

A Conversation Across 125 Years



CHARACTERS:

MILDRED: Mrs. Mildred Bennett Golden, portrayed as she was in the early 1900s, launching the Week of Prayer for State Missions.

ABBY: A present-day Tennessee Baptist woman, involved in missions giving at her church.
(Note: The director may rename this character to fit the presenter.)

STAGING NOTE: Two simple areas on the platform: a small writing table with an oil lamp, stationery, and string on one side (MILDRED's space); a stool or chair with a phone or tablet on the other (ABBY's space). The two women do not initially see each other. As the dialogue progresses, they may turn toward one another, though it is not necessary for them to physically interact - the effect should feel like two moments in time, laid side by side, discovering they can hear each other. Presenters should adapt the language to their own comfort, as with the original monologue. You do not have to follow the script word for word; just rehearse and make it your own!

ABBY: Four million people in this state don't know Jesus. Four million. I saw that number again this morning - same as always - and I just sat there wondering if anybody actually reads these prayer calendar emails I send out.

MILDRED: Four million.

ABBY: I'm sorry - who -

MILDRED: Forgive me. I didn't mean to intrude. I was only...I've been sitting here thinking about the same number. Though in my day, it wasn't four million. It was closer to a million and a half, I believe, when my husband first brought the reports home from the convention. Tennessee. 1902, if the calendar on my wall is to be trusted. I'm Mildred Golden. Mrs. Golden, if you'd rather.

ABBY: Golden - like the Golden Offering?

MILDRED: Well, they hadn't named it after us yet in 1902. That came later - 1943, when I was gray-headed, and my shoes had gotten a good deal more sensible. But yes. That offering.

ABBY: I send out emails for that offering every fall. I've probably typed your name a hundred times and never once pictured you sitting at a table like this.

MILDRED: What did you picture?

ABBY: Honestly? A name. A line on a bulletin.

MILDRED: That's fair. I was a line on a bulletin too, once, before I was anything else. Tell me - what were you doing just now, before I interrupted you?

ABBY: Wondering if it's worth it. The emails, the announcements, the little giving envelopes in the bulletin. Our church is small. What we send in would hardly show up in a total.

MILDRED: I wrote that thought myself, hundreds of times, though I never sent it as a letter. Would you like to know what I was doing the night our very first offering went out?

ABBY: Please

MILDRED: Counting string. My husband - Dr. Golden - insisted every inch be used, not wasted, tying up the little bundles of prayer material we were mailing to twelve hundred churches. We had no fine office, you understand. Just our dining room table, and our neighbors who came in to help fold paper. And when it was all totaled at the end - the very first Week of Prayer, the very first offering -

ABBY: How much?

MILDRED: Eight hundred dollars.

ABBY: That's it?

MILDRED: That's it. I won't pretend we weren't disappointed. We had hoped for so much more. But we did not let ourselves be discouraged - because it was never really about the eight hundred dollars. It was about whether Tennessee Baptists, once they truly understood the need, would respond at all. And two years later, my husband stood before the Convention and reported that the gifts to state missions had more than doubled. I wrote hundreds of letters, by hand, to pastors just like the one at your church, asking them to organize a missions society - women praying, giving, promoting the work - in congregations no bigger than a large parlor. I never knew, writing those letters, which one would matter. I only knew that if I didn't write it, no letter went at all.

ABBY: We don't write letters anymore. We do a group text or email.

MILDRED: A...group text? Email?

ABBY: It's - never mind. It's a letter. It just goes faster, and I don't have to lick anything.

MILDRED: Well, progress! I'd have given a great deal for something that went faster than the mail in 1902. But tell me this - when your, what did you say...group text goes out, does anyone answer it whom you didn't expect?

ABBY: Actually - yes. Last year, a woman who almost never comes to church sent forty dollars. Just...out of nowhere. Said she'd been reading about the need and it stuck with her.

MILDRED: There it is.

ABBY: There's what?

MILDRED: The whole reason for the Week of Prayer. It was never a fundraising campaign, not really - though the funds mattered, and matter still. It was meant to be a week where the truth simply gets told, plainly, to people who hadn't stopped to hear it. I always believed that if Tennessee Baptists truly understood - not the economics of it, but the spiritual need in the state, the towns without a single Baptist witness - they would respond. Your forty dollars from a woman who barely comes to church - that's a hundred and twenty-five years of the exact same purpose.

ABBY: I don't know why that gets me. It's forty dollars.

MILDRED: It was eight hundred dollars once, and people called that small too. May I ask you something?

ABBY: Of course.

MILDRED: Is there still a Baptist church in every village? In every town? That was our dream, Dr. Golden's and mine. We used to speak of it as children speak of Christmas. A church in every village, every town in Tennessee.

ABBY: Not everywhere. There are different kinds of gaps now - some are country towns that dried up, and some are whole neighborhoods in cities that grew too fast for us to keep up. There is still poverty and still wrecked families, but, you know, we've seen in the videos how God uses these things to bring people to Jesus.

MILDRED: Videos? I'm not familiar with that, but I have hundreds of these letters left to address tonight. I expect you have your own version of that waiting for you.

ABBY: Something like that.

MILDRED: Then let me leave you with the only thing I really know, after all these years - though I suppose I didn't know it yet in 1902; I only hoped it. It is this: you cannot see from your dining room table whose hands the B-mail will land in.

ABBY: That's E-mail.

MILDRED: *(Chuckling)* Email. Whatever form it takes, Abby - keep sending the emails.

(Optional Ending)
ABBY: Mildred, before we go, let me show you one story - maybe you'll understand video a little better. *(Show a story video from this year's promotional materials)*