

WHY I LEFT THE CHURCH AND RETURNED



By
LESLIE E. FOOKS

This book, originally written in the 1960's, has been completely reformatted and corrected for this new digital release. Brother Fooks passed away in 2009.

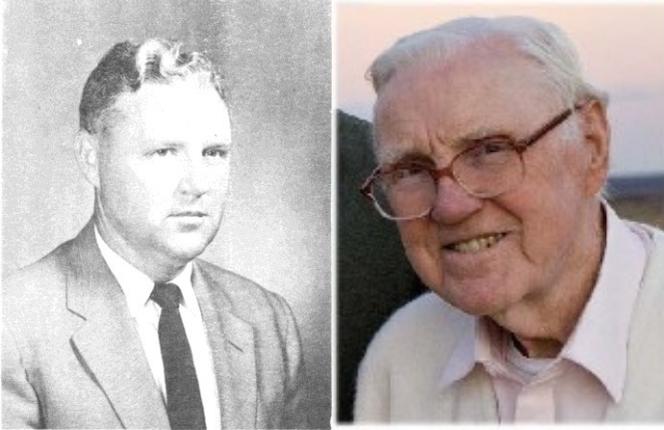
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leslie Eugene Fooks began preaching the Gospel of Christ in 1947.

One of eight children, he was born in Texico, New Mexico in 1921. The family moved to Arkansas when he was one and later back to New Mexico because of a serious illness of his mother. They farmed around San Jon, New Mexico until the dust storms of 1935 forced them to move to Ponca City Oklahoma where he finished High School.

Mr. Fooks joined the Army Air Corps in 1941. After attending photography school he became an Air Cadet and graduated as a Pilot in February 1944. Flying combat missions as CO-Pilot on a B-17 out of Fogga, Italy until the end of the war, he earned several combat citations and awards.

He married the former Dorothy Jean Hendrix in 1943 and they have two children.

After studying Business Administration at the University in Wichita, Kansas, he transferred to Abilene Christian College and began preaching in 1947.

Mr. Fooks is the author of the 300 page book "The Tipton Home Story" which was published in 1958 and other writings.

PREFACE

We believe this is a new concept in the teaching process by the printed page. Particularly do we believe it is new in the field of Bible study.

Here we tell a story to hold the interest of the student. In this case it is a true story.

At the end of each division pertinent questions are asked. These questions and discussion ideas are not designed so the reader will remember the story, but so the student will learn lessons from the experiences of the characters involved.

In this booklet, which is prepared for high school and college young people, we also hope this age group will get a clearer insight into the patterns of human behavior.

In the very near future these young men and women will be on their own and will have to face people with differing behavior patterns in the work-a-day world and in their social life. Whether young Christians remain faithful to Christ and his teachings after they leave the protection of parents and older Christians at home, will be determined largely by the way they respond to new acquaintances, new environments and situations. By being forewarned they will be better prepared to face up to the world in which we live.

Adults may want to use this booklet in Ladies' Bible Classes or other special classes so they will be alert to the modern day problems youth faces.

INTRODUCTION:

It was on a warm spring afternoon a few weeks before I graduated, I was walking down the long hill that led homeward from the high school in Ponca City, Oklahoma. After sitting in class all day the warm sun felt good. A car pulled up to the curb and a kind voice called out, "Leslie, could I give you a lift home?"

I looked up to see Vaughn Crumley. "Okay," I said in a typical high school manner. Opening the door, I fell limp into the out-dated automobile.

Vaughn Crumley was a fat man with a winning smile and an assuring twinkle in his blue eyes. He was from a family of preachers. And it had been his lot to preach for the church in my home town that met down on South Fifth Street, where I attended irregularly since my family moved to town several years before.

Mr. Crumley asked about school and rambled a little about the beautiful spring weather, probably trying to loosen me up for more serious talk. "Leslie," he said, "you've been attending church services for a longtime. Do you ever think about obeying the Gospel?"

He saved me the embarrassment by not reminding me how spasmodic my attendance had been. I kept a fairly tight lip, but I did tell him I had thought about it. And I had seriously thought about becoming a Christian many times.

I didn't tell him that I had been going to other churches with some of my friends. Nor did I tell him that a friend, I'll call Kelso, and I had been going places and doing things that Christians have no business doing. I was pretty quiet during the ride home but I was thinking a lot. What I was thinking would not make good conversation with the preacher. So, I just kept quiet letting him do most of the talking.

He pulled up close to home to let me out. But before I had time to leave the car, he caught me by the arm and said, "Think about what I've said, Leslie." That is what he had heard my mother call me, and since I had stayed shy of him so much, he had not learned that most of my friends called me Gene.

Since Mr. Crumley had shown some interest in me, I began attending Sunday school and church services more regularly.

