL KENT, OSWALD CHAMBERS, A LIFE IN PICTURES, DISCOVERY HOUSE, 2017—MRS. BARBARA (CHAMBERS) PENN
 TOKYO BIBLE TRAINING SCHOOL—ONE MISSION SOCIETY / MICHELLE ULE



Hannah and Clarence Chambers, 1910

— 1912 *Biblical Psychology* by Oswald Chambers is published.

— May 24, 1913 Kathleen Chambers is born.

— 1914 World War I breaks out in Europe.

— 1915 Oswald volunteers as a front-line chaplain and closes the BTC. He is permitted to bring his family to Egypt. Bidy, Kathleen, and their friend Mary Riley join him.

— 1916 The Chambers family ministers at various camps along the front-line, including in the Zeitoun district of Cairo.

— 1917 In January the YMCA asks Oswald to stay at Zeitoun rather than return to England.

— October 17, 1917 Oswald begins experiencing abdominal pain but refuses to take a hospital bed as wounded soldiers return from the offensive in Palestine.

— October 29, 1917 Oswald undergoes an emergency appendectomy at Gizeh Red Cross Hospital.

— 1917 Complications from Oswald's surgery cause a blood clot and hemorrhaging on November 4. Oswald dies around 7:00 on the morning of

November 15. His funeral is held in Cairo the next day, with a memorial service in Zeitoun on November 18. Bidy and Kathleen remain in Zeitoun, where Bidy continues to minister.

— 1917 In December *Baffled to Fight Better* is published. Free copies are distributed all over Egypt. Bidy receives donations to continue the work of compiling, typing, and editing Oswald's sermons and other works.

— 1918 *The Shadow of an Agony* is published.

— 1919 Kathleen and Bidy return to England in July.

— 1922 *The Psychology of Redemption* is published.

— 1933 *Oswald Chambers: His Life and Work* is published.

— 1938 Kathleen completes nursing school and returns to live with Bidy in London.

— 1939 World War II begins.

— 1940 The London Blitz destroys the entire stock of Oswald Chambers books. Enough books and printing plates survive elsewhere to allow Bidy to reprint Oswald's works.

— 1942 Oswald Chambers Publications Association is incorporated.

— January 15, 1966 Bidy Chambers dies.

— 1968 *Oswald Chambers: An Unbribed Soul* by David Lambert is published.

— 1993 *Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God* by David McCasland is published.

— May 30, 1997 Kathleen Chambers dies.

— 2000 *The Complete Works of Oswald Chambers* is published.

Timeline adapted from Oswald Chambers: A Life in Pictures by Paul Kent



League of Prayer leaders, c. 1911

— 1924 Bidy and Kathleen move to Oxford; *Shade of His Hand* is published.

— 1927 Bidy publishes *My Utmost for His Highest*. It reaches a wide audience and increases printing demand for Oswald's other works. Bidy continues to devote her time to "the work of the books."

— 1929 Bidy moves to London and publishes *Our Brilliant Heritage*.



Oswald, Bidy, and Kathleen Chambers, 1913

Making *My Utmost*

BIDDY CHAMBERS AND THE UNEXPECTED BEST-SELLING DEVOTIONAL

Amy Boucher Pye



As I take in the large townhouse before me in north London, I think about Bidly Chambers, a widow living behind these bricks who walked these same streets some decades before me. Of her standing at the top of the nearby hill, gazing at the rows of closely gathered steeples and the view beyond to the skyline of London. Of her sending to missionaries and friends copies of the recently published book that she compiled, edited, and published, *My Utmost for His Highest*. I think of her role in this now best-selling devotional by Oswald Chambers—a book the author didn't even know about.

AN UNLIKELY CALLING

In their limited time together, Oswald and Bidly lived their utmost for God's highest everywhere God took them. Throughout it all, Bidly embodied her nickname, "Beloved Disciple," as she shared Oswald's calling to minister to those they met with God's love.

HOLINESS HONEYMOON Oswald and Bidly's honeymoon included a preaching tour with the League of Prayer. The couple went almost everywhere together. Whenever Oswald spoke, Bidly recorded his words.

But Bidly also exercised her skills of word-perfect stenography, and when she met and married Oswald, she focused on capturing through shorthand his life-giving talks and lecture notes. She eventually had a treasure trove (including actual trunks of papers) of squiggles and marks that documented every talk, sermon, and lecture she heard him deliver over the course of their marriage.

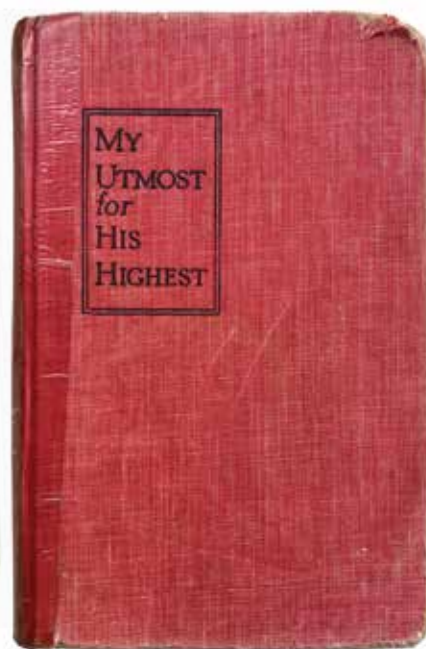
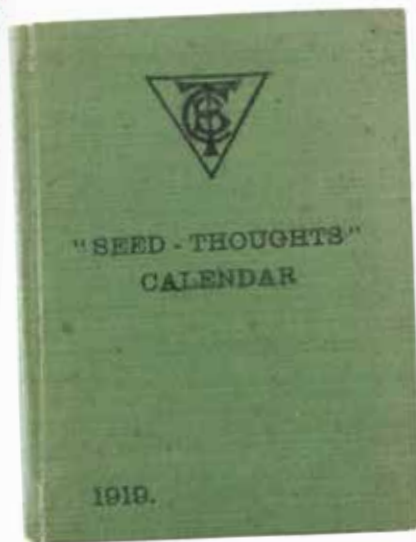
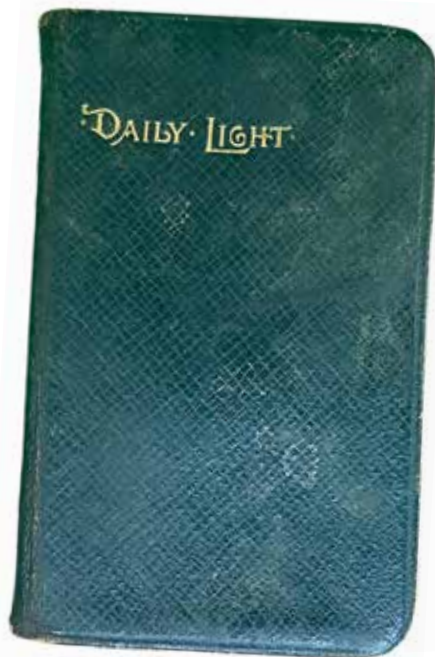
The couple never imagined such a wide reach for Oswald's work, but Bidly produced pamphlets, booklets, and eventually books in response to the demand of readers. The first published were Oswald's sermons that Bidly prepared for publication in the League of Prayer's magazine (with which they were associated). Then when Charles Rae Griffin (1881–?), the director of a small publishing company, heard one of Oswald's lectures at the Bible Training College, he immediately wanted to share this wisdom with others. After Bidly edited, compiled, and typed the content, Griffin distributed the pamphlets to a warm reception through the London Baptist Missionary Union.

Other connections in Britain and the United States clamored for Oswald's teaching, and in 1912 Oswald's first book was published, *Biblical Psychology*. Yet far from being an eager first-time author, Oswald focused on the people in front of him. Neither he nor Bidly ever sought financial compensation for the works they produced.

BAFFLED TO FIGHT BETTER

After her husband's unexpected and untimely death in 1917 in Egypt, Bidly continued to send out his sermons and lectures, now to comfort their bereft and shocked friends around the world. Even in her grief, she sought to encourage others with Oswald's words, dedicating herself to the calling she embraced for the many remaining years of her life.

She and Kathleen stayed in Egypt for two years after Oswald died as she continued to provide hospitality to the soldiers and share from Oswald's materials. With confidence and clarity, she said to the men gathered, "Oswald is not here to teach us and so we will learn



WORK OF THE BOOKS After Oswald died, Bidy carried on his ministry (with YMCA workers, right). The couple's favorite devotional, *Daily Light* (above left) inspired the *Seed Thoughts Calendar* (middle), though the publisher rejected the idea. Bidy proved she could do it on her own; she published numerous books, including the best-selling *My Utmost* (above right).

together now." She had already sent *Baffled to Fight Better*, a study written specifically for soldiers, to the printer. It was published just one month after Oswald died. Bidy also sent out monthly sermons to soldiers, friends, and missionaries as part of her wide correspondence. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and eventually the YMCA sent out 10,000 copies each month of *Baffled* and other sermons.

After the war ended, she and her now six-year-old daughter moved back to England in June 1919. Eventually settling in Oxfordshire, Bidy earned a meager salary through running a clean and safe boarding house for university students and making meals for them. She somehow also found the time and energy—usually at night after Kathleen was asleep—to compile, edit, and distribute Oswald's words of encouragement and conviction. Even though Kathleen was reduced to accepting worn and stained clothes from well-wishers, Bidy would always put any money received from the publications into the next round of printing and distribution costs.

Bidy's first project back in England seems like a precursor to *My Utmost*; she compiled 366 short and pithy thoughts into what she called a *Seed Thoughts Calendar*. Two sample entries embody Oswald's characteristically vivid and straight-talking devotion to Christ: "Grousing destroys generosity like a moth does a garment, slowly but completely" (March 1). And, "The people who are always desperately active are a nuisance; it is through the saints



who are one with Him that God is doing things all the time" (October 4).

Bidy presented the idea for this short work, complete with four months of sayings, to a publishing contact of Griffin's. But the publisher didn't catch the vision for the book, turning down the idea on the spot. Crestfallen, Bidy described feeling "undone" by the meeting. Yet after time to pray and process, she realized that not going with a traditional publishing arrangement left her at "liberty only to go along the lines of spontaneous moral originality." Although she would not have claimed the title, she eventually became a boutique independent publisher who produced more than 40 books, based on Oswald's teaching, in her lifetime, including the one most known and loved, *My Utmost for His Highest*.

For the years of their marriage, Bidy and Oswald started each day with a shared time of prayer and reading



the Bible and the *Daily Light* devotional, a compilation of Scripture passages arranged by theme. Perhaps inspired by the encouragement they received through this small devotional, Bidy determined to create a through-the-year resource to help believers stay committed to Jesus.

As she shared in the book's introduction, Bidy included content from Oswald's lectures at the Bible college and his talks in Egypt. Translating her shorthand notes, she then edited several talks into each day's reading of around 500 words each—all the while running the boarding house. The book's style follows how Oswald wrote and spoke during his lifetime—deep and yet understandable, compassionate while calling readers to confess sin, realistic about suffering and yet enduringly hopeful.

