

Out of Darkness

by Dr. Manford G. Gutzke

My Home

I have not always believed in God. I grew to manhood as an unbeliever. Of course I was conscious of the idea of God; I was living in a community where there were churches, and I went to church. I sang the hymns and I knew that the people talked about God, and I had some feelings that way. But I didn't trust my feelings and I didn't respect them, and I must admit that the whole idea of there being a God was very much a question mark with me. And yet I was not a rebel. I grew to young manhood without feeling guilty about my unbelief. I did feel uneasy, however, because I had nothing else to take the place of God and felt altogether alone in the universe. That didn't feel so good.

Things are much different now, for I do not only believe in God, but I believe that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, that He came into this world specifically to die for sinners and that He is able, without any question, to save to the uttermost all those that come unto God by Him. And I firmly believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, what we commonly call the Bible, actually is the Word of God. I believe that anybody, reading the Bible, can come to know God. But even before I became conscious of these truths, some things happened in my childhood that made certain impressions on me which afterwards were useful when I did come to faith. If you have a home and are raising a family, you may wonder to what extent your home life will affect a child that is very young. That's where my story is going to start - when I was very young.

My mother died when I was three and a half years old. I have glimpses of her in my memory that I have cherished throughout the years, but there is one incident in particular that has always stayed clear in my mind. It was the last time I ever saw her alive. She was quite a young woman; I don't think she was thirty years of age when she died. I had no understanding as to why so many strangers were in the house and why everybody seemed to be so upset. I was a little boy and I can only remember being in the kitchen and staying out of the way. And then someone came calling me and took me to my mother's bedroom. Apparently she had asked to be left alone with her little three and a half year old boy. And then I recall her talking to me.

I really remember more about it than I can take time to tell you, and one time later on when I gave this testimony my father quietly said to me that what I had to say was very nice and beautiful, but he doubted very much that I really remembered it. So I said, "Let me describe the room." And I described the room as I remembered it - where the bed was, where the window was, and what the situation was. I remember how my father looked at me and said, "Well, you remember all right. It was exactly that way." But this is what I recall above all other things . . . how my mother looked into my face. I remember that of all the people I had seen outside crying, she was the only one who was not crying. I can remember her smiling at me, and how she had told me to be a good boy and always do what my father told me to do, and then she added these words: "And you come and be with me where I am going to be." That was all. I thought no more of it at the time and I didn't think of it for years. But years later this was used in my life, almost like a beacon. But I must pass on and tell you some other things in my family life.

I think of my father who lived to be eighty nine years and eleven months old, if he had lived ten days longer, he would have been ninety years old when he died. He was an honest man, a clean spoken man, and a hard working man. I would say that he was a God-fearing man but not a God-trusting man. Could

you understand how a man could fear God and yet not trust Him? For instance, my father believed in the Ten Commandments. He really felt they were the law of God. And he believed in judgment. He believed that God would judge those who broke the Commandments. He felt he had broken the Commandments and he felt he would be judged. I know that my father believed in hell and he expected to go there. And as he tried to live an honest, sincere life, I think one thing he had in mind was that the more honest he was, the more sincere he was, the more straight-forward he was, the less he would suffer on the judgment day. He was not a member of the church and never made a profession of faith in those days. Years later he did become a church member. But in my boyhood days he was not a member of the church and when I was about nine or ten years old he stopped going to church. The church officers whom I will be telling you about in my story were so careless and ungodly, he just quit going.

When I was about six years old my father married again. I think the best way to describe my stepmother is the way my sister spoke of her not long ago when we were thinking back over these things and my step mother had already been gone for several years. My sister said that she was the most belligerently moral woman she ever knew. And truly that was so. My stepmother tried to do everything right and she tried to see to it that we did everything right. She was a hard taskmaster but she was fair. She was just as hard on herself as she was on us. And yet I remember how she showed a deep hunger for the things of God.

I didn't realize it at the time but as I look back I am sure that it affected my mind a great deal the way she used to sing hymns. She had one of those cloth-backed, limp-covered books that I think were called the Moody-Sankey Hymnals. It had about a thousand hymns in it, in print that was so fine the average person couldn't read it without a magnifying glass. But she was able to, and I still picture her sitting in a high back rocking chair outside the house on a summer evening, and with her clear soprano voice, singing the evangelical hymns. She sang the gospel hymns. They always struck a deep chord in my heart. I don't know why it didn't occur to me that you should believe them. I never thought of believing them. I just thought they were nice and I liked the way she sang them. I can remember her singing, "Come to the Savior. Make no delay. Here in our midst He's standing today, tenderly saying, Come." I never heard anyone sing that the way she used to sing it. And now when I think back on it, I believe that she was a hungry soul. She really longed for those things but she was not a professing Christian and not a church member.

When I think about my home life I have to think of things like this. There was no profanity. My father never took God's name in vain. There was no loose or careless speech. None of us ever felt free to say anything that was suggestive or to use language that in any way was coarse or unclean. And then, I suppose, of all the things that I think definitely affected me one of the most important was our Sabbath observance. Now we were not members of the church. None of us were professing Christians. But both my father and stepmother made it a rule to do no labor on the Sabbath day. And I want to tell you they carried that out to the letter. There was nothing done that could be counted as work on Sunday. And that made a big difference. There were no boisterous games played and there were no excursions made that had an interest in business, or for that matter an interest in pleasure. I doubt very much that my family would ever have gone to a picnic on Sunday. They just wouldn't do that kind of thing. And I'm sure that made a big impression on me. So you see I had the feeling in my boyhood days that God was real and yet in some sense He was not our God. He was our Creator and He was our Judge, and we would have dealings with Him. But the idea that God would forgive you and be gracious to you, never once occurred to me in all those childhood days.

If you have children in your home and you're around where children are, somehow get across to them

the idea that Jesus loves them. Teach them the little song, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." I don't know whether we ever sang that song or not, but somehow the fact never did get through to us. And I remember that I grew up as a boy without any feeling that God particularly had me in mind. That came later . . . by the grace of God.

My Church

The church in our country community happened to be a Presbyterian church. But if it had been a Methodist church or a Baptist church, I'd have gone to it. We would have gone to whatever the local church was and in that particular community it happened to be a Presbyterian church. Everybody in our neighborhood went to church some of the time. Now in Canada when I was a boy, the law forbade any kind of labor on Sunday. It was against the law to take a team of horses in the field and to work them on Sunday. So we had Sundays free.

We had preaching in that country church every Sunday afternoon at three o'clock. Our Sunday School was every afternoon at two o'clock. And going to church meant that you dressed up in your best and that you acted your best. You met your neighbors and you talked with them. I remember that my ordinary experience of church service brought no particular pleasure. They sang hymns, but they sang them slow and the hymns were always long and had many words and ideas that were strange. Then there would be Scripture reading in the course of the service. It was usually unintelligible. I didn't understand what was read and I didn't think anybody else did either. And I don't think anybody cared. There was a certain amount of Bible to be read, so they read it. And then there was prayer that went on and on. Even now I can remember people calling it "the long prayer." Well it was a long prayer. And then there were sermons. I don't remember any of them. Perhaps there were discussions of some sort. And yet the man must have talked about something. He couldn't come out Sunday after Sunday, the same man, preaching all the time, without saying something. But as a boy all I know is that it never did reach me.