John Hardin, tall and handsome with dark hair and intelligent

eyes, was the Sunday school teacher for the high school class. He also was an excellent song leader for the congregation. Single at the time, he seemed to take a special delight in working with teenagers. I still have not forgotten the wiener roasts and how he led us in singing the popular songs.

These things helped to divert my interest from the questionable activities in which I had previously engaged. I felt myself losing interest in other things and gaining interest in Christ and saving my soul. It didn't seem to matter. In fact, I was glad the tide was turning.

A week or two before graduation in 1940, I came into the kitchen where Mother was busy preparing supper. I stammered around but finally told her that since it was Wednesday, I planned to go to midweek services with her and Dad and be baptized. I could see a warm emotional feeling welling up within her, so I left the room because I did not want to see her cry with joy over my decision; nor did I want her to see tears in my eyes.

That Wednesday evening near the close of the services, Vaughn Crumley repeated the same words I had heard him say many times before. He told of Christ's invitation to all sinners and that if all who believe would obey him in baptism, He would forgive them of their sins. Heretofore I hadn't paid very much attention to the words. But it had finally soaked in and I was glad to hear them.

John Hardin led the song to assist and encourage sinners like me to come to the Lord and accept His salvation. My mind was already made up and it wasn't hard for me to walk down the aisle. After making the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, I was buried with Him in baptism.

Knowing that many of the other Christians would want to shake my hand and welcome me as a new born child into the family of God,

I dressed slowly hoping that some of them would get tired waiting for me and go home. I felt embarrassed being the center of attention.

After the joyful and sympathetic Christians expressed their delight over the "new born child in Christ", I walked home slowly in the light of the moon and the stars. I remembered the creation story and the Psalmist's exclamation of praise, "The heavens declare the Glory of God." I felt alone with God in His universe. A cool refreshing feeling filled my being, my soul was clean and I was in the presence of my Maker. Everything was lovely and my mind

wanted to think only of things serene.

I never realized that a time would come shortly that I would have no place for these reflections in my mind. I did not suspect that I would be "sifted and tried" by sin and temptation in the near future. The thought did not cross my mind that the environment and the companions that I was to choose would prove too great for me.

In 1940, the newspapers, magazines, and radio carried news stories of the World War II Battle for Britain and the slaughter of innocent women and children and of the heroism of fighting men on the ground and in the air and on the sea.

These stories, the talk of friends, the challenge and patriotism led me to enlist in the Army Air Corps on February 17, 1941. I was in the Army Air Corps four and one half years. It was during this time that I left the church of the Lord. It would not be right to conclude that the Army caused me to leave the church. For it could have happened just as easily in college or working on a civilian job.

The service of our country encourages each man to pursue his faith and to take an active part in the belief he has embraced.

But in the army I met men of every religious hue and moral character. I had a wide range of men from which to choose my friends. Unfortunately for me, most of the friends I chose were of questionable character when it comes to the standard of Christian morals. The fact still remains that I chose my own friends and I have no one to blame for my falling away from the faith but myself. I cannot say it was the Army, or the war, or Harry, or Tom or Joe — it was I.

It is true in time of war when our nation's freedom is at stake, duty demands more time. A Christian cannot always assemble with believers to worship God in spirit and in truth. With time at a premium and priorities having to be satisfied, and deadlines having to be met, it is easy to shove Bible study and worship in the background and almost, if not completely, forget it.

But I started out to tell you why I left the church. At that time I could not have told you why. But the intervening years have given me a better perspective and much time to think and to regret those years of self-indulgences.

IDEAS AND QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED AND DISCUSSED:

1. I often wonder if I would have become a Christian while in high school if Brother Crumley had never singled me out and talked to me. Do you appreciate it when someone you respect shows a special interest in you? Do you usually respond?
2. Are social gatherings and fellowship with people your own age who believe like you do profitable to you? In what way?
3. After you believed and were baptized into Christ did you feel a close relation to the Heavenly Father? Would you care to tell about it?
4. When you leave home what kind of temptation do you expect to encounter? Will you be able to remain faithful?
5. What is the best way to be prepared to meet these temptations so you will not be overcome and fall away?
6. Whose fault is it when a person falls away or leaves the church?

RAESON NUMBER ONE:

I left because I was not grounded in the faith. Leaving home so quickly after becoming a Christian, and being constantly among men who were older, whose heads were chuck-full of worldly wisdom, made it easy for me to drift away.

