

**MOVIE: “Chariots of Fire”****Sub Topic Theme:**

What Does God Want  
From Me?

**Lesson Objective:**

To provide teens with an inspiring true story of one man who had an unusually clear sense of what God wanted for his life. The life of one of

Scotland’s greatest runners, Eric Liddell, as shown in the 1981 movie “Chariots of Fire,” provides an example of what God wants us to be like, as well as what God wants us to do.



Below are two links to the movie trailer. The first one from The Internet Movie Data Base (IMDb) has greater clarity but takes somewhat longer to download. The second is from youtube and has more-than-adequate quality. Both clips are the same in content and roughly equal in length (IMDb being slightly shorter). CHEESY ALERT: If you choose to show this preview at a Club setting, it might be worthwhile to remind your teens that this movie is 30 years old so the trailer might seem a little over-hyped. Though old and a little long (124 min), the movie is a classic; one that everyone needs to see at least once.

<http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi3434938649/>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuHUarXZu\\_s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuHUarXZu_s)

**Intro to the Movie:**

The movie opens with a funeral eulogy for Harold Abrahams who died in 1978. The rest of the movie is a flashback to the events surrounding the lives of Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams and the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris, France.

The movie showcases these young runners’ lives. Harold Abrahams, a devoted Jewish man, runs to prove to the world that his people are not a second-rate class. As a student at Cambridge in 1919, Abrahams has to overcome anti-Semitism from the college staff. But his mental toughness is proved genuine through a string of undefeated victories at national competitions. That streak is eventually ended when he faces off against Eric Liddell, who beats him soundly in the 100 meter dash. It is a defeat that Abrahams does not handle well. But through it, he meets a professional trainer, Sam Mussabini, who commits to work with Abrahams to improve his form and technique. It is a move that draws the criticism of Cambridge’s top leadership. However, the young runner

perceptively sees through their feigned concern as a cover for their anti-Semitic beliefs. With his expert coaching, Abrahams overcomes the setback and wins gold in the 100 meter race in Paris.

Eric Liddell, by contrast, is a deeply committed Christian who runs for God's glory. He is the son of Scottish missionaries to China where he was born on January 16, 1902. At an early age, he is sent to a missionary boarding school. It is there that his athletic prowess begins to emerge. He excelled in both cricket and rugby, but his greatest passion was running. His athletic pursuits are not well thought of by his sister Jennie, who feels his training is a distraction to his faith. When Eric misses a prayer meeting on account of his training, Jennie rebukes him for his lack of commitment. It is then that he assures her that he has every intention to return to China as a missionary and that his devotion to God has not wavered. He says, "I believe that God made me for a purpose. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

It is Eric's religious convictions that preclude him from running in his best event at the Olympic Games, which was scheduled for a Sunday. No amount of coaxing can change Eric's mind. So he decides to run in the 400 meter race instead. Although he is considered the underdog, Eric gets a last-minute boost of encouragement and inspiration. He ends up running his best time ever, which earns him not only a gold medal but also a new world record. It is a stunningly beautiful victory for a man whose national patriotism was doggedly questioned for not running on Sunday. And it stands as an inspiring testimony of God's uncanny ways of honoring those who honor him.

One interesting fact the movie does highlight is that, following the Games, Eric remained true to his promise by returning to China. He faithfully served both the privileged and poor over the next 20 years until his death on February 21, 1945 in a Japanese internment camp.

As you prepare your teens to watch the movie, challenge them to pay particular attention to the characters of Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams. Invite them to identify what motivates them in their pursuit of excellence. Also, challenge them to identify some of the hurdles each of them had to overcome. Finally, you will want to have them pay attention to how both these two runners understand their purpose in life and which seems to be the more meaningful. These questions are your 3D lenses through which you and your teens will gain a deeper appreciation for this British classic.

(You may want to turn on the subtitle feature because some of the audio is hard to hear.)

### Discussion Group Questions:

- As you watched the movie, what qualities did you observe in Eric and Harold that stood out to you? Whose character impressed you more and why? How are the two characters alike? How are they different?

- What was Harold Abrahams' purpose in life? What was Eric Liddell's? As best as you can tell, what do you think was the primary motivator for each of these Olympic athletes? Who seemed to find greater enjoyment in running and why?
- What were some of the hurdles each had to overcome to achieve his goals?
- Looking specifically at Eric Liddell's character; did he see his running as being distinct, or separate, from his Christian faith? Why or why not? Which do you think was more important to him? How do you know?
- Finally, how was Eric able to glorify God through an activity that on the surface has no spiritual overtones?

