

David Livingstone (1813 – 1873), was a great missionary pioneer pathfinder whose greatest desire was granted only after his death: the eradication of the slave trade and the opening up of Africa to Christianity and lawful commerce.

## Livingstone the Liberator

He had the grace to see that his mission was part of a divine plan to set many souls free from slavery, both physical and spiritual. Livingstone's great goal of bringing to the world's attention the scourge of the Islamic slave trade in Africa was achieved largely through the work of his convert, American journalist Henry Morton Stanley.

## Upbringing in Scotland

David was brought up in a pious but poverty-stricken home in Scotland. He was an avid reader and borrowed extensively from the local library. By age 9 he had already committed to memory Psalm 119 and won a copy of the New Testament as a reward. By age 10 David was employed 14 hours a day, 6 days a week, at the local cotton spinning factory. David managed to read in the factory by placing his book on a portion of the spinning jenny so that he could catch sentence after sentence as he passed at his work. He maintained fairly constant study, undisturbed by the roar of the machinery. His conversion at age 12 inspired him to resolve to devote his life to the alleviation of human misery.

## Dedication

Three themes dominated his life: **Evangelisation, exploration** and **emancipation**. He wrote at the time:

*“The salvation of men ought to be the chief desire and aim of every Christian.”*

He therefore made a resolution: that he would give to the cause of missions all that he might earn beyond what was required for his subsistence.

## Theology and Medicine

After 10 years of daily drudgery at the cotton mill, David set out to study theology and medicine. Medical science in the 1830's was, by today's standards, primitive. Surgical operations were performed at hazardous speeds because of the lack of anaesthetics. Chloroform and ether were not introduced until several years later and the discovery of antiseptics lay 25 years ahead. The study of chemistry was growing, but biochemistry and bacteriology were unknown. Nothing at all was known about the tropical diseases he was to encounter, such as malaria and black water fever.

## Diligent

It was not in Livingstone's character to relax. He took his task and calling most seriously and whatever he did he performed thoroughly. He was uncompromising, diligent and inflexible in his adherence to his word.

## Resolute

Friends described him as: *"a man of resolute courage"; "fire, water, stonewall would not stop Livingstone in the fulfilment of any recognised duty."*

## To Africa

It took him 3 months by sailing ship to reach Cape Town and another 4 months by ox cart before he even reached Robert Moffat's mission station at Kuruman where he would begin his work for the Lord in Africa. When he landed in South Africa, on 17 March 1841, David Livingstone was coming to a continent that was plagued with problems. Africa was still a place of mystery to the Europeans. The Arabs south of the Sahara never ventured far from the coast inland. The rivers were riddled with rapids and sand bars. The deadly malaria disease was widespread and inhibited travel. Entire expeditions of 300 to 400 men had been wiped out by malaria. The African terrain was difficult to negotiate. Floods, tropical forests and swamps thwarted wheeled transport

## Fearless Faith

Livingstone soon acquired a reputation for fearless faith – particularly when he walked to the Barka tribe (infamous for the murder of 4 White traders whom they had mercilessly poisoned and strangled). As the first messenger of mercy in many regions, Livingstone soon received further challenge. Chief Sechele pointed to the great Kalahari desert: *“you never can cross that country to the tribes beyond; it is utterly impossible even for us Black men.”* The challenge of crossing this obstacle began to fascinate Livingstone.

Livingstone wrote: *“I shall try to hold myself in readiness to go anywhere, provided it be forward.”*

## Frustration

Livingstone is reported to have had a steadfast manner and folk knew where they stood with him. His plans to establish a Bible college for Africans were frustrated. However, the Sovereignty of God was seen in this. Had Livingstone’s wishes been carried out, he might have spent his life’s work teaching in a Bible college rather than traversing Africa and dealing a death blow to the slave trade.

## Daily Challenges

His three great daily challenges he described as: **heat, harsh conditions** and **hardness of hearts**.

## Determination

*“I hope to be permitted to work as long as I live beyond other men’s line of things and plant the*

*seed of the Gospel where others have not planted. But every excursion for that purpose will involve separation from my family for periods of 4 or 5 months."*

*"I am a missionary, heart and soul. God had an only Son, and He was a missionary and a physician. A poor, poor imitation of Him I am, or wish to be. In His service I hope to live; in it I wish to die."*

## **Family Matters**

During his first missionary journey with his wife and children, their 4th child, Elizabeth, was born. Within a few weeks she had died and the rest of the family were sick. He received much criticism for the *irresponsibility* of taking a wife and 4 children on a missionary journey in the wilderness. Later he was criticised for sending his family back to Britain while he pioneered the hinterland of Africa. When his wife rejoined him for his second great missionary expedition in the Zambezi Valley she died of malaria.