The work took her three years to complete, and when in 1927 she had finished the typing, compiling, editing, and proofreading, she arranged, through gifts from friends, for the funding of the first edition. Her presentation of Oswald's words immediately resonated with readers, reaching a broad Christian audience and crossing many denominational lines. As demand for this compelling new devotional soared, she realized that its distribution was beyond her capabilities and she entrusted a London firm with the task.

LABOR OF LOVE

Throughout the writing and editing of *My Utmost*, Bidy kept a low profile about the book, not least with her teenaged daughter, Kathleen. Years after Bidy had died, Kathleen remarked to David McCasland, Chambers's biographer,

She never talked about the books to me. She didn't want me to have anything to do with the books. I was going to be a nurse and the books were her job. . . . But my mother got the books out into print and she typed and retyped and typed and typed and she read all the proofs herself.

Bidy never claimed her title as editor or compiler of this work, or for any of the many books she created from

UP IN FLAMES German air forces bombed London for months during World War II, destroying property and lives in the Blitz (*above*). Paternoster Row, where book publishers (including Bidy Chambers) warehoused their books, burned in December 1940. This painting (*above left*) captures the destruction.

her notes of her husband's talks. Even her introduction to *My Utmost* bears only her initials, "B. C.," and not her name. She never sought the limelight, instead wanting to work for God's glory while remaining hidden in Christ. She adhered to Oswald's admonition in *The Dedication of Following*:

[W]hen we are following Him, it will be a matter of indifference whether God puts us in the forefront or in the back seat. When we realise this, then the joy of the Lord is ours because we are fulfilling our regenerated purpose.

Bidy held what's sometimes called a "holy indifference" even to the published books she'd labored so hard to create, as evidenced in 1940 when during the Blitz a bomb destroyed a book warehouse close to St. Paul's Cathedral. When she received the news that all 40,000 copies of various works were lost—none being insured—she set down her teacup and remarked to Kathleen, "Well, God has used the books for His glory, but now that is over. We'll wait and see what God will do now." (Eventually, the books were reprinted and have remained in print ever since; see pp. 28–30.)

From stenographer to compiler and editor to proofreader to publisher, Bidy was years ahead of her time in conventional publishing terms. Yet she didn't think of her life that way, of course. She simply loved and served God, seeking each day to give her utmost for his highest. **GH**

Amy Boucher Pye is the author of six books, including 7 Ways to Pray, a speaker, and spiritual director. She has been associated with the Oswald Chambers Publications Association (OCPAL) for eight years. She and her family make their home in north London, not far from Muswell Hill, where Bidy once lived.

“My Utmost for His Highest”

Wisdom from Chambers’s best-known work

LEAVE ROOM FOR GOD

But when it pleased God. . .

—Galatians 1:15

Have you learned how to leave space for God—to give him a little elbow room to work in your life? Too often, as we go about making our plans, we forget to leave a place for God to come in as he chooses. We say that this or that will happen, but none of our predictions leave room for the element of divine surprise.

Would we be shocked if God came into our meetings, our prayers, or our preaching in a way we’d never expected? However well we think we know God, we can never know exactly what he’ll do. What we can know is that, when it pleases him, he will break in. This is the great lesson to learn—that at any minute God may arrive. We tend to overlook this element of surprise, and yet God never works in any other way.

Keep in constant, intimate contact with God, so that his surprising power may break through at any time and any place. Always be in a state of expectancy, and remember to leave room. Do not look for God to come in any particular way, but do look for him.

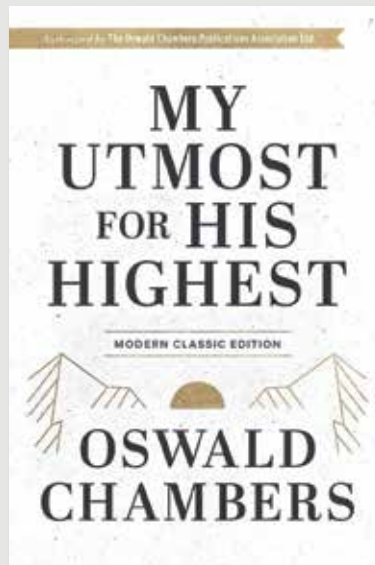
WHAT MY OBEDIENCE TO GOD COSTS OTHERS

They seized Simon from Cyrene . . . and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

—Luke 23:26

If we obey God, it is going to cost other people more than it costs us. We delight in obeying our Lord because we are in love with him. But this means that his plans come first in our lives, not the plans of other people. If the people around us do not love him, they may accuse us of indifference or selfishness. They may taunt us: “You call this Christianity?”

It isn’t indifference or independence that makes us act as we do. Many of us would probably prefer to be independent, to carry the burden of our obedience alone, never asking anyone for anything. We must learn that to obey is to be swept up in God’s universal purposes. His purpose for other people may be that they help us in his work, as Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus with the cross, or as Susanna offered him material support (Luke 8:2–3). To refuse help like this is to let our pride win out.



Are we going to remain loyal to God and go through the humiliation of depending on others? Or are we going to say, “I will not cause other people to suffer. I will not cost them anything”? Beware of the inclination to dictate to God what you will allow to happen if you obey him.

We can disobey God if we choose; we can prevent other people from suffering. Our disobedience will bring immoderate relief. But it will hurt our Lord, and, in the long run, fail to help anyone: God has already thought about the consequences of our obedience. If we obey, he—not we—will take care of everyone involved. We need only to let him.

IS YOUR HOPE IN GOD FAINT AND DYING?

Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

—Isaiah 26:3

Is your imagination stayed on God, or is it starved? A starved imagination is one of the greatest sources of exhaustion in a disciple’s life. To attain the perfect peace Isaiah describes, we must set our minds steadfastly on God, trusting entirely in him.

If you have never used your imagination to put yourself deliberately before God, begin to do it now. It is no use waiting for God to come to you: you must go to him, turning your gaze away from the faces of idols. Imagination is the greatest gift God has given us, and it ought to be devoted entirely to him. If you learn to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, it will be one of the greatest assets to your faith when the time of trial comes, because your faith and the spirit of God will work together.

“We have sinned, even as our ancestors did. . . . They did not remember your many kindnesses” (Psalm 106:6–7). If you find that your mind is not steadfastly set on God, if you cannot remember his kindness and love, drive a stake through the heart of your forgetfulness. Remember whose you are and whom you serve. If you do, your affection for God will increase tenfold, your imagination will be quick and enthusiastic, and your hope will be inexpressibly bright.

—My Utmost for His Highest, *modern classic edition*, adapted by Macy Halford

From typewriter girl to publishing powerhouse

CHANGES IN “WOMEN’S WORK” LED TO BIDDY’S “MINISTRY OF THE BOOKS”

Katherine Goodwin Lindgren



Widowed, in the foreign field, mother of a toddler, and administrator of an international ministry, Biddy Chambers stared down a mountain of unopened mail and wondered how to carry on after the death of her husband, the charismatic preacher Oswald (see pp. 18-20). Would she stay at the Zeitoun YMCA camp? Would she return to England as a pensionless widow to eke out a living in a secretarial pool? What would happen to the international ministry she had built with her husband during their seven years of marriage? As she sorted through letters on the morning of January 7, 1918—barely two months after burying Oswald in a Cairo cemetery—“the way opened.”

The director of the Nile Mission Press wrote that “he was printing *The Place of Help* in Arabic for their magazine, and also that he wanted a psychology book to study for his talks.” *The Place of Help* was originally printed in the newsletter of the Chamberses’ ministry in England. Now printed in Arabic, missionary publishers wanted more of Oswald’s words to help their work across northern Africa and beyond.

WORKING WOMAN By the start of World War I, over 160,000 women had entered the workforce as clerks. With the invention of the typewriter, “white blouses,” as women were called, often filled typist roles.

This request marked a significant turning point in Biddy Chambers’s life and career (see pp. 24–26). But what enabled this former secretary to become an unprecedented publishing phenomenon?

THE WHITE BLOUSE REVOLUTION

Women’s work was changing in turn-of-the-century England. Chambers was one of over 60,000 women called “white blouses” who revolutionized the workplace. From 1850 to 1914, the number of clerks in Britain increased from 95,000 to 843,000. Women accounted for nearly 20 percent of the swelling ranks, their ranks growing from 2,000 to 166,000 by the start of World War I.

This growth also coincided with a technological innovation: the typewriter. A corresponding workplace innovation—the female typist—was dramatized in Grant Allen’s *The Typewriter Girl*. Published in 1897, this novel depicts the journey of a lower-middle-class woman who was trained as a secretary and typist before filling a central role in the growing British economy.

Chambers, then Gertrude Hobbs, took a clerical position at the Woolwich Royal Arsenal the same year *The Typewriter Girl* was published. A correspondence stenography course from Pitman Metropolitan School made her excellent at shorthand, but it was her additional skill as a typist that set her apart. As *The Typewriter Girl* dramatizes, “every girl in London can write shorthand.” Women like Hobbs who were trained stenographers and typists were in high demand, and their multipurpose skills were compensated accordingly. In industrial centers like Manchester, female stenographers and typists could earn up to double the wages of other secretaries. Even then their earnings were still significantly lower than men’s.

Work for middle-class women was assumed to be a temporary situation, either to add supplementary income to a male-headed household or as an economic stopgap before marriage. “Marriage bans” against married women working reinforced the assumption that working women were single women. Ironically women entered the workforce in part to make up for the lagging population of working-age—and marriageable—men.



RISING TO THE CHALLENGE Biddy Chambers (*above*) never received an extended education, but her resourcefulness and ambition merited her opportunities, enabling her to be “Lady Superintendent” for the BTC (*above right*) and indispensable to Oswald’s ministry during the war. Women, such as these clerks (*right*), were a crucial part of the war effort.



At the start of her career, Hobbs had no serious prospects of marriage and likely considered her career as a long-term plan for financial stability. Her friend and fellow secretary Marian Moore had similarly ambiguous marriage prospects. Their shared work and friendship led Hobbs across the Atlantic to join Moore as a secretary in a New York legal firm. In 1905 Hobbs boarded the *Baltic* and headed for America—coincidentally alongside Oswald Chambers (see pp. 11–13).

Their shared religious devotion was an easy talking point, but a new conversation began over the potential for professional (and personal) collaboration. As Oswald repeatedly told her, “I want us to write and preach; if I could talk to you and you shorthand it down and then type it, what ground we would get over!”

The two were married in 1910. Biddy joined Oswald on his preaching tours in America where she developed a dual vocation: preacher’s wife and secretary.

