

# The Life of John Paton

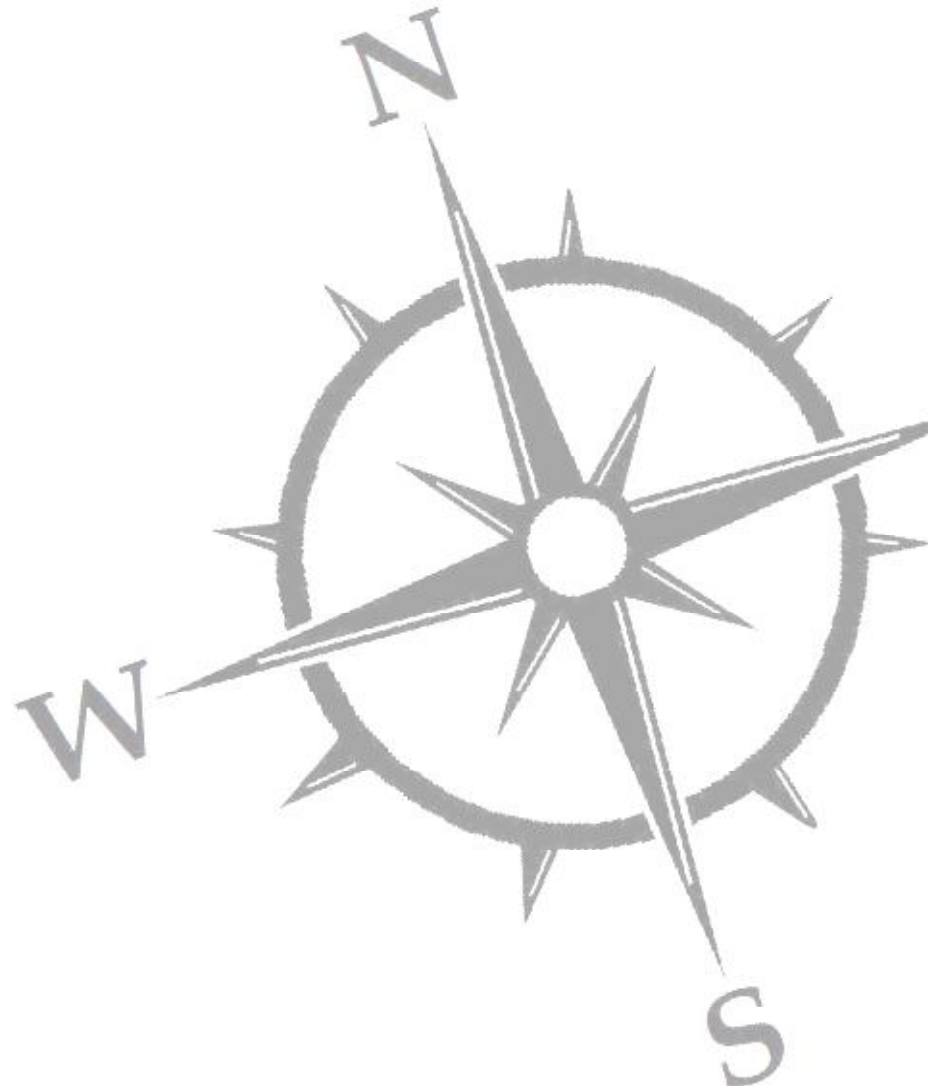
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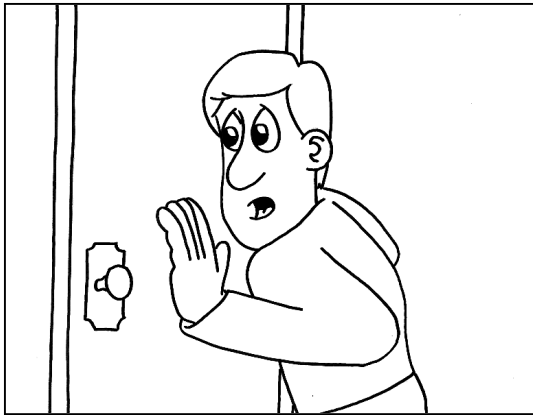
## Lesson: 3.10 – Finishing Missionary Spotlight Series

This story reminds us that even if we start out our Christian life well, it is very important that we finish well. We must be faithful in serving the Lord throughout our whole lives. John Paton had served the Lord all of his life, but finishing the race is just as important as running hard the rest of the race.

