

How to "run well"

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A GOOD START

You stand, if just converted, upon the threshold of an absolutely new epoch in your existence. Doubtless things seem to you new, and the path you now commence to tread a little mysterious. I want to be allowed, somewhat after the fashion of "Interpreter" with "Christian" in "The Pilgrim's Progress," to point out one or two things which may, with God's blessing, help you at the start of your Christian career.

We shall not have much to say as to your past-that is settled; nor as to your future-that is secure: both through the value of the precious blood of Christ. Our thoughts must be concentrated upon **the present**. You are a dead loss to Satan for eternity, and he knows it he will therefore concentrate his efforts upon spoiling your testimony for the Lord now.

If he can make you definitely dishonour Him, so much the better from his point of view, and if not, well! he has some very successful ways of stunting spiritual growth and making his poor victim anything but a successful Christian.

The animal kingdom is divided into two great classes: the Vertebrate-those with backbone, and the Invertebrate-those without. Believers also, may be classified thus, and we long that you should be a "Vertebrate" Christian, having backbone, and being marked by decision and spiritual vigour, and not by stagnation and decay.

Be warned at the outset against the idea that in being converted you have reached the summit of all ambition, the goal of the Christian race. The truth is that far from conversion being the goal, **it is the starting-post**. The race is just beginning, so that it is emphatically not the time for you to take things easy, but rather for you to prepare for action. It would be well if every convert imitated Saul of Tarsus (afterwards the Apostle Paul) in the questions he asked upon conversion (Acts 9: 5, 6). The first was, "Who art thou, Lord?" The second, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

And Jesus also is your Lord: not only your Saviour- blessed be His Name!-but your **Lord**. This, of course, you acknowledge, else you are no true convert; prepare then to arise and go at His bidding as Saul did, In the epistle addressed to some converts from the Jews' religion to Christianity we find the exhortation, "Let us **go on** unto perfection" (Hebrews 6: 1). Take these words, "**Let us go on,**" as a motto, and bear them continually in mind; for just as a cyclist must **go on** if he would **keep on**, so we must advance if our Christianity is to be much more than a worthless name.

You want, however, a good start. Then first of all **be real**. If you still have lingering doubts and fears as to how you stand with God, have courage to say so, rather than to continue professing to be all right when you are not sure. Never mind if you have told preacher and friends, even many times, that you **are** saved; your confession will not greatly surprise them-if they know much of their own hearts- and they may be able to help you. Anyhow, be **real**. Don't say "I see" if you don't see. Don't go one inch beyond where you are to please the best of friends. Far better take time and get a firm foothold, or you will never start well.

CONFESSION

Once, however, you have the Word of God beneath your feet and **are** sure, **confess Christ immediately**, let nothing make you delay. There is too much truth in the proverb, "He who hesitates is lost." The Scripture says, "**If thou shalt confess with thy mouth** the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10: 9). You will never be happy without it, for you will be a hypocrite. Inwardly a Christian, outwardly still a man or woman of the world, drifting with the stream, doing as others do, feebly smiling when worldlings direct the shafts of their wit and ridicule at sacred subjects, for fear of making yourself conspicuous, and hating yourself for so acting all the while. Ah! the misery of it!

Stand shivering on the brink no longer, but plunge bravely in, Never mind the shock; the ridicule, the sneers, the cold shoulder; it will not be half so bad as you imagine, and will be followed by the after-glow of a peace and joy you never knew before. **Begin at home**. "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee" (Mark 5: 19).

Having confessed the Lord, you have fairly started as a Christian, and if you enquire what will give vigour to your Christianity, and ensure a successful and God-glorifying career, I should reply, **Be whole-hearted**.