FROM SECRETARY TO LADY SUPERINTENDENT

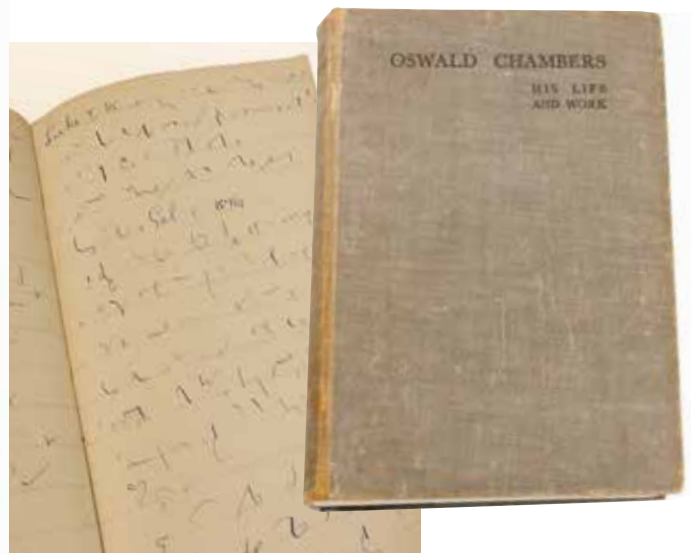
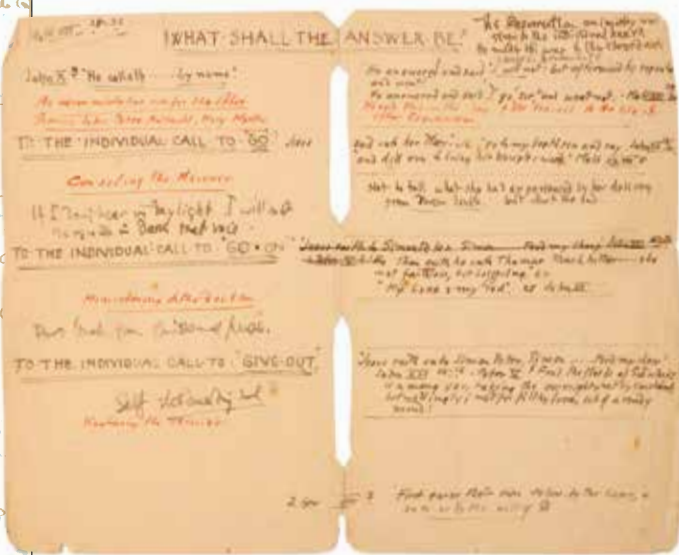
In 1911 Oswald’s itinerancy stabilized in a permanent position as the head of the Bible Training College (BTC) in London. Mary Harris, widow of Richard Reader Harris and head of the League of Prayer, “had long been feeling the need for a Training College where scholarly teaching of the Bible would be given . . . and also where practical holiness would be taught and demonstrated” by Chambers himself. This hope was postponed during his bachelorhood. Now married, Oswald had “the helpmeet he needed.” With Biddy as “Lady Superintendent,” the Bible Training College opened its doors.



Biddy fused her professional skills with new opportunities in administration and education. As a “white blouse” revolutionary, she was the college’s central administrative engine and kept detailed notes of as many of Oswald’s teachings as she could. This role also gave her access to another working world: education. Women were considered to be naturally inclined toward nurturing the next generation and therefore capable of becoming educators. Forster’s 1870 Education Act expanded this professional opportunity for qualified women as new council schools across Great Britain required a large number of qualified teachers.

Biddy was not a trained teacher. However, Oswald considered her to be such an authority on the Psalms that she regularly lectured on the subject. She was one of many women in evangelicalism who found greater opportunity to teach and preach to audiences of both women and men, but as wife to the head of the BTC, she had unique access to a professional role that was unthinkable to her at the start of her secretarial career.

As the BTC grew, so did demand for greater access to Oswald’s teaching. Biddy translated her shorthand notes into typed pamphlets, then disseminated them through



parachurch networks. The future, first imagined on the deck of the *Baltic*, came to fruition as Bidly's notes-turned-text carried Oswald's teachings beyond the doors of the BTC.

World War I relocated Oswald from London to Egypt, and he closed the BTC. By Christmas 1915 Bidly and daughter Kathleen joined him in the dusty huts of the camp and rebuilt their ministry of sermons and shorthand. When Oswald died suddenly, Bidly refashioned her dual vocation as secretary and wife to publisher and widow (see pp. 18–20; 24–26).

THE WORK GOES ON

Back in England Bidly Chambers entered a market ready to receive her religious publications. The book trade in interwar Britain was booming in the 1920s. Books were an accessible form of entertainment as well as religious teaching tools for the increasingly literate population. The Religious Tract Society published women writers like Nellie Hellis, Rosa Nouchette Carey, and editor Anne Hepple, who produced “wholesome” literature as an alternative to pulp fiction and romances frequently targeted at women.

Like these publishing women, Chambers struck out into the literary world to edify a Christian audience. A group of supporters formed the BTC Publishing Committee in 1922 to help connect her manuscripts to willing publishers.

Chambers typed and organized her notes into publishable works from the basement of her Oxford boarding house. She began the most significant of these—*My Utmost for His Highest*—in the early 1920s. After the success of this instant best-seller, the BTC Publishing Committee reorganized as the Oswald Chambers Publications Association to better support Chambers's publication project and ensure financial stability. With this she effectively established her own publishing house.

After World War II and the end of wartime paper rationing, a new demand arose for Oswald's words. Chambers frequently sent books to Bible colleges and missionaries in India, China, Italy, and the United States; even the Church of

BIDDY'S TREASURE TROVE Bidly captured many of Oswald's sermons (*above left*) and talks in her shorthand notes (*above center*). By the end of his ministry, she had trunks full of these notes, which she later turned into books. She also produced a biography of Oswald's life (*above right*). Bidly's meticulous records preserved Oswald's words for future generations.

England requested permission to include various quotations in its devotional materials! Chambers indeed covered “such ground” through her publications, reaching the farthest corners of the mission field as well as the nooks and crannies of English churches.

WORDS OF “SPIRIT AND LIFE”

“My store of notes seems inexhaustible. ‘The trees of the Lord are full of sap.’ And the joy and privilege of the work increases as the years go by and letters come from all over the world telling of the way God is making the words ‘spirit and life.’”

Bidly wrote this in her 1934 biography of her husband, *Oswald Chambers: His Life and Work*. Compiled from memories of friends and Oswald's own journals and letters, she published it to correct a case of mistaken identity: grateful readers consistently wrote to her as though she were Oswald himself! Though she published over 40 books and countless articles in Oswald's name, Bidly never considered herself the author. As wife and secretary, she felt it was merely her duty to record and disseminate her husband's words.

By her death in 1966, Bidly Chambers had transcribed nearly all of the notes taken during her marriage. Her 50-year publishing career was birthed out of grief, tested during war, and endured countless cultural transformations. Through it all the secretary gave her utmost to produce some of the most highly respected devotional publications in twentieth-century Christianity. **CG**

Katherine Goodwin Lindgren is assistant professor of women's and gender studies at Hope College.

My search for Oswald Chambers

*Discovering the man behind
My Utmost for His Highest*

David C. McCasland

Around 1960 I acquired a copy of *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers. Friends told me it was a challenging devotional book. As a young man of 17, wanting very much to live for Christ, I began to read the daily selections. Still, many mornings I closed the book with no understanding of what Chambers had written. I couldn't seem to get into it.

In 1985, while I was preparing for a short-term missionary venture to Africa, *My Utmost* came alive. Perhaps it was my age or the circumstances. Maybe it was the afternoon a month before our departure for Africa when my wife and I were stunned by the news that she was pregnant. Suddenly life felt out of control, and Oswald Chambers seemed to be reading my mail.

I felt that, many times, a sentence in *My Utmost* was written just for me: "There is no condition of life in which we cannot abide in Jesus" (June 12). "God gives us the vision, then He takes us down to the valley to batter us into the shape of the vision, and it is in the valley that so many of us faint and give way" (July 6).

My Utmost became for me what it has been for countless other Christians: a major source of encouragement and guidance for living life in the Spirit.

A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK

Chambers's writing birthed in me a curiosity about the man himself. From where did his wisdom and insight spring? What circumstances molded such a man? I learned the outline of Chambers's life from *Oswald Chambers: His Life and Work*. But for all its rich insight and detail, the book left me wondering about key areas.

There wasn't much information available on Chambers. His diaries had disappeared, and only three or four of his letters remained. He had been dead for nearly 75 years, and everyone who knew him was probably gone as well. When the Oswald Chambers Publications Association invited me to make a survey trip to Britain, it seemed like a needle-in-a-haystack situation.

In September 1991 I traveled to England and met Kathleen Chambers. She was gracious while retaining



GONE FISHIN' Chambers loved the outdoors. His retreats into the wilderness spiritually refreshed him.

a healthy skepticism about a new book. I didn't blame her. Visits to the British Library and Cambridge University library yielded nothing. Apparently no one had ever written a thesis, dissertation, or even a scholarly paper about Chambers.

A Sunday afternoon in London's Imperial War Museum gave me glimpses of World War I from the British perspective. Out of curiosity I returned later in the week to visit the museum's library and archives. After sifting through a hundred index cards, I requested a small personal memoir of a soldier who had an association with the YMCA in Egypt. On page 10 I was dumbfounded to find an arrow pointing to a photograph of Oswald Chambers and an account of how Chambers had brought this soldier to a personal faith in Christ.

I gave the loudest inner shout possible in the dignified silence of the reading room and thanked God. In one of the biggest archival haystacks in Britain, he had given me a needle.



That was the first of many “haphazard” discoveries that I believe were engineered by the Holy Spirit. Each one involved finding key material that I didn’t know existed. One afternoon in London, Kathleen Chambers casually told me, “There’s a woman still alive who would have known my father. Her name is Dorothy Docking, and she lives in Santa Barbara, California. Here’s her address.”

I couldn’t believe it. On a beautiful Sunday in April, Dorothy Docking, 92 years old and brimming with enthusiasm, welcomed me to her apartment. We talked for nearly two hours.

“Oh yes,” she beamed, “from the time I was eight until he went off to the First World War when I was 15, Oswald Chambers spent one week every year in our home in Blackpool.”

When I asked her to describe Chambers’s preaching, she smiled and said, “I never went to any of his meetings. In fact, at first I didn’t even know he was a minister. From the day we met, he was just a friend to me; someone who asked about the things I was interested in. When he died and I found out he was nearly as old as my parents, I was staggered. He seemed eternally young.”

Chambers was also known and loved for his rollicking sense of humor. After meeting Oswald for the first time, one serious young man said, “I was shocked at what I then considered his undue levity. He was the most irreverent Reverend I had ever met!”

“APOSTLE OF THE HAPHAZARD”

The man I discovered transcended narrow theological or denominational niches. He could speak relevantly to a group of Christian workers, for instance, warning them,

Dealing with souls is tenfold more dangerous than dealing with bodies. Unless you are in a healthy, vigorous condition with God, you will

PILGRIM ON THE WAY Chambers always seemed to be on a journey, both spiritually and physically! He explores with Kathleen on his shoulders (*left*), perches Sherlock Holmes-like on a cairn (*right*); and poses on a boat in Damietta, Egypt (*middle*).

catch the disease of the soul you are dealing with instead of helping to cure it.

