

Companion Guide  
for

# Children's Heroes

from

# Christian History

V O L U M E 1

Prepared by  
Christian History Institute

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# Companion Guide to Children's Heroes from Christian History, Volume 1

To Parents, Teachers, and Leaders

## INTRODUCTION

*from Dr. Ken Curtis,  
President of Christian History Institute.*

Welcome to Children's Heroes of Christian History. For years we have wanted to put out a series of programs like these, for we are constantly asked to provide resources to acquaint children with our Christian heritage.

So here is our first attempt in that direction. We assume that these programs were acquired by an adult for use with children in your home, Sunday school class, or perhaps for a grandchild, or just some special young ones you care a lot about.

Your role in using these programs is vitally important. These are not "babysitter" television programs. Your participation and active involvement in the viewing experience is needed. This is for a number of reasons.

First, the stories are not typical children's entertainment. These programs are not fast paced "shoot 'em up and slap 'em down" animation intended to overwhelm the child with non-stop action. Nor is it distraction time, as is the case with so much of children's television, with the intent to just amuse the child so he/she will be more receptive and susceptible to commercial enticements at the breaks.

Much of children's video intends the child to be a passive sponge. No interaction or response is sought or wanted. That is not the case with these programs. We hope more than anything that they will elicit many questions from the children, a desire to learn more about the subjects, and a hunger to pursue the spiritual truths that are set forth.

That is why your adult involvement is so very important. The stories need to be introduced. And you need to be available to discuss the contents after viewing.

These guides with each videocassette provide you with further background on each story, and with discussion starters you may find helpful.

Each individual segment runs from 7 to 10 minutes. For those with shorter attention spans you may want to use just one story per sitting with some brief conversation to introduce the segment and follow up discussion after viewing. Others will find that more than one segment can be used to good advantage at a single sitting.

### General Tips to Introduce Series

You will want to let your children know that there are some special things about these stories they are going to learn.

First, they are not like typical stories on the news— here today—gone tomorrow. No, these stories have lasted hundreds and hundreds of years.

Second, they are all true stories--they happened to real people like us.

Third, these are about lives that helped and inspired people. We will see people who brought others to find God.

Forth, just about without exception all of the great people we will meet encountered seemingly impossible difficulties in their lives, yet with God's help they found a way to meet and transcend these problems.

Fifth, these stories show us some of the amazing ways of God. The lives we will discover were all very different and the problems they faced diverse, yet in their experience we see the gracious hand of God guiding them and doing things in them and through them beyond their greatest expectations.

For each program you will find a write up that goes beyond the content we were able to include in the video story. You will find this additional background useful to fill in further details of the stories. Many of the write-ups are from our church bulletin insert series called *Glimpses*. Others have been adapted from our feature on the internet called "What Happened On This Date in Christian History?" (Note you may write us for free samples of *Glimpses*. They are also posted on the internet, as "What Happened On This Date" and you find us at "<http://www.chinstitute.org>").

### General Questions That Can Be Used For Just About All of the Segments

- What was the motivation of the central subject?
- How did he find a personal relationship with God?
- What impressed you most about his life?
- If you could meet the subject what would you like to talk about? What questions would you ask?
- What were the most difficult obstacles faced?
- What are the happy moments in the story?
- Where and how can we see God at work in this person's life?
- How were they prepared in early life for the work that later awaited them?
- Why did the person seem to want so much to please God and serve others?
- When in the program would the person have most likely felt like giving up? What caused him/her to press on. What role did faith in God play?
- What difference did the subject's life make in the world?
- Did you learn anything about God or Jesus?
- Can you see any important roles played by parents, spouses, friends, neighbors, pastors? Who were the ones that influenced this person most?

A wonderful side benefit of these stories is the opportunity to teach some world geography. We suggest you have a world map or globe available to pinpoint the location(s) of each story.

## JOHN BUNYAN

To go free, all John Bunyan had to do was make one promise. He must agree not to preach publicly anymore.

Bunyan's reply: "If I was out of prison today, I would preach the gospel again tomorrow by the help of God."

Older folk must have shaken their heads in wonder. "John Bunyan of all people! Why, we remember when he was a filthy mouthed ringleader in every sort of mischief."

