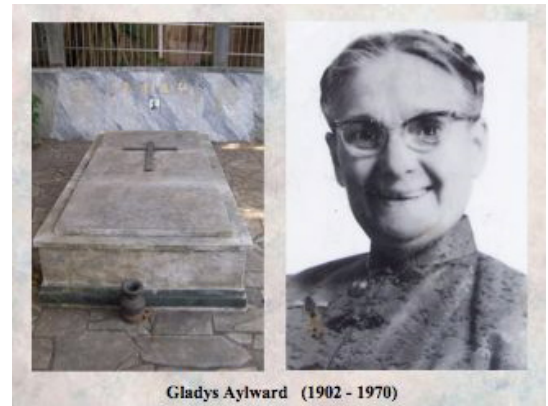


Gladys Aylward (1902 - 1970) *Missionary to China*

Gladys Aylward stands out as an example of how God can use someone of meager means and abilities when they give themselves over to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Born into a working class family in Edmonton, London on February 24, 1902. Daughter of a mailman and oldest of two sisters and 1 brother. Unlike many famous Christians in history, she didn't excel scholastically or set her self apart based on her exhaustive knowledge of the Bible and the classic languages, rather her early life was marked with a propensity for play acting and a willingness to serve. God prepares those He calls for the roles they are to play and these propensities would come to be contributing factors in her success as God put them to good use.



Though raised in the Anglican Church, she was not a particularly religious person in her early years and her "adequate" education and working class social position left her with few options. She became a parlor maid at the age of only 14. Her call to missions came about when she attended a revival at when she was 18 in which the preacher expounded on giving ones life over to the service of the Lord. The message struck a cord in her heart and an awakening desire to serve on the missionary field began to blossom. Having spent the last four years serving others surely gave her a unique insight to a servant's heart. She gave her life to Christ willing to be used in whatever way He sought fit. Some sources indicate that her decision to pursue a missionary assignment to China may have come about from having read a magazine article about China, a nation where millions of people had never heard the Gospel.

She continued her work as a parlor maid with little chance to realize her calling. In her mid-twenties, she applied and was given a probationary position with the China Inland Mission Center in London but this endeavor didn't bear fruit. At the age of 26 her probation ended in failure. She had fallen short of their expectations and was rejected for service as a missionary to China. However, no one can frustrate the will of God or reject for service those who are called of God "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Rom. 11:29)

Determined to follow God by whatever means available, she continued to work and to save her money and after four years, at the age of 30, her opportunity came in the person of an aging missionary, Mrs. Jeannie Lawson, who was looking for a young assistant to carry on her work. Gladys was accepted but Mrs. Lawson didn't have the means to assist her with the passage to China. Adding to the difficulties, save as she might, Gladys lacked the funds to travel by ship, the preferred method of travel to distant lands. So she put her affairs in order and with only her passport, her Bible, her tickets, and two pounds ninepence, set off for a perilous, overland journey to the inland city of Yangchen, in the mountainous province of Shansi, a little south of Peking, an area where few Europeans visited and the people didn't trust foreigners.

The two women set about planing the best way to attract an audience to hear the message of Jesus. Knowing that the city in which they lived was an overnight stop for mule caravans and that the building in which they lived has once been an Inn, they determined to do some repairs and restore its original purpose offering food and care for the mules along with hospitality, food, and a warm bed for the drivers at a fair price. It is reported that Gladys would run out and grab the halter of the lead mule and lead it into their courtyard. The other mules followed and the drivers went along for the ride.

In the evenings after serving a meal and before bed, the women would gather their guests and tell them stories about a man named Jesus. In this fashion, the Gospel message began to be proclaimed, not only at their Inn but by the drivers who carried the stories with them to other stops along their journey. It also served to open Gladys' mind to the new challenge of learning the language as she sat and listened to these stories, participating as she was able. She spent many hours each day learning to communicate in the vernacular of the locals until she finally was competent, something the China Inland Mission Center thought beyond her ability.

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Shortly after this, her mentor, Mrs. Lawson fell and was seriously injured leading to her death a few days later. Gladys, along with the Chinese cook, who was a Christian, determined to continue the work. Fluent in the language, she began to share the Gospel in surrounding villages and through circumstance, became aware of the many unwanted children. Her missionary work turned in a different direction, care for these unwanted little ones. But, her care wasn't limited to children only. During those years China was under attack by Japan and many Chinese soldiers were wounded. So she added their numbers to those for whom she provided succor. Her Inn became a refuge for 20 orphans and as many as 30 to 40 injured soldiers at a time.

The war intensified and her children charges now numbered around 100. She had become a citizen of China in 1936 and her activities in support of the local populace, including a bit of spying on the Japanese made it unsafe to remain in Yangchen. Being warned of a bounty for her capture, dead or alive, by Colonel Linnan a member of the local Chinese resistance, she gathered up the children and narrowly escaped the city.

Unable to use roads or transportation, she was forced to lead her children, on foot, over the mountains to the safer province of Sian some 100 miles distant. The trek took twenty-seven days in which they had to endure the elements and many hardships. She herself had become ill en route and when they finally arrived safely, she collapsed. The doctors were amazed by the feat as she was suffering from typhus, pneumonia, a relapsing fever, malnutrition, and supreme exhaustion.

She regained some strength but never recovered totally from her illness yet this didn't stop her from continuing her ministry, now located in Sian. She started a church and once more she was sharing the Gospel in the villages, prisons, and among the sick and helpless. Her ministry continued until 1947 when the new Communist regime took control. Gladys and other missionaries had to leave China and her choice of destination was decided because she had a burden for the spiritual condition of her native England.

She wrote: "England, seemingly so prosperous while other countries passed through terrible suffering at the hands of Communist domination, had forgotten what was all important - the realization that God mattered in the life of a nation no less than in that of an individual."

In 1958, after ten years in England, she left for Taiwan and started another orphanage. She remained here for the rest of her life serving God by serving His children. She died January 3rd, 1970.

She was known as 'Ai-weh-deh', (Virtuous One) by the Chinese who grew to love this foreigner they initially distrusted. She lived her life before God and for God and is an example of what He can accomplish using the least of us.

..... Gleaned from "Theology Through Technology"