Or he could talk gently to war-sick soldiers evacuated from the murderous Gallipoli Campaign. On March 3, 1917, Chambers wrote in his Egypt diary:

Yesterday in introducing me to a missionary from India, Mr. Swan called me “the apostle of the haphazard,” . . . God’s order does seem to me to come in the haphazard, and we partake of His order as we discern Him in the common “bread and wine” of ordinary experience.

At the time, he had no idea that his own life would end suddenly in a few months. Nor could he know the extent to which God would exponentially increase the scope of his spoken words after his death. Chambers once said: “Many of us are serving our own ends and Jesus Christ cannot help Himself to our lives; if I am abandoned to Jesus, I have no ends of my own to serve.”

It was not his natural winsomeness or gifts, but a deeper, spiritual quality that has enabled him to speak forcefully to this century.

Who was Oswald Chambers? I found he was many things to people—artist, teacher, husband, father, friend. But above all, in solitude or service, he was someone wholly and joyfully abandoned to God.

David C. McCasland is a contributor to Our Daily Bread and the author of Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God. This article originally appeared in Christianity Today and is adapted and reprinted with kind permission.

Faithful legacies

PREACHERS WHO INFLUENCED OSWALD CHAMBERS

Jennifer A. Boardman

CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834–1892)

The oldest of 17 children, Charles Spurgeon (see *CH* #29) was born in Essex, England. He accepted Christ as a teenager and began itinerant preaching.

Only four years after his conversion, at the age of 19, he was called as pastor to New South Street Chapel, the largest Baptist church in London at the time. So quickly did his sermons gain fame that they were printed each week and had high circulation.

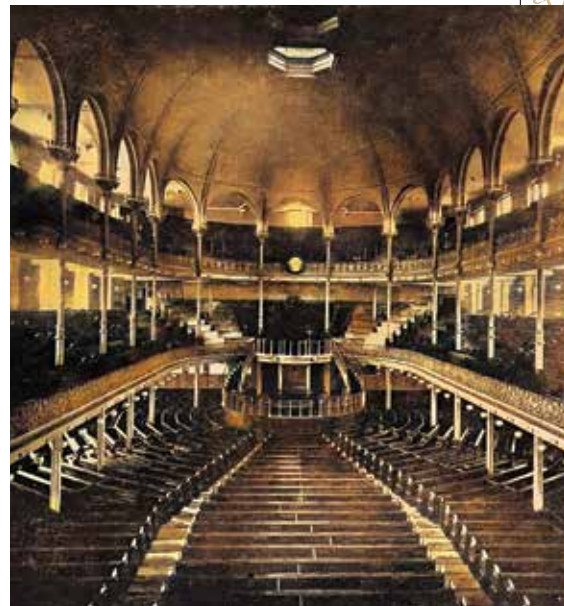
In 1856 Spurgeon founded his Pastors' College, which Clarence Chambers, Oswald's father, attended in its earliest years. Six years later Spurgeon's congregation moved to the largest to-date church building of its kind at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, which held 6,000 people. The church complex also included various societies and institutions, such as an alms house, orphanages, and health infirmaries.

When Oswald Chambers was a teenager, he and his father visited the Metropolitan Tabernacle to hear Spurgeon preach soon after they moved to London. After hearing Spurgeon's call to follow Christ, the young Chambers gave his life to Jesus on the walk home that night. Though Chambers had been raised in a loving Christian home, Spurgeon's sermon still changed the trajectory of Oswald's life.

Spurgeon preached to approximately 10 million people in his life and wrote more than 3,500 sermons; his speaking and writing styles were easy for his lay audiences to understand. He encouraged average Christ-followers to delight in small things.

You can only give away a tract in the street. . . . Souls have been saved by the distribution of tracts and sermons. Scatter them, scatter them. . . . You can only write a letter to a friend about Christ. Don't neglect to do it: write one tomorrow. . . . Mother, it is only two or three little children at home that you have an influence over. Despise not the day of small things. . . . God accepts your little works if they are done in faith in his dear Son.

Spurgeon was unwell for much of his adult life, suffering from gout and other ailments. He died at age 57 in



THE PEOPLE'S PREACHER The ministry of C. H. Spurgeon (left) touched thousands of lives, including those of the Chambers family. After hearing Spurgeon preach at the Metropolitan Tabernacle (right), Oswald Chambers truly came to Christ.

the south of France and was buried in London. Massive crowds stood along his funeral route to honor the great preacher and teacher.

ALEXANDER WHYTE (1836–1921)

Widely regarded as the preeminent Scottish preacher of his time, Alexander Whyte was born in Kirriemuir, Scotland, to a young, unmarried woman named Janet Thomson. His mother joined the Free Church of Scotland during the Disruption of 1843, when a large group of congregants left the Church of Scotland over disagreements concerning the true head of the church. The Church of Scotland gave Parliament and the British Crown the power to make clerical changes, whereas the Free Church of Scotland wanted to leave church matters to those within individual church bodies.

After apprenticing as a cobbler, Whyte became a schoolteacher in 1854, and a local pastor taught him Latin and Greek. He thus was able to attend university to study theology. He subsequently served both as minister in the Free Church of Scotland and as a professor of the New Testament. He authored numerous books and was an ecumenist, corresponding often with Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801–1890).



OSWALD'S CHURCH HOME Chambers was baptized at Rye Lane Baptist Chapel (*below*). It was here he received his first ministry opportunities.



CHRIST ALWAYS Chambers attended the church of Alexander Whyte (*above left*) during his time in Edinburgh. Whyte's ministry influenced Chambers's decision to leave art school and work toward full-time ministry instead.

FOLLOWING IN HIS FOOTSTEPS Clarence Chambers (*above center*) served in full-time ministry for Oswald's entire life. Oswald, as well as Clarence's oldest son, Arthur, did the same as their father.

While Oswald Chambers was an art student at the University of Edinburgh in the mid-1890s, he discovered the teachings of Alexander Whyte. Whyte was an erudite and charismatic preacher, and after Sunday evening services, Chambers and other young men would remain behind to hear more teachings from him on the Bible and the biographies of well-known Christians. While in Edinburgh Chambers felt called away from a career in art and toward full-time ministry, soon entering Dunoon College near Glasgow to start his theological training.

Whyte, an impassioned preacher and a constant student, was also a man dedicated to prayer. One can imagine Whyte's words sinking into a young Chambers's heart:

No prayer! No faith! No Christ in the heart. Little prayer! Little faith! Little Christ in the heart. Increasing prayer! Increasing faith! Increasing Christ in the heart! Much prayer! Much faith! Much Christ in the heart! Praying always! Faith always! Christ always!

Whyte died at the age of 84, having served in ministry into his eighties.

CLARENCE CHAMBERS (c. 1837–1925)

Clarence Chambers, Oswald's father, was born in Kent, England. He and his wife, Hannah, were Baptists and were both baptized by Charles Spurgeon in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Clarence, in fact, was one of the first students in Spurgeon's Pastors' College. Clarence and Hannah were subsequently involved in

D. L. Moody's (1837–1899) revival movement when he visited England.

By the time Oswald was born, Clarence had served as the minister of Crown Terrace Baptist Church in Aberdeen, Scotland, for 10 years, the church's longest tenured pastor. Two years later, Clarence and Hannah moved their family from Scotland to Stoke-on-Trent, England. There Clarence became an evangelist for the North Staffordshire Baptist Association. He later moved the family back to Scotland where Clarence returned to the pastorate. Then, in 1889, Clarence and the family settled in London, where he served in the Baptist Total Abstinence Association.

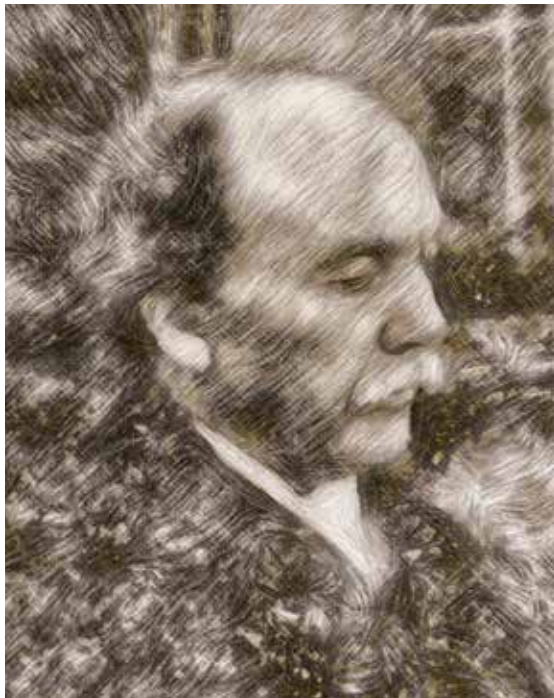
His new position in the Baptist Total Abstinence Association was as one of two traveling secretaries. The job required a challenging travel schedule of visiting churches from Scotland down to Wales and throughout England. For nearly two years, Oswald's father was away from home serving in ministry. During this time, Oswald was a teenager, and his mother served as his primary parental influence as he settled in at the family's new church home, Rye Lane Baptist Chapel in London.

Oswald and Clarence often did not see eye-to-eye on practical issues, including aspects of the ministry. Kathleen Chambers recalled of their relationship,

My father loved my grandfather very much, but of course, they disagreed, you see, very, very fundamentally and very strongly.

Ultimately Oswald came to appreciate his father and the Christian upbringing he provided. He lovingly described his family as "God's institution." Indeed Clarence influenced Oswald's decision to enter the ministry and Oswald's earliest preaching reflected Clarence's severe preaching style.

Clarence outlived his son by some eight years, dying in 1925 after a life of faithful Christian service.



J. T. "PA" BRISCOE (DATES UNKNOWN)

When the Chambers family moved to London in 1889 for Clarence Chambers's new job in the Baptist Total Abstinence Association, their new home was a short distance from Rye Lane Baptist Chapel, founded in 1818. The church had grown to 800 members after Rev. J. T. "Pa" Briscoe took the helm in December 1876.

As many as 1,000 people gathered to worship and to hear Briscoe on Sundays. David McCasland wrote that

[His] warmth melted every barrier of position and distance between him and the congregation. It was "Pa" Briscoe speaking fervent, unforgettable words of encouragement from God.

With Clarence Chambers often traveling in his new position, Oswald's mother, Hannah, soon got the family involved in Rye Lane Baptist.

Briscoe was a talented preacher, and his congregants described his sermons as "interesting and eloquent." He had a passion for evangelizing and an interest in finding young, willing workers for God's kingdom. If Briscoe saw a young person sitting in his pews week after week, he would sometimes ask in the middle of the evening service, "Why are you here instead of out doing evangelism at one of the missions?" Briscoe preferred workers in the kingdom over those filling pews to hear him preach.

