

The Story of Eric Liddell

Eric Liddell was a 20th Century Scottish Rugby Internationalist, Olympic Gold Medallist and Scottish Missionary to China.

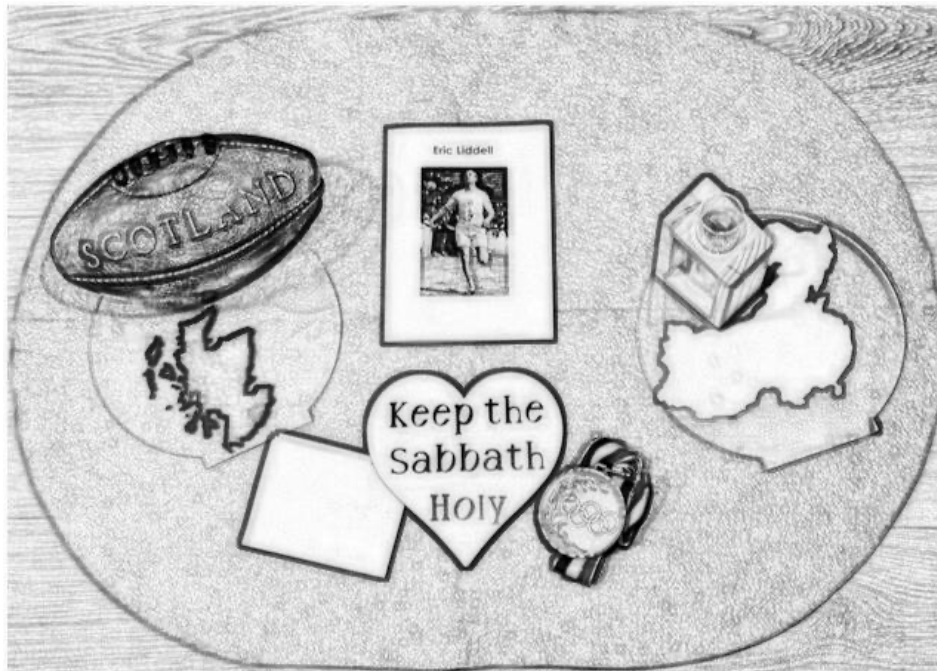
God made him fast and God made him for China.

Born 16 January 1902, died 21 February 1945

How to Use This Lesson

- Extension Lesson – in the style of Godly Play.
- Afterwards Lesson – stories about people and events that took place after the biblical era.

Story Layout



Final Layout – from the children's perspective

The Material

- Location: The Mystery of Pentecost Shelf, Lower Shelves.
- Pieces:
 - Eric Liddell booklet,
 - Miniature rugby ball
 - A small test tube
 - A piece of note paper, with the words:

In the old Book it says:

"He who honours me, I will honour"

Wishing you the best of success always.

- A gold medal, with a red, white and blue ribbon.
- A wooden/plywood heart with The Ten Best Ways Summary (Summary of the Law) on one side and 'Keep the Sabbath Holy' on the other side.
- Maps showing both Scotland and China
- Underlay: An oval – shaped like a running track - or rectangular piece of blue or white felt about 61 cm x 43 cm (24" by 17").

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Notes on the Material

The pieces should be about the same size – around 10 cm (4").

The underlay should be an oval piece of blue or white felt, between 50 and 55cm (20" and 22") wide. The colour you use depends on your tradition. It is folded on top of the objects. This is slightly bigger than the other Saints underlays, as there are a couple of extra objects. A rectangular underlay could also be used.

- Blue – for Scotland and to reflect the colours of the Saltire and the rugby colours. This means that you should choose a mid blue.
- White – for Christmastide, or to reflect Sabbath rest

Miniature Rugby ball - if you can find one in a 'vintage' style that would be good, but it is not necessary. It isn't necessary to have 'Scotland' printed on it either. We bought our miniature rugby balls from Etsy.

Gold medal - you can find medals engraved with VIII OLYMPIADE PARIS 1924, but that might just be nice, rather than necessary.

The double-sided heart:

- The Summary of the Law (The Ten Best Ways), as found in the Revised and Expanded Volume 6 of the Complete Guide to Godly Play should be used with children and adults who are familiar with Godly Play.
- Children who are not familiar with Godly Play may not recognise or connect the reference to the story of the Ten Commandments. It may be easier for them to only have the 4th commandment, 'Keep the Sabbath Holy'.