You have heard of the general who, having disembarked his men, burnt the ship from which he had landed, deliberately throwing away his only chance of retreat, He did it, that not one of his men might be tempted to cast a lingering look behind him. Act on this principle yourself, make a clean break with the world behind you, and make up your mind that by the grace of God, Christ and His claims shall be supreme, your chief consideration under every circumstance. in the world that man succeeds who, having selected his pursuit-be it money, learning or power-sticks to it with unwavering fidelity and dogged persistency. His object controls him, everything is made subservient to it, and eventually he becomes a millionaire, a great scientist or a prime minister, as the case may be If you make Christ your object, He will control you, you will be able to turn everything to account for His interests, and ultimately you will get the greatest of all rewards, "Well done, good and faithful servant," from His own lips.

THE FIRST FALL

You will not have been converted many days, or even hours, before you will discover that there are many traps for your feet. Let me point out some of them, so that being forewarned you may, with God's help, be forearmed To begin with, it is rather an anxious time when the first fall after conversion occurs, especially so if you have previously been enslaved by any particular evil habit or sin. Not one of us escapes this experience. The joy of salvation is in our hearts, the happy hours go flying by, and it seems as if no sorrow or clouds would cross our path again, and then suddenly, unexpectedly, we are down! Ah! the bitter shame and sorrow that fill our hearts, and, who knows?-perhaps some of you whose eyes scan these pages have that sorrow and shame in your hearts as you read. Possibly, to make matters worse, your worldly friends have noticed it and their amusement at your discomfiture is but ill concealed, your Christian friends are none too sympathetic, and you don't know what to do.

Now is Satan's opportunity, and he will tender you advice after this fashion: "A nice mess you have made in thus attempting to be a Christian. Would it not be better to give up at once, and thus save further disgrace to yourself and dishonour to your Lord?" He would fain lead you to distrust God. **Give up** is always his word.

Friend, let me tell you what to do. Do not give up, but **get down** and **go on**.

Get down, I mean, in humiliation and self-judgment before God, remembering that though you have changed, He has not, This sin of yours is one amongst the many for which Christ suffered on the Cross, and He has now gone on high to be your Advocate (see 1 John 2: 1). God is still your Father, and the word to you is-

"If we confess our sins, He [the Father] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9),

Get down, then, in confession to God, and from Him as your Father you will get forgiveness; the very process itself through which you pass will have a cleansing effect upon you, and, with greater confidence in Him and less in yourself, go on.

OLD ASSOCIATIONS

Another thing. **Beware of old companionships and associations.** Sometimes when the convert himself starts brightly, confesses the Lord and seeks to break with his old companions, they, for reasons of their own, are not willing to part with him, and move heaven and earth to retain him. Sometimes it happens that in after years love begins to grow cold, and the believer begins by slow degrees at first, more rapidly as time goes on, to drift back to people and to things he once forsook.

Sometimes, most subtle and dangerous of all, we entertain the idea that if only we join with our former ungodly associates we shall thereby more effectually gain their ear and influence them for good. This is a great mistake. **We shall not lift them up. They will drag us down.**

Experience universally confirms this statement, and so does Scripture.

Jehoshaphat was one of the best of Judah's kings, Ahab the very worst that ever disgraced the throne of Israel, and yet we read, "Jehoshaphat . . . joined affinity with Ahab" (2 Chr. 18: 1).

With what result? Did Jehoshaphat elevate Ahab to his own level, so that he could say with satisfaction "Thou hast become as I am"? By no means; the very reverse, In verse 3 of the same chapter Jehoshaphat says: "I am as thou art," and the admission brought no blush of shame to his cheek.

This was followed by the expedition to Ramoth-gilead, in which Ahab lost his life and Jehoshaphat escaped with the skin of his teeth, only to be confronted with a very serious message from God, through Jehu the prophet, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (2 Chr. 19: 2). The final upshot of the whole affair was that Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram married Ahab's daughter (2 Chr. 21: 6)-the notoriously wicked Athaliah, a true daughter of her mother, Jezebel, and the cause of untold misery to Judah.

