

The Life of

# John Paton

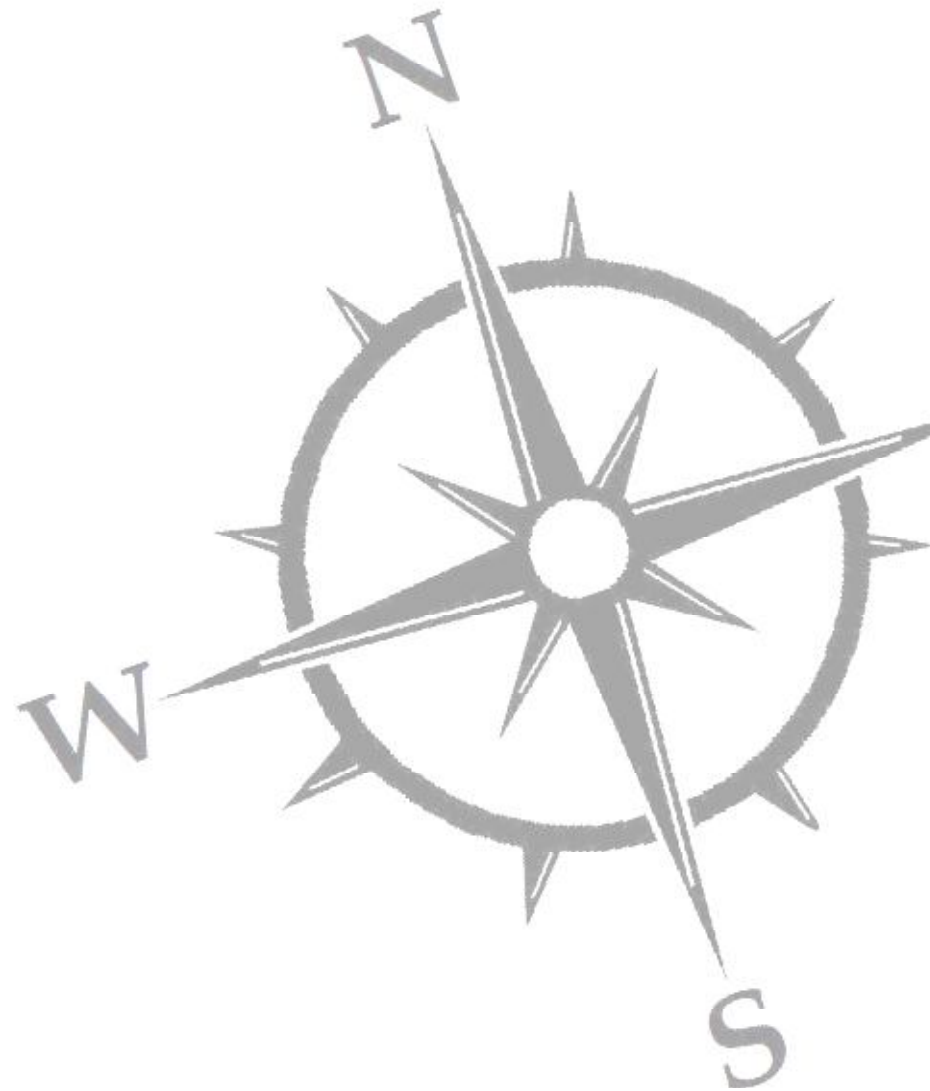
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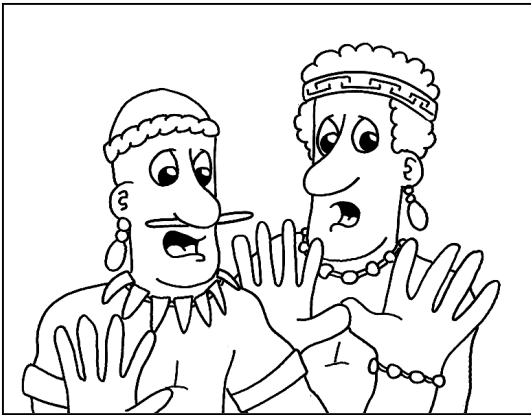
## Lesson: 3.6 – Courage Missionary Spotlight Series

This story encourages us not to be afraid of what is around us. Sometimes we might be afraid, but a Christian must remember that God is with him and have the courage to do what God has asked. John Paton could have been scared of the dangerous places in Vanuatu, but he remembered that with the Lord on his side, he had nothing to fear.

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” - Psalm 27:1*







### **Who remembers where we left off last week?**

(Read the last paragraph from last week's lesson to begin this lesson as a review).

