

# The Life of Gladys Aylward

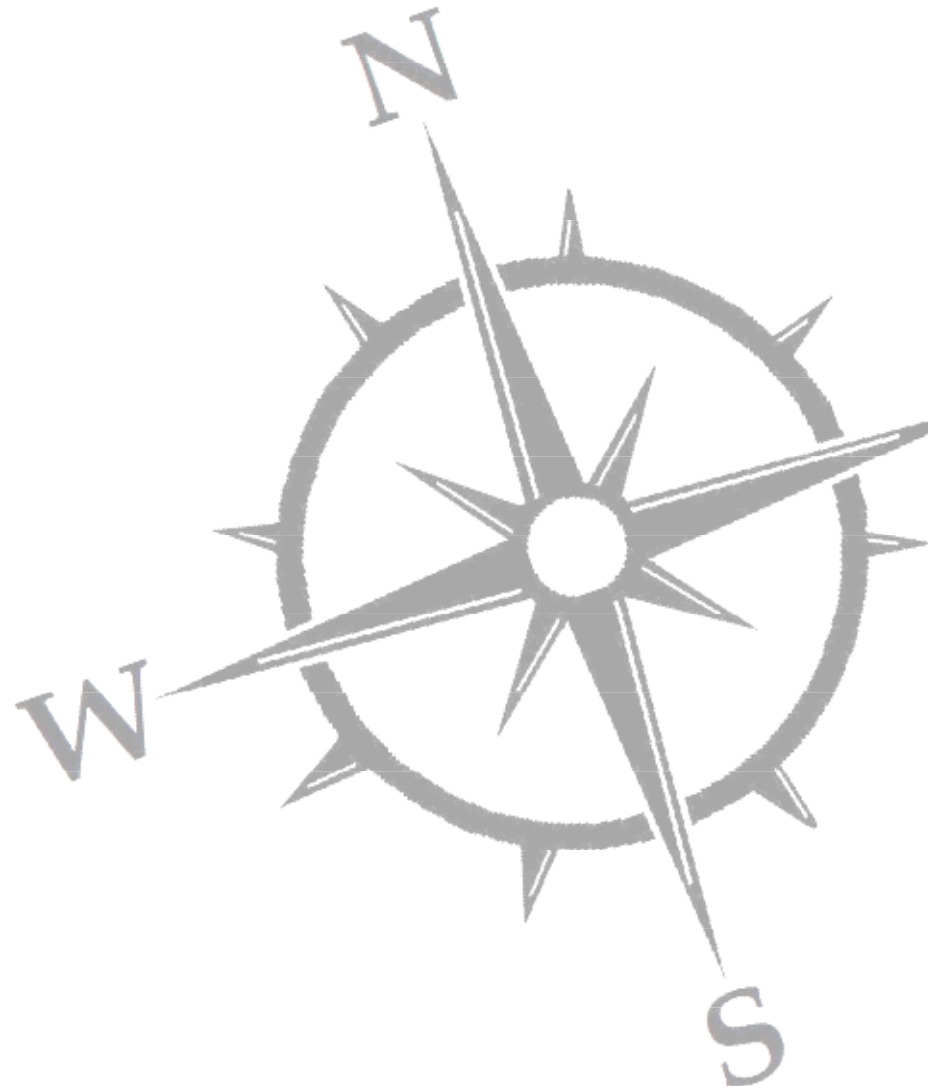
(1902-1970)

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## Lesson: 1.28 – 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 Gladys Aylward needed God to guide her in what she was about to do for the people of China.

*“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 lady who left her home and went to work as a missionary in China. She traveled all by herself and didn't know how to speak the language at all. This missionary knew that God wanted her to go to China, but she needed God to guide her and show her exactly where to go and what to do. Let's listen carefully to what happened to Gladys Aylward...

### **Missionary Story:**

"ALL ABOARD!" The conductor called for the last time. I could not believe it, but there I was sitting on board a train bound for China. Only two years before, I found myself seated across from the principal of the China Inland Mission Training School. "I'm sorry, Gladys," he had said, "but your grades after these first three months are very poor.

We don't feel you have what it takes to be a missionary in China." I couldn't believe my ears. All of my life I had felt like God wanted me to be a missionary in China, but now it wasn't meant to be. I found a job as a housekeeper working for two retired missionaries who encouraged me not to give up on what I felt God wanted me to do.

One Sunday, I learned of an older missionary in China named Jennie Lawson. Jennie had written a letter begging for someone in England to come and be her assistant and help her in China. I wrote Jennie a letter and was excited when several weeks later she wrote me back telling me how happy she would be to have me join her in China.

