



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #12: "Obedience Through Christ"

How God Brought Conversion

Jesus said, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Salvation is a free gift, but it is given on condition that we are born again.

Yet even the conversion experience that we call the new birth is a gift from God. Long before we were born, God was already trying to figure out ways to win our affection and bring us to salvation. "He chose us ... before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." He "predestined us to" be His "adopted" children. (Ephesians 1:4, 5.)

Imagine; God already had plans for you 6000 years ago, before the world was even created! When Jesus died upon the cross, He already knew of your sins and rebellion from Him, and it was for those sins that He died. Thus God demonstrated His "love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).

Our God is a very personal God. He cares for us individually. Jesus said to consider the little sparrows that flit about the yard, for "not one of them is forgotten before God.... and you are of more value than many sparrows." God takes so much notice of you that even "the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Luke 12:6, 7). "Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest.... The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watch care, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son." Happiness Digest, p. 49, 50.

Our stories today are about how God carefully and miraculously arranged events so as to bring two of His lost children to conversion. In both cases He used someone else. In our first story, He used a mother's love to win a son, and in the second, He used a son's love to win a father. Just as God planned for the salvation of these two individuals, so He has planned for your salvation. Yet God will never force, He only tries to win. Eventually, we have to surrender to that love or be lost.

LACED WITH LOVE:

From her southern home, Ella heard about the need of nurses for the sick and dying in the army. It was during the evil days of civil war, and Ella longed to do the work of Christ in helping the sick and sharing with them the gospel.

It was the Sanitary Commission that collected gift supplies of blankets and clothing from the churches to be used in the army hospitals. In one of the Sanitary Commission boxes, Ella found a beautiful patchwork quilt that she could tell was laced with love. The stitching was exquisite, and care had been taken to make it as light as possible so as not to lay heavy on the soldiers' wounds. Upon touch, she found it

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soft and smooth. It was made of square blocks of calico and white cotton intermingled. Every other block was white and every other colored.

But the most unusual feature of the quilt was that upon every white square was a carefully embroidered text of Scripture or verse from a well-known hymn. On the central block, in large bold letters so as to catch the careless eye, was embroidered the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and below it the prayer of the repentant, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The head border, which would be nearest to the sick man's eyes and most often read, were texts of promise, love, and comfort. Among them Ella read: "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."

Ella's eyes moistened as she read the note attached within: "I have made this Scripture quilt for one of the hospital beds, for I thought that while it would be a comfort to the poor body, it might speak a word of good cheer to the precious soul; the words are so beautiful and blessed, and full of balm and healing! May it be a blessing to the dear boys in the army, among whom I have a son."

"Oh," said Ella, "that all our beds had such a quilt!"

"God will surely speak through these embroidered words of love to the sick and wounded," added another. "They will read the verses on this quilt when they will read nothing else. Who knows what good will come from this quilt?"

Ella folded the note and placed it in her Bible. She decided she would notice what happened to the quilt and those who used it.

It was not long before a man with pneumonia was brought into the sick bay and the new quilt was put on his bed. He was too sick to notice anything at first, but as he grew better Ella saw him intently studying the texts. "Handy to have 'em here!" he said, pointing to them as she stood beside his bed.

"Then you know how to value them," she said. "I do," he answered heartily.

After that she saw many studying the quilt, in fact, almost all who laid beneath it. One poor soldier, who had tossed and turned with pain and fever for several days, caught sight of the words, "And I will give you rest." He beckoned to Ella and, pointing to the verse, asked: "Where can I find that rest? I need rest—rest for body and soul. I am half mad. You can see that I am sick, but I'm even sicker where no one can see. Tell me how to get rest!"

"Have you never heard of the way? Have you never heard of Jesus?" she asked. "Tell it to me again," he said. So she told him the story of the cross.

"He died for my sins?" he asked. "Yes, yours," she assured him. "He saw you in your sins and pitied you. He loved you and died to save you from sin and to give you rest and peace. He died to make you happy!"

"I have never been happy. Never." he said. "I've been too wicked. Tell me, did He really die for me? I never felt it before. It just never seemed very real to me before."

"I hope you will come to feel it," she said. "Have you seen the lines on the quilt that say: 'None but Jesus, none but Jesus, Can do helpless sinners good?'"

"It's true," continued Ella. "I know it is true. None but Jesus can bring you help. I've tried everything else, and there is no other way. Here is another verse on the blanket from a hymn that says: 'I'll go to Jesus, though my sins, have like a mountain risen.'"

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"But I can't go. I don't feel like I can do anything. I am a very wretched man. That's all I am, a wretched man," he responded.

"Then just leave yourself with God," Ella said. "Repeat this verse: 'Here, Lord, I give myself away, 'Tis all that I can do. 'That's all you have to do, just give yourself to Jesus.'"

"Is that verse here on the quilt?" he asked.

Ella showed it to him, after which he said: "I'll keep it before me. Oh for a little rest!" Not long afterward he found rest—rest of soul and peace of mind. He had found Jesus. Soon he left the hospital, a happier man than before he came.

