

Gladys Aylward: Marching Orders

Born 24 February 1902

Missionary to China

Died 1 January 1970

Gladys Aylward was a very small woman, four foot ten to be exact. She dropped out of school at the age of 14, not really qualified for any sort of job. She began working as a nanny or a maid in wealthy households, and at night she attended drama classes because she wanted to be an actress.

In her early twenties she accepted Christ as her savior, and almost from the beginning became interested in taking the gospel to China. At first she tried to convince others to go, but then she thought, "Why didn't I go myself?"



She applied to the China Inland Mission [founded by Hudson Taylor and now called Overseas Missionary Fellowship] but they judged that she was not qualified and that her education was too limited. They suspected that the Chinese language would be too difficult for her, especially at her age. Gladys was stunned by this news; she had been so certain that God wanted her to go to China. The question for Gladys was this: Was *no* from China Inland Mission the same as *no* from God? Or did God have some other plan, some other way of her going to China? She asked some trusted friends, "How am I to know if He wants me to go to China or to stay in Bristol?" They told her, "He will show you in His own good time. Keep on watching and praying."

Later when she was still perplexed about God's call on her life, she read the story of Nehemiah. She was greatly interested in his story because she was a parlor maid and Nehemiah worked as a sort of butler. He had to obey his employer, but that didn't stop God from sending him on a mission. While she was reading about Nehemiah she heard in her spirit, "Gladys Aylward, is Nehemiah's God your God?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then do what Nehemiah did, and go."

"But I am not Nehemiah."

"No, but I am his God."

That settled it for Gladys. She later said, "I believed those were my marching orders."

Now Gladys had to rely on God to provide a way for her to get to China. She had a new job as a parlor maid, and when she went up to her room to settle in she spread out on her bed her total assets. They added up to one Bible, one copy of Daily Light, and three coins amounting to two pence halfpenny (approximately 5 U.S. cents). She prayed, "O God, here's everything I have. If you want me, I am going to China with these." Her mistress called her downstairs. She wanted to repay the fare Gladys had paid to get there. Gladys returned to her room with three shillings (63 cents) in her hand. In a moment God had increased her savings one thousand percent! This seemed like God's promise He would provide the money she needed to get to China.

She set up an account with a booking agent and made payments toward the forty-five pound (\$78.30) fare she would need for the train ticket. Through Gladys' hard work and God's providence she was able to collect enough money for the full fare in less than a year when she had expected it to take three years. She felt like God had given her two bonus years.

On October 15, 1932 when Gladys was 30 years old she departed London for China. Her suitcase was filled with food because she had no money to buy meals along the way. In addition to a suitcase she had a bedroll, a teakettle, a saucepan, a small camping-type stove, and an army blanket bundled around some clothes. The tiny, simple, unpolished woman had never traveled outside her own country, had never been where the language was foreign. She was setting out alone into a new world. But she was not alone; God was with her and He showed Himself powerful and faithful as He protected her and provided for her on her five-and-a-half week journey through Germany to Moscow, across Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, to Japan by ship and finally sailing to Tientsin, China.



At last Gladys Aylward, former parlor maid, was standing on Chinese soil! It was there that Gladys was hit with the realization that God had been preparing her for this day since before her birth. One of Gladys' childhood heartaches had been that she had black hair



while all the other girls had golden curls. The other heartache she had as a child was that everyone else kept growing while she stopped at four feet ten inches. Now she stood in the midst of the people God had prepared her for—they all had black hair and none of them had kept growing.

She felt like she was home.

References:

Faithful Women & Their Extraordinary God, by Noel Piper, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2005.

The Little Woman, by Gladys Aylward and Christine Hunter, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1999.

For some interesting information, photos and maps regarding the Trans-Siberian Railway, visit the site <http://transsib.ru/Eng/>