

Two Stories of Christians from the Great War

Florence and Albert: Lives lived for God

Florence volunteered at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in her village near Chesterfield every Sunday. She ran the Girls' Bible Class: young girls from the village would come to hear Bible stories and sing and pray together. She wanted to follow God's way in all she did. The chapel was a big thing in her life.

There was a nice young man, Albert, who led the Boys' Bible Class, and they became good friends. True love blossomed, and the two young volunteers got married. They kept on teaching Bible class together. Not so long afterwards, in 1916, when they were expecting their first baby, the government was asking every fit young man to come forward and join the army.



Albert and Florence agreed he should volunteer to 'serve his king and country.' But at the recruiting office, when they found out that Florence was pregnant, they sent Albert back home. Perhaps they knew his wife would need him most when the new baby was born. 'Come back when the baby is three months old' they told him.

Albert and Florence were blessed with their new tiny baby Mary Estelle. She was lovely. When she was three months old, Albert went back to the recruiting office again and was accepted for service. He was assigned to the London Regiment, Post Office Rifles. After his training, he went to the Western Front. A few months later he was dead. Albert was killed at the battle of Passchendaele. Florence was a widow, aged only 23, and baby Mary Estelle had lost her dad before she was one year old.

Florence found comfort after Albert's death from her strong faith. She was glad when a young soldier who used to be a member of Albert's Bible Class found her, and told her about the last time he saw Albert, a few days before he died. The soldier had been injured and was being carried away on a stretcher when he saw Albert. Can you guess what he was doing?

"He stood in an open field with an open Bible and a group of young men around him. He was just finishing a talk to the young soldiers, and then he led them in singing a hymn. 'Rejoice, the Lord is King. Your Lord and King adore.'" Cynthia, Albert and Florence's grand daughter, made a comment: "That was something really good for my grandmother to hang on to. She knew that he was still, at heart, the leader of the young men's Bible class to the very end. In the war, he was still preaching, encouraging young fella sand trying to keep up morale. I like to think that in that terrible time he didn't keep the faith: the faith kept him."

George Vinell: Saved by the Bible

George Vinell served as a Bombardier in the Royal Artillery. He carried a Bible in his pocket which gave him spiritual comfort even in hard times during the War. It also saved his life. On 17th July 1915 he wrote home to his mum and dad sending a pocket Bible with his letter. The Bible had a hole in it, made by a piece of shrapnel.

George came into his sleeping compartment and took off his tunic at

about midday when he heard a shell flying in close. It exploded and threw bits of metal around the compartment. One went straight into his tunic, but because the Bible was in the pocket it didn't get through. George threw himself to the floor while another shell exploded on the compartment and then ran for the protection of the trenches. He wrote 'as soon as we heard the next shell coming I flattened myself in the bottom, not caring about the dirt, until it was over.'

When he got back to the sleeping compartment, there were ten men dead. As well as the shells, four bullets had come in: George felt hugely fortunate because one had hit his pillow, one had hit the floor where he had been lying just a moment earlier. Then he picked up his tunic, and found the shrapnel, aimed at his heart, but stopped by his Bible. He reminded his mum and dad of his last letter, where he had written that he felt 'safe in the hands of God' and wrote: 'Here I am, without a scratch, safe and well'. The shrapnel had gone through the whole Old Testament, and the point of it stopped at Isaiah 49 verse 8. George read the verse, which said 'I will preserve you.'

It felt like a miracle.



For discussion and written work

- **What is the saddest thing in the stories? The most amazing?**
- **What difference did the Bible make to Florence, Albert and George?**
- **Is it surprising that Florence and Albert's grand daughter became a minister too?**
- **Do you believe in miracles? Was it a miracle that saved George? Why don't miracles happen more often? What would those who disagree with you say in reply?**
- **The Bible teaches: "Never let go of loyalty and faithfulness. Tie them round your neck! Write them on your heart! If you do this, then both God and other people will be pleased with you. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do and he will show you the right way." (Proverbs 3: 3-6).**

Did these ideas come true in the lives of Albert, Florence and George? In what ways?

Source: 'Hear My Cry': A book of prayers and readings published by the Bible Society and the Royal British Legion. Grateful thanks for the use of this material.