

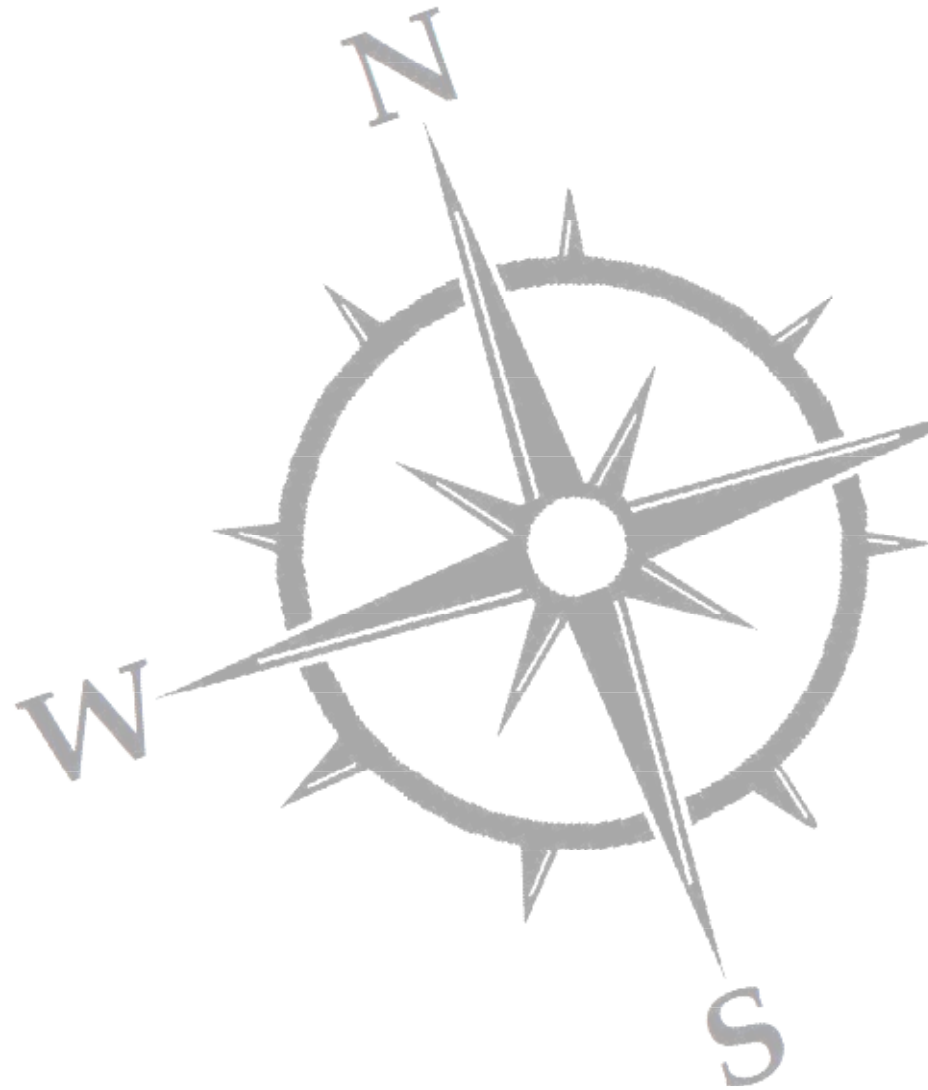
The Life of John Paton

(1824-1907)

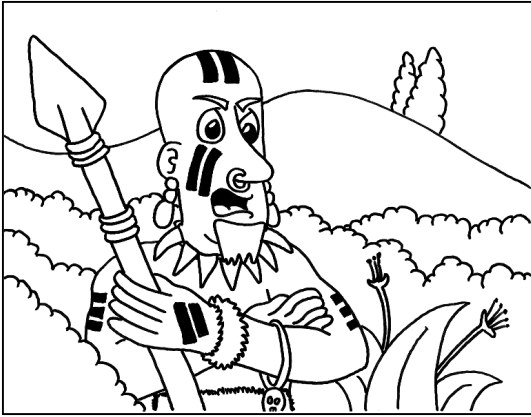
Lesson: 6.24 – Direction Missionary Snapshot Series

This story reminds us that God leads and guides those who are serving Him. He leads us to where we need to be and away from things that might harm us. It is our job to follow His leading. Many times in life, we get into situations where we are not sure what to do or where God wants us to go. God promises to guide and give wisdom to those that are serving Him by faith. Missionary John Paton needed God to guide him in what he was about to do for the people of Aniwa.

“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” – Psalm 48:14







Introduction:

Imagine going on a tour through a jungle. It would be scary not to have a guide along with you. You might get lost or come across something that might hurt you. A guide can help you to figure out where to go and what to avoid. Our story today is about a missionary to an island of cannibals. This missionary was about to do something to try and help the people, but he needed God to guide him and show him exactly where to go. Let's listen carefully to what happened to John Paton...

