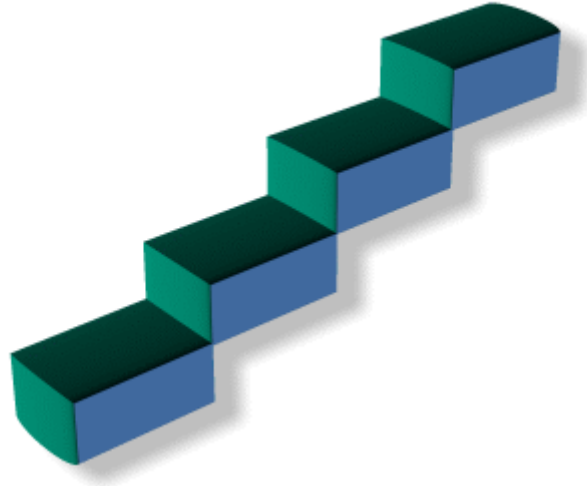


Steps for New Converts



By John R. Rice



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1. Assurance of Salvation

"They that gladly received his word. . . ." - Acts 2:41.

Here are some lessons in the Christian life. Every Christian starts out as a baby Christian. One has to learn after one is saved. One has to grow in grace after being saved. A good example is in the book of Acts, after Pentecost, when they had three thousand people saved. The Lord tells us how they did after they were saved - these new converts. My, how happy and fruitful they were!

In Acts 2 we begin to read with verse 41:

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Today I want you to see that "they that gladly received his word were baptized." Who was baptized? That is, who publicly took on himself the name of Christian? Who was it that counted themselves committed, branded, lined up with God's people? Those who gladly received His word.

Let us imagine that here a great number of people come. They say, "Peter, I have been saved. I have trusted the Lord." Peter says, "Are you taking God's word for it? Are you believing that He died for your sins? Are you relying on His death, that He paid for your sins? Are you relying on His promises, that He gave you everlasting life when you trusted Him?"

"Yes."

"All right. then you may be baptized."

Those that gladly received His Word were baptized. I am talking about assurance of salvation.

One Can Know He Is Saved

When I was a boy back at Gainesville, Texas, I remember that Dr. Talley was the pastor. At prayer meeting a woman said, "Dr. Talley, a neighbor of mine says she knows she is saved. Now isn't it presumptuous for anybody to say she knows she is going to Heaven?"

Dr Talley very wisely answered, "No. If she is relying on the Word of God, she has a right to know that she is saved."

Can you know you are forgiven, and know that you are going to Heaven? Yes, you can. In II Timothy 1:12 Paul says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." "I know whom I have believed." It is already done. I have already believed. Not "I am believing," but by an act of faith I committed myself to Christ, I relied on Christ. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded (or convinced) that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." Now Paul committed himself and the saving of his soul to the Lord. He said. "And I know He will keep what I have already committed to Him." Paul knew he was saved.

Paul could say in Romans, chapter 8, in the triumphant closing of that great passage, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." That settles that Jesus is taking up for me. I have been saved.

I read on in Romans, chapter 8, beginning with verse 35:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature (No, Paul says not any other created thing), shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

One Can Know by Plain Statements of Scripture

Oh, Paul said, "I know whom I have believed. I know He is keeping that which I have committed to Him." Can one know he is saved? Oh, yes. I read in I John 5:11-13: "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life." That is interesting. God gave it. It is not bought. You are not earning it. You are not working it in. But "God hath given to us eternal life." What kind of life? Eternal life. He not only gave me life but He gave me eternal, everlasting life. Oh, how often He said, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you (in the Bible) that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." John says. I have written these things so you can know you have eternal life.

Now, how am I going to know? By the record in the Bible. God loves me. Jesus died for me. My sins are all paid for. He said they would be blotted out and not held against me any more if I would come to Jesus and rely on Him. The Bible says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). The Bible says in John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath

everlasting life." The believer already has it! He is not going to have it some day, but he has it now."... HATH everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." So He said, "I have written these things that you may know that you have eternal life when you believe on Jesus." Thank God, one can know!

After Years of Ignorant Doubt, I Learned I Had Everlasting Life

Why don't people know? For three sad years after I was converted I did not know for sure I was saved. When I was a boy about nine years old, in the First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Texas, the pastor, dear Brother Ingram, preached on the prodigal son. He told how when he was a boy he ran away from home and got a job in a print shop, and how he made a botch of it when he spilled a whole font of type, making pie out of it when every letter, every period and comma had to be set by hand. He spilled that and the fellow fired him and didn't pay him. He was hungry and went home and his father loved him and forgave him and took him back home when he had run away.

This preacher said, "As that prodigal son came home to his father and the father ran to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him, so you can come to Christ now, and He will take you."

When the invitation was given, I walked down the aisle and told the preacher, "All right, I have come to trust Jesus." But nobody then took the Bible and showed me how Christ had promised to us everlasting life. Nobody showed me any Scripture. They just said, "Now, John, you ought to join the church."

Well, I went home that day and said, "Dad, what about me joining the church? (I didn't know how to tell him what had happened.) He said: "Well, Son, when you are really old enough to repent of your sins and be regenerated, then will be time enough to join the church." Well, I didn't know what those big words meant, but if my dad didn't think I was saved, I guessed I wasn't, since he was the smartest man in the world. So sadly I put it aside. I supposed I was too young. Dad seemed to think so, and I supposed I was not saved.

The next morning as I went to school, I stopped down at the creek bottom and knelt on the sand bar under a willow tree and prayed, "Now, Lord, I guess I am too young to be saved," - and I mentioned this one and that one and others I knew. I said, "Lord, they are not too young, they can be saved, Lord, save them."

Isn't it a strange thing that I had a burden for people to be saved when I didn't know for sure I was saved myself? Well, I went on a time wondering. A boy that day had come who was twelve and he was crying. I wondered if I would have been saved had I cried more. I didn't know what it took to be saved.

I went on doubting for three sad years. Then I decided to leave this thing with Jesus. I remember I asked a preacher to pray for me and I didn't say, "Tell me how to be sure." He didn't know how to tell me, I suppose. All he said was, "All right, John, I'll pray for you and you pray for yourself."

So I went home and knelt down by my bed that night and prayed, but I didn't feel any better. I went to bed and I didn't feel good and I said, "I had better get this settled." So I

got up and knelt down and prayed again. Well, I decided I would join the church and try to live for Christ the best I could.

But after I had been saved for three years I started reading the bible. I read the Scripture which says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). I read where "he that believeth on him is not condemned" (John 3:18). I read John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I read John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." I said, "Here it is. When I believed in Jesus, when I trusted Jesus, I got everlasting life! That is what the Bible says." And, God is my witness, as far as I know, I have never had a second of doubt about my salvation since then.