A Colorado newspaper in 1886 cited Briscoe's attitude toward punishing children, revealing his heart for the Bible. Often when nineteenth-century children misbehaved, Christian parents would require them to memorize Bible verses as punishment. But Briscoe found this abhorrent, believing it made the Bible a book



FATHER FIGURE Arguably one of the most influential pastors in Chambers's life was Duncan MacGregor (*above left*). Under MacGregor's discipleship, Chambers came through his most intense spiritual struggles and grew immensely as a minister and a Christian.

PREACHER IN LAW Richard Reader Harris (*above*) was a barrister (lawyer) before he came to Christ. Focused on revival, he became a Methodist pastor and the cofounder of the Pentecostal League of Prayer.

of terror, a book children hated. Instead Briscoe desired that children would find reading the Bible a privilege and a joy. The newspaper wrote:

The bible, he thought, was the best story book in the world for boys and girls, and if children must read stories they ought to read the best stories—that is, the bible ones.

When Oswald Chambers was 16 years old, he was baptized by Reverend Briscoe and received as a member of Rye Lane Baptist Chapel.

DUNCAN MACGREGOR (1842–1913)

Highland-born Rev. Duncan MacGregor was the pastor of Dunoon Baptist Church and founder of Dunoon Bible College. Dissatisfied with the lack of robust education for his own denomination's ministers and the state of theological training in general, MacGregor started the Gospel Training College in 1893 and served as its principal. He initially ran the college out of his own home.

When Chambers arrived at Dunoon, MacGregor took the young man under his wing. They became fast friends, with MacGregor discipling him as a son in the faith. Chambers received many opportunities to grow his gifts with MacGregor's help, teaching at the college and



preaching in MacGregor's church. When MacGregor fell from his roof and nearly died, Chambers personally cared for him and kept Dunoon Bible College running.

MacGregor's mentorship left an indelible mark on Chambers, who went on to disciple young men and begin his own Bible Training College just as MacGregor had.

RICHARD READER HARRIS (1847–1909)

Richard Reader Harris was the son of the chief constable of Worcestershire, England. Reader Harris first apprenticed as a railway engineer, and excited to travel, he moved to Bolivia for a year to help establish its railway systems. When he returned to England, he began his training as a lawyer.

Reader Harris was first influenced by Charles Bradlaugh's (1833–1891) Ethical Society. Bradlaugh was an atheist who nevertheless advocated for living out Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. But merely

following Jesus's teachings without regarding him as God didn't satisfy Reader Harris, and he converted to Christianity as a young man. He married Mary Griffin Bristow in 1880.

By 1891 he and his wife had founded the Pentecostal League of Prayer, an interdenominational group dedicated to prayer and revival. He would preach most days at their London headquarters, and he used his lunch hour to walk around the city wearing a sandwich board inviting interested people to attend meetings. Reader Harris and Oswald Chambers met at Dunoon College in Scotland. They became fast friends. In 1905 Reader Harris described Chambers as "a new speaker of exceptional power." Through the Pentecostal League of Prayer, Chambers also met Juji Nakada, a Japanese evangelist, who inspired Chambers's interest in global evangelism.

In 1907 Reader Harris published the book *The Lost Tribes of Israel*, in which he rather controversially claimed that the Anglo-Saxons were descended from the 10 lost tribes of Israel.

Reader Harris suffered a serious stroke and died in 1909 at the age of 61. After Harris's death, Chambers kept contact with the widowed Mary Reader Harris and the Pentecostal League of Prayer which she then led on her own. The league purchased a building for Chambers to start his Bible Training College in London in 1911. There he trained missionaries, with 40 serving in the mission field by 1915. That same year, Chambers suspended the

THE "D. L. MOODY OF JAPAN" Juji Nakada, the first bishop of the Japan Holiness Church, evangelized Japan and helped establish a truly indigenous church presence in the country. His nickname was well-earned.

school's work to move to Egypt to minister to soldiers based there during World War I.

JUJI NAKADA (1870–1939)

Juji Nakada was born in northern Japan to a Samurai father and a Christian mother. His father died when he was a young boy, and thereafter his mother took Juji and his brother to a Methodist church. Though he attended university in Tokyo, he was more interested in judo and didn't graduate. He was married in 1889, and after being recognized as a gifted speaker and evangelist by his pastor, he was sent out as a missionary to remote parts of Japan in 1891.

After traveling and preaching, Nakada knew Japan needed more than just his preaching to spread Christ. He decided to enroll in the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 1896 to learn more as an evangelist. He soon became friends with Charles Cowman (1868–1924), a Western Union executive, and his wife, Lettie (1870–1960), author of *Streams in the Desert* and *Springs in the Valley*. Lettie wrote of Nakada:

As he earnestly sought to be filled with the HOLY SPIRIT, it was not long until his hungry heart was satisfied. Having come so definitely into the blessings, he soon felt strongly impressed that GOD would send him back to his people to preach full salvation to them.

Nakada returned to Japan in 1898 and subsequently cofounded the Oriental Mission Society and the Tokyo Bible Institute in Tokyo, funded in large part by the Cowmans, who also moved to Japan as missionaries. Nakada also served as a chaplain to troops during the Russo-Japanese War.

In 1906 Nakada traveled to England for spiritual rest, and there he befriended Oswald Chambers at the Pentecostal League of Prayer in London. Through 1906–1907, the friends traveled to the United States to teach at a Bible school in Ohio and then went on to Japan to work with Charles Cowman at the missionary society in Tokyo.

Nakada continued preaching and teaching in Japan and came again to America in 1920 to preach at Japanese holiness churches in Los Angeles. Nakada was often referred to as the "D. L. Moody of Japan," and the mission society he cofounded with the Cowmans and others still exists in 81 countries as the One Mission Society. Nakada died in 1939 at the age of 68. **GI**

Jennifer A. Boardman is a copyeditor and writer. She holds a master of theological studies from Bethel Seminary with a concentration in Christian history.

“Obedience the goal”

THE ULTIMATE LEGACY OF OSWALD AND BIDDY CHAMBERS

Amy Boucher Pye

Oswald and Biddy Chambers never sought the limelight nor wanted to keep a human enterprise going simply because it seemed to be doing well. As Oswald often said, “When God finishes something, it must be finished.” But their legacy continues to this day, more than a hundred years after Oswald died.

This couple might be surprised to hear that thousands upon thousands of people have read *My Utmost for His Highest* daily, with over 15 million copies sold and over 30 translations in different languages. They might be startled by the many books about them (with David McCasland’s deeply researched *Abandoned to God* the definitive biography) and even the release of a new Oswald Chambers Bible. But perhaps they wouldn’t marvel too much over God’s movements, as reflected in *My Utmost*: “God knows what He desires. The things that happen do not happen by chance—they happen entirely by the decree of God. God is sovereignly working out His own purposes” (August 5).

As recounted elsewhere (see pp. 24–26), *My Utmost* had an unlikely beginning. That it is so popular today goes against current publishing convention. After all it’s not a feel-good devotional boasting compelling illustrations that capture the reader’s emotions. Nor do its readers always finish it completely in their first encounter! But through it God calls people to center their focus on Jesus. How this devotional continues to bless is a God-honoring story in itself.

HELPING HANDS

Biddy continued to faithfully type, edit, and compile Oswald’s sermons and talks into books—but in the 1930s, the demand for the newly published *My Utmost* started to overwhelm her. A group of friends gathered to help: Percy Lockhart, best man at their wedding, who chaired the group; Oswald’s sister Gertrude, who had long assisted Biddy with correspondence; Charles Rae Griffin, a publishing friend and colleague; and L. R. S. Clarke, a former soldier from Egypt.

These volunteers helped to shoulder the increasing responsibilities, such as requests for new translations and editions. And when the income outweighed the expenses, they also paid a small salary to Biddy, the rent for her home and her taxes, and a gift for an annual holiday. The group knew that she wouldn’t do this herself as she didn’t want to profit from the books.



SIDE-BY-SIDE Into their short seven years of marriage, Oswald and Biddy packed a lifetime of serving God. Here they study beside one another on a beach in Egypt.

For her part, Biddy didn’t hold back from voicing concerns when the discussion became more business-oriented than ministry-focused. For instance when money arrived from foreign translation rights, she’d suggest a recipient on the missions field to receive it. And when the committee queried the number of books given away, she’d remind them that their purpose wasn’t to sell books but to help people. She kept her focus on God and his work.

In 1942 the group became formalized as the Oswald Chambers Publications Association Ltd. (OCPAL). Although any personal links have long since passed, it continues with volunteers who love and appreciate Biddy and Oswald. They act in the role of “author” to deal with publishers and distribute the royalties to Christian colleges and literature projects around the world.

TIMELESS MESSAGE; UPDATED LANGUAGE

Before *My Utmost* secured Our Daily Bread Ministries (ODBM) as its main publisher, it languished with a New York firm that left royalties unpaid. In the early 1980s, Maurice Garton, then chair of OCPAL, retrieved the rights and called Robert DeVries, publisher of Discovery House (then ODBM’s publishing wing), saying, “I have a Christmas gift for you if you want it . . . the rights to

Meeting held 15 October '26

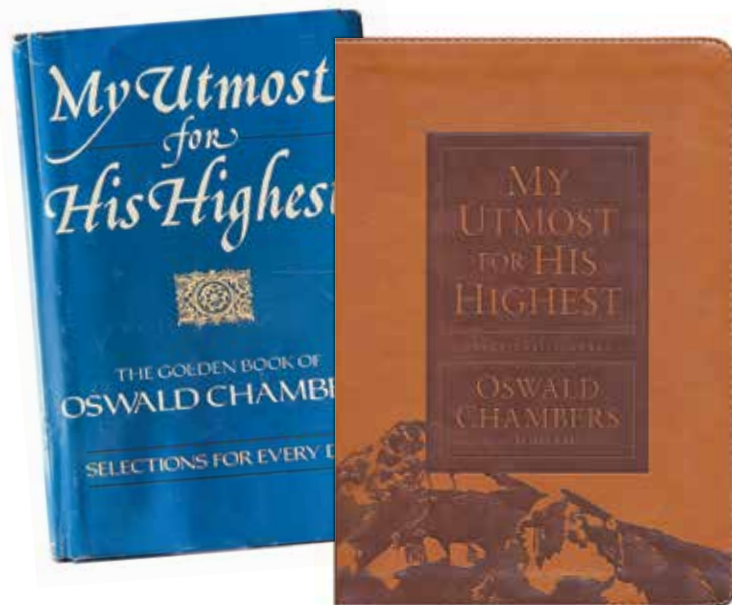
Present: Rev. D. Lambert in the Chair
 Mrs Chambers, Miss Chambers & Hobbs
 Miss Hanson & Clarke
 The meeting opened with prayer
 Mr Lockhart was absent owing to
 illness: a letter of regret was sent
 but was hoped he would make a speedy recovery.
 15th October £ 350.

Bank Balance.
 Due to £ 236.
 pay

Order placed £ 103 without Calendar
 Accts 1 Nov £ 342 from Semperis
 receiving

Stock
 what is getting low
 1 grow up into Nov - 6 more supply
 2 utmost - stock of Nov. 2/6 utmost
 will be exhausted in Dec
 5,000 to be bound

MORE OF MY UTMOST Discovery House, now Our Daily Bread Publishing, re-released and popularized *My Utmost* for American audiences. The devotional now has multiple editions (below).



