

The Life of

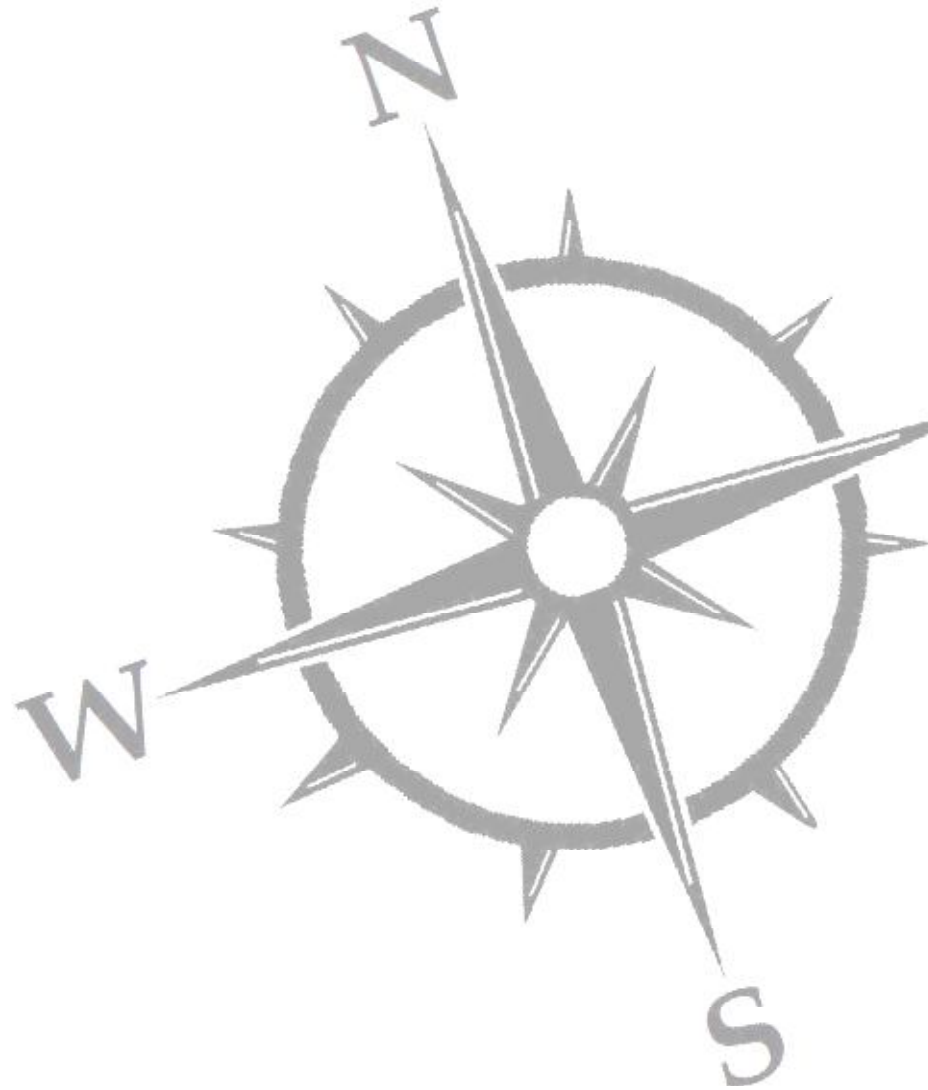
John Paton

(1824-1907)

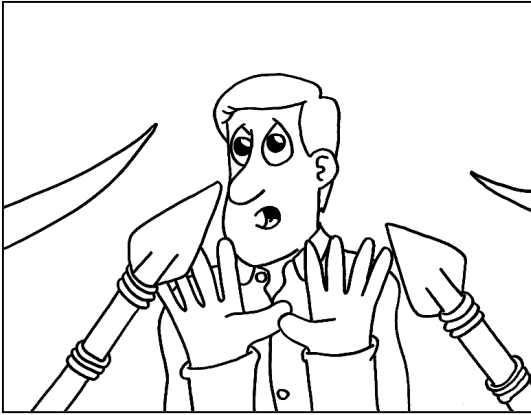
Lesson: 3.7 – Guidance Missionary Spotlight Series

This story shows how God leads missionaries throughout their lives. God protects them and provides for them. God will lead His children, but it is our job to follow Him. God had prepared John Paton to serve Him in England. John now had to make some very important decisions and needed God to guide him with what was about to happen in his life.

