

# Missionary Norris Groves Biographical Sketch

by James Malachi Jennings

---

*This sermon presents a biographical sketch of Anthony Norris Groves, highlighting his faith, challenges, and impact on missions.*

**Duration:** 55:06

**Scripture:** Psalm 91:10, Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, Philippians 4:13, James 1:12

**Topics:** "Missionary Work", "Persevering Faith"

---

## Description

This sermon is a biographical sketch of Anthony Norris Groves, a missionary who faced immense trials and suffering in Baghdad, including the plague, floods, and personal losses. Despite the hardships, Groves displayed unwavering faith and trust in God, leading to conversions and impactful work. His story highlights the challenges and sacrifices of missions, the need for emotional strength, and the importance of persevering in the face of adversity.

---

## Transcript

This morning, I'm going to do a biographical sketch on a dear friend of mine I walked with for the last month named Anthony Norris Grove. He's such a dear friend. Even watching him die weeks ago as I was reading this, I just wanted to share some about him as a missionary with you all.

And there's a verse I read in my daily reading days ago that I wanted to start with. You don't have to turn there, but in 2 Chronicles 21, Jehoram was a wicked man. And it says the Lord gave him an incurable disease.

In the course of time, at the end of two years, his bowels came out, and because of the disease, he died in great agony. Now listen to what it says about this man. And he departed with no one's regret.

He departed with no one's regret. No one had sorrow that he was gone. People, they didn't want him to live any longer.

They were thankful this man was gone and dead. Now that was Jehoram. But Norris Groves, Hudson Taylor, other missionaries we can look on in the past, some of them David Brainerd, their lives cut so short.

You look at them and you regret they're gone. You regret that they died. Norris Groves, he died a little older than 40.

He died at 58 of pancreatic cancer, cancer to the stomach. But unlike Jehoram, he was a man who was a follower of Jesus Christ. And what is my justification this morning to talk about him and to do a biographical sketch? And my justification is a sermon I preached months ago from Philippians 3, 17-21, where Paul there says to look among yourselves to those who follow the example you have in us.

And he's calling us to imitate that example. And Paul called those at Philippi to do that. And so I'm wanting to bring out this morning some things from his life to imitate as well as some things to not imitate that we could learn from him as he walked with Jesus Christ.

So that's one reason. Another reason I'm sharing on Norris Groves is because he specifically was a missionary. He's not like Spurgeon, a preacher.

He was a missionary. And I hope something in his life will stir you guys up as it stirred me up to think more of missions. So in some way, I'm kind of giving a missions report this morning.

One that was given 200 years ago in the 1800s. And another thing I'm wanting to share at the start here is what obstacles he had to overcome in order to get to the missions field. Because that's where a lot of us are right now.

We're not on the missions field. And maybe some of you have questions about the missions field and burdens. And you're wondering, is the Lord in this? So I find it interesting to see how he got to the point of actually going to the field to begin with.

And so where we're going to start is at his conversion. And then we're going to start looking at some of the obstacles that he had to get overcome in order to go to the missions field. And I've probably got too much to share here.

And this in itself is a sketch. But maybe this sketch will encourage you to look at the full painting that Robert Bernard Dan did in this biography called Father of Faith Missions, The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves. A lot of what I'm sharing today comes specifically from the insights that this man had on his life.

And so I recommend this biography. It was very stirring and sad in different ways. So I've never done this before, a biographical sketch.

So bear with me. So Anthony Norris Groves. Norris is his name.

What he went by. He was born in 1795. At the age of 13, he was still spiritually lost.

And he heard a sermon. And after hearing the sermon at 13, he thought, what a noble thing it would be. What a worthy object to die for if I could just go to India and win one idolater to Christ.

That's what he thought at 13. But little then did he realize, he says, that I was ten times worse than the Indian. And I was as great of a sinner.

And I didn't have the excuses that the Indian had. So he realized he was a hypocrite. As a lost youth, the idea of overseas missions service came back to him again and again and again.

Even when he's lost, he's thinking about missions. It's coming to his mind. However, his thoughts as far as how to save himself, they were still directed towards his own works.

He was not a true Christian. He was trying to save himself by his works. As he grew up, he became very attached to a Mary Thompson.

And he desired to marry her. But her father refused because they were first cousins and their friendship ended. Norris then became a dentist.

He studied dental and became a dentist. At some point, Norris met two sisters. And their unashamed devotion to Jesus made Norris feel very awkward.

Very awkward. The Scriptures one of them showed him finally brought the young dentist into assurance of salvation. Abandoning all hope of making himself worthy of God's love, he put his trust completely in Christ as Savior.

And right when the Lord saved him, immediately his missionary longings revived. They were no longer as a means of finding favor with God, but now as a natural desire to share with others the assurance he had obtained in Jesus Christ. So you see, desires and missions.