*“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:” - 2 Timothy 4:7*







### **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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Something strange was going on. I had noticed a pile of green coconut leaves lying behind our mission house. Every morning, there seemed to be more and more leaves. That night, there was a loud banging on the door. A voice rang out that something terrible was about to happen. I opened the door to find my friend, Chief Namakei. "They are trying to burn your house down," he said, pointing out into the bush. In the trees, I could see several Aniwans carrying torches in their hands. Then I noticed buckets and other containers full of water sitting along the edge of the porch. I also saw several of my native friends sitting on the leaves. "We have been coming each night to protect your house," Chief Namakei told me. I thanked him and the others. Seeing that I knew of their plans, the Aniwans hurriedly

ran off into the jungle and did not come back the following night.

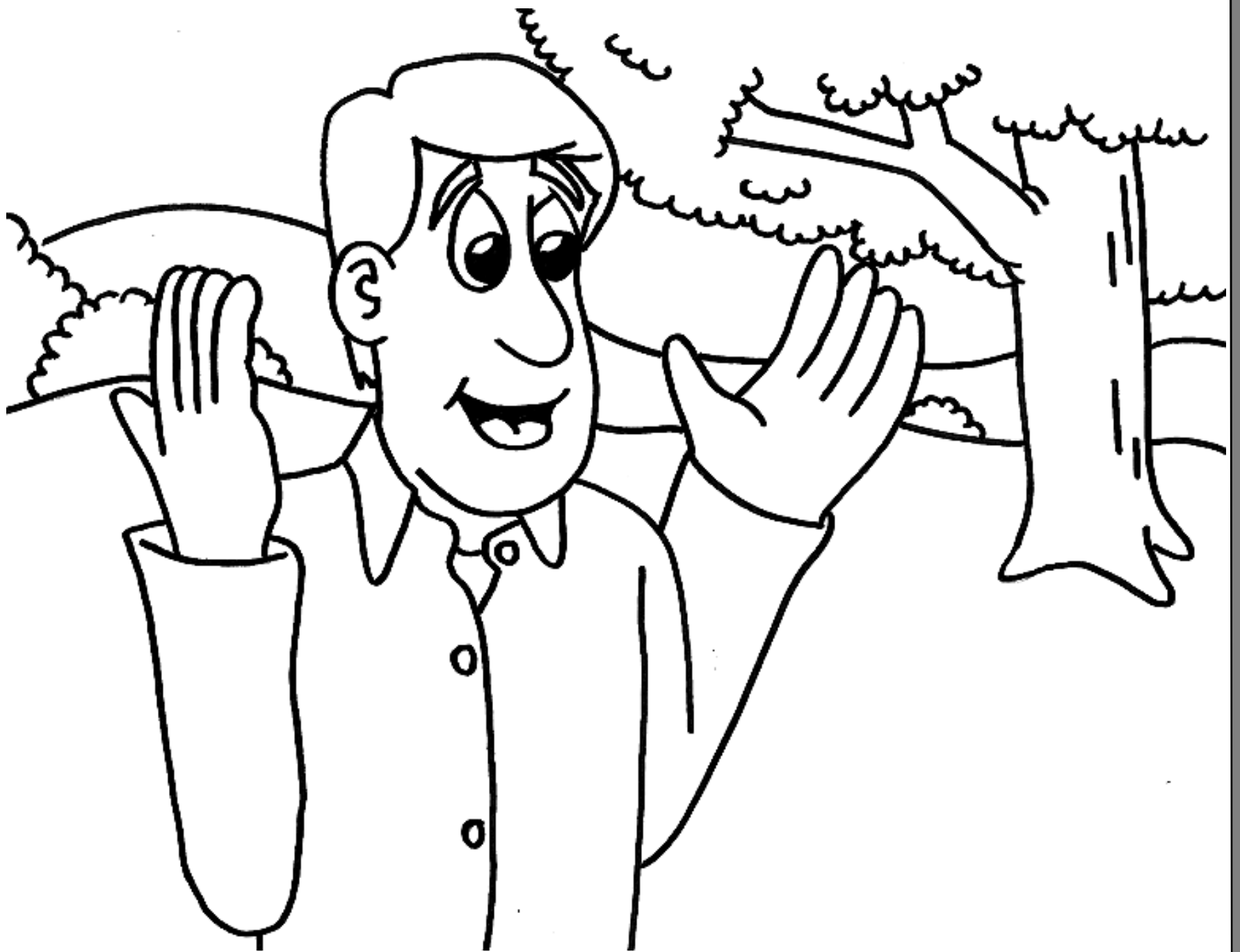
Chief Namakei went on to tell me something else. "When you first came here, we saw your boxes full of blankets, fish hooks, axes, and knives. We didn't want you to leave because we wanted those things for ourselves. That is why we told you to buy this piece of land. This place was a sacred land where we used to hold our feasts and cook our enemies. If you lived here, we thought our gods would kill you and your family, and then we could take your things. When you planted bananas, we were sure you would drop dead from eating them. Our witch doctors told us that if anyone except themselves ate fruit from sacred ground, they would die. We watched for days and days, but no one died. We then realized our gods could not kill you. Your God was stronger."