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The people and I had started to build a church and school. We had only been working a short time when one of the workers suddenly screamed out in terror. Everyone stopped working and gathered in a circle around the man. I pushed through the crowd to find out what had happened. I saw that the worker had dug up a large, round strangely-carved stone. "This is the stone of our ancestors," a native man said, "it was where we sacrificed our enemies to the gods. We are very afraid to touch it or be near it." "It is only a stone," I told the people, "it cannot hurt us. We will leave it there and put the church on top of it. You will see that the Lord of the church protects us and will keep us safe. This stone has no power." One by one the workers nervously picked up their tools and began to help again. The whole

building was put up without any more trouble. I wondered what the people in the Green District would think of our new church building made of wood and sugar cane leaves. "I guess it's not all that different from a hayloft," I chuckled to myself.

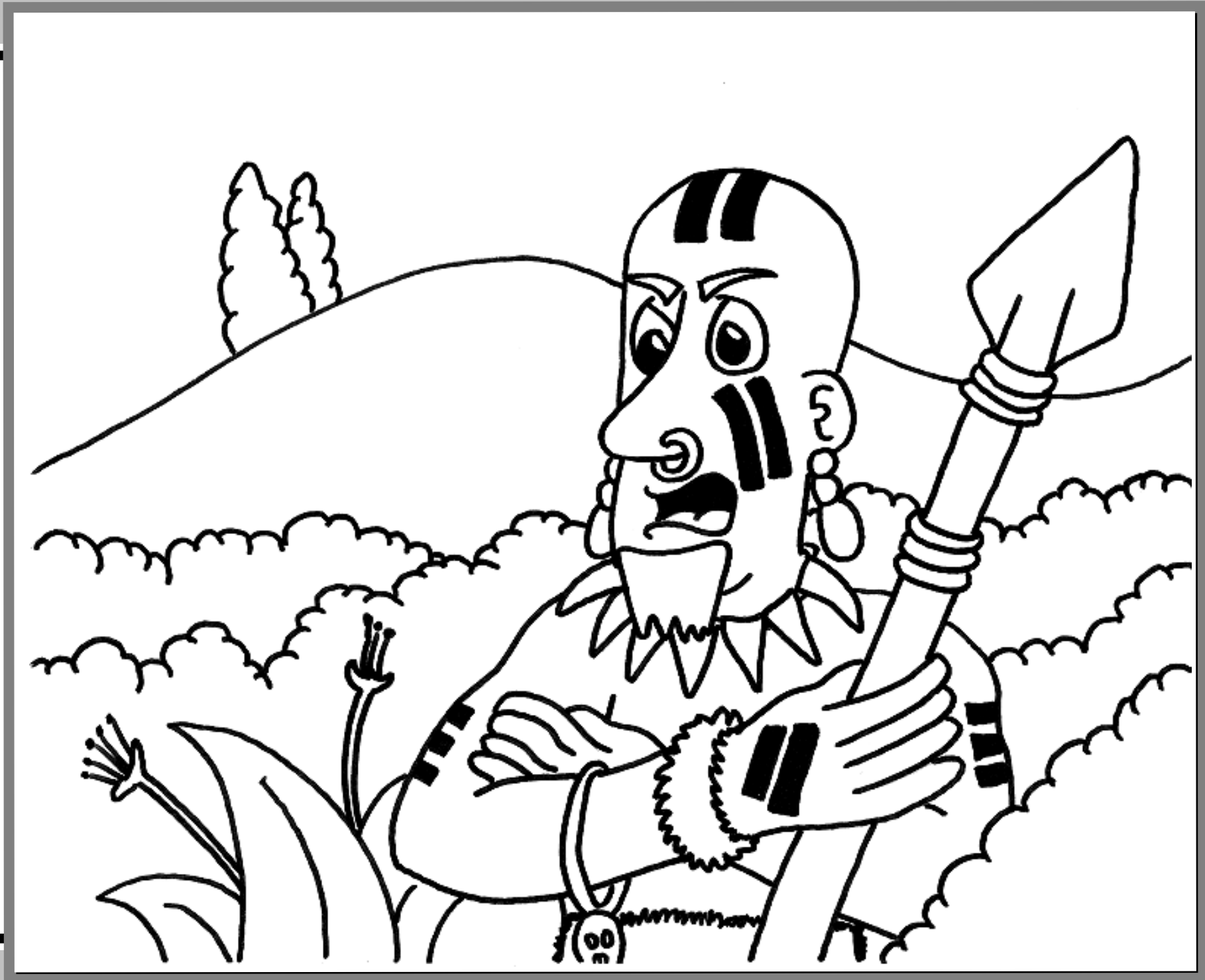
The people of Tanna had begun to realize that I was not like the other foreigners who had come there before. I had dug a well so that they could have fresh water. I had built a school so that I could teach them. But the witch doctors still tried to blame me when bad things happened. During one bad hurricane storm, a large number of coconut and banana trees were destroyed. Since the people relied on these trees for food, I knew that the witch doctors would blame me for what had happened. But then, an idea popped into my head. I had visited another tribe who were fishermen. I visited that tribe again and gave the people axes and knives and asked them to make me a large fishing net. I watched as they pulled bark from trees and twisted it into cords to make the net.

