

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

# 285

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with a famous missionary from a previous generation. Her name is Gladys May Aylward. In particular, we will focus on how she served God "alone". Of course, as a devout Christian, she was never really alone. Jesus is always with those who believe in Him. But from the human standpoint, she labored alone for most of her life. Gladys was born Feb. 24, 1902, and passed away Jan. 3, 1970. She was born in Britain and went as a missionary to China. The story of her amazing life was published in 1957 in the book *The Small Woman*, by Alan Burgess. (She was only 4'10" tall) It was then condensed in the *Reader's Digest* and made into a movie in 1958. The movie was called *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, starring Ingrid Bergman. We honor Gladys Aylward for it is a godly thing to honor anyone who dedicates their life to the cause of Christ (Phil. 2:29).

Gladys was one of 3 children born to a working class family in England. At the age of 18 she had her first spiritual encounter while attending an evangelical meeting. Someone simply grabbed her hand and told her that "God wanted her". This simple act made a profound and lasting impression on her mind. Some 10 years later it was still haunting her when she read an article about people in China who had never heard of Jesus. Remembering that "God wanted her", she decided to go to China as a missionary. Remember! **"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Prov. 25:11).**

So Gladys enrolled in a 3 month course sponsored by the China Inland Mission. She did not do well learning Chinese, however, got discouraged and dropped out. Thankfully, man's approval is not necessary to be used by God. She took a job working as a lowly housemaid and despaired that her dream of being a missionary would never come true. One day, discouraged and desperate, she placed a few coins on her Bible and cried out to God for help. Providentially, at that very moment, someone knocked on her door and told her that she was wanted downstairs. God had immediately answered her prayer for her mistress knew of her dreams, called her downstairs, and volunteered to pay the fare for her trip to China.

Traveling by ship, of course, was the safest and best way to get to China. Gladys, however, deemed it far too expensive. So she dared to travel "alone" across the 11 time zones of Russia via the Trans-Siberian-Railway. At this time China and Russia were in a state of undeclared war which made the trip even more dangerous. An English woman traveling alone to China raised suspicions and Gladys was detained by the Russians. By the grace of God she managed to escape, made her way to the sea, and boarded a ship for Japan. From Japan she boarded another ship to Yangcheng, China. Then she completed the final part of her long journey by train, bus, and mule. With the help of Christ she arrived at last in the mountainous province of Shansi. It was here that she connected with a 73 year old missionary named Mrs. Jeannie Lawson. At last Gladys was no longer "alone".

These two godly women concluded that the best way to spread the Gospel was to establish an inn for the many caravans carrying coal, cotton, iron goods, etc. on their three month journey to market. After feeding the men and caring for their animals they would entertain their guests by telling them stories about Jesus. Many of these men would repeat those stories as they continued on their way.

Sadly, Mrs. Lawson suffered a severe fall and died, leaving Gladys to carry on "alone". Now fluent in Chinese she had earned the respect of local leaders who trusted her with an assignment fraught

with danger. A recent government decision was made to stop the centuries old practice of foot binding and Gladys was selected to go from house to house enforcing the law. Even though enforcing the breaking of tradition was dangerous, it gave her the opportunity to tell the story of Jesus in house after house throughout the entire region. Thankfully, even though Mrs. Lawson was dead, Jesus was alive. As you know, He has promised to never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

The Chinese came to call Gladys “Ai-weh-deh,” which means “virtuous one”. Her reputation for virtue led the local Mandarin to seek her help in quelling a prison riot. The Warden reminded her that she had been teaching that the followers of Jesus had nothing to fear. Gladys proved him right and boldly walked “alone” into the melee of rioting prisoners. She shouted for everyone to be quiet, and when they obeyed, she asked to speak with one or two spokesmen. With the help of Jesus the “virtuous one” understood their grievances and was able to negotiate much needed prison reform. This not only brought peace to the prison, but also enabled the prisoners to work and earn money to buy food.

Gladys bought her first orphan for ninepence from a woman who trafficked in children. It was a little girl about 5 years old covered with sores and badly malnourished. Soon the word got out and Gladys was caring for a hundred orphans. When the Japanese attacked in 1938 she escaped with all these children into the mountains. Twelve days later they came to the Yellow River but had no way to cross. It was then that the children reminded her that God can do anything. Their child like faith led them to praise Jesus and start singing. A Chinese officer “just happened” to hear them sing, got a boat, and took them safely across the river. After several more difficult days of travel they finally arrived at Sian where Gladys delivered her orphans to safety and promptly collapsed with typhus fever. When her health improved she again labored “alone” and started a church in Sian, and then a settlement for lepers in Szechuan near the border of Tibet. If God is for us, who can be against us?

In 1947, Gladys returned to England for much needed surgery, then back to Taiwan in 1955 where she founded another orphanage. Gladys died in Taiwan Jan. 3, 1970. She was only 67 years old.

There is, of course, nothing wrong in working with a team. Jesus sometimes sent out workers “two by two”. Other times, however, as in the case of Philip the evangelist and Gladys Aylward, Jesus sometimes sends out His disciples to work “alone”. Someone summed it up like this: “God is always reliable but never predictable”.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce