



BE
Still.

GOD & ONE REDHEAD

MARY SLESSOR OF CALABAR

from Jerusalem to Irian Jaya by Ruth A. Tucker

The exploration and missionary work of Livingstone and Stanley inspired scores of others to embark on Africa—women as well as men. Most of the women, not surprisingly, envisioned their ministry sheltered within the confines of an established mission station, such as Kuruman where Mary Moffat spent most of her life. Exploration and pioneer work was not even an option for a single female missionary—at least not until Mary Slessor arrived on the scene.

The story of Mary Slessor, as much as the life of any missionary in modern history, has been romanticised almost beyond recognition. The image of her as a Victorian lady dressed in high-necked, ankle-length flowing dresses, pompously escorted through the African rain forests in a canoe by painted tribal warriors is far removed from the reality of the barefooted, scantily clad, red-haired, working class woman who lived African-style in a mud hovel, her face at times covered with boils, and often without her false teeth. Yet her success as a missionary pioneer was amazing, and the oneness she felt for the Africans has been equalled by few. She held the distinction of being the first woman vice-consul in the British Empire, but the greatest tribute she ever received was paid to her before her death by fellow missionaries who knew her well, and in spite of her faults and eccentricities,

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION



honoured her for the great woman of God she was.

Mary Mitchell Slessor, the second of seven children, was born in Scotland in 1848. Her childhood was marred by poverty and family strife, due largely to the sporadic work habits of her alcoholic father, who had been known to throw Mary out into the streets alone at night after he had come home drunk. At age eleven, Mary began working alongside her mother at the textile mills as a half-timer while she continued on in her schooling. By the time she reached fourteen she was working ten-hour days to support the family due to her mother's confinement in the birth of her seventh child. For the next thirteen years Mary continued in the mills and was the primary wage earner in the family.

Though she later referred to herself as a “wild lassie,” Mary’s early years were spent mainly at work, both at the mills and at home. There was little time or opportunity for leisure in the crowded, polluted working-class district where her family lived. Fortunately, church activities provided a fulfilling outlet from her miserable home life. Converted as a youngster through the concern of an elderly widow in the neighbourhood, Mary soon became very active in her local Presbyterian church. She taught Sunday school, and after the death of her father she volunteered for home missionary work. When she was in her early twenties she began working with the Queen Street Mission, which provided practical experience for her future missionary

“Their past experience was not of great use to the Israelites in their journeyings. You will not get through because you got through before. You must ask fresh counsel of God.”

“THE LORD WENT BEFORE THEM BY DAY IN A PILLAR OF A CLOUD, TO LEAD THEM THE WAY.” EXODUS 13:21

endeavours. How many times she had to stand up to foul-mouthed thugs and bawdy street gangs who sought to break up her open-air meetings. The courage she would need in later years was developing in the blighted neighbourhoods of Dundee.

Foreign missions, since early childhood, deeply interested Mary. Missionary meetings were a common occurrence in her church, and furloughed missionaries pleaded for workers. The progress of the Calabar Mission, established two years before her birth, was followed with lively interest, and Mary's missionary-minded mother hoped her only living son, John, would become part of the foreign missionary force. His death, when Mary was twenty-five, shattered her mother's dreams. But for Mary, it was an inducement to escape the mills and to take her brother's place. The Calabar Mission had always made room for women, and Mary knew she would be a welcome addition to the staff. The death of David Livingstone clinched her decision, and all that remained was to sever the close physical ties she had with her family.

In 1875 Mary applied to and was accepted by the Calabar Mission, and in the summer of 1876, at the age of twenty-seven, she sailed for Calabar (located in present-day Nigeria), long known for its slave trade and deadly environment. Mary's earliest years in Africa were spent at Duke Town, where she taught in a mission school and visited with the Africans, picking up the language quickly, but she was dissatisfied with her assignment. As a mill girl, she never felt quite at ease with the social niceties and ample lifestyle of the several missionary families comfortably stationed at Duke Town. (And no doubt they had reservations about her—a twenty-nine-year-old woman who admittedly had climbed every tree worth climbing between Duke Town and Old Town.) Life was too routine. She wanted more out of her missionary career than what she was offered at Duke Town. Only a month after her arrival she wrote, "One does need a special grace to enable one to sit still. It is so difficult to wait." Her heart was set on doing pioneer work in the interior, but for that "privilege" she would have to wait.

After less than three years in Africa and weakened by several attacks of malaria (and many more of homesickness), Mary was allowed a furlough to regain her strength and reunite with her family. She returned to Africa refreshed and excited about her new assignment at Old Town, three miles further inland along the Calabar River. Here she was free to work

by herself and to maintain her own lifestyle—living in a mud hut and eating local produce that allowed her to send most of her mission salary to her family back home. No longer was her work routine. She supervised schools, dispensed medication, mediated disputes, and mothered unwanted children. On Sundays she became a circuit preacher, trudging miles through the jungle from village to village, sharing the gospel with those who would listen.

