

The Life of

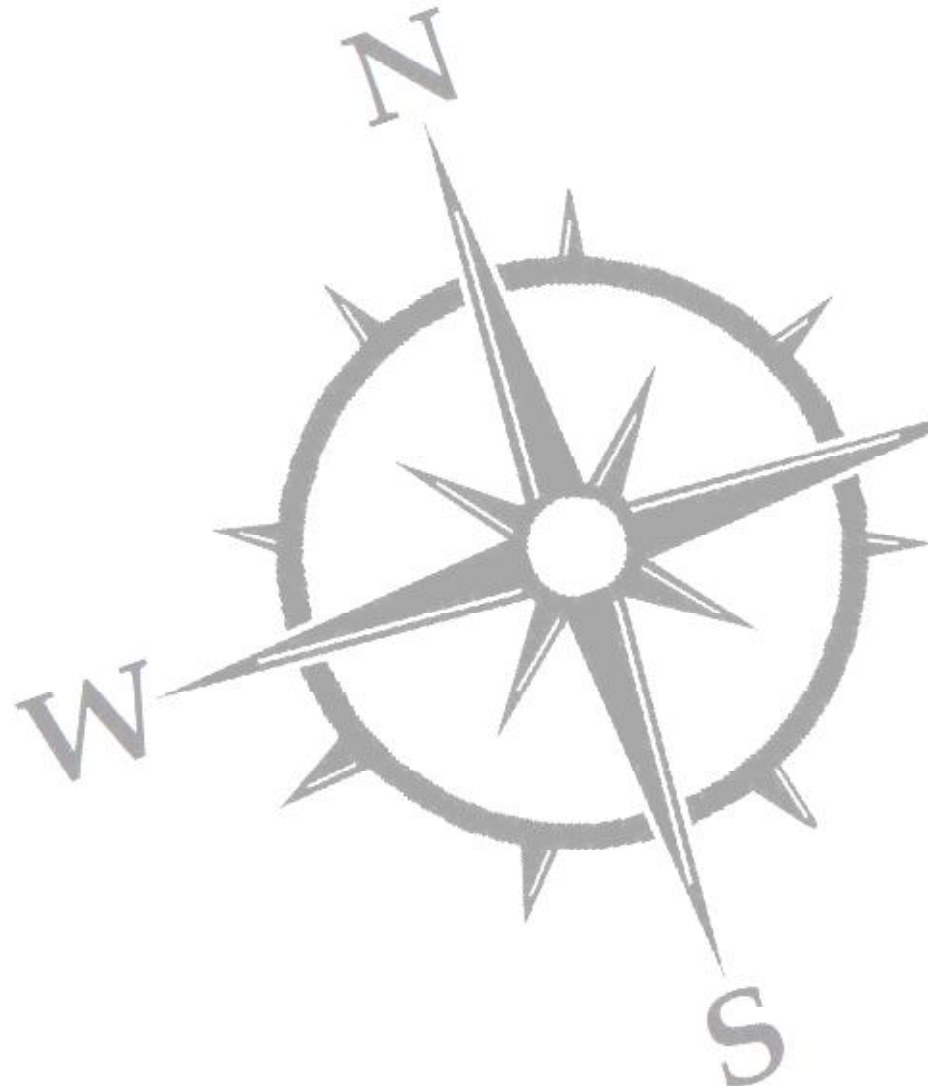
John Paton

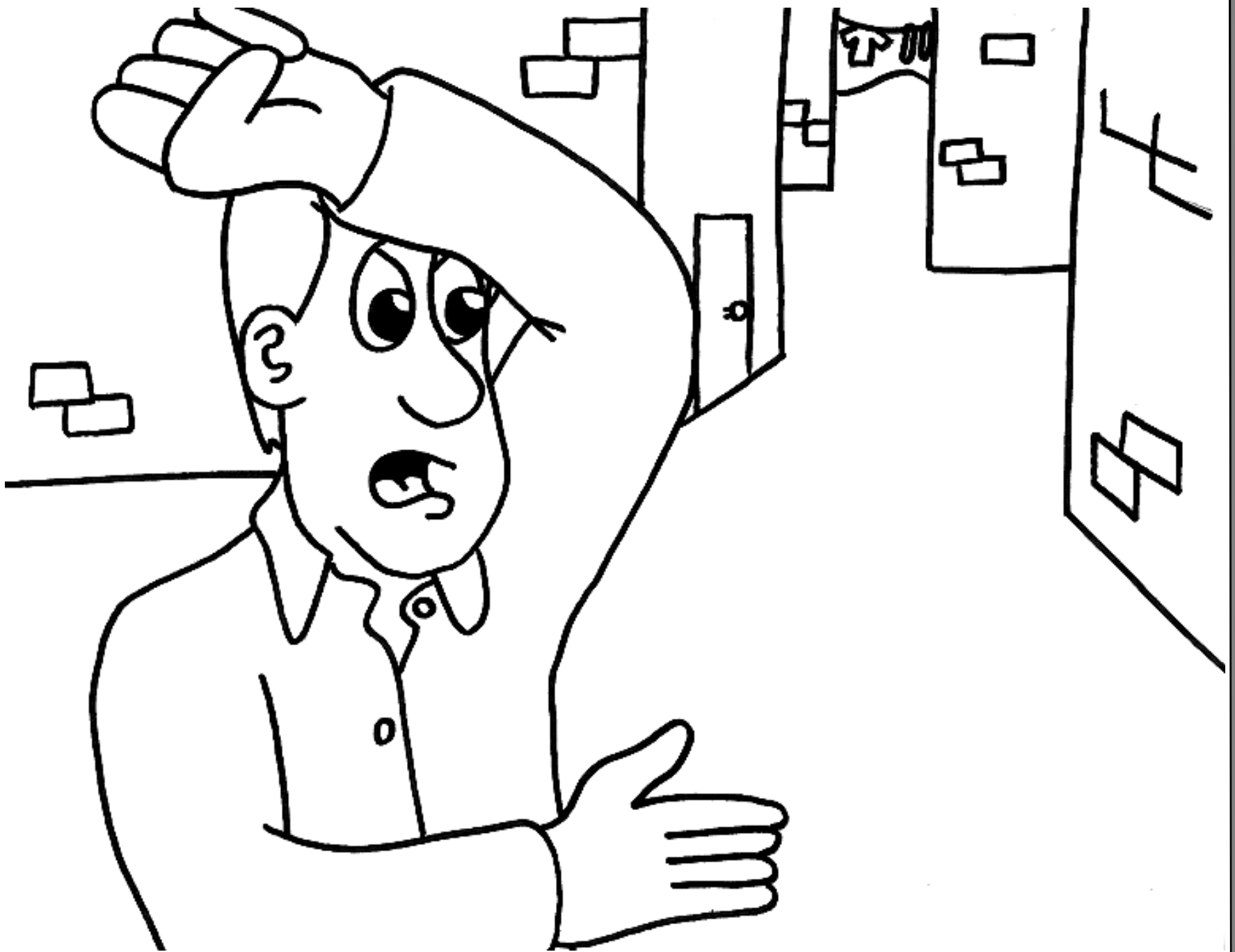
(1824-1907)

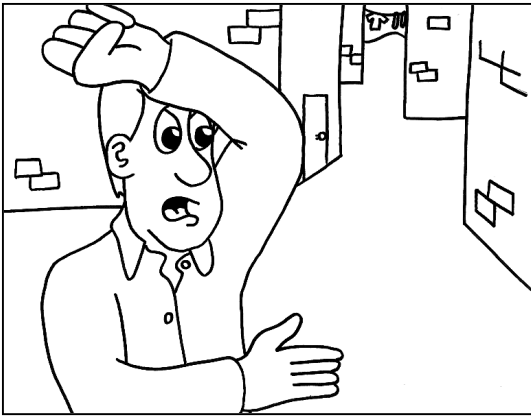
Lesson: 3.5 – Action Missionary Spotlight Series

This story reminds us that Christians are to be actively serving the Lord. With the Lord returning at any time, Christians are to be busy working to reap eternal benefits. John Paton saw a great spiritual need in Vanuatu. Others might have been content not to do anything. John didn't just think about the needs that he saw though, he decided to go and do something about them.

"Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." - Luke 12:43







Who remembers where we left off last week?

