OCHORUS ORIGINALS

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Brave for God

Six who followed Jesus into the wide world



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"Freely ye have received, freely give."

Matthew 10:8

Table of Contents

Samuel Crowther: The Boy from the Slave Ship — 5

Mary Slessor: The Girl Who Feared Nothing — 7

Hudson Taylor: The Man Who Would Not Be a Stranger — 9

George Müller: The Man Who Prayed for Breakfast — 11

Gladys Aylward: The Maid Who Led a Hundred Children — 13

Amy Carmichael: The Mother of the Rescued — 15

Samuel Crowther: The Boy from the Slave Ship

When Samuel Crowther was a boy in Africa, he was not called Samuel at all. His name was Ajayi, and he lived in a town called Osogun, in the land of the Yoruba people, in what is now Nigeria. He had a mother and brothers and sisters and a home he loved.

One terrible morning when he was about twelve years old, raiders swept into the town. They set the houses on fire and dragged the people away in ropes to be sold as slaves. Ajayi was torn from his mother. He was sold once, and then again, and again, until at last he was pushed onto a crowded ship bound across the sea. Below the deck it was dark and hot and full of frightened people. He did not think he would ever see his home, or the sky, again.

But God had not forgotten the boy in the dark. Out on the water, a British ship came sailing after them. Its sailors hunted for slave ships and set the captives free. They caught Ajayi's ship, struck off the chains, and carried the freed people to a town called Freetown, in Sierra Leone, where they could begin a new life.

In Freetown, Ajayi did something he had never been allowed to do before: he went to school. He turned out to be a wonderful learner. He soaked up reading and writing the way dry ground soaks up rain. When he was baptised as a Christian, he took a new name — Samuel Crowther — but he never forgot Ajayi, or his people, or the language they spoke.

That last thing became his life's great work. Samuel had heard the good news of Jesus in English. But his own people, the Yoruba, could not read English. So Samuel sat down and began the long, patient job of putting the Bible into the Yoruba language, word by word, so that mothers and children and old men in his homeland could read it for themselves. He helped write down the Yoruba language for the very first time.

Samuel grew up to be a minister, and then, in 1864, something happened that had never happened before: he was made a bishop — the first African bishop in his church. The boy who had been sold in chains now led others in following Jesus, and he did it as an African, proud of the people he came from.

Samuel Crowther could have grown up bitter about all that had been done to him. Instead he spent his life giving his people the greatest gift he had been given: the words of God, in the language of home.

Mary Slessor: The Girl Who Feared Nothing

Mary Slessor grew up poor in the grey city of Dundee, in Scotland. Her family had so little money that Mary went to work in a jute mill when she was only eleven, tending the great clattering machines from early morning, and going to school for just half the day. She had red hair and bright blue eyes and a temper she had to learn to tame.

In the mill, someone gave Mary stories about a missionary named David Livingstone, who had travelled across Africa. Mary read them until she could almost see the rivers and the forests. She made up her mind: one day she would go too.

And she did. When she was grown, Mary sailed to Calabar, in what is now Nigeria, to tell people about Jesus. But Mary did not want to live apart from the people in a comfortable house. She wanted to live with them. She learned their language, Efik, until she could laugh and argue and pray in it. She ate their food and slept in their villages and walked barefoot through the forest. The people stopped seeing her as a stranger. They called her "Ma."

In that place there was a cruel and frightening custom. When twins were born, people believed the babies were cursed and that one of them must be a child of an evil spirit. So the twins were taken out to the forest and left to die, and their mother was driven away.

Mary thought this was a lie, and a wicked one. So whenever she heard of twins, she ran — into the forest, into the dark, into the middle of angry

crowds — and she scooped up the babies and carried them home. She raised many of them as her own. Little by little, because one small red-haired woman would not be afraid, the killing of twins began to stop.

Chiefs came to trust her so much that they asked her to settle their quarrels. A woman who had once been too poor to finish school now sat as a judge of peace between whole villages.

People said Mary Slessor feared nothing. That was not quite true. Mary was often afraid. But she had decided long before that she would rather be afraid and go, than be safe and stay — because she believed God was going with her.

Hudson Taylor: The Man Who Would Not Be a Stranger

Hudson Taylor was a young man from England who longed to tell the people of China about Jesus. In his day, China was the largest country in the world, and most of it had never heard the good news even once.

When Hudson arrived, he noticed something that troubled him. The missionaries there dressed in English clothes, lived in English houses, and ate English food. To the people of China they looked like foreign strangers, and it was hard for a stranger to be trusted or believed.

So Hudson did something that shocked the other missionaries. He put away his English suit. He dressed in the clothes the Chinese people wore. He grew his hair long at the back in a braid, the way Chinese men did then. Some of his own friends laughed at him and said he had gone too far. But now, when Hudson walked through a town, the people did not see a foreigner. They saw a man who had come close, who had made himself one of them so that they might listen.

Hudson wanted to reach not just the coast of China but the vast inland, where no missionary had ever gone. To do it he would need many workers and a great deal of money — and he had almost none. So Hudson made a quiet, daring decision. He would never ask any person for money. He would ask only God, in prayer, and trust God to send what was needed.

