

Gladys Aylward

Gladys knew that God was calling her to China.

"You would not make a good missionary!" some people said. "You are not even trained for anything useful, like teaching or nursing."

Living in England fifty years ago, the family was quite poor. Gladys's father was a postman and did not earn very much.

"How can I ever get enough money to go to China?" thought Gladys.

When Gladys was old enough she was able to get a job herself. She saved hard and worked over time. Finally she had enough money for a one-way ticket to China. In fact she had just two pounds over. The ticket to China was not a plane ticket or a boat ticket, but a train ticket. She would have to go overland through Holland, Germany and Russia.

Gladys had heard of an old lady who was working as a missionary in China. Her name was Mrs. Lawson. Gladys decided that she would go to help Mrs. Lawson.

As Gladys boarded the train with her two suit cases and just two pounds, she felt excited. The train set off. Gladys had been warned about the war between Russia and China.

"You may not get through, you know," people said. But Gladys didn't worry. God would take care of her.

While travelling through Russia, the train stopped suddenly. It could go no further because the line was blocked due to the war. Gladys got off the train and started walking.

After walking many miles carrying her luggage, she was able to catch another train to a busy Russian port. From here she caught a boat to Japan, then another to China.

Now that she was in China, she had to find Mrs. Lawson. It was another long journey to the inland of China, through wild mountains, on the back of a mule.

Gladys proved to be a great help to Mrs. Lawson, who ran an inn for travellers. As travellers stopped to rest, and water their mules, she would share the love of Jesus with them. She had employed a good Chinese cook, so the inn had quite a reputation for its good food. Each night, before the travellers went to bed, Mrs. Lawson would tell stories from the Bible.

Gladys listened carefully to the Chinese language and was soon making good progress. One day, Mrs. Lawson, who was now a very old lady, died suddenly. Now it was up to Gladys to carry on the work.

Gladys soon became popular with the Mandarin. (The Mandarin was like a prime minister.) He asked Gladys to help him stamp out the old practice of foot-binding. For many centuries, the feet of baby girls had been tightly bandaged so that the feet would not grow to their proper size. Small feet were thought to be more attractive. The Mandarin asked Gladys to be the official inspector of feet! This meant visiting the villages and reporting any cases of foot-binding.

It was on one of these visits to the villages that Gladys met a woman who could not afford to look after her child. Gladys took the little girl home and cared for the child herself. Soon Gladys found that there were many children who had no homes because their parents could not afford to look after them. Soon she had many children to care for.

A war had broken out between China and Japan. It took some time for the fighting to reach the inland, but finally the bomber planes encircled the city where Gladys lived. They came again, and this time dropped bombs on the city. Gladys and her children were not harmed, but she knew that she must flee from the city to a village far away, where she knew of some Christians who could help her look after the children. By this time Gladys was looking after nearly one hundred children.

It was soon obvious that even the village would not be safe. She knew of a centre for homeless children far away beyond the mountains in Siam. She must take them there. They would have to go on foot. The Mandarin, who had now become a Christian, gave Gladys some sacks of rice and two men to carry them.

It normally took four days to cross the mountains, but because of the Japanese soldiers, they had to avoid the main road. They would have to pass through difficult terrain.

"It will take you at least twelve days," said the Mandarin.

The children walked and walked, without complaining for the first few days, but then they became tired. The sacks of rice started to get low. Every day Gladys read to the children from the Bible, and they asked God to help them. As the last of their food was used, Gladys knew that God would provide.

"We're hungry!" said the little ones.

"Look, some soldiers!" said Gladys. No, not Japanese soldiers. They were Chinese soldiers who gave the children some food. Soon this food was gone, and they were hungry again. God provided again as they came upon a mountain village.

"Please give us some food," begged Gladys. "The children are hungry."

The villagers gladly supplied them with food.

At last they reached the Great Yellow River. This was the final obstacle before reaching safety. When they reached the river bank they realized that there was no ferry to take them across. The Japanese soldiers had stopped all boats. If they waited here too long they would be discovered. They waited and prayed. Then a Chinese soldier came along.

"What are you doing here with all these children?" he asked.

Gladys explained.

The soldier knew about a secret boat, hidden amongst the reeds on the other bank. The soldier gave a whistle. Quickly and quietly the boat made its way across the river. It collected the children and ferried them to the other side. Once again the Lord had provided for them, and protected them.

By the time they reached the town where the children would be cared for, Gladys was very ill. In this town there was a Christian mission hospital where Gladys stayed until she was well again.

It was only because of the Gladys's great trust in a great God, that she was able to take one hundred children on such a dangerous journey, and every one of them was kept safe.

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Activities

PART A

1. How did Gladys get enough money for a ticket to China?
2. What troubles did she have on the journey?
3. Who was Mrs. Lawson?
4. How did Mrs. Lawson share the love of Jesus with travellers?
5. Why did Gladys visit Chinese villages?
6. Why did Gladys have so many children to look after?
7. How did God provide for the hungry children as they walked across the mountains?
8. Why was the journey dangerous?
9. How did they cross the river at the end of the journey?

PART B

God is provider

God is faithful. He will never let us down. Because Gladys trusted in her Heavenly Father, she had the courage to make such a dangerous journey. She also trusted that God would provide, and He did!

How can I have courage to do things for God?

I can remember that God is faithful. He will _____ let me down.

I can trust Him to protect me and _____ for me.

Missing words: provide never