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

Something had hit me in the forehead and I was bleeding and dizzy. I looked all around and then spotted a stone on the ground in front of me. I felt above my eye and found a large cut. I managed to get on my feet and took a few wobbly steps. "I know the doctor lives around here," I thought, "but where?" Then I spotted the green door of the doctor's house down at the end of the street. I slowly stumbled down the street, holding onto fences, gates, and anything that would help keep me on my feet.

"You must be careful, John," the doctor said as he wiped the blood from my wound. "Was it one of the pub owners again?" he asked. Many people in the Green District had been saved and had given up a life of drinking. Even the doctor reminded

me of how God had recently rescued him from alcohol. The pub owners weren't happy about all these people getting saved and had tried all sorts of things to get rid of me. One time, just a couple weeks before, one of them tried to pour boiling water down on me as I walked past a house. Another time, they blocked the doors of the church with their wagon and then had myself and a couple of men in the church arrested when we tried to move it to let people leave the church because they said we were trying to steal something that didn't belong to us. They were not happy with us, but God was doing some amazing things. Things were going so well in the Green District that the mission had allowed me to stay. I wouldn't be leaving after all... or so I thought.

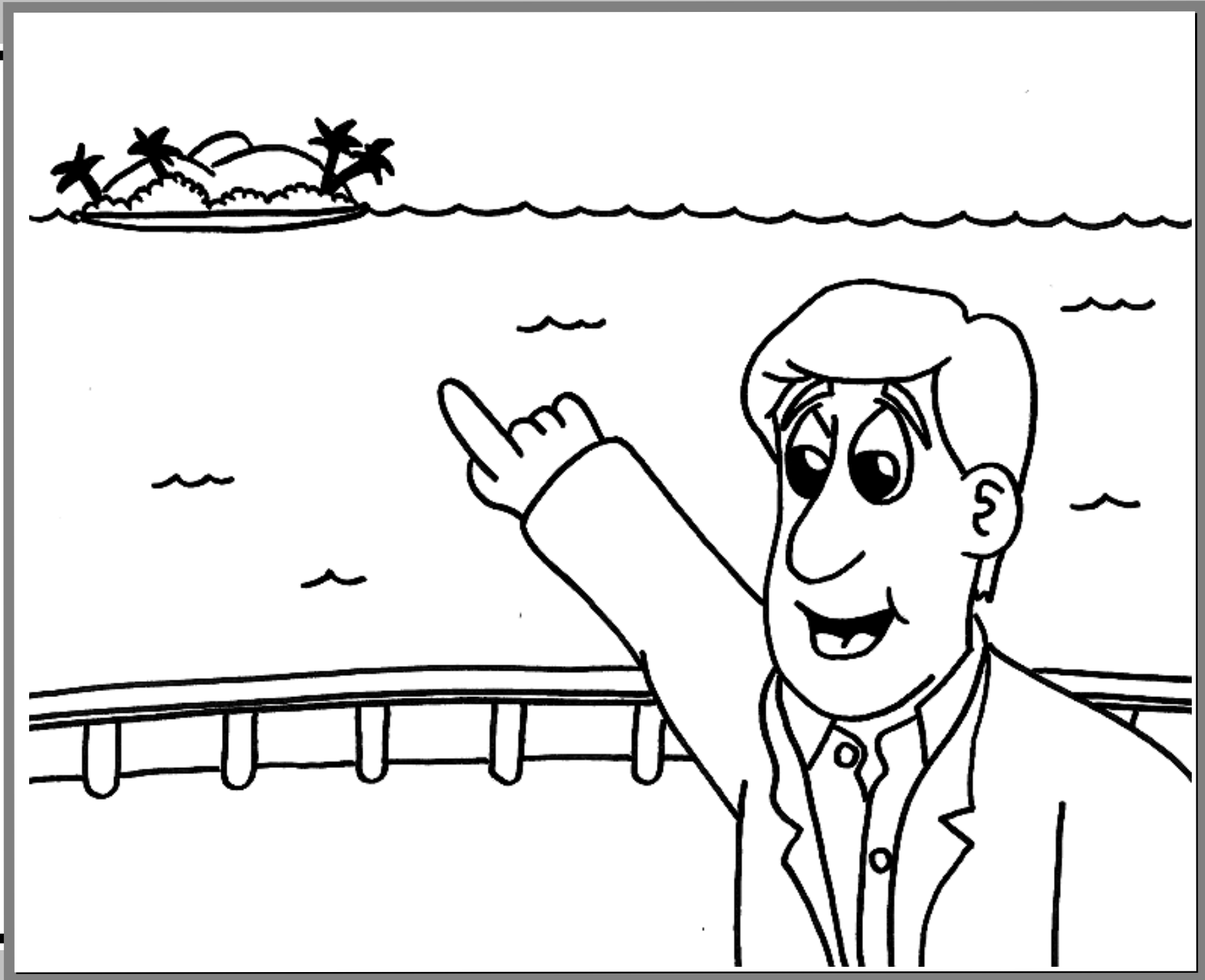
One Sunday morning in church, our pastor was talking all about the great needs in a place called the New Hebrides Islands. It was a place filled with cannibals, but a place where people had never heard about Jesus. A fire burned inside my heart. I knew in an instant that this is what God wanted me to do. This is what He had prepared me to do. As news started to get around that God had called me to go to the other side of the world, my friends started to give me advice. "Don't go, you'll be eaten by cannibals," one said to me. "They are savages, they won't listen to you," said another. "Look at all you have done here in the Green District," a pastor friend said, "who will carry on here if you leave?"