People Doubt Because They Partly Depend on Good Life

Now why do people doubt their salvation? Well, it is a natural thing to do. In the first place, we don't like to admit we are wicked old sinners who can do nothing to earn salvation. We like to feel respectable.

Lynn Tompkins who worked for us and who is now at Dr. Tom Malone's school, one night at 10:00 had not won anybody that particular day. He said, "I must get somebody saved before I sleep." (He usually won somebody every day.) So he went downtown and found a store which had not yet closed. A line of people were waiting at the check-out counter. A boy with long hair was in the line. He walked up to this fellow and said, "If you died right now, would you go to Heaven?"

The young fellow said, "I think I would."

Lynn Tompkins said, "What makes you think so?"

"Well, I'm a pretty good boy."

Lynn said to him (this is a little brash), "No, sir, you would split Hell wide open. You would go straight to Hell!"

Well, the fellow became a little indignant at that and said, "Who said so?"

Lynn said, "Jesus did. Look here in John 3. He said you must be born again and if you don't get born again, you will never see the kingdom."

It wasn't long until he had the fellow on his knees there in the check out line while everybody waited patiently as the young fellow prayed and trusted the Lord and was saved!

What I am saying is, aren't you glad you know you are saved? I know I am and I thank God I know it.

Everybody likes to feel he is a pretty good fellow. You don't like to admit you are an old sinner who deserves to go to Hell. I don't deserve God's mercy. Neither do you. But we don't like to admit our sinful condition. Everybody likes to think he can earn part of it. An old song says:

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

Well, the old carnal nature would like to change it to:

Jesus paid a part,
And I a part, you know;
Sin had Left a little stain,
And we washed it white as snow.

That is not the way. The Lord has to do it all. You say, "But I ... don't think I deserve it." You don't get salvation by deserving it; you get it by the grace of God: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." This trying to work it, trying to earn it, is part of the reason for dissatisfaction. As sure as you live you are going to know you are not worthy, and your conscience will hurt you. You say, "Oh, what will I do, then?"

Some Depend on Feeling for Assurance of Salvation

Here is another reason people doubt. We do something wrong and our conscience condemns us and we feel so bad about it and we say, "I guess I am not saved. I did feel good but I have lost it now; so I guess I am not saved."

Sometimes the discouragement is a matter of health. I remember a woman was in the change of life and she was upset and nervous and not normal in her feelings. With her it was mainly a matter of health and nerves. But she got so upset and decided she was not saved. Her husband, a pastor, brought her from down in Alabama, up to Clarksburg, West Virginia, where I was in a citywide campaign - to talk to me. She thought either she had never been saved or that she had committed the unpardonable sin.

What is your trouble? Maybe it is because of ill health and some natural depression that comes from ill health. But more likely it is because your conscience tells you you haven't done all you ought to do, and you feel guilty and are afraid that you are lost. But put this down, when you come to Jesus, you can know He saves you.

Now how can you know for sure? Take what God has written in the Bible, such as Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Isn't that a good, solid Scripture you can rest your soul upon? "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." You mean if you just come and ask God for forgiveness? Absolutely. If your heart turns to Jesus for mercy, you get it right then. He wants you to trust Him about it.

How long does it take you to make a deposit in your bank? Well, it doesn't take that long to turn your soul over to Jesus and rely on Him to keep it for you.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
He will not, He will not desert to his foes.
That soul, though all Hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

Throw Away Your Doubts: Rely on Jesus Christ

Then, how are you going to be sure? You say, "I'm going to believe what God said. I'm not going to make God out to be a liar. I'm not going to doubt what He said."

I believe it was J. Wilbur Chapman who said that when he was a young fellow, he was in Moody's meeting. He was already converted but he didn't have the assurance he wanted. He said, "I don't believe I have faith enough."

D. L. Moody said, "Who is it you don't have faith in? Are you doubting Jesus Christ?"

"Oh, no! Oh, no! I'm doubting myself."

"Well, you are not the one who does the saving. If you don't doubt Jesus, then leave it with Him."

That is the only way. Let Jesus do the saving. He does it free. You can love Him and tell Him so and try to live for Him. But assurance of salvation will only come as you say, "I rely on Jesus and He said He will take me. I know He will. He said He would never forsake me. He said He would give me everlasting life." You can rely on the Word of God.

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Ah, you can know it, too. Like I knew it when I saw that God said, "He that believeth on the Son (or trusts in the Son) hath everlasting life." Not just believe something about it, but did you rely on Him? All right, you have everlasting life if you have.

And if you don't have it, you can have it now. Oh, unsaved soul, remember that today Jesus loves you and He promises you everlasting life. You can rely on Him and have it settled now forever. Will you do that? Won't you write today and say, "I am casting away my doubts. I am going to believe in Jesus Christ and leave it with Him." I hope you will.

2. Baptism: Make Public Your Allegiance to Christ

I am talking on how to be a good Christian, with the understanding that everybody starts as a baby Christian.

The Scripture says that "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." And Scripture commands us to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

When people are saved, they are not necessarily graduates of college or of seminary. They don't know much Bible. And when a baby is born, he is just a baby but precious, and is a member of the family. So when you trusted Jesus, you are saved but certain things ought to follow to make you a happy Christian.

I read in the first message Acts, chapter 2, that after Pentecost, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Everybody who had gotten saved that day got baptized. Those who gladly received His Word were baptized. People ought to be baptized, because the Lord commanded it. In Matthew 28: 18-20 Jesus said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations (or make disciples), baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Christians Are Commanded to Be Baptized

Now when people went out to preach they were to do what? Make disciples, get people saved. Then what? They were to baptize them. They were to get them marked as Christians. The new Christians were to go on record publicly, "I am a child of God. I am joining in with God's people. I will get baptized." That has a sweet meaning. Then they were taught to go back and get other people saved, and get other people baptized, and get other people to winning souls also. It is part of the Great Commission that everybody who is saved ought to be baptized. While John the Baptist was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, Jesus came and asked John to baptize Him. John said, "I'm not fit to baptize Thee, Lord Jesus, you baptize me."

Jesus said, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him." Jesus said it becomes us. Jesus was to be baptized because it pictured that He was going to die, would be buried in Joseph's tomb, and would come out of the grave resurrected. Baptism pictured that. But it becomes us also because it pictures that Jesus died so we could be raised from the dead also. That means also that I'm going to bury this old sinner I used to be, count him dead, and count myself raised from the dead to live a new life for Jesus. So Jesus said it "becometh us" - Jesus and us - to be baptized. Yes, Christians ought to be baptized.