Communion services were held every three months. They were impressive, but I didn't know what they meant, and the boys I went to school with didn't know what they meant. Oh, we heard what they said about, "This is my body, broken for you." But we didn't understand. And then there was the cup. It meant nothing to me. My family were not members of the church and we never partook of communion. Nobody ever asked us to join that church. In my boyhood days I never saw anyone join that church. In fact, before I became a Christian myself I never saw anybody ever get up and say, "I have now accepted Jesus Christ."

I remember going to Sunday School. We went at two o'clock. In the summertime there were women in attendance and little children who had to be taken care of, and there were two men. That's all. In the winter, quite a few people went in because it was warm in the building. But we came into the building slowly. I remember that after the first hymn, then there would be a little silent time when we who were outside would know that the invocation prayer was being said. And then, during the second hymn, the grammar school boys would go in. After that there would be the reading of the lesson from the lesson leaflets and then there would be the singing of a third hymn. That's when the teen age boys, the fellows who were half grown men, would file in. And then we would go to our classes and start our lesson for the day. After the lesson was well begun, perhaps even half way through, the men would come in and they would sit in the back of the adult class. Throughout all of that there was what I would call decorum. Oh, we all acted right. You could say we acted dead . . . that would be more like it. There was silent attention. It could have been a funeral service. I suspect, when I think back on it, there probably was a

considerable lack of comprehension. Maybe there were some people who knew what was going on. I only know that as a boy, and even later as a high school boy, I never knew what it was all about. In all my boyhood days I never heard any layman discuss the gospel, or mention the gospel, or talk about the gospel. I never heard anybody except a preacher, talk about the things of God. If anybody believed in the Lord in our church they certainly kept it a secret.

I can recall when I was a lad about sixteen years old, working out in the hay field, and stopping there and talking to some of the neighbor boys. They were just about my age and I sort of chummed around with them; we were pals together. And I recall how one of these boys made the comment one day, "I don't know what it means to be a Christian. But I am going to find out, and I am going to be one." I recall how I thought in my heart, that's a laudable ambition, and I don't know but what I ought to do that myself. But we didn't have an idea in the world what it really meant to be a Christian, and I wouldn't say that we were particularly encouraged by the people in our church.

Take, for instance, the matter of stewardship, the matter of giving. This is years ago, and money was scarce, but even as scarce as it was, I think you'll appreciate this. My father was in the fifteen cent class. And that means it was proper for him to give fifteen cents at an offering. If he had given a quarter the neighbors would have thought he was showing off. Fifteen cents - that's what he would give. Now if he had given only a nickel they would have said he was stingy. If he had given only a dime, they would have said he was close. But he gave fifteen cents and that's about where he belonged. And I remember the satisfaction that was in him when he was considered in the twenty cent class. And when he got up to where he could give twenty-five cents he was just like a rich man. That's exactly the kind of church we had. Do you think that would affect a boy's mind? I knew what it cost to buy a horse. I knew what a cow was worth. I knew what it would cost to buy a new buggy. I knew those things. And I knew what fifteen cents was: the cost of a plug of tobacco. I knew about that. And that's what you gave to the church. Do you think that doesn't mean something to a child? It's just as bad today - maybe even worse. Look at the father who goes to a football game and it costs him six dollars for a seat: the next day he gives a dime or twenty-five cents to the Sunday School offering. Don't you think that his little boy knows about that? I did, and I added it up just like that. Whatever there was to the church surely didn't amount to much. You could just tell. Look at what the people gave.

Now so far as participation was concerned what would you participate in? The people who sang were the people who liked to sing. Some of the folks in the choir didn't have the best morals, but if they wanted to sing in the choir, nobody said in front of them that they couldn't. Do you think that would make an impression on a boy? It certainly did with me.

In that community where I grew up, I was the first boy ever to go to high school. So, when they needed a substitute teacher for the little boys in our Sunday School, you can be sure they picked on me. It was easy . . . by the time we read through the lesson leaflets and I asked all the questions that were on that lesson leaflet, and by the time they did the memory work, twenty minutes was over.

When I think back on the whole thing I am satisfied that the basic reasons for my unbelief, the fact that I really grew up without any faith in God, developed right there in that church. God wasn't important. The things of the Lord were not important. And the things of heaven and the things of the gospel were not intelligible. It was just a lot of mumble jumble. They didn't talk that way in the street. They wouldn't talk that way to anybody else. And so, whatever it was, it was just an act that people put on, and after all it was respectable.

My Lone Witness

When I was about nine or ten years old, a new farmer, a new neighbor - Mr. Caruthers - moved in. He bought a farm just about a mile and half from our place. This man came to church the first Sunday he was in the community. Now that was a startling thing. His wife wasn't well and she couldn't come with him. But he came alone with a five year old boy. It struck me as strange. A man wouldn't have to come to church the first Sunday he was in the community. He would have to take some time to settle down. He found out on that first Sunday, coming at three o'clock to the church service, that we had Sunday School at two o'clock. The next Sunday he came at two o'clock to Sunday School, and he went in on time.

As mentioned earlier, there were only two men who came to the Sunday School in the summertime. One man was superintendent, but we boys were never greatly impressed by that, because he was the only man that held a local political office, and we always felt that anything he did in the way of Sunday School operations and so on was good politics. The other man was the treasurer. This man might well have been one of the Lord's own, but the circumstances were such and his teaching was such that all thought that all he lacked was a dress. If he had put on a dress, everything would have been proper. He seemed like a sissy to us, and yet he could have been a fine Christian person. These were the only two men who went in on time. But when Mr. Caruthers first came to Sunday School, he went in on time and from then on he always did. He would smile at the neighbors out in the yard, and he would talk to them in passing, but when it came two o'clock and that organ would start to play that first music, Mr. Caruthers was in there. It's no wonder that the second Sunday he came, they made him teacher of the adult class. And he was a good one.

Now we boys noticed that he carried a Bible. You may think it's strange, but we would be suspicious of any man who carried a Bible and wasn't a preacher. If the man was a preacher, he could carry a Bible, because after all it was a sort of a tool of his trade. He needed that. But any other man not a preacher carrying a Bible we would suspect him of being a crook. We just didn't believe in him. Then we also heard that Mr. Caruthers would return thanks in his own home at the table at meals. It is true that a few people did say grace at the table, but either the mother did it, or little children did it, but I didn't know of any man who ever did. Now in our own house it was silent. We dropped our heads, and we each one said our own blessing. Silently. We at least had that much. We had been taught what to say as little children. But it was reported that when Mr. Caruthers would return thanks sometimes he would extend his prayer to two or three sentences, and they weren't always the same. That marked him as being different.

I was one of the grammar school boys who gathered out in the barn before Sunday School started, and out there we discussed this strange case of Mr. Caruthers. The best hypothesis we could agree upon, the best explanation we knew, was that this was a case of a genius for religion. We didn't know anything about a genius, but we had read about them. We had heard that some of them were poets. We had never seen one, but we knew that there were such men as wrote poetry and they would have a genius for poetry. And then there were musicians . . . like Mendelssohn and Beethoven and Handel, these men whose names were on our church music. Probably they were exceptional in music . . . geniuses. Now we thought with reference to genius that such a person was a bit cracked and a little bit off, but not dangerous. That's the way we thought of Mr. Caruthers.