An illiterate Irish lad lay under the quilt. One day when nearly well he was looking at it. "Is that reading?" he asked, pointing to a text of Scripture.

"Yes," answered Ella. "Would you like to know what it says?"

"Please read it to me," he said. Ella read: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

"Read this one," he said, pointing to another square. "I love them that love Me, and they that seek Me early shall find Me," Ella read. "It was the Lord who said that," she added.

"Yes, it was the Lord. It's so good to a lonely person to hear you read," the young Irishman said.

As the months went by, dozens of boys and young men laid beneath the blanket, each one being observed by Ella. What blessing, cheer and hope the blanket, stitched with love by some Christian mother, brought to nearly all. It was as if God was directing just who should lay beneath it.

One young man under the blanket laid for over a week in a near unconscious state. Why they gave him that bed they did not know. But soon he began to come to his senses. Ella watched to see if he would notice the Scripture texts and hymn verses upon the quilt; he did not. But then she witnessed the strangest thing. He eyed the comforter carefully, and then she thought she saw him kiss it!

"Maybe his mind is wandering," she thought. "Or maybe he found a special verse of Scripture," she mused. She carefully marked with her eye the area of the blanket that he had kissed in order to find out what Scripture it might have been that so touched him. But when she walked by close enough to see, to her surprise there was no text on that square at all! The spot that he had kissed was one of the bright colored, calico blocks with the pattern of a little crimson leaf sewed into the middle of it.

He kept looking at that leaf with tears in his eyes. Ella was sure his mind must be wandering. Then she saw him kiss it again, so she came closer to the side of his bed. He looked up at her with a smile shining through some tears and asked, "Do you know where this quilt came from?"

"Some good woman sent it to us through the Sanitary Commission," she said.

"You don't know her name or where it came from, do you?" he asked.

"No, but why do you ask," Ella wanted to know. "Because the material in this crimson colored leaf looks just like my mother's gown and it reminds me of her," he said.

So that is why he kissed the leaf, Ella thought. "There was a note that came with the blanket which I saved in my Bible," she told him. "Would you be willing to let me see it some time when it is convenient?" he pleaded.

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"Oh yes," she said. "I'll get it right now." As she handed it to him, she saw him open it and look at the handwriting. His lips trembled and grew white when he saw the writing. "Please read it to me, quite slowly," he asked. "It's my mother's writing."

Ella read and re-read the note to him. "Are you going to keep that note?" the boy wondered. "Oh yes," said Ella. "I value it and the comforter very much. It has brought salvation to many soldiers."

He put his hands over his eyes, not wishing any to see him cry. Ella thought he wanted to be alone, so she left him for a time. The next day, as she came to his bed, she was wondering if he had seen any of his mother's texts. He had, and pointed one out to her. It said: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He whispered: "That is me. I am no more worthy."

Ella put her finger on the next white block and read to him, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." As she looked up, she saw tears upon his cheeks, and his lips were trembling once again. Again he covered his eyes and she left him.

A few days later, when he had grown much stronger, he held up to her the text she had shown him, saying, "I was a great way off, but He has met me and had compassion on me."

"Do you feel the Savior's love?" she asked. "Yes," he responded, "and I am filled with a peace I've never known before. I believe God does love me. He led me here, just at this time, and gave me this blanket that my own mother has made! What a Savior!"

"Shall I write to your mother and tell her that her son who was dead is alive again; that the one who was spiritually lost has been found?" she asked.

"Would you please?" he responded. "I'm sure that she was thinking of me with each stitch she sewed in this lovely blanket. She didn't know I would ever see it, but she knew that some mother's son would feel its comfort and read its texts. Please let her know that I've given my heart to Christ."

And so it was that God used a mother's love to reach her wayward son. And now let me share with you a short story of how God used a son's love to reach a wayward father.

CURIOUS QUESTIONS:

Harold Jenkins later confessed that he was "a self-righteous follower of the world and its frivolities." His religion was psychology and logic. He did not pray or believe in prayer, nor did he go to church or any religious function. He claimed that religion was a hoax and its followers were hypocrites. He did, however, believe in basic morality, hard work, and in doing the best one could.

Upon having a son he became anxious about his welfare and future career. He knew that as little Jason grew up he would face temptations of drugs, sex, and homosexuality, and that he would be exposed to all kinds of evil influences in today's permissive society. His mind was exercised as to what would eventually become of him.

Harold's concern for his son led him to take great care in the choice of a babysitter for his son. The one he chose was a Christian young woman whom he felt would be honest and faithful. It was from her that Jason first began to learn about Jesus and the Bible.

Soon he was asking his father questions; they were the strangest questions! Harold couldn't figure out where they were coming from or why he was asking them. They were questions about his "Heavenly Father," and "that happy land, far, far away." Harold was puzzled, and yet the questions were asked in

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such a sweet and earnest manner that he couldn't bring himself to shatter his son's simple belief. After all, he himself had been raised in a Christian home and taught these same things when he was a boy. Though he was no longer a Christian, he was sure it was the Christian principles he had learned as a boy that made him the industrious and prosperous man he was.