Missionary Story:

“Rain comes from the sky, not from the ground,” Chief Namakei said shaking his head. It was a warm day, and the sun was just climbing into the sky. There was not a cloud in sight. “Chief Namakei,” I said, “God has put water up in the sky, but He has also put water beneath the ground.” I stood up from where I had been kneeling and stuck my shovel into the ground. Then I rolled up my sleeves and wiped some sweat off of my forehead. “We will dig a deep hole right

here. Once we find the water, your people will be able to freely take it and will no longer have to pay the witch doctor for water.”

Some of Chief Namakei's men who were standing around us began to laugh. “Water under the ground,” they said as they shook their heads and chuckled. I understood how this all might sound a bit crazy to these people. On the Island of Aniwa, the only way that the people had ever been able to get water to drink was to pay the evil witch doctor whatever he asked of them to get some. You see, the witch doctor had built a large cistern or bucket to catch the rainwater in. For the people to get any of that water, they had to give the witch doctor whatever he wanted or do whatever job he asked them to do. The witch doctor also fooled the people into thinking that he could control the weather. He told them that he would do his special rain dances, but only when the people had brought a large enough gift or offering to him.

I pulled out one shovel full of dirt. Suddenly there was a noise behind me in the bushes. The witch doctor stood up from where he had been hiding. I could hear his necklaces of bones that rattled together as he moved. “I will curse you all,” he shouted, “especially you, Missi John!”

Missi John was what all the people called me since they had a hard time saying missionary. “I will curse all of your crops and fishing traps,” he went on. “I will ask that deadly snakes be sent to your houses.” With that, he turned to leave, his necklaces of bones once again rattling together as he

walked away. The people were afraid of the witch doctor and his curses.

“When we finish our well, everyone can fill their cups freely and drink as much as they want,” I said again. “Now, who will help me dig?” One of the tribesmen told me that digging was supposed to be a job for women, not for men. I pulled out another shovel full of dirt. I was going to need the people's help to dig a well in this hard soil. Then I thought of something that might make them want to help me. “Anyone who helps me dig this well today can have one of my sharp metal fish hooks,” I said. I was glad to see some of the men pick up tools and begin helping me to dig the well.

After digging in the hard soil for several hours, I took a break and sat down in the shade of a nearby tree. I saw a boy sitting by another tree across from where I was sitting. I remembered back to when I was a little boy in Scotland. How different Vanuatu was from Scotland. There never seemed to be peace on these islands. Tribes were always fighting with each other and then fighting again to take revenge for those who had been killed in the last battle. There had been many times that I nearly lost my life, but God continued to guide and protect me.

I remembered one time when three witch doctors had listened to me preach about Jesus to a crowd. One of the witch doctors said he would find a piece of food that I had eaten and would put a curse on it and I would die. The people had seen the witch doctor do this and had seen people get very sick and die. “My God is more powerful than your curses are,” I told them. “Give me





a piece of fruit now, and I will eat some of it, and you can take it and put a curse on it.” The people froze and waited to see what would happen. The witch doctors took the fruit and began chanting their curses. They told me that I would die in a couple of days. The people were amazed when one week later I came back to see them, and I was just as healthy as ever.

Suddenly, a scream came from down in the hole. I jumped to my feet and rushed over to look inside. We had already dug about twelve feet down. The scream came from one of the men in the hole. One of the walls had just caved in a little bit. A small amount of dirt had fallen around one of the men’s feet in the well. “See,” the witch doctor yelled from the side, “the Earth gods are angry at what you are doing and will judge you.” The people became very scared and refused to help me dig anymore.

“If you will not help me, I will dig alone,” I told the people. They begged me to stop. They worried that the Earth god would get angry and let the walls collapse and bury me inside the well. “God will keep me

safe,” I told them as I kept on digging. I prayed quietly that God would provide water in this well so that once again the people would see that God had power over their evil witch doctors.

During the second and third days, I continued to dig all by myself. The people watched me from a little ways away. At the end of the third day, the hole was about thirty feet deep. My hands ached and were covered in blisters, but I saw that the dirt was beginning to be moist. “We have to be close,” I thought, “Please Lord, help us to find water tomorrow.” I climbed up out of the well and told the chief that I thought that God would give us water tomorrow. “No, Missi,” he said, “rain will never come out of the ground... you are talking like a madman.”