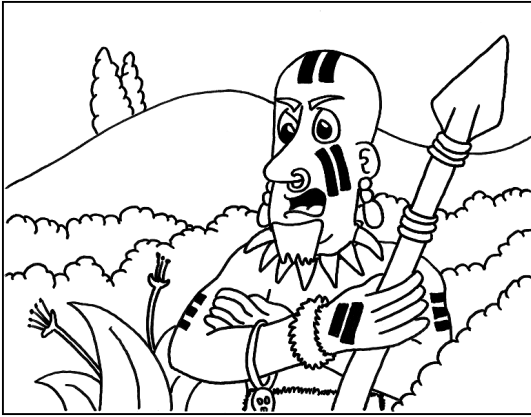
Finally, my net was done and Abraham helped me carry the large net away. "I know you are hungry," I said to the people, "I have made this net for you to catch fish with. I will loan it to you for several days, but I want you to bring it back to me on Saturday." I smiled at the chief's puzzled look. No traders or foreigners ever gave things away or let the native people use their things. Before long, more and more natives began coming to the church and the school.

Stealing was also a real problem on the island of Tanna. I had to be watching all the time. If I dropped anything on the ground

a Tannese person would move their foot to cover it. Then they would hold it with their toes as they walked away. One morning, the wives of two of my Anatom helpers were hanging my pajamas out to dry in the sun. Suddenly, Miaki, the war chief, came running out of the trees. "Missi," he said, which was the peoples' nickname for me instead of "missionary," "Missi, you must come, I need your help!" He quickly ran into my house and I followed him in there. Suddenly, the two wives of my Anatom helpers started to scream outside. I ran out just in time to see the last of my pajamas disappear in the jungle. "Miaki," I said, "you have tricked me just so that your men could steal my things." Miaki looked to the ground. "No, no, it was not like that," he said. He started to hit the ground with his club. "I will smash the men who stole from you," he said and then ran off into the jungle. A few days later, I asked him about the pajamas and he lied and said that he could not find them.

Seeing the people act like this made me sad. But watching the school continue to grow meant that some people were listening. "You don't have to live in fear," I preached to a group of people one afternoon. "Believe in Jesus! He will bring happiness into your life." The people listened, but I noticed many of them glancing at the three witch doctors near the back. "We do not believe in your God," one of the witch doctors said. I watched as his necklace of bones rattled as he moved. "We have great powers and can kill you with a single curse," he continued. I knew that these three witch doctors kept the people living in constant fear on the island.





They claimed that all they needed was a piece of fruit that a person had taken a bite out of and they could curse it and that person would die. I knew that this was my chance to show that God was much more powerful than any spell of the witch doctors. I looked around and saw a woman with a small basket of plums. I asked her for a plum and took a big bite out of it and walked over to the witch doctors. "Here you go," I said as I handed the half-eaten plum to them, "put a curse on this. We will see if my God can protect me." The witch doctors took the fruit and smashed it and rolled it up in large leaves. Then they set fire to parts of it and yelled and shrieked all kinds of curses. Many people ran off, but those who stayed watched expecting me to fall down dead at any second. Finally, the witch doctors said "We will call a meeting of all the priests. Watch this poor mission-man for the next couple of days. He will be dead before Sunday." I turned to the people that were still standing around. "But if I come to your village next Sunday strong and well, then all of you will have to admit that your gods have no power over me, and that my

God is the one true God and that He has protected me from your witch doctors."

All through the week, I could hear the drums beating. I knew that the witch doctors were busy with their curses and black magic. Early Sunday morning, I got dressed and headed to the village. A large crowd had gathered to see what was going to happen. When I walked into the village, the people couldn't believe their eyes. No one had ever survived the witch doctor's curse. One of the witch doctors stood up. "We have failed," he said, "Your God is stronger than our gods and He has kept you safe." I smiled at the crowd. "This is true. Jesus is stronger than your gods, He protected me. If you will listen to me, I will tell you how you can know this true and living God too." Two of the witch doctors listened, but the other one stood near the back waving his spear. For many weeks after, that same witch doctor would jump out of the jungle into my path and yell things at me and wave his spear at me before running off into the jungle.

