

# Hero of faith - Eric Liddell

by Isobel Booth-Clibborn



## Messy reflection

So that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Philippians 2:15-16a (NIV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorned its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)

- How do these passages show something of Eric Liddell's faith and values?

We let what Christ has done for us shine through everything in our lives. We let the righteousness of God be evident in our lives as we live lives that are pure and blameless before God. Second, we shine like stars in the universe when we take on the mind and attitude of Jesus.

- How did Eric's life shine with the love of God?
- How might we shine in what we think and do?

## #discipleship: team

### How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session will reflect on the life, faith, mission engagement and sporting achievements of a great man of faith – Eric Liddell.

It will encourage people to reflect on how his faith impacted his life and the lives of others. This year marks 100 years since Eric's famous gold medal at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris.

Alongside his successes on the track, his Christian values and example are an inspiration encouraging us to consider how we use our God given talents and share the good news of Jesus.

## Eric Liddell's story

Watch this video ([ericLiddell.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EL100-Promo-Video-small.mp4](https://ericLiddell.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EL100-Promo-Video-small.mp4)) or do a dramatised telling of his story.

### Key points of Eric's life

- Born in the north of China to Scottish missionary parents in 1902.
- Aged five he moved back to UK and went to boarding school.
- Aged 18 Eric went to the University of Edinburgh and got involved in running.
- 1922 – he plays rugby for Scotland.
- 1923 – sets the British 100-yard record.
- 1924 – wins Gold at the Olympics – BUT refuses to run on a Sunday so has to run the 400 m instead of the 100 m and he wins.
- 1925 – retires from sport and moves to China to serve God as a missionary.
- 1932 – ordained as a minister.
- 1934 – marries Florence and has three children.
- 1941 – the family are separated because of the war.
- 1943 – Eric captured and put in an internment camp. He helped with sport and shared his faith in the camp.
- 1945 – Eric dies of a brain tumour in the camp.



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## Activities

### 1. Eric Liddell's life and witness

**You will need:** the list of video clips on Eric Liddell at the end of this session; the video on the summary of the life and legacy of Eric Liddell – [ericLiddell.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EL100-Promo-Video-small.mp4](http://ericLiddell.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EL100-Promo-Video-small.mp4)

Watch the video of Eric's life and legacy, as well as choosing some from the list to also watch. Why not include some clips from *Chariots of Fire*.

**Talk about** what you found interesting about Eric Liddell.

### 2. Eric Liddell's timeline

**You will need:** a timeline of Eric's life cut into strips (there is a useful resource here with a timeline at the end – [boys-brigade.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/seniors-heroes\\_of\\_faith\\_eric\\_Liddell-themed\\_programme-with\\_activity\\_sheet-web.pdf](http://boys-brigade.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/seniors-heroes_of_faith_eric_Liddell-themed_programme-with_activity_sheet-web.pdf))

Make sure you have enough copies for each group and then get each table to put the key events of Eric's life in order.

**Talk about** how Eric had a sense of calling and commitment to God.

### 3. Double star jumps

**You will need:** a timer

People can take it in turns to see how many star jumps they can do in one minute, or if they're feeling brave, try four minutes!

**Talk about** how many star jumps each person managed in one minute and four minutes. How much harder was it to keep going for four minutes? How would it have been for Eric to have trained for the 100-metre race but then to run (and win!) the 400-metres instead?

### 4. Run the race in Mandarin Chinese

**You will need:** paper; good writing pens (calligraphy ones are even better!)

Copy or trace the below writing, which says 'Run the race' in Mandarin and is pronounced Pǎo bǐsài.

跑比赛

**Talk about** how Eric Liddell 'ran the race' of his life in Britain and in China.

### 5. Sporting heroes

**You will need:** pictures of different sports people

See if people can guess the different sporting heroes and what makes them a hero?

**Talk about** how Eric Liddell was a hero.

### 6. Take my hands and feet

**You will need:** paper; pens; scissors

Read the verse below from the hymn 'Take my life' by Frances Havergal (1836–79). Invite people to draw around their hands and feet. Cut these out and write on the hands how God might take your hands and use them – what you might DO for God? On the feet, how God might take your feet and use them – where you might GO for God? This could be your street, school or further afield.

Read the verse again while all holding your cut-out hands and feet.

*Take my hands, and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love;  
take my feet, and let them be  
swift and beautiful for thee.*

**Talk about** how Eric Liddell offered his life to God. He used his feet to run and win races; his hands and feet to play rugby; he travelled to China to share about Jesus; his used his hands and feet to help others while in an internment camp.

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## Celebration

Explore the life of Eric Liddell and how he shines from the inside out.

