

William Whiting Borden: The Millionaire Who Wanted to be a Missionary

Steve Burchett

I was hoping to be inspired during some downtime as I sat in the missionary guesthouse on a recent ministry trip in Africa. In the biography section of their library, I found a book by Warren Wiersbe entitled *Victorious Christians You Should Know*. One of the chapters was about William Whiting Borden. Before I put the book back on the shelf, I recorded some information about Borden in my journal. His story, and Wiersbe's comments, bolstered me, and my desire is that they will have the same affect on you.



William Whiting Borden was born on November 1, 1887. His father was a millionaire. When he graduated high school, his parents gifted him with a trip around the world. This experience was instrumental in motivating Borden to become a missionary.

While in college (Yale), his godliness impacted his fellow students significantly. He not only started Bible study and prayer groups that eventually involved the majority of the students, but was also known for ministering to the most oppressed in town—including the disabled.

Keeping track of key dates in Borden's life is important in order to understand his story. After graduating from college in 1909, he attended Princeton Seminary. After finishing seminary, Moody Church (Chicago) ordained him on September 9, 1912, to be a missionary. The public couldn't understand his decision because his dad had died in 1906, leaving him more money than he could ever need. They wondered why a millionaire would ever want to become a missionary. A friend of his even told him that he would be "throwing his life away as a missionary." Borden replied, "You have never seen heathenism."

In December of 1912, he went to Egypt to study Islam and Arabic. Sometime close to Easter in 1913, he was stricken with cerebral meningitis. He died on April 9, 1913, less than five months after arriving in Egypt. He was only 25 years old.

Here are Warren Wiersbe's poignant reflections:

Why should such a gifted life be cut short? Perhaps the best answer was given by Sherwood Day, one of Borden's missionary friends. "I have absolutely no feeling of a life cut short. . . . A life abandoned to Christ cannot be cut short." . . . It is not the length of a person's life that matters, but the strength of one's influence for God. A Judas would read Borden's life and sneer, "Why this waste!" but our Lord would evaluate it differently. . . . Borden's desire was to magnify Christ "whether it be by life, or by death," and God gave him his desire.¹

Whether you live 25 years or 100 years is God's business. But what are you doing with the years the Lord *is* giving you? Please read and reflect carefully on these words of Jesus:

And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:34-38)

Here's the simple prayer I wrote in my journal on the day in Africa when I read about William Whiting Borden. You might make it your own, even now:

Lord, give me grace to live a life abandoned to Christ—that He may be exalted in my life whether by my living for Him or by my dying for Him. Amen.

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¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Victorious Christians You Should Know* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 32.