

Her Story Silhouette by Shari House

www.sharihouse.com



Silhouette:

Mary Slessor was born in Aberdeen, Scotland on the 2nd of December, 1848. From an early age her mother would read to her from a monthly missionary publication that highlighted the activities and needs of missionaries from around the world. From these readings Mary developed a burden for lost souls, and even though the desire continued to grow in her heart, by the age of 14, she found herself working full-time in the mills in order to provide for her widowed mother and two younger sisters. Finally at the age of 26, upon learning of the death of David Livingston, she answered the call to go to the Dark Continent. She trained to be a missionary, and on the 5th of August, 1876, she sailed from Liverpool to Nigeria. Although she did have some experience working in different mission projects in the slums where she lived, it wasn't until her arrival in Calabar that she realized the true depths to which the human race could fall when left to its own thoughts and intents. Her heart was burdened even more to share God's love and His Word with the Nigerians. Such a small, timid woman...what could she possibly accomplish in the face of such degradation of humanity and demonic control? She knelt and prayed, "**Lord, the task is impossible for me but not for Thee. Lead the way and I will follow.**"

With her commitment to her calling stronger than ever, she set out to make a difference. Two common practices, killing twins so as not to bring a curse on the family and poisoning someone to determine whether they were guilty or not, were particularly appalling to her. She began to rescue twin babies that had been discarded in the forests for ants or other wild animals to eat and to try to teach them how to settle disputes following Biblical principles. She was not satisfied to live in the mission compound as other missionaries were and desired greatly to reach the tribes that were further afar in more dangerous areas. A common statement of hers was, "**Anywhere provided it is forward.**"



After more than a decade of missions work, in 1888 at the age of 40, she began her great adventure of moving into the interior. Besides rescuing hundreds of babies and stopping the practice of determining guilt by poison, Mary was used of God to heal the sick, see a multitude of people trust Christ as their Saviour, establish a number of churches, and teach the villagers how to live in a civilized and peaceable manner. One writer summed her life up with these powerful statements, "In a land of death, she

brought a message of life. To souls in deepest sorrow, she brought a message of comfort and hope. To people dwelling in the habitations of cruelty, she spoke of love and kindness. To beings more degraded than animals, she spoke of kinship with God. Lives steeped in barbarism and sin, she pointed to the redeeming Lord."

The Nigerian chiefs came to rely on her wisdom and boldness. Many a time she was called upon to stare blood-thirsty savages in the face and order them to stop their evil intentions and follow God's way. She stared death in the face a thousand times proving to them her commitment to God and her commitment to them, and it earned her their respect and the title "White Queen of Calabar."

Mary died on the 13th of January, 1915, at the age of 66 after 39 years of service. One can only imagine the welcome she received upon her arrival in heaven. She is a true example of a lady of whom it can be said, "**She hath done what she could**"!

Her Story/My Story:

Over the many years that Mary served in Nigeria, she faced the hardships of loneliness, sickness, hunger, spiritual warfare, and the like over and over. She proved her commitment to her calling time and again. One particular time of testing came during an epidemic of smallpox where most of the people had fled the area out of fear of the dreaded disease. Mary stayed to nurse and feed the victims left behind. She worked tirelessly trying to help them get well, and while caring for their physical needs, she took the opportunity to point them to Jesus. It was a struggle to say the least, especially when she had to bury the many who had died all by herself. Physically exhausted and yet finding the strength within to carry on, she made this comment in a letter concerning this experience, "**It is not easy, but Christ is here and I am always satisfied and happy in His love.**"



I remember well the time I spent in Nigeria as a missionary. It was my first "post" shall we say, and I had no plan of ever leaving. It wasn't always easy by any means, but God's grace abounded, and there were many great victories. In a relatively short amount of time I was dressing like the Nigerians, speaking Yoruba when buying my food in the markets, cutting my grass with a machete, and flicking the ants off my plate while trying to eat instead of throwing the food away and disinfecting the plate with bleach. I loved the people and the work the Lord had called me to. I remember the day they gave me my Nigerian name - "Ilaelabola." It meant "the beauty that has been brought into the house of God." I was so pleased about my new name until my dad said, "Ebola??? They're calling you a disease???"

After a few years the Lord sent me to New Zealand. After 10 more years He sent me to Thailand. Although there are several times I could tell about when my "commitment" to my calling was challenged, one that stands out in my mind took place in the summer of 2010. I had gone home for a short visit for my grandparent's 70th wedding anniversary among other things. My grandmother, although quite strong for our family's 3-day get-together, had taken a turn for the worse just a week later. I was supposed to be returning to Thailand in just a few days, and I had this terrible dread that she wouldn't be here the next time I came home. The day came to say goodbye, and

it was hard to not completely break down as I hugged this thin, frail woman that I loved dearly and kissed her goodbye. I remember specifically sitting on the plane on my return flight and asking myself this question, "What in the world am I doing on this plane? Why am I doing this?"