When he's lost, then he gets converted. Desires of missions, they come. They're there again.

Norris still desired to marry now as a Christian. And her sister got sick and died. And the father now not wanting to prevent his other daughter from not having happiness and her too dying, he allowed them to get married.

And Norris, he wrongly was hasty to say yes. Now as a Christian, he didn't know whether Mary was converted. But he said yes without waiting on the Lord, and they got married.

Shortly after being married, Norris had dawned on him she wasn't even a Christian. So now here he's desiring to go to the missions field and he gets married to someone who ends up not even being a true believer. How was marriage for Groves? He said, "...often did I, with every earthly thing that man could desire, I felt most miserable.

I had a wife who loved me, dear little children. I had a most lucrative profession as a dentist. Yet I had not the Lord's presence as in days of past.

Therefore, I was miserable." Now look at the first obstacle that had to be removed for him to go to the missions field, and it was that he had a lost spouse. A lost spouse. I've heard other brothers come to me, burdened for missions, and that's the exact obstacle in their own life.

At least one of them. A lost spouse. His lost wife had a settled bent to root out the desire to go out as a missionary.

Everything she did, she hated that desire. She wanted to root it out of him. After six years of resistance, her mind was all the more settled into resistance.

So six years goes by, she's just resisting. Does not want the idea of missions at all. Then in 1825, Norris wrote a booklet called Christian Devotedness.

The consideration of our Savior's precept to lay up not for yourselves treasures upon earth, but to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. And his whole life started to change. He started to see how Christ encouraged us to not lay up treasures on earth, and he started leading his wife and family in such a way.

They started to give more and more away. We're going to consider that track and book a little later that he wrote. Around this time, Norris' wife met a woman who had faith and love she had not seen before.

And a bitter struggle began in her heart. A longing for real faith. But Mary Groves, Norris' wife, had a fear that such faith would lead once again to the question of missionary work overseas.

So his lost wife, one thing keeping her from Christ is she does not like this idea of missions at all. She struggled with convictions, but eventually she saw the love of Jesus Christ. She saw His love from eternity past, and she could not believe it.

And the Lord saved Mary Groves. And with conversion, her desires changed, and in these next years, they constantly were discussing missions together. So now the first obstacle's gone.

His lost wife is no longer lost. She's saved. And now she's actually thinking about missions.

Then a door opened and came for missions work in America. Norris thought to himself, well, this is a lot easier than going to Persia. It'd be more easy for her in the culture over there.

So they met with a man who was offering them to go to missions work in Ohio in America. And they were meeting with this man, and Norris turned to his wife, and she said, well, dear, will you go? It was too soon. Her heart couldn't bear it.

She burst into a flood of tears. At this point, Norris had thought and prayed on missions for ten years. Ten years he's praying, asking the Lord, burdened, to go to the missions field.

Months went by, and then the Lord worked in Mary's heart. And all of a sudden, Mary one day, she came to Norris, and she said, write to that bishop. Tell him we'll go.

Tell him we'll go to the missions field. This is an interesting note. Norris appreciated this.

He would not consider taking his family overseas until Mary was happy to go. And this meant a delay of ten years. By then, she was as enthusiastic as he was himself, and her wholehearted support meant much to him.

Thirty-four years earlier, William Carey had went to India. I mean, his marital situation was entirely different. Groves here patiently waited.

The Lord saved his wife, worked in her, and made such a difference, he says. So Groves, he wrote to the bishop, we'll go to Ohio. And they never heard back.

Never heard back from the bishop. The Lord shut the door. And Groves thought about this.

He said, you know, there are many secular advantages to being in Ohio in America. It's a lot easier over there. He said many could be expected to go there.

But Groves said this, whereas few, very few, will feel themselves able to go to Persia. And you think about that today. I think about places I've been burdened for like France.

But then you think about Iraq and Lebanon, where our brother is serving at in Lebanon. What's easier to go to? In some ways, it's easier to go to a more secular, advanced state like France than to go over to Lebanon. Not that the Lord might not send someone to France, but it's a lot more difficult over there in

Lebanon.

A lot more difficult in Persia. So then Groves, he wrote to the Missionary Society. He submitted his application.

And they received him with great joy. He had tried to apply ten years earlier when he was first saved. And it was rare a dentist would want to go.

Now here the second obstacle is keeping him from the missions field. Second obstacle. Being burdened to go to the missions field doesn't just happen.

There's obstacles that the Lord has to remove. They had this question to ask themselves. Should they stay at home and support missionaries by the means of their professional income? You see, he's making a lot of money.

I mean, do we really want to send the dentist who's making all this money? Or should they go as missionaries themselves? On top of that, his wife stood to inherit 12,000 pounds. I mean, that is hundreds of thousands of dollars. She was going to inherit that money.

But they knew if they told her family they were going to the field, the Father would no longer give them the money. He would take it away upon his death. Someone told Norris this.