Baptism Not Necessary for Salvation

Is baptism a part of the plan of salvation? No. That is a part of claiming Jesus, confessing Him openly. Jesus said in Matthew 10: 32, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven," by which He meant, "You claim Me and I will claim you." One of the ways we have of publicly claiming Christ is to be baptized.

That isn't all. When the meanest old sinner - any infidel, anybody - sees a young convert baptized, he knows that person says he is a Christian, that person says he is going to Heaven, that person says he is going to live for Jesus. So baptism is a public profession of faith in Christ. Some may argue that it takes that to be saved. But the Bible says so plainly, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." One who believes in Christ already has everlasting life.

Oh, but somebody says the Great Commission, as given in Mark, says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," Yes, the Scripture has already said that one who believes is saved and then he is to get baptized right away, the same day, if he can. The Lord is not changing here what He said elsewhere; He is only reminding you of the importance of baptism. One who is saved ought to be baptized, ought to claim the Lord openly, publicly. I'm not talking about some doctrine of my church, about some way one denomination decides to do it. I am talking about what the Bible says. People who are saved ought to be baptized. Jesus was baptized. Others ought to be baptized, too, because we are to follow His steps. We are to do like Jesus. "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." So every Christian ought to be baptized.

Baptism Is Burial in Water

Now, how should we be baptized? Turn to Romans, chapter 6, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

What is baptism? It is a burial. In baptism we are "buried with him," that is, Jesus is going to die on the cross and be buried in Joseph's tomb and come out alive. Baptism means I believe that. But it also means that my body will rise from the grave and I will see my loved ones again in the resurrection. It means also that I count this old sinner I was dead, and I am raised up now to live a new life in Christ. So baptism ought to be a burial.

The Bible says about John the Baptist, "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there." Much water? Yes, if you are going to have a burial in water, you need enough for a burial. And the Scripture says in the 8th chapter of Acts that Philip was told, "Go down on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. There is a man I want you to talk to." So Philip went down there and found an Ethiopian eunuch in a big chariot, the treasurer of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, reading the Bible. He has a manuscript of Isaiah. He is reading from Isaiah 53 that on Him all our sins were laid and with His stripes we are healed, etc.

Philip ran near and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The eunuch said, "No, how can I unless somebody shows me, somebody guides me." He said, "Is Isaiah talking about himself?"

Oh, Philip took the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus. And he must have told him about baptism, too. For the eunuch said, "Stop the chariot! Wait a minute."

"Why?"

"Here is some water; what about me being baptized?"

Philip said, "Well, if you believe with all your heart, you may."

So he took him and baptized him.

Now the Scripture says, "They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." Now you could go down into the water to sprinkle a little water on the head but there is no reason to get your clothes wet unless it means a burial. It does mean a burial. So baptism should be by immersion.

You know, it is sad that the world went wrong on baptism. The reason why was that people began thinking you have to get baptized to be saved. The Roman church said, "What about all these babies? We don't want them to go to Hell. Well, we will change baptism and put a little water on the head and count that buried." So they did.

All the old Catholic churches up until the thirteenth century had big baptismal pools for immersion. One was in the old church at Galilee in Nazareth. We saw one in the Church of St. John at Ephesus. They went wrong on the doctrine, then went wrong on the way to baptize.

So new converts are buried with Him in baptism. You may say that is not convenient. Oh, yes, it is. If it means as much to you as it ought to, you should be glad to take a public stand publicly burying the old sinner you used to be; publicly thanking God that Jesus arose from the dead and that He is your Saviour and He will raise your mortal body.

So everybody ought to be baptized. And baptism should be by immersion.

Now, what is the meaning? First, it is good to commit yourself. It is good for everybody to know when a person has been saved! There is wonderful, refreshing joy in following Christ in baptism.

Baptism Is a Happy Profession of Faith

At twelve years of age I was baptized out in West Texas. I had been saved two or three years but I had not been baptized. But when I was baptized on a cold November day, down at the railroad tank or pond, a big artificial lake, I remember I waded out into the water. The preacher came out and one by one we were baptized. Then in dripping clothes we stood at the edge of that water and people sang,
O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my saviour and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad.
Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!
He taught me how to watch and pray,
And live rejoicing ev'ry day;
Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!

Now that wasn't the day I got saved, but that was the day I got happiness about it. My heart was so happy and glad! It is wonderful to be baptized and to know you have done

what Jesus said do, telling the world you belong to Jesus, that you believe in Him; He has risen from the dead and He is your Saviour. Baptism is a happy thing.

In Sherman, Texas, we had an open-air revival campaign on the courthouse lawn. We organized a church, put up a tent for dressing, and built a baptistery. The firemen filled the baptistery with water. Soon we baptized twenty-eight people. When a seventy-two-year-old man was baptized, he came up out of the water, lifted up his hand and said, "Glory to God!" He put the other arm around my neck and kissed me on the cheek, then he went sobbing down to the tent to dress.

That night it had a wonderful effect. There was an old drunkard there, J. D. Welch. He had lived at Houston and had drunk and drunk and drunk. He turned to his wife that night and said, "If I had my clothes, I would go get baptized right now!"

His wife said, "Well, if you will get the rest of it fixed in your heart, we will get your clothes here tomorrow night." He said, "I've got it fixed." So the next night he came and made a public profession and was baptized. He lived only six months, but he went back to the bars in Houston, Texas, and went from one to another telling what God had done for a poor old drunkard like himself. Baptism is a good testimony.

In Decatur Texas, we had ten weeks of revival and organized a new church with hundreds of converts. We organized with more than three hundred members, bought a piece of ground, built a tabernacle and called a full-time pastor before I left town.

One night as I was baptizing converts one dear woman came down into the baptistery in the new tabernacle we had built whispering to herself. She was trying her best to be nice. She was saying, "Oh, praise the Lord! Oh, praise the Lord!" I said, "Lady, if you want to, just say it out loud." She said, "Praise the Lord! I have been wanting to do this for nineteen years!" She was baptized. Back in the dressing room I could hear her saying, "Oh, praise the Lord!"

You know, it is a happy thing to do what Jesus said about baptism. People ought to be baptized. Jesus was our example in baptism.

It is a happy thing to follow Christ in baptism. That is a good way of letting everybody know you plan to live for God. That is making a break with the past. That is putting yourself on record. So when one is saved, he ought to be baptized. How often I have found people through the years who had not been baptized or maybe had a little water on their heads and they were never satisfied. They meant well. Mother thought that was the way to do it, so they thought it was all right. Or a godly preacher they knew thought pedobaptism was all right. He may have, but you had better do it the Lord's way, which is the happy way.

