

# The Life of Eric Liddell

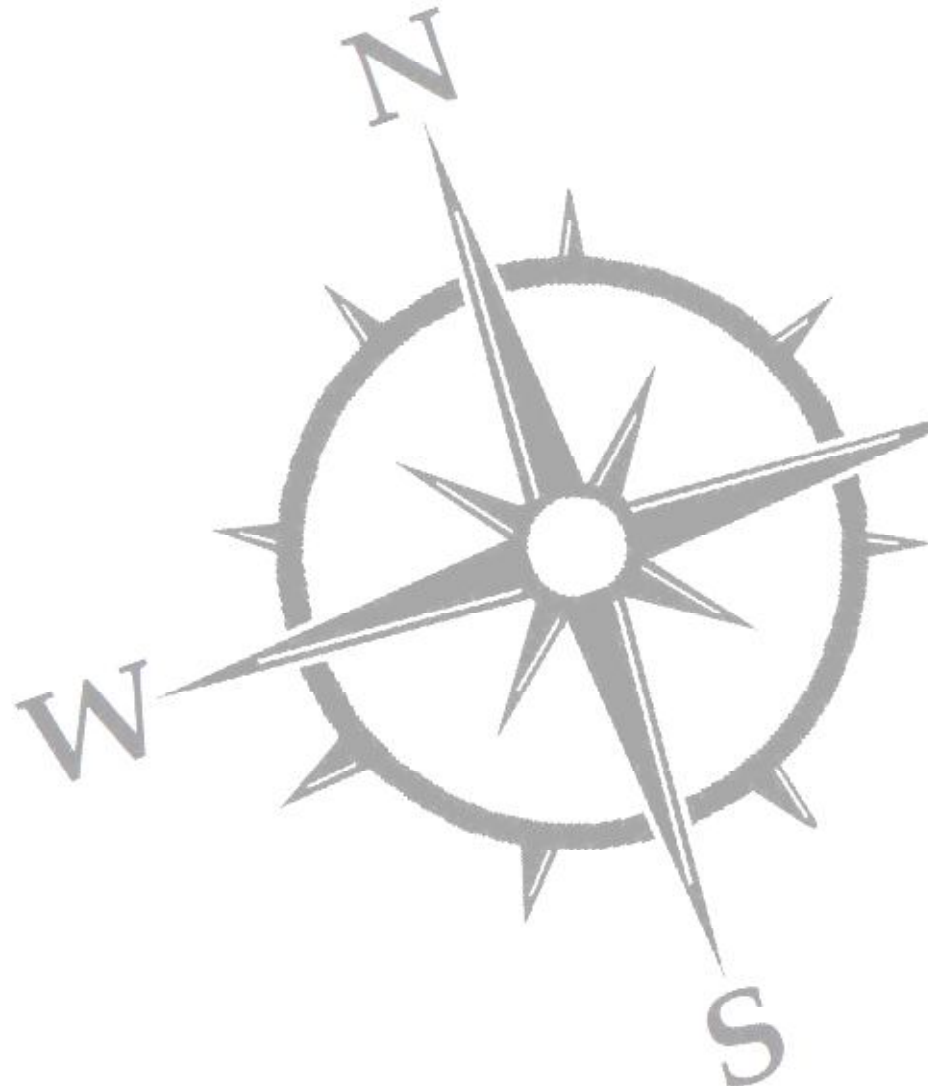
(1902-1945)

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## Lesson: 1.23 – Sacrifice Missionary Snapshot Series

This story reminds us that God provides for those who help others. It is a sacrifice to give our things to others, but God promises to supply our need when we help others in need. God is always watching and many times He gives extra blessings to those who sacrifice for others. Eric Liddell learned about sacrificing for others. Often when we sacrifice for the Lord, He rewards us in amazing and exciting ways.

***“...let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” – Philippians 2:3-4***







### **Introduction:**

Have you ever seen a man give up his seat to a woman or an older person? This is a chivalrous and kind thing for a man to do. Sometimes if a person is tired or uncomfortable, it might be hard to make a sacrifice for others. Our story today is about an Olympic champion. This Olympic champion was about to be asked to make a big sacrifice. He would be asked to give up his fame and fortune as an Olympic athlete for something else. Will he be willing to make the sacrifice? Let's listen carefully and see what happens in this story about Eric Liddell...

