



DARING DEVOTION

A 31-DAY JOURNEY

WITH THOSE WHO LIVED

GOD'S PROMISES

M. R. CONRAD



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Daring Devotion: A 31-Day Journey with Those Who Lived God's Promises
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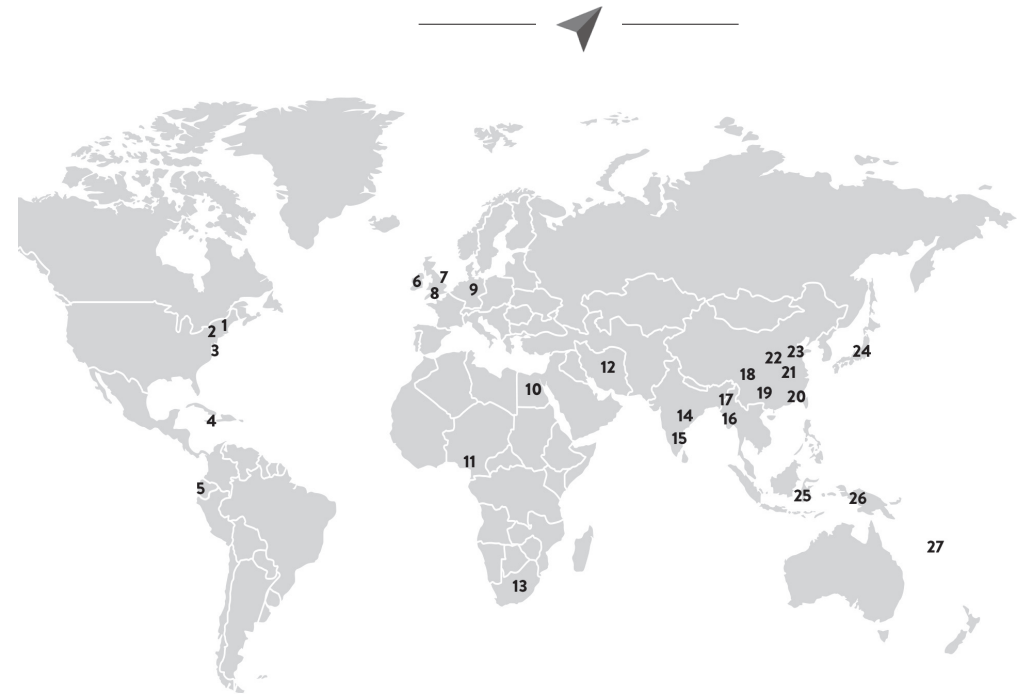
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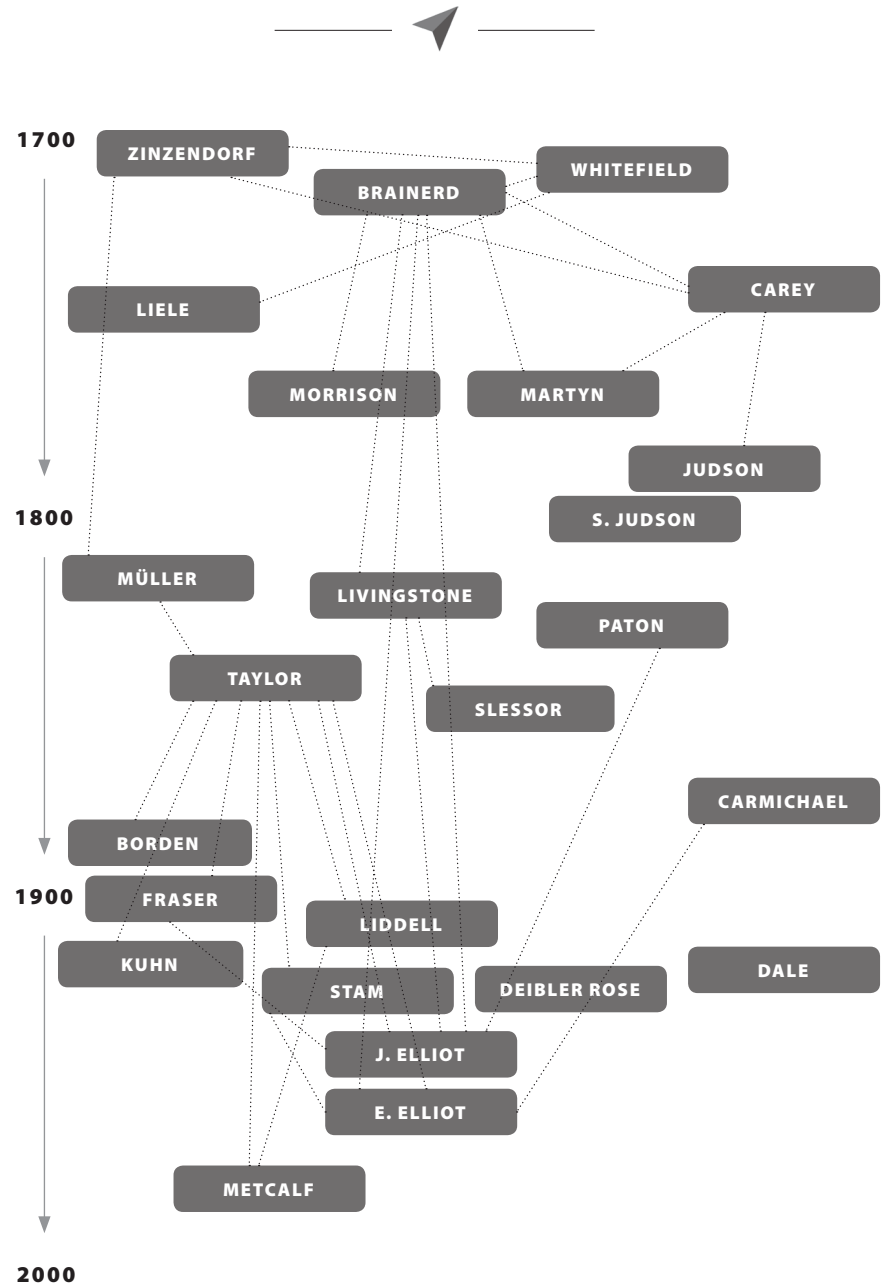
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MAP OF WHERE GOD'S PROMISES LED