Although I couldn't seem to shake that lingering question in my mind, I was excited about getting back to my work and seeing everyone on that first Sunday. As I walked into the main building, Gop greeted me with a big smile and an even bigger hug. I was pleased to see her, too. You see, Gop is a convert of mine. She was saved in January of 2009, and after a few months of encouragement she came to church for the first time. She was baptized a few weeks later and became a faithful member. Six months later, I had the privilege of leading her mother and brother to the Lord. Gop continued



to grow spiritually, and at the beginning of 2010 she started coming regularly to the evening services, as well. Gop helped wherever she was needed - serving the food, helping with the baptisms, or corralling and quieting kids. That day, my first day back, I found out that she had led her first soul to Christ that very week. She was excited. I was excited. I praised the Lord for the spiritual growth in her life and for this "fruit" that I hoped would be the first of many. Right in that moment the Lord whispered to me, **"This is why you get back on that plane, and this is why you fly over that ocean once again."**

Bible Study: Commitment

Usually during these times of questioning my calling, I will eventually ask myself this question, "Is this the thing that is going to stop you?" "Is this the incident that is going to cause you to leave the field?" It doesn't matter how frustrated I might be at the situation or that it might be figuratively speaking the "straw that breaks the camel's back." When I ask myself this question and look at the incident individually, I usually can honestly say, "No, this will not be the thing that will stop me." "This will not be the reason I returned from the field." This helps me put things in perspective, and each time after a period of reflection on my calling, my commitment to it has been strengthened. I was in Bible college when I heard a visiting missionary make the statement, "[A burden will get you to the field, but a calling will keep you there.](#)" I have found that to be very true.

I've also heard it said before that the definition of commitment is "[All I am, all I have, all the time.](#)" I know that success is measured in decades not in years, but I believe that success over decades comes only from daily commitment. It is a day by day decision...sometimes an hour by hour decision. While studying the book of Acts many years ago, I came across Peter's statement in chapter three to the lame man who was begging for alms outside of the temple. Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; **but such as I have give I thee...**" The thought struck me that Peter was willing or committed to giving his all. All he had to give were the truths he had been entrusted with and his commitment to his calling to tell the world about Jesus. I began to study the story surrounding this statement and learned several things about Peter's commitment to his calling and the subsequent events that followed this miracle. If you look at these ten things, I think will you find, like I did, that you've experienced many if not all these things to some degree while trying to stay committed to your calling.

When you are committed to your calling....

1. You touch people in such a way that their life touches others' lives as well.

(Acts 3:7-10) - "And he (Peter) took him by the right hand, and lifted him up...and (the lame man) entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God...and they were filled with wonder and amazement..."

2. You realize everything you accomplish comes because of God's power, and you accept no glory for it. Your hope is that all you do reflects the Lord and brings Him honour and glory.

(Acts 3:12) "...why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?"

(Acts 3:16) "And his (Jesus') name through faith which is by him hath made this man strong..."

Often people imagine that their desire is to serve God, when really their desire is the distinction of serving in some way which others will admire them. Missionaries who serve for their own glory rarely last on the field.

3. You sometimes have to rebuke others, or sometimes your life itself rebukes others and you lose popularity.

(Acts 3:14-15) "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life..."

(Acts 4:1-2) "...the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people..."

4. You become an outspoken witness for Jesus and have the ability to stand before men of influence.

(Acts 3:19) "Repent, ye (the Jews that had gathered) therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..."

(4:8-10) "...Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel...be it known unto you all..that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole."

5. You will know the Scriptures and be able to readily quote them.

(Acts 3:21-24) "...which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began...for Moses truly said unto the fathers... Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken..."

Peter brings a convicting message because he can quote the Scriptures.

6. You will have boldness.

(Acts 4:13) "Now when they (rulers, elders, scribes, the high priest, and his kindred) saw the boldness of Peter and John...they marveled, and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

7. You will sometimes suffer threatenings and real persecution.

(Acts 4:3) "And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day."

(Acts 4:17) "...let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name."

8. You will see God do great things.

(Acts 4:4) "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."

9. You will not be satisfied to keep the truths of God's Word that you have learned to yourself.

(Acts 4:20)"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

10. You will have great power and great grace to continue in your work.

(Acts 4:33) "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all."

May we each endeavor to renew our commitment to our calling on a daily basis, or at least every time it begins to waver.

Resources & Book List:

<http://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bioslessor2.html>

Run, Ma, Run (Flashcard Biography of Mary Slessor, Missionary to Calabar) – June, 1978, Louis H. Dick

Ma Slessor: Forward into Calabar (Christian Heroes: Then & Now) - July 28, 1999, Janet Benge

White Queen of the Cannibals: the Story of Mary Slessor of Calabar - December 18, 2012, A.J. Bueltmann

These are just a few, there have been dozens of books written about her.