### **Missionary Story:**

“POP! The sound of the gun exploded throughout Colombes Stadium. The 400-meter Olympic race had begun. I sprang forward off the starting line along with all the other runners. I had drawn the outside lane which was the worst lane to be in for any race, but especially for the Olympics. Running next to me was the American, Horatio Fitch. Horatio had just set a world

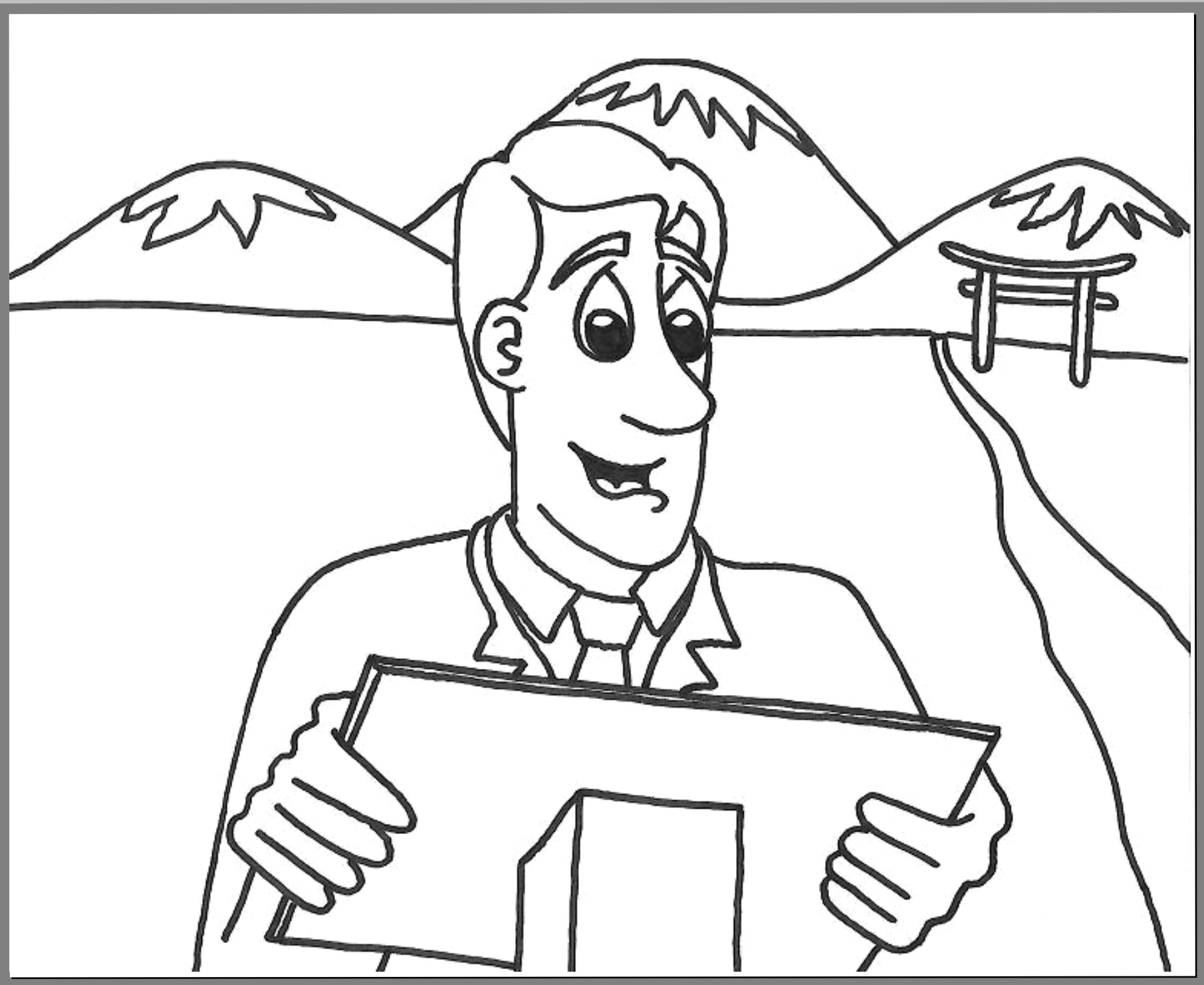
record a few days before to qualify to run in this race. He was a very fast runner. Next to Horatio, was the Swiss runner, Joseph Imbach, who also had just set a world record to qualify for this race. He was also a fast runner. Everyone expected one of those two men to bring home the gold medal. I, on the other hand, wasn't originally even supposed to run in the 400-meter race, but here I was and I was determined to do my best.