In Ephesians, chapter three, and Colossians, chapter one, the writer speaks of being grounded in faith and love, having our roots grounded deep in the teachings of Christ Jesus. Well, I am convinced that I was not grounded in the faith; I was not grounded in the love of my Saviour, Jesus Christ. Therefore, I could not remain steadfast but rather, I became somewhat, as Paul described the Ephesians who were only babes in Christ, and not full grown; they were tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Also there is another passage that described me in Luke the eighth chapter, "Now the parable is this, 'The seed is the word of God. And those by the way side are they that have heard; then cometh the devil and taketh away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved. And those on the rock are they who, when they have heard, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And those which fell among the thorns, these are they that have heard, and as they go on their way, they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.'" Again, I have nobody to blame for my not being grounded in the faith but myself. Certainly, I think the Lord could have used no better language to describe me and many other people in the world then and some still are of this description.

Therefore, I would like to suggest to all parents: make sure that your children are grounded securely in the faith of Christ Jesus and in His love before these children leave home. If they are grounded they will not be tempted by the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of this world and fall away. And may I suggest also to you younger people that you gain all the scriptural knowledge you can while you are home. For many times after you leave the protection of your parent's home, other things have a strong tendency to crowd out Bible study and worship if you are not grounded in the faith. A knowledge of the Scriptures and the acquiring of the Spirit of Christ in your life can save you many sorrows and heartaches, and can give

you the rich "more abundant life" Christ speaks of in John 10:10.

To be grounded in the faith, a background of Christian experiences is often times very important. We will notice that in many cases, the strongest and most influential Christians of our generation have had parents and grandparents who have been faithful through their generations. The young man, Timothy, was blessed in this respect in that his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, were faithful to God. (II Tim. 1:5). Since they were acquainted with the teachings of the Creator, they were able to teach Timothy by word and action the ways of the Lord more perfectly. This helped him to become grounded in the faith more completely. And he became one of the great Christians of the first century.

"Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it". (Prov. 22:6) We note that Samuel had the benefit of the training of a Godly mother and a faithful priest. (I Sam. 1:11) As a result of this background Samuel became the great religious leader of his day.

I did not have the privilege of a background such as Timothy and Samuel had. This is one of the reasons that I was not grounded in the faith but that cannot be used as a reasonable excuse for me to leave the church. For others, who have had no better background than my own, have remained faithful.

The Lord has promised that he will help us if we will continue to place our trust in him. This I did not do.

Questions:

1. Why is it so important to be grounded in the faith?
2. Study Christ's parable as found in Luke 8:11-14 and discuss it.
3. Why should we urge parents to make sure their children are grounded in the faith before leaving home? How do you suppose Christian parents feel when their son or daughter leaves the church and Christ after leaving home?
4. Why is it so easy for you to drift away if you are not grounded in the faith and God's love? Compare with a ship without an anchor.
5. Why is background so important?
6. Discuss some of the noted leaders in the chapter today, whose families have been faithful for generations.
7. How did Timothy become grounded in the faith?

8. Discuss Samuel's background.
9. Is a background of many generations in Christian faith, essential in remaining faithful to the Lord?

REASON NUMBER TWO:

I was proselytized. When the Scriptures speak of the ministers of Satan (II Cor. 11:14, 15), I know well what is meant. Some men in sin seem to be dedicated to persuading youth to follow them. Especially is this true if the youth shows uncertainty and weakness. I have never yet seen a Christian try so hard to convert one to Christ as some men and women tried to convert me to evil. They worked day and night. They were sincere because they themselves had been deceived and converted.

Since their materialistic minds were bent on having a good time by self-indulgences, they always held this out as a promise for happiness and defeating loneliness of a soldier away from home.

When I speak of these men as being ministers of Satan, I do not say it in a derogatory sense. For they did not mean to be bad, for they would say, "We are Christians too." Basically, they were good men fighting for freedom and country just as I was. They wanted to help us to defeat loneliness.

There is pleasure in sin and it does defeat loneliness. Even if it does last "but for a season" as Moses found out. (Heb. 11:24-26). It costs too much to indulge in sin. For the Lord assures us if we engage in sin and continue in it, we will lose our soul for eternity. "What would a man give in exchange for his soul?" The rich man of Luke 16:19ff learned what a terrible thing it is to lose one's soul in torment. Therefore, Moses, being wise, gave up the pleasures of sin for a season and chose rather to suffer ill treatment with the people of God because he looked forward to an eternal reward with Christ.

But to the man who is living from day to day and has only a fuzzy hope of eternal life which sometimes dives into a sea of doubt, he is primarily interested in what is going on right now, and in pleasure and defeating loneliness. He has closed his mind to the future. He has accepted the Epicurean philosophy. "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die." Or "Live today and let tomorrow take care of itself." And because it eases his conscience, he has in addition accepted the Universalist doctrine which reasons that because God is merciful, all men will be saved regardless of how they live. These two teachings make the sinner feel that his soul is as safe for eternity as the faithful Christian. He actually feels sorry for the Christian who is "narrow-minded" and thus still tied to the

"Puritan ideas."