Maps of Scotland and China:

- It would be useful to include a small world map with the materials, so that children can see how far Scotland and China are from one another.
- If you are including maps of Scotland and China with the resources, then choose a contrasting blue to the underlay for Scotland – maybe something very light. We put these maps onto an acrylic base, so that we could more easily include the Scottish islands.
- For China, I initially used a red map, however, as far as I can see, the colour the Chinese identified with their nation when Eric was born is a golden yellow. That was the royal colour. (Fun fact: It was only the Emperor who could have golden-yellow Goldfish. This is why Goldfish are usually orange and not yellow, even though they are naturally yellow.)
You may also add dots to the map, showing Eric's birthplace at Tientsin and where he was interred and died, at Weihsien.
- The map of China can be either yellow – the imperial colour of China – or red.

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Background

Eric Henry Liddell was born in Tientsin, Qing China on 16 January 1902 and died, of a brain tumour, in Weihsien Internment Camp, Japanese China on 21 February 1945, aged 43.

Eric is not a saint in the normal sense of the term. He is a Christian witness – someone who lived their life for God.

His parents called him Henry Eric, but on the way to the church, to have him baptised, they realised that his initials (H E L) were not suitable for the son of missionaries. So, they swapped his first and second names. This change of names may resonate with children who have heard The Great Family, Paul's Journey or the Dr Martin Luther King stories.

He spent his early childhood in a missionary compound in Tientsin. When he was four he was very ill and during his recovery walking was difficult and painful.

The family had furloughs in Scotland, and it was during one of these that Eric and his older brother, Rob, were enrolled in Eltham College, a boarding school for the sons of missionaries, near London. Eric was six and Rob eight. Their parents and younger sister, Jenny, returned to China.

The family, later with younger brother Ernest, came home on furlough a few times, each time living in Edinburgh.

At Eltham College, Eric was an outstanding athlete. Eric and Rob won most of the sports prizes. Although Eric was good at all sports, he seems to have preferred playing rugby. The headmaster of Eltham College described Eric as being "entirely without vanity." Eric was also involved in the Christian Union and said that he knew even as a child that God was calling him back to China.

Eric followed Rob to Edinburgh University, where he studied pure science. He continued playing rugby, initially with the university, then Edinburgh District and Scotland. He played in seven of the eight five nations games in the 1922-23 season, scoring four back-to-back tries. His main weapon was speed. He was inducted into the Scottish Rugby Hall of Fame in 2022.

Rev D P Thomson, creator of the Glasgow Students Evangelistic Union, encouraged Eric to speak at working men's unions and clubs across Scotland. Eric drew huge crowds.

Eric's athletics career was almost by accident, invited along to the University games, he said that he had no time, but then thought that was such a ridiculous thing to say. He won and kept winning. He was once knocked over in a race, got back up and still won. Eric was the fastest man in Scotland – maybe even the fastest Scot ever. He had beaten Harold Abrahams (who won the gold medal for the 100m at the 1924 Olympic games) at the tri-nation meeting at Stanford Bridge.

Eric was told that the 100m heats would be run on a Sunday several months before the Olympic Games. He never wavered in his assertion that he would not run on a Sunday. If he ever had doubts he didn't ever express them, even to his family or, years later, to his wife. It was not a popular decision. He was lambasted by the press and the Scottish/Edinburgh press was most viscous, going as far as calling him a traitor.

After the Paris Olympics, Eric returned to graduate from Edinburgh University. He was given the highest honours and carried on the shoulders of the other students.

In 1925 Eric travelled to China to begin his work as a Missionary, teaching children science. His brother, Rob, was already working in China as a doctor.

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People had expected Eric to pursue an athletics career, to continue to compete at least until the 1928 Olympic Games, but the call to China was stronger than the desire to run. While he did run intermittently, this was not his focus. During his first furlough in Scotland, he was ordained as a minister of the Congregational Union of Scotland.

He met his wife, Florence, in China, and they were married in 1934. Two of their three daughters were born in China.

When World War II broke out, Eric and his family were on furlough in Scotland, but Eric wanted to return to China. In 1941, when China became very dangerous, the family were asked to return to Scotland. However, Rob was ill, and Eric stayed in his place. He would never return home again.

