

#4 of 12 - 5 & 10 on the 15th

(a monthly series on impactful Christians who poured out (5) their lives in Christ's strength and power (10) sent out around the 15th of each month)

William Whiting Borden: A very short life with a very long impact

Psalm 119:9 — "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word"

Intro Refrain - This is the fourth in a monthly series this year entitled *Victorious Christians You Should Know* from Warren Wiersbe's book by this title, introducing you each month to one amazing Christian from the past.

Church history is so important! It's both encouraging and inspiring to hear how Christians have sought the Lord, lived for Him, been sustained by Him to accomplish great things in the Kingdom of God, and then die and pass into eternal life. We are the church in our time! We must both take up the cause of Christ in our day and also live for Jesus with dedication and passion – laying down our lives so that the life of Christ might be lived in us and through us. I hope these short sketches inspire you to read more about each of these Christians and to go out, asking Holy Spirit, to help you live a more earnest and uncompromising Christian life.

William Whiting Borden: A very short life with a very long impact

William Whiting Borden was born on November 1, 1887, in Chicago, Illinois, into a wealthy and influential family. His parents, William Borden and Mary Whiting, were part of the elite Borden Dairy family, a company that had established itself as a leader in the dairy industry. However, Borden's legacy is not defined by his family's wealth, but by his deep commitment to faith, missionary work, and a life of service, though it was ever so short.

Early Life and Education

Borden's upbringing was marked by privilege, but it also gave him a strong foundation in Christian faith. From a young age, he was taught the importance of giving back, and his mother instilled in him a sense of duty toward others. At the age of seven (7) young William stood up in what became The Moody Church in Chicago and not only publicly surrendered his life to Christ, but proved to keep that commitment his entire life, which was sadly only eighteen more years.

Growing up in a wealthy family, Borden had access to the best education, and he attended the prestigious Hill School in Pennsylvania, where he continued to show his religious devotion and desire to serve in foreign missionary work. His commitment to this cause became clearer when he went on a trip to the Middle East after high school, exposing him to the challenges faced by people in those regions, solidifying his desire to bring the message of Christ to those in need. The trip also included stops in China where he was impacted by the China Inland Mission (which we learned about in our first “5 & 10” on Hudson Taylor, who founded the China Inland Mission in the mid 1800’s).

Yale University and Personal Transformation

Borden enrolled at Yale University in 1905, where he quickly distinguished himself not only as an academically-gifted student but also as a leader in campus Christian organizations. Part of Borden’s zeal at Yale stemmed from the fact that in spite of the school’s historic Christian background, there was a lack of spiritual life on campus. Borden spurned secular organizations and spurred multiple Christian activities on campus, particularly the Yale Evangelical Union. Borden chose the psalm verse at the introduction of this article along with Psalm 119:11 as his motto for his college years, “Your word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

His faith was the foundation of his life at Yale, where he was also known for his generosity. He gave away large sums of his personal wealth to help the poor and support various missionary projects, founding the Yale Hope Mission to help indigent people in New Haven, where Yale is located. Another of his notable actions was the creation of a Bible study group that grew to involve more than 1,000 students. He believed in the power of prayer, and as he once stated, "I always prayed that God would give me strength to do what He wanted me to do."

A visitor to America once told Dr. Henry Frost, an American executive of the China Inland Mission, that the thing that impressed them most about America was “the sight of that young millionaire kneeling with his arm around a bum in the Yale Hope Mission.”

The Calling to Missionary Work

After graduating from Yale, Borden entered seminary at Princeton, was named a trustee of the Moody Bible Institute, became a member of the North American Council of the China Inland Mission, and pursued his missionary

commitment to go to China to share the Gospel with the 15 million Muslims who he'd learned about at a missions conference while at Yale. He began his training in Arabic and Chinese. While in seminary, he taught a Sunday School class in an African Methodist Episcopal Church, and he gave \$70,000 (\$2.3 million in today's dollars!) to various Christian causes.

His parents, however, were resistant to his decision, given his potential to inherit the family wealth and lead Borden Dairy. They hoped he would return to manage the company, but Borden's resolve was unwavering. As he once told his friend, "No reserves, no retreats, no regrets."

When he graduated from seminary in 1912, newspapers gave great publicity to the event because it was so strange that a young millionaire would bury himself in China as a missionary.

In 1912, he left for China, but tragically, while en route, he contracted spinal meningitis and died on April 9, 1913, at the age of 25. He had spent only a few months in Egypt preparing for his missionary work, but his brief life had a profound impact.

Legacy and Impact

Upon his death, his personal Bible was found with several notes and inscriptions that revealed his unwavering commitment to serving God. On the inside cover of his Bible, he had written: "No reserve. No retreat. No regrets." — the hallmark of his life's story. His commitment to giving up everything for the cause of Christ inspires generations of Christians to live with the same kind of selflessness and dedication, a powerful example of how wealth and privilege can be used for a greater purpose. He could have lived a life of comfort, but instead, he chose a path of service. He once said, "The greatest thing you can do is give yourself away to God's service." His life, though brief, was full of purpose, and his example challenges people to consider how they can live a life of deeper meaning and service. His life is remembered not for what he could have gained, but for the example he set in giving up everything for a higher calling.

And remember that this amazing life in Christ flowed out of a commitment that Borden had made public at the age of seven!

As our Savior Jesus said, "He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." (John 12:25)