If you wish further evidence from Scripture, read carefully Genesis 13, Genesis 14 and Genesis 19, which give the history of Lot's sad downfall through his alliance with the men of Sodom. He did not elevate them; they degraded him; so much so that nobody paid the least attention when he attempted to testify of the impending storm; and we ourselves should have had no certainty as to whether he was a true saint of God or not had it not been that the Spirit of God, knowing the difficulty, set the question at rest by calling him in the new Testament "that righteous man" (2 Peter 2: 8).

Of course you **must** meet your old companions, but lose no time in letting them know that the old relations exist no more. Speak to them of Christ. Whatever you do, don't descend to the old level, and don't be hail-fellow-well-met as before. So surely as you do, your power, Samson-like, will have fled, and you will become their easy prey.

In the great majority of cases one good bold confession of Christ is enough. Some may receive a homethrust that will eventually result in their conversion others may just leave you. If not, you will find it best to leave them. If you can't **help** them, they will **harm** you. Don't give them the opportunity.

The foregoing remarks apply with equal force to the **forming of new links and associations**. A guiding star in your Christian life should be this Word-

"Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6: 14, read 2 Cor. 6: 14-18), Frame this text in your prayers and hang it in a prominent place on the walls of your heart and memory. It will save you a world of sorrow if obeyed. You will need it, for you cannot go through the world without forming associations of many kinds.

Beware of the "unequal yoke" in **society**, beware of it in business. Many a Christian has had his testimony ruined through partnership with an unconverted man, and thus getting mixed up with his questionable practices; above all beware of it in **marriage**. A few days or weeks suffice to break the unequal yoke in society or in business, but here it is life-long, either for yourself or for your unconverted partner. How many promising young lives have been darkened, and what chapters of sorrow could be penned as a result of disobedience to the divine command. Would that I could lift up my voice like a trumpet and warn every young convert in the land.

FALSE TEACHERS

Take a warning also as to false teachers and their doctrines. Do not be surprised that they exist, Satan has his servants as well as God, and he works by way of **imitation**. The Apostle Paul, speaking of some of his agents, said, "Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11: 13, 14). It is more than likely, therefore that before long you will meet with men or women who will bring you strange doctrines, advanced with much plausibility and covered with a thin veneer of truth.

Accept one or two hints:

If they come to you with doctrines that cut athwart the simple gospel you have received, belittling the death and resurrection of Jesus, refuse and avoid them. They are false (see Gal. 1: 6-8).

If they do not acknowledge Jesus as their Lord (1 Cor. 12: 3), or that He-a divine Person-is come in flesh; i.e., has become man; if they do not, in short, confess His Deity and Manhood (1 John 4: 3), they are not of God.

If Christ is not the centre of their teaching, but rather some religious fad, or if they demand your subjection to the teaching of some man or woman who assumes the place of prophet, or to some new revelation which somebody professes to have received, you may safely turn from them. If tested they prove to be but liars (see Rev. 2: 2).

If the teacher himself be unconverted, don't listen to him. Of course he **may** say what is right, just as a parrot sometimes makes very appropriate remarks. Scripture, however, is very decisive. "The natural man [i.e., man in his natural or unconverted state] receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2: 14)

Pay no attention, therefore, to infidel theories, whether honestly advanced by avowed unbelievers, or dishonestly cloaked as "Higher Criticism" and "Modern Thought" by professed ministers of religion. The poor authors of these soul-destroying delusions have not the Spirit of God, and hence, though possibly very learned, are no Christians at all, and know nothing of **true heart religion**.

Once more, if anyone comes to you with doctrines, to support which he has to twist Scripture either by giving strained meanings to words in our English version, or by continually referring to the Greek or Hebrew original and translating to fit with his ideas, or if he tears texts away from their contexts or surroundings, which always decide their meaning, you have every reason for considering his doctrines with the gravest suspicion. "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1: 20). Remember, also, that the Bible is one whole; thus one part dovetails into the rest, not only agreeing but explaining.

HOBBIES

One more warning, though it may seem a strange one. Seek grace from God to live your life **without a hobby**.