We had an annual offering for foreign missions in our Sunday School. In an ordinary year we gave altogether about \$3.85. We knew where most of that money came from. If it was a real good year it might run up as high as \$4.20, or even \$4.40; poor years ran down to about \$2.85. Well the first Sunday that this man Caruthers was in the picture, and we took up the foreign missions offering, he personally

brought in a check for \$40.00! That was the price of two cows, and the following Sunday we boys hardly got into Sunday School at all. We discussed that thing and it was utterly baffling to us. Why on earth would a man give that much money to send the Christian message to South America? He had never been there. Or to Africa? He had never been there. Why, that was big money . . . the price of two cows! Why would he do it?

So this man continued to intrigue me. I used to sit beside him when I got big enough to sing in the choir. He used to carry a little pocket notebook and a little stub pencil and, would you believe it, when that preacher would talk, that man would make notes. I was in high school at the time, and I used to look over that man's shoulder at the notes he made. He wrote so poorly I couldn't read his notes very well, but I never could figure out one bit of connection between what he put down and what the preacher said. And now that I am years older, I suspect that there wasn't any connection. I think that while Mr. Caruthers was apparently listening to the preacher, he had some good thoughts of his own and he just made a note of them. Maybe that's wrong: when the preacher would announce where he was going to read, Mr. Caruthers opened the Bible at the right place.

I didn't understand it. And yet later, this man's personal testimony was used of the Lord, in bringing me to faith. When I asked myself if I knew one case of a person who was a real believer, I had to think of old man Caruthers. Before he retired from that farm, the last winter he spent in that community, he made personal engagements with each one of his neighbors. He would ask the whole family to be together, and he would sit down and ask them - "Do you know how to be saved?" And then he would tell them the gospel story. On the last day that that man went to our church before he moved away to the city of Winnipeg to retire, seven people joined the church on confession of faith. This was the only time in its history so far as I know, that that ever occurred.

This man I often speak of as my lone witness. And when I look back on it, I think how wonderful that man's testimony was. There was no support from any other people. But he evidently knew the Lord and walked with the Lord. I've always counted him as a personal friend of mine, and afterwards when I was called into the ministry, I went to see him in his home in Winnipeg, Canada. I told him that I was a Christian and going into the ministry today because once upon a time he gave to foreign missions the price of two cows. And I remember how with tears in his eyes he said, "Oh, my! Oh, my! Suppose I hadn't done it!" And he looked at me and said, "When I was thinking about giving that money, I said to myself I can't afford that. Why that's the price of two cows. And then I would think of the people who were lost and the souls that were lost, and I said I can't leave them. I can't afford not to."

My High School

As I look back, I see that even in those days when I was not a believer and when the circumstances were producing unbelief in me, there were certain other elements actually preparing me and affecting me that God afterwards could use to lead me to faith.

I attended a small high school in a small town. For me, it was a big affair. I had been living on a farm. As a matter of fact I lived out on a farm five miles from my school . . . five horse and buggy miles. That's a long piece. We didn't have any buggy horses, so to speak; we just took work horses to drive to town. And in the summertime when the horses were working on the farm, it meant that I walked that five miles to school. And not on pavement, either. It was just an ordinary dirt road, or mud road, as the case might be. I was a country boy in a town situation.

Even if it was a small town I didn't feel that way about it. As I look back on that school now, I think

the most important factor in that high school was the principal. Perhaps that's just about the way it should be. Perhaps the most important thing in the congregation is the pastor. Just as the most important part, perhaps, of any team is the manager or the captain . . . the leader. The leader matters especially for boys, and we had a marvelous man as a principal. He was a little Irishman by the name of Finn. I always feel I have to share his name with my friends . . . Theophilus Grant Finn. We didn't give him that name "Theophilus." We could hardly say it. We called him T. G. He was T. G. Finn. As I took back on it now I honor him to this day. He was the soul of honor. Years later when we talked about him, I one time characterized him as a white flame going straight up and that's really and truly what he was. And yet he was not a church member. He didn't take part in church and didn't go, except just occasionally with his family. And yet that man inspired an honor system in our high school that was operated by the boys. I hadn't been on the campus more than a week when it was explained to me. Any boy would be permitted to lie once, then he would get his warning. If he lied twice, the boys would run him off the campus. And I mean I actually saw it happen. I went to school for four years in a high school where the code enforced by the boys was strict honesty.

I may sound awfully naive, but it never dawned on me that a person old enough to go to high school would cheat in an examination. I never thought of such a thing. I thought it was dishonorable. A fellow would be so ashamed he might as well walk on the street naked. I know that I was very fortunate to be in that high school. And yet none of those boys were church members. Not one of them. I never heard of them joining the church. Now, we were not against the church, and this was the most dangerous part about it. We were benevolent toward the church. I think we had the feeling so far as the church is concerned that it's a kind of good thing for people who need it, and there are probably people who feel very lonely and they get real company there. As for the overtones of having faith in God and about the Lord Jesus Christ, and so on, maybe that's just part of the frills you have to put on for that kind of thing. We didn't mean anything bad by it. We really felt benevolent toward the church and the boys would go to church, mind you. And they belonged to Sunday School classes and they went to picnics. They did those things. But nobody took it seriously. If we came across a religious person we thought they were queer, but we were tolerant about that. We saw people, for example, who wouldn't wear jewelry. We had certain Mennonite sects out in our part of the country. We understood about them and we respected them. They were honest people. They wouldn't wear any kind of jewelry. The men wouldn't wear a necktie. We always thought they at least played the game like they meant it.

I think our boys, if they had known that the church needed anything, would have helped the church, but they would have felt like it was a good deed. I was going to high school when the Boy Scouts were originated by Baden Powell. It just kind of put into implementation the way in which our whole high school tried to act. By the way, of that bunch of boys I went to high school with, sixty percent of the boys who went through high school went into professional life. Three out of five turned out to be doctors or lawyers or dentists. We hardly called a banker a professional, but we would rate the banker in there. We didn't count merchants and men like that as professionals. But it was still three out of five. That was the record in that school, but so far as I know even to this day I was the first and only one to enter the ministry. Ministry just wasn't thought about.

Certain attitudes were prevalent among us in my high school days. Take for instance the matter of religion. We knew there was religion in the world and we thought it was a universal, normal, human activity. There was a lot in the world you didn't know, so you felt kind of awed by it. That was religion. It easily turned into superstition. We could all tell each other what the superstitions were. We knew about them. We enjoyed them, and when we saw some people fingering the cross, we figured that was

superstition. When we saw some people with a special regard for the Bible and called it sacred, that was superstition to us. We weren't particularly mean about it. I don't remember that I ever despised it or made fun of it, but I never was impressed by it.

We would go into the church and go through the usual form, the ritual, you know. Well, when we would talk about that afterwards we decided the ritual was organized that way to help people who didn't know anything about what they were doing. Just keep them in line and they would all work together. After all, we boys were accustomed to marching. We would march in rank, by fours. The only way you can organize them anywhere is to line them up and march them in fours. That's the way you do it. So in church service you line up and you go through with your ritual. That's the way in which you do it. After all, how are you going to get three hundred people to do the same thing? So you have your reading, your responses, one verse by one group and one verse by the other group. It didn't impress us, but it looked like a practical thing and we had no objection to it.

