

Isobel Kuhn

The true story of Isobel Kuhn, missionary to the Lisu tribes of Southwestern China

Introduction: Put your hand on your head if your family has moved more than once. Stand up if you have moved twice or more. I would like two of you to share what that experience was like. (*Allow responses*)

Flashcard IK-1:

The Miller family had just moved to Vancouver, British Columbia. Sometimes moves can be scary and hard but Isobel found she loved her new home. It was near the ocean and close to the mountains. Isobel loved looking at the tall mountain peaks. Isobel's mother liked to play the piano while the whole family would sing. As they sang, Isobel thought of the many happy evenings her family had spent at the beach that summer. Sometimes they had sat around a bonfire to sing. Sometimes they had listened to her father preach at a Gospel meeting right next to the ocean. Isobel didn't know it, but God had a plan to someday bring her to different mountains in a country far away.

Flashcard IK-2:

A few years later, when Isobel left for college, she remembered all the things her family had done together and how they had served God. But Isobel had only been in college for a short time when she began to wonder about everything her parents had taught her about God. One of her favorite teachers said, "No intelligent person believes what the Bible says." When Isobel admitted that she believed the Bible, the teacher answered, "Oh, you just believe that because your papa and mama told you so."

Is that true? Isobel asked herself. *Do I believe it for myself?* She worried about it all the way home from class.

All her life Isobel *acted* like she believed in Jesus. She read her Bible and went to church. She tried to do the right things and not be bad. But she had never known God for herself. She had never trusted Jesus as her personal Savior. Now she had no answers for the questions in her heart. Isobel was struggling with sin.



You also struggle with sin. Sin is anything you think, say or do that breaks God's law. When you tell your parents you don't have any homework so you can go outside but the truth is you have 3 pages to do in math, what is that called? (*Sin*) What are some other things kids your age do that is sin? (*Allow responses*) (*Read Isaiah 53:6a*) We were all born with a "want to" inside to do the opposite of what is good for us. We want to sin. We want our own way. We want to run our own life from the time we take our first breath in this world. The punishment for your sin is to be separated from a holy, perfect God. The punishment is a horrible place of fire and darkness forever. We all struggle with sin just like Isobel.

During the next few years at college, Isobel turned away from the truth she had learned as a child. She thought, *Why should I bother to read my Bible if God isn't real? Why should I go to church?* She grew more unhappy and restless every day. She was so lonely and miserable she couldn't sleep at night. She began to wonder whether life was worth living. She even thought that it would be better if she were dead.

One night she sat on her bed thinking about how sad she was and how she couldn't find any peace. She began to think about God. Could she be wrong? What if God was really out there? Would He care about her? She took a deep breath and looked up. She whispered, "God, if you even exist...if you give me peace, I will give You my whole life. I'll do anything You ask me to do, go where You send me, obey You all my days." After saying these words she crawled into her bed and closed her eyes.

When she woke up the next morning what do you think happened? (*Allow responses*) God answered Isobel's prayers! Did He answer yes or no? If you think God answered yes and gave Isobel peace show me a thumbs-up. If you think God answered no and she did not have peace show me a thumbs-down.

Thumbs-up, you are right. She believed that God was real and she had peace. God loved Isobel and wanted to have a close relationship with her.



God wants you to know He loves you always, no matter what. He is holy, which means He is perfect, and He never makes a mistake. God created you and didn't make a mistake then either. He gave you your eye color, your smile, your height, your hair color and the color of your skin. After He created you, He said this is good. There is nothing you can ever do that would stop God from loving you. He hates sin because sin and holiness can't be together. But He loves you and doesn't want you to be separated from Him. (*Read 1 John 4:19*) You need to believe that God loves you.

Isobel believed that God loved her. Isobel wanted to know more about God. She prayed and read her Bible. As she did this, she learned more and more about Jesus. She knew it must be true and she trusted Jesus as her Savior.

Flashcard IK-3:

At a summer Bible conference a few years later, Isobel met a missionary who had come from one of the farthest corners of China (*show map*) to tell about his work with the Lisu (*Lee-sue*) people. (*You can share with the children that the distance between Canada and China is close to 5,500 miles. That is more miles than traveling from Canada to Florida and back.*) He described how the Lisu lived in little bamboo shacks perched on the sides of towering mountains. He explained how these people knew nothing about the one true God before he had gone there, how they lived in fear of demons and how the power of Jesus could change their lives. As he spoke, Isobel was filled with a longing to work with the Lisu.