In 1943 Eric was sent to an Internment camp by the Japanese. The soldiers were cruel to the internees, but Eric still prayed for them. This angered some of the other internees, some even went as far as saying that Eric was a traitor. However, Eric explained that we should pray for everyone, regardless of who they are and what they have done. God's love is for all.

Eric died of an undiagnosed brain tumour in April 1945, three months before the end of the war. He was nursed by Annie Buchan, a missionary nurse from the north east of Scotland.

He was buried in the internment camp. There is a statue to him there. The Chinese view Eric as their first Olympian.

Chariots of Fire

Eric Liddell was portrayed by Ian Charleson in the 1981 film 'Chariots of Fire'.

Charleson had to learn to run, then he had to learn to run like Eric. Charleson said that he couldn't see where he was going, he kept running into things, then he realised that Eric was running with faith:

"He ran with faith, he didn't even look where he was going".

Charleson felt that the role of Liddell was one that he fit like a glove. He studied the bible intensively in preparation for the role and wrote Eric's post-race speech for the film.

While looking for photos for the booklet, I have played an interesting game of 'Liddell or Charleson'. Often, I have only been able to tell that the image is of Charleson by looking at the other people in the picture.

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Godly Play®

This story is part of a collection of stories of Scottish 'saints', written to supplement the collection of stories about the saints in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*. These stories of Scottish 'saints' are *written in the style of Godly Play*.

In the collection of lessons on the saints found in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*, there is a lesson called 'The Child's Own Saint'. The lesson invites children and Godly Play mentors to add to the lessons on the saints by writing the story of one of their own heroes. This story, and the others in this collection, serve as examples of this – a Christian person who inspires us all to honour God and respect the dignity of every human being.

These stories are mainly for children, so they try to minimise the distance between the child and the adult we are talking about. Some of the ways this is done is to keep the relationship informal, such as calling the person by their first name and emphasising things about the person's childhood. This means that the stories are somewhat open and very personal, to engage the child's intimacy and wonder with these amazing people.

We are intentionally spare with the details of these stories so as not to obscure the core reality. However, we encourage Godly Play mentors to include children's books on the shelves nearby, just as we do with the other heroes of the church.

Godly Play® is an interpretation of Montessori religious education developed by Jerome W. Berryman. It is an imaginative approach for working with children that supports, challenges, nourishes, and guides their own spiritual quest. It is more akin to spiritual guidance than what we generally think of as children's education.

It involves children and adults, as mentors, moving together toward fluency in the art of knowing how to use Christian language to nourish their spiritual lives.

Godly Play assumes that children have some experience of the mystery of the presence of God or the spiritual in their lives, but that they lack the language, permission and understanding to express and fully enjoy those in our culture. In Godly Play, we show how to enter into parables, silence, sacred stories and liturgical action in order to discover the depths of God, ourselves, one another, and the world around us.

Godly Play for Schools

Godly Play offers religious and moral education sessions, using an experiential discovery method, which engages the child's hands, heart, mind, senses, and intuition. Whilst these stories are shared from the Christian perspective, some of the stories shared are also known in other religious traditions.

During a Godly Play session a child's verbal and nonverbal learning will be stimulated through the use of sensorial and kinaesthetic materials.

Godly Play sessions can be used as a one off experience or offered as a series of classes throughout the school year across all ages, with a maximum of 30 children in each session. A typical Godly Play session lasts between 45 minutes and an hour. It can be tailored to meet the needs of the school, teachers and students with the parts of a full session adapted to fit the space and time available.

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Using Godly Play

If you are not an experienced Godly Play mentor, we strongly encourage you to download and read *How to Lead Godly Play Lessons*, available at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. This will explain the background of Godly Play, its methodology, and clear guidelines for its use. You will need this grounding before attempting to lead a Godly Play presentation, such as this one.

Alternatively, you could invite an experienced Godly Play mentor to lead the session for you. You can find a mentor by contacting admin@godlyplayscotland.co.uk.

If you are interested in becoming a Godly Play mentor you can find training courses on the Godly Play Scotland website – www.godlyplayscotland.co.uk.

Enjoy the wonder of this story.