We knew that religion was somehow related to respectability. We knew that it was important to be respectable and we expected to do the things that made a person respectable. I was going to be a lawyer. There were others who were going to be doctors and so on, and I imagine every single one of us thought that when we would set up our business, wherever we were, of course we would join the church. On the whole, we felt that religion was related somehow to decency.

We knew about the Ten Commandments and we loved the way in which they read. Thou shalt not lie; we agreed with that. Thou shalt not kill; we subscribed to that. Thou shalt not covet what belongs to your neighbors; that meant you would be honest and fair and square, and that made sense. Now as to what those hymns meant and those references to the blood of Christ and "what can wash away my sins, nothing but the blood of Jesus" . . . as to what that meant, we didn't know and frankly we cared less. It didn't matter so much to us. We had a feeling that in a general way Jesus of Nazareth had set a good example and we just appreciated it.

We thought that so far as actual Christianity was concerned it was a kind of a western, cultural product; that it blended Jewish and Roman and Greek cultures with some sort of German Teutonic overtones; and that the general theme was the golden rule. So far as Jesus was concerned, we considered Him to be an honored example of how religion would be if it was at its best.

My Loneliness

While I was in high school I became very conscious of being lonely. I was young in years, but big for my age. And I am very conscious of the fact that psychologists would probably say that this feeling of loneliness was due to my biological development, and I don't doubt that this was a contributing factor. When you reach a certain stage in life you become conscious of yourself, and it may be that my sense of loneliness was actually inherent in the emergence of my self consciousness at the age of thirteen or fourteen. I wouldn't be surprised about that, but I'm also sure there were other circumstances in my life that were partly responsible for my feeling.

My stepmother usually was too busy to show affection. She wasn't unfair and I have nothing to complain about except that I grew up as a boy without knowing what it was to have a consistently kind situation at home. What's more we lived in a neighborhood where all the people were from the British Isles. And our name was Gutzke. Why they couldn't even say it, and they certainly couldn't spell it. It's a European name, but it was foreign in Canada. Our family had been in Canada for three generations, longer even than our neighbors (I was the third generation in Canada), but still we were treated as if we

were outsiders. So far as high school was concerned, I was a country boy. In that whole school there were only about three or four country boys. The rest were all from the town.

Suddenly it became clear to me, along about the time when I was a junior in high school, that nobody really cared about me. I was just something that was in the road for most people. If they could get anything out of me, then I was useful. If I could do something for them, that was fine, too. But if I couldn't do something for them, the sooner I was out of the way the better for everybody. I came to realize that practically the only people I had as friends were people who were expecting to get something out of me . . . even among the boys. But worse than that, I became conscious of the fact that I would hear two people talking about a third person. When they met him they treated him nicely, but behind his back they talked about him. And I was unfavorably impressed by that. It was a general false attitude or false front that people wore. I now would call it social hypocrisy. It shocked me. I couldn't believe anybody.

At home, I felt as though I was a trouble to the folks. So far as the people in school were concerned, most of the time I seemed to be a trouble to them, too. I couldn't believe my teachers really cared about me. They wanted me to do my work and to keep quiet. Others just wanted me to get out of the way and let them have my place. It wasn't all as hard boiled as that, but deep down inside, it hurt. It just hurt like everything. I remember thinking of my mother and it struck me that, if she were living, there would be somebody who would really care for me. It wouldn't matter whether she liked me all the time, but she would care about me. That I was sure about. And suddenly I wondered, is my mother alive? Could I actually find her? Would I ever be with her again? I knew that she would be one person who could know all about me and would care for me just the same. That's when I had the sudden realization that I had no confidence about heaven.

I realized I didn't believe the Genesis story. You see, I had read widely and I had gone through our courses in science in high school. I knew about the origin of the world according to the nebular hypothesis and that appealed to me. With reference to the origin of plants and animals, I had heard about Darwin's theory of evolution . . . that sounded good. Yes, I believed in evolution for just a little while, but even before I was out of high school I quit it; I gave it up way back in my unbelieving days. You know why? I gave it up because it was proposed to be a scientific fact and they had no evidence. No real evidence. They have appearances, but no evidence that it actually took place that way, and I dismissed it from my mind. You can imagine my surprise now at this late stage in my life when I come across it in church and in church thinking . . . here, there and everywhere. People fall for it just like we fell for it when I was a boy, because it seems to sound so reasonable. But the same question could be asked today that I asked way back there as a senior in high school. Where's the evidence? Give me one case to show that it actually took place.

In spite of all of that, even though I gave up on evolution, I still didn't believe Genesis. In fact, I didn't have any confidence in the Bible at all. After all it was one of the religious books. The Mohammedans have one. The Hindus have one. The people of the Far East have one. The more I thought about it, the more I looked on the Bible as just a literary deposit out of the history of the times. Today when I come across that kind of thinking and when I read it in religious literature, it makes me smile. I thought of that when I was in high school and I had no confidence in the reality of God. I couldn't be sure about God. Sure, the universe was here and maybe it did have some great first cause. But why should we believe it was caused by a person?

When I looked about me, it was easy to see that smart men didn't pay any attention to God. I had noticed in the community where I grew up, the really competent, capable men, the men who amounted

to something in business and the men who amounted to something in finance as far as we knew, the rich men . . . oh, they went to church. Sure . . . to please their wives and to please their children. They were in favor of morals and so they supported the church. They would even give chimes to the church because, after all, they were in favor of the church. And, after all, a five hundred dollar contribution looked awfully big to people back in those days. But we high school boys looked underneath the covers on that and we found out those men didn't believe in God.

I had no confidence in heaven. I had no confidence in the soul and I want to tell you right now I was miserable. I realized I was all alone. I felt in my soul like a little boy in a great big warehouse, about midnight, in the dark . . . alone and with noises. Believe me, I wasn't happy about it.

My Start

I had just finished my junior year in high school when I began to start toward God. The loneliness which I spoke of earlier became very acute. Life just wasn't worthwhile. There didn't seem to be any reason for doing anything. I went to school but it didn't seem to be really important whether I studied or whether I didn't study, whether I made good grades or whether I didn't make good grades. I had no interest in trying to please my teachers or trying to please anybody.

I had lived a very quiet life out in the country and, generally speaking, had not participated in any sort of what you would ordinarily call bad habits. At the same time I recall that those were the days when I used to love to go downtown and spend time in the local pool room. Now if you know anything about pool rooms in a small town, you will know that, generally speaking, it is not the best people in the community who are to be found there. And yet I went to those pool rooms a great deal. Now I didn't use tobacco and I didn't drink and I didn't swear even though many of the fellows in the pool room did swear and they did drink and they did use tobacco and they told dirty stories . . . and yet I went there. You know why I went? I was welcome. Those fellows made me welcome, even if I didn't do what they did. They treated me like they were glad to see me around, and I couldn't think of any place else where that would be true. At the same time I had a very real sense of sin. I felt in my heart I wasn't what I ought to be. And that was a very real thing. I remember in those days I used to wish that evolution were true, because if evolution were true then we would just be like animals and couldn't be blamed for the way we acted. But I really had no confidence in the theory of evolution.

That's when I thought about my mother. I suppose somebody could call that homesickness. Well I guess it was, but is that bad? Would that be something bad for a boy to want to be with people who would care for him? But even this line of thinking brought very little comfort, because I didn't know for sure if I would ever see her again. And when I think about that now I rather am of the opinion that my major concern was not so much in seeing her, because after all I didn't know her; a boy three and a half years old would remember very little about his mother. But I suspect that the main thing I had in mind was that I felt she would care for me. And so you see my major concern centered in my own misery.