THE BUSINESS OF THE BOOKS Much of the “work of the books” involved practical administration, such as keeping track of bank balances and book stock (above), but Bidly ensured OCPAL’s focus remained on serving God.

My Utmost.” After much discussion about the ministry’s publishing philosophy, a comment by Margaret DeHaan, wife of ODBM leader, Richard, may have helped its acceptance: “Of course we’re going to publish it! I’ve been reading it for many years.” A fruitful partnership emerged with a nonprofit ministry producing *My Utmost*, keeping Bidly’s missional outlook as its heartbeat.

Not long after Discovery House released *My Utmost*, bookseller James Reimann had the idea of updating the beloved devotional, noting words that an American audience had found antiquated or obscure. The updated version appeared in 1992 to grateful readers.

CONTINUING LEGACY

Several decades later, around the centenary anniversary of Oswald’s death in 2017, members of OCPAL dreamed about a new edition of *My Utmost*, one that would retain the heart of the classic edition yet connect with twenty-first-century readers. They enlisted the help of Macy Halford, a former editor at *The New Yorker* who’d been profoundly affected by Oswald’s works. She sought to combine the approach of Bidly the stenographer, who reproduced her husband’s words just as he spoke them, with Oswald’s way of polishing and editing the few works published in his lifetime. This clarity and readability shines through in the new Modern Classic version, published in 2023, which honors the context of the original sermons and lectures from which Bidly took

the excerpts. While updating the language, Halford preserved Oswald’s message and voice.

People continue to read the words of Oswald and Bidly Chambers, often finding God meeting them through “zingers” that go straight to the heart. And the royalties from *My Utmost* and the other works bless people around the world, chiefly through a collaboration with Media Associates International (MAI), a charity that provides culturally relevant training to help people produce life-transforming Christian content in their heart language.

Over the decades the royalties have funded, for instance, a new Bible translation in Burkina Faso, children’s literature in the Czech Republic, discipleship works in Colombia, materials for use in prisons around the world, and many other projects. OCPAL has also underwritten the Oswald and Bidly Chambers Author Fund with MAI and the David McCasland Research Fund at Wheaton College.

When we consider the legacy of Oswald and Bidly Chambers, we should perhaps ponder what this couple calls us to—the ways of God:

We must never confuse our dreams of success with God’s purpose for us.... To God, the question of achieving a goal is incidental.... God is training us to obey him in the present moment, and to leave all other considerations alone. We have no control over what happens after we obey; we go wrong when we start dwelling on the “afterward.” . . . If we have a further goal in view, we are not paying enough attention to the present. But if we make obedience the goal, we will find that each moment as it comes is precious (July 28). **CH**

Amy Boucher Pye is an author and OCPAL director.

OSWALD CHAMBERS PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATION MEETING NOTES, OCTOBER 15, 1926—OSWALD CHAMBERS PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATION, LTD. / WHEATON COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
 OSWALD CHAMBERS, MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST, 1989—DISCOVERY HOUSE PUBLISHERS
 OSWALD CHAMBERS, MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST DEVOTIONAL, JOURNAL: UPDATED LANGUAGE, 2018—OUR DAILY BREAD PUBLISHING

Utmost ongoing

AN INTERVIEW WITH MACY HALFORD

Macy Halford is the author of My Utmost: A Devotional Memoir and the curator and editor of the OCPAL-authorized Modern Classic Edition of My Utmost for His Highest. We spoke to her about Oswald Chambers and his famous devotional's impact, both personally and generally, over the years.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY: Tell us about how you became acquainted with Oswald Chambers and his works. How have his life and writings influenced and inspired you personally?

MACY HALFORD: I got my first copy of *My Utmost for His Highest* from my grandmother when I was 15. I started reading it daily not long after. Then I kept reading it, over and over again, for years (now decades!).

I think of *Utmost* as a refrain that calls us back, again and again, to certain essential truths. The most notable, for me, is the truth that God is in control of every aspect of our lives. That might sound like nothing original, but in Chambers's hands, it becomes an entire philosophy, or mode of living: God is in control of every minute of our lives; he has commanded us not to worry; and he expects us to abandon ourselves to his will, day by day, minute by minute. This is the discipline of faith. When we commit to living in this way—continually abandoning ourselves to his will—we are free.

Chambers wrote often on this theme, but he also put it into practice in his own life. So I suppose I find his life and work inspiring for exactly the same reason.

CH: Do you have a favorite devotional or other work by Chambers? What is it and why?

MH: I love the two volumes of *Christian Disciplines*. Like all of Chambers's published books, the essays in these volumes originated as spoken messages, but unlike most of his books, which were edited and published posthumously by Bidy, they were edited by Chambers himself. They really show what kind of thinker he was. Each essay is based in Scripture, but also incorporates bits of poetry, philosophy, hymns, and essays by popular writers.

What I love about the *Disciplines* is that they allow you to get into the Chambers groove. It isn't always



A TIME FOR WAR? This 1934 painting presents images of past warfare framing the crucified Christ. Chambers similarly acknowledged the darkness of modern wars and Christ's readiness to meet those suffering through them.

obvious in *Utmost*, which is comprised of very brief excerpts, but Chambers was a highly kinetic speaker. He never used notes or outlines when he preached; he just spoke as the Spirit moved him. I imagine this is also how he edited *Christian Disciplines*: the citations are woven in a bit wildly, and the whole thing has a flow to it that makes it feel alive.

There's a meta quality to all of Chambers's work that's most evident in the *Disciplines*. The subject of his work—abandoning oneself to God and the Spirit minute-to-minute, second-to-second—is also how his work was produced as well as an indication to the reader of what kind of work it is: a spiritual document.

CH: Many Christians are familiar with *My Utmost for His Highest* (MUFHH) but don't know much about the man behind it. Why do you think that is the case?

MH: I think this was a purposeful choice, first on Chambers's part and then, following his death, on the part of his wife. In essence their philosophy was: not me, but God



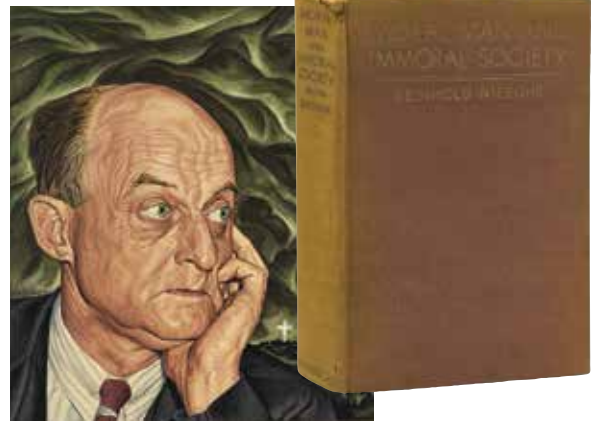
in me. Chambers often preached on John 3:30: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” He was wary of becoming what he called “an amateur providence,” someone who took the place of God in someone else’s life.

Biddy, his wife, was even more extreme in her desire to remain unknown, even abandoning her birth name, Gertrude. Her nickname “Biddy” describes how she saw herself: as a person defined by her relationship to the Person she served, not by anything in her self. She aimed to live the life “hid with Christ in God.”

Now, of course, there are multiple biographies of both Biddy and Oswald. I’m not sure what they would make of this! But when you are the author, or coauthors, of a book that has been a bestseller for decades, you’re going to have a little light shone on you. I imagine they’d say it’s fine—as long as the light ultimately shines through them onto the cross.

CH: How important was Biddy Chambers to the formulation and publication of *My Utmost for His Highest*?

MH: It would be hard to overstate the scope of Biddy’s accomplishment with *Utmost*. For a decade after Oswald’s death, she’d been producing books and pamphlets from her own shorthand notes of his sermons. But none of these early efforts had met with much success, probably because, printed verbatim, Chambers’s sermons and lectures were difficult to parse; certainly they were very, very long. Perhaps they were engaging as spoken word, delivered by Chambers (a reportedly



RISE OF REALISM With the ascent of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini to power (left), Christians faced anew the problems of suffering and evil. Christian Realism sought to answer these problems, latching onto the theo-political works of Reinhold Niebuhr (above).

charismatic speaker), but they didn’t quite work as printed books.

So what Biddy accomplished with *Utmost* is pretty amazing. She hit upon a format—concise, thematic readings, anchored by a Bible verse—that finally allowed Oswald’s message to resonate with a large audience.

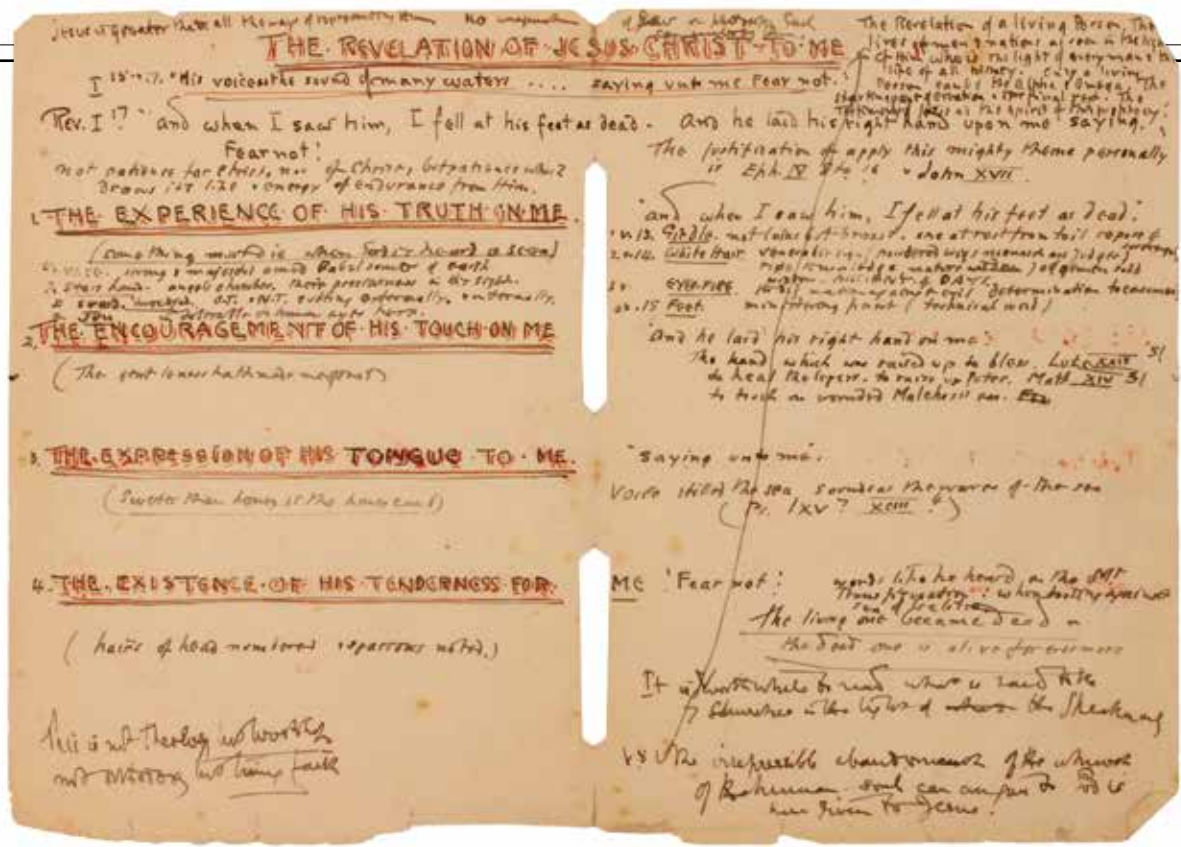
CH: What impact do you think MUFHH had on believers when it was first published?