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| 2 John Eliot | 16 Adoniram Judson |
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| 11 Mary Slessor | 25 Darlene Deibler Rose |
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CHART OF INFLUENCE



P R E F A C E



JOURNEY BRIEFING

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; Of whom the world was not worthy.”

—HEBREWS 11:32–38

I invite you to read this book as an uninspired extension of Hebrews 11 into the twenty-first century. Hebrews 11, often called the “Hall of Faith,” provides brief glimpses into the lives of

those who acted on the promises of God. The writer of Hebrews does not give their whole biographies. He does not endorse every action, decision, speech, or belief of these men and women. Instead, the inspired author highlights how each one acted on the promises of God.

God knows we as Christians not only require propositional truth but also incarnated truth. We need to see biblical principles and promises lived out by common people throughout history and in diverse cultures. A. W. Tozer wrote, “Next to the Holy Scriptures the greatest aid to the life of faith may be Christian biography.”¹ Jonathan Edwards agrees: “There are two ways of representing and recommending true religion and virtue to the world; the one, by doctrine and precept; the other, by instance and example; both are abundantly used in the Holy Scriptures.”²

I have found this to be true in my life. The Lord used many of the biographies referenced in this devotional to disciple me as a young man considering God’s will for my life. These books compelled me to do what few around me dared to try. If God could use the weak, flawed men and women of these biographies because they trusted God’s promises, could He not do the same with me?