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







Who remembers where we left off last week?

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

Armed men had surrounded me early one morning. They told me that they had come to kill me. 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. I bowed my head and prayed again. When I looked up, amazingly, one by one, the men lowered their weapons and then turned and walked off into the jungle without saying anything. I thanked the Lord for sparing my life.

A few nights later, I was sitting in my house studying, when I heard a knock at my door. When I opened it, a Tannese man stood there. "I have come from the other side

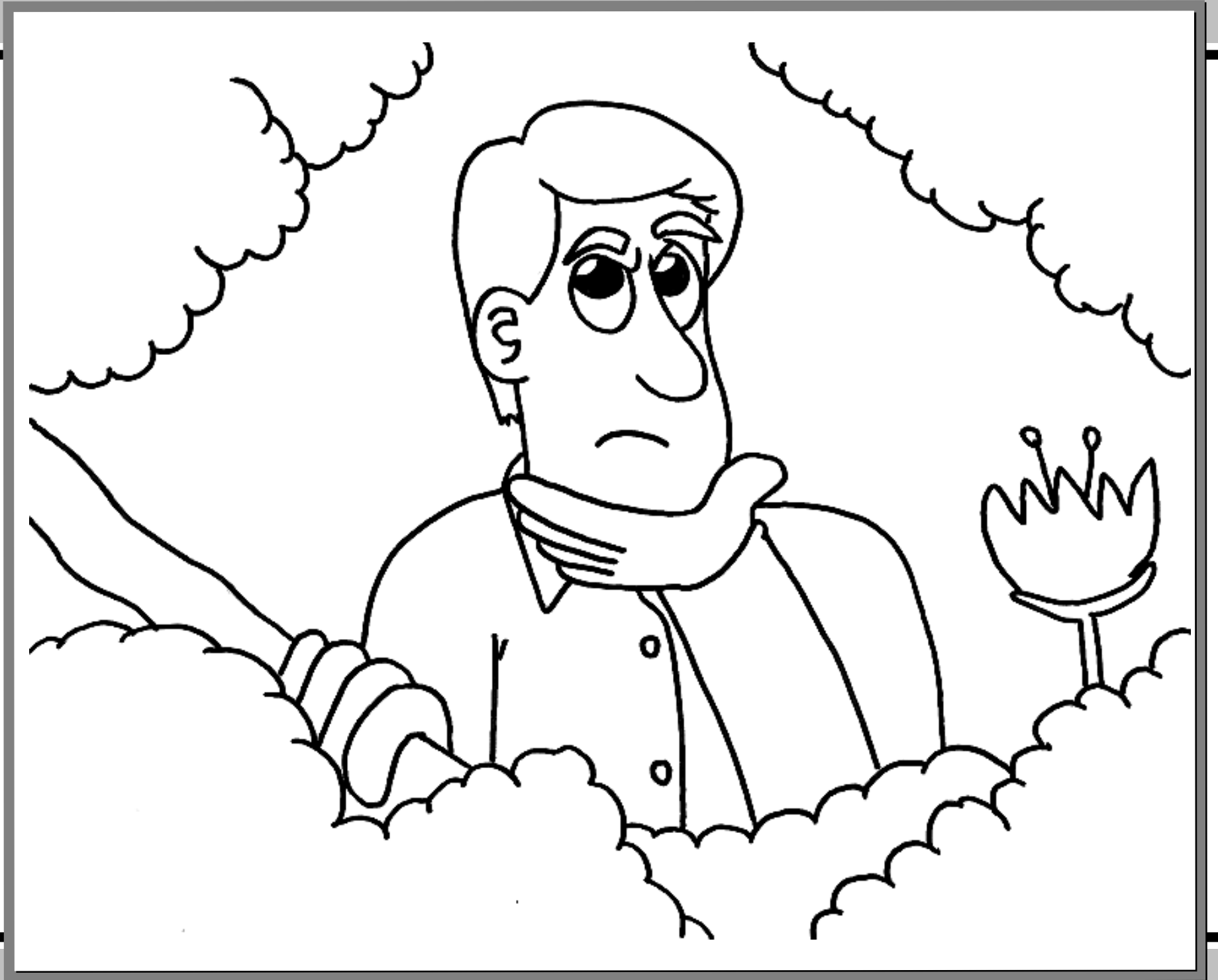
of the island," the man said, "your missionary friends are nearly out of food. They have asked that you send them some flour at once." My friends Mr. and Mrs. Mathieson had recently come to Tanna to help and now they needed my help, but getting flour to them would not be easy. There was a war going on between the tribes and I would probably be killed if I tried to cross on land. I would have to go around the edge of the island by boat. The next morning, I hurried to Chief Nookamara's village. Chief Nookamara agreed to help me. I found a big stone jug and filled it with flour. Then I tied the stone lid on tightly and hurried down to the shore. Chief Nookamara and his men were already there waiting for me. I put the jug in the middle of the canoe and it wasn't long before we pushed out into the water. We tried to stay close to the shore, but the coral reef around Tanna made the waters very choppy. The waves caused the canoe to rock from side to side and the spray of the waves made us all soaking wet. All-day long, we bounced along the waves trying to reach the other side of the island.