This is what removed the obstacle. He said, Norris, if you're called of the Lord to the work, money cannot be set against it. It is men whom the Lord sends, and He stands in need of men more than money.

That's exactly what Christ prayed. The harvest is plentiful. The money is little.

What did Christ say? The harvest is plentiful. The laborers are few. The issue is laborers.

It's not finances. It's laborers. And that removed the obstacle.

Norris realized this idea of staying because I'm a dentist, that's not a justifiable reason. Third obstacle Norris faced. Should he get a seminary degree or not? That's a very practical question nowadays.

At this point, after applying to the Church Missionary Society, he began three years of study. After those three years, he could go. But Groves at that time, he started to get really disillusioned to the church of England.

Even at one point, he ran into someone who was a pastor and they were saying obscene things. And Groves just thought, what on earth do I want to associate with this group when here these men have such a perversion in their life? At some point in all this, Groves left the church of England. And around that time in church history, there was a movement that was started that is sometimes called as the Brethren Movement.

And Groves and George Mueller and some others were some of the founding members of that movement at that time. Eventually, the Lord, He shut the door on getting a degree. Groves even thought about getting a degree because if he did, then if he got sick and got off the missions field, he'd have a way to get a job and make money.

But he donned on him, can I not trust God to provide? And so he went, nonetheless, trusting the Lord at that point. Groves gave this insight. He said this, if I had to prepare for a missionary course, I would not go to college or an institution, but I would learn medicine or go to a blacksmith's watchmaker's or carpenter's shop.

And there pursue my preparatory studies that I might be self-supporting. And I was reading, that's one of the same things I've heard in our day and age. There's different people who think about missions, and I've heard pastors say, go get a degree as a nurse.

Because if you're a nurse, here you can support yourself and then you can use that on the field. Yes, get studied in the Word in the local church, but how profitable it is to have a skill that you could be self-supporting if possible. So Groves, he came to realize that.

Now their plan was to go to Persia, to the Middle East. Not Ohio, not America, Persia. To the Middle East.

In later years, Groves, he said this, he said there's many people in England who are waiting to be baptized with power from on high before they go to the missions field. Groves said how long should the heathen wait while missionaries were seeking this power? So, fourth obstacle that Groves had to have removed, that the Lord had to remove before he could go to the missions field, and it was his in-laws. Again, that's another very practical thing.

Because often, that's one of the things that prevents us. We want to honor our family, but then here our family doesn't want us to go. Do we go? Do we honor our family? What do we do? Upon sharing their plans with Mary's family, the inevitable thing they perceived happened, happened.

He removed all the inheritance from them. And not only that, he then looked at Groves and from years prior, Groves' own father had borrowed a thousand pounds from Norris' father-in-law. And now his father-in-law brought that up and he said, you need to pay that back now.

Nothing said he was going to pay it back, but now the father-in-law brought it up and threw it in his face. What was Norris going to do? Norris wrote back and he said this, I will never leave England until I have personally paid every single penny back to you. So Norris wasn't in a rush.

He knew if God's in this, God will provide. So quickly, they scraped together a hundred pounds. They sent it to her dad.

Hundred out of a thousand taken care of. Maybe this is going to take another year. Who knows? Well, weeks later, they got news that her dad had died.

Just suddenly died. And they wrote, and Mary, his wife, went to join the family. Norris didn't know if he was going to be welcomed, but then they wrote and said, no, come.

Norris, come. On Mary's arrival, word was sent asking him to come. When he arrived, he learned that her dad had drawn up a new will two to three days before his death.

Mary now was to receive her share of the inheritance after all. About 10,000 pounds. Even the 100 pounds they had sent was returned to them.

So now in a matter of moments, all financial constraint to go to Persia had been removed. And here he sought to honor the father. And yet, God honored him at that moment.

What a lesson there. You see, Norris had written a track years earlier as a new Christian called Christian Devotedness. And he wrote it, he was so gripped with this reality to lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.

And he didn't just write the track, he lived it out. Fifth obstacle before they could go. The Lord saw they needed more separation from the world.

You know, there's different things that pull on our hearts. At this time, Norris and Mary had three kids. Two sons were about 10, and one daughter, Mary.

Mary, the daughter, her health kept declining and plans of missions must be shelved now until she was well enough to travel. But shortly after, their little five-year-old daughter Mary, she died. And Groves and his wife, they said this, it said this of them, the loss of their only daughter was use of God as a means by which they became yet more separate from the earth.

And while it made their path clear, it strengthened them to devote themselves to God. The fragile loves and fleeting hopes of a fallen world seemed bathed in light of eternity. Just think of that for yourself.

Even when you read biographies, you put yourself in their shoes. What if my daughter died? You think things like that separate you more from the world. And that's what it did for them.