The Episcopal Church Taught Immersion

I love to read the Journal of John Wesley who founded the Methodist church. He came first to America as a missionary to the Indians. He was in Georgia as a missionary. He preached to the colonies in Georgia. There came up a case, and charges were brought against him. Do you know what the charges were? Parker had a baby he wanted baptized and Mr. Wesley said, "Is he sick?"

"No, he is not sick."

"Well, then, we will immerse him because according to the rule book of the Episcopal church that is the Bible way." Wesley was wrong to baptize a baby, but he said, "We will have to immerse him."

"No," Parker said, "we are not going to immerse him."

Wesley said, "Unless you signify that he is sick, I could not baptize him except by immersion."

They brought that charge against him. Finally Wesley went back to England and got converted. But even then, he knew baptism ought to be by immersion.

Well, why does it matter?

Anything Jesus said matters. Whatever He wants is what I want. That is what you ought to want. Baptism by immersion is His way, and that is the way to happiness, and that is the way to a good testimony. Follow Jesus in baptism. He was baptized. Is Jesus our example? Yes. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet, 2:21). So we ought to follow the steps of Jesus in everything we can. And one of the examples He gave was to be baptized openly, publicly.

I wonder how many today can say, "Brother Rice, I have been saved. Not only that; I have shown it to the world. I have thus proclaimed my faith by being baptized, showing I am going to count dead and buried this old sinner I used to be. I am raised up now to live a new life for Jesus. I know Jesus died and came out of the grave and He lives to be my Intercessor, always to take my part, to keep me saved. Now I am following Him in this matter of baptism"? Well, that is what a Christian ought to do. That brings real happiness for a Christian. Those people at Pentecost "that gladly received his word were baptized." Why? They found it is in the Bible, and were glad to do it.

3. The Young Christian and His Bible

How will a Christian learn to be happy and victorious? How will he learn to conquer temptations and have influence for God and win souls? By loving and using and meditating in the Bible.

When those three thousand converts at Pentecost were saved and baptized, Acts, chapter 2, says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine ..." Now, they did not have printed Bibles, only manuscripts copied by hand, which very few people could afford. So preachers would read the Scriptures or memorize them and quote them in public. So what the apostles taught is what they wrote down in the epistles in the New Testament later. Later they would have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and they would have the books of Acts and I and II Corinthians and Romans, etc.

So the apostles' doctrine was the teaching of the Old Testament and what God revealed to these apostles that would later be in the New Testament. It is the same, let us say, as the Word of God. Now we have the Bible all written down and printed. Every individual can have a Bible and can read it for himself. There are so many promises that depend on whether you love the Bible, listen to the Bible, meditate in the Bible. I do not know any way in the world for a young convert to be a happy, good Christian without taking time to love the Bible, learn the Bible, read the Bible, enjoy the Bible.

The Blessed Man Who Delights in, Meditates in the Bible Day and Night

Let's start with Psalm 1:1-3:

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Now first he says this blessed man quits the Devil's crowd. He doesn't stand in the way of sinners. He doesn't walk in the way with the ungodly. He doesn't sit in the seat of the scornful. He breaks away from fellowship with the ungodly.

And what? "But his delight is in the law of the Lord." That is another word used first in the Old Testament, first for the Pentateuch and then came to mean the whole Old Testament. Here it refers to the whole Word of God.

What about this blessed man? "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Oh, how he loves it. He just memorizes a lot of it, thinks about it, enjoys it. And the Scripture says, "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Everything he puts his hand to will be blessed. Let us be sure to get this sweet, blessed promise and claim it and live by it - the Word of God. Then you will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

This world is a pretty sad old world. There is a curse on the earth. The ground brings forth thorns and thistles. It is easier to grow weeds than a crop of corn. It is easier to do wrong than to do right. Even nature itself is under a curse. We have tornadoes, drought, floods, plagues of insects. There is a curse on this world. And Satan, "as a roaring lion, walketh

about, seeking whom he may devour." This is a desert kind of world. Oh, a Christian needs help.

But I have good news for you. There is a river in this world the Word or God. And a blessed man is like a tree planted by that river and its roots go down and soak it up all the time, "like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season." Christian, never mind - you have a source of blessing. What is that? The Word of God!

And whatsoever this man does will prosper. Isn't that a great promise? This is one of the biggest promises in the Bible for one already saved. You mean everything ...? Yes. You mean if I go to school I can I make top grades? Yes. You mean if I get a job I will get a good job and make good in it? Yes. Meditate in the Word, love the Word of God, then you will love the right woman, will have a happy marriage. You mean if God sends little children, you can rear them for God, and they won't be hippies nor dropouts nor dopeheads nor rebels against society? Right! You mean they will turn out to be godly Christians, serving God and making good? Right! Everything you put your hand to will prosper!

And if you will start out to win souls, God will help you. You can build a Sunday school class that will grow and prosper. "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper," if he turns his back on the Devil's crowd and meditates day and night in the Word of God. And "his leaf ... shall not wither." We have too many Christians with withered leaves. We have too many horsefaced Christians. We have too many sad Christians. A Christian ought not be sad.

Dr. Jack Hyles said the other day as he talked to a great crowd about serving God, "Dr. John Rice and I are two of the happiest men you ever saw." We are happy. We work hard. We preach hard. We weep over sinners. But we are happy. A Christian can be happy all the time IF he meditates in the Word of God. He can be like a tree, with his leaves always green, and bears fruit in season. "And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Christians Need "Every Word" of the Bible

Well, these people, the converts at Pentecost, continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching which now we have in the Bible. Steadfastly, daily.

So what ought a Christian do? Jesus talked about the Bible in Matthew 4:4:

"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Where did the Bible come from? Every word in the original manuscripts proceeded out of the mouth of God. Man is not to live just by food and digestion and building up his body; he is to feed his soul, too, on the Word of God: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

That is the way for a Christian to be happy. That is the way for a Christian to have what he ought to have. A Christian is to meditate in the blessed Word of God - all of it. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but BY EVERY WORD." Read all of the Bible? Yes. Learn it and have it in your heart? Yes. Every word. That is the way to be happy and be a good Christian.

Do you know what Jesus thought about the Bible? In Matthew 5:17,18 He said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." How He loved the Bible! No wonder every now and then Jesus said, "The scripture saith," or He said, "... that the scripture might be fulfilled." Jesus believed it. He too wants us to love it and follow it. There is no way to be a good Christian without taking time every day with the Bible.

What the Bible Will Do for a Christian

What will the Bible do for you?

1. First, the Bible is the one thing that leads to salvation. First Peter 1:23 says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Born again by the Word of God.

Look at Psalm 19:7: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul."

Jesus said, "A sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side." What is this seed that gets people saved? The Word of God. Then, the blessed Gospel!

Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

So the Word of God had a part in your salvation. You would not have been saved had you not heard the truth of the Gospel as it is in the Bible. We are sinners, Christ died for our sins.

Well, what does this Bible do for us?

2. That is the way to have assurance of salvation. Let me read again I John 5:13, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Do you want to be sure you are saved? Find what God promised and hook your soul on that. Rely on that. You can know you are saved. The assurance of the Word. If God says He gave you everlasting life when you trusted Him, believe it, because He did. If He says He will never cast you out, rely on it. That is the promise of God. The way to know you are saved is by the Bible, not by how you feel.

What will the Bible do for You?

3. It is the way to have faith. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That will help you have faith.

4. Do you want your prayers answered? In John 15:7 Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." You may ask anything you want? If you are full of the Bible, and wrapped up in Jesus and concerned about Him, you will want to please Him. If you know the Bible well, you will know what He wants and so you can pray in the will of God and get your prayers answered.

There is a sad Scripture on this in Proverbs 28:9, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." If you turn your heart away from the Bible, then God says your prayers are no good. If you don't like God's Word, God says, "I don't like yours either." So the way to get your prayers answered is to love the blessed Bible, take time to meditate in it, learn it, and then pray. Try to pray in the will of God. Oh, you can do that.

What will the Bible do for you?

5. You will grow in grace. We read in I Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." You are to love the Bible. You are to meditate in it. You are to read it. You will then grow by the Bible. Then you can use the Bible to get people saved. You can use the Bible to show people they are sinners, to show them Jesus died for them. You can get people saved. So learn to use the Bible to show people they are sinners and how to trust in Jesus.

What a Christian Should Do With the Bible

What shall you do, then, about the Bible?

1. First, read it. Read it every day. Set out to read the Bible through in a year. That would mean read at least four chapters a day. I would not try to do less than that every year. Didn't Jesus say man ought to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God? Well, some of you never even read it one time. You couldn't possibly obey that Scripture. You can't be a good Christian unless you read the Bible, and read all the Bible.

What else? I would read it consecutively. If you are reading in Genesis, read the first chapter of Genesis, the next day read the second chapter, or if you read the first three chapters there, then I would read three more until you finish that book. If you are reading in Matthew 1, then read Matthew, chapter 2, etc. Read consecutively in the Bible.

2. I would read the King James Version. You say it is hard to understand. No, it is not. You have heard somebody talk like that. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" - is that so hard to understand? "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" - is that so hard to understand? "Blessed are the peacemakers" - is that hard to understand? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" - is that hard to understand? No. The truth is, if you mean business you can understand the Bible. Read the King James Version.

What about the Amplified Version, the Expanded Version? All those words are not in the Bible. Those are men's commentaries on the Bible. What about the Living Bible? It is what some man writes down, what he thinks the Bible may have meant. It is not a translation; it is a paraphrase and not reliable. Any paraphrase is only reliable as man's wisdom, and man's wisdom is never as good as the Word of God itself. And that, of course, is part of the trouble with the Revised Standard Version and the New English translation, Moffatt's translation, and many others. Use the King James Version. I have seventeen or eighteen translations, but I use the King James Version all the time. That is by all means the best.

I would get a Scofield Reference Bible if I could. I do not necessarily agree with every little detail of the notes, but it is by far the best reference Bible in the world. I would get a Scofield Reference Bible and I would read it every day.

What else?

3. Then I would set out to memorize some sweet things.

I was on a plane the other day, going down from Oklahoma City to Dallas. My Bible was packed in my briefcase, so I quoted by memory Psalm after Psalm to myself. I quoted the first Psalm, then the 103rd Psalm, the 121st Psalm, the 23rd and the 126th. I quoted some of those sweet Psalms to myself and had a good time in the Lord. Some things I thought about that I had never seen before in those sweet Psalms. I already had the words in my heart, now I could meditate on the meaning since I already know the words of many of the chapters and thousands of the verses in the Bible. Set out to meditate in the Bible.

Then what? Oh, love it. Memorize some of it. Have it in your heart. Read it every day. Ask God to help you understand it and love it.

Sometimes when I have gone to bed at night I have gotten the Bible and put it under my pillow. I wanted it closer than that so I put it in my arms and went to sleep with the Bible at my breast. Oh, the Bible! You ought to love it and set out to learn it and delight in it.

4. Then I would use it to win souls. Use it to comfort your heart. Use it to help you do right. A Christian cannot be a good Christian except as he learns the Bible, loves the Bible, tries to follow the Bible. I hope you will say, "I am going to be a good, mature Christian. I am going to grow. I am going to be a good, strong Christian." That will mean setting out to know and use the Bible. May God bless you in it.

4. Prayer Life of a Christian

I am speaking this month on how to grow to be a strong Christian, taking as an example the Christians at Pentecost, those three thousand people who were saved and baptized then. And in Acts, chapter 2, verses 41 and 42, I read again, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Now, watch what these young converts did: " And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Steadfastly in prayers. So young Christians are going to have to not only just pray but to be steadfast in prayer. That is persistently praying. That is continually praying. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. and in breaking of bread. and in prayers."

Steadfast, Persistent Praying, All the Time!

A Christian, then, ought to learn to pray all the time, ought to learn to pray about everything. That comes up often in the Bible. Luke 18: 1 says about Jesus, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint," He said. "To this end, that men ought always to pray." You mean pray all the time? Yes. That would evidently mean a Christian ought to get to where he prays again and again consciously a hundred times or more a day, get to where there is something going on in his prayer life in his heart all the time, crying to God. "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

He said it in Romans 12:12 also: "... patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." "Continuing instant in prayer." That is, always on the alert in prayer. Just keep on praying? Yes, continuing instant in prayer,

He said again in Colossians 4:2, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." "Continue in prayer." Now, we believe we should pray regularly. That is good, but that isn't all they did and that is not enough for us. We ought to keep on praying.

A song says:

Just keep on praying till light breaks through;
The Lord will answer, will answer you;
God keeps His promise, His word is true.
Just keep on praying till light breaks through.

A Christian ought to pray all the time.

Colossians 4:2: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." "Continue in prayer." There are two words that go along with prayer in the Bible and in Christian literature: "fast" and "pray." That means doing without food. Sometimes I ought to miss a meal because I am burdened and I want to keep hold on the face of God, I want to keep on pleading with God. I don't want to let my mind wander about ordinary things; I want to give myself wholly to prayer. So sometimes one ought to "fast and pray," because he is so concerned and so anxious that his heart centers on that.

When I played college football we did not eat a big meal before a game. After the game, after one has lost several pounds in sweat, and after one has a good bath, then the player can have a good steak and enjoy it.