Many estimable Christians, both young and old, are sadly lacking in freshness and spring. They are like a plum with the bloom rubbed off, and this is frequently traceable not to the allowance of positive sin or worldliness, but to their taking up with some pursuit or hobby that occupies much valuable time and thought, that could be far better employed. Some have a pipe for their hobby, others novels, and others again, dress, motoring, recreation in its many forms, or something more scientific, such as the radio. Do not misunderstand me. I plead for nothing legal or straight-laced. If we merely make you affect a spurious piety and wear a sanctimonious expression, we have got you "out of the frying-pan and into the fire" indeed. No! Of course you must have exercise and recreation especially if you are young, otherwise your health will suffer; only, mind-this is the point-keep them in a quite secondary place, subservient to Christ and His interests. Don't let them become hobbies; if you do they will become weights.

"**Let us lay aside every weight**, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience" (Heb. 12: 1), is the inspired direction of the apostle. Notice it is the "weight **and** the sin," i.e., weights are something additional to and different from sin. "Sin" is like some entanglement across the

racer's path: if he catches his foot in it, down he comes; a "weight" may be something very useful and excellent in itself, but if the race is to be won, it must be laid aside. The athlete does not even carry valuables. He has no **pockets** in his scanty attire.

If ever in your Christian life you find anything, however good in itself, becoming a weight to you, have the moral courage to lay it aside, We want you to get the maximum of joy and blessing out of your knowledge of Christ.

THE CHRISTIAN'S SUPPORT

I can quite imagine that some begin to think that it must be difficult if not almost hopeless work to be a Christian. It will do you no harm to discover that it **is hopeless work in your own strength**, if you do not forget that the power of God is on your behalf. Lions in the way there certainly are, but do not play the part of Mr. Timorous, especially as God has Himself provided you with certain things that are of the greatest help.

You have not believed upon a dead Saviour, but upon a living One. He is out of sight, having left this world. He is your **great High Priest, in heaven** He has entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9: 24).

There He has charged Himself with the management of our concerns. Use Him, make Him your Friend. Confide in Him. Keep no secrets from Him, but let Him have the key that opens every chamber of your soul.

You will meet many a temptation, "He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb 2: 18).

Weakness and infirmity will sometimes press you sore. He is able to **sympathize**. He can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4: 15).

Seas of difficulty and danger may roll in on your soul and threaten to engulf you. "He is able also to save . . . to the uttermost" (Heb. 7: 25), i.e., right through to the end.

Succour and sympathy may reach you from your Christian friends. We trust they will, but if you want absolute certainty, look to Him!

THE CHRISTIAN'S POWER

Connected with this is the great fact that the Holy Spirit of God, a divine Person, is upon earth and that if a believer, **you have received the Holy Spirit**. "But," says many a young convert, "I have not felt anything special. Is it possible for anyone to receive the Holy Spirit without some great and unique experience?"

It is certainly possible, and two things account for it First, the outward and visible signs which once accompanied His entrance, such as a tongue of fire or speaking foreign languages, do so no longer; and secondly, His mission is emphatically **not to call attention to Himself**, but to glorify Christ (see John 16: 13, 14).

Silently, noiselessly, He takes up His abode, but soon the effects of His presence are felt. Perhaps it never occurred to you that the very glimpses you get of Christ and His preciousness, and of the love of God; the fact of the Bible becoming a new book to you; and of prayer becoming delightful instead of irksome; are just the results of His presence.

"But in my case," somebody says, "I fear these results are conspicuous by their absence, and yet I do believe in Jesus. I fear I have never received the Spirit." The probable solution of the difficulty is not that you have never received Him, but that having received Him you have grieved Him.

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption," said the Apostle Paul to the Ephesian believers (Eph. 4: 30). To **grieve Him is to lose the practical benefits of His presence**. He then grieves you and since He is the Teacher in the things of God and the Power for worship, communion and service, no wonder you are unhappy.