So, I want to stop for a moment. Before we look at what happened on the missions field, I want to think for a moment about this track he wrote. Because this track at the end of his life, this track is a new convert, some looked back and said it was the most fruitful thing he ever did.

In his first year of conversion, he wrote a little booklet, Christian Devotedness. What was it on in short? It was about living completely by faith in dependence on God's provision. And you say, what's so unique about that? We hear about that all the time.

What's so unique about it was in his day and age, that was not something that was common. You see, Norris Groves was before George Mueller, before Hudson Taylor. We hear of them.

And they had such an impact on our lives as we read their journals about living by faith. But they were influenced by this man, Norris Groves. In this booklet, he said, the best security for all spiritual blessings and temporal mercies lies in doing the will and trusting unreservedly in the promises of God.

That God who has said, can a mother forget her nursing child that she should not have compassion on the fruit of her womb? Yet she may forget, but the Lord will not forget you. He's saying you've got to be able to unreservedly trust in that God who says that in His Word. And Norris, having declared his convictions in that book, he acted on them.

Some during the day, they said never has a man more completely practiced what he preached. And this little tract he wrote, it actually went all around the globe. This was no Internet back then.

This tract went all the way around the globe. Robert Morrison at the time, one of the lead pioneer missionaries in China, it even landed in his hands. And Morrison said in 1827 in China, he said a tract titled Christian Devotedness has appeared a little in my way with views as some deem fanatical of devoting all to God and not laying up treasures in the earth.

Some opposed it fiercely, but Morrison defended Groves and he said this, it is apostolic fanaticism. Oh, I abominate the mode of reasoning that people say that, oh yes, this is all very well in theory, but it won't do in practice. But he said Christ's precepts are not high spun in practical dogmas that we don't live out.

Oh no, let it not be said. I think the words in Groves' tract are words of truth and soberness. Where can we look for help but to God alone? So this little tract is a new Christian.

It was having an impact. And one of the men it had a massive impact on was George Mueller, who we all know that name. Most of us know that name.

He had orphanages. Very well known. His biographies.

Mueller, it says, had heard about a prosperous dentist, a man who had given up nearly 1,500 pounds a year in order to go as a missionary to Persia. This made such an impression on Mueller, he declared, and delighted me so that I not only marked it down in my journal, but I also wrote to my German friends about it. When it came into Mueller's hands, he read it and it moved him deeply.

In fact, it changed the course of his life. Listen to what Mueller said. He experienced something he said when he read it like a second conversion.

He later described it as an entire and full surrender of heart. He gave himself fully to the Lord. One little tract that Groves wrote had that much of an impact on George Mueller.

Soon after, George Mueller even married Norris Groves' sister. So Norris Groves was the brother-in-law of George Mueller. In the years following, we know it well.

George Mueller started orphanages that he is well known for, and he trusted God for the needs to be met. And that very idea that was biblical, Groves is the one who wrote about it and impacted Mueller in his path of faith to trust God. I had no idea about that.

That was encouraging. Hear the Lord use this little tract in such a way in Mueller's life. Hudson Taylor.

He was baptized just a few months, years later, before Norris Groves died. And he was profoundly impacted by Mueller. And if you look at the chain of effect here, Groves, God got His hand on him.

Live by faith, trust Me. That impacted Mueller. That impacted Hudson Taylor.

And it just continued down the line. Even as I was thinking about Groves, there was a man that Charles Leiter and Bob Jennings knew, Bock Seen. Well, Bock Seen, if you look down all the line to people he knew, it goes all the way back to Norris Groves and his impact that he had in the missions field.

To live by faith and trust God for all this provision. So now Groves, after many years of reflection about the work of a missionary, after ten years, he could say, I'm finally on my way. Finally on his way.

He got there. To go. We'll see what happens.

Their plan was to set out to Persia. If you look at Persia, it's kind of like Iran, but Iran was spread out all over. It was a lot bigger and it was known as Persia.

They were heading there, and in the end, they headed to Baghdad. We know about Baghdad. Baghdad, Iraq.

That's where he was headed. That's where he's going to end up. Groves set out in 1824.

He was 34 years old with his wife. So if you're 34, you think you're too old for missions. You know what? It's not the case.

Groves is 34. With his wife, Mary, two sons, Frank, and others on a team. They headed out.

Some historians say this was considered the first evangelical mission to Muslims in the Arab world. There had been others years earlier in Lebanon, but they specifically didn't reach out to the Muslims. They just reached out to the Jews.

But they were going to Baghdad specifically to reach out to the Muslims. In regards to the entire team that would end up there, Dan, the biographer, he says this, the imagination of an entire generation in 1829 was stirred by the prospect of a successful dentist. That was Groves.

Another one of the men, a qualified medical doctor. Another one of the men, a member of government and of nobility. That man had been converted under Groves and was even street preaching weeks after he was converted.

He was a government person of nobility. Later known as Lord Cogleton. I don't know how to pronounce that.

