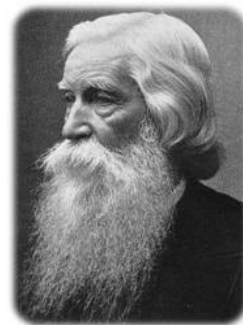


Real Life Stories

John G. Paton - Missionary to the South Sea Islands

John Gibson Paton (better known as John G. Paton) was born on 24 May 1824, near Dumfries in Scotland. The eldest in a family of eleven children, he worked with his father after leaving school at the age of twelve. However, having an appetite to learn, John worked extremely hard at several jobs to finance and further his own education.



The biggest spiritual influence in his life came from his father. He was a godly man who constantly prayed that God would save his children and then use them in His service. God heard his prayers, and three of his children grew up to become ministers of the gospel. It was John's father who led him to Christ at a young age.

As a young man John felt called by God to serve as a missionary. The command of Matthew 28:19-20 weighed heavy upon his heart: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." In his early twenties John determined to prepare himself for the mission field. He went to Glasgow, where he studied at the university and at the Reformed Presbyterian Bible College. He would eventually spend ten years in Glasgow, working as a city missionary, visiting the needy, and engaging in tract distribution.

It was while labouring in Glasgow that John's heart was powerfully stirred about foreign missionary work through an advertisement in his own church. After much prayer he then offered himself for this position. However, although the secretary of the Heathen Missions Committee cried for joy, not everyone was pleased at his decision. One respected elder exclaimed, "You will be eaten by cannibals!" John responded:

Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.

After being ordained by the Reformed Presbyterian Church on 23 March 1858, John G. Paton married Mary Ann Robson on 2 April 1858. Fourteen days later they set sail for the South Sea Islands. One of their first tasks was to establish a mission station in Tanna, an island west of Australia, which was then home to a savage cannibal people. During this time John wrote:

On beholding these natives in their paint and nakedness and misery, my heart was as full of horror as of pity. Had I given up my much-beloved work and my dear people in Glasgow, with so many delightful associates, to consecrate my life to these degraded creatures? Was it possible to teach them right and wrong, to Christianize or even to civilize them? But that was only a passing feeling. I soon got as deeply interested in them, and all that tended to advance them, and to lead them to the knowledge of Jesus, as ever I had been in my work in Glasgow.

On 12 February 1859, John and Mary had a son. However, on 3 March, Mary died of a sudden attack of pneumonia and was followed in death by their son on 20 March. Although brokenhearted, John, for the next four years, continued to labour in Tanna. His life was continually under threat, either from sickness or savages, and he was eventually forced to flee the island in 1862.

After returning to Scotland to plead the cause for missions, John married Margaret Whitecross in 1864. Two years after marrying they set out for Aniwa, a small island near Tanna. God gave them favour with the people, and over the next fifteen years the entire island of Aniwa was turned to Christ. Years later John wrote, "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God Aniwa now worships at the Saviour's feet."

As well as bringing the gospel to these unreached people, the Patons also built orphanages, opened schools, ministered to the sick, taught many practical skills, and translated the Bible. Despite great success on the mission

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field, John and Margaret suffered great personal loss. Out of their two daughters and eight sons, one daughter and three sons died at a very young age. Nevertheless, they laboured on unceasingly to reach the lost for Christ.

On 28 January 1907 John Gibson Paton went to be with the Lord. The labours of this godly missionary remind us of the mighty transforming power of the gospel. As he preached Christ, savages became saints, cannibals became Christians, and satanic witchcraft was replaced with spiritual worship. His own words testify to the tremendous Christ-like love he possessed for perishing souls:

If God gave me back my life to be lived over again, I would without one quiver of hesitation lay it on the altar to Christ, that He might use it as before in similar ministries of love, especially amongst those who have never yet heard the Name of Jesus.

. . . . Gleaned from LTBS