Bunyan was born in 1628 in the heart of England, a mile south of Bedford a few years before the English Civil War. His family was so poor that when his father died John was left only one shilling and his tinker's anvil. The boy had little formal education. However, he learned to read and feasted on medieval romances in which valiant knights underwent great trials and conquered villains and monsters. In youth he boasted a mouth so profane it shocked even wicked men. Additionally he loved to dance and lead Sunday sports, considered improper by Puritans. Although he attended church, he had little religious conviction.

John turned sixteen in 1644 at the height of the Civil War. He joined the army. Since Bedford was a Parliamentarian stronghold, it is probable he served Cromwell. While on duty he was "drawn out" to take part in a siege. Another soldier asked to take his place. "As he stood sentinel he was shot in the head with a musket bullet and died." John came to see this as proof God had spared his life for a great work.

Returning home, John married. He was twenty. His wife was as poor as he; between them they did not have dish or spoon. Her godly father had furnished her with two Christian books—books which John read with an increasingly troubled conscience. One Sunday as he played, he heard a voice. "Will you leave your sins and go to Heaven, or have your sins and go to Hell?" His distress was acute. He felt that he had sinned so gravely he was beyond forgiveness. Nonetheless, he struggled to find peace with God by obeying scriptural commands. Outwardly he reformed and put off swearing and improper sports. Inwardly he still longed to participate. He read the Bible. Although without peace, he thought God must be pleased with him.

One day he overheard some women speaking of their inner religious experience and realized he lacked something. Leaving the Church of England, he joined their fellowship. Still he lacked peace. Only after reading Luther's commentary on Galatians did he realize he could be justified by faith alone. His inner struggles were not over, but he found relief. Bunyan felt compelled to tell others of faith in Christ. He became a field preacher. So effective were his words, people would arrive at dawn to hear him preach at noon.

Open-air preaching was illegal. Officials feared that demagogues would incite revolution. For this reason, John was careful never to side with any political faction in his teachings. All the same he was in danger. Warned that he was to be arrested if he held church at a friend's house, he went anyway, determined to set an example of boldness. If he fled, weaker brethren would see it and run also. He was seized.

Without a hearing or witnesses, the judge sentenced John to three months in prison. The conditions at Bedford's prison were not the worst in England. Yet they were a genuine hardship. There was little light and no bathing facilities. The place stank of unwashed bodies. "Prison fever," or Typhus, killed many prisoners. The cells were overcrowded. John's ration was one quarter loaf of bread a day. Worst of all, he was separated from his family. His first wife had died and he had

remarried. He was not home to care for his children, including his blind daughter, Mary, whom he dearly loved. To support them, Bunyan made thousands of long, tagged shoelaces which he sold. Church members helped the Bunyans, too.

At the end of three months, John was offered freedom on condition he no longer preach. Again he refused. The months turned to years. All in all he spent twelve years in prison. Fortunately, a sympathetic jailer let John secretly slip off to meetings. He knew John would always return. Once he even let John go to London, but when his job was threatened, he forbade him to so much as peek out the jail door anymore.

For political reasons, Charles II released a number of prisoners. Bunyan was not among them. He was told he would have to apply for a pardon. He refused. To do so would be to admit he had done wrong. Elizabeth, his wife, pleaded for his release, but sympathetic court officers said John could go free only if he complied with the authorities. So John remained in prison. He was cheerful, believing he suffered for Christ. He had true freedom, he said. In prison he could read the Bible, preach and sing hymns with no one to stop him. He was also allowed to write. In jail he completed many of his sixty books, including the best known: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Bunyan's first book, *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, had attacked Quaker beliefs. Ironically it was Quakers who freed him. Told by the king to prepare a list of names for pardon, they included Bunyan's with their own members.

Released, Bunyan immediately returned to preaching. By now the authorities realized he was concerned only with the Kingdom of God. They jailed him again for six months in 1675, but otherwise he remained free until he died at sixty years of age, having written *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the world's most widely circulated book next to the Bible.

### Discussion Starters

- There was not freedom of religion in John Bunyan's time and place. Can you think of places in the world today where such freedom is also restricted?
- Do you know the names of any other books Bunyan wrote in addition to *The Pilgrim's Progress*? One was called *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. What do you think that was about? You might want to see if you can find a copy, to learn more about John Bunyan.
- Why didn't John just agree to stop preaching and the authorities would have set him free so he could rejoin his family?
- What is his book *The Pilgrim's Progress* about?
- What influence led John to Christ?
- John was a "Puritan." What does that mean?