Other stories in this collection:

The Story of Saint Mungo
The Story of Mary Slessor

Bibliography

Berryman, Jerome. *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volumes 1 to 8*

Benge, Janet & Geoff. *Eric Liddell: Something greater than gold*. YWAM Publishing, 2011

Hamilton, Duncan. *For the glory: The life of Eric Liddell*. Transworld Publishers, 2016.

Magnusson, Sally. *The Flying Scotsman*. Quartet Books, 1981.

Sports Legends, Olympian Edition: Eric Liddell. Prager University Foundation, 2022

Chariots of Fire, 1981, directed by Hugh Hudson, written by Colin Welland, produced by David Putman. Eric Liddell was portrayed by Ian Charleson.

Wikipedia

The Story of Eric Liddell

Movements

Wait until the children are settled and you are ready. Then go to the shelf with the stories of Christian people and find the material for Eric Liddell's story.

If you don't have a set of shelves, simply collect the story.

Bring the story to the circle and place it in front of you.

Show the circle the basket of materials you have just collected. They probably won't be able to see much beyond the underlay. Then place the basket at your side.

Take the underlay and unfold it in front of you – do this as close to the middle of the circle as you can, without damaging your back - and say:

If you are in a church that uses colours, you can add:

Take the booklet from the tray and place it in the middle of the underlay, in the middle, with the photo of Eric showing.

Put the world map at the top of the underlay. You can point to China and then to Scotland, just to show how far away they are.

You could make a banging motion with one of your fists, but don't actually hit anything.

Emphasise the first 'he'.

Words

Are you ready for a story?

Watch where I go to get the lesson for today.

This is the story of Eric Liddell.

I wonder why we remember Eric? Let's see.

Eric's church doesn't use colours, so let's use the blue of the Saltire – the Scottish flag - instead.

Eric was born in Tientsin, China.

His parents were Scottish missionaries.

He was the second of four children.

His parents called him Henry, but when he was baptised, they changed his name to Eric.

When Eric was a small boy, his mother caught him banging a nail into the wall of the house. She was angry because the house belonged to the mission.

Eric asked if he belonged to the mission, too. It felt like he did.

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Movements

Point to China on the map and then move your finger, as if travelling round the world, to the map of Scotland.

If it helps you to remember the words, 'travel' your finger back to China on the map.

Place the test tube on the middle of the right side of the underlay. [On top of the map of Scotland.]

Place the rugby ball, in front of the test tube.

If you have a rugby ball with 'Scotland' printed on it, initially place it so that the children don't see that, then when you speak about Eric being capped, turn it so that the children can see.

But if you do that, make sure that 'Scotland' isn't upside down!!

You can show or count to 7 with your fingers.

Words

When he was about five years old, the family travelled home to Scotland for a holiday.

When the holiday was over, Eric and his older brother, Rob, were left at school while the rest of the family returned to China.

Eric was sad without his parents and China was his home, but he had Rob. Everything Rob did, Eric did, too.

Eric knew that God was calling him back to China, but he didn't tell anyone that yet.

The boys loved sports and science,

and Eric's sport was rugby.

When Eric went to university, in Edinburgh, to study science, he played rugby for the university, then for Edinburgh District and, he even played for Scotland.

He was so good that he played for Scotland seven times.

All the time that Eric was playing sport and learning about science, he was also telling people about God's love.

He would speak to people all over Scotland, and because he played rugby for Scotland, people came to hear him.

During the summer there was no rugby. One of Eric's friends asked him to enter the university athletic competition.

Eric said that he didn't have time, but he came anyway and won the 100m race.

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Movements

Place the heart on the underlay, in the middle, nearest the children/farthest from you.

If you are telling this story to children who are familiar with Godly Play, then place the heart with the summary of the Ten Best Ways showing.

If you are telling this story to children who are not familiar with Godly Play, you should put the heart down showing the side which has the fourth commandment – Keep the Sabbath Holy – showing.

Take your time as you say all these words.

Words

He kept running and he kept winning.

He stopped playing rugby, so that he could run.

He was so fast that he was invited to join the Great British Olympic team for the 1924 games in Paris.

A few months before the Olympics, Eric was told the heats for the 100m would be held on a Sunday.

Eric could not run on a Sunday.

Sunday was the Sabbath.

God's day.