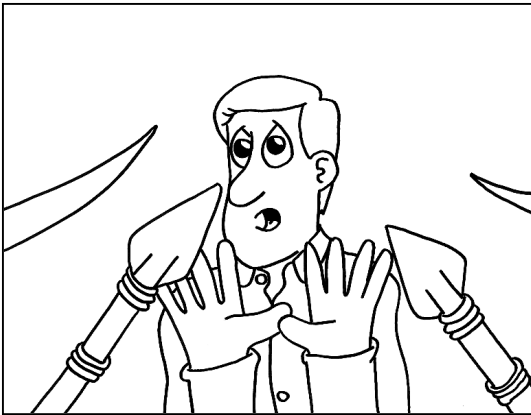
Abraham wasn't the only Christian who came over to Tanna to help me. There was also Nomuri and Lazarus. I had watched Nomuri put up with a lot of bullying from the people. They could not understand why he would give up his cannibal ways to follow this white foreigner. But eventually, his kind, caring and humble ways won them over. He had happiness inside of him that they wished they had. Some of the local witch doctors hated Nomuri because the people began to listen to him. One day, a witch doctor jumped out in front of him and threw a killing stone right at his face. It was called a

killing stone because it was sharp and usually killed anyone it hit. Nomuri was quick and was able to dodge it, but got a deep cut on his hand. The priest then jumped on him and beat him nearly to death with his club. Nomuri stumbled and crawled the short distance to my home. I was just coming out of the door when I spotted my friend leaning up against a tree. I imagined this was what I had looked like back in the Green District when I got hit by that rock. "Escape!" Nomuri said, "They hate our God and want to kill us all." I hurried over and cleaned his wounds and bandaged them. It took nearly three weeks before Nomuri could walk again. "I want to go and live around the Tannese people again," he said one afternoon. I warned him that I didn't trust that the witch doctor wouldn't try this again. "I want to tell them about Jesus," Nomuri said, "when I see them wanting me dead, I remember myself when the missionary first came to Anatom. I too wanted to kill him. If he had run away from danger, I would still be a cannibal. I cannot stay away from them." I thanked the Lord for Nomuri's testimony and his desire for others to learn about Jesus.

Lazarus also told me some exciting news. "Now that you have survived the food curse, the people have come to me to be taught from the Bible. They are amazed that you care for them so much." It seemed the people were beginning to listen.

One morning, Nafatu, Abraham's wife, came running to my door. "They have broken into our cook-house! Everything has been stolen. Even the kettle is gone." I went to see Chief Nookamara at once. The chief





said that he would find the thieves and punish them at once, but I knew that if we walked through his village we would see people using the missing things. I had a different idea. “I have to boil water. Tell your people that I’ll give a blanket to whoever brings back my kettle.” I wasn’t surprised when later that evening there was a knock at my door. Miaki was there with my kettle. He told me that he had to work very hard to get me the kettle and that the lid was somewhere on the other side of the island. “So much for punishing and finding the thieves,” I thought to myself. I gave him his blanket and took the kettle back.

The next morning, Abraham and Nafatu left to help Lazarus. I stayed behind to build shutters for my windows. As I was working, I looked up and spotted a man holding a gun that was pointed right at me. Should I run? I decided to keep working but prayed that the Lord would protect me. The man continued to point the gun at me. Every so often, the man would shoot the gun over my head hoping to scare me. Eventually, after four hours of doing this, he left. Later

that night, some people snuck to my house around two in the morning and tried to open the door. My dog, Clutha, began to bark very loudly and the men shouted a few things before running off into the jungle.