If you would give up food for a time in order to play football, why wouldn't you give up food sometimes to pray? That is what the Lord is saying here: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving."

Regular Times for Prayer Are Good, but Not Enough

The word "watch" means keep the night watches, stay awake at night. That is another way of praying. We are sometimes too much concerned to go to sleep. Or we deliberately stay awake in order to pray because we want to pray through and get things settled. Well, that is a virtue. So the Scripture says, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." Just keep on praying.

Now there ought to be certain times set aside to pray. Maybe you ought to have a regular place of prayer. My wife and I have our four chapters in the Bible, then we have a season of prayer. We pray for our children, for our workers, for the Sword of the Lord. I have about ninety people I pray for by name. Every day we have that regular season of prayer. Then we have at the Sword office every morning a devotional time and some prayer. And at 12:00 and at 4:00 on Thursday we have a prayer meeting at the office. And we have prayer meeting Wednesday night at the church.

But there ought to be, besides these, times when you don't do anything but pray. We ought to pray all the rest of the time, too, whatever we do.

I have sometimes illustrated it this way: I used to have a girl friend. I used to go see her up on a big, black land farm in Cooke County, Texas. She is the same girl friend now, by the way, only my wife now. Sometimes we would sit on the front porch and talk, sometimes we would sit in the parlor by the fireplace and talk. Sometimes she had to wash the dishes, so I would dry them and we would talk.

So you ought to sometimes set aside everything else to pray. Then whatever else you do, you ought to take God with you and keep your heart crying to God and pleading with God and rejoicing in the Lord whatever else you do. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

In Ephesians 6, verse 18. "Put on the whole armour of God ... Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Oh, people ought to keep on praying. Pray about everything.

And I Thessalonians 5:17 says. "Pray without ceasing." Oh, we ought to have God so close to us! You don't have to get down on your knees, you don't have to go through a nice, formal preliminary when you talk to your Heavenly Father. You ought to be able to just say, "Lord Jesus, help me." You ought to be able to say "Thank You, Lord Jesus." You ought to say, "Lord Jesus, give me wisdom now." and, "Lord Jesus, help me." Like Peter, walking on the water. When he began to sink, he said. "Lord, save me!" That is not much of a prayer, but it was to the point and he got himself saved from drowning. Why not set out to pray all the time?

Prayer in the Bible Is Asking

We are not talking about pretty little clichés and "Lord, we know this," and, "Lord, we know that," and quote the Westminster Catechism and the Apostles' Creed. I am not talking about that. I am not talking about meditation. I am talking about asking God. A Christian ought to set out to ask God for things every day.

James 4:2 says. "Ye have not, because ye ask not." "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not." So Christians ought to set out to ask God for some things. It would not be a bad idea to write out your requests No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4. If you are going to the store to buy groceries, you make a list. Well, why not when you pray? Be honest. Rewrite the list every day or two to make sure it doesn't get to be just a little set form. Take things to God and ask for certain things when you pray.

You know asking is prayer. In Matthew 7:7,8 the Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Prayer is asking you are not praying if you don't ask. So be sure to make your requests known to God.

Oh, a Christian ought to pray. A Christian ought to enjoy praying. You ought to feel that God is near. You ought to feel you can turn everything over to Him. My, what it will do for you! That is the way to have things.

God's Cure for Worry Is to Pray Through

And that is also the way to cure worry, fret and trouble. You can have God's peace all the time, for Philippians 4:6,7 says, "Be careful for nothing (don't be full of care about anything); but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanks giving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." A Christian ought to pray all the time. We are plainly commanded to pray without ceasing.

A new convert ought not to feel he is going to some formal Being. He doesn't have to bow, like he is being introduced to Queen Elizabeth in England. Then you would dress up as nice as you could. You might be introduced one at a time. You go forward and bow down very low before the Queen, then back out. But our Heavenly Father, our own Heavenly Father, loves us and we can "come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb.4:16).

As Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., used to say, "I am not a stranger. I am at home in my heavenly family. I just pull my chair up to the table and say, 'Pappy, please pass the biscuits.'"

A Christian has a right to go to his own Heavenly Father and tell his needs to Him and have His heart lifted, his joy restored, his sins forgiven, get light on dark places, get wisdom as to what to do. A Christian ought to take everything to God in prayer.

So these Christians at Pentecost, "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." They just kept on praying. If you don't pray, you are sure to sin. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye

are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." You don't have to yield to temptations. You don't have to have the Devil come out victorious in your life. You can have strength every day. Oh, you say there are lots of temptations! Yes, but if you pray like you ought, you can have help. Always there is victory. Christians can have help. If a Christian begins to pray in time and takes time with the Lord and His Word, the Lord will help him. That is the way to victory. That is the way to have help every day.

How Many Promises Encourage Prayer!

"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you."

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee."

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

How many great promises there are about prayer!

There is Matthew 21:22, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." What about Mark 11:22 where the Lord said, "Have faith in God."

Then verse 24, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

What about John 14:13,14, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

Isn't that a promise! Here it is again: John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

And in John 16:24, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

Oh, learn to get your prayers answered day by day and have God's leading and God's strength and God's provision. A happy life it is. You can call on the Lord daily and have His help. A Christian ought to learn to pray.

Mrs. Rice and I have had great joy out of an incident that happened here. I often get my prayers answered and that is good. For instance, I prayed for rain and got rain more than once. And some time ago, last summer or fall, after we had had our morning Bible reading, I prayed, "Lord, the grass is getting a little dry in the pasture for the horses and cattle. Will you give us rain that the grass may be green? Other people need rain." I expected it to come that day. The truth is, later we found the weather report was that probably we would have rain that day. But in our community a little boy wanted to go, that closing Saturday, to the State Fair, and he said, "Oh, Mother we must go."

She said, "Honey, it is going to rain. The weather forecast says it will rain. See, it is clouding up now."

"No, it won't rain, Mother."

"Oh, yes it will," she said.

And they saw him go into his bedroom - a little fellow six or seven years old and kneel down by his bed. After awhile he came back and said, "Mother, it is not going to rain. We can go to the Fair."

Well, when they tried to outtalk him, he said, "No, there won't be any rain. We ought to go." Well, to humor him everybody took their umbrellas and raincoats and went to the Fair. they carried their weather togs around all day and it was a fair day, and it didn't rain a drop. Then that night, after they got back home, the Lord answered my prayer and gave rain, too. And Mrs. Rice thinks that is a great joke that the Lord answered that little fellow's prayer and postponed mine until he could have his day at the State Fair! Do you believe God did that? I do.