You might call me selfish, but I don't feel I was any more selfish than a man that has the toothache and is thinking about his tooth. I'll tell you right now if a man has a toothache and he is thinking about his tooth, it's small help to call him selfish. He would be glad to be rid of it. But he's got it and it's bothering him. And that's the way it was with me, thinking about my loneliness. Mind you, all I wanted was to be with somebody who would care for me. Isn't it too bad someone didn't tell me then about the Lord Jesus Christ? Isn't it too bad that somehow in Sunday School and church it never dawned on me that the Lord Jesus Christ is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother? Maybe this fact was touched upon at some

time in our church, but nobody seemed to act like they believed it. If such a statement ever was made, I would have doubted it because nobody seemed to really care about the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody ever talked about Him as I remembered it.

I used to just wish and wish and wish that heaven might be real. But that would only be possible if God was real. And then I would say to myself, whether or not God is real I don't know. I was rather afraid to think that there is no God. I used to ask myself, who knows whether there is a God or not? And one night while I was at home there on the farm I remembered bringing in the cows after the day's work, and I was walking across a stubble field. Suddenly it came to me just as clear as anything . . . if God is real He sees me right now. I am in His presence. He sees me and He knows me. He knows I don't know and He knows I don't believe, but He knows me. And so it came to me. How about turning to Him? How about just asking Him? Of course you don't know whether He is there, but if He is there, then that's the answer. And I just said to myself I'll do it. So I stopped there in the wheat field and the cows went on toward home, and I stood and looked up into the starry sky. I remember I reached up and took off my cap, and I felt like a fool, because maybe there wasn't anything up there. But I reassured myself that if there isn't anything up there then nobody sees me. But if there is anything up there I am certainly not going to be presumptions.

So I took off my cap and, looking up into that twinkling sky, this is about what I said: "if You are there, You know I don't know and You know that I don't mean anything bad by that. I just don't know. But if You're there, and if heaven is real, if anything a man can do here on earth will help to get him there, if there is any kind of condition to meet and he can make it, if You show me what to do I'll do it." I meant it. You know I had the strangest experience. I felt as if I had been heard, but I was afraid I was just fooling myself about that. Yet, at the same time there came into my heart a really quiet joy. You know why? I had committed myself to something. If there was a God I had told Him, and I meant every word I said. I would play it straight. If He would show me what to do, I'd do it. And when I went home that night, I milked the cows and I felt real good, because I felt as though something had been done.

The next morning when I awoke the glow was still in my heart and I was thinking what a wonderful thing if God shows me and I can do it; then I'll know that I am going to go to heaven. Then I started wondering . . . how would God show me? How would He show me what He wanted me to do? I wanted to be sure I would recognize it. Would He speak to me in the night? I stopped to think about that. If I heard my name at night what would happen? Maybe I would think I was losing my mind. Will I see a vision? Will I believe it? Would I have a dream that would come vividly to me? No, if I had a dream I would just think it was something I ate. Would I see my name in a cloud? Would the clouds form in a certain way and would my name appear there? No, the wind would come and blow it away and I wouldn't believe I had ever seen it. Suppose I walked in the woods and I saw my name there with the sticks and twigs just arranged in a certain way for my name. I remember even then thinking that nobody can spell it.

I began to think that there was no way in which God could get across to me. Suddenly I had an amazing idea. Maybe this is what the church is about. Maybe that's what you ought to learn when you go to church. And right there I made up my mind I would go to church every Sunday and I would listen. And maybe God would use some preacher to tell me something about how a soul could get right with Him.

My Program

Why not go ask the preacher? I knew who the preacher was. I knew where his home was in town and I could go to him. But I figured that if I go to the preacher and tell him I want to know how to get to heaven, he will just tell me what he thinks. And I won't know whether that's right or not. How would I know? And as I got to thinking about it, it was a strange thing. You know what I said to myself? I said if there is a God, He can make that preacher tell me. The preacher won't even have to know. God will use him and he will get it across to me and I'll know when he tells me. So with that I went to church.

After a couple of Sundays nothing had happened. I listened and I didn't get a glimmer of anything I wanted to hear. I couldn't make out why he was even taking the time with the things that he was talking about. So while this was going on in this way, my own heart and mind got a little discouraged. After a couple of weeks I didn't feel quite the elation that I had felt. The glow wasn't quite as bright as it had been and I became terribly afraid that I just might forget all about it and I'd be worse off than before. I didn't want that to happen. And I began thinking that, after all, going to church once a week and listening for twenty or twenty five minutes to something that wasn't really directed my way . . . that was pretty thin. And then suddenly it dawned on me. Maybe this is what the Bible is about, and I could certainly start reading the Bible.

I had a Bible which I had received for regular attendance at Sunday School. What this actually meant was something like this: in the first place we were too poor to go on vacation and I was at home all year 'round; in the second place, it meant I had good health because I never was sick, so of course I was ready to go to church every Sunday; in the third place it meant my father had a strong mind because he saw to it that I went to church. So, because I had a perfect record I got a Bible, and that's the Bible the Lord used to open His truth to me. Of course I didn't read it in the presence of anybody else.

I was living and working on my father's farm and going to school, and that meant that at night in my bedroom I would light the coal oil lamp and I would take my Bible and I would read at least one chapter, sometimes more. I read through Genesis. I read through Exodus. I read into Leviticus and when I got into Leviticus with all those different sacrifices and offerings I decided to look in the New Testament. And so I turned over to the New Testament and began to read. I was reading fairly carefully because I began to find out that you should pray. I read the place where the disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray and He taught them the Lord's prayer. So I memorized the Lord's prayer. Each night when I would read a chapter of the Bible, I would repeat the Lord's prayer.

I discovered if I was going to be right with God I would have to love Him and I found that very difficult. About that time it had become the fall and the winter of the year and I recall going out one night and looking up into the skies. Up in Canada when the temperature gets to be about 35 degrees below zero, those stars just seem to crackle. I looked up at those stars twinkling and cold, and I thought to myself, how could you love that? It was beautiful but who could love that? I wonder what would have happened if someone had told me that Jesus was to be the object of my love . . . because He was God. What if someone had told me that Jesus of Nazareth really had come for me! True, I went to Sunday School and I went to church and I sang the hymns and it's all in there, but apparently nobody ever seemed to believe it. And so I didn't believe it.

"If you love me keep my commandments." That was the next step. The only commandments I could think of were the Ten Commandments. And so I added that to what I was learning; I memorized the Ten Commandments. Each night I would read a chapter of the Bible and I would recite the Ten Commandments and I would repeat the Lord's prayer. By now I was following a regular ritual.

If I was in town where there were services both morning and evening I went both morning and evening. I didn't want to miss it if God was to speak to me. One time when I was at home on the farm and I was still a high school student, the weather was so bad one Sunday afternoon nobody went out. My father wouldn't let me take a horse out. He said that the weather was too bad to take a horse out into that storm. So I walked three and a half miles to attend the Sunday afternoon services at the church. What difference did it make? I was young, and I was healthy and I walked through that storm in order to get to church. But the janitor didn't even come. They didn't even light the fire. There was a terrible blizzard. I remember standing outside in that weather, and I pulled out my old Ingersol watch and I stayed there about twenty minutes. Then I said, "Well, I kept my part of the bargain." I had said I was going to go to church every Sunday and that's what I did.

