

## A GROUP MEETING: ERIC LIDDELL

### Useful resources for planning this meeting:

[The-Story-of-Eric-Liddell-24-1.pdf \(godlyplayscotland.co.uk\)](#)

This includes a full Godly Play video session and account of Eric Liddell's life

[Lord Puttnam - Eric Liddell: All of Life is a Race - YouTube](#) (4 mins 15)

[Eric Liddell: From Olympian to Martyred Missionary | Cody Crouch on TBN \(youtube.com\)](#) (11 mins)

[He who honors God \(youtube.com\)](#) (4 mins 30)

<https://ericliddell.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EL100-Promo-Video-small.mp4> (2 mins 15)

### Reading

Hebrews 12: 1-13

### Hymn

May the mind of Christ my Saviour (CH4 536)

### Prayer

Loving God, we thank you that we are free to meet today, to be together and to learn more about what it means to give our lives to you. As we hear again about the faithful service of Eric Liddell, 100 years on from his amazing achievement and as we remember all that Eric did for your sake and to bring glory to your name, inspire us afresh in our commitment to love you, whose we are and whom we serve. Amen

### Activity

1. Look at the timeline of Eric's life together to refresh your memories. (see separate sheet)  
What things stand out for you?
2. Read through the following quotes. Can we apply his words to our lives?

"The greatest victory is not in winning races, but in overcoming obstacles, breaking down barriers, and pushing through limitations."

"Champions are not always the ones who win, but those who never give up and keep fighting till the end."

"True strength is not just physical; it is mental, emotional, and spiritual. Train all aspects of your being."

"True greatness is not measured by how fast you run, but how well you inspire others to run with you,"

"We are all given talents, but it is up to us to discover them, nurture them, and maximize their potential."

"Success is not about winning races; it's about becoming a better person and making a positive impact on the world."

"Don't compare yourself to others; compare yourself to the person you were yesterday. That's the only competition that matters."

### Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for Eric's example and the inspiration that he can provide to each one of us in our own lives. As we go home, may the thoughts we have shared here stay with us and be an encouragement to us until we meet again. We pray in Jesus name. Amen

### Hymn

When we walk with the Lord (Trust and obey) Mission Praise 760

## TIMELINE OF ERIC LIDDELL'S LIFE

[\(Eric Liddell \(1902 - 1945\) | The University of Edinburgh\)](#)

- 1902 16<sup>th</sup> January - born in China
- 1907 Moved back to the UK to Glasgow and then to England for schooling
- 1920 Started studies at Edinburgh University
- 1922 Played rugby for Scotland in seven international games
- 1923 Set 100yd world record
- 1924 11<sup>th</sup> July - won the gold medal for the 400 yards at the Paris Olympics  
2 weeks later - graduated with a BSc
- 1925 July - moved back to China  
Took up the position of science teacher at Anglo-Chinese Christian College  
Led students in renovating a sports stadium – at the time one of the best in China
- 1929 Last gold medal won at the International Games in Tianjin
- 1930 Last race run - winning the North China Championship
- 1932 Ordained as a minister
- 1934 March - married Florence
- 1935 First daughter born (Patricia)
- 1938 Second daughter born (Heather)
- 1941 Family separated when Florence went to stay with family in Canada
- 1941 Third daughter (Nancy Maureen) born in Canada but was never able to meet her father
- 1943 Sent to an internment camp  
Made sports matches available for children in the camp, using his personal belongings  
For the good of the children, sacrificed Sunday to referee sports matches
- 1945 After developing a brain tumour Feb 21<sup>st</sup> - died at age 43

## Eric Liddell Biography

Although his parents were Scottish, Eric Liddell was both born and died in China. He was born on 16 January 1902 in the city of Tientsin (now Tianjin) in north-eastern China.

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!

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.

In 1921, he moved to Edinburgh University where he studied Pure Science.

From his school days, he was an outstanding sportsman excelling in short distance running, rugby union and cricket. In 1922 and 1923 he played rugby union for Scotland in the Five Nations. However, it was at running that he really excelled, and after setting a new British record in the 1923 100 yards sprint, he was considered a great prospect for the Olympics in 1924.

Eric Liddell was a committed Protestant Christian. During the Paris Olympics – because the heats of the 100m sprint were held on Sunday, he withdrew from the race – a race considered to be his strongest. Instead, he concentrated on the 400 metres as the race schedule didn't involve a Sunday.

Liddell was considered to be a strong favourite for the race. Before the final, the US Olympic masseur slipped a piece of paper into his hand. It included the words from the Bible 1 Samuel 2:30 "Those who honour me I will honour".

Sprinting from the start, Liddell created a significant gap to the other runners and held onto win gold and set a new Olympic record time of 47.6 seconds. He described his race plan:

"The secret of my success over the 400m is that I run the first 200m as fast as I can. Then, for the second 200m, with God's help I run faster."

He also won bronze in the 200m. In this race, he also beat Harold Abrahams a British rival and teammate.