Others through history report similar experiences. William Carey, after reading accounts of the lives of David Brainerd and John Eliot, points to them as models for his own life and work. Henry Martyn’s journals speak of the influence of David Brainerd and William Carey. Jim Elliot, Isobel Kuhn, and many others testify of spiritual growth cultivated through reading Mrs. Howard Taylor’s two-volume biography of Hudson Taylor. Elisabeth Elliot, who knew Amy Carmichael only through her writings, calls her

“my first spiritual mother” who “showed me the shape of godliness.”³ The testimonies of those who lived God’s promises attract and inspire those surrendered to God to also live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

I designed *Daring Devotion* to be a gateway to a wealth of spiritual encouragement. May this book give this generation a taste of what God and His promises have meant to faithful men and women who ran the race before us. May God awaken a hunger within you to learn more of these devoted servants—to read their biographies and see how God worked in their lives. Having feasted on God’s faithfulness to those of the past, may you be inspired to step out on the promises of God and take godly risks for His sake.

Be careful as you read this book. It may compel you into a life of deeper dedication to God. Elisabeth Elliot wrote of the risk of reading her husband’s story, and her warning applies to all biographies of godly people:

Let this be a warning. You can’t be too careful what you read. This man’s story might do three things: (1) Give you someone to imitate—not a model of perfection by any means, but a man of “like passions” with the rest of us, whose heart was set on God. (2) Show you a pattern of God’s sovereign love in the twenty-eight years of a real flesh-and-blood man of our century. (3) Demonstrate that obedience is costly, but the rewards of obedience are priceless—among the few things we *cannot* lose.⁴

The examples in this book may inspire you to step out for God in a way you have never before considered.

This book contains thirty-one readings—one for each day of a month. My hope is that you will use this to supplement your personal devotional time. This book is no substitute for the Word

of God. I suggest that you continue opening your day with God as you normally do. Add this book afterward. Better yet, establish a second time with God in the evening, and use this book as a guide.

I have arranged each chapter in a topical manner. However, if you would prefer to read chronologically, please refer to the chronological table of contents. I have also included a map showing how those who lived God's promises spread across the world. Additionally, there is a chart that begins to show how Christian biographies have influenced others to follow Christ.

We know of the lives of these men and women because they or others recorded their stories. They represent the unnamed thousands who have served faithfully throughout the centuries. Those highlighted here are a mere sampling of those who lived God's promises.

Like those listed by God in Hebrews 11, these men and women, though champions of the gospel and faithful in their service, were flawed. As we read their writings, we find that they were often aware of and humbled by their failings. From our contemporary perspective, we may also be shocked by areas of their lives in which we perceive them to be blinded by their upbringing, times, and culture.

Writing in the late nineteenth century, J. C. Ryle, in the foreword of his brief biography of George Whitefield, cautions on how we should view Christians of the past:

The story of Whitefield's times is one that should often be told. Without it, no body is qualified to form an opinion either as to the man or his acts. Conduct that in one kind of times may seem rash, extravagant, and indiscreet, in another may be wise, prudent, and even absolutely necessary. In forming your opinion of the compara-

tive merits of Christian men, never forget the old rule: "Distinguish between times." Place yourself in each man's position. Do not judge what was a right course of action in other times, by what seems a right course of action in your own.⁵

In the future, people will look back at us. They will see areas in which we have erred or been blinded by our times. Future generations of believers may have caveats about our lives and ministries. I pray they also will say we were faithful to God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. May we extend to those before us the grace that we ourselves wish to receive from those who follow us.

When all earthly hope fades, the promises of God shine through. We live “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2). The Word of God declares, “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). God’s character guarantees He will always keep His promises.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- To what specific promises do I cling when life whirls out of control?
- On what do I base my hope for the future?
- On what aspects of God’s character can I depend when discouragement threatens to swallow up my confidence in God?

FURTHER READING

Romans 4:13–25

Anderson, Courtney. *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987.

DAY 4

IMMORTAL TILL MY WORK WAS DONE

“Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in His hands, and felt immortal till my work was done.”¹

—JOHN PATON, MISSIONARY TO VANUATU (1824–1907)

*“Lo, I am with you always,
even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*

—MATTHEW 28:20

John Paton died an old man in his own bed. For most, this would not be remarkable. For a missionary to cannibals, Paton’s longevity was the miraculous work of God.