## DAVID LIVINGSTONE

No one had heard from David Livingstone for years. The last anyone knew, he had landed in Zanzibar in 1866 and had set out for Africa's interior, searching for the source of the Nile River. That was the last anyone had heard of the Scottish missionary and explorer.

Livingstone's reports of his earlier explorations in Africa had fascinated readers at home. His *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, published in 1857, told of his walk across the African continent from east to west. His explorations of this uncharted territory laid the foundation for later missions by acquiring information about the people and geography of Africa's interior. He awakened the world to the horrors of the Arab trade in east African slaves, describing slavery as "that monster of iniquity that has brooded over Africa." By publishing the horrors of the slave trade, Livingstone worked effectively to see it abolished. In the Nyasa region of Africa alone, Livingstone estimated that 100,000 Africans would be killed and wounded in a raid to capture and export 20,000 slaves. He wrote in his diary, "The many skeletons we have seen...along the paths of the wilderness attest the awful sacrifice of human life which must be attributed directly or indirectly to this trade in hell."

England, America, and the world were concerned when they had not heard of Livingstone for five years. The New York Herald sent Henry Stanley, a determined young journalist, to find him. On March 21, 1871, Stanley landed in Zanzibar and began tracing Livingstone's steps towards the African interior. On November 10, 1871, Stanley found a white man at Ujiji, where the Arab slave route met Lake Tanganyika. Stanley knew this could only be one person, so when he walked to meet him, he said, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume." Stanley and Livingstone explored together for a couple of weeks, but Stanley could not persuade Livingstone to return to England with him. Stanley returned to England tremendously impressed by Livingstone's character. He later wrote that "Livingstone's religion is not of the theoretical kind, but it is a constant, earnest, sincere practice...and is always at work. In him religion exhibits its loveliest features; it governs his conduct towards all who come in contact with him."

### Discussion Starters

- David shows us how life can lead where we least expect.
- Do you have any dreams like David did?
- What would you like most to explore in the world?
- What motivated David to push on in spite of all of the difficulties he faced?
- Can you imagine what it must have been like for David to go into the unexplored regions. Think of what it meant. No maps, no motels, no McDonalds to stop at for food. If you were with David on his travels, what do you think you would have found most difficult?
- What notable person in the Bible also went out in obedience to God to an unknown land (See Abraham in Hebrews 11:8-9.)
- Discuss the sacrifices that David's family had to make.
- What was David's reaction to slavery? (You may want to discuss this in relation to "William Wilberforce," another program on this tape.)
- Although he lived and worked so far away from his native land, David Livingstone, nevertheless, became famous and a hero within his own lifetime. Do you think he was tempted to opt for an easier life back home as a celebrity?



## MARY JONES

It was dark when Mary and her mother were walking home from the meeting. As they carefully kept to the path in the darkness, Mary recalled the preacher's words from Psalm 119, "God's Word is a lamp to my feet and a light unto my path." How Mary wished she had a Bible of her own so that she could learn more of God's Word!

Mary Jones was born December 16, 1784 in the Welsh village of Llanfihangel y Pennant, at the foot of Wales' famous Cedar Idris. Her father had been a weaver, but he died when Mary was four. Mary and her mother were poor, but they got on as best they could.

When Mary was about eight, a school was established about an hour's walk from Llanfihangel. Mary took the two hour round-trip walk each day and progressed well in reading. She kept saying how she wished for a Bible to read, but her mother told her it was too expensive.

A neighbor did have a Bible though, and every Saturday afternoon Mary went to read Mrs. Evans' Bible for several hours. Mrs. Evans was not poor like the Joneses, and she lived in a house filled with beautiful things. Mary, however, was not distracted by the comfort and riches around her. She read through book after book of the Bible.

One day as Mary was doing her chores, washing her family's clothes in the river, she got the idea that she could earn some money by washing for other people to save enough money for a Bible of her own. When Mrs. Evans heard of Mary's plan, she gave Mary some chickens to raise. When the chicks became hens, Mary could earn money by selling the eggs. Mary soon found other ways for earning money too -- looking after children, weeding gardens, knitting socks.

