

LEGACY OF A MOTHER'S FAITH

GOD'S PROTECTION IN WW2 GERMANY DREW IRMA TO CHRIST



By Margot Bass and Irma Pressley

Irma Behm's journey to faith in Jesus Christ started with her mother's life of prayer and unwavering trust in God during World War II in Germany. Now 84, Irma is passing on that living faith to her own family and a generation of younger women at Calvary Chapel South Jersey.

And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You. PSALM 9:10 NASB

In 1930, Max and Bertha Brustle, Germans living in the United States, accepted Jesus as their Savior at a church in Brooklyn, NY. In 1933, Bertha returned to care for her sick mother in Germany, where Irma was born. Max followed later, was drafted into the German army, and sent to the Russian Front in 1941.

Young Irma watched her mother's faith deepen despite their uncertain future. "She told us we had a heavenly Father who never slumbered or slept and would always watch over us," Irma recalled fondly. "I would see her on her knees praying, tears streaming down her face, as she lifted her burdens to her Savior."

Their mother read Scripture to the children daily. Irma recollected, "At 12 years old, I had already read through the Bible and memorized much Scripture because of my mother's love and deep respect for God's Word." Irma believed the Bible but didn't yet realize that she needed to make Jesus the Lord of her life. "I know now that my mother's witness was preparing me for when she would be gone and I would receive Him for myself," Irma added.

Irma and her siblings often slept in the same bedroom in their clothes, ready to leave at a moment's notice to escape falling bombs. Some nights they slept in bomb shelters. But Irma said they were rarely afraid because they saw their mother's faith. "God was real to her, and she knew He could be trusted

with our lives, so we children believed also." Her mother would pray with them for God's protection; Irma recalled, "In all those times of peril, we children slept in peace and never once did our town get shelled!"

For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. 2 TIMOTHY 1:12b

Another boost to young Irma's faith was her mother's steadfast hope in God after her sixth child's birth necessitated emergency surgery. Doctors told Bertha to prepare for her death; instead, God healed her. Irma never forgot the miracle of her mother's healing: "This gave me incredible faith and

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hope for my own family. Many times, I have prayed with my husband, children, and grandchildren and watched God intervene miraculously in their lives."

Irma recalled another act of God's divine protection during the War. In 1943, her father Max returned home. The family struggled to find food and endure intense Allied bombing, so Max built a covered wagon to escape. When it was time to leave town, they only had two cows to pull the wagon, and one of them was frenzied. Irma recounted, "Our escape that night was only from the hand of God. That crazy, panicky cow ended our trek by running into a ditch, pulling us under a large tree that hid us from sight of the planes above." After the war, the family returned safely home.

However, Irma's mother died of cancer in 1948. Dying, she asked Irma, 14, to sing a hymn about heaven with her. "With a broken heart, I tried my best to give her this last request, but I could not sing with joy," Irma said. Heartbroken and lonely, she left her beloved homeland and moved to America to live with relatives in 1949. "My once-tender heart began to grow bitter and cold," Irma admitted.

But God reached out to her through her Aunt Rose, a Christian. "In time, her words about Jesus began to reach the deepest parts of my heart, and I began to remember the words and example of my mother," Irma said. When Irma was 18, her aunt urged her to ask Christ to reveal Himself to her.

"I called out to Jesus in her home. He came to me; and my heart was filled with comfort, healing, and the joy of Christ. I had finally met my mother's closest friend, Jesus, for myself."

Irma married American soldier Joseph Behm, a strong believer, in November 1953. Married for 58 years, they had five children—two now in full-time ministry. "We prayed together about our problems and really grew in the Lord. God has been so faithful through

my life and in all the storms I have experienced. His Word teaches us that this world is full of trouble, but He is always there."

The Behms held nightly devotions, often including neighbors. They named their first daughter after her mother; Irma Pressley is now the pastor's wife at CC South Jersey. Irma Pressley stated, "That's how Scripture became so real to us. From the time I was a very small child, my mother taught me to believe God's promises and to pray, pray, pray. She daily chooses to believe God for the impossible as she continues in her fervent prayer life." Her mother often attends CC South Jersey, where her testimony "never fails to encourage the [CC] ladies in prayer, in their roles as mothers, and in hopeless situations," said Irma Pressley.