The next morning, I climbed down into the well again. I had only dug for about an hour when suddenly water started to pour in. I was so excited! I could hardly keep my cup steady as I scooped up a cup full of water. Even though the water was filled with dirt and mud, I could tell that the water was sweet and fresh. “We’ve found water!” I shouted from down in the well. Men, women, and children from the tribe came running as fast as they could. Even Chief Namakei was there. I scooped up another cup full and handed it up to the chief. The chief turned the cup all around in his hands and watched the water move in the cup. Then he dipped his finger in it, and finally, he tasted it. “Missi John...it is rain,” he shouted. “Rain does come from the ground!” The chief turned to me and spoke again, “No god of Aniwa has

ever helped in this way. Your Jehovah God is the true God.” Chief Namakei turned to his people and said, “we will burn our idols and learn more about your God and His Son Jesus.”

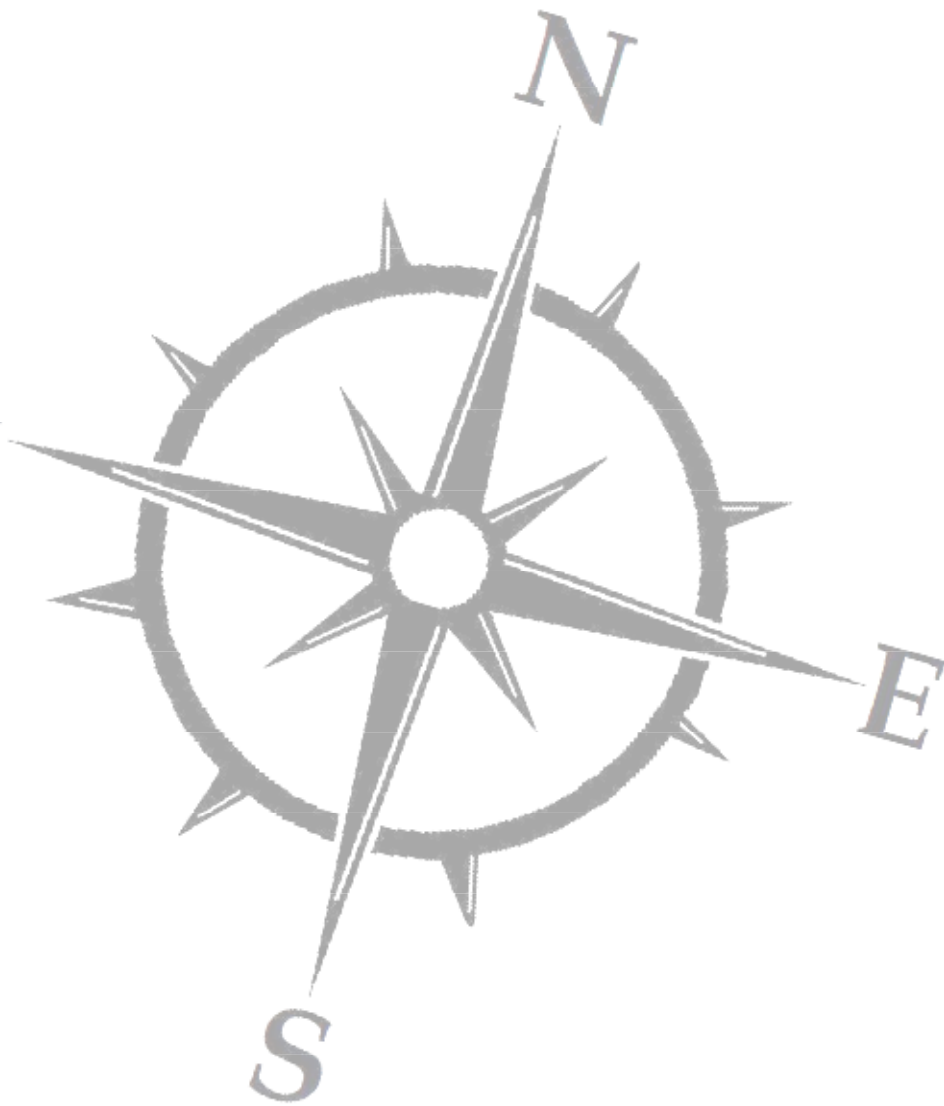
“Thank you, Heavenly Father, for working a miracle today for these people,” I whispered in prayer. Cups of water were being passed around, and everyone was cheering and rejoicing that God had given them water.

Application:

You know, boys and girls, Psalm 48:14 tells us that God will guide those who are serving Him. God had guided John Paton more than he realized in digging that well. Years later, other people came to the island and tried to dig some other wells for the people. They dug all over the island, but God had led John to the only spot on the island where fresh water could be found.

John Paton worked with the cannibals for over 40 years. Before his death, he had seen many of the people on the island of Aniwa accept Jesus as their Savior. Many native teachers, including Chief Namakei, had been sent to the villages to preach the gospel. John finished translating the New Testament and a hymn book for the people to use. He also helped place missionaries on twenty-five of the thirty islands of the New Hebrides.

*(For additional information, discussion questions, and materials on this lesson please refer to lesson 6.24 on **page 136** in your China 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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