And a first class Oxford graduate. So these guys are pretty high class. And the generation then was inspired.

They abandoned all wealth, comfort, and career in order to live by faith and proclaim the Gospel to Persians and Arabs. So you can think as Mueller's hearing about this, his later-to-be brother-in-law, and he's seeing these people go in faith, had an impact. Look, even in a small way, our brother over there in Lebanon right now, that's had an impact on me.

His willingness to go there with his five or six children all under the ages of eight or however old they are now, that's made an impact. The sacrifice that they've made to go into the Middle East. Their journey, it took six months to get there.

They traveled 5,000 miles. On unmade roads. On the way, they ran into Muslims.

And Groves said, this awakened a thought in our hearts that should we labor among them, our lives must be little valued in our sight. For the Muslim man they ran into during their conversation, he laid his hand on his dagger. And reiterating a curse, he said, stop, say not another word, for I must become an infidel if I listen to what you say.

Not an infidel if I become a Christian. If I just listen to what you say. And there he's laying his dagger.

Here you're going down to Baghdad and you're running into Muslims like that. Maybe we should turn back. They eventually got to Baghdad after these six months.

They got there and they found out the exact area they went through on the way there, a German archaeologist had been murdered. And Groves said this, this unfortunate traveler was running these risks and exposing himself to these dangers for reputation, which perhaps will now remain only in the memory of a few who knew him. Oh, if they do this for a name, if they labor thus to collect that which is of little or no

use when it is collected, what ought not we venture in serving our Lord? He got to Baghdad.

Baghdad at the time, 80,000 people lived there. That was a lot back then in some ways, 80,000. 70,000 of them were Muslims.

There were some Jews. And there were kind of these lost Orthodox Christians and 700 Armenians. Their initial mission, they determined to talk directly with Muslims about Christ and to awaken the apostate eastern churches from their slumber.

They devoted every Friday evening to prayer and fasting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They studied and were learning the Arabic language. Groves firmly believed you've got to learn the language if you're going to be effective.

They started medical outreach. That gave an opportunity for Muslims to come to them and not be viewed as an infidel because they were coming for medical outreach and they were able to give them truth. Groves said this of his wife.

And I read this and I thought I could say this of my wife. This is an encouraging thing for married couples to be able to say. He said this, My sorrows, my hopes, my fears, she shared and bore them all.

My dearest, dearest wife, Groves calls her, the joy, the help, the companion of all in which I was engaged. They discussed every aspect of the work and committed it to the Lord. On any essential point for some years, we have never had divided judgment.

In every work of faith or labor of love, her desire was to animate, not to hinder me. She has been to me in the relation of a Christian wife and missionary wife, just what I felt I so much, so very much needed. So that was his wife.

God saved her and she was very helpful. In the first year, they had a newborn girl. So the first year of Baghdad commenced.

Evangelism, a school, medical outreach, and during this time, the Lord provided every single one of their financial needs. Miraculously. Now here my missionary report is.

So this is the point. They get to Baghdad. You know, missions is not, and I'm saying this, I'm not a missionary, but obviously, you hear it from others.

You read it from biographies. It's not a romantic vacation into another land. It might be in some places.

Maybe Ohio back then, if they would have went to America, it would have been pretty nice. In Baghdad, after that first year, they had war, the plague, famine, and a whole lot more come upon them. At this point, around 2,000, 3,000 Arabs with weapons, they surrounded Baghdad.

They wanted to kill the head of the city and take over the city. That's one thing that's coming upon them. Then they heard of this, the plague.

The plague, these rats were carrying fleas. These fleas had bacteria. The cities around them were being wiped out.

People were dying from the plague. Even one Muslim from the mosque, he said this in regards to the plague. He said the horror he felt at the thought of the plague.

He said, the sword, I don't mind. But the plague, I do mind, for it is the work of God. Groves told the man, God who directs the plague is my Father whom I loved.

And I knew He would not allow it to come nigh to me unless He had no longer anything for me to do. And then it would come as a summons from a scene of labor and many trials to one of endless joy. The Muslim said, yes, it's very well for you to not fear death, who believe in Christ is having atoned for you, but I fear to die.

During this time, Groves and his team, they had two opportunities to leave Baghdad. They didn't leave. They didn't want to leave the work.

They didn't feel like God wanted them to leave. And looking back, the two groups that left to avoid the plague, they both got killed off anyways by floods and other things and the plague. Groves said this of those in Baghdad.

He said the poor inhabitants, they don't know what to do. If they remain in the city, they die of the plague. If they leave it, they fall into the hands of the Arabs who strip them of everything.

As the plague started, you had 1,500 people dying every day in Baghdad from the plague. This is out of a population of 80,000. Eventually, more were dead than alive.