The sinner has been deceived into thinking he is actually doing youth a favor by freeing him from fundamentalist thinking. Peter described such a sinner in this manner, "These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm; for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved. For, uttering great swelling words of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error promising them liberty, while they themselves are bond-servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage". (II Peter 2:17-19). Yes, they think they are giving you liberty. They say, "You are free, white and twenty-one." They fail to realize or perhaps they have never learned when we are freed from Christ and righteousness we become servants of Satan and sin. We either obey Christ or the adversary. (Rom. 6:16-18). We are not our own, for we have been bought with a price.

The educated sinner has picked up enough Bible knowledge along the way to justify his actions and beliefs in his own sight. The little scriptures he is acquainted with have been misapplied, distorted, taken out of context and misinterpreted. If Satan's personal worker senses that youth has a respect for God's word and tries to follow its teachings, he is ready to challenge. As Satan used the scripture in his battle with Christ during the temptation, (Matt. 4), so his servants also use the scriptures to defeat the followers of Christ. There is one difference: Christ knew the answers when Satan misapplied the Scriptures. Weak Christians do not always know the answers.

To entice young people to drink with them, the sinner will point out that Noah got drunk after God saved him in the ark. They also know that Noah was favored in the sight of God. They remember the passage that tells of Christ turning the water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana. And that Paul told Timothy to drink wine. They seem to forget conveniently this was medicine for his stomach trouble.

When I think back, it is amazing that my sinner friends knew so much about the Bible, yet at the same time they knew so little. The old adage, "we hear what we want to hear and remember what we want to remember," certainly applied in their case.

I can answer the deceitful justifications for sin, now, but not

then. I was like a reed shaken with the wind, not grounded in the faith and in love.

Questions:

1. What do we mean by proselytizing?
2. Why do the "ministers of Satan" work so hard to get youth to follow them?
3. What do these people promise their followers?
4. What did Moses learn about the pleasures of sin? (Heb. 11:24-26).
5. After studying the story of the rich man as found in Luke 16:19ff answer Christ's question, "What would a man give in exchange for his soul?"
6. Discuss the Epicurean philosophy and the Universalist doctrine. Why do these teachings cause a sinner to think he is safe in sin?
7. Why does the "minister of Satan" think he is doing the youth a favor by getting him to engage in sin?
8. Note Peter's description of the person who promises you liberty in sin. (II Peter 2:17-19).

REASON NUMBER THREE

Another reason why I left the church of Christ was that I was proud. I thought I knew all the answers. This, as any veteran Christian knows, is sure to bring the downfall of a young Christian. There was no one present to remind me, "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:13). There was no one around to point out the scripture, "Yes, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." (I Pet. 5:5). There was no one to quote these precious truths. I was on my own; I was weak, progressively getting deeper and deeper into sin. I did not bother to search the scriptures to learn the truth, the law and precepts of God. Pride blinded me to the fact that "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the droppings of the honeycomb." (Psalms 19:9-10). If I had known the value of God's word, it would have saved me much heart-pain, sorrow, and shame.

Pride has caused many a faithful follower of the Lord to fall temporarily if not permanently. On the night that Jesus was betrayed he announced to his Apostles "All ye shall be offended in me this night." But Peter proudly retorted, "I will never be offended in thee." But Christ assured him that before the cock would crow, he would deny him three times. (Matt. 26:31-35).

A close study of the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14, will show that his pride and arrogance was his downfall. On the other hand, the humility of the Publican caused him to be justified before God.

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." To be poor in spirit is the opposite of pride. The phrase means, to realize our own inefficiency and our dependency upon God.

Questions:

1. What will pride cause us to do?
2. Discuss 1 Cor. 10:12-13.
3. Why do you suppose that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble?"
4. Discuss Psalms 19:9-10. What good is it to you to know the value

of God's word?

5. Discuss Peter's temporary fall.
6. Why was Peter able to come back to the Lord after his sin while Judas was not?
7. What was the difference in the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:9-14?
8. Discuss the phrase, "the poor in spirit."

REASON NUMBER FOUR

I left the church because I was deceived. Youth wants to be liked by his associates. To be different he sticks out like a sore thumb. The servant of Satan who is trying to recruit Christian youth to his ranks is well acquainted with this bit of psychology. His old refrain that he never seems to tire of singing is, "You don't want to be a square. Why be different? Everyone else is doing it. Who wants to be an odd-ball?"

No, I didn't want to be a square, or be different. I wanted friends and wanted the other fellows to like me. There was no one to remind me and make it stick, "Be not deceived, evil companions corrupt good morals" (I Cor. 15:33) or "Flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (II Tim. 2:22). "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life." (Gal. 6:7-8).