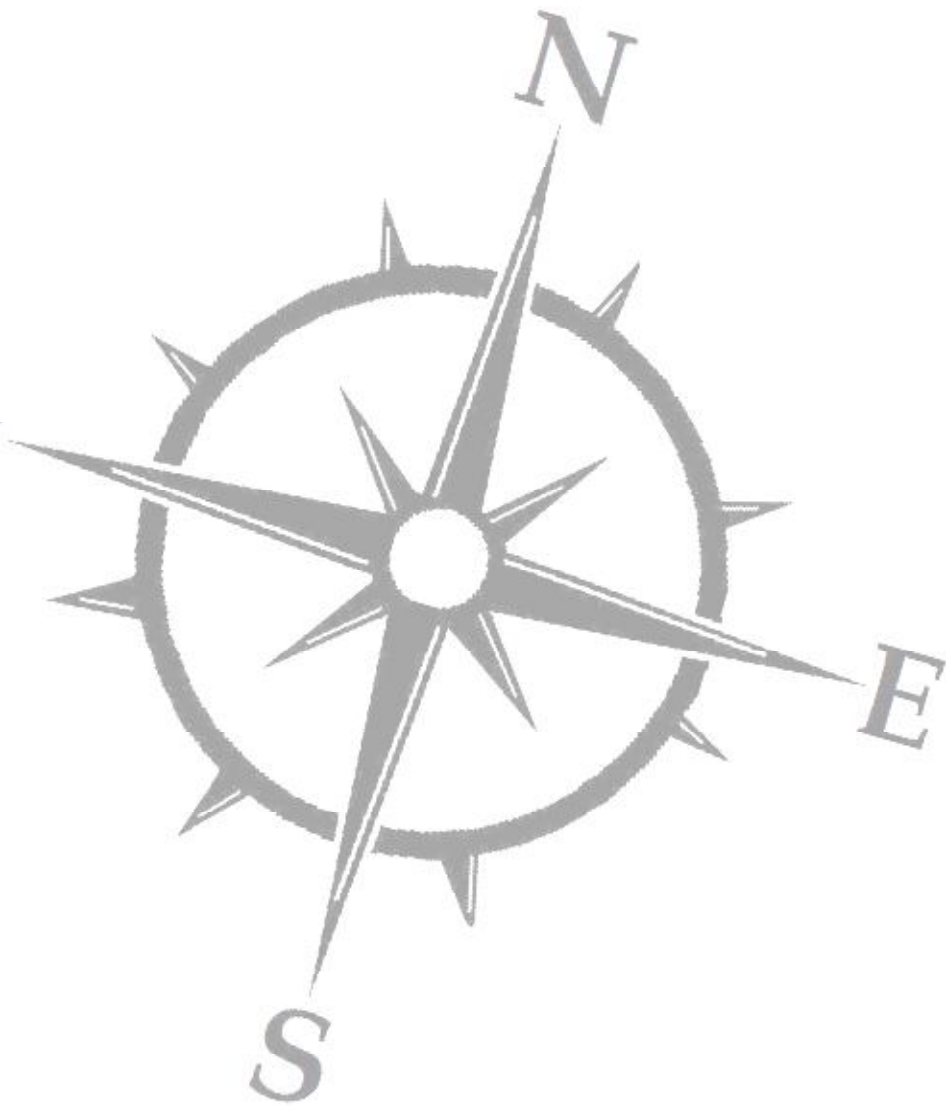
One morning, a group of excited Tannese came running up to my house. “There is a large ship on fire,” they said, “we cannot see flames, but it sends up smoke just like the volcano does. You must come and see.” I calmly told the men “I cannot come right now, because I need to put on nicer clothes. That sounds like a warship from England. It is probably coming to ask me how you are all behaving. They will want to know if you steal my things and threaten me.” The chief who was with the men suddenly got a very worried look. “Will they ask you if we have been stealing your things?” he asked. “I expect he will, and I will have to tell him the truth.” The men told me not to say a word to the ship. Within minutes, natives came running to the mission-house with my pots, blankets, pajamas, and knives. Before long, almost all the stolen items had been returned. “I don’t see the lid to my kettle here yet,” I said. “I have sent a man to get it from the other side of the island,” one chief said, “please do not tell the captain. It will be here tomorrow.” The next day, the captain arrived onshore. I welcomed him and spent the day showing him different things on the island. He told me that rumors had reached him about how I was being treated on the island and he had to come and see for himself.

But once the ship had left, it wasn’t long until things seemed to go right back to

how they had been before. Only a couple of days later, armed men surrounded me in my garden early in the morning. “We have come to kill you,” the leader said. I knelt down and prayed; quite sure that it would be my last day on Earth. I had hoped to form a church here like the one on Anatom. As I looked around at each of the armed men surrounding me, I saw some who had come to some of the church services. “My friends... have I ever hurt any of you or have I tried to help you?” I asked. No one spoke. No one moved. All of their weapons were still pointed right at me. “Was this it?” I wondered.

**Will John survive? What will happen?  
To find out, come back next time.**

*(For additional information, discussion questions and materials on this lesson please refer to **lesson 3.6** on **page 136** in your *Vanuatu 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 our information:

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