And the people weren't even able to bury the dead quickly enough and they just threw them in the river. At one point, they saw a little girl of 12 years of age on the street. She was carrying an infant in her arms and being asked whose it was, she said she did not know, but had found it in the road having heard both its parents were dead.

So the parents died. There was just a baby in the road. No family alive.

At one point, every house in the city that they knew of had had two or three people die except their house. None had died in their home. He said this is the Lord's marvelous love.

Then one night flooding came. And one night 7,000 houses collapsed and 15,000 people died being crushed by the masonry of those houses. And yet that flood, the water, it stopped just up the bottom of their street where their house was at.

A week later, half the cities and houses had collapsed in the floodwaters. In the midst of this, Groves said this, he said, we did feel assured that the Lord would spare our dear little united happy family, but His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. Groves said, I've heard thus far of none family save our own where death is not entered.

And in Psalms 91, it says that the plague will not come into your tent. And they had read that passage and they thought God had given it to them as a promise that they will not have the plague come in. And for the whole time, that appeared to be what happened.

But then Groves' wife got sick. Groves said, doubtless God will reveal in His own good time the reason why He has acted so contrary, not only to mine, but especially my dear wife's strongest convictions, which were that He would preserve us all safe through this calamity. It's such a strong conviction of that.

He said this, how hard for the soul to see the object, his wife, of its longest and best grounded earthly affections suffering without the power of affording relief, knowing too that a heavenly Father who has sent this suffering can relieve it and yet seems to turn a deaf ear to one's cry. Here he's just been there a year. His wife is sick.

It seems the plague. He's wrestling here. We thought the Lord gave us His passage.

What's happening? And here the Lord could stop it. Night after night, Norris attended her, allowing no one else near in the hope that the rest of the family might avoid infection. He continued to sit besides her keeping the flies from her face through times of deep sleep.

Groves presumably at the time he thought the plague was transmitted by personal contact. They didn't know about the fleas and the rats back then. Him and his wife, they thought they were contagious.

They quarantined themselves from everyone else. Every day, Groves went over to read and pray with the children through the open door on the other side of the courtyard. They were quarantined away from father and mother.

The baby held out her hands and called to him. She could not understand why he refused to pick her up. Yet, the Lord, He took Mary Groves.

She died from the plague. They couldn't even bury her because of all the contamination and people came and took her body away. Groves said this to think, so near the end, we should have been thus visited.

How mysterious. And it seemed that every evil until the very end when the plague stopped, they had been preserved. And at the very end, God took his wife.

Shortly after his wife died, they finally, after all the time, they had yet to get letters. It took like 16 months for letters to get there. They finally got letters.

Rather than cheering Groves, they depressed him. Letters were full of joyous confidence in the Lord's protection and hopes for the work he and Mary would be doing together. Some clothes came in a small package for the baby, but would she live to wear them? There was no news from Aleppo where the reinforcements were coming to join them.

This was a big trial. As you read the biography, the confidence, the faith he had, as you read it, you just assume it's going to end up they're all going to survive. What happens as you're reading it, and then to see Mary die, it is somewhat shocking in some way.

But he learned from this. He said, to see God rebuff the faith of one who had trusted Him as Father, this is hard to comprehend. But he knew God's not failed.

God has not failed. They both firmly believed that a death angel would pass over them. Even that Psalms, it says that a thousand will fall at your side.

Ten thousand at your right hand. But it will not come near you. And that was happening.

The plague did not come near them. And a thousand and ten thousand were falling at their sides. The exact thing Psalms 91 said, it appeared was happening.

You can't blame them for taking massive encouragement in that psalm. It says no plague will come near your tent. But looking back, he realized he erred.

He in some way took the promise as a permanent immunity from all sickness and sorrow and death and their trial at Baghdad. And it wasn't that the Lord had given that to him. There's a lesson here to be learned.

When there is someone you care so much about, like a family member, you're more vulnerable to miss the Lord's guidance and lay hold of certain texts that God isn't giving you. And they're not to be taken in a certain way. It's a vulnerable time to do that.

And then once God doesn't pull through, or He does pull through, not the way you expect, because you laid so much hope on something you thought was a word from God and it wasn't, now you can struggle with faith here. Lord, why? Groves said this, that time he realized, God hasn't given me a promise to be immune from suffering. And he said, how much I owe to the light imparted to me in that one truth that this is a time of suffering and sorrow and will remain such till the Lord comes.

It leads me to look on a thousand trials in my path and possibly, yet certainly to my future course, is no strange things, but is fiery trials appointed to try and purify me. And Groves said this, how easy it is to kiss our dear and loving Father's hand when He turns bright providences towards us. How easy then it is to praise, but I feel my dearest Teacher is teaching me the hardest lesson to kiss the hand that wounds, to bless the hand that pours out sorrow, and to submit with all my soul, though I see not a ray of light.

O Thou holy and blessed Spirit, come and help Thy poor wayward scholar. So Groves learned a lesson there. We're not immune from sorrow.