After six years of careful saving, Mary finally had enough money to buy a Bible. But there was none to be bought in her village. Reverend Thomas Charles sold them in Bala, though. But that was over twenty-five miles away! In the summer of 1800, when not yet sixteen, Mary set out alone on the long walk to Bala with the money she had earned. She even took off her shoes and carried them so they wouldn't wear out. Although a long and difficult walk, it really didn't hurt that much as Mary was so full of anticipation.

When she finally arrived and found Rev. Charles, he told her he only had one Bible left and it had already been promised to someone else. Mary could not hold back the tears. After working and saving for six years, then walking over twenty-five miles, Mary could not help but be extremely disappointed. All her work seemed wasted! But when Rev. Charles heard Mary had worked six years to buy a Bible, he made her take his last one. The other person could wait a little longer.

Rev. Charles was tremendously moved by Mary's efforts to obtain a Bible. Many people in Wales and throughout Britain were coming to Christ; Bibles should be more readily available for these new converts. In December 1802, Rev. Charles was in London and laid before a committee of the Religious Tract Society the desperate need for Bibles in the Welsh language. Rev. Charles told the committee about Mary Jones and all she had had to do in order to get a Bible of her own. Though the committee appreciated the need for Bible distribution, neither the Religious Tract Society nor the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge felt they could meet the demand. Rev. Joseph Hughes suggested that "a society might be formed for the purpose — and if for Wales, why not for the Kingdom; why not for the whole world?"

Fifteen months later, on March 7, 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed “for the wider distribution of the Scriptures, without note or comment.”

The Clapham Sect, a group of influential evangelicals including William Wilberforce, were important in establishing the BFBS. The BFBS was concerned with distributing Bibles throughout the whole world, and within a few months the Gospel of John was issued in the Mohawk language. The Society was not interested in fostering any particular interpretation of the Bible; it was solely concerned with people having access to the Scripture. The governing committee was interdenominational and included fifteen Anglicans, fifteen Free Church laymen, and six representatives of foreign churches.

Auxiliary local groups arose throughout Britain to raise funds and distribute Bibles in their localities. Similar Bible societies were formed in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Russia, France, Greece and the U.S.A. The Bible Societies worked closely with the growing missionary endeavors to bring the Bible in other languages. All of the great missionaries, including William Carey in India, Robert Morris in China, Henry Martyn in India, and Adoniram Judson in Burma, relied on the Bible Societies for support. By 1907, the BFBS had distributed 203,931,768 Bibles, Testaments and portions of Scripture throughout the world. This world wide movement of Bible translation affected men and women of many nationalities and church traditions, but in its inception, it grew out of local needs, such as those of little Mary Jones.

Mary died at the age of 82. In the town of Llanfihangel, a monument has been erected with the following inscription in English and Welsh: *To the remembrance of Mary Jones, who in 1800 at the age of 16, walked from here to Bala, in order to buy a Bible from Rev. Charles in the Welsh language. This event was the cause of the foundation of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The Bible Mary bought from Rev. Charles is now in the Cambridge University Library.*

### Discussion Starters

- Imagine if the Bible was not readily and inexpensive available to us today. Would it make any difference? Would you miss it?
- Why was getting a Bible so important to Mary?
- Mary walked 25 miles each way to get her Bible. Figure out what would be some 25 miles from where you live. Would you be ready to walk there and back if that was the only way you could get your own Bible?
- Mary at first was thinking of buying a Bible for herself. But something far greater what born out of her example. What was it?
- Mary showed how young people can sometimes have a far greater influence than they might ever have expected. Think of other young people in the Bible that God used (Examples: David, Daniel)



## WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

He was only five feet tall and rather homely, by most accounts, but William Wilberforce had a smooth and powerful way of speaking. It wasn't easy, but this Christian politician managed to convince the British Empire to abolish slavery.

You probably wouldn't have chosen the young Wilberforce as a moral crusader. Born to wealthy parents, educated at Cambridge, he started out as quite a playboy. As a child, he had stayed for a while with an aunt and uncle who were devout Methodists, but his mother, concerned that this kind of religious "fanaticism" would lead him astray, removed him from such spiritual influences, sending him off to a prestigious boarding school. From that point, William was on the fast track to political success.