One night I was in a Presbyterian Church service and the preacher preached on heaven. First man I ever heard in a church talk about heaven. I was very much interested. I don't remember exactly what he said, but I do recall how he said at the end, "I have been talking to you about heaven but I haven't told you how to get there. If anybody wants to know you just come and see me at my home." So when we came out of the church that night I spoke to the two young students who were with me - two young men students, the three of us had gone to church together - and I said to them, "I am going to fool that guy." They said, "How?" I replied, "He said if anybody didn't know how to get to heaven to come and ask him; I am going to go and ask him." They said, "We want to go too."

Tuesday night we startled this preacher, I know. He wondered what in the world had happened to bring these three young students to see him. I was the spokesman. I started off, "You said Sunday night if anybody didn't know how to get to heaven you would tell them."

"Yes."

"Well," I said, "I don't know and I wish you would tell me." He had a bit of trouble getting started, and I sympathized with him. It isn't very easy to do. He started asking me questions and found out that I didn't drink. I didn't even smoke. And I didn't gamble. I didn't use profanity. I lived a clean life. I went to church every Sunday. I read a chapter of the Bible every night. I repeated the Ten Commandments. I repeated the Lord's prayer. When he found out all those things he said to me, "Why, you don't have anything to worry about. Everything is all right. You just keep right on that road and you'll get there. Just stay right on like that." So when we came out of there I remember I turned to the fellows who were with me. I said, "Hah! He doesn't know either." They asked why. I said, "Listen, I have been reading and memorizing and going to church and all that for a couple of years. I've been asking for guidance and I have been holding the phone receiver to my ears for over two years; there's nothing coming across. That's a dead wire."

My Search

As a young school teacher I still wasn't a believer. Down inside me was a vague ambition to be a lawyer. I was already beginning to read books that had to do with evidence and things of that nature. But at the same time temptations were more pressing. You'll remember I had undertaken to live according to the Ten Commandments. When I was younger it didn't seem to give me any trouble, but by now I was getting out and among young people, and so on, and I became more and more tempted to do what other people were doing. And I would ask myself the question, why should I keep the morals of the day? These are only rules which society makes up to protect itself and again I would think, maybe after all evolution is true, or at least it's a better way of looking at things. Maybe after all we are only animals and

I would think about that, you know, and I would almost wish we were, because the animals seemed to be more free. They did anything they wanted to do and didn't seem to have anybody that objected to it. And why not live that way?

In my own reading and in my own study I had become interested in Greek thinking, in the old writing of the Greek philosophers, and I had noticed that as the Greeks were trying to figure out the things in this world, they had developed three different schools of thought that some of you will recognize right away. Two of them are mentioned in Paul's experience in the seventeenth chapter of the Book of Acts.

There were those who were called Stoics. Now these were people who said that you ought to be good just because it was good to be good. They were just that kind of people. They were good, as we say, for goodness' sake. And they were a hardheaded folk. They were moral, but they were not lovely to be with. Another group was called Epicureans. They followed the teachings of one man by the name of Epicurus. They had a philosophy that went like this: the only good that exists is the experience that you are having now; if you can have any pleasure you'd better have it now because this is the only time you are going through here. It was their custom to say, "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." And then there was another group called the Cynics. The Bible doesn't particularly speak about them, but secular history will tell you. These Cynics said it doesn't make any difference what you do, it's never going to turn out good anyway. Everything is just plain bad.

When I thought about these three different ways in which the Greeks thought, I found in my own heart and spirit that I would have agreed with the Epicureans. "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Better have a good time now. You're going to be a long time dead. But if I was going to keep up my Bible reading, and if I was going to quote the Ten Commandments, and if I was going to recite the Lord's prayer, I didn't feel so free to do the things that are wrong. Then I would say to myself, why keep up the program of Bible reading? I have been doing this now for over two years; it's just my own ritual; it's just my own procedure; it was self imposed. If I put it on I could take it off. And when I'd think about that I would say to myself, but I haven't yet proven this thing. I don't know for sure that God isn't. It might yet be that God is real, because I have only been at it two years . . . and eternity is a long time. And if God is, and He knows me, maybe He knows that I am not worthy; that I am just the kind of person who will hunt for two years and then quit.

And so I would go along. But I didn't have any heart for it. Even then I could see that the issue was really one of faith. What did I really believe? I remember how often I caught myself saying I'm only going to believe what I see. I can still remember some of the ways in which I checked up on that. I had a lot of time to myself. I was teaching school out in the country and I took long walks and I would think about these things, and I would wonder, now is this really a sound idea . . . to just believe what I see? When I stopped to think about it, I realized I see some things I don't believe.

Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever stood on a railway track and looked at it going off into the distance? Isn't it true that you see the rails coming together when you look down a railway track? But do they come together? You know right well they don't come together, but that's what it looks like. Now if you are going to believe only what you see, what about those railroad tracks? They come together. Do you believe it? Of course you don't. So you see you don't really believe what you see.

You believe what you know better than what you actually see. You interpret it. Do I believe that Napoleon lived? Yes, I believe Napoleon lived, but I never saw him. Do I believe Julius Caesar lived? Yes, I really believed that he lived, that he was emperor in Rome. Did I ever see him? No. Do I believe there is such a city as Paris? Yes. But have I seen Paris? No. Do I believe that there is such a city as London? Yes, I believe it. But have I seen it? No.

Perhaps I believe only what I can understand. What I can't understand I won't believe. But now look at this: the same food is eaten, we will say, by a dog and he grows hairs. And it is eaten by a chicken and the chicken gets feathers. It might even be given to a fish and he would grow scales. How can the same food turn out to be fur on a cat, hair on a dog or a horse, and feathers on a chicken? How can that be? And I'd wonder about that and wonder about it; I didn't understand it, but I had to believe it. The evidence was there. And I found out that I really believed things I couldn't understand.

Then I would think to myself that doubting is scientific. And if I can possibly doubt I should doubt, because it's intelligent. So I asked myself about that. Is it really true that I should doubt just as long as I possibly could? I was boarding in a certain home at that time and I raised this question with myself. When my hostess, my landlady brings me my scrambled eggs in the morning, shall I ask her whether they are poisoned? They might be, mightn't they? Why don't I know? I wasn't there when she fixed them. When she brings me milk to drink, shall I ask her whether it is chemically pure? It might have been poisoned accidentally. If somebody stopped and asked me to get in the car and ride with him, should I say to him, "Have you had your steering gear checked? Do you know for sure it won't break down? Have you had your axles checked? Do you know for sure they won't break down?" Suppose when I went into one of the big stores and the elevator operator opened the elevator and I was going to step in, but first I would say, "Excuse me, but have you checked your cable to see whether it is actually running?"

That's the way I was looking at the Bible. I wasn't going to believe anything I couldn't prove. I wasn't going to believe anything that wasn't checked. And yet in daily life I accepted things that I felt I would reject in the Bible. Suppose somebody gave me a five dollar bill and I would say to him, are you sure this is a real five dollar bill and it's not counterfeit? Have you had this down to the bank? I have a funny feeling that if I ever started doing like that they would be out looking for me with a net. And yet that's the way I was treating the Bible.