Ever bear in mind, therefore, that "your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 6: 19). Shun every defiling thing, for with the Spirit of God ungrieved you have power greater than any that can be brought against you (1 John 4: 4).

THE CHRISTIAN'S GUIDE

There are four things of great practical use as helps to the Christian, be he young or old; the Spirit of God will certainly lead you to be very diligent in their use.

First and foremost, **the Word of God**. Read your Bible, and read it well. Make it far and away the foremost book in your library. Other books you will find helpful, especially such as continually refer you back to the Bible, but never allow them to supplant in your reading the Word of God itself.

We live in days of much infidelity, one of its greatest strongholds is ignorance of the Scriptures (see Matt. 22: 29). Let us, therefore, arm ourselves with a close and prayerful acquaintance with **the Book**. It is related of a certain well-educated gentleman of infidel views that being advised by his doctor of the slow but certain approach of death owing to an incurable disease, he became very desirous of seriously investigating for himself the claims of the Bible to be a revelation from God. Meeting a Christian acquaintance he asked advice as to what book or books he had better read to enable him to form his judgment of the Bible's merits. The laconic answer was "The Bible." In astonishment he repeated his question, but received the same answer with the advice to begin at the very beginning and read straight on. He did so and had not completed the five books of Moses before he became convinced that its origin was divine. He was ultimately converted to God.

Yes! if there is a royal road to understanding the Bible it is the reading of the Bible itself; prayerfully and in dependence upon the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Read consecutively; don't jump about hither and thither, and don't have favourite portions which you read over and over again, neglecting other parts.

Read also comprehensively; not so fast as not to think about what you read, but sufficiently fast to bear in mind the drift of the whole passage or argument, to get a kind of bird's eye view of the whole.

Search the Scriptures, as well as read them. Points will often arise in your life upon which you must seek the mind of God. Sometimes you will find a passage bearing directly upon the point in question, sometimes you will not; then you must search to find some God-given principle which will apply to your case and shed light on your pathway. The Bible is pre-eminently a book of principles, be like the Bereans, who "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17: 11).

Cultivate also the habit of diligently **turning over the Scriptures in your mind**. To be well nourished, it is necessary not only to eat but to digest. The ox must not only browse on the fresh grass, but also chew the cud; so let us not only read and search and thereby gather information, but having

done so, turn it over and over in meditation, that it may really soak its way into our souls. This means prosperity. Paul said to Timothy, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all" (1 Tim. 4: 15).

THE CHRISTIAN'S RESOURCE

Second only in importance to the Word of God is **Prayer**. If you wish for some idea of how necessary it is, take your Bible and read steadily through Luke's Gospel, underlining with a pencil every place where Jesus prayed. Mark! He who was a Divine Person, when here on earth frequently prayed.

Or read Paul's Epistles, and what he says about prayers, "Night and day praying exceedingly," and so forth. If Paul had to pray, surely you and I need to.

You may just simply pray about anything and everything (read Phil. 4: 6, 7). **Nothing is too small**. Our God is great enough to attend to your smallest need.

"What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!"

Unburden your heart, and make your request with thanksgiving. Whether you get the answer you would like or no, you will get at least His peace in your heart.

Don't forget intercession, i.e., praying for others, both saved and unsaved. There is a danger of our becoming cramped and narrowed in our thoughts and prayers. There is always a great blessing in thinking of others.

But, at all events, **let us pray**, and that "without ceasing." Keep in an attitude of continual dependence and waiting upon God. Let your heart ever be breathing the spirit of prayer even if you cannot always be upon your knees. Besides being helpful, it is **safe**. The old couplet is very true:

"Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees."

THE CHRISTIAN'S COMPANY

Let me now impress upon you the great importance of **keeping Christian company**. Much of what has been said as to old companionships and associations would come in appropriately here, but repetition is needless. It suffices to say that the best way to keep out of the old associations is to form and heartily cultivate the new.