Evangelism in Calabar was a slow and tedious process. Witchcraft and spiritism abounded. Cruel tribal customs were embedded in tradition and almost impossible to subdue. One of the most heart rending of these customs was twin-murder. Superstition decreed that a twin birth was a curse caused by an evil spirit who fathered one of the children. In most cases both babies were brutally murdered, and the mother was shunned by the tribe and exiled to an area reserved for outcasts. Mary not only rescued twins and ministered to their mothers, but also tirelessly fought against the perpetrators of this heathen ritual, sometimes risking her own life. She courageously intervened in tribal matters and eventually gained a respect unheard of for a woman. But after three years Mary was once again too ill to remain on the field.

On her second furlough Mary was accompanied by Janie, a six-month-old twin girl she had rescued from death. Though she desperately needed rest, Mary was inundated with speaking requests. She and Janie were a sensation, and so great was the demand for their appearance that the mission committee extended Mary's furlough. Mary was further detained by obligations to her sickly mother and sister; but finally in 1885, after nearly three years' leave, she returned to Africa, determined to penetrate further into the interior.

Soon after she returned, Mary received word of her mother's death, and three months after that of her sister's. Another sister had died during her furlough, and now Mary was left alone with no close ties to her homeland. She was despondent and almost overcome with loneliness: "There is no one to write and tell all my stories and troubles and nonsense to." But along with the loneliness and sorrow came a sense of freedom: "Heaven is now nearer to me than Britain, and no one will be anxious about me if I go up-country."

"Up-country" to Mary meant Okoyong, an untamed area that had claimed the lives of other missionaries who had dared to penetrate its borders. Sending a single

woman to the Okoyongs was considered by many to be an exercise in insanity, but Mary was determined to go and would not be dissuaded. After visiting the area a number of times with other missionaries, Mary was convinced that pioneer work was best accomplished by women, who, she believed, were less threatening to unreached tribes than men. So in August of 1888, with the assistance of her friend, King Eyo, of Old Town, she was on her way north.

For the next quarter of a century and more, Mary would continue to pioneer missions in areas in which no white man had been able to survive. For fifteen years (minus two furloughs) she stayed with the Okoyongs, teaching them and nursing them and arbitrating their disputes. Her reputation as a peacemaker spread to outlying districts, and soon she was acting as a judge for the whole region. In 1892 she became the first vice-consul to Okoyong, a government position she held for many years. In that capacity she acted as a judge and presided over court cases involving disputes over land, debts, family matters, and the like. Her methods were unconventional by British standards (often refusing to act solely on the evidence before her if she personally was aware of other factors), but they were well suited to African society.

Although Mary was highly respected as a judge and had influenced the gradual decline in witchcraft and superstition, she saw little progress in bringing Christianity to the Okoyongs. She considered herself a pioneer and she viewed her work as preparatory and was not unduly anxious that she could not send glowing reports back home of hosts of converts and thriving churches. She organised schools, taught practical skills, and established trade routes, all in preparation for missionaries (ordained men being her preference) to follow. She saw some fruit from her evangelistic endeavours, but it was mainly in her own family of adopted children. In 1903, near the end of her term at Okoyong, the first baptism service was held (with seven of the eleven children baptised being her own), and a church was organised with seven charter members.

Mary's life as a pioneer missionary was a lonely one, but she was not entirely without social contacts. Furloughs back to England and periodic trips to Duke Town reacquainted her with the outside world. During one of her sick leaves to the coast she met Charles Morrison, a young missionary teacher, eighteen years her junior, serving in Duke Town. As their

friendship grew they fell in love, and Mary accepted his marriage proposal, providing he would work with her in Okoyong. The marriage, however, never took place. His health did not even permit him to remain in Duke Town, and, for Mary, missionary service came before personal relationships.

Mary was not really suited for marriage anyway. Her living habits and daily routine were so haphazard that she was better off by herself. Single women had tried to live with her, but usually without success. She was careless about hygiene, and her mud huts were infested with roaches, rats and ants. Meals, school hours, and church services were irregular—all much more suited to Africans than to time oriented Europeans. Clothing, too, was a matter of little concern for her. She soon discovered that the modest tightly fitted long dresses of Victorian England were not suited to life in an African rain forest. Instead, she wore simple cotton garments, often clinging to her skin in the dampness (causing one male missionary to insist on walking ahead of her on jungle treks so he would not have to look at her, even though she was the one who was familiar with the trails).