When Isobel told her mother about her desire to work with the Lisu people, she was amazed to find out her mother didn't understand. Her mother even thought it would be a disgrace to have a missionary daughter. "No!" her mother cried. "I will never give my consent!"

Isobel had to make a choice. Should she go to China or stay home? She believed God wanted her to go, but she knew it would be really hard. Did she really want to move so far away and work so hard? Isobel prayed, "Lord, show me what path I should take." Whenever she looked up at the beautiful mountains that surrounded Vancouver, she would think about the Lisu people in their tiny mountain homes. *I can't forget how much they need Jesus*, she decided. *I will go.*

To be a missionary, Isobel first had to go to Bible school. To her surprise, her mother allowed her to go even though she still didn't want Isobel to go to China. So Isobel went off to Bible school in Chicago, praying that God would change the way her mother felt about her becoming a missionary. Finally her Mother agreed that Isobel had made the right choice.

Flashcard IK-4:

Isobel's years at Bible school went quickly. While she was there she met a young man named John Kuhn. John, who was ahead of Isobel in school, also planned to be a missionary in China.

When it was time for John to leave for China, he asked Isobel to marry him. She would have gladly said yes except for one thing. *God has work for me to do with the Lisu tribes, I'm sure*, she thought. *What if I marry John and he is sent to work in a different part of China?* She wanted God's work with the Lisu to come first, no matter how much she loved John. After she prayed and talked to John, they decided to wait until they knew where the mission was going to send John before she agreed to marry him. Isobel knew God had a plan and purpose for her life. She wasn't going to let anything interfere with that.



If you have already believed that Jesus died and rose again from the dead to save you from your sins, then you can also know God's plan for your life. When you trusted in Christ as your Savior, God the Holy Spirit came to live inside you. One of the things the Holy Spirit does is guides you to God's plan for your life. (*Read Jeremiah 29:11*) Maybe He isn't asking you to go to another country. Maybe he is telling you to talk to the kid next to you in your classroom and share about Jesus with them. Perhaps even invite him/her to come to Good News Club with you. Is God calling you to serve Him in some way even at your age? Yes, definitely, especially if you know Jesus and what He has done for you. Look at the verse again. He is saying He has a plan for your life and that plan is going to be good for you, it will give you a future and a hope. **Word up: God Has a Plan for Me.** Isobel wanted to follow God's plan. At last the answer came. John had been assigned to the province of Yunnan (*yoo-NON*)—the area where the Lisu lived!

One of the first things Isobel noticed was that it was hard to find time to be alone. The Chinese people were around Isobel all day long, staring at her strange white skin or peering into her house. How she wished she could get away by herself once in a while!

There were other things about China that bothered Isobel too. In those days people in that part of China were poor. They didn't take hot baths or change into clean clothes when they needed to, so they didn't always look or smell very clean. The white pork fat they served in big, shiny chunks on top of their rice made Isobel sick. When she visited in their houses with their dusty mud floors, Isobel discovered that bedbugs, lice and fleas also lived there. She often came home covered with itchy flea bites! Show me what you would do if you were being bitten by bugs. (*Scratch your arms and legs*)

Isobel knew God had a purpose for her life. God had shown her that His plan for her was to share the Gospel with the Lisu people. She knew she would have to have help to not care about the food and bugs in China. She constantly prayed, "Dear Lord, help me not to care about these things so the Chinese people can hear about you and be saved."

Flashcard IK-5:

God answered Isobel's prayers! Gradually she learned to like the flavor of pork fat and she stopped getting sick. She also found that insect powder kept the fleas from biting her. Best of all, God gave her an even greater desire to tell the Chinese people that Jesus could be their Savior from sin.