### Group input:

Solicit responses from the large group on reactions to some of the questions.

Gather ideas and themes recognized in the discussion groups and focus on guiding the audience toward the main objective: *Eric Liddell is a living example of 1) who God wants us to become and 2) what God wants us to do.*

### Bullet Objective:

*Put this summary section in your own words, but here is an idea you can use:*

One of life's most significant questions concerns the issue of purpose: Why am I here? What is the point of my existence? If there is a God, then what does he want from me? Some answer that question from an atheistic or agnostic understanding of the universe. They disbelieve in God's existence. They would argue that macro-evolution provides a suitable answer to life's origins and that when we die, we simply pass into oblivion.

But here at Club Beyond, we believe differently. One reason is purpose. If evolution is true, then it fails to provide a substantial reason for our existence beyond a cruel bout for the survival of the fittest. In fact, the late British philosopher and atheist, Bertrand Russell, once observed: "Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless." The weak are regarded as inferior and are thoughtlessly swallowed up by the strong. This leaves us with a gnawing, unresolved search for a meaningful purpose.

When I watch a movie like "Chariots of Fire" or hear about men and women like Eric Liddell, it strikes a chord with my soul. His story is inspirational. It's moving because deep down inside each of us we yearn to do something heroic, something daring and bold with our lives, and this is not merely for the sake of self. There is nothing moving about selfishness; however, when someone sacrifices self for the good of others and the glory

of God, we inwardly pump our fists with resolute affirmation: “YES, that’s right! That’s the way it should be!” And that’s my response to Eric Liddell.

Friends, there are two things we can learn from Eric’s life. First, he understood God’s first purpose for his life – that God desired a personal, abiding relationship with him. God sought him even from a young age, and Eric responded to God by committing to live his life for God’s purposes. Eric rightly recognized that God loved him like crazy, and in return, he loved God with all that was in him – his whole heart, soul and mind.

But Eric also understood God’s second purpose for his life – that he was to glorify God in all that he put his hand to. God designed Eric to be fast. For him not to run would have been to ignore who God made him to be. When he ran, he felt God’s pleasure. Notice that Eric’s passion to run and desire to serve God were not separate agendas; they were one in the same. He actually served God through his athletic talents. In fact, his whole life was a living sacrifice to God.

So what does God want from us? What is his purpose for our lives? In the broadest sense, God desires all of us to repent of our sins and return the same affection for him that he has shown us. Second, he desires that we make him look great in all that we put our hands to. How do we make him look great? By how we love those around us.

Believe it or not, Jesus summarizes God’s purpose for our lives in Matthew 22:37-39. Jesus is being grilled by the Pharisees and Sadducees, which are two religious groups who hated Jesus’ guts. They were actually trying to trap him with carefully crafted and deceptive questions. But Jesus sees through their charade. Their final question to him in this tense scene is, “<sup>36</sup> Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”<sup>36</sup> You see, it was commonly believed in Jesus’ day that if a Jew were able to perfectly obey even one of the commandments, then that would earn him God’s salvation. So the question as to which one of the 600-plus different commandments was the most important was intensely debated. Their thinking was, “Surely, a mere carpenter is not nearly as learned or bright as us trained scholars and theologians. He’ll tie his own noose with this question!” Listen to Jesus reply! Without missing a beat, he answers: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and the most important commandment.<sup>39</sup> The second most important commandment is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’<sup>40</sup> The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Jesus perfectly summarized the whole of Old Testament Law! Amazing! And in doing so, he also carved out for us God’s two primary purposes for our lives. Our love for God is shown by the quality of our love for others. Eric Liddell’s life serves for us as a shining example of what that ought to look like.

**Challenge:**

I challenge you to take some time this evening to reflect on these questions:

- Have you fulfilled God's first purpose for your life? If not, is that something you would like for yourself?
- If you have already committed to live your life for God, then are you making him look great? In other words, by your actions and words, are you making God look attractive? Or are there things you regularly do that make God look ugly.

If you still have questions regarding what God wants for you, then please come to talk one of us. We would love to continue the conversation!

*Lord, thank you for men and women like Eric Liddell who devote themselves wholeheartedly to your purposes. This evening, I pray that you would grant each of us the desire to pursue your purposes for our lives. And, by your grace and mercy, reorient all that we do in this life to reflect your glory. Help us to represent you well. Amen.*

Bibliography

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.