

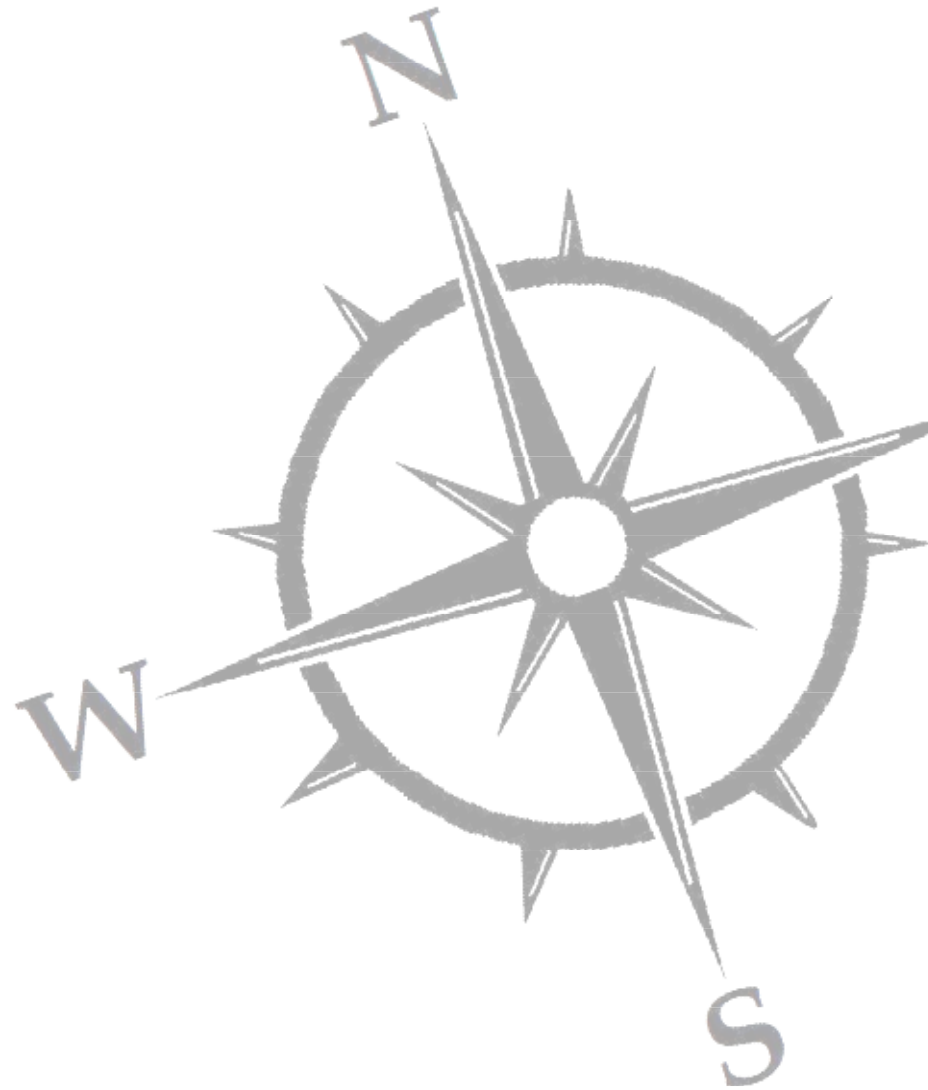
The Life of John Williams

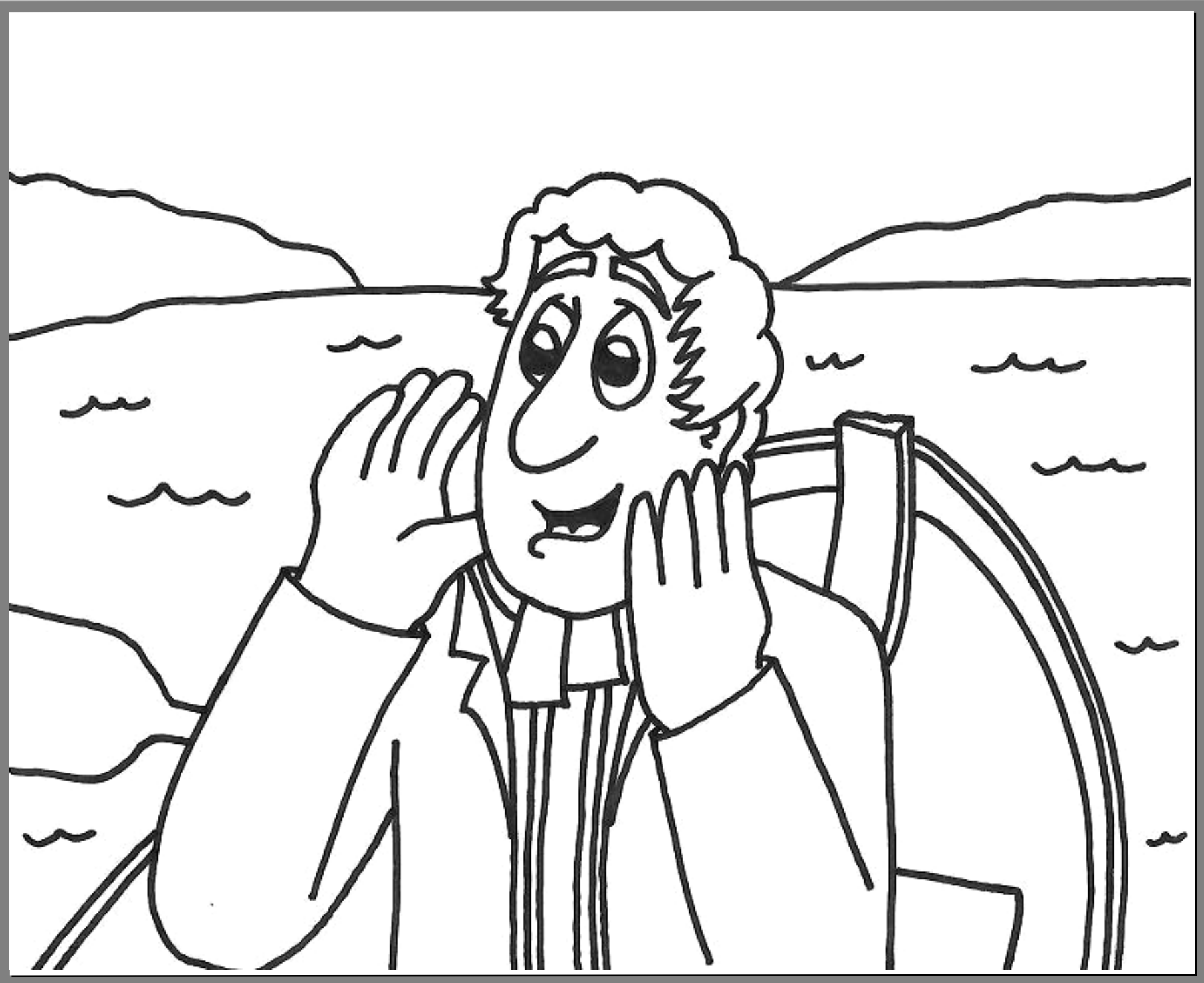
(1796–1839)

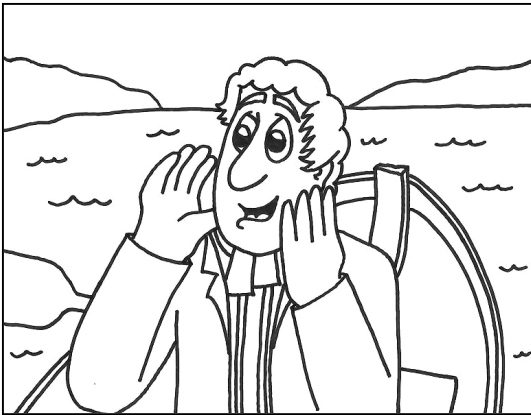
Lesson: 1.26 – Changed Missionary Snapshot Series

This story reminds us that God can change the heart of even the worst sinner. God's wonderful gift of salvation will transform someone from God's enemy into God's child. God completely changes them. They are not just trying to live better or turning over a new leaf, they are completely new on the inside. John Williams watched God take those who were once God's enemies and transform them into His servants.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." – 2 Corinthians 5:17







Introduction:

How many of you have ever seen a cocoon or chrysalis? Cocoons and chrysalises are amazing things. An ugly, fat caterpillar goes inside of it and a little while later, a beautiful butterfly comes out. A great change happens on the inside of that cocoon. Our story today is about a missionary to a place where people had never heard about God and the things of the Bible. This missionary risked his life to go and tell these cannibal warriors about Jesus' love. There were many times that he could have been killed or seriously hurt. Could the gospel change these people's hard hearts? Let's listen carefully and see what happens in this story about John Williams...

Missionary Story:

"Climb into the boat... we must leave now," one of the two tattooed Polynesian men said from front of a small rowboat. I climbed on board and the boat began to move slowly and steadily through the crystal-clear waters of the lagoon. Suddenly, I heard the sounds of voices singing. I turned to see

many of my island friends lining the beach. "I will return to you soon," I shouted and waved to the beach. I smiled to myself as I thought about the first time I had met these people many years before. Back then, their chief, Roma-Tane, had regularly ordered children to be sacrificed and enemies to be cooked and eaten in order to honor the gods of the islands. They had also robbed and harmed the first missionaries who came there as well. But now they called their island Lotu, which means given to God. God had done a great work on Atiu.