He wasted no time. In 1780, at the tender age of 21, he ran for a seat in Parliament and won. He began to display the speaking talent that would make him a legend. Literary giant James Boswell saw him on the campaign trail and commented: "I saw what seemed to be a mere shrimp mount about the table, but as I listened the shrimp grew and grew and became a whale." Wilberforce had arrived. Representing the large and influential district of Yorkshire, he enjoyed the good life, hobnobbing on intellectual subjects with his friends, and generally looking down on the religious zeal of the "evangelicals" in Britain.

But in 1785, while on a trip through Europe, Wilberforce borrowed a book from a friend—*The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, by Philip Doddridge (perhaps best known as the writer of the hymn "O Happy Day"). Reading this, and following along in Scripture, Wilberforce became convinced of the truth of the Gospel.

For several months he continued to live the high life. Christianity was in his mind, but had little bearing on his daily decisions. Yet a conviction grew within him: If he was to follow Christ fully, he would have to say no to his worldly ways.

In fact, Wilberforce thought about giving up his political career for Christ. He sought the advice of John Newton (another hymnwriter, known best for "Amazing Grace"). Newton had been a slave trader before his conversion, but now he spoke out strongly against slavery. He convinced the young Wilberforce that God could use him exactly where he had put him—in the midst of the precarious political arena.

Slavery was one of those hidden scandals, comfortably out of sight of the average Englishman, who benefitted from it but never had to see firsthand its unspeakable human misery. Through the influence of Newton and others, Wilberforce knew he must combat slavery.

How little did he grasp then how formidable enemies can be when their economic interests are jeopardized. Would he have persevered if he had any idea that it would be over twenty years of exhausting conflict in Parliament before the slave trade was finally abolished in England in 1807—primarily due to his efforts? It would take an additional 26 years to emancipate the existing slaves—just a few days before he died at age 74 in 1833.

Wilberforce endured one setback after another, often laid low by frail health and the attacks of opponents. Yet his position against slavery eventually won. His life remains an encouragement to all who are willing to fight social evil no matter how many setbacks are encountered.

Wilberforce was part of an amazingly effective small group of wealthy British Christians that became known as "The Clapham sect." Among their activities was the founding of the Sierra Leone colony in Africa for slaves who had been freed.

Wilberforce was known to be involved with over 60 organizations in his driving concern to spread the Christian message and lift the moral climate. This included work for prison reform, opposition to pornography, and funding Christian schools for the poor. He also served as a co-founder of the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Church Missionary Society.

Wilberforce and his allies had assumed that slavery would die a natural death, once they made it illegal to buy and sell slaves (in 1807). But the slave trade just went underground, and continued—only slightly inconvenienced. The fight to abolish slavery entirely dragged on into the 1830s. Wilberforce was unstinting in his efforts, but his health was slipping. Younger members of Parliament took up the cause as Wilberforce recovered from various illnesses. He was resting at home on Friday night, July 26, 1833, when he heard the House of Commons had finally passed the Abolition of Slavery. Saturday morning he took a turn for the worse, and early Monday morning he died—having seen his life’s dream accomplished.

### Discussion Starters

- Think of the following people in the video. What influence did they have in William Wilberforce's life? Prime Minister Pitt, Isaac Milner, John Newton, Thomas Clarkson, Joshua Wedgewood.
- How did William become a Christian?
- What changes were brought about in Wilberforce’s life after he became a committed believer?
- What did William learn about slavery and about those who benefitted from the slave trade?
- Williams opposition to slavery challenged something that was seen as essential for the economy and well being of his nation. Reaction against his position was intense and emotional. What kind of political initiative if introduced today would be comparable to Wilberforce's in his day?
- Were slaves considered persons? What were the different opinions on this?
- Do you have any general impression of professional politicians? Does the example of Wilberforce influence your opinion as to what the role and influence of a politician might be?
- What do you make of this advice William gave to his son Robert? “But I wish you from my heart not to become a politician. I hope you will act on a far higher level and where the path blessed by God is clearer as well as more peaceable.”
- What can we learn from the career of Wilberforce about what is involved in trying to combat evils in society, and to effect changes for justice?