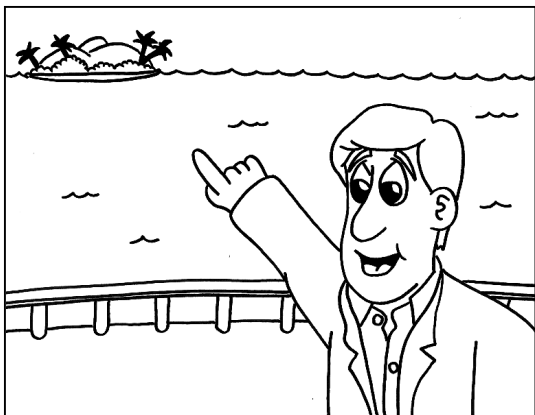
Even though everyone seemed to be warning me to stay in Glasgow, there was one person who was in favor of me going.

Her name was Mary Robson. Mary and I had fallen in love and she had not only agreed to marry me but had said she was willing to go to the South Seas Islands with me as a missionary.

I decided to go home and tell my parents and family the news about what I believed God wanted me to do. My parents were overjoyed to see me. "There are people who have never heard the name of the Jesus there," I told my parents that night, "People who have no Bible in their language." My parents listened quietly and then my father stood up and spoke "There is something I need to tell you, my son," he began. "Many years ago, when you were first born, your mother and I prayed that God would call you to be a missionary. We are thrilled that God has done just that!" Soon after, my brother, Walter, had more exciting news. "I have spoken to the committee, and I will be taking over for you in the Green District when you leave," he said.

Everything seemed to be falling into place. Mary and I were married and not long after, we stood on the deck of the *Clutha*, in Glasgow, watching all of our boxes and even a small piano being loaded on the ship for our journey to the South Seas. Mary was excited to play and to teach the people how to sing. It was March 1858 when the ship pulled out of the Glasgow harbor. We stood on the deck waving to our family and friends until they drifted out of sight. We then went below deck to settle into the cabins that would be our home for the next several months. As April, May, June, and July passed by onboard the ship, I kept busy





preaching and talking with the captain who was also a Christian.

Finally, our ship arrived in Sydney, Australia in August of 1858. It wasn't long until our 50 boxes and things were being loaded onto a smaller ship with a new captain that would take us to the New Hebrides Islands. "Look, John," Mary said pointing to flying fish jumping out of the water. "Come and see these odd creatures," I said pointing to some jellyfish just below the surface of the water. This place was filled with creatures we had never seen before.

Twelve days later a cry came from the ship's lookout, "land ahead!" Mary and I were excited to see the land getting closer and closer. This was an island called Anatom. Missionaries were already working on this island and the plan was for us to stay here to get started and then move to another island to begin working with the people there. Suddenly, the ship stopped. The captain explained that he would not be going anywhere near these islands. He signaled to someone onshore and it wasn't long before a missionary named Dr. John Geddie and some

Anatom natives were sailing out in two tiny mission boats.