Liddell's running style was unorthodox. Towards the end of the race, he would fling his head back, with mouth wide open appearing to gasp for breath.

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

During his first furlough in Scotland, he was ordained as a minister of the Congregational Union of Scotland.

He met his wife, Florence MacKenzie, in China, and they were married in 1934. Daughters Patricia and Heather were both born in China.

When WW2 broke out, Eric and his family were on furlough in Scotland, but Eric wanted to return to China.

By 1941, China was very dangerous, so Florence and the girls travelled to Canada, where Nancy Maureen was born. However, Eric stayed in China. He would never return home again.

In 1941, the advancing Japanese army pressed Liddell and his family to flee to a rural mission station. Liddell was kept very busy dealing with the stream of locals who came to the station for medical treatment and food.

In 1943, the Japanese reached the mission and Liddell was interned. Aggravated by the shortage of food and medical treatment, Liddell developed a brain tumour and suffered severe ill-health.

Many camp internees attest to the strong moral character of Liddell. He was seen as a great unifying force and helped to ease tensions through his selflessness and impartiality.

In *"The Courtyard of the Happy Way"*, Norman Cliff, wrote of Liddell: "the finest Christian gentleman it has been my pleasure to meet. In all the time in the camp, I never heard him say a bad word about anybody".

A fellow internee, Stephen Metcalfe, later wrote of Liddell: "He gave me two things. One was his worn-out running shoes, but the best thing he gave me was his baton of forgiveness. He taught me to love my enemies, the Japanese, and to pray for them."

Eric Liddell died on 21 February 1945, five months before liberation.

He was nursed by Annie Buchanan, a missionary nurse from the north east of Scotland and he was buried in the internment camp.

He died from his inoperable brain tumour – through overwork and malnutrition undoubtedly hastened his death. It was revealed after the war that Liddell had turned down an opportunity to leave the camp (as part of a prisoner exchange program), preferring instead to give his place to a pregnant woman.

His death left a profound vacuum within the camp – such was the strength of his personality and character.



## QUIZ

1. What year was Eric Liddell born? (1902)
2. Where was he born? (China)
3. What was Eric's nickname? (The Flying Scotsman)
4. In what city were the 1924 Olympics held? (Paris)
5. What was Eric's favourite race? (The 100-metre sprint)
6. Why did Eric not enter the 100 metres race? (Final was to be held on a Sunday)
7. What distance did he run and win gold? (400-metre run)
8. Which race did he win bronze for at the same Olympics? (200-metre run)
9. Which rival and team-mate did he beat in the 200m race? (Harold Abrahams)
10. At which university did Eric study? (Edinburgh)
11. What was the name of Eric's wife? (Florence)
12. How many children did Eric have? (3 daughters)
13. What were they called – a point for each! (Patricia, Heather & Nancy Maureen)
14. Why did he return to China? (To serve as a missionary)
15. Which subject did he teach? (Science)
16. Where was Eric when war broke out? (On furlough in Scotland)
17. When was the film 'Chariots of Fire' released? (1981)

Total possible score = 20



ERIC LIDDELL WORDSEARCH

A	I	C	I	R	T	A	P	A	N	Z	C
L	G	E	O	N	E	S	I	R	A	P	J
I	T	Z	K	V	T	M	X	O	I	H	M
H	Q	N	U	S	E	E	U	U	T	I	A
E	G	O	H	W	A	W	R	R	S	W	U
A	I	R	S	A	Z	N	B	S	I	P	R
T	D	B	U	R	R	S	I	K	R	M	E
H	Y	U	N	B	F	O	X	H	H	E	E
E	P	W	D	R	N	U	L	H	C	I	N
R	V	A	A	Q	N	I	G	D	O	H	C
F	J	P	Y	G	O	L	D	T	Y	R	N
D	F	L	O	R	E	N	C	E	L	H	B

CHINA

EDINBURGH

PARIS

FLORENCE

MAUREEN

MISSION

BRONZE

SUNDAY

PATRICIA

WAR

CHRISTIAN

GOLD

HAROLD

HEATHER

INTER

### WORDSEARCH ANSWERS

A	I	C	I	R	T	A	P		N		
		E		N		S	I	R	A	P	
		Z			T				I		M
H		N				E			T	I	A
E	G	O	H	W	A		R		S		U
A		R	S	A		N		S	I		R
T		B	U	R	R		I		R		E
H			N	B		O		H	H		E
E			D		N		L		C		N
R			A			I		D			
			Y	G	O	L	D				
	F	L	O	R	E	N	C	E			

The Eric Liddell 100 is a programme of events and activities to recognise and celebrate the life, sporting and community service achievements of one of Scotland’s iconic figures. It is being planned around 2024, the centenary of Eric Liddell’s historic success at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris.

The Eric Liddell 100 is led by The Eric Liddell Community, a registered care charity based in Edinburgh, close to where Eric lived and taught. The organisation was established in 1980, and its work is inspired by Eric’s values to deliver positive change in their community.

[www.ericliddell.org](http://www.ericliddell.org)