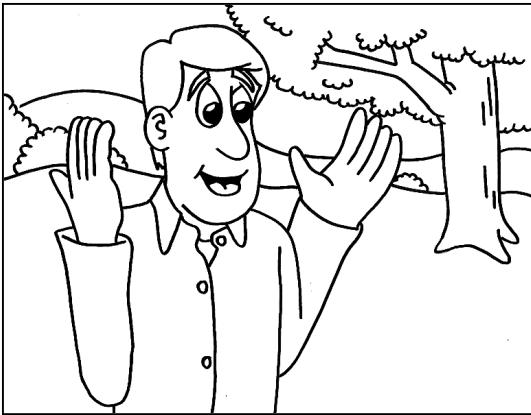
Chief Namakei went on to say that no one had ever come to their island and treated them as kindly. He laughed as he talked about me digging the well and how foolish they all thought I was for thinking water was beneath the ground. "Many have tried to dig a well after you did, but their wells only found coral, not water. God led you to the one perfect spot on the island where water could be found," he said.

The chief had gathered his people together and said, "Wonderful are the things your God can do; none of our gods have ever helped us in this way. Since our friend came to the island, he has told us many strange things that we did not understand. The strangest thing was that rain was below the ground. He prayed and prayed and then dug

and dug. He told us God would answer his prayer, and God did. I will believe what the missionary has told us about Jesus. I will not laugh at his words any longer, I will believe them."

The people nodded their heads up and down. Soon, Chief Namakei also announced that his people must get rid of their gods. They brought their stone and wood idols and burned them in a large pit. Some of them even threw their idols out into the deep waters of the ocean. The people were also much more interested in what I was doing. Slowly, more and more people began coming to church. Many still did not trust their neighbors, so they would often come with their weapons and animals so that no one would steal them while they were gone. This led to some funny church services, with pigs grunting, chicks cheeping, and dogs barking. God was working in hearts. I remembered back to when we had first come to Aniwa. One afternoon, Margaret was in our hut with our baby Freddie, while I was working on building our new house. Suddenly, the curtain that we had hung over the window to keep the Aniwans from looking into our hut began to rustle. "Is the wind making the curtain move like that?" she wondered. But it was a hot day, and there wasn't any wind. Suddenly, the curtain ripped down, and an Aniwani man with an angry look on his face was standing there. He shouted something at her and then jumped at her. Margaret took off out of the hut and ran to where I was building the house with Freddie held tightly in her arms. Margaret told me what had happened. A man who was helping me to build the





house said that he knew who the man was. “His name is Nelwang, and he has a horrible temper. You are lucky that he did not kill your wife and baby,” the man said. I knew that luck had nothing to do with it, but God had protected Margaret and Freddie. Several months later, Nelwang showed up and asked for my help. He and a girl named Yakin wanted to get married. I helped him. A few weeks later, Nelwang and Yakin showed up at our house and explained that they wanted to help us, and soon both had asked Jesus to save them.

I worked hard to get the Bible written in the Aniwan language so they could read it for themselves. Every day, someone would come and ask, “Is it finished? Is it finished?” Finally, one day, I was able to tell them “yes!” Chief Namakei came running to my house. “Does it speak my words?” he asked. “Make it speak to me... let me hear it speak.” I read some of it to him, and he began jumping all around excitedly. “It does speak! It speaks just like I speak!” He got down on his knees and begged me to show him how to make it speak to him. I explained that I must

teach him how to read. It wasn’t long before he had learned to read and began traveling all over the island to read God’s word to others. We set up schools and began teaching others to read. We also set up an orphanage for some of the orphan children on Aniwa. We also had a wonderful new addition to our family when my son Frank was born.