MH: *Utmost*’s first surge in popularity came with the Second World War, in part because it was known as a war book. Some of its excerpts had been taken from sermons Chambers preached to soldiers stationed in Egypt during World War I, and these spoke to what people were experiencing in the 1940s.

In terms of content, there’s a heavy strain of realism, focused on the problems of sin and why God allows suffering, which runs throughout Chambers’s work and makes it a natural fit with the Christian Realism movement that began in earnest in the 1930s. Reinhold Niebuhr published *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in the United States in 1932; *Utmost* appeared in the United States in 1935.

There are crucial distinctions between Chambers’s work and the work that came out of that movement. Chambers was never overtly political or concerned with international relations, for instance. But I think *Utmost*’s initial impact and sudden success can be understood in view of the Realism movement’s critique of Protestant churches before World War II: they saw a weak, naive, and utopian Christianity preached that failed to address suffering. Chambers lodged the same complaints at churches in his own prewar era.

For a readership grappling with the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, realism about sin and evil was actually quite comforting. When I think of Chambers, the phrase “cold comfort” comes to mind.



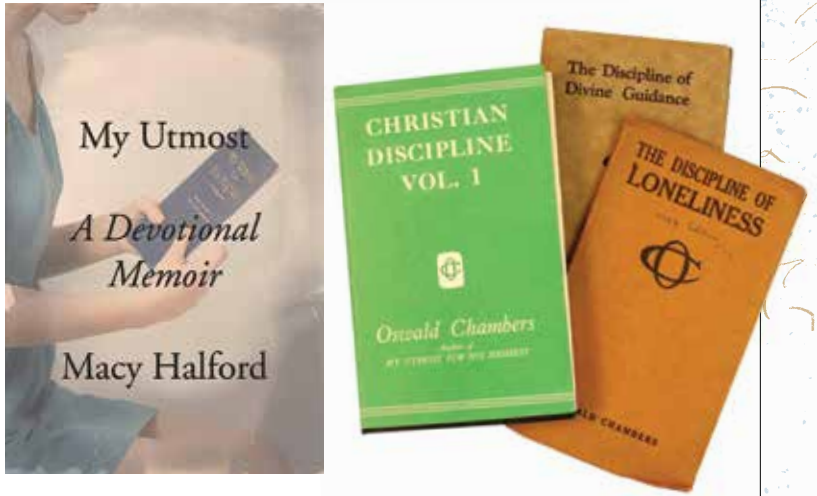
“THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST TO ME” Chambers’s sermon outline (above) displays his logical and yet personal approach to expositing Scripture.

CH: What are the critiques this devotional has received over the years? How do you respond to those critiques?

MH: It has been critiqued for its realism and for what some see as an overly pessimistic view of humanity, its emphasis on negating the self in favor of Christ-realization. Alternately, it has been criticized for emphasizing an individualistic faith, rather than a community-oriented faith (though I think this critique is simply without merit). And its message on sanctification has drawn fire. But by far the most common critique is that it’s difficult to understand.

First I’d respond that *Utmost* is only an entry point to the rest of Chambers. He was a student of philosophy, psychology, and theology, and his sermons are works of philosophy, psychology, and theology. Their full meaning can be glimpsed in *Utmost*, but not grasped entirely.

Second—and this is a defense I love to mount, and which I develop at length in my memoir—is that Chambers’s thought is difficult to follow on purpose. He took his cue from John 3:8: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” Essentially he thought that the Spirit was inherently unpredictable and that those following its dictates (those who had the Spirit dwelling inside them) were impossible to pin down or predict. Chambers never wanted to be intellectually pin-downable; his friends called him the “Apostle of the Haphazard.”



FINDING REAL FAITH In *My Utmost*, Halford weaves her faith journey with the life of Chambers and explores his works, such as *Christian Disciplines*.

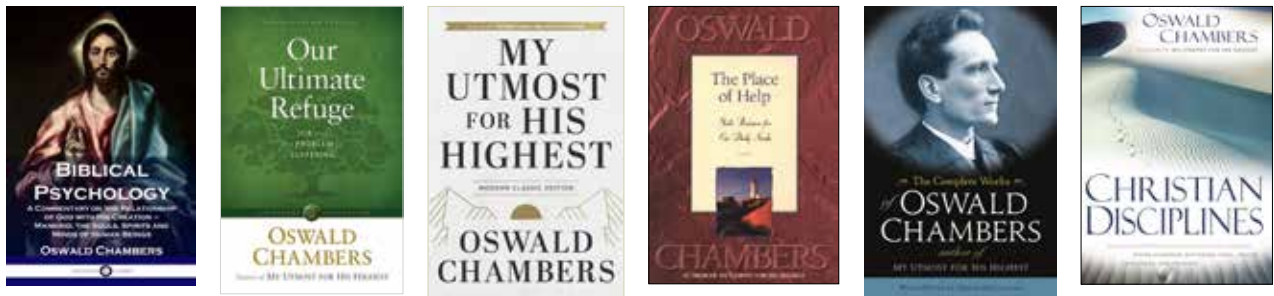
Finally I’d respond by saying that *Utmost*’s complexity has clearly worked in its favor. It gives readers a lot to think about.

CH: How do you think MUFHH can speak to the world today?

MH: *Utmost* is timeless. Even if Chambers’s initial audiences were soldiers in wartime and, before that, missionaries in training, his words speak to the struggles we all face, day to day. Chambers had a keen sense of human nature and human psychology and a deep understanding of what the Bible has to say about human nature. Any work that takes these as its themes will never be out of fashion. **CH**

Recommended resources

DISCOVER THE WORKS, LIVES, AND MINISTRIES OF OSWALD AND BIDDY CHAMBERS AND OTHERS IN THESE RESOURCES RECOMMENDED BY OUR AUTHORS AND THE CH TEAM.



BOOKS

This issue gives a small taste of the **teachings of Oswald Chambers**. His works include *Biblical Psychology* (1912); *Shade of His Hand* (1924); *My Utmost for His Highest* (1927); *The Place of Help* (1935); *Christian Disciplines* (1995); and *Our Ultimate Refuge* (formerly known as *Baffled to Fight Better*, 2020). Find these titles and more in *The Complete Works of Oswald Chambers* (2000).

For books on the **life of Oswald Chambers**, see Gertrude (Biddy) Chambers, ed., *Oswald Chambers: His Life and Work* (1933); D. W. Lambert, *Oswald Chambers: An Unbribed Soul* (1968); David McCasland, *Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God* (1998); and Paul Kent, *Oswald Chambers: A Life in Pictures* (2017).

Discover the **life of Biddy Chambers** with Michelle Ule, *Mrs. Oswald Chambers: The Woman Behind the World's Bestselling Devotional* (2017). For more on **women and work at the turn of the century**, try Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* (1930); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* (1987); and Katrina Honeyman, *Women, Gender, and Industrialization in England* (2000).

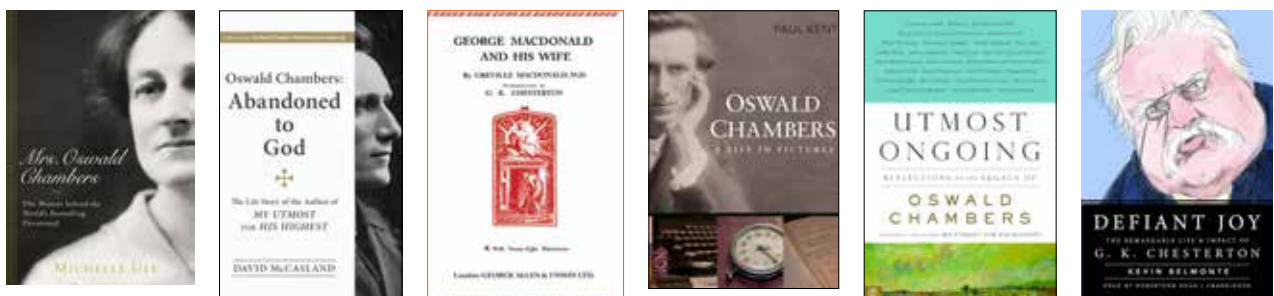
This issue discussed a number of figures who influenced Oswald Chambers. While extensive resources do not exist

for some of them or are only available online, you can read about **Alexander Whyte** in G. F. Barbour, *The Life of Alexander Whyte* (1923); **George MacDonald** in Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (1924); **Richard Reader Harris** in Mary Hooker, *Adventures of an Agnostic: Life and Letters of Reader Harris* (1959); **G. K. Chesterton** in Kevin Belmonte, *Defiant Joy: The Remarkable Life and Impact of G. K. Chesterton* (2011); and **C. H. Spurgeon** in Michael Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life* (2018).

For more on **Robert Browning**, try G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (1903), or Richard Kennedy and Donald Hair, *The Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning* (2007).

Read about **Juji Nakada** in Isamu Yoneda, *Biography of Juji Nakada* (1959). Learn more about the **Oriental Missionary Society** he cofounded in Esther and Edward Erny, *No Guarantee but God: The Story of the Founders of the Oriental Missionary Society* (1969); and Robert Wood, *In These Mortal Hands* (1983).

Learn more about the **Holiness and Pentecostal movements** that influenced Chambers in Martin Wells Knapp, *Lightning Bolts from Pentecostal Skies* (1898); Charles Stalker, *Twice Around the World with the Holy Ghost* (1906); William Kostlevy, *Holy Jumpers: Evangelicals and Radicals in Progressive*



Era America (2010); and David Bundy, Geordan Hammond, and David Sang-Ehil Han, eds., *Holiness and Pentecostal Movements: Intertwined Pasts, Presents, and Futures* (2023).

For more about Chambers's **Bible Training College**, read Katherine Ashe, *The Book of the College* (1915). For **God's Bible School**, start with Raymond Lloyd Day, *A History of God's Bible School in Cincinnati, 1900–1949* (1949); and Wallace Thornton Jr., *When the Fire Fell: Martin Wells Knapp's Vision of Pentecost and the Beginnings of God's Bible School* (2014).