Though Mary often failed to take the most basic health precautions and “lived native” (as other missionaries were prone to say), the fact is that she outlived most of her fellow missionaries who were so careful about health and hygiene. Nevertheless, she did suffer recurring attacks of malaria, and she often endured painful boils that appeared on her face and head, sometimes resulting in baldness. At times, however, she was surprisingly healthy and robust for a middle-aged woman. Her many children kept her young and happy, and she could heartily say that she was “a witness to the perfect joy and satisfaction of a single life.”

In 1904, at the age of fifty-five, Mary moved on from Okoyong with her seven children to do pioneer work in Itu and other remote areas. Here she encountered great success with the Ibo people. Janie, her oldest adopted daughter, was now a valuable assistant in the work, and another woman missionary was able to take over the work at Okoyong. For the remaining decade of her life, Mary continued doing pioneer work while others followed behind her—their ministry made much easier by her pioneering efforts. In 1915, nearly forty years after coming to Africa, she died at the age of sixty-six in her mud hut, a great testimony to Christian missions in Africa.

THE SCHOOL OF THE SPIRIT

Jay N. Forrest

It offers the highest and most respected degree in the universe...

Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

This is Christ’s personal invitation for us to become one of His disciples. He invites us to come and sit at His feet, to enroll in His school, and to learn about Him. “Take My yoke upon you” is an old phrase of the Jewish Rabbis, meaning “enroll in my school.” And “learn from Me” means to sit at His feet as a student.

This school that Christ invites us to enroll in is the School of the Spirit. It is not a human institution, but rather the spiritual instruction given by Christ, to believers, through the Holy Spirit, from the Bible (John 14:26; 16:13-15; Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 12:12; 24:45; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Nehemiah 9:20).

This school holds the highest accreditation possible, for it is accredited, endorsed, and established by the government of almighty God. It offers the highest and most respected degree in the universe, a B.W.J. degree (i.e., a Been With Jesus degree). This is the degree that Peter and John had (Acts 4:13). Truly this school is the spiritual training centre for all who desire to know Christ (Philippians 3:10).

THE TEACHER

Jesus Christ is the Teacher in the School of the Spirit. Who but Christ Himself could teach believers the ways of the other world? Who, but Christ Himself, has wisdom and knowledge far beyond that of Solomon, wisest of men? Is it not true of Christ, that He is indeed Teacher of teachers, with a wisdom wider than the sky and a knowledge deeper than any sea? Yes it is true, for in Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

There is no teacher better equipped for the task of imparting the knowledge of eternal things than Christ. By precept He imparts to His students knowledge concerning **the true nature and value of things and their relation to God and His kingdom**. By example He

illustrates to His students **the way the righteous should live**. And by entering into the daily life of His students, He trains them in each circumstance, to rejoice, pray, give thanks, and constantly lean on the everlasting arms of God in full assurance of faith (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Philippians 4:4-7; Hebrews 11:6). It is Christ who is the Master, the Divine Expression, and the Revealer of all that is holy and sacred. It is He who opens the understanding and the heart (Luke 24:45; Acts 16:14). Christ’s presence and teaching are the secrets of all true Bible study. And this learning takes place in the classroom of the inner chamber, at the feet of Jesus.

We are to learn from Christ, but we are also to learn Christ. **He is both Teacher and lesson**. His gentleness of heart fits Him to teach, to be the illustration of His own teaching, and to work in us His great design. It is only as we are meek and lowly in heart that Christ can teach us by His Spirit what God has for us.

How can a Christ in heaven teach students upon the earth? There must be a Go-between. This Go-between is none other than the blessed Holy Spirit, who has come to guide us into all truth. For He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears from Christ He will speak to us (John 16:13). Christ teaches us through the agency of the Holy Spirit, so that the voice is His but the words are Christ’s (John 14:26). It is Christ’s instruction, but the Spirit is the one relaying to us that instruction.

THE STUDENT

The New Testament was written in Greek. So in order for us to understand the exact meaning of a word used, we must first find out its literal definition in Greek.

The word **disciple** occurs some 150 times in the New Testament, while the term Christian appears only three times. The word disciple in the Greek denotes a student and a follower. **It implies the acceptance in mind and life of the views and practices of the teacher**. So we are talking about people who not only think but do. It is thought accompanied by endeavour.

As students and followers of Christ we must not only take in new information from God,

we must also apply that information to our lives (Luke 11:28; James 1:22). **Christians are first of all disciples** (Acts 11:26), **and if they are not disciples, they are not true Christians.** This truth is evident from the fact that if you are not a knower (student) and a doer (follower) of the word, you are lost and headed for hell fire (Matthew 7:21, 24-27; James 1:22; 4:17; Ezekiel 33:31-32; Deuteronomy 17:19; Ezra 7:10; Luke 6:46, 64-49; 8:21; 11:28; 12:47; John 13:17; Romans 2:13; 1 John 2:4).