One begins to crack and to give in a little at a time, and before long the young Christian finds himself entangled in a web of sin and overcome. REMEMBER: "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first. For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them. It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, 'The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire,'" (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

The Scriptures describe the devil as being "the deceiver of the whole world". He has been at this business of deceiving men for a long time. He has deceived some of the best and wisest of people. I made the mistake of thinking that I was too smart to be deceived. Others may also make the same mistake I did.

To mention a few of the great characters of the Bible who have been deceived by Satan, let us call attention to our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were deceived into eating the forbidden fruit. The mighty Samson was deceived by his girlfriend, Delilah. (Judges

16:4-20). The wise and illustrious King Solomon was deceived into thinking that he could marry foreign women without hurting himself or his nation. (I Kings 11:1ff).

Coming down into the Christian era, we note that Saul of Tarsus was deceived to persecute and kill Christians. All the while, he thought he was doing that which pleased God. For he later said, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day." (Acts 23:1).

I, like these people, was deceived not realizing, "That the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps," (Jer. 10:23).

The only way to keep from being deceived by Satan is to know what the Lord has said in his Word.

Questions:

1. Who deceives youth? What methods are used?
2. What will evil companions do for our morals?
3. Is it "chicken" to flee from a car that is about to hit you and kill you? Is it "chicken" to flee youthful lusts that may cause you to lose your soul? (See II Tim. 2:22).
4. Discuss Gal. 6:7, 9.
5. What does Peter say about those who are Christians and again become entangled and overcome by sin? (2 Peter 2:20-22).
6. Discuss the, "Deceiver of the whole world" and how he works on the human heart.
7. Suggest what Adam, Samson, Solomon and Saul of Tarsus could have done to have kept from being deceived.

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REASON NUMBER FIVE

I failed to add to my faith, the seven items of Christian growth listed in Second Peter, chapter one. "Add to your faith, virtue, and to your virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control steadfastness, and to steadfastness godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love." And lacking these things, I became blind, seeing only what was near, having forgotten the cleansing from my old sins. It is so easy and convenient to forget.

When a youth is breaking the "apron strings" that bind him to home and parents, it is just another short step out of the church into the world. It is perfectly natural and ordained of God for a youth to leave his father and mother to become independent, establishing a home of his own. But it is not natural nor is it pleasing to God for youth or anyone to leave the house of his heavenly Father, the church. The church is universal; the house of my earthly father was not. The church is not bound by time, the home of my earthly father is. Since the death of my father and mother, their home has ceased to be. The church lives on.

In failing to add the seven Christian graces, I soon forgot the clean and pure inward feeling that was mine the night I entered the kingdom of God. I forgot other things also. For instance, the rebukes and promised punishments God will give to sinners. When one can forget these things and refuse to hear them again, he can be in a blissful state and ignorantly happy. He doesn't have a thing in the world to worry about. He doesn't let himself think about the future of his own soul, and he doesn't care about the souls of others. He is usually careful to stay away from suffering and the poor and needy. Since he doesn't see these things, they don't bother him. If he chances to see a beggar, he flips him a coin to ease his conscience and rushes on his way to plunge deeper into the abyss of forgetfulness. He searches for happiness much like a hungry animal searches for food. He rushes in where angels fear to tread. If he does not find his happiness one place he says, "Let's get out of here," and continues his search. As long as he has money, there are plenty of places that will accommodate him. All helping him to forget.

Since money is usually the one passport needed in the search for worldly happiness and forgetfulness, it often becomes the thing

uppermost in his mind.

One might think, as some naive preachers teach, the sinner is restless and cannot sleep because of a guilty conscience that plagues him. There are several reasons why this is not so in many cases. His Epicurean philosophy and his belief in the doctrine of Universalism, help him to have a clear conscience in his own sight. You will notice also that in most cases, the sinner stays out late at night. His parties last until very late hours. There is a reason. This serves to tire his body and mind so he can sleep. He has also learned that strong drink often has a tranquillizing effect bringing sleep and comfort.

The sinner wants to forget about the realities of this life and the life to come. Therefore, he volunteers to make himself a prisoner within the walls of false doctrines and blinding philosophies, where he engages in an endless cycle of indulgences designed to help him forget. When a well-meaning Christian attempts to penetrate his prison walls with truth and realities, the sinner generally becomes irritated, sometimes abusive and maybe even insulting. He is a captive of Satan, and his master he obeys. It takes strength on the part of the Christian to break down the wall and "take Captivity captive." I forgot that I was inside that wall.

Questions:

1. Be able to name the "Seven Christian Graces" we are to add to our faith, (2 Peter 1:5ff).
2. Does God expect us to leave our parents and be independent?
3. Why is it an easy step to leave the church when we leave our parent's home?
4. What happens to the Christian when he fails to add the "Seven Christian Graces" to his faith?
5. Why does the sinner want to forget?
6. What part does money play in finding worldly happiness?
7. Why can the sinner usually rest, be at ease and sleep without his conscience hurting him?
8. What attitude does the sinner sometime have when a faithful Christian tries to help him? Why does he have this attitude?

