

CHRISTIAN HEROES: THEN & NOW

# CAMERON TOWNSEND



Good News  
in Every Language

**JANET & GEOFF BENGE**

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YWAM Publishing is the publishing ministry of Youth With A Mission (YWAM), an international missionary organization of Christians from many denominations dedicated to presenting Jesus Christ to this generation. To this end, YWAM has focused its efforts in three main areas: (1) training and equipping believers for their part in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), (2) personal evangelism, and (3) mercy ministry (medical and relief work).

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## The Oval Office

Cameron Townsend sat on the couch and looked around. He found it hard to believe he was seated in the Oval Office of the White House. Across the room, behind a beautifully handcrafted desk sat President Richard Nixon, his craggy gaze fixed on Cameron.

It wasn't the first time Cameron Townsend had been in the presence of a president. On the contrary, he had met with numerous presidents and leaders around the world. A former president of Mexico had even become his close friend. But somehow, being in the presence of the president of the United States was different. Many Americans dreamed all their lives of meeting the president, and now Cameron Townsend sat less than ten feet from him.

After he had been introduced to President Nixon, Cameron explained that workers with Wycliffe Bible Translators, the organization he'd started, had just begun translating the Bible into its five hundredth language.

President Nixon looked very impressed. He leaned across his desk and looked Cameron in the eye. "What an achievement!" he exclaimed. "You are doing two wonderful things: giving people the Bible in their own language and teaching them to read it. What can I do to help you?"

Cameron took a deep breath. The president wanted to help him! It was more than he could have hoped for. He chose his words carefully. "Mr. President," he began, "we still have a lot of work to do. Even today there are over two thousand language groups that do not have an alphabet, much less a Bible translation. We need eighty-five hundred new recruits to get the job done. Would you be kind enough to write a letter that we can use to challenge young people all over this nation to volunteer their services?"

President Nixon's eyes lit up, and the corners of his mouth curled in a smile. "I would be honored to," he replied.

Cameron shook President Nixon's hand, and then their meeting was over. Cameron took one last look around at the plush surroundings of the Oval Office before being led from the room. After some of the places he had lived over the years, from a cornstalk hut to a tent, it was hard for him

to imagine what it would be like to live in a mansion like the White House. Yet Cameron Townsend would not have traded one night living in a hut or a tent for a night in the White House. His living conditions may have been less than basic at times, but he had always been pursuing his lifelong dream. Besides, position, power, and prestige were not important to him. What was important was that people who had never had the chance to read the Bible in their own language got that opportunity. And that was the reason he had come to the White House to meet the president.

It was a snowy, blustery day outside when Cameron walked away from the White House. As he walked, he looked towards the Capitol and thought back to growing up in Southern California. His fellow students in high school had been convinced he would end up a senator within ten years. But what a different turn his life had taken. Yet as a missionary and a linguist, he had probably met more world leaders than he ever would have met as a senator. He wondered whether any of his boyhood friends back in Downey could have foreseen the twists and turns his life would take. Cameron Townsend certainly hadn't. Yet he wouldn't have changed the course of his life for anything.



## A Trip to Fresno

The crowing of a rooster woke fourteen-year-old Cameron Townsend early one morning in July 1910. As the early light of dawn filtered into the tiny room he shared with his brother Paul, Cam, as everyone called him, tried to remember why today was so special. Suddenly it came to him. Today he was going to Fresno with his mother and Paul. His four older sisters, Oney, Ethel, Lula, and Mary, wouldn't be going. They all had more important things to do than visit relatives in Fresno. They had jobs and boyfriends and other responsibilities they could not leave. And Cam's father, Will Townsend, would also be staying behind on the small farm the family rented. He had to tend to the tomato crop that would be ripe for picking in less than a month. After the

harvest, he would make several trips into Los Angeles to sell his tomatoes at the farmers' market.

Until now, riding along on the wagon to Los Angeles with his father was the most exciting thing Cam could imagine. After all, Los Angeles was ten miles away. Today, though, things were going to change. He was about to ride a train two hundred twenty miles north to Fresno. Not only had he never ridden on a train before, but the farthest he'd been away from the farm was Long Beach, fourteen miles south of Downey. Each year the family went there on an outing to watch the ships pass by and wade in the cold water of the Pacific Ocean.

After rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Cam dropped his feet with a thud onto the polished wood floor. He was anxious to get his chores done and be on his way. He pulled back the threadbare floral curtain that separated the "bedroom" from the living room and scurried through the kitchen, where his father was sitting in the old rocking chair to the left of the stove, exactly the same place he sat every morning. His father was reading his Bible, just as he always did—three chapters on a weekday morning, five on Sunday. Cam waved to him as he grabbed a bucket and headed to the water pump for a morning wash. The wash taken care of, he quickly pulled on his coveralls and went to help his father milk the cows.

"Morning, boy," said Mr. Townsend in a very loud voice.

Cam turned his head so that his father could read his lips. "Good morning, Dad," he replied delib-

# Inspiring true stories of men and women who answered God's call

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*Christian Heroes: Then & Now* chronicles the exciting, challenging, and deeply touching true stories of ordinary men and women whose trust in God accomplished extraordinary exploits for His kingdom and glory.



## Cameron Townsend

(1896-1982)

*The Cakchiquel man became indignant when Cam offered him a tract in Spanish. "Do you have one in Cakchiquel?" he asked. "There are none, I'm sorry," replied Cam. "Well," retorted the man, "if your God is so great, why can't he speak my language?"*

In one decisive moment, Cameron Townsend understood that God had called him to translate the Bible into the language of his Guatemalan friends. For Cam, the obstacles were small in comparison to the growing reward of helping the diverse people of Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru read God's life-changing Word for themselves.

Quick on his feet and slow to give up, Cam started Wycliffe Bible Translators with the dream of making the Good News available in every language. Since 1942, Wycliffe has translated the entire Bible into hundreds of languages, spreading God's word to people all over the world.

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