So I started asking myself, how could you trust anybody or anything? How could you ever trust this book? Or how could you trust anything? How do you trust a doctor? Do you know everything he knows? No. Well, why do you ever trust him? Because his patients say he is reliable. How can you ever trust a bridge? You are not an engineer. How can you trust a bridge enough to drive your car out on that bridge? Well if you see some man driving a big truck over, then you can believe it. In other words, if you have witnesses. If you have witnesses who tell you it's true, you can believe it . . . even if you have never seen it, even if you don't understand it.

I began to realize that the Bible has the witness of Christianity that this is the word of God.

My Postmaster

Not long ago I was to speak at a service club luncheon. The secretary was arranging the chairs and all the various items around the table and I was there early before the group gathered. She saw me and came over to talk to me. When she found out I was the speaker of the day, she asked several questions. I remember how she said to me, "You are a preacher, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." Then she turned to me and asked, "Do you believe the Bible?" I said, "Yes." After a while she said, "Do you know who wrote the first five books in the Bible?" I said, "No." She seemed surprised. "You don't know who wrote them?" I said, "No. I think Moses wrote them, but I really don't know." And then she said to me, "And yet you believe it?" I said, "Yes, I believe it." She said, "Isn't that funny?" I said, "Well, maybe it is. What do you think is funny about it?" "Well," she said, "you don't know who wrote it and still you believe it." I said,

"Yep, that's the way it is." I said, "You know, yesterday I went to see my doctor and he gave me a prescription. I went over to the druggist just now and got it. The druggist gave me a bunch of little capsules and I am supposed to take two a day: one in the morning, one at night. You know what? I don't know the name of the druggist who made them up. I don't know the name of the drugs that are in there. I don't have any idea what they'll do to me, but you know what? I am going to take them. I guess I am just funny that way." She gave me a queer look and she didn't ask me any more questions.

You believe when you have reason to trust. That's the way it is with reference to the Bible. Here I was, a young school teacher, and I had gotten that far: I wondered whether or not I had any reason to trust. Just at this time, something happened in the providence of God that really made a big difference in my life. I met a man who was a postmaster, a country postmaster, who believed that Jesus Christ was alive. When he told me that - in so many words - I couldn't believe my ears. Yes, I knew it was in the hymns that we sang. And we would talk about it and something in the Bible reads that way. But I didn't think anybody in his right mind really and truly believed that Jesus was alive. But this old farmer did. He kept the country post office and I went over there Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights for my mail. That's when the mail came out from town.

The postmaster was a widower, alone in his house and we had much time for conversation. It fascinated me because I was interested to find out if there was anything true about God, and whether or not heaven was real. And this old man who believed these things was the first man I could talk to who could discuss these things. I remember we had been visiting together only a little bit when one evening he turned to me and asked, "Are you a Christian?" I had never been asked that question before and, when I stopped to think about it, I knew I wasn't a Mottaftimedan, and I wasn't a Buddhist, and I didn't worship trees and rocks and stones. And after I'd turned that over in my mind, I said, "I don't know, I think maybe you'd say I am." He said, "Oh that's all right, I know now." And of course that provoked me. How did he know when I hadn't even told him? But that got us started.

He asked me a lot of other questions of one sort or another and I learned several things in succession. For instance, when he found out I was interested about getting to heaven, he told me about that. He said, "If you're ever going to get to heaven, it's free. Heaven will just be yours. It will be just given to you." I thought about that and I told him, "Oh no, that isn't true." He said, "Why not?" "Why," I said, "that's immoral." He said, "Immoral? What's immoral about it?" "Well," I told him, "you just now said that I would get it for nothing." "Sure," he said, "you'll receive it absolutely free for nothing." I said, "That doesn't make sense. That's not moral." "Why not?" I said, "The only people who receive anything in this world honestly are the people who work for it. If anybody gets something in this world without working for it and without paying for it, he is either a thief or a crook." So he thought about that and then he said, "You're going to be staying with me here tonight and going to have a little supper with me, and I've got members of my family coming in here and we are all going to eat together. I certainly hope that you will stay, but I will have to remind you that you haven't done anything for this supper, and you haven't paid me anything as yet for it. Now, I don't want to make any profit, so I think about eighteen cents will cover it. If you have eighteen cents, you can give it to me, and if not, you can bring it over later. I do hope you will come and eat with me, but I don't want you to feel like a thief or a crook."

I had a strange feeling that something was slipping, but I was determined and I had further argument with him. I don't know whether he really got me that night but I know I had my first insight into anything that pertains to the gospel. I discovered that you could get something very worthwhile for nothing if the person who had it to give wanted to give it to you. And if they wanted to give it to you as a gift you could have it for nothing. After I admitted that, then he told me, of course that's what salvation

is. It's free as a gift and you can have it. Just free. That's the way you'll get it. I remember one day he asked me this question, "Do you know what grace means?" I was a school teacher and that's just a little five letter word. I opened my mouth to tell him and while I was opening my mouth I thought quickly about grace. I knew about the grace a woman shows when walking across the room. And I knew about the grace that a person asks at the table. And it just occurred to me that neither one of those two would fit the phrase "by grace are you saved." So I had to shut my mouth, and I said, "I don't know."

I felt terribly embarrassed, for I was a school teacher. He said, "Oh, don't mind. Scarcely anybody knows." And that provoked me and I determined that I would find out. If there was a dictionary that could tell me I would certainly know it, the next time he asked me. Then he went on to say this: "One reason why scarcely anybody knows about it is there is so little of it." And then he went on and told me that it had to do with being gracious. He told me how you could offer a meal to a man. If you offer a meal to a man for him to eat and you really wish he hadn't asked you, but you give him a meal just because you don't want him to go away hungry, that's one thing. You said you would give him a meal, but there's no grace in your heart. But if you asked your friend to eat with you and you really wanted him to eat with you, it would make you feel badly if he turned you down. You were really anxious that he should eat with you. You gave him a meal too, but you did this with grace.

That postmaster got the idea across to me that Almighty God really was anxious to save me; that He really wanted to save me. And that was wonderful to listen to. I remember after we had been talking about it for a while, he said to me, "What do you think of that?" I said, "That's too good to be true." He said, "Why do you say that?" I said, "According to you anybody could be saved. Anybody at all." He said, "That's the truth. Whosoever will may come." I could not see it. Several days later he asked me again, "What do you think about the grace of God?" I said, "Just like I told you, it's just too good to be true." Then he asked me, "If there is a God, how big is He?" I said, "He's infinite." "If He is God, how strong is He?" "He's infinite." "How wise would He be?" "He's infinite." "Well," he said, "How good would He be?" I said, "He would be infinitely good." He said, "If God is infinitely good, do you think this is too good for Him?" And in that way he finally got it across to me.

But I was still puzzled about it, and he said, "Aren't you able to believe that?" I said, "No." And he said, "Why not?" I said, "Why would He want to do it? Why would He want to do this wonderful thing for me?" And then he gave me John 3:16 in a way that I'll never forget: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And so the first promise of light began to shine in my soul. Almighty God, because He cared for me, would actually do everything that was necessary to save me . . . if I'd just let Him. He is that kind of Being. He is a God of grace.

I became very much interested then and began to study far more because if that was true, I certainly wanted to know about it in my own soul.