Years ago at Wheaton, Illinois, a heavy snow had fallen and it was bitter cold. We got in the car to take the youngsters to school and I stepped on the starter. R-r-r, r-r-r - awfully cold! It didn't start. I tried again: R-r-r-r, r-r-r-r, r-r-r - it didn't start. I was getting vexed and discouraged, I tried again and again. So Joy, who was then about eight years old, said, "Daddy, I know what we could do."

I said, "Yes, I know, too. I can go get a taxicab or I can have a wrecker come and start this car and you children will be late to school."

Joy said, "Daddy that wasn't what I meant."

I said, "What did you mean, dear?"

"We could pray."

I said, "We sure could."

We stopped and prayed and I stepped on the starter and the engine started with a roar, and we went on our way!

The way to live is to pray day by day and take all your burdens to the Lord and ask whatever you want. God is not old and tired. Ask whatever you want. He loves you. Remember He said in Romans 8:32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Oh, then, take your burden to the Lord.

Young convert, set out to pray about everything. Pray for money when you need money. Pray for food when you need food. Let your requests be made known to God - whatever you need. Oh, you have not because you ask not!

I prayed and saw God raise up my father when the doctor said he wouldn't live through the night. I prayed when my little girl had a fever of 105, with diphtheria, and saw God answer. That afternoon my wife and I prayed by the bedside and that afternoon the fever all disappeared and the next morning not a sign of diphtheria. And the county health department tore down the quarantine sign they had put on my house. I prayed and God

raised up a woman who was dying with TB, back in the days when there was no antibiotic drugs like we have now. I saw her three months from then and she was well, and had gained fifty pounds. She told me, though the doctors had not expected her to live a week and one more hemorrhage and she was gone, "Brother Rice, after you prayed it was two weeks before I was strong enough to do all my housework and the washing for the family!"

Listen! You have not because you ask not. God wants you to learn to pray and ask Him and have His blessing.

5. Christian Giving and Soul Winning

Are you learning to be a good Christian? The Scripture says we should grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Scripture says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." When you get saved. You are a baby Christian and you need to learn, you need to grow. Since you are not a graduate of a theological seminary when you get saved, you need to learn. And I want to help you about that.

I have discussed about how to be a good Christian; now I come to your giving and your soul winning.

In Acts, chapter 2, we learn about those young Christians, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Then what? "... and fellowship ... and in prayers." And now you see in Acts 2:44-47:

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

These New Converts Set Out to Give

There was a time of persecution and trouble. People lost their jobs. These people got saved and now they are under persecution, and somebody has to help them, They brought their goods and sold what they had and put it at the apostles' feet. They gave all they had to the Lord and to His work.

There was an emergency. This was not commanded. And later they gave up that plan when it was no longer necessary and when other people sent money in to take care of these poor saints in trouble at Jerusalem. So this is not like communism where there is a dictator and where the people are forced. But they felt like giving everything they had to Jesus and to His work. Isn't that wonderful? They didn't count what they had their own; it belonged to God.

Years ago in Texas, Dr. J. B. Gambrell had an article in The Baptist Standard, titled "Who Owns the Wool?" (He was talking about the sheep.) The normal and proper answer was, "The man who owns the sheep owns the wool also."

Well, the God who owns the Christian owns his money and his possessions. Actually, all we have belongs to the Lord. We are not our own. We are bought with a price. So God wants us to give.

You know, the God who made the world doesn't need our money. But we need to give it. The cattle on a thousand hills are God's, and the silver and gold are His. But it is part of the loving kindness of God that He lets us share with Him. The Bible says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." That is a saying the Lord Jesus gave but it was not recorded in Matthew. Mark, Luke and John but recorded later as they passed it among the people (Acts 20:35). So it is more blessed to give than to receive; and God lets us have a sweet part in His work.

I feel so glad and so blessed when I think about this giving and what God has done and what part He lets us have in giving to His cause. These people in Jerusalem were happy. Everything they had they gave to the Lord and divided with other people. That is a wonderful thing about giving - God's way in giving.

These people here gladly gave everything. Later we learn one of the men was Joses who had some land out on the island of Cyprus. He went and sold that and brought the money and gave it to the apostles and said, "Use this for the poor folks." And they did. The apostles gave him another name - Barnabas, the "son of consolation." He became an apostle and went with Paul on his missionary journeys.

That was an example of the kind of Christianity they had in those days.

But some Christians were not very good Christians then. Ananias and Sapphira said, "Listen to these apostles bragging on Barnabas!" They said, "Now, we will sell some land, too, and we will bring part of the money and we will pretend that is all of it, so we will get credit, too." Now that was selfish on their part, but you are still a human being when you get saved and you still have temptations. So Ananias and Sapphira sold some property and brought part of the money, and Peter said, "Now you didn't have to sell it."

"I know."

"You don't have to give it."

"I know, but this is all of it."

Peter said, "You lied to God, and men are here ready to wrap you up and take you out and bury you." So Ananias fell dead.

Then Sapphira came in and Peter asked her, "Did you sell the land for so much?" "Yes, Sir, and we gave every penny of it."

Then Peter said, "The boys are just getting back from burying your husband and they are ready to wrap you up and take you out." She fell over dead and they carried her out and buried her, not because she was supposed to give all but because she lied about it, pretending to be better than she was. God hates hypocrisy. But what God wants is loving gifts given willingly.

It Pays to Tithe and More From the Heart

"Dr. Rice, do you believe in tithing?" people ask. Yes, but I believe in a great deal more than that.

"But Brother Rice, tithing, that is in the Old Testament, isn't it?" It is in the Old Testament, but do you not think God wants a Christian under grace to be just as generous-hearted, just as loving as a Christian under the law, as a Jew under the law? Don't we owe God as much as some Jew with ceremonies? The emphasis in the Old Testament is they brought the tithes in and some offerings; but in the New Testament it is not only that one-tenth belongs to God but that all belongs to God. Whatsoever you do, whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God, the Scripture says. All belongs to Him.

I promise you two things: One, tithing is the way of great happiness. And it is the way of prosperity and blessing, too.

First, how many promises there are that it pays to give! Someone says, "It looks like it would pay one to save up and keep all he can." But that is not the way to have more. The way to have more is to give more. Jesus, speaking in Luke 6:38, said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." That comes up again and again in the Bible.

We read back in Proverbs 3:9,10, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." Isn't that wonderful?

You give in a way to honor God, and God will see that you have better crops. You give thus, and God will see that you get a better salary. You give, and God will see that you don't have as many accidents, as many doctor bills, as much extra expense. He promises, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

Here it is again in Proverbs 11:25, "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" - fat spiritually, and fat in material blessings, too.

Years ago a good woman, Mrs. Widner, was teaching a big Bible class in Dallas, Texas. She said, "Don't talk about what you get out of it. You ought to give to God because you love Him. You ought not be talking about the rewards you will get."