We loaded our things on the two small boats and then climbed into them ourselves. The captain was in such a hurry to get away that his ship sideswiped our little boat breaking the tail mast. I pulled Mary out of the way just in time as the heavy mast came crashing down and almost crushed her. "Now we had no way to steer the boat. Captain, please help us!" I shouted, but the captain ignored our shouts and kept sailing away. "We are drifting towards the other islands," Dr. Geddie said. "If we go there, the native people will kill us and take our things. We must all help to row the boat if we want to get to Anatom safely!"

It took a lot of work, but it wasn't long until our boats reached the sandy shores of Anatom. Dr. Geddie showed us all of the houses and gardens of the mission there. "Our work is going well here in Anatom," he said, "many of the people have accepted Jesus as their Savior here. I will send some of them to Tanna with you to help you build your house." I closed my eyes and imagined starting my work with the people of Tanna soon.

Not long after, a strong young man, who had been re-named Abraham after he had been saved and some others offered to go with me to Tanna. It was now November and very hot. I wanted to get our mission house built before the rainy season began. It took several hours to sail to Tanna, but finally, my feet stood on the sands of the place that would be my home for a while. I soon purchased some land with axes, blankets, and

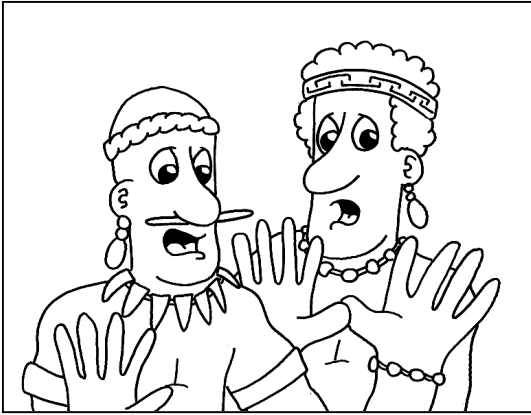
fish hooks and Abraham and I started to build the house.

"Nunksi nari enu?" one of the natives said to his friend as he lifted one of my tools one day several days later. I think he is saying "what is this," Mary whispered to me. So I picked up a piece of wood and repeated the phrase "Nunksi nari enu?" They smiled and told me what it was called. For many days, I repeated the phrase and wrote down each thing's name and the way they said it.

Weeks went by and everything seemed to be going well. It had been almost a year since we had left Scotland. We also had a brand new baby boy named Peter. We were slowly learning the language and had even made friends with Chief Nookamara and his tribe. Then something terrible happened. Mary and Peter started running high fevers and became very sick. I tried everything I could think to do, but they both passed away. I was very sad. Some other missionaries came over from Anatom and offered for me to come back there, but I knew that God was too loving and too wise to make a mistake. God wanted us to come to Tanna. Mary wanted to work in Tanna. I knew that Tanna was where I needed to stay.

Within a couple of days though, I too began to have fevers. "If you stay here, you will die soon!" Chief Nookamara warned me one day. "You sleep too close to the swamp, you must move to higher ground where we are. The fresh wind keeps us well." I thanked him, but after all of the work I had done to build my house near the beach, I dreaded the idea of moving it all again. A week later, though, when I was still having fevers, I





realized that I had to leave this spot and move to higher ground. Abraham agreed to help me to move the house to higher ground.