REASON NUMBER SIX

Like Demas, (II. Tim. 4:10-11) I left the church, having loved this present world. There was no one present, nor did I tell myself, "If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you." "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" I was like those on the rock, who when they heard the word which is the seed, received the word with joy; and they had no root, who for awhile believed, and in time of temptation fell away. Having fallen away, I left the church.

This verse by James McGranahan, describes me perhaps better than anything else unless it be one of Christ's parables:

"O, the bitter pain and sorrow
That a time could ever be,
When I proudly said to Jesus
'All of self, and none of thee.'"

There is nothing modern about worldliness and sin. As I studied the scriptures, I noticed sin and worldliness were as old as man himself, dating back to Adam and Eve. Every sin that is practiced today was committed by the generations before us. In the Roman letter we are told that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And almost everyone who engages in sin does so to his own dreadful sorrow. An example of this sorrow for sin is given in Psalms 51, where David seeks forgiveness from God for his sins.

In our present day, statistics point out that there are more patients in mental hospitals than in other hospitals. And according to some psychological reports the majority of the mental patients are the result of grief and sorrow for past sins. These people have not been made to realize that they have a God that loves them who will forgive them if they will but repent and obey.

The world can get a hold on a person that is hard to shake loose. Some, as Paul points out to Timothy, who are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. (I Tim. 6:9).

Questions:

1. Discuss the man Demas. (II Tim. 4:10-11) See Concordance.
2. If we love this present world (I John 2:15-17) do we love the heavenly Father?

3. When a fallen Christian finally returns to God why is he so sorry for his past sins?
4. How old is sin?
5. What usually is the result of sin?
6. Discuss Paul's warning when he wrote to Timothy.

MY RETURN TO CHRIST AND THE CHURCH:

Somewhere in the back of my mind a few of the things taught me in the church at home stuck. Among those things was the teaching that I should marry a Christian. Why this stuck but other things did not remain, I do not know. But I waited to marry until I found a Christian girl, Dorothy Jean Hendrix, who learned about Christ and His church while she was in the Tipton Home.

I did not care much about living a Christian life, but I wanted a wife who did. Most of the other men I associated with felt the same way. I often wonder what would have become of me if I had married a woman who was of the same inclination as I. I know what has happened to other men who did not marry Christians that were faithful. Some of their homes have broken up and some of them have gone from bad to worse.

If I were called upon to name a day or any event that changed my life more than any other, I would say that it was a September day in 1944. My B-17 crew of ten men was stationed at a U.S. Army Air Base in Foggia, Italy. Our job was to fly a bomber in formation with other planes and bomb the heart-land of Germany.

Since we were one of the newest crews on the air field, we were assigned to fly Holy Joe. Holy Joe was a famous World War II Bomber with a preacher painted on the side of his nose. Most planes had cover girls painted on them; but not this one. I don't know who painted the man with a black suit, clergyman collar with a book in his hand. It was painted long before we came to Foggia.

On this September morning after flight-briefing the ten of us walked out to prepare Holy Joe for the mission. The sky was bright and cloudless. Walking toward the plane loaded with flight equipment, we could hear other planes warming-up. As we approached Holy Joe, we saw scores of metal patches that covered the flack holes in the hull of the old warrior. Before we could take off, we had to work on his generators. Finally, we took our position, warmed up the motors, and slowly took off under the weight of heavy bombs. We flew into formation and headed northward in position with other planes, as we continued our climb. Before we got half way to target area, one of Holy Joe's motors began to cough and soon became worthless. We begin to fall behind the formation. There was a possibility that we could still drop our bombs on the

target and return home so we continued. The crew, who on previous missions chattered constantly on the intercom system, was silent that day and try as I would, they refused to loosen up and talk.

After we crossed the Alps, we lost power in two more motors. The rest of the planes in our formation looked like small black specks in the enemy sky. We dropped our bombs, ball turret, and equipment to lighten our load so we could keep our altitude. We were all alone when we looked down and saw a small town far beneath. All of a sudden flack began bursting around us. We did evasive action to get out of the way . . . but not before they put more flack holes in Holy Joe. With our oxygen supply gone and one motor worthless and two others drawing only about half power, we knew that we could not return home. The generators, all electric motors and instruments were out. We were flying on magneto. We had lost altitude and the clouds began to roll in. If we flew far in the thick clouds, we were afraid we would ram a mountain. So we began to circle and pray. Soon a hole in the clouds opened up beneath us and we could see an air field.