My Savior

That old postmaster wisely explained the plan of salvation to me before I decided about whether I could believe in God, and that's when I came to know the plan of salvation even as I have it today: that salvation is by the Lord Jesus Christ; that a man is saved in the Lord Jesus Christ; that I am saved through what the Lord Jesus Christ does for me; that if you talk about a person being saved you mean somebody in whom Jesus Christ lives and works.

Who is this Jesus Christ? God tells you in the Bible. Now I had all that in my mind before I believed

there was a God, but it was clear to me that if you were going to be a Christian, you would have to take the Bible as the source of your information and find out about Jesus Christ in that Bible. Now the problem that came to me of course was, is it true? Is it real? Everything would follow if God was real. But how would you know God was real? While I was studying about that I asked myself, what am I trying to decide? I am trying to settle in my mind if I have any evidence that God is an actual, living being. I checked out in my mind that I didn't expect Him to show Himself to me because being a Spirit, He didn't have a body such as we have. Well, then, how could I ever know? And it came to me that I would know in the things that He would do. So I got to thinking about how I would know He is doing them. To guard against receiving an answer by chance I set up a set of criteria of my own, and by that, I mean if certain things happened, then I would know for sure. Now maybe nobody else would be impressed by this, but I was impressed with this kind of idea. A stone could roll down the hill and hit a nail on the head once by accident. Now if it hit a nail on the head twice, the chances for that were just fantastic. But if it was to hit a nail on the head three times in a row, nobody could expect that to happen by chance. The more I thought about it, the more I was satisfied that I would be impressed by that.

For a number of years I had been trying to find out about God . . . reading at least a chapter of the Bible each night . . . reciting the Ten Commandments each night . . . repeating the Lord's prayer each night . . . going to church every Sunday to every service I could get to . . . listening all the time. I had been doing that now for nearly three years. Just on and on and on, I'd been doing it and doing it and doing it and doing it. I hadn't gotten anything. But still I was doing this kind of thing. And so it just came to me if there is a God, He should know I am doing this and there should be some way in which He brings things to my mind. Maybe He has been bringing it, to my mind and I didn't realize it. So as I thought about that, I said to myself that if anything comes to my mind, as any kind of insight or information, and if it comes to my mind, as much as three times in a short time, say in a few days, from three different sources, and if it is really pertinent to my problem, then I would think maybe there was a person on the other side who was trying to tell me something. I no sooner had this settled in my mind when a sequence actually took place in regular order, the way I am going to tell you.

On a Friday night the old postmaster asked me a question. He said, "Do you have in mind that some day that you are going to be a Christian?" And rather defiantly I said, "Yes, I do. I have that in mind." He said, "Am I right in thinking that you think that after you have controlled yourself a little bit, and after you've made sure that you have your bad habits under control, then you are going to be good enough? And after you are good enough so that you think you would pass, that that is when you are going to try and join the church?" "Yes," I said, "I think I will." And then he said to me, "You are getting further away from it all the time." And that made me indignant. It really did. He just turned his back on me and walked away. "Oh," he said, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." That made me furious. And I thought, "He is just an old fool and I don't have to talk to him any longer."

That was on Friday night. On the following Sunday, I was in church. We had a visiting preacher, an old man from Ireland. This man got up to preach and I didn't particularly hear what he was saying until I heard him saying something like this: "There are young people who really want to do the right thing. They really want to live the Christian life. They have in mind that if they will just control themselves and control their habits and control their ways, they would get to be good enough and they would get to be Christians." I started thinking, "That's the very thing. Now I'll go tell the farmer that the preacher said that was okay." But suddenly the preacher stopped and said, "If this is what you think, you are getting further away from it all the time." I was so mad I nearly walked out. If I hadn't been a school teacher in that community I would have charged out of that church. I didn't hear another thing he said. It just made

me furious. Suddenly it dawned on me, while I was sitting there fuming and burning in that church, that's just what the old postmaster said. That's the nail hit on the head the second time, just in two days.

Then I thought, "Wait a minute. The old postmaster and the preacher have just been talking to each other. And now the preacher saw me sitting here and brought it all back to his mind. Nothing to it." So while I was still sitting there in the church, just waiting until the service was over, not paying any attention to what he said, suddenly it also came to me, "But you don't know." You don't know that they talked to each other and you don't know if the one man told the other. "No," I said to myself, "I don't know, but I can find out." And after I got out of church and started walking home, I was thinking this thing over and I determined to find out.

I checked that very afternoon and I found out that that preacher and that old postmaster had never met. They didn't even know each other. This preacher was a visitor. They were complete strangers. Then I was face to face with this strange fact that the same idea had come to me on Friday night, from the postmaster, and on Sunday morning from the preacher. So I was reading my Bible Sunday evening and in the Book of Acts I read about Cornelius who was a good man, a just man, who prayed to God always and gave alms to the poor and God had respect unto him and to his prayers and to his offerings. And I said, "That's it."

I could hardly wait to see the postmaster. On Monday night I came in and, as soon as he had given out the mail, I said to him, "I found a place in the Bible where a man was doing the right thing and God received him because he was doing the right thing. And you said that it wouldn't make any difference." "Well," he said, "Who do you have in mind?" I said, "There's a man in the Book of Acts and he is a good man. He prayed to God always and gave alms to the poor and God listened to him. His alms came up as a memorial before God." He said, "He was a pretty good man, wasn't he?" "Yes," I said, "he was a good man, but he was a man and he was doing it and that's what I am saying that if you did the right thing God would certainly turn to you." "Well," he said, "let's read on about it." He said, "You know who it was?" Well, I tried to think. "it wouldn't be Cornelius, would it?" I said, "Yes, that's who it was." And it kind of provoked me that he knew, without my telling him. I started to look it up and he said, "Look in the tenth chapter of the Book of Acts." That provoked me, too. I had forgotten where it was and he knew. But I looked it up and then read it out to him. He said, "Read on." I said, "I don't have to read on. Here it is." "Well," he said, "read on and see what else there is." He finally persuaded me to read on and I found that God said, "Because your prayers and alms are come up before me, send to Joppa to the house of one Simon the tanner, and you will find there Simon Peter and he will come and tell you what you ought to do."

And so, as you remember, Simon Peter came on over and told Cornelius the story of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . that "to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Now I was face to face with the fact that from the Bible itself I had picked up the idea that you were saved by faith. Friday night, the old postmaster. Sunday morning, the preacher. Sunday night, the Bible itself. And I want to tell you that before Monday morning came I was convinced that God was real.

Now from this time on my story is very simple. Since I already knew the gospel and God was real, it only remained for me to believe it for myself. It wasn't easy, for I couldn't be sure He meant me. Finally, I looked up into the heavens one night while I was walking on a country road all by myself, and I just spoke to God. I said, "I believe now that you are there, and I believe that Jesus Christ is your Son, and I believe that He died for me. And I know that I need salvation, but I believe that He has it prepared for me, and I want to believe it was for me. Help me." And suddenly I was able to believe. It was just as

though everything had been completely settled. And I could truly say, "My Lord and my God."

Someone might ask me, "How is it with you now?" Many is the time in life I still feel like a small boy - alone in a warehouse in the middle of the night and it is dark and there are noises all around me. But there is Someone holding my hand. I am never alone any more. Now I walk in the presence of the Lord, and He holds me in grace and mercy.