The sounds of the people had faded and I looked up to see that we were nearing the opening of the lagoon. Beyond that was the ship that would take us to the island of Raiatea. Raiatea had once been the center of a large religious group who worshipped the god Oro. Polynesians came from miles around to offer human sacrifices to the gods. Something amazing had happened there before missionaries even arrived. Chief Tamatoa had been exposed to the gospel several years before when he brought his warriors to Tahiti to help King Pomare put down a rebellion. The Tahiti Christians impressed Chief Tamatoa so much that he accepted the gospel and abandoned the worship of Oro. When he returned home, he decided to travel around the island and tell the people of this new God.

As Chief Tamatoa traveled, he allowed his wife to sit and eat pork with him. Pork was a food that Oro only allowed men to eat, surely Oro would punish the chief's wife. The people waited and watched, but nothing happened to her. Soon all the woman

traveling with the chief and his men asked if they could eat turtle. Turtle was even more sacred than pork was. Surely Oro's wrath would come now, but again nothing happened. Finally, some of Chief Tamatoa's men took shelter in one of Oro's temples during a thunderstorm and even used some of the cloth off of an idol as a blanket. This outraged the followers of Oro and they attacked the Chief and his men. Even though they were greatly outnumbered, Chief Tamatoa and his men won. Instead of killing and eating his enemies, Chief Tamatoa let them go free. This strange behavior got everyone talking about this new God who was even more powerful than Oro.

When I had arrived on Raiatea, God began to work in the people's hearts. Many people were saved and baptized and the people wanted to build a church to worship the Lord in. Not everyone was happy about what God was doing in Raiatea though. One afternoon, I was in my hut working on a sermon. Suddenly there was a knock at the door and a voice from the other side yelled, "Send out the hog so that we can cut his throat!" I quickly put a bar across the door and peered through a crack in the wall. There stood two very large men. "I said come out," said one of the men holding a large machete knife in his hand. "Oh Lord, please help us," I prayed silently knowing the only way out of the house was through the front door. Then suddenly, I heard voices singing... many, many voices singing. It was the people from the church. Several children were with them carrying a banner which said "Had it not been for the gospel, we would have been





destroyed as soon as we were born.” An older man who had been saved, came up to me and said sadly, “if only I had known then what I know now, I would have many of my grandchildren here to celebrate with me.”

Soon after, another chief, Chief Auura, arrived on Raiatea and told them of a terrible sickness that he believed the gods had sent to his people on the island of Rurutu to punish them. After seeing that the people of Raiatea had destroyed their gods and not suffered, he asked for teachers to come and tell his people about the gospel. Two members of the church volunteered to go. Several months later, we received letters telling us of the great things that God was doing on Rurutu. The people of Raiatea were so excited to reach other islands with the gospel. Two other men Papeiha and Vahapata volunteered to go to the island of Aitutaki. Again, God worked mightily in the hearts of the people. When I was finally able to go and visit Aitutaki, Papeiha and Vahapata led me to the new church that the people had just built. The people were excited to meet me and asked where I had

come from. I explained that people far across the ocean had given their money to send me to them. “We have no money,” one Christian said, “we must find some way to send people so that other islands can hear the gospel.”

“Hold on, Father, hold on,” one of the Polynesian men shouted bringing my thoughts back to the rowboat and the lagoon. I whipped my head around to see a huge wave that had come out of nowhere crashing down. Before I had time to grab anything, the boat had flipped over sending me head over heels into the water. I thrashed my arms and kicked my legs, but it was no use... the undercurrent continued to pull me under. “I cannot drown... there are too many islands left to reach,” I thought. My lungs ached for air. Then I noticed I seemed to be slowly rising. I began to kick and swim and finally my head came above water and I hungrily sucked in air. I looked around and saw the two Polynesian men swimming towards the shore. I began to follow when another wave came crashing down sending me under water once again. This time I felt my leg smash into the razor sharp coral. I knew many men, even expert swimmers, had drowned here. “Lord, please... please help me!” I begged. Suddenly, two strong arms grabbed me on either side. The two Polynesian men pulled me to the surface and began swimming me back to the shore.

Very soon after, we tried again, this time making it safely to the ship. “How will I ever reach all these islands with the gospel?” I wondered. When we arrived on the island of Aitutaki, Papeiha walked up with a big smile on his face. He handed me a small bag.

