Aimee Semple McPherson was a woman of intense passion, creativity and energy. She led an incredible life that exemplified God’s miraculous mercy. She sparked revival, established a major evangelical center in Los Angeles, and changed the lives of countless individuals.

Born Aimee Elizabeth Kennedy, she grew up in a Christian home in Ontario, Canada, but began to feel conflicted about faith as a teenager. Then, at age 17, she attended a revival led by Robert Semple. After three days of fierce uncertainty, Aimee asked the Lord to save her.

A year later, she married Robert, and they soon set sail for China as missionaries. Tragically, shortly after the newlyweds arrived in China, they both contracted malaria. Robert died as a result, leaving young Aimee both pregnant and penniless in a foreign land.

Aimee later married Harold McPherson, a Christian businessman, and they had a son, Rolf Kennedy McPherson. Ultimately, though, while she and Harold were on an evangelistic campaign in Key West, Fla., their marriage came to end. Sadly, Aimee’s third marriage to David Hutton also ended in heartbreak. He filed for divorce while Aimee was in Europe recuperating from illness. Though a staunch supporter of family values, heartbreak and pain were a reality for Aimee’s marriages.

Meanwhile, her love for God and dependency on His grace continued to grow, as did her miraculous ministry. During revivals and Spirit-led services she hosted across the United States, people were regularly healed by God from illnesses and infirmity. The American Medical Association even launched an investigation in 1921 in response to reports of astonishing physical healings and found that they were “genuine, beneficial and wonderful.”

Famously refusing to bow to the social injustices of her day, Aimee preached to everyone: men and women, rich and poor, black and white, German and Japanese. All were welcome at her events.

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Aimee rented large auditoriums to accommodate vast crowds. At one event in San Diego, the National Guard had to be called in to control a crowd of more than 30,000. People would wait in line for hours, even overnight, to hear “Sister McPherson” (now affectionately referred to as “Sister Aimee”) preach and pray.

In 1923, Aimee founded the first Foursquare church, Angelus Temple, in Los Angeles. There, she held services presented in five languages, encouraged ‘round-the-clock prayer, and created “illustrated sermons” to bring the gospel to life through the arts near the city’s budding Hollywood scene. She opened a commissary and fed more than 1.5 million people during the Great Depression. She explored new technologies and became the first woman to preach a sermon over the radio, which reached all the way to the Cape Verde islands off Africa’s coast.

However, as Aimee’s reputation grew so did the threats. In 1926, she was kidnapped and held for ransom. After she escaped from the tiny shack in Mexico where she was being held captive, the media cast it as a ploy to cover up an affair. A district attorney tried to indict Aimee for conspiracy, but admitted that he couldn’t produce a single witness to testify against her. Aimee’s public image took a beating but, as always, she continued to work hard to bring the gospel to those who needed to hear it.

During her ongoing ministry, many more thousands of people found healing and salvation in Jesus through her tireless work. Under Aimee’s direction, the first Foursquare Bible institute (known today as Life Pacific College) opened to train men and women alike and send them out as ministers. Church plants began to take root, and congregations multiplied. Missionaries were sent out worldwide to reach people who had never before heard about Jesus. Her ministry led to such growth that in 1927, after 100 Foursquare churches had been established, steps were taken to incorporate what would become the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (ICFG) denomination.

Meanwhile, evangelism remained an integral part of Aimee’s life. She relied on the Holy Spirit to maintain her gospel-centered message, but also to reveal new methods to reach people who needed Jesus’s restoration through repentance.

While ministering in Mexico in 1943, Aimee contracted an aggressive bacillus in her intestinal tract. She maintained a vigorous schedule, and she took tablets to help her sleep.

After she led a revival service in Oakland, Calif., on Sept. 27, 1944, a tube running to her kidneys ruptured, allowing the tablets’ medication to directly enter her system. Aimee Semple McPherson died as a result.

But the movement that she started survived. Known today as The Foursquare Church, it continues her powerful legacy of passionate evangelism and worldwide missions in the name of Jesus Christ—Savior, Baptist With the Holy Spirit, Healer and Soon-Coming King.

For more information about Aimee Semple McPherson or The Foursquare Church, visit foursquare.org.