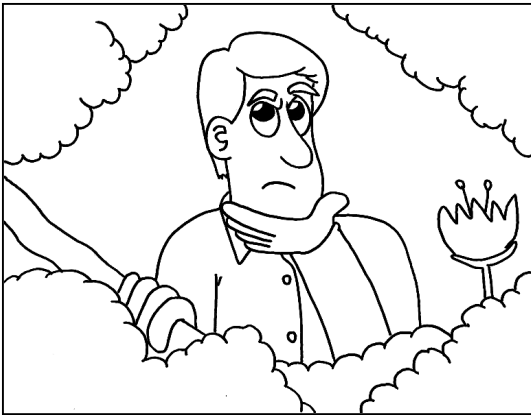
We were only about a mile from the missionaries' house. Suddenly, a wave picked up our canoe and brought it down hard tipping it and throwing all of us into the sea. I frantically grabbed onto the side canoe and prayed for God to help us. One of the tribesmen had reached the shore and he saw me clinging to the canoe and swam out and pulled me to safety. "Where is the flour?" I shouted as I looked all around. Just then, I saw another tribesman walking out of the water with the stone jug on his shoulders. It

wasn't long before we were standing outside of the Mathieson's mission house with our jug of flour. They were so thankful for it and begged me to spend the night with them. "I cannot leave my mission-house unguarded overnight or people will come and steal my things," I said. "I cannot expect my dog, Clutha, to fight them off all on her own."

When I got back to the beach, it was too late to try to travel by sea. "We should hurry across the island," I said to Chief Nookamara. "Now that it is dark, no one will see us or try to kill us." But the Chief and his men refused to go. They were fearful of the dark and would not step out into the night. So I decided to make the journey all by myself. "You'll never make it alive," the chief shouted after me, but I had to get home before anything happened.

I tried to walk along the shore for as long as I could. Pretty soon, I heard voices talking. I quickly hid in the bushes and waited until all was quiet again. I continued down the shore until I was forced to head inland. Very soon, I came to a very dangerous spot in the trail. A huge hill of solid rock stood in front of me that I would have to climb. Grabbing at roots and bushes that stuck out from the cracks of the rocks, I was able to slowly climb up. Once I reached the top, I began to walk, but then my foot slipped a little bit and I decided to crawl. One small slip and knew that I could easily fall off the cliff and into the sea below. I stopped for a moment trying to figure out where I was. I knew that I needed to find the river and cross it. One minute it seemed like the noise of the river was in front of me, another





slid until I was almost flying through the air. Seconds seemed like hours and then suddenly...my feet splashed into the water. I was alive! On top of that, I found my umbrella too. I set off towards home and a little while later, I saw two Tannese men that I knew. At first, they did not recognize me and raised their guns towards me. "Don't shoot," I shouted, "you know me, friends!" They lowered their guns and then walked with me the rest of the way to my house. Clutha was happy to see me and gave me several slobbery kisses when I got home.

When the people found out that I had crossed the island in the dark safely, they were amazed. "If anyone of us had tried to walk that way in the dark, we would have surely been killed," they said. I explained that my God listened and helped me. I explained that their stone gods and wooden gods could not hear them or help them. "My God listens and cares for me and He will care for you too, if you will accept Him," I said.