Jesus can be your Savior from sin. Remember we said that God wants to have a relationship with you, His creation? What keeps you from having that relationship? Your sin keeps you apart from God. So God the Father sent God the Son, Jesus, down from Heaven as a baby so that He could take our separation from God away. He willingly died and bled on that cross. He took all the sins of everyone including you on Himself. The perfect God the Son, became sin for you so He could pay the debt you owed. How can you know that for sure? Listen as I read from the true word of God: (*Read 1 John 4:14*) This gift to you did not stop with His death. No, He was buried and came alive again to show that He is God and won over sin and death. You don't have to be separated from God anymore.

Isobel was eager to share this wonderful, Good News with the Lisu people. Gradually Isobel got to know the Lisu and their customs. She was sad to see the wrong beliefs that filled their lives with fear. Each Lisu child wore a dirty cord around his wrist that the people thought would protect him from demons (evil spirits). His parents taught him that the bite of a demon would make him sick. If he got sick, the family would have to kill one of their pigs so the demon wouldn't be angry anymore. The people didn't understand that most sicknesses were caused by germs.

Some of the Lisu had already heard about Jesus from missionaries who had been there before Isobel and John. Those who had believed in Jesus had started a church. During the rainy season, when the men couldn't work in the corn fields, she started Bible studies with the church leaders. The studies became

known as “Rainy Season Bible Schools.” Isobel was following God’s plan for her life. **Word up: God Has a Plan for Me!**

During this time there was a war—World War II. China was at war with Japan. Every day, war planes flew over the mountains where the Kuhns worked. Still the Lisu came to the schools. God helped Isobel not to worry even when the Japanese soldiers came dangerously close. The fighting between China and Japan got worse. The missionaries in China knew they were in great danger. What do you think they did? (*Allow responses*) It was no longer safe for John and Isobel or any of the other missionaries to live in the mountains where the Lisu lived. They all had to leave. But as soon as the war was over John and Isobel came back.

Flashcard IK-6:

Isobel eagerly greeted the Lisu friends she had left behind. But Chinese Communists had moved into the Lisu mountains and wanted to rule all of China. Whenever they took control of a town, they refused to let the people there worship God. John and Isobel kept sharing Jesus with the Lisu people for three more years, but when the Communists came to their district, they had to go back to America.

Their mission decided to continue its work in Thailand (*point out on map*), a country next to China. So John and Isobel were able to continue sharing the Gospel with the Lisu people in Thailand. Many of the Lisu escaped to there to get away from the Communists. The busy months in Thailand passed quickly until one day Isobel Kuhn learned she had cancer. After talking about what they wanted to do, Isobel returned to America where her grown children lived and John joined her shortly afterward.

Before she left China, Isobel had begun to write books about the Lisu people and the missionaries she had met. In America, she fought her cancer for almost three years and used that time to continue writing about the work God had done. In March of 1957, Isobel Kuhn died. But before she died, she had finished eight books, telling how God was working both in her and in the people around her. You can still read these books today! God, the Holy Spirit, had been with her, guiding and helping her every step of the way.



If you have trusted in Jesus as your Savior, God the Holy Spirit will guide and help you also. God is for you and wants what is best for you. He wants that close relationship with you. God says: (*Read Jeremiah 29:11*) Will you ask God to show you His plan for you? Trust and obey Him to guide you in His plan for your welfare, future and hope. **Word up: God Has a Plan for Me!** Come back next week and let your small group leader know whether you prayed this or not and what God showed you through your prayer.

That is what God did with Isobel and she followed His plan helping many people get to know Jesus.



What about you? Do you know Jesus as your Savior from sin? Do you doubt that God exists or do you doubt that He can save you from your sins? (*Read John 3:36*) What do you need to believe? Believe means you trust that Jesus is God the Son, who died for you, and that you are placing your trust only in Him to forgive your sin. The God who made you and loves you will save you from sin’s punishment and give you everlasting life that starts right now and goes on forever. One day He will take you to Heaven to live with Him forever. Will you put your trust in Jesus today, believing on Him? Please bow your head and close your eyes. If you have just believed in Jesus or you want to know more about how to believe in Him and receive eternal life, please stand and walk to your small group leader. (*Give children who are standing time to do that. Close in prayer with those who are still sitting.*) Pray something like, “God we so thank you for loving us to death and for those of us that have believed in you as our Savior, thank you for God the Holy Spirit living in us and giving us a way to know your plan for our lives. **Word up: God Has a Plan for Me!**”