The next day, I went to the travel agents office. "What does it cost to go to China?" I asked setting my coin purse up on the desk. Seeing such a small woman with such thin looking clothes I'm sure he thought that I was kidding. "By boat it'll cost ninety pounds," he said. "Ninety pounds!" I gasped. I only had a few pounds total. "A train ticket is only about forty-five pounds," he said seeing my disappointed face. "I'll take it," I told him. I had him create a ticket for me and told him I would bring money to him each Friday until it was paid for. "You can't get to China right now," he said, "there is a war between Russia and China and the border is closed." I smiled. "If God wants me in China, then He will have the border opened before I have paid off my ticket," I said confidently.

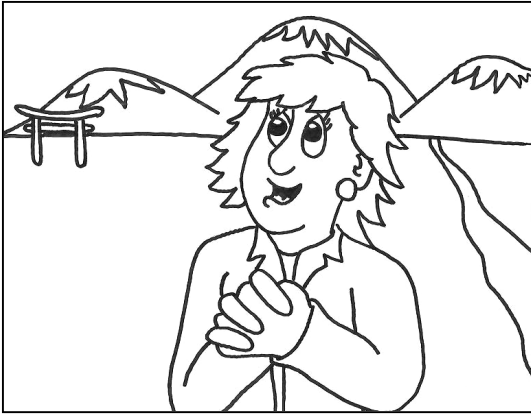
And here I was, ready to make a 5,000 mile trip to China. It was October, 1932, and my heart was racing as we pulled

out of the station. My journey to China was full of adventures, not all of them were nice though. In Russia, some officials pulled me off of the train and demanded that I go to work in a factory. They had misread the word "missionary" on my passport and thought it said "machinery." A few days later, I found myself in the middle of a war. I even slept outside one night and was awakened all through the night by the howling of wolves that were nearby. Four weeks from when I first left England, my mule finally stopped in front of a small house in the little mountain town of Yangcheng. I had arrived!

"I'm going to open an inn for muleteers," Jennie told me a few days later, "when they stay with us, we will tell them all about Jesus." I was a bit nervous. "I don't know how to speak any Chinese," I said, "How will I be able to speak to them?" Jennie laughed. "Thankfully, the mules don't speak Chinese either," she said "your job will be to go into the street, grab the mules by their manes and pull them into our courtyard. Their drivers would most likely be too tired to put up a fuss. For now, let me and Mr. Yang do all the talking," she said.

Over the next several months, things went very well. I learned to pull the mules in quite well and the drivers always enjoyed our inn, because they got to hear stories. But then, one day about a year after I had arrived Jennie fell and got so badly hurt that she passed away. I was now alone in a strange country. I could not speak Chinese as well as I would've like to. "What was I going to do? How was I going to pay the taxes for the inn? The muleteers barely gave us enough money





to buy coal and food, much less pay the taxes. And I was so busy running the inn that I hardly had time to tell people about Jesus. After all, the whole reason that I came here was to be a missionary, not to take care of mules! Questions and angry thoughts flooded my mind and then I did the only thing I could... I knelt and prayed. "God, you brought me all the way to China," I prayed, "I know don't know what to do or where to go. Please show me what to do next."

Just then, there was a loud tapping on the front door of the inn. Mr. Yang came running into my room. "Come quickly," he said nervously, "the Mandarin is here to see you. You must come out right away!" The mandarin was like the governor or king of the town. "The Mandarin must be angry that we haven't paid our taxes for the inn yet," I thought as I rushed to the front door. Out in the courtyard, the Mandarin sat high upon his horse looking towards the sky. He seemed displeased. His officials all stood around him. I bowed in respect to him as I walked out into the courtyard. "What excuse can I make for not having the tax money?" I

thought.

"Miss Aylward," he began, "I have come to see you about a very important matter. I need you to...to become my official foot inspector." I was surprised. "Y-Your what?" I asked. The Mandarin went on to say that the new nationalist government had outlawed the ancient practice of binding little girl's feet to make them small. He needed a foot inspector to go into the mountain villages and make sure people were obeying the law.

"Was this something that the Mandarin was asking me to do or was this was something he was telling me to do?" I wondered. I had come to China to be a missionary, not a foot inspector! "How will I ever have time to run the inn and tell people about Jesus if I accept this ridiculous request?" I thought. But then... suddenly, I thought of something...

"I would be honored to be your foot inspector," I said bowing once again, "but only if you will allow me to freely talk to people about Jesus when I go into the people's houses while I am there."