## **Conviction**

*"I shall open up a path into the interior or perish," he declared. "May He bless us and make us blessings even unto death." "Shame upon us missionaries if we are to be outdone by slave traders!" "If Christian missionaries and Christian merchants could remain throughout the year in the interior of the continent, in 10 years, slave dealers will be driven out of the market."*

## **Overcoming All Obstacles**

Battling rains, chronic discomfort, rust, mildew and rot, totally drenched and fatigued, and laid low by fever, Livingstone continued to persevere across the continent. Hostile tribes demanded exorbitant payment for crossing their territory. Some tense moments were stared down by Livingstone, gun in hand. Trials tested the tenacity of the travel wearied team. *"Can the love of Christ not carry the missionary where the slave trade carries the trader?"*

## A Man of Principle

After 2 years of pioneering across the hinterland of Africa, Livingstone reached Luanda. The *Forerunner* ship was ready to take him to England. However, Livingstone chose to return overland to bring his guides and porters back to their village. Rather than risk their being sold into slavery in Portuguese West Africa, he preferred to take another 2 years crossing the continent that had almost killed him on his first journey!

However, had Livingstone chosen to return he might well have ended his ministry. The ship sank with all hands lost (and with his journals)! By God's grace, Livingstone still had a copy of his journals that he had laboriously written out – just in case!

*“These privations, I beg you to observe, are not sacrifices. I think that word ought never to be mentioned in reference to anything we can do for Him, who though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor.”*

## Deprivation

Often Livingstone endured excessive and unnecessary suffering and deprivation, hacking through dense jungle on foot because lack of funds prevented him from affording the *luxury* of a canoe!

## Confronting Slave Traders

Livingstone often saw the sickening results of the Islamic slave trade: burned out villages, corpses floating down rivers and long lines of shackled slaves being herded through the bush. Livingstone's mere presence often sent the Yao slave raiders scurrying into the bushes. Many hundreds of slaves were set free by Livingstone and his co-workers. On one occasion a war party of Yao warriors attacked the missionary party. While attempting to avoid confrontation, the team found themselves cut off and surrounded by the aggressive and bloodthirsty mob. Finally, Livingstone was forced to give the command to return fire. The slave traders fled.

### “More Light Might Enter Your Mind”

This incident led to much criticism in England. Charles Livingstone, his brother, on hearing one outburst from Britain replied: *“If you were in Africa and saw a host of murderous savages aiming their heavily laden muskets and poisoned arrows at you, more light might enter your mind . . . and if it didn’t, great daylight would enter your body through arrow and bullet holes!”*

### Three Slave Trades in Africa

It was Livingstone’s great desire to see the slave trade cease. Firstly, there was the internal slave trade between hostile tribes. Secondly, there were slave traders from the coast, Arabs or Portuguese, for whom local tribes were encouraged to collect slaves by marauding raids. Thirdly, there were the parties sent out from Portuguese and Arab coastal towns with cloths, beads, muskets and ammunition to exchange for slaves.

### The Shortest War

Incidentally, Livingstone inspired the shortest war in history - 27 August 1896 - when the British Navy presented an ultimatum to the Sultan of Zanzibar to close the flourishing slave market. When the Sultan refused, his palace was shelled - resulting in a record-breaking surrender within 38 minutes!

### Twin Concerns

In his writings and public speaking engagements, Livingstone regularly spoke on his twin concerns - to enlighten people on the evils of the slave trade, and to spread the Christian Gospel amongst the heathen. Although he was renowned for his

**exploration,**

in his mind it was only a means to

**evangelism**

and to  
“*disciple the nations*”.

## **Body, Mind and Spirit**

Dr. Livingstone believed in comprehensively fulfilling the Great Commission - ministering to body, mind and spirit. Along with his Bible, surgical kit and medicine chest, Livingstone always carried a microscope and sextant - with which he observed God’s spectacularly diverse creation with awe and wonder. His books are filled with fascinating scientific, medical, botanical, anthropological and geographic observations and details. Livingstone was the first to map the great Zambezi River and many other parts of the vast hinterland of Africa. He was one of the first scientists to make the connection between mosquitoes and malaria, and he pioneered the use of quinine as a treatment - often experimenting on himself!

## **Not a Sacrifice!**

The challenge of Livingstone rings out to us today: *“Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay . . . it, is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather, **t is a privilege!**”* **i**

## **A Vision of Victory**

The optimistic eschatology of Livingstone the Liberator, comes as a stern rebuke to the prevailing escapist eschatology of defeat and retreat.

## **An Inspiring Example**

Livingstone’s steadfast example has been used by the Lord to inspire hundreds of men and women to devote their lives to African missions. Mary Slessor, for example, went to Calabar

(present day Nigeria) and ended the practice of murdering twins (believed by animists to be bewitched.)

## Galvanised Back to the Field

Peter Cameron was inspired to return to Africa after his first mission failed, when he read the inscription on the tomb of Livingstone in Westminster Abbey: ***“Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they shall hear My voice.”***

## The Challenge of Africa

*“I beg to direct your attention to Africa: I know that in a few years I shall be cut off from that country, which is now open; do not let it be shut again! I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity: **will you carry out the work which I have begun? I leave it with you!**”*

***“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness ...”*** Matthew 6:33