THE COST

Christ calls us to take upon ourselves His yoke. This is a symbol of service; an emblem of commitment to Christ. It is a token of toil; a sign of our absolute surrender to His Lordship. The yoke suggests submission, obedience, and service. It is a call to surrender, to submit, to yield your whole life to Christ.

Let me drive this point home. "You are not your own," you belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). When you submitted yourself to God you made free surrender of all to Him, to be ruled and governed according to His will. You do not own anything and you have no rights, but the rights granted to you by the Governor of the universe. You have no right

to spend even one hour as if it were your own. You have no right to go anywhere, or do anything without the express permission of God. You must hold all at the disposal of God, and use all to His glory. You must renounce all rights to your own life. If you have not, or will not renounce these rights to God, know that you are none of Christ's (Matthew 10:37-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24; 14:26, 33; John 12:24-26).

True disciples are love slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:24-25). You are the slave of the power you choose to obey, either God or selfishness (Romans 6:16). If Jesus is not your Master, you are not His servant. If Jesus is not Lord of everything, then He is really not Lord at all. Oh, that you would die to your old selfish way of life, and humble your proud heart to the gentle Saviour (Matthew 16:24). Sin is a hard task master and its burden is heavy. But Christian freedom is a new kind of control where we are free to do anything we choose to, because we choose the things that are for the greatest welfare of everyone. This is the freedom of the love slave. The cost is allegiance to Christ, commitment to learn humbly at His feet, and absolute obedience to every one of Christ's commands the minute that you come to know them (John 14:15; 1 John 2:4-6;

Matthew 28:20).

God's invitation to learn is for all that will pay the price. Come to Christ, all you who need instruction, and learn in Christ's school. Why do you admit that you know little about spiritual and eternal things and yet do nothing about it? Put Christ's yoke upon you, and be willing to learn at the feet of the Master. The opportunity to learn many hidden truths in God's Word is open to all. Will you now enroll in the School of the Spirit? Will you now sit at Christ's feet? Will you not learn of the Son of God?

Come to the feet of the Teacher of teachers, and breath in the purest wisdom, the most splendid knowledge, the clearest discernment, and the sweetest understanding.

May the Spirit now bring us to His classroom and begin the training. As John the Baptist in the desert and Paul in Arabia, may the Spirit lead us to that place where the Divine Teacher can visit us. Let us now commit ourselves to begin our studies and training in the School of the Spirit.

*More about Jesus, in His word,
Holding communion with my Lord.
Hearing His voice in every line,
Making each faithful saying mine.*

DAVID served in one generation—his own. He could not serve in two!

Where today we seek to perpetuate our work by setting up an organisation or society or system, the Old Testament saints served their own day and passed on. This is an important principle of life. Wheat is sown, it grows, it ears, is reaped, and then the whole plant, even to the root, is plowed out. God's work is spiritual to the point of having no earthly roots, no smell of earth on it at all. Men pass on, but the Lord remains.

Everything to do with the Church must be up-to-date and living, meeting the present—one could never even say the passing—needs of the hour. Never must it become fixed, earth-bound, static. God Himself takes away His workers, but He gives others. **Our work suffers, but His never does.** Nothing touches Him. He is still God.

—WATCHMAN NEE

The Patience of Faith

"Because thou hast kept the word of My patience." REVELATION 3:10

Patience is more than endurance. **A saint's life is in the hands of God like a bow and arrow in the hands of an archer.** God is aiming at something the saint cannot see, and He stretches and strains, and every now and again the saint says—"I cannot stand any more." God does not heed, He goes on stretching till His purpose is in sight, then He lets fly. Trust yourself in God's hands. For what have you need of patience just now? Maintain your relationship to Jesus Christ by the patience of faith. "Though he slay me, yet will I wait for Him."

Faith is not pathetic sentiment, but robust vigorous confidence built upon the fact that God is holy love. You cannot see Him just now, you cannot understand what He is doing, but you know Him. Shipwreck occurs where there is not that mental poise which comes from being established on the eternal truth that God is holy love. **Faith is the heroic effort of your life; you fling yourself in reckless confidence on God.**

God has ventured all in Jesus Christ to save us. Now He wants us to venture our all in abandoned confidence in Him. There are spots where that faith has not worked in us as yet, places untouched by the life of God. There were none of those in Jesus Christ's life, and there are to be none in ours. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee." Eternal life is a life that can face anything without wavering. If we take this view, life becomes one great romance, a glorious opportunity for seeing marvellous things all the time. God is disciplining us to get us into this central place of power.

—OSWALD CHAMBERS

"Our mind is where our pleasure is, our heart is where our treasure is, our love is where our life is, but all these, our pleasure, treasure, and life, are reposed in Jesus Christ." —Thomas Adams