A few days later, Chief Nookamara came to my door very excited. "Captain Winchester built a house near the shore and he is giving all of us free muskets, gunpowder, and ammunition. I had heard of this trader before and wondered what kinds of tricks he was up to. The next day, I went to visit him. "Why are you giving weapons to the people here?" I asked. "You know that it will only lead to more wars and people being killed." Captain Winchester laughed and then told me his terrible plan. He was giving them guns for free so that when they ran out of ammunition, they would be willing to pay a lot to get more ammunition.

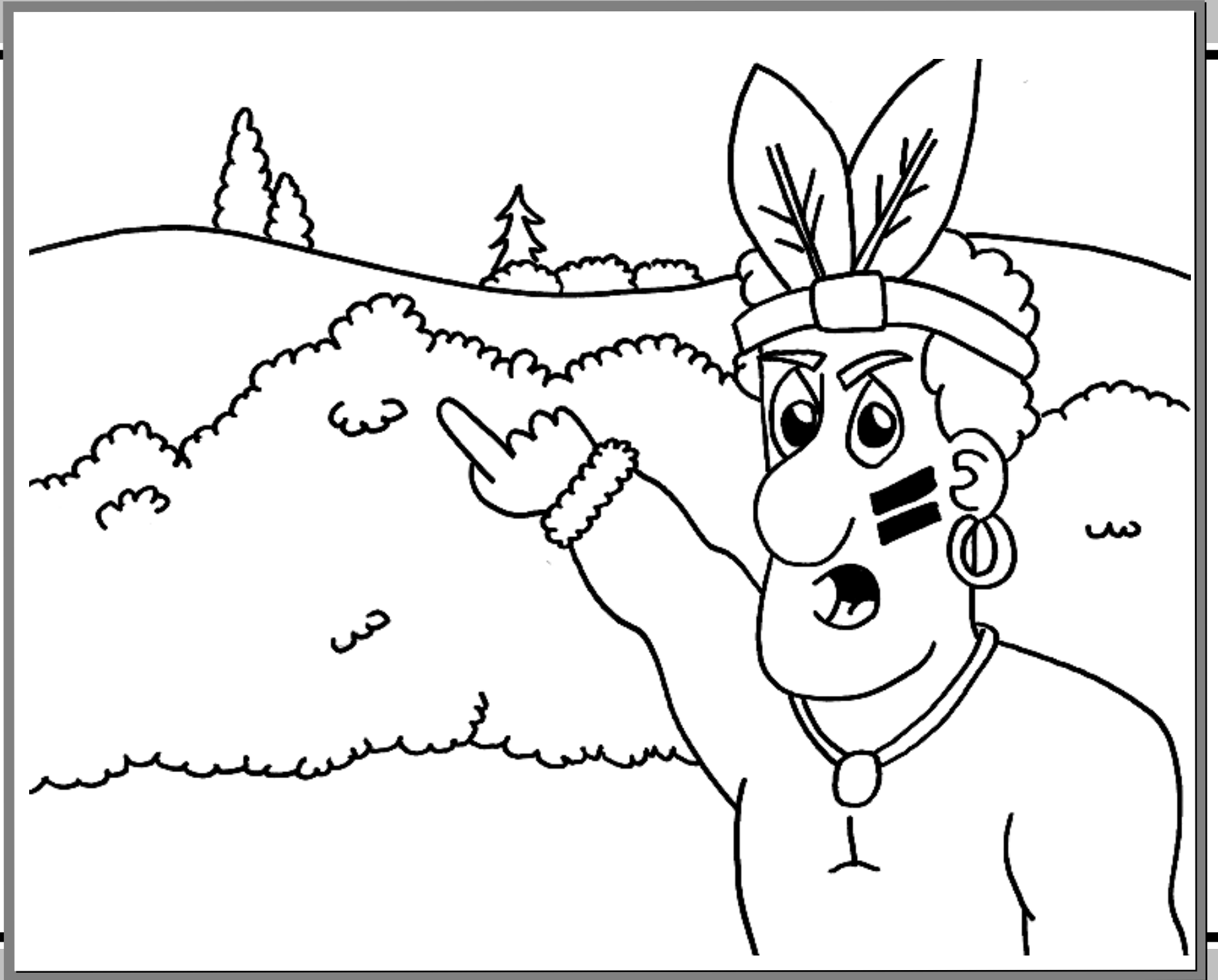
minute I realized that noise was just the wind blowing through the trees. Finally, I found a small stream and crossed it. Then up ahead I saw light flickering through the bushes ahead of me. As I got closer, I saw men sitting around the fires. This tribe was the most dangerous on the island. If they found me, they would surely kill me. It was so dark that I couldn't see in front of me. I knew I couldn't stay until the sun came up. I carefully felt my way around until I came to a high ledge. I realized I had come to the edge of the great rock. I knew that it was a long way down to the shore below. Then I remembered seeing a flat area on the rock that almost made a slide during the daylight. If I could find that spot, I could slide down to the shore safely. But if I picked the wrong spot, I could fall and be killed. I found a spot that seemed smooth and threw some rocks down to see if there was water below and listened. Not a sound. I threw my umbrella down next hoping to hear something...again, not a sound. I prayed that the Lord would protect me and I grabbed hold of my loose clothes and pushed off. Faster and faster I