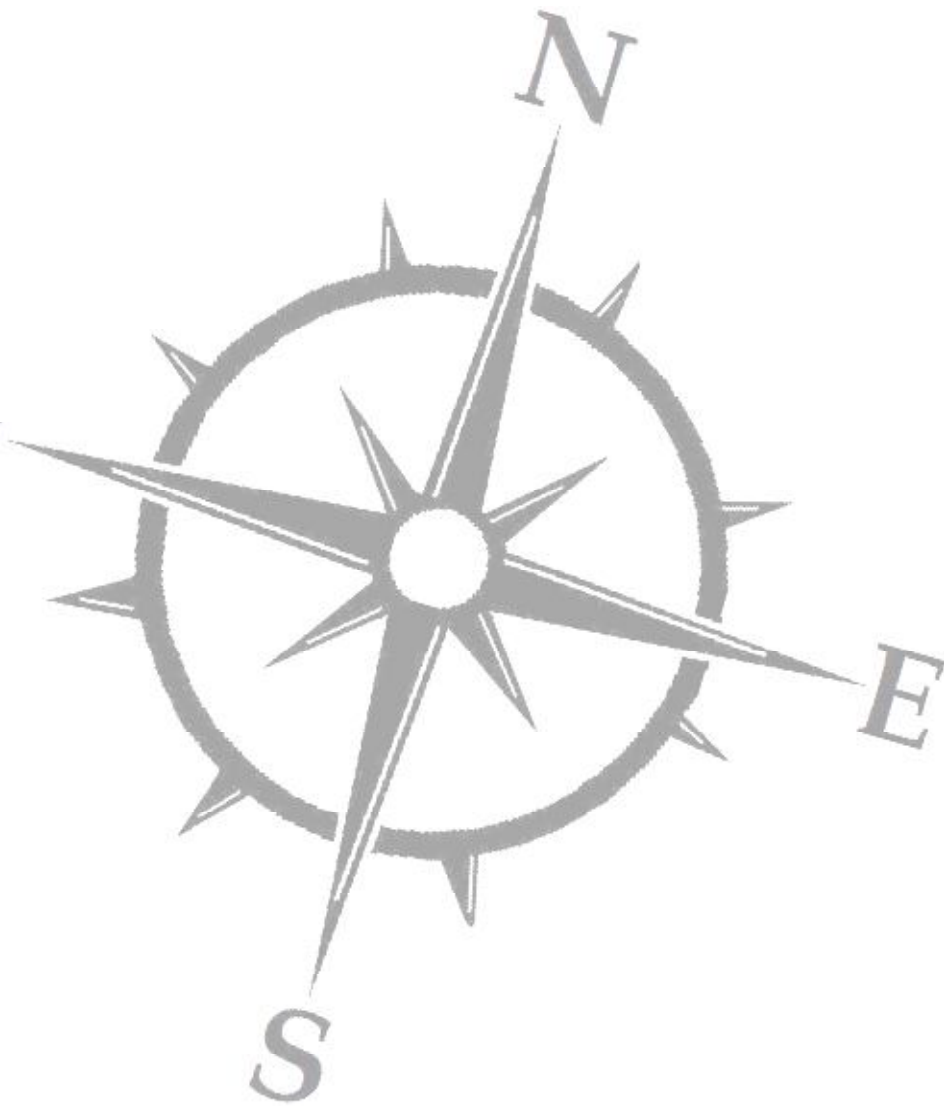
Tanna was a beautiful place, but I was learning that Tanna was also filled with problems. Not only were the people cannibals and were fighting all the time, but the people also believed that evil spirits caused many of the things that happened on Tanna. They believed the fire-god caused the volcanoes to erupt when he was angry, so they threw innocent people into the volcano to try to make the god happy. They couldn't understand that storms and illnesses were natural things. The witch doctor of the tribes told the people that evil spirits caused these things to happen when they were angry. The witch doctor also said that he could control when it rained by asking the gods to make it rain. The reason rainwater was so important was that Tanna had very little freshwater. You could boil spring water, but because it was so hot in Tanna, it took several days for the water to cool down. The people gave gifts to the witch doctor hoping he would cause it to rain.

Chief Nookamara was puzzled when I told him one day that I was going to try to dig a well just like we had back in Scotland to get water from the ground. "Water does not come from the ground," he had said. Before long though, I had begun digging. It took a couple of days, but finally, the bottom began to fill with water. I tasted it and handed a cup up Chief Nookamara. "Water from the ground!" he said. "You should show this to Miaki, the War Chief! He hates all foreigners. Perhaps this water will make him treat you better." I smiled at the chief's words. "Please tell everyone that I want to help all of you. I want to also build a school to teach you many good things," I said to the chief.

Very soon, natives began coming and asking me what a school was and how I was going to build one. Soon, I had many volunteers and we began digging the foundations of our new school and church. 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 began to push my way through the crowd of people. "Why had everyone stopped? What was going on?" I wondered.

What do you think happened to that worker? What are the people looking at? To find out, come back next time.

*(For additional information, discussion questions and materials on this lesson please refer to **lesson 3.5** 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*. Christan Focus.