You may find helpful context on the **Middle Eastern theater of World War I** with C. E. W. Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918* (1929); Edward Erickson, *Gallipoli and the Middle East 1914–1918* (2014); Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East* (2014); and Rob Johnson, *The Great War and the Middle East* (2016). You can also dig deeper on the YMCA during the war with James Barrett, *The War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt* (1919); Frederick Harris, *Service with Fighting Men: An Account of the Work of the American Y.M.C.A.s in the World War* (1922), and Clyde Binfield, *George Williams and the Y.M.C.A.* (1988). For **missionaries in North Africa** contemporary to Chambers, read Christy Wilson, *Flaming Prophet: The Story of Samuel Zwemer* (1970) and Miriam Rockness, *A Passion for the Impossible: The Life of Lilius Trotter* (1999).

Finally, several of this issue's authors have also contributed to *Utmost Ongoing* (2017), a book of essays reflecting on *My Utmost for His Highest*.

PAST CH ISSUES



These past issues of *Christian History* relate to some of this issue's content. Read online or purchase available hard copies:

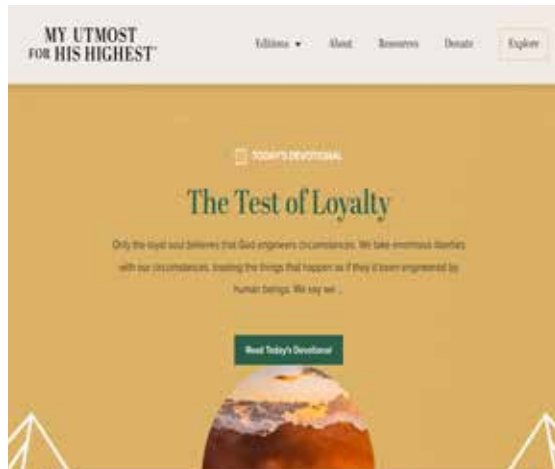
- 25: *Dwight L. Moody*
- 26: *William and Catherine Booth*
- 29: *Charles Spurgeon*
- 75: *G. K. Chesterton*
- 82: *Phoebe Palmer and the Holiness Movement*
- 86: *George MacDonald*
- 113: *Seven Literary Sages*
- 121: *Faith in the Foxholes*

VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO



Relevant videos include *C. H. Spurgeon: The People's Preacher*; *Many Beautiful Things: The Life and Vision of Lilius Trotter*; *Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*; *The Fantasy Makers: Tolkien, Lewis, and MacDonald*; and *World War I Military Chaplains*. Some of these titles are only available via digital download; you may access more content by streaming on Redeem TV.

WEBSITES



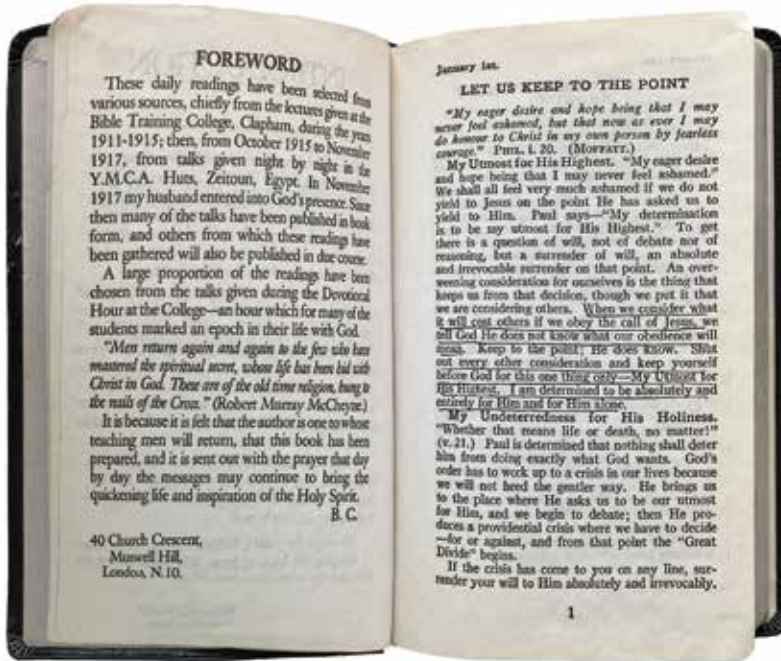
Websites dedicated to the life and ministry of Oswald Chambers include *My Utmost for His Highest* where you can find many resources on Chambers as well as his individual and collected works. Michelle Ule writes often about Biddy and Oswald at her website, MichelleUle.com.

As always many public-domain primary source documents referenced in this issue can be found at the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* and at *Gutenberg.org* (you will also find older secondary sources at Gutenberg). The *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* can tell you more about what was happening in the art world during Chambers's lifetime. Have a look at the *Internet Modern Sourcebook*, especially the sections on nineteenth-century Britain and World War I, as well as *The Victorian Web*.

Some of the groups dedicated to continuing the movements and legacies of people in this issue include *The Browning Society*, *One Mission Society* (the Oriental Missionary Society in Chambers's day), the YMCA, and *Dunoon Bible College*. [CH](https://www.dunoonbiblecollege.org/)

Questions for reflection

The lives and legacies of Oswald and Biddy Chambers



NO OC WITHOUT BC Biddy presciently wrote in her foreword to *My Utmost* that Oswald was an author “to whose teaching men will return.” Without her there would be no teaching to return to, but Biddy was never interested in recognition. Here she credits herself simply as “B.C.”

Discuss these questions with a group or use for personal reflection.

1. How much did you know about Oswald Chambers before reading this issue? What new details did you learn about him?
2. Identify spiritual influences in Chambers’s early life (pp. 6–9). How did they encourage him to pursue ministry?
3. How did Chambers’s time with the League of Prayer and with God’s Bible School (p. 10) inform his theology and writings?
4. Why did Chambers choose to leave the art world behind (pp. 11–13)? How do you think his artistic and poetic abilities came out in his preaching and teaching?
5. What did you learn about Biddy Chambers (pp. 14–16)? How did her work affect Chambers and those he served?
6. How did the BTC live on in Chambers’s YMCA camp in Zeitoun (p. 17)? What was unique about Biddy’s ministry there?

7. How did Chambers’s experiences in Dunoon prepare him for World War I (pp. 18–20)? What can we learn from his wartime ministry, both in times of peace and war?

8. Describe Biddy’s “work of the books” (pp. 24–26). What impact did this calling have on others during her lifetime? Why do you think she chose anonymity in her ministry?

9. Consider the excerpts from *Baffled to Fight Better / Our Ultimate Refuge* (p. 21) and *My Utmost for His Highest* (p. 27). Which excerpts stuck with you and why?

10. What was the white blouse revolution (pp. 28–30)? How did the changing world of women’s work allow Biddy to become a publishing phenomenon?

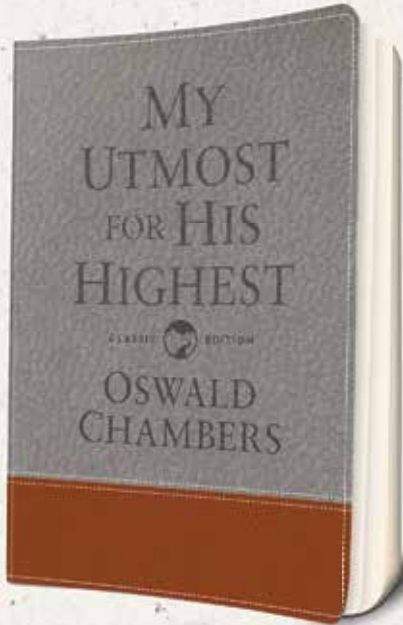
11. What did David McCasland’s search for Oswald Chambers (pp. 31–32) reveal about Chambers that readers of *My Utmost for His Highest* had not known before?

12. Who were the figures included in “Faithful legacies” (pp. 33–36)? Which preacher interested you the most and why? Who do you think had the most influence on Chambers’s spiritual development?

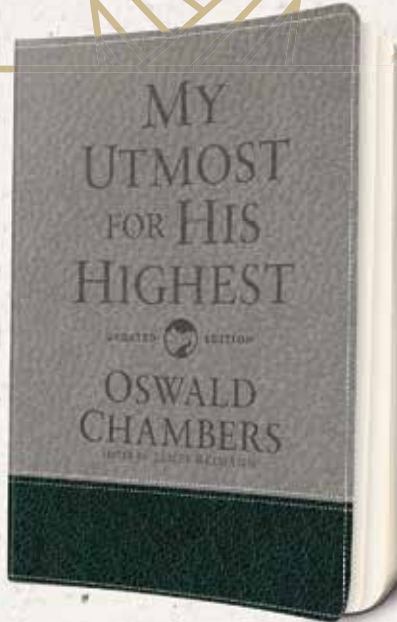
13. How did the legacy of Oswald and Biddy Chambers extend beyond them (pp. 37–38)? Why do you think Oswald’s works had such an extensive reach?

14. In *CH*’s interview with Macy Halford (pp. 39–41), we looked at some critiques of *My Utmost for His Highest*. Do you agree with the critiques? Why or why not? **CH**

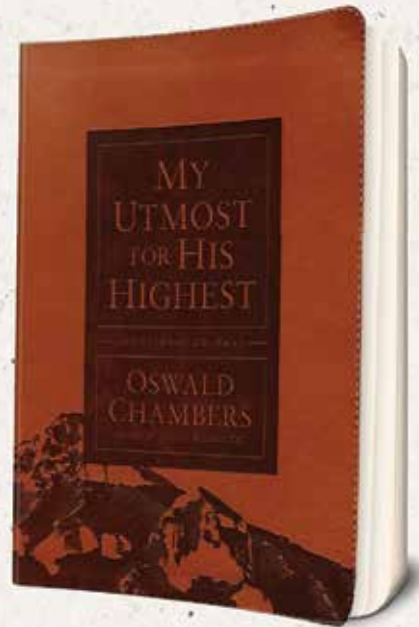
The Best-Selling and Most Beloved Devotional Book of All Time!



**My Utmost for His Highest,
Classic Language
Gift Edition**
ISBN 9781627078801



**My Utmost for His Highest,
Updated Language
Gift Edition**
ISBN 9781627078818



**My Utmost for His Highest
Updated Language
Devotional Journal**
ISBN 9781627077347

These specially designed gift editions of
My Utmost for His Highest present that beloved wisdom
in leatherlike covers—perfect for gift giving.



Order yours
today



**Our Daily Bread
Publishing™**



Subscriber #

Source Code

Your roots run deep

Explore how far they go

Discover the roots of your
faith with *Christian History*
magazine, one story at a time

Each issue of *Christian History* connects you to your past—the 2,000-year story of the church—through vivid images, accessible storytelling, and careful research you can trust. For more than 40 years, *Christian History* has been telling the story of the church for the people of the church, one topic at a time. Discover just how deep your roots run today!

Enjoy a FREE one-year subscription with code CH154.*



*CH is made possible by generous donations from our readers. Free one-year subscriptions available in U.S. only; a free sample issue can be sent to all other international destinations.

ChristianHistoryMagazine.org

1-(800) 468-0458