"If people want to listen to you talk about your religion, that is there business," he said. He then told me that he would pay me a monthly salary, give me a mule to ride, and send two soldiers with me for protection. As the gate closed behind the Mandarin, tears welled up in my eyes. How foolish I had been. I didn't have to worry about where the money would come from, or about anything else. God already had a wonderful plan in mind for my life. "Lord, I'm sorry for all of my doubts," I said "thank you for this

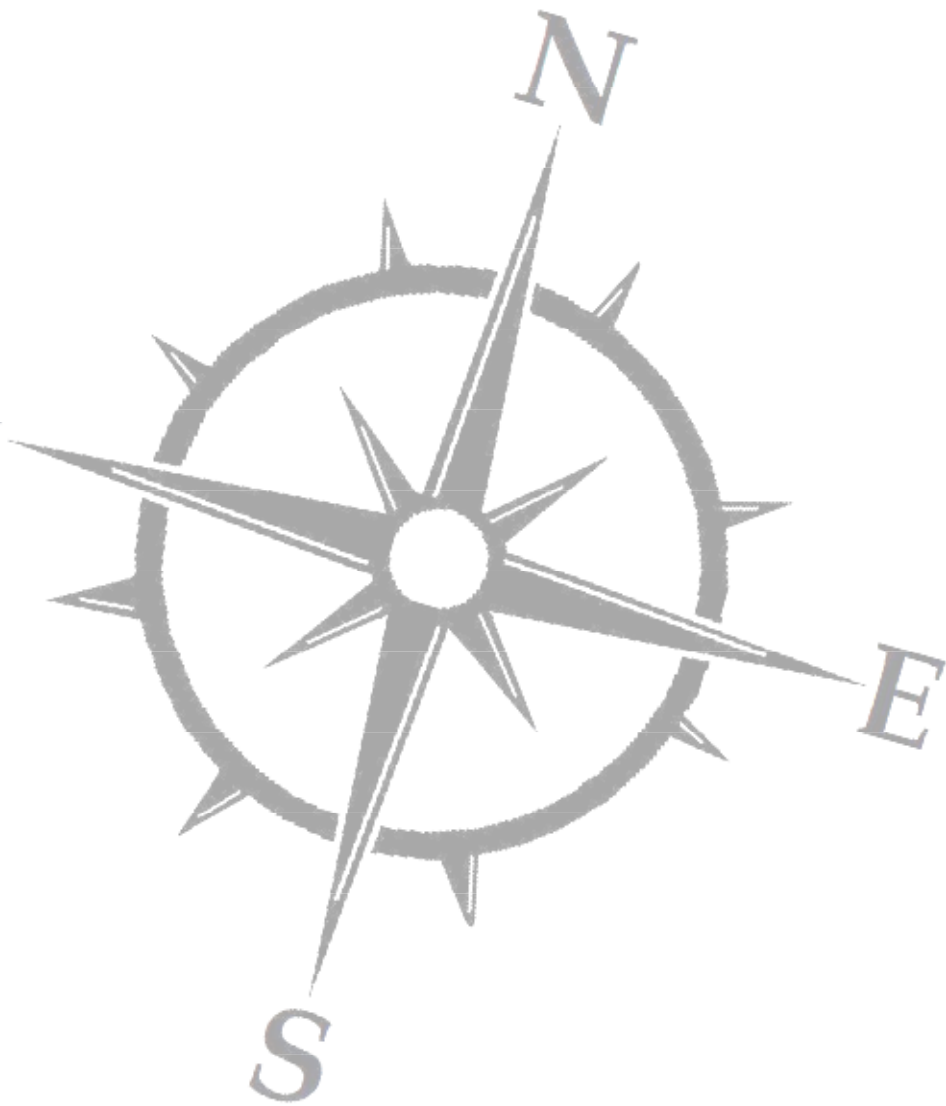
opportunity to tell others about you!"

### **Application:**

You know, boys and girls, Psalm 48:14 tells us that God will guide those who are serving Him. God has a wonderful plan for each of our lives. His plan is always the best plan and the one that will bring us the most joy. Just like a jungle guide, God is watching out for us every step of the way. It was not long after the events in this story that China was attacked by Japan. Gladys Aylward would again have to trust the Lord to guide her as she led over 100 orphan children on a dangerous journey through the mountains to safety.

Gladys Aylward worked in China for over forty years. Over one thousand people attended the funeral to say one last goodbye to their Ai-weh-deh (virtuous one). Memorial services were held all over the world for her. She was told she was too old and too frail to be a missionary in China. Yet over those forty years, she took care of hundreds of orphans, traveled hundred of miles throughout China, and faced many very scary situations without ever shying away from them. In 1966, a movie was made about her life called the *Inn of Sixth Happiness*. Some said she'd never make it in China, but she persevered and watched God do amazing things in her life because of it.

*(For additional information, discussion questions and materials on this lesson please refer to lesson 1.28 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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