As we reached the midpoint in the race, I was in the lead. “What is Liddell doing?” one of the coaches whispered to another on the sideline. To them it was obvious; I was a 100-meter race runner, who had no idea how to run a 400-meter race. Runners who sprinted right from the start would use up all their energy before they ever reached the end of the race. I could hear the footsteps of Horatio and Joseph coming up behind me, the crowd became strangely quiet. As we rounded the bend, Horatio was only two meters behind me. Just as everyone thought Horatio was going to pass me, a gasp went through the crowd. It couldn't be happening...but it was. Just when everyone thought the race was over, I threw my head back and began to frantically swing my arms around like I did near the end of every race. With it, I found a final burst of speed and pulled inch by inch, foot by foot, and meter by meter ahead of Horatio. I wasn't slowing down, I was running the second half of the race faster than I had run the first half! The crowd burst into cheers as I crossed the finish line five meters ahead of Horatio and collapsed into my coach's arms. I had done the impossible and set a new world record!

“Your country expects great things from you young man... great things,” a reporter said following my race. I smiled, but I knew that God expected some great things from me as well... some things my countrymen may not understand. You see, I grew up in China. My parents were missionaries there. And I had already told the Lord that I would return to China someday to serve Him there.

“You are going to do what?” my coach said with shock when I told him my plans to return to China as a missionary. “Have you ever given thought to all that you would be giving up here son?” But I had thought long and hard about it and I knew that this was what God wanted me to do. “I guess the more I think about it Eric, giving things up for others is just the kind of runner and person you are,” he said. He then reminded me of some of the things that I did for other runners. Back in those days, runners used to have to dig a small hole for their feet to push off of. I always kept a small shovel with me to dig my hole, and then unselfishly, I would pass it to all the other runners to make one for themselves. “Let's not forget about the jacket,” my coach continued. A couple of weeks before the Olympics, I had run in the Scottish intervarsity race. It was a cold morning, and one of the other runners was shivering. I had taken off my jacket and wrapped it around him to help him keep warm before the race.

“You always seemed to be looking out for other runners Eric,” he continued. He reminded me that at another race, I had gone up and volunteered to switch lanes with a





runner who was not a strong runner and take the dreaded outside lane. In those days, there was no staggering to make up for curves, so the runner in the outside lane had to run farther to win the race. Yes, sacrifice was something I was familiar with, and this was something I believed God wanted me to do.

I spent several weeks traveling around Britain, attending dinners in my honor, and telling people of my plans. “Christ for the world, for the world needs Christ!” I told the people when I spoke. “Why would you sacrifice running for China?” someone once asked. “Many of us are missing something in life because we are after the second best,” I told them. However, I soon learned that I did not have to give up my running to go to China. I found many of my students there listened to me better because of my running and racing with them. I ran in many local and national races while I was there in China.

To get to one race, I traveled across a river on a ferry to the city of Tientsin. The last ferry back was at 3:00 p.m. The only problem was that I found out that my race

started at 2:30 p.m., leaving only thirty minutes to get back through town to the ferry. I called a taxi and had the driver wait at the stadium gate with the motor running. The race began right at 2:30. I ran and won the race, but instead of stopping when I crossed the finish line, I just kept on running right out of the stadium. However, I did stop when I heard the band begin to play “God Save the King,” which is the British National Anthem, in honor of my victory. Finally, I jumped in the taxi and we sped off to the dock. We arrived just as the ferry was pulling away. I hopped out, sprinted down the dock, took a flying leap and landed on the deck of the ferry which had pulled about 15 feet from the dock at this point. From then on, I became known as “The Flying Scotsman.”

Not long after that, the country of China was attacked by the Japanese. The British government told all British subjects to get out of China immediately, but I could not abandon the Chinese people. I did send my wife and children out of China, but I remained to help. It wasn’t long before I was captured and put into a Japanese prison camp. I wasn’t going to let this defeat me though. I organized games and races for the prisoners and continued to tell them of Jesus’ love for them. The kids often asked me what it was like running in the Olympics. I told them “It was a wonderful experience to run and bring home a gold medal. But since I was a young boy, I have had my eyes on a different prize. Each one of us is in a race that is even bigger than the Olympics, and this race ends when God gives out the