It was a frightening way to live. There were times when there was little in the cupboard and nothing in his pocket. But again and again the money

came — sometimes in the very hour it was needed, from people who had no idea how great the need was.

Hudson Taylor started a mission that sent hundreds of workers deep into China, to places that had waited hundreds of years to hear the name of Jesus. He spent more than fifty years at it, and never grew tired of the country or its people.

Hudson had learned a lesson he never forgot: to reach people, you must first come near to them. He would not stand far off and shout. He would come close, and become a friend, and would not be a stranger.

George Müller: The Man Who Prayed for Breakfast

When George Müller was a boy in Germany, he was not good at all. He lied, and he stole, even from his own father, and he ended up in prison before he was sixteen. He seemed the last person on earth to become a hero of faith.

But George met Jesus, and everything turned around. He moved to the city of Bristol, in England, and there he saw something that broke his heart: children with no mothers or fathers, sleeping in the streets, hungry and alone. George decided to build a home for them.

Then he decided something even more surprising. He would run the home in a way that would show everyone how real God is. He would never ask a single person for money. He would not send out letters begging, or hint that he was short. He would tell God alone what he needed, and wait.

One famous morning, the children sat down at the long tables with their plates and cups in front of them — and there was no food in the house at all, and no money to buy any. George stood up and thanked God for the breakfast they were about to eat, though there was nothing there to eat.

As he finished praying, there was a knock at the door. A baker stood outside. He could not sleep in the night, he said, and felt he must get up and bake bread for the children, and here it was, still warm. The knock came again. It was the milkman: his cart had broken down right outside,

and he did not want the milk to spoil — would the children like it? The children ate breakfast that morning after all.

Things like that did not happen only once. Over his long life George Müller cared for more than ten thousand orphans, and built great houses to keep them warm and fed and taught. And through all of it, he asked no one but God.

George Müller wanted the whole world to see one simple thing: that God hears, and God provides. He proved it not with clever words, but with ten thousand children who went to bed each night with full stomachs because a bad boy from Germany had learned to pray.

Gladys Aylward: The Maid Who Led a Hundred Children

Gladys Aylward was a small woman from London who worked as a maid, cleaning other people's houses. She was sure that God wanted her to go to China. But when she asked a mission society to send her, they tested her and told her no — she was not clever enough, they said, and too old to learn the language.

Gladys did not give up. She saved her wages, penny by penny, until she had just enough for the cheapest, longest, most dangerous way to travel — by train across the whole of Europe and Asia. She arrived at a town called Yangcheng, high in the mountains, with almost nothing but her Bible and her stubbornness.

And there the people came to love her. She learned the language after all. She opened an inn where travellers could rest and hear stories about Jesus. She even became an officer whose job was to travel the villages, and everywhere she went she gathered up children who had no one to care for them, until she had a whole houseful.

Then war came. Soldiers invaded the land, and it was no longer safe to stay. Gladys had nearly a hundred children in her care, and no army to protect them — only herself. So she did the only thing she could. She gathered the children and set out on foot, over the mountains, to carry them to safety on the far side.

It took nearly two weeks. They climbed steep paths and crossed a wide, rushing river. There was little food, and the little ones grew tired, and Gladys carried the smallest and sang to keep them going. When they were afraid, she reminded them of the God who had brought His people safely through the sea long ago.

Every single child came through the mountains alive.

The clever people had told Gladys Aylward that she was not enough. God took the maid they turned away and made her strong enough to carry a hundred children through a war.

Amy Carmichael: The Mother of the Rescued

Amy Carmichael was born in Ireland, with brown eyes she did not like. As a small girl she prayed that God would turn them blue, and in the morning she ran to the mirror — and they were still brown. She was disappointed then. Years later she understood: God had a reason for those brown eyes, and He would use them.

Amy grew up and went far away, to the south of India, to tell people about Jesus. There she discovered a secret that filled her with horror. Little children, some of them only babies, were being taken from their families and given to live in temples, where terrible things were done to them, and from which they were never allowed to leave.

Amy could not walk past that. She began, very quietly and very bravely, to rescue the children. Sometimes a frightened child would be smuggled to her in the night. Sometimes Amy went herself into places she was not meant to go. To pass through the crowds without being caught, she dressed in a plain Indian sari and stained her fair skin dark with coffee — and now her brown eyes, the ones she had wished away as a girl, helped her blend in and go unseen. God had known.

One by one, then dozens by dozens, the rescued children came to live with Amy at a place called Dohnavur. She made it a real home, full of gardens and songs and safety, where a child who had known only fear could learn to laugh. The children did not call her "miss" or "madam." They called her *Amma* — which means "mother."

Amy never married and never went home to Ireland. She gave her whole life to the rescued children of Dohnavur. Near the end, after a fall, she spent twenty years unable to leave her room — and even then she kept writing, sending out words to comfort and strengthen people all over the world.

Amy Carmichael had once wanted different eyes and an easier life. Instead she became a mother to children no one else would save — and would not have traded them for anything.

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