The bomb-bay doors refused to close, and the wheels stubbornly refused to lower. When we broke out of the clouds at about five hundred feet, the rain almost blinded us. The pilot pulled Holy Joe a little to the right of the concrete runway to land on the tall, wet grass instead of the concrete strip. He cut the throttles and ordered me to cut off all gas supply to diminish the possibility of fire. As Co-pilot, I ordered the crew to abandon ship as soon as Holy Joe came to a dead stop on his belly.

Fortunately we had landed in neutral territory and were treated courteously. After interrogation, we were taken to a nice room where warm food was set before us. While we sat in awkward silence, no one touched his food. We all bowed our heads, and someone said a prayer of thanksgiving for a safe landing after such a hazardous flight.

This prayer was revealing for it came from men who had not prayed ever since they were boys at their mothers' knees. Our action was proof again that "There are no atheists in foxholes." When things were going good for us, we never thought about calling upon God. But in trouble we went to Him for help. Long before we landed, we knew Holy Joe was done for. It was not our skill alone that brought all ten men down safely. We knew God was with us for

we could almost feel His presence.

Weeks later, when the fright had worn off and we were safe again, we ceased to give thanks when we ate. Before long most of us were living just as sinful as we were before that September day.

I started thinking that by all reason I should have died that day. If it were not for the providence of the Lord, I would have. Actually my life was not my own, I belonged to God for he had saved my life again. It seemed foolish to me to call upon God in time of danger and fright and shun him when everything is going all right. To say the least such action seems hypocritical.

While in sin, God continued to bless me in so many ways. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." By the grace of my Creator, I had a strong body that was never sick. By the powers, the faculties and the talents God gave me, I worked my way up in the Air Corps. This gift of good health along with all the other powers I took for granted. Someway in my twisted thinking I felt that these good things were a result of something I had done.

Financially I was doing all right. But my spiritual resources were dangerously low. Faithful friends and congregations led me to see how "poor in spirit" I actually was.

I had neither cares nor worries because I had accepted false doctrines and erroneous philosophies. For some time my mind was closed to the realities of life and the certainty of death and the judgment.

I almost tremble now to think how proudly and nonchalantly I walked on the brink of eternal ruin. "Are not the angels ministering spirits, sent forth to do service (protect) for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14).

Shortly after returning to the states, I began to attend church services regularly with my wife. I was discharged from the army in 1945 and we made our home in Wichita, Kansas. With the help of new acquaintances, like the Charles Loves, and by their encouragement and guidance I came to myself.

Jesus, in Luke the fifteenth chapter beginning with verse eleven, tells of a father who had two sons. The younger of the sons came to his father and said, "Father give me that portion of the inheritance that belongs to me." His father did and a few days later the young man took his possessions and went away into a far country to spend

his life, his talents, and his money in riotous living. All went well for a while. And then disaster struck. A great drought came in this far country. The young man ran out of money, his fair-weather friends deserted him. So he hired himself out to a man to feed the hogs. The youth was so desperate he ate the husks along with the hogs.

Finally the young man came to himself. No longer being able to forget, he began to remember how pleasant it was in his father's house. He said, "How many hired servants of my father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of the hired servants. He arose and left the hogs. With no money, no shoes, and scarcely any clothing, he started home. And as the wayward son approached his home, while he was afar off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, "Father I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son." The father would have none of this kind of talk but rather said to his servants, "Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

My heavenly Father gladly accepted me back into the fellowship of the "house of God, which is the church of the living God." (I Tim. 3:15).

Many congregations and faithful Christians helped in my return to the church. In Galatians the sixth chapter, Paul wrote, "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any transgression, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thy self, lest thou also be tempted." Many people did that.

And James adds his voice to this by writing "My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converts a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins." (James 5:19).

In the eighth chapter of Acts, the story is told of Philip's preaching in Samaria. When the people believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. And Simon the

sorcerer also himself believed: and being baptized, he continued with Philip; and beholding signs and great miracles wrought, he was amazed.

Christ had promised, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mk. 16:16) Therefore, we understand Simon was saved from his past sins.

When Peter and John came to Samaria from Jerusalem, Simon wanted to buy with money the power to do miracles through the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8). But Peter said to him, "Your silver perishes with you, because you have thought to obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter: for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore, of this your wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of your heart shall be forgiven you. For I see you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

Here is a Christian, a child of God, who had sinned and was about to perish along with his money. Peter, an inspired apostle, describes this once saved man as being in a fallen condition. Peter did not tell the sinful Christian to be baptized again. But rather he told him to repent and pray that he may be forgiven.

Though I had not committed the same sin Simon had, nevertheless, I had sinned and found myself in a fallen condition. Since God is no respecter of persons, he required the same thing of me he required of Simon who sinned after becoming a Christian. Like Simon, I had to admit my sin which is a hard thing for any sinner to do. I had to repent by turning away and leaving sin behind. I had to pray, seeking forgiveness from God and others I had harmed.