Soon enough, another war did begin. The people went back to Captain Winchester and he demanded many things in exchange for the ammunition. The Tannese soon realized they had been tricked. In the middle of the night, I heard a knock at my door. It was from Captain Winchester. Chief Nookamara had sent many warriors to surround his house and the captain was very afraid. "You have done an evil thing," I said, "I cannot allow you to come into my house or the people will think I am on your side. You must leave." Captain Winchester left Tanna after that and did not return.

However, Captain Winchester must have told other traders about the Tannese and me. Not long after that, some traders arrived and told the chiefs that they would not trade with them unless they killed Abraham and I. Chief Nookamara warned me that a war-party was gathering to come and kill me, but another chief stood up in the meeting and slammed his heavy club onto the ground. "The man who wants to kill the mission-man will have to kill me and my people first." This put an end to the war party's plans.

Not long after, I saw four ships anchored in the bay. One trader came ashore and told me some terrible news. "We have sent four natives who are infected with the measles into four different villages. Soon, many will die," he said. "What a dreadful thing you have done!" I angrily shouted at him, but he was already climbing back into his rowboat to head back to his ship, laughing as he went.

It wasn't long before Chief Nookamara sent an urgent message to me.





“We need your help. A strange and terrible illness has come into the village.” There was little we could do. The people had high fevers, sore throats, and diarrhea. We did our best to comfort them and give them what medicines we had, but many of them still passed away. Finally, the disease ran its course and people started to get better.

A few months later, a terrible tropical storm hit Tanna. Strong winds knocked trees down and many houses were destroyed including the church building and my house. I knew that I would be blamed for this storm. Sure enough, a group of warriors surrounded me as I left my house one morning. “My friends,” I said, “have I ever done anything but help you? When you were sick, I gave you medicine, when you were thirsty I dug a well. I am not afraid to die, because I will go to Heaven.” I bowed my head and prayed that God would protect and when I opened my eyes, the men were gone.