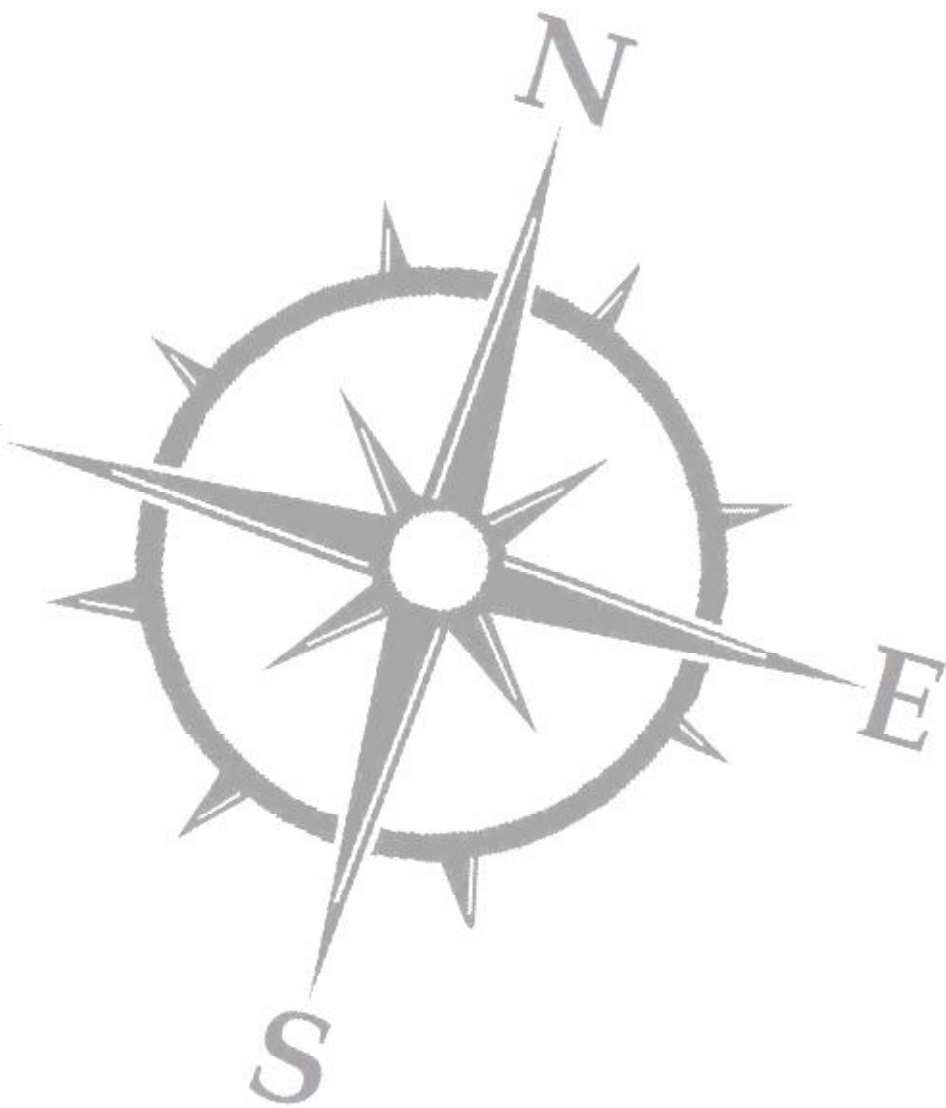
medals.” It is for those medals that I run every day of my life.

### **Application:**

You know, boys and girls, Romans 12:1-2 tells us to use our lives as a living sacrifice for the Lord. We are to live each day for the Lord doing what He would have us do. Sadly, Eric Liddell passed away from a brain tumor while in that prison camp. Just a few years ago, the Chinese government revealed something about Eric that no one knew. During the war, the Japanese wanted to make a prisoner exchange. They offered to trade the famous Olympic champion Eric Liddell for some of their prisoners. Eric, however, sacrificed and gave up his place so that a pregnant lady in the camp could go free instead.

Eric Liddell worked in China for 20 years. He influenced many Chinese people for Christ. In 2009, Eric Liddell was voted the greatest Scottish athlete of all time, he was also inducted into the Hall of Fame. Books have been written and even a movie *Chariots of Fire* was made about his life and his successes. Eric would probably have laughed if he had known this. He never thought of himself as anything special. He was just a man who tried to honor God and help people in need. In the end, it was those two things that made him a very special person to so many people around the world.

*(For additional information, discussion questions, and materials on this lesson please refer to lesson 1.24 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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