When Paton left Scotland in 1858 to take the gospel to the South Pacific islands of Vanuatu (then called New Hebrides), he immediately began testing the Lord’s promise in Matthew 28:20. When Christ said, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,” did our Lord mean He would be with someone who purposely moved to an island of cannibals? Did He mean His

presence would sustain His people in an age ravaged by epidemics? Could Christ's presence combat the constant mental strain of living on a knife's edge of imminent peril? As Paton wrote,

With regard to my life amongst the Cannibals, as I had only once to die, I was content to leave the time and place and means in the hand of God who had already marvelously preserved me when visiting cholera patients and the fever-stricken poor [in the U.K. prior to his work in Vanuatu]; on that score I had positively no further concern, having left it all absolutely to the Lord, whom I sought to serve and honor, whether in life or by death.²

Was such a pronouncement recklessness or profound faith in the promises of God? Paton believed he was simply taking Christ at His Word. As he reflected,

Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear Lord and Saviour, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. His words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," came to me so real that it would not have startled me to behold Him, as Stephen did, gazing down upon the scene. I felt His supporting power, as did St. Paul, when he cried, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me." It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after twenty years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smile of my blessed Lord in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life. Oh the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing "Him who is invisible!"³

Such was Paton's consistent testimony. He wrote, "This is strength;—this is peace:—to feel, in entering on every day, that all its duties and trials have been committed to the Lord Jesus,—that, come what may, He will use us for His glory and our own real good!"⁴

In 1862, during what might be considered the most dangerous episode of his life, John Paton's survival hung in the balance. Caught in tribal warfare escalated by European traders and the muskets they sold to the warring clans, Paton tried to protect his life and the lives of those who had turned to Christ during his first five years in Vanuatu. He urged Christian and non-Christian alike to fear God. A couple of chieftains challenged his claims.

"Who fears Jehovah?" [asked one chief] 'He was not here to protect you to-day!' 'Yes,' [Paton] said, 'My Jehovah God is here now. He hears all we say, sees all we do, and will punish the wicked and protect His own people.'"⁵

His enemies did not believe his words, and Paton fled for his life to a neighboring village. The treacherous chief Miaki, who had for a time pretended to be his friend, dispatched warriors to kill him. Chief Nowar, the leader of the village to which Paton had fled for refuge, promised to protect him. However, when he saw the coming warriors, Nowar refused to let the missionary stay in the safety of the chief's house.

"Run into my plantation and climb the tall chestnut tree," Nowar said. "We will bring word when it is safe."

With no other choice, Paton spent the night in the tree. Gunfire and shouts below broke the stillness of the jungle. He had no certainty that those currently claiming to be his protectors would not turn out to be his betrayers.

He would later testify of that night:

Alone, yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Saviour's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship. If thus thrown back upon your own soul, alone, all, all alone, in the midnight, in the

bush, in the very embrace of death itself, have you a Friend that will not fail you then?⁶

We, too, can claim the promise of Christ's presence as we live out the Great Commission. Our fears and challenges today probably differ greatly from those faced by John Paton, but the words of Christ are the same. Go. Make disciples. Baptize believers. Teach Christ's commands (Matthew 28:19–20).

We, like Paton, should take godly risks. If the words of Christ do not stir us to do what is naturally uncomfortable for us, we are taking neither His commands nor His promises seriously. God does not call His people to a life of ease. He calls them to spiritual warfare. We are soldiers of Christ, not pampered, spiritual elites. Opposition, misunderstanding, and even danger will come to those who strive to live like Christ and make a difference for Him in an evil world.

Throughout the fight, even when we seem to stand alone, we are never alone. Christ is with us always—through all time and in every place. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ or the presence of Christ. Though hell should rage against us, Christ will build His church, never forsaking His people as His banner ever surges forward through the flames.

We are immortal until the work God has given us is done. Nothing can touch us until the time appointed by God. When that time comes, nothing can keep us from joining our Savior. John Paton's peaceful death in Victoria, Australia, at age eighty-two attests to this truth.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- If I truly believed that I am immortal until my work is done, how would this conviction change the way I make decisions?
- What verses bring me hope when I need assurance of the presence of God?
- When has the presence of God been the dearest to me?

FURTHER READING

Daniel 3

Paton, John Gibson. *The Story of John G. Paton: Thirty Years Among South Sea Cannibals*. New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1892.