It was not a day made for running.

People were angry with Eric.

Some people even called him a traitor.

He was the great hope for a gold medal and he was throwing it away.

Wasn't a gold medal more important than God?

But Eric still said that he would not run on a Sunday.

He said that he could run in the 400m instead.

The Olympic Committee said yes, but didn't think he would even get to the final.

The Story of Eric Liddell

Movements

Pick up the folded note and show the children.

Open the note and read the words – you can let the children see the words, you don't need to hide them.

Fold the note up again and place it under the 'Love God' part of the heart, or if you are using the 4th commandment, under the top of the right side. Place it so you can still see most of the note.

Place the medal beside the bottom of the heart.

If you are using the Summary of the Ten Best ways, place it beside "God Loves You".

Words

Still, Eric trained and worked to prepare for the race.

At the Olympic Games, people were still angry with him, but he reached the final.

On the day of race, one of the team gave Eric a little note, he opened it just before the race began.

He read:

In the old Book it says:

"He who honours me, I will honour"

Wishing you the best of success always.

When the race began the crowd gasped. Eric was running this race like it was the 100 metres.

He would collapse before the end.

At the 200m mark, the other runners were beginning to catch Eric. Soon they would pass him.

But Eric threw his head back and his arms out and ran even faster.

He couldn't see where he was going. He ran with faith.

That day he won the gold medal and set a new world record.

After the race, Eric didn't drink champagne and celebrate like everyone else, instead he went to the Scots Kirk in Paris to speak to the people there.

The Story of Eric Liddell

Movements

Add the map of China to the left side of the underlay.

Take a breath ...

... and another!

Then move the test tube from behind the rugby ball to just above the map of China.

As you speak about Eric teaching the children, touch the test tube, and when you speak about him organising sports, touch the rugby ball and when you speak about him telling the people about God's love, cup your hands around the heart/ Summary of the Ten Best Ways, almost in the 'coming close' gesture. Keep your hands there while you speak about Eric praying for everyone.

Bring your hands back into your lap.

Words

People expected Eric to keep running and winning medals.

He was a hero, everyone wanted to meet him and to hear him speak.

But Eric needed to go back to China, to teach science, to care for people and to tell them about God's love.

He knew that God had made him fast, but that God had also made him for China.

He travelled back to China in 1925.

He met his wife, and they were married in China. Two of his daughters were born there.

While they were there, war broke out.

China became a very dangerous place and was invaded by the Japanese.

Eric's family were sent home, but Eric stayed to look after his people.

Even when he was taken to an internment camp, he was still looking after people.

He taught the children;

he organised sports

and he still told people about God's love.

He shared everything he had with them.

And he prayed for everyone, including the Japanese soldiers. Some people did not understand how Eric could pray for the soldiers, but Eric taught people in the camp to love and pray for their enemies.

He helped them to understand forgiveness.

His message was of true peace.

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Movements

Show the booklet again. Point to the maps of China and to Scotland on the booklet, as you speak about the memorials, then turn the booklet over. Take a minute to wonder internally about this amazing man and all the things he did.

When you are ready, begin to guide the wondering about Eric Liddell's life by using the wondering questions.

Show the children the booklet. Point out the map of China showing where Eric Liddell lived and the story printed in the booklet to help the children know Eric better.

Put the objects you used to tell the story carefully back into the basket. Fold up the underlay and put it on top. Make sure that the booklet is at the front of the basket.

Then take the basket back to its place. When you come back to the circle, help the children decide what work or response they need to do today.

Words

But Eric was also very ill.

He died in the internment camp, just a few months before peace and he is buried there.

There are memorials and statues in China and in Scotland, to help us remember him.

This is the story of Eric Liddell.

God made Eric fast

and God made him for China.

I wonder which parts of Eric Liddell's story you like best?

I wonder which part of the story you think is most important?

I wonder which part of the story is about you, or where you might be in the story?

I wonder if we could leave any part of the story out and still have all the story we need?

I wonder what you are wondering about this story and about Eric?

Let me show you what is inside this booklet and how you can use it to find out more about Eric Liddell.

Now, let's put this story away, then you can wonder about what you need to do today to think a bit more about the story of Eric Liddell.

You can think about that while I take the story back to the shelf, and once I am back, I'll go round the circle and ask.