One woman said to Mrs. Widner, "Dr. John Rice says that if God says He is going to reward you, it is all right to tell what God said He is going to do, isn't it?" She laughed and said, "That is right."

And God did say He is going to reward those who give - "Give, and it shall be given unto you." And, "The liberal soul shall be made fat."

Over in II Corinthians 9 we read, "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly. and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give: not grudgingly or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." The Lord sure likes it when you enjoy giving.

I have found such joy in giving. I used to keep very careful account. When Mrs. Rice and I married, we had a little book where we listed everything that came in. We didn't get much: we lived mighty cheaply. We spent \$5.00 to \$8.00 a month on groceries. We bought a pint of milk every two days. We kept very close account. On one page - I got today, \$11. Over here I would put down \$1.10 - 10% for the Lord, The next time I got \$2.30 - put down 23 cents over here.

I came in one day and I said to my wife, "I don't like that way of doing. It looks like I am afraid God will get more than His share. I don't feel that way."

She said, "I don't either."

I said, "Let's just start out giving 20% to foreign mission causes and what we want to to local expenses and other things." That is the way we did it. So it has been through these years - always 20% and sometimes 50% or 60% and 70% of our income.

My how God has cared for us so wonderfully! It sure pays to seek first the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you."

Blessed is the Christian who delights to give. He prays so he can have money he can give. God loves a cheerful giver. So you and the Lord will get along fine if you will set out to seek His face, then to please Him with your giving. How happy that way is.

A Missionary's Testimony

Years ago I was in a revival campaign in a country community in West Texas. In a daytime service I set out to teach people gathered under a brush arbor that God demanded first place in everything, that He wanted tithes and offerings from the loving and believing hearts of His people. Present in the service that day was a dear country preacher, Brother Kuykendal. He was then, and had been for years, county missionary in Palo Pinto County, preaching in churchless communities, building up weak churches, selling and giving away gospel literature as a rural missionary. He asked if he might tell how God had dealt with him about tithing. I gladly asked him to proceed. He arose and told his story about like this.

"Some years ago when I was county missionary of this county the famous Baptist businessman, H. Z. Duke, who founded the Duke and Ayers Nickel Stores over a wide area, came to this county and, speaking as a Christian layman, urged the men and women everywhere to try God and see if He would not make good His promises to bless them in material things when they gave tithes and offerings to His cause. After Mr. Duke had spoken in one community, I took him in my buggy to another community. Mr. Duke said to me, 'Brother Kuykendal. do you believe in tithing?'

"'I certainly do,' I said. 'I believe in tithing and I preach it myself.'

"'But, Brother Kuykenda1, do you practice tithing?'

"'Sadly I had to answer, 'No, I do not. I believe in tithing, but I cannot practice it. You see, I have thirteen children at home. Every meal fifteen of us sit down at the table. I receive only \$125 a month, \$1500 a year as salary. I have to maintain my own horse and buggy for constant traveling. It is just impossible to take care of all the needs of a family of fifteen out of \$125 a month and have money left to tithe. So I believe in tithing. and I preach it. but I cannot practice it.'

"'Mr. Duke was a very kindly man. He said, 'Brother Kuykendal, would you like to tithe? Would you tithe if I would back you up financially so you could be sure you would not lose by it?'

"'Nothing would please me more,' I said.

"'So Mr. Duke made me the following proposition:

"I want you to set out to give God at least \$12.50 every month as soon as you get your salary. Then as you feel led, you may give more. I promise you that if you need help, I will give it. Simply write me a letter and say, "Brother Duke. I am giving a tithe, but I miss the money. I need it for my family. I have given this year so much." I promise you that I will send you a check by return mail. Are you willing to try tithing on that basis?"

"I hesitated a moment, moved with emotion, and Brother Duke said, 'I have thirty-two stores. I have plenty of money to make good my promise. I will be glad to do it. Will you risk me and start tithing on my simple promise that I will make good any amount you have given, any time that you find you miss it and need it? Will you trust me about it?'

"I gladly accepted his offer. I said, 'Yes, Brother Duke, I have long wanted to tithe, but I felt I simply could not do it. Now, thank God, I can tithe and I will be glad to. And I will not feel like a hypocrite when I tell others they ought to tithe.'

"So I started tithing for the first time in my life. Every month I took out first of all one-tenth of my salary and gave it to the Lord's cause; then, as I felt led, I gave more. In the back of my mind I always had this thought, 'Mr. Duke promised me that he would make it up any time I need it. He will send me the money if I simply ask him for it.'

"But a strange thing happened. It seemed our money went farther than before. I would preach in some country community and somebody would tie a crate of chickens on the back of my buggy. Somebody would put a ham under the seat. Or a godly woman would put some home-canned fruit in my buggy.

"A neighbor farmer said, 'Brother Kuykendal, God has blessed me so that I cannot get all my corn in the crib this year. I have a big wagon load extra that I cannot keep. May I put it in your crib for your buggy horse?'

"Another neighbor drove over with a great hay wagon full of hay for the cow.

"It was very strange, but that year we had no doctor bills. The children's clothes seemed not to wear out so badly. It was a happy, happy time. I never did have to call on Mr. H. Z. Duke to make up the money I had given to the Lord in tithes.

"Then one day when the year was about gone and the test was about over, I suddenly realized with shame that I had believed what H. Z. Duke said. He promised to make good anything I lacked because of tithing, and I believed him. But my Heavenly Father had made the same promise, and I had not believed Him! I had taken the word of a man when I did not take the promise of God! Now I had proven God's promises and found that He took care of me and my big family on a small salary. I found that \$112.50 per month took care of our family better, with God's blessing, than \$125 did without being under the blessed covenant which He has made with those who seek first the kingdom of God and who tithe."

That godly country preacher stood there before the congregation weeping. With the deepest emotion he said,

"Now I have tithed for many years. My salary has been increased year after year. We have always had enough. We have never been shamed. The greatest spiritual blessing of my life, aside from my salvation, has been in learning to trust God about daily needs for my home and a big family."

Will You Now Begin Tithes and Offerings?

Somebody says, "I can't afford to tithe." You can't afford not to. You may starve to death if you don't. So, young Christians, set out to tithe and then set out to win souls.

I don't have time to go into that now, but a Christian can be a happy, giving Christian, and then set out to win souls day by day and God will help you in that. You can. You know, that is what those Christians did. That is the Great Commission get them saved, then get them baptized, and setting out to winning others and then teaching them to do exactly what I told you to do - get them saved and get them baptized.

Oh, what a happy life for a Christian, with the Bible day by day and following the Lord and reading and praying and giving and winning souls. You can be a happy Christian.