And of course God, like the father of the prodigal, is happy when any sinner comes home. And as the prodigal, a feast was set before me. Not a feast on meat of the "fatted calf," but of the "Blood" and the "Body" of the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." And with the other Christians, I had the glorious privilege of sitting down at this table with the family of God, with God the Father, and with Christ the Saviour, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit and have sweet communion with the holy Godhead, the Trinity.

The other day I visited an elderly Christian lady, and she remarked, "You always looked reverent when the Lord's Supper is

passed. You sit there so silently with your head bowed." I did not know anyone ever watched. But for whatever it may be worth, I would like to tell you that when the communion is passed my prayer is that God will never let me leave my Father's house again. It is frightening to think of this possibility, and stop to realize what a dreadful chance I was taking while walking promiscuously on the rim of eternal ruin.

It is my sincere desire and everlasting prayer that I shall always have the strength, the courage, the conviction to stand up for Jesus and not be afraid. "To him be loyal and be true," He needs those who are not set back by frowns or fears. He needs those who will not be afraid of what people may say, but rather those who are afraid not to walk humbly in the presence of an ever present God.

Temptation comes to all of us and if we are not careful anyone of us may fall and leave our Father's house, his church. The Lord in his love, grace and mercy has given us warning by saying, "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." (I Pet. 5:8). Our God, who loved us and gave his Son for us, wants us to rely upon his admonitions and promises. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also a way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it." (I Cor. 10:13). To Paul and to us he has promised, "My grace is sufficient for you." (II Cor. 12:9). Again he has promised, "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will in any wise forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5).

Our Father is faithful and steadfast, and He will never leave us. If we are ever separated from Him, it is not God but the Christian, who leaves by sinning. But when we leave the house of God, "the church of the living God," Christ continues to seek and save the lost since He is not willing that any should perish but wants all to come to repentance.

"Try your own selves, whether you are in the faith:" (I Cor. 13:5) and if you have found you have left the church or maybe some time in the future find you have not been faithful to the Lord, "Harden not your heart" (Heb. 3:12-15). And if some Christian comes to talk to you about returning to Christ and his church, accept the spiritual one graciously, remembering that this Christian has been sent to you by the Lord himself, by commandment found in the Scriptures.

Observe a baby learning to walk. He will stumble and fall many times. But every time he gets up and tries again. We must learn to do the same thing as we walk with Christ. We will often sin and fall. It happens to every Christian. So just get up, brush off the sin by repentance and prayer, and try again. Like the baby, the child of God, will soon learn that he can follow Christ father each time without falling.

When you have sinned, never be too proud or too unconcerned to admit it. REMEMBER: The One who never sins is more than human; and the person who does not admit his sins is less than Christian. (See First John 1:5-22).

So live that when thy summons come to join
That innumerable caravan which moves
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

—William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis".

Questions:

1. Why is it so important to marry a faithful Christian?
2. Why do some men and women want their mates to be Christians but do not care much about living the Christian life themselves?
3. Why do you suppose that this September day back in 1944 was such an important day to me?
4. Why do you suppose a group of sinful men paused to pray before eating the food given them after the flight?
5. The statement "There are no atheists in fox holes" became popular in World War II. What does it mean?
6. Within a few weeks after the flight, when the fright had worn off, most of us ceased to pray and were living in the same sinful way as before. Can you explain this action?
7. I believe the providence of God helped us to land safely among the Alps under such hazardous conditions. What do you think?
8. After reading Heb. 1:14 and related passages, discuss the part angels play in our lives.

9. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like the angels or the providence of God helped you get out alive?
10. Discuss the passage "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust," (Matt. 4:45).
11. I felt like my good health, talents and blessings were the result of something I had done, and not a gift from God. Do you feel this way sometimes?
12. How can some sinners be carefree and not care about their souls?
13. After reading Luke 15:11ff, discuss the story of the "Prodigal Son." Remember, God always wants every sinner to return.
14. Note that Gal. 6:1ff and James 5:19-20 tell of the importance of faithful Christians helping their wayward brothers. Discuss.
15. What did Peter tell Simon to do after he had believed and been baptized and then was about to perish with his money? Acts 8:9ff.
16. What was the "feast" set before me when I returned to my Father's house, the church?
17. What is my prayer when the communion is passed? Do you pray at that time?
18. Note the warnings, admonitions and promises God has given to us. How do these apply to you?
19. If we become separated from God, who is it that leaves the Way? Is it we or God?
20. Why should we accept the Christian graciously who comes to talk to us about returning to the Lord?
21. What can we learn from a baby learning to walk?