He realized I read too much into that passage. But let's go on with this missions report. The trials, things didn't get easier.

Groves then got very sick with a high fever. And just to clarify, my point in what I just shared there, God did not fail. God did not fail.

And Norris got to the point where he realized God has not failed. He just misunderstood and misinterpreted a passage. Groves then got very sick with a high fever.

He closed his journal on May 16th, never thinking he'd open it again. He thought he was going to die. He didn't die.

The Lord raised him up. Shortly after that, he's in a room in their house. He sees dust starting to come down from the ceiling.

They get the stuff out of there. The room entirely collapsed. Groves said at that point, he said, I'm comforted that my Heavenly Father is yet still protecting me.

At times, Groves had great peace. At other times, he said this, I remain in absolute darkness as to the meaning of my Lord and Father. During all of this, armies were outside.

People were being murdered in the street. One night, Groves was up on the deck of his house and a bullet grazed right by his head and hit the wall. He spent a lot of his time caring for their newborn baby, and then she died.

One night, thieves broke in their house demanding gunpowder and weapons. Groves, at times, he started to sink into periods of profound introspection. He was depressed at his inability to rejoice in the Lord.

And he says this, How easy it had been to appear an outstanding Christian when blessed with a loving wife, a comfortable home, a rewarding profession, and a stimulating circle of godly friends. And how hard to maintain any Christian spirit at all when stripped bare and exposed to a thousand weaknesses. And he's just saying, at that point, he realized, what am I really? The plague swept two-thirds of the city away.

Two-thirds died. Two-thirds of the houses collapsed. One day, he's returning from home.

A man leveled a gun at his head. Yet, even there, he said, I'm thankful that without a permission, not one of my hairs will fall from my head. Then, typhus fever took him.

For a month, he was prostrate. He lost all his appetite. He couldn't sleep.

He started to have strange and overwhelming depression. In his mind, he just kept weeping. He didn't even know why.

And you know what he was doing during this time? He was reading a biography. Here, I'm reading his biography, and he was reading one. He was reading the biography of Henry Martin, missionary to Persia who died at 31.

He was moved to seek a more abiding union with Christ. And he was moved, he said, to make the most of my talent that I not be numbered among the slothful servants of the Lord on that great day. Later, he came to read William Tyndale.

Tyndale got burned at the stake. All manner of things. And look what Groves said as he's reading Tyndale years later.

He said this, It made me ashamed of the little troubles which affected me. So I thought, okay, I'm reading Groves' and it makes me ashamed of the little troubles that afflicted me. And then he's reading Tyndale's and he's ashamed of the little troubles that afflict him.

It's incredibly humbling. I mean, I don't have a clue what suffering is. That's just the honest truth that I have to be honest with.

And like he said, it's easy to appear like an outstanding Christian when you're blessed with all these things. So in the midst of this, the reinforcements arrive. So here their missions report is reinforcements arrive.

And I'm going as slow as molasses compared to what I thought I could do here. So I've got a brief time left. Unless you guys let me.

It's nine o'clock on the clock. The reinforcement parties arrive. Now get this, there's reinforcements.

They just coasted there easily, right? John Parnell, the noble man, there they're waiting in Aleppo. His wife who's pregnant, she fell from her donkey and she died. Her and the baby died.

Cronin, the doctor who is coming, right before he left to come, his wife in England died. They had a newborn baby. But Cronin determined to come anyways with his newborn baby.

And his mother came, or his mother-in-law, or his mom came with them. He determined to go. On the way to Baghdad, Cronin who's coming to reinforce, he was knocked down by the mob and indeed he was left for dead.

His friends turned back and found him laying, blood, and barely conscious at the roadside. Groves got tempted. Get on a boat, go down to Tigris, and get out of here.

The other missionaries arrived. He said the presence of his friends was medicine to a wounded soul. Just like as some of you all visit Lebanon.

You know what? There's medicine there for those saints. So here you have three missionaries. Groves, his wife and daughter just died.

Parnell's wife and baby in the womb just died. And Cronin's wife just died. It's not that romantic.

It's not a movie. This is reality. This is suffering.

Henry, his son, said, I looked back after they got here at the periods of trials and of the plague and the flood and the famine as the most memorable of my entire life. That's what the 15-year-old son said. It was a time when godly men drawn together by sympathy and love and by sorrow shared and experienced much close and holy and earnest walking before God and direct dealing with God.

His sons at that point, they had not even been able to leave the house for five months. Groves said this, truly whatever makes Jesus precious and eternity a reality is most blessed, though it cuts up all earthly things by the roots. Can we say that? Whatever it takes, Lord.

That's a scary thing to say, but it's not scary in that the Lord controls these things. During this time, they carried on the work and they had their first convert. A young man had tried to leave Baghdad.

He saw his uncle die. They got surrounded by flood water. He came back to Baghdad.

