# Working for Jesus, being like Jesus: John Flynn

## Lesson overview

The Reverend John Flynn (1880–1951) was a Presbyterian minister who started the world’s first air ambulance service in 1928, which would later become known as the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Flynn’s portrait is on the Australian twenty-dollar note.

Dr Paul Roe (the interviewee in the video) is a historian and storyteller who specialises in uncovering and sharing the stories of men and women of faith who have helped shape modern Australia.

### Learning intentions

Students will learn about:

* How John Flynn set up the air ambulance service and other services to help people in remote areas in Australia
* What motivated Flynn to undertake these projects and how they were received
* The role of Flynn’s Christian faith in what he achieved.

### Success criteria

Students will be able to:

* Identify links between Christian values, Bible content and the service of others
* Recognise what the Bible says about faith in action, especially in terms of serving others in need.

### Note to teacher

You may wish to explain the following terms and people mentioned in the video: magic lantern shows (early travelling ‘slideshows’); Morse code; the ‘dumb bush’ (dumb=voiceless); padre.

### Bible content

Matthew 5:16, John 13:34–35, Philippians 2:3–4, James 2:14-17.

### Link to Australian Curriculum

General capabilities: Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding.

## Lesson plan

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| Preparing the lesson  * View the video content and read the questions that accompany each segment. * Read through the material provided and select the activities and Bible content you wish to use with your students.   **Note:** there are quite a few activities and Scripture passages provided for this lesson. You may wish to give greater focus to some activities and/or some Bible verses than others. You can omit or modify content as appropriate for your class and the time you have available.   * Use the resources listed in ‘Further reading’ if you wish to explore the topic more fully for your own reference before teaching. |

### A. Discussion starter (4 mins)

Say to students: *Finish this sentence: ‘When there’s a crisis like a natural disaster, or when someone needs help, Australians have a reputation for …’* (Prompt students to recognise Australians’ distinctive tendency to help each other out. You could mention volunteer organisations like the SES and the Rural Fire Service, as well as general community behaviour during crises like floods and bushfires.)

### B. Bible framework (6 mins)

Give students some or all of the following Bible verses and read them aloud:

* Jesus said: “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)
* Jesus said: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34–35)
* Paul wrote: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” (Philippians 2:3–4)
* James wrote: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:14-17)

Ask: *What ideas do these verses contain about how followers of Christ should treat other people?* (Suggestions: Christians should be others-focused; seek to do good out of love for God and for others; show Christ to others by doing good; take action to help others as part of a genuine faith in Jesus.)

### C. Show video segment 1 (approx. 6 mins including questions)

While the video is playing/after it has finished, ask students to write answers to the following viewing and listening questions:

1. *When* and *why* did the Royal Flying Doctor Service begin?

2. How old was John Flynn when he got “a call from God”?

3. What talent did Flynn have which he used to help get support for people in the bush?

4. What is one important understanding that Flynn gained early in his career?

(**Teacher note:** For question 4, ensure that students have got the point that Flynn believed Christian teaching was important but should not happen in isolation from giving practical help.)

### D. What did Jesus do? (5 mins)

Paul Roe says that “Jesus did things for people and the message sort of flowed out of what he was doing”. Jesus was deeply compassionate, caring for people in their suffering and ministering to their needs, both physical and spiritual.

Give students a three-minute challenge: Ask them to form pairs or groups of three and brainstorm (or use a search engine to find) examples in the Bible when Jesus demonstrated his Father’s deep love and compassion for people during his ministry on earth. Ask groups to share answers with the class.

### E. The next part of the story … (2 mins)

Tell students about Flynn’s next challenge – communication:

* All very well to have planes, but how could people call for help?
* No telephone services in the bush yet.
* Flynn investigated how radio technology could be used.
* Amalgamated Wireless Australia (AWA) said it would take decades to equip the outback with radio sets
* But Flynn didn’t give up – he found engineer Alfred Traeger, who helped him develop pedal powered radio: using bicycle pedals to power a Morse code radio.
* Now outback communities could call an emergency air ambulance; women living in the bush on isolated stations could find safety in communication; and soon Flynn would also help establish the ‘School of the Air’ (distance education via radio for school-aged children).

### F. Show video segment 2 (approx. 8 mins including questions)

While the video is playing/after it has finished, ask students to write answers to the following viewing and listening questions:

1. How did John Flynn deal with obstacles? Why do you think he persisted in spite of them?

2. What did you find interesting about Flynn’s relationship with the church?

(**Teacher note:** For question 2, you may wish to prompt students to consider (a) whether the church was right or wrong in objecting to Flynn’s work; (b) how Flynn obviously dealt with the conflict rather than just walking away from the church; (c) the personal sacrifices Flynn made in order to persist with his vision.)

### G. Full class discussion question (7 mins)

Why do you think Christian people do “good works”? (**Teacher note:** This is an opportunity to check students’ understanding of grace: that good works do not earn salvation. See optional extension ideas below.)

### H. Lesson wrap-up (2 mins)

Say to students: *The video extracts you’ve just watched come from a series called ‘Faith Runs Deep’. Even though many people in today’s society would not describe themselves as ‘Christians’, a lot of our social values, institutions and social services have been built on a Christian foundation. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is an excellent example of how faith runs deep in Australia’s history over the last few centuries.*

*The values our nation is known for – sacrificing our own time, energy and money to help out in a crisis – have been shaped at least in part by Jesus’ example and by those Christian values in the Bible verses at the beginning of the lesson.*

### I. Going deeper: optional extension ideas

Depending on available lesson time, students’ interests and school priorities, teachers may wish to build on this lesson plan and further explore:

* More on what makes faith real as opposed to “dead” (James 2:17)
* More detail and clarity regarding faith, works, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone (e.g. Ephesians 2:8–9)
* The origins of other social institutions in Australia (or worldwide) that grew from Christian roots
* The role of contemporary church members and organisations in providing relief during disasters such as floods and fires.
* Personal reflection opportunity for Christian students to consider how their knowledge of Jesus, God-given personal talents and Christian values and convictions may shape their futures, with time to pray and ask God for guidance as they seek their life’s purpose (picking up on Paul Roe’s observations about young people at the end of the second video segment).

### J. Further reading

* Karl Faase with George Marriot, *Faith Runs Deep Anthology: Unearthing stories of faith in Australia*, Olive Tree Media, 2022
* Royal Flying Doctor Service website: <https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/> and especially https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/about-the-rfds/history/john-flynn-bio/
* Australian Dictionary of Biography: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/flynn-john-6200>
* Did You Know Education: <https://didyouknow.org.au/johnflynn/>