Yet, how could he answer his son's questions? He began to distrust himself and to sense a degree of inability to raise his son with the same values he enjoyed. His son didn't pray when he went to bed as he had been taught to pray. His son didn't have the same simple trust in a God to protect him while he was going to sleep that he had had when he laid his head upon the pillow as a lad. Why, he didn't even have a Bible in the house! Harold was greatly perplexed as to whether he should teach his son about Jesus, as he had been taught - but how could he teach him something he didn't believe anymore?

One day tragedy struck. One of his son's little playmates died. And before the year was over, another of his friends was laid in the grave. And then an uncle died, and then he began to rebel against the sorrow. He began to grow bitter. He wanted to know why "God had done it?"

"Why, daddy? Why?" he wanted to know. What was a poor father to say to a question like that? He didn't want his son bitter or hard. Somehow he had to explain the best he could.

He explained how God didn't bring the suffering but that an angel named Lucifer had rebelled. Then Adam and Eve had chosen to disobey God. "It was sin which led to the suffering and misery we see in the world today," he told his son. The whole time Harold was trying to explain these things he had learned as a boy he felt like a hypocrite, for he claimed he didn't believe such things any more. Yet he felt he had to do it; his son needed an answer.

Then one evening little Jason was lying in bed. Harold was sitting with his wife by the fire. She had been telling him that Jason had not been a good boy that day and had to be reprovved for his behavior. All was quiet, when suddenly Jason broke out in loud crying and sobbing. Dad and Mom hurried up the stairs to his bedroom to see what was wrong.

"I don't want it there, daddy! I don't want it there!" said the child.

"What is it my child? What don't you want?"

"Why daddy, I don't want the angels to write down in God's book all the bad things I have done today. I don't want it there! I wish it could be wiped out!" He was in great distress for a little boy. What could Harold do? He did not believe in all those Christian things anymore; at least he was trying not to believe. But here was his boy in great distress with a guilty conscience at such a tender age. He had to be taught the way.

"Well, you do not have to cry," his father suddenly said in a most tender manner. "You can have it all wiped out in a minute if you want."

"How daddy?"

"Why, just get down on your knees, and ask God for Christ's sake to wipe it out and He will do it." He did not have to speak twice. Little Jason jumped out of bed, saying, "Daddy, help me do it!"

Now came the real trial for Harold, who was trying hard to maintain his unbelief. It was one thing to say things he didn't believe - but to pray! How could he pray? And yet the boy's anxiety was so great and his pleading so earnest that Harold was nearly overcome with emotion. And so, ever so reluctantly, though he dared not show it, he bowed down on his knees before God for the first time in many years. There, doing the best he could remember to do, he humbly asked God to wipe away his son's sins and give him a clean heart and a clean record on the books of heaven. Then he said Amen.

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"Daddy, are you sure it is all wiped out?" asked little Jason.

It seemed that every question Jason asked cut a wound into his poor father's heart. It brought his mind back to his mother's prayers and how he had once believed. And now he had a son. What would happen should his son die? Would he be ready for heaven? What would happen when he himself died? Would he be with his son? All the while he thought, Jason sat expectantly waiting for an answer. "Daddy, are you sure it is all wiped out?"

"Yes, son. The Bible says that if from your heart you ask God for Christ's sake to do it, and if you are really sorry for what you have done, it will be all covered up."

A smile of pleasure passed over little Jason's face as he quietly asked, "And what is it covered up with? A black marker?"

Harold had to smile, but again his feelings were stifled. It was as if the Holy Spirit was determined to bring him back to his childhood faith. The Bible says "a little child shall lead them." And so it was that God was using a child to lead his father to a saving belief in the Lord.

"No, son," Harold finally answered. "It is not covered up with a black marker, but with the precious blood of Christ. 'The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin.'" He hoped he had quoted the verse right.

Something changed in the heart of that poor old dad as he explained this beautiful Bible truth to his son. The tears began to flow and he could not check them. He felt like a poor, lost sinner. Turning away he said to his wife, "Mary, we must find the Lord. Jason must know the Lord, but we must find Him ourselves in order to teach him the way."

Harold could not sleep that night. At last he got up and knelt beside his sleeping son's bed and poured out his heart to the Lord: "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief" Mary, too, could not sleep. And thus she joined him there beside the bed of their dear son who asked such curious questions. And God heard their prayers. In fact, he had heard their prayers long before they were prayed, for it was He who had touched Jason's heart in order to reach his parents.

Dear friend, the Lord loves you. Even, if you have not yet given your heart to the Lord, He is even now seeking to bring you to the point of conversion. And if you have at some time surrendered, He is still seeking to teach you more and to lead you step by step into a closer relationship with Him. May the Lord bless you as you study this lesson on the New Birth experience that you may not only learn about it, but that you might experience it.