Even though the island had many trees, there were times when food could not be found. One time, no one could find food. I had no food for myself or any of the orphans. “We are hungry,” they said, “can’t you give us something to eat?” I explained that I was hungry too, but that we would have to wait until the *Dayspring* brought our next delivery of supplies. Every night, the children and I prayed, and every morning they would rush to the coral rocks and look for the ship. I knew it was hard, and I explained that sometimes God allowed us to wait before He answered our prayers, but we shouldn’t give up.

Then one morning, the children ran in shouting, “Our ship is here! Our ship is here!” I looked through a telescope and saw that there was a ship with the *Dayspring*’s flag, but it wasn’t the same ship. Soon, the ship was anchored, and food and supplies were brought ashore. Everyone was excited and grateful to have the food and supplies. I soon learned that the *Dayspring* had wrecked, and another ship had been rented to bring us supplies. I also learned that the *Dayspring* had been bought and put back together by a group of slave traders. “That is terrible!” Margaret said. “The people on the islands will rush out thinking it is our boat

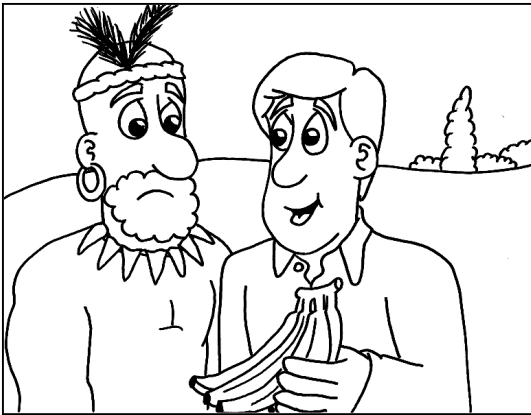
and will be captured as slaves.” Several weeks later, and after many prayers, I came back to the mission house with great news. A few nights before, the slave traders had gone ashore on one of the islands, and a storm had come up and sunk the *Dayspring* in the bay.

Things continued to go well on Aniwa, though I often thought of and missed the people of Tanna. One day, I learned that several Tannese people had come to our island. I hurried to the beach and looked through the crowd of faces. “Nookamara!” I shouted when I saw my old friend. It had been a long time, and we were both much older now. I learned that Miaki had created a war on Tanna and that many had fled for their lives. The Aniwans and I welcomed the Tannese to live in Aniwa with us.

By 1884, I was excited to see several more missionaries coming to the islands. I was also asked by the mission to come back to Scotland again to help raise money for a new steamship that would be able to travel between the islands much faster. I traveled all over Scotland and Great Britain and even to the United States, telling people about what God was doing in the South Seas. People were excited to give and even offer themselves to serve God as missionaries there. I enjoyed spending time with so many people. I even spent time with the famous George Muller and got to see his famous orphanages. But I must admit that I was excited when the time came for me to travel back to Australia and my island home once again.

I was now a much older man and had trouble getting around as easily as I had





before. I loved to go and be with the island people. Because I have been sick lately, I decided to make another trip back to Australia. I think the rest and fresh air will do me some good. During the long boat ride to Australia, I thought about the people of Tanna again. Aniwa now had a thriving church. How I hoped that someday God would also reach the Tannese people. Even though I had not lived on Tanna for many years, the people there still held a special place in my heart.

*(Summary of the life of John Paton)*

While in Melbourne, Australia, John Paton quietly went home to be with his Lord on January 28, 1907. He was eighty-three years old. John had arrived on the shores of Tanna over forty-three years before. It was a land of spiritual darkness and superstition. He worked tirelessly to reach the Tannese and Aniwa peoples with the gospel. Though he was often frustrated on Tanna, he later watched as most of the island of Aniwa became Christians and saw many

missionaries follow behind him there.