Groves took him in. Groves later adopted people. Groves was incredibly loving, incredibly compassionate.

And this young man and Henry, his 15-year-old boy, were converted. So, Henry at 15 and this guy, Sirkeys, both got converted. Then, in 1833, at 15 years of age, Henry, his son, 15 years old, got an acute fever marked by inflammation and pain in the joints which severely affected his lungs and he was sinking fast.

Groves promised his son whatever the cost, he would carry him to the Mediterranean and if necessary, to England. Poor Henry longed to see England again and if to die, to die there. But his physical weakness, Henry wondered, was this sickness not just Satan's device to break up the mission and bring all of its plans to nothing? So Henry, his 15-year-old boy, just converted.

He determined to remain for life or for death so that the work could go on. They spent a day in prayer and fasting that God would heal them. And during that time of prayer, the Lord really heard them.

And the Lord, in some way, healed Henry and he kept increasing thereafter. Years later, Norris, reflecting on this time, he said this, My poor dear boys, in writing about the siege and their prospects in Baghdad, his 15-year-old and 13-year-old boys, they express themselves more like old soldiers than children. They have been so accustomed to trials and dangers.

And the biographer rightly says this type of homeschooling that Henry and Frank received was the most equipping thing for them in the rest of their life. And Henry became a missionary like his father and served in India for many, many years. So I'm out of time.

So this is my first try at this and I clearly had way too much material and didn't go through it as fast as I could. Norris grows. He suffered a lot.

He had faith. He trusted God. A lot of encouragement in this biography.

I guess one last point. It would be wrong to end it right here. He didn't stay in Baghdad.

After all the trials, all the suffering, you get to a point in the biography that is rather sad. A man Cotton had visited who had read Groves' track. And it so impacted him he went all the way to Baghdad to meet Groves.

And he was from India. And upon hearing of all the hardness of the Muslims there, he thought he encouraged Groves maybe he should go to India to see about work there. And so Groves did.

He took a trip to India. And the long story short, in the end, he ended up in India for 20 years serving there as a missionary before he went back to England and died with George Mueller at 58 years of age. But listen to this, Groves looked back on his life and he wanted to say, what were my failures? What were my failures? And he said this, he considered one of his greatest failures that after the miseries of Baghdad had so affected him so much, he wished to return there to resume the work.

But Groves was never able to summon up the emotional strength to do so. And this he felt to be his first failure. You know, it was amazing reading him say that near the end of his life, because as you read the biography, part of you kind of felt like, you guys broke so much ground in four years.

They had three converts in the four years. They got tons of literature out in the four years. Yet, they suffered tremendously.

And the biographer remarked how Groves' own son Henry in the end, it seemed Henry had a more toughness than his own father in certain areas. But it's amazing, Groves looked back and felt he needed to overcome the emotional pain. And you think of other missionaries.

John G. Peyton, his wife died early on and he stayed and saw fruit. Not that the Lord wasn't in Groves going to India. Groves himself looks back and was critical on himself for what he did.

But it's just an interesting thing. Emotional strength. What would I do in a situation like that? Do I have this strength and faith in the Lord that in the midst of these trials, He would give grace? So I better end it at that because we're out of time in the Sunday school.

But I'm sorry if I did not get to give a fuller picture on him because I obviously had way too much. And maybe I'll encourage one of you guys to get the biography. Let's pray.

Lord, what a thing as Christians, we're constantly wanting to rightly discern Your will. Rightly know where You want us to be. Every conversation.

Lord, we look at Anthony Norris Groves, George Buehler, Taylor, these missionaries from the past. Livingston. Lord, we look at them.

We see their labor. We see their sufferings. John G. Paton included.

And Lord, we ask for grace. Lord, as was prayed on Wednesday night, Lord, I just pray, Lord, You would grip us with an eternal reality. Lord, like Norris said, we're not archaeologists, Lord, wanting to just discover things about rocks.

Lord, we've been entrusted as ambassadors of You with the greatest message, the only message of hope. The Gospel of Your blessed Son. Lord, would You help us to take it forth to the neighborhood? Would You help us to take it forth to the world? To the ends of the earth? And Lord, You said that You'll be with us.

And so, Lord, I pray, we pray, Lord, would You raise up laborers from our own church to send into the harvest? Lord, You said the harvest is plentiful, and Lord, it is. We scratch our heads and look at the billions and the thousands that are dying daily. Lord, we look at places that are even unreached.

Lord, we want You to do something, but we want You to be in it. We want You to guide. And so, Lord, I pray, Lord, work in our church.

Work in us a greater desire for Your Son, a love for Him, Lord, that we would be faithful. Just ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

---

Video: [https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/2aDe3\\_WivJQ.mp4](https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/2aDe3_WivJQ.mp4)

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/james-malachi-jennings/missionary-norris-groves-biographical-sketch/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**