David said, "I will not know a wicked person . . . Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful" (Psalm 101: 4-6), and in so saying he was doubtless a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. To avoid the evil and to cultivate the good was ever **His way**, and if so, we shall do well to make it **ours**.

Again, the very first act of Moses' life singled out for mention and commendation is that, having come to age, he whole-heartedly threw in his lot with the despised people of God. "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for season" (Heb. 11: 25).

Don't start with the idea that Christians are perfect or you will have a big disappointment in store. They are not so; far from it, but you will find amongst them a warmth and a love which you will never find in the world. Stick to them, and if they don't come quite up to your expectations or square with your notions stick to them still. Even should they give you the cold shoulder, return the compliment by giving them a warm heart, and you will soon get your capital repaid with interest.

Generally, however, matters stand the other way about, I have heard a good many affirm that their fellow Christians are so cold that they never get spoken to after the service or meeting. On closer investigation I nearly always find that these very people are noted for jumping up instantly the meeting closes and bolting without giving anyone the chance of a friendly handshake. They are cold, not their fellows. A frequent symptom of disease is that one complains of cold when really it is quite warm.

To shun the company of Christians is an early symptom of spiritual disease. When flock-masters or their shepherds see one sheep standing in a field quite apart from the rest they at once conclude that it is ill. When well, all keep together. Beware, then, of sulking alone. It is the stragglers who fall an easy prey to the wily foe.

Some, however, may wish for a practical word as to where to go, seeing, alas! that Christians, even true ones are divided into many bands, some great, some small, meeting in various places.

My advice is, **Go where the Word of God would lead you.**

But, remember, what you **like**, or what your parents did before you, has nothing to do with the matter. The question must be decided absolutely by God's Word as if it were your salvation at stake. Here, then, is a point on which you may well search the Scriptures prayerfully.

Do not become a rolling stone, or, as it is commonly termed, a "free-lance." Such a procedure chiefly indicates grave lack of principle; far better stay just where you are for so long as the Word of God, and a good conscience, and true-hearted love for our Lord Jesus Christ, will let you.

THE CHRISTIAN'S SERVICE

Last of all. Do not forget to **serve the Lord**. And by this I mean not merely that you should do everything, even daily toil of the meanest sort, if such is your appointed task, to the Lord (Col. 3: 22-24), but that you should definitely take up **some interest and work** for the Lord Jesus Christ, even though it be very small.

What shall I do? is the question often asked. Ask that question of your **Master**, who alone has the right to answer it and you will soon discover what you should do. Opportunities abound, and the need is great.

Possibly you have already begun to serve the Lord, almost without knowing it.

Like Andrew, you have sought out some brother, some friend, that you might bring him to Jesus (see John 1: 40-42). Having found the Lord yourself, you did it without being told, just as a duckling, when hatched, instinctively waddles to the pond. If so, thank God and do not tire of this blessed work. Go on, and having sought to bring your friends to Jesus, enlarge your borders and still go on!

How many ways there are of serving the Lord-by personal conversations, anywhere and at all times, by tract distributing, by sick visiting, by teaching the young in Sunday School, besides the public preaching of the Gospel, and ministry of the Word to believers. Ask the Lord what you are to do, and, having found out, DO IT.

Do it in obedience to the principles laid down in the Word of God.

Do it prayerfully, and

Do it in concert with your fellow Christians, but I repeat, DO IT.

Bodily health is impossible unless we work. Solomon observed this and said, "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" (Ecc. 5: 12).

Many fashionable members of society suffer from "nerves" and similar complaints, simply from lack of something to do, and Christians may be found who do not get on for just the same reason; they rank amongst the unemployed, unless, indeed, they devote their energies to what is profitless if not mischievous. The old rhyme is as true as ever:

"And Satan find some mischief still

For idle hands to do."

Let us, therefore, be like the Thessalonian believers, to whom it could be said, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1: 9, 10).

If that verse becomes a truthful summary of our lives they will **have been lives** well worth living.

May you richly BE BLESSED, and may you thereby BECOME A BLESSING