Use the song 'Shine' – [youtu.be/WGarMi70QsS](https://youtu.be/WGarMi70QsS).

Sing the song with actions at the start and end of the celebration, then explore the life of Eric Liddell and how he shone through different aspects of his life. Have a station set up for each area and people can carousel round them.

1. **Sport** – Eric used his gift of sport to play rugby for Scotland as well as running. The race he trained for was the 100 metres but he chose not to compete in that in the Olympics because the race was on a Sunday so instead he ran the 400 metres and won!

Eric said: 'I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.'

What gifts do you use for God? What brings God pleasure?

2. **Faith** – Eric's faith in God was really important to him and it came first in his life. He refused to run on a Sunday – the sabbath that he felt should be kept holy.

Eric said: 'Many of us are missing something in life because we are after the second best. I put before you what I have found to be the best – one who is worthy of all our devotion – Jesus Christ. He is the Saviour for the young and the old. Lord, here I am.'

How might you put Jesus first?

3. **Sharing faith** – Eric shared about his faith in Jesus wherever he was – on the sports track, in China and in Scotland. People came from far and wide to hear him speak.

Eric said: 'We are all missionaries. Wherever we go, we either bring people nearer to Christ or we repel them from Christ.'

How do we share about Jesus and bring others to him?

4. **Suffering for faith** – Eric was separated from his family and sent to an internment camp during the war, and he eventually died there of a brain tumour. His faith in God helped him in this hard time and he was able to help and encourage others.

Eric said: 'Victory over all the circumstances of life comes not by might, nor by power, but by a practical confidence in God and by allowing his Spirit to dwell in our hearts and control our actions and **emotions**. In the days of ease and comfort, learn to think in terms of the prayer that follows, so that when the days of hardship come you will be fully prepared and equipped to meet them.'

How can your faith in God help you when things are tough?

*As we have explored Eric's life and faith, we have seen how he 'shone from the inside out, so the world may see he lives in me.'*

## Prayer

*A bit like in the celebration time, have different prayer stations where people can do different prayer activities.*

**Sport** – Write down some of your gifts and things that you are good at on a rugby ball or football. Thank God for the gifts he has given you and pray that he will help you use them well.

**Mission** – Write prayers for churches in different countries to grow. You could stick them to a world map.

**Living your faith** – On a large star outline, write or draw what you might do to shine and live out your faith and share God's love.

**Suffering in times of war** – On a newspaper, write short prayers for those suffering because of war, or pray for specific countries where war is a daily reality.

## Song suggestions

'Shine (from the inside)' – Spring Harvest

'With all I am' – Hillsong Worship

'Running the race' – Harbour Collective

'Run the race' – Holly Starr

'Running the race' – Freedom Church

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## Meal suggestion

A Chinese-inspired meal, such as wraps with shredded chicken and hoisin sauce, noodles with a sweet and sour sauce, prawn crackers and green tea.

Find out more about The Eric Liddell 100 at [ericLiddell.org/the-eric-Liddell-100](http://ericLiddell.org/the-eric-Liddell-100), email [EL100@ericLiddell.org](mailto:EL100@ericLiddell.org) or search for The Eric Liddell Community on social media.

## Video clips about Eric Liddell

You can use the full *Chariots of Fire* movie (the full movie can be rented on Amazon Prime or watched on Disney+) or these short clips in a whole variety of ways.

Clips from *Chariots of Fire*:

- A speech by Eric Liddell – [youtu.be/w57Atv9GyNY](https://youtu.be/w57Atv9GyNY)
- I'll not run on the sabbath – [youtu.be/uslpld3BZWw](https://youtu.be/uslpld3BZWw)
- He who honours God – [youtu.be/uwyltmUR3MU](https://youtu.be/uwyltmUR3MU)
- Where does the power come from – [youtu.be/kbGR-pOIFbE](https://youtu.be/kbGR-pOIFbE)

Other video clips:

- The flying Scotsman takes gold – [youtu.be/IYNUxdolacA](https://youtu.be/IYNUxdolacA)
- The death of Eric Liddell – [youtu.be/KL0kzagSQwY](https://youtu.be/KL0kzagSQwY)
- Eric Liddell: from Olympian to martyred missionary – [youtu.be/rZdGZLe-N2U](https://youtu.be/rZdGZLe-N2U)
- Eric Liddell: all of life is a race lecture – [youtu.be/r9NclUKgqFs](https://youtu.be/r9NclUKgqFs)
- A summary of the life and legacy of Eric Liddell – [ericLiddell.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EL100-Promo-Video-small.mp4](http://ericLiddell.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EL100-Promo-Video-small.mp4)

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