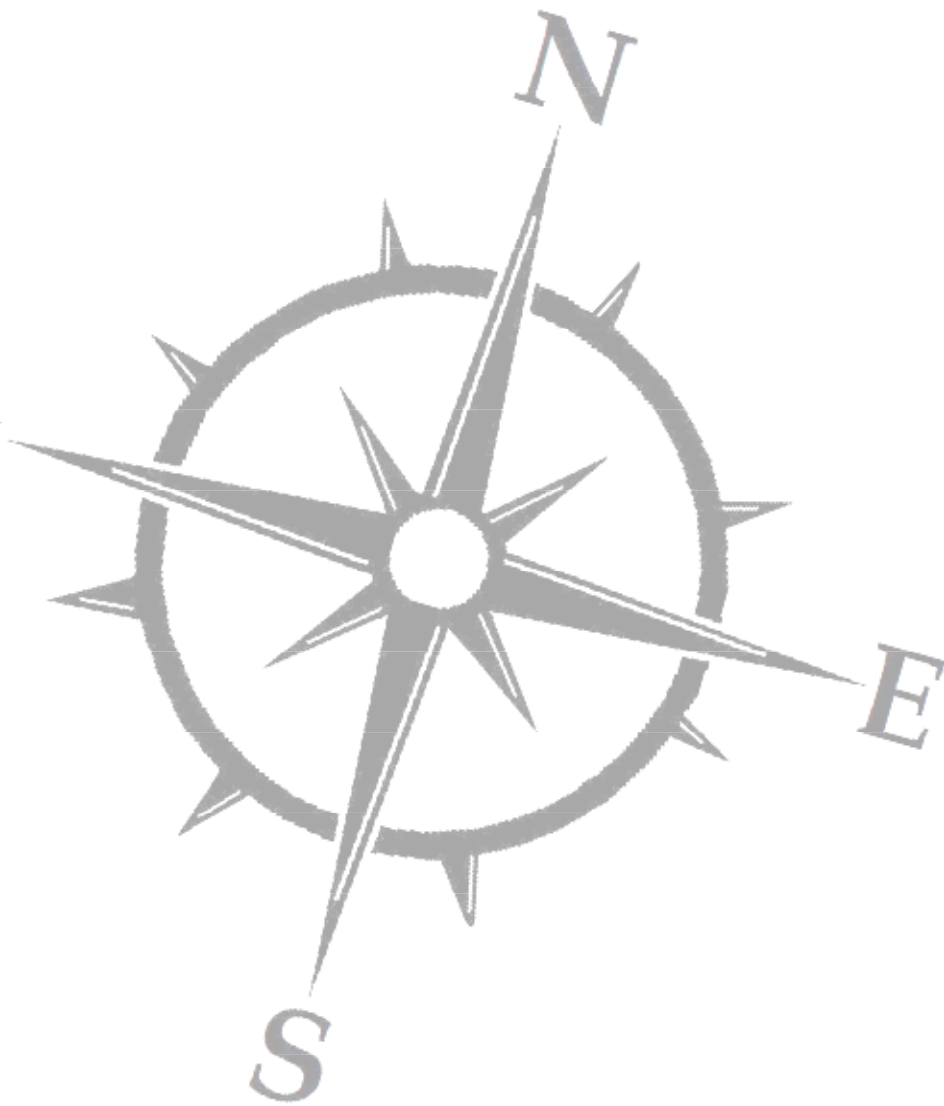
I opened the bag and found...money! “Count it,” said Vahapata. “50...100... 103 pounds,” I counted. “Each of us sold a pig to the captain of a ship,” they said, “now we have money to send our people out so that others can hear of the gospel.” I smiled. I didn’t have to reach all those other islands with the gospel. God had a much better plan to use the Polynesian people to do it instead.

Application:

You know, boys and girls, Ezekial 36:26-27 tells us that God can save even the worst of sinners. He can change our dirty hearts and make them clean and new through His salvation. Some people are afraid to tell others about the Lord. John Williams was not afraid to tell many chiefs and cannibals throughout the South Seas Islands about Jesus. John knew that God could take the hearts of murderous cannibals and save them and change them. God was doing a mighty work and stirring up the Polynesians to reach their own people with the gospel.

John Williams worked in the Polynesian islands for over 22 years. His main focus was on the islands of Tahiti, Raiatea, Raratonga, and Aitutaki. Each of these islands saw thousands of people saved and horrible cannibalistic practices done away with. These islands sent their own missionaries out opening the nearly 30,000 islands of the Pacific to gospel.

*(For additional information, discussion questions and materials on this lesson please refer to **lesson 1.26 on page 90 in your England Expedition - Leader's Guide.**)*



References

For further reading or to obtain more information on this portion of the life of this missionary, please consult the following sources from which we obtained information from:

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