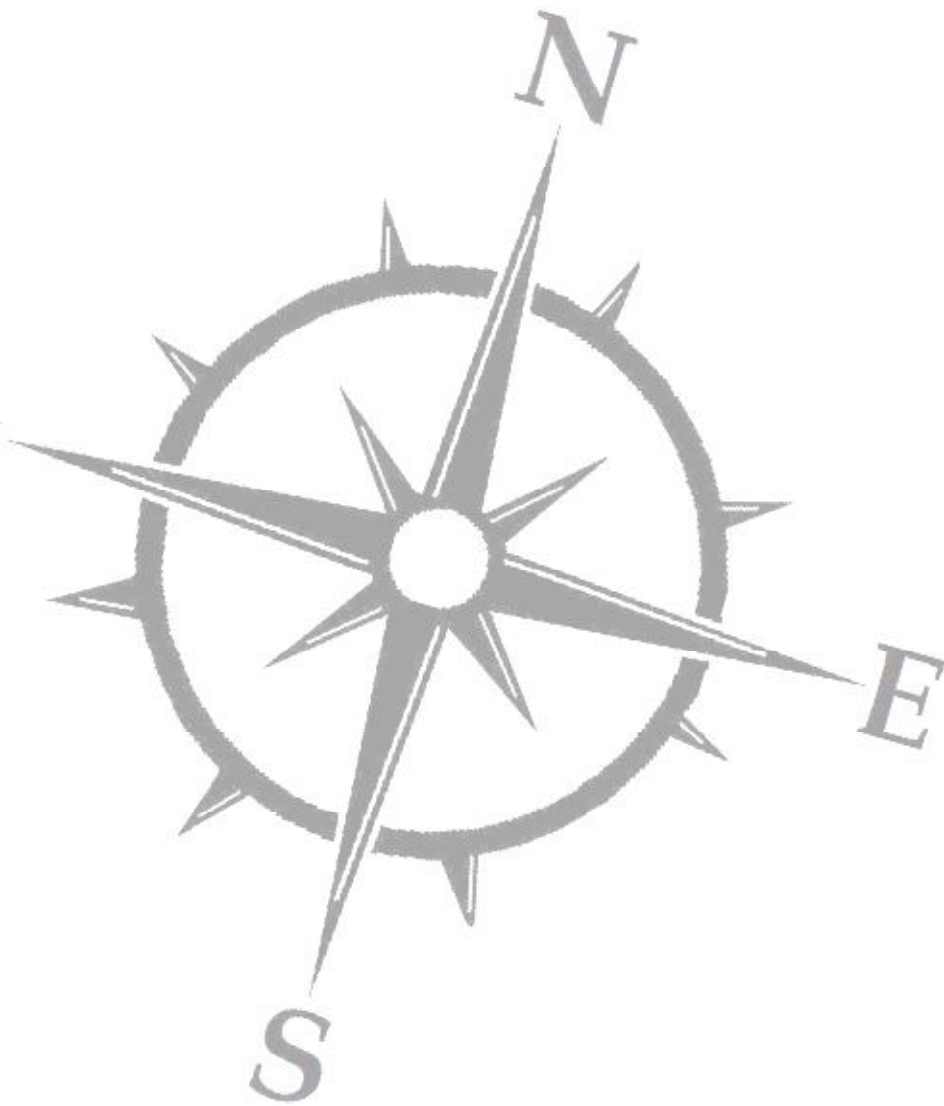
The Island of Tanna had two main tribes. The Harbor people lived near the sea and the Inland people lived near the center of the island. The two tribes were always

fighting. One day, I received a message that the Harbor and Inland people wanted me to come to the dancing grounds. “If I go, I might be killed,” I told Abraham. “But I see no other way to stop this fighting though. Surely God will protect me.” I started off to the meeting spot. Along the way, I ran into Enan, who was one of the chiefs of the inland people. “Come with me,” he said in a low angry voice. “God will punish you if you try to kill me,” I said. Enan did not say a word but continued down the narrow path through the jungle.

When we reached the clearing, I saw something that made me very nervous. Standing on one side of the field were many Harbor warriors all dressed up with war paint on their faces. On the other side of the field were many Inland warriors also dressed up with war paint on their faces. Everything was quiet. All eyes were looking at me. Chief Enan spoke very loudly, “These harbor people hate you and your Bible. Say the word, and we will shoot and attack them and kill them all.” I took a deep breath. My next words were very important. If I said the wrong thing, many people would die or I might even be killed. I raised my hand and took a deep breath.

What will John say? Will his words start a fight? To find out, come back next time.

*(For additional information, discussion questions and materials on this lesson please refer to **lesson 3.7** 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:

Bach, T. J. (1955). *John G. Paton, to Cannibals on Pacific Islands*. Retrieved from <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/biopaton14.html>

Creegan, C.C. & Goodnow, J.A. (1895). *John G. Paton*. Retrieved from <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/biopaton10.html>

Harrison, E. M. (1945). *John G. Paton: The Apostle of Christ to the Cannibals*. Retrieved from <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/biopaton.html>

Howell, C.G. (1912). *John Gibson Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides*. Retrieved from <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/biopaton8.html>

Jackson, D., & Jackson, N. (2001). *Hero tales, volume Iv: a family treasury of true stories from the lives of Christian heroes*. Minneapolis: Bethany House.

Mouillesseaux, C., Seger, D. L., Piccini, M., & Carlson, G. (1999). *John Paton: Pioneer Missionary to the Islands of New Hebrides*. Warrenton, MO: Child Evangelism Fellowship.

N.A. (2017). *John G. Paton: A Missionary of Courage*. Retrieved from <https://missionsbox.org/missionary-bio/john-g-paton-missionary-courage/>

Paton, J. G., & Unseth, B. (1996). *John Paton*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers.

Pounds, J. B. (1907). *Pioneer Missionaries: John G. Paton*. Retrieved from <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/biopaton9.html>

Walsh, K. (2005). *John G. Paton: South Sea Island Rescue*. Christian Focus.