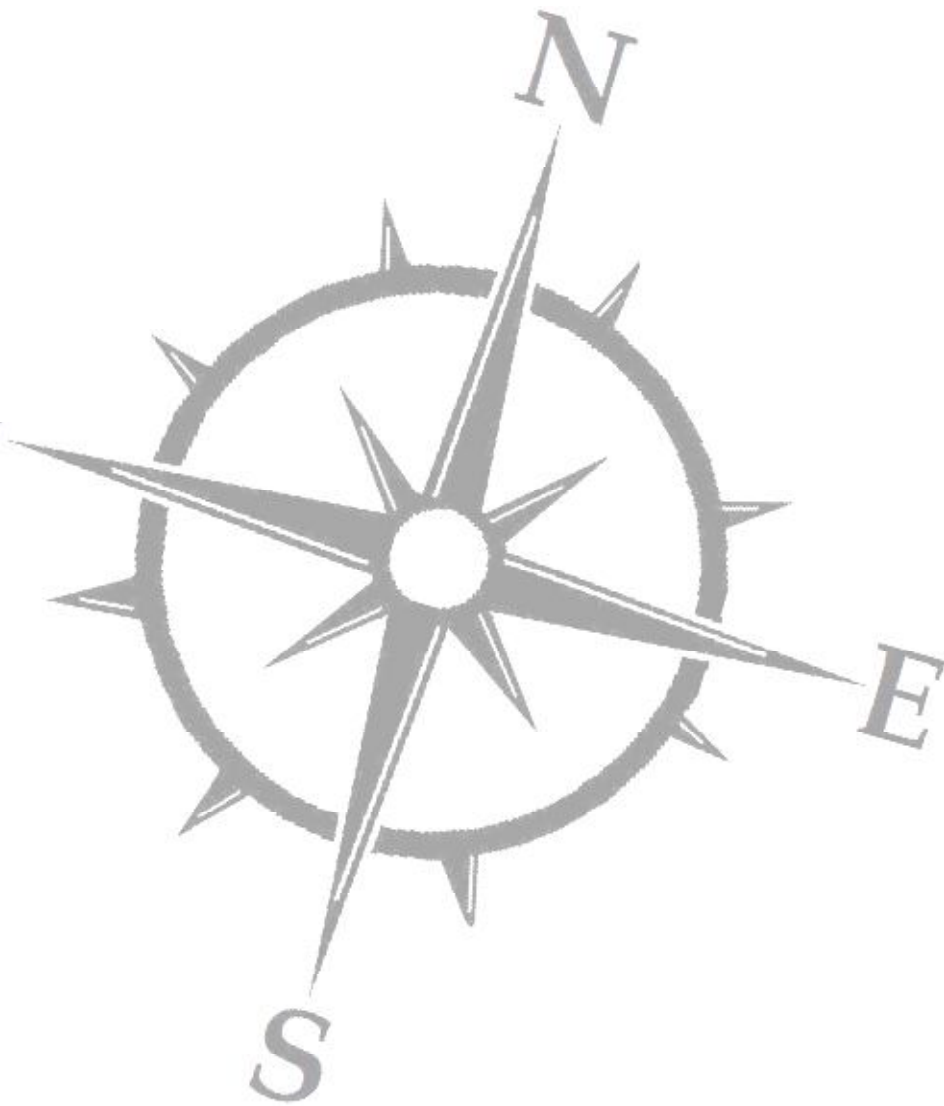
John left the Aniwan people with a translation of the Bible in their language and a hymn book that they could use to praise and tell others about the Lord. Though John Paton visited Tanna a couple of times after he worked there, he never stayed on the island as a missionary again.

During his stay in Aniwa in 1898, someone preached a message. “Long ago, John Paton left Scotland to come to the dark land of Aniwa. He brought the light of Jesus to us. But there is still darkness across the sea in Tanna. We must take the light there until that land is full of light just as Aniwa is,” the preacher said. Chief Namakei’s daughter Litsi was now queen of the Aniwan people. Queen Litsi decided to send six Aniwans to Tanna to help out a brand new missionary who was going there. At long last, the people of Tanna finally broke from their ways and listened to this new missionary, and many accepted Jesus. Over the next few years, a faithful church was built on Tanna that would have brought joy to John’s heart. Even more joyful was the fact that this new missionary who had come to Tanna was none other than Frank Paton...John’s youngest son.

John Paton had been faithful to serve his God. He had finished his life well and could be proud to meet his Savior face to face.

**Would you be willing for God to use you somewhere to do great and wonderful things like He used John Paton in Vanuatu?**

*(For additional information, discussion questions, and materials on this lesson, please refer to lesson 3.10 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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