

**ERIC LIDDELL'S  
1924 OLYMPIC STORY**



**RACING  
FOR  
GLORY**

**GRAHAM DANIELS & JONNY REID**

***“AND NOW, IN ONE HOUR’S TIME, I WILL BE OUT THERE AGAIN. I WILL RAISE MY EYES AND LOOK DOWN THAT CORRIDOR – FOUR FEET WIDE, WITH TEN LONELY SECONDS TO JUSTIFY MY WHOLE EXISTENCE. BUT WILL I?”***

Six men lined up for the 100 metres final at the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. Harold Abrahams of Great Britain was convinced that winning gold would be the defining moment of his life.

***TEN SECONDS TO PROVE HIS PURPOSE IN LIFE.***

***TEN SECONDS TO PROVE HIS WORTH.***

***TEN SECONDS TO JUSTIFY HIS WHOLE EXISTENCE.***

***HE WON.***

Watching Abrahams in the crowd was his "rival under the same flag", Eric Liddell. A brilliant sprinter, Liddell had been the natural choice to run the 100 metres, 200 metres and relays for Great Britain in the Olympics. However, he had chosen to withdraw from these events as they included Sunday heats and Liddell's convictions didn't allow him to run on a Sunday.

Liddell suggested entering the 400 metres instead. The 400 metres is now known as the "killer sprint" but in 1924 nobody sprinted the whole way. Eric changed all this.

Despite reaching the final, Liddell wasn't expected to win.

But, conserving no energy, Liddell ran the first 200 metres as hard as he could, stunning



the spectators. And then he ran the next 200 metres harder. Head back and arms out, he passed the tape four metres ahead of his nearest competitor.

**COMING IN AT AN INCREDIBLE 47.6 SECONDS, HE BROKE THE OLYMPIC RECORD SET JUST TWO HOURS EARLIER AND CHANGED THE 400 METRES DISCIPLINE FOR EVER.**

Liddell and Abrahams' story is made famous in the Academy Award-winning film *Chariots of Fire*. In the film, Liddell explains his motivation for running:

God "made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure".



## *Chariots of Fire*



Liddell loved to run but it didn't define him. He knew that, win or lose, ultimately his worth wasn't dependent on his performance on the track. He believed his sporting ability was a gift from God that brought him great joy, rather than something that defined his life.



In contrast, Abrahams is depicted as lost, lonely and insecure in *Chariots of Fire*, despite being a world-class athlete competing in his second Olympic Games.

At one point, Abrahams says:

*"Contentment. I am 24 and I've never known it. I'm forever in pursuit, and I don't even know what it is I'm chasing."*

It's not just top athletes who are in danger of seeking meaning in their skills and achievements. We are all prone to falling into the trap of thinking that our accomplishments in life will somehow prove our worth, but this inevitably ends in disappointment.



Looked back to  
the 1924 Olympic  
Games, the British  
4x100m relay team  
performance was  
the greatest of all  
time. It was the  
first time that  
something had



Contentment seems just out of reach, and success isn't enough to satisfy.

Instead of enjoying a relationship with the God who gave us our lives, talents and friendships, we look elsewhere in our search for worth and purpose. We end up trying to outdo others, longing to be recognised and admired for our achievements while ignoring the God who made us and loves us.

The Bible calls this sin, and not only does it leave us searching and unsatisfied, but worse, it destroys our relationship with God. When we reject him and place ourselves at the centre of our lives, the result is separation from God for eternity.

Liddell knew this and he found great joy in telling others about his Saviour Jesus Christ who can deal with our separation from God.

Jesus died on the cross to take on himself the punishment for sin. If we admit our wrongdoing and turn from our self-centred lives to Jesus, trusting him instead, then we can receive forgiveness and new life.

We don't have to sort out our own sin and achieve for ourselves this new start, because God loves us and sent Jesus to die for all the wrong we've done.

Having died on the cross to pay the price for our rejection of God, Jesus rose to life again.

***IF WE TRUST IN JESUS, WE WILL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE WITH HIM. WE NO LONGER HAVE TO STRIVE TO BE GOOD ENOUGH, SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH OR MORAL ENOUGH. WE CAN LAY THIS BURDEN DOWN.***

Liddell had contentment and peace because he knew God accepted him. God welcomes anyone who receives Jesus as their Saviour and puts him in first place in their life.



Turning away from our sin and turning to Jesus means we are freed from having to prove our worth, from searching for purpose and from justifying our existence. Instead, we can live our lives like Eric Liddell, enjoying the life, talents and relationships God has given us rather than seeking satisfaction through what we achieve.

As Eric Liddell put it:

*"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 best – one who is worthy of all our devotion – Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>*

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1. All quotes from *Chariots of Fire* (dir. Hugh Hudson, 1981) unless otherwise marked. Although based on the true story, the character's words were written for the film.
  2. Widely attributed to Eric Liddell, see John W. Keddie, *Running the Race: Eric Liddell Olympic Champion and Missionary* (Evangelical Press, 2007), 157.

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