

JESUS IN PURSUIT

The Hounding of a Haughty Heart

By John Andrews

“Lord, my heart is not haughty.
My soul is even as a weaned child”
—Psalm 131

I wasn't always a follower of Jesus Christ. For a long time I was into self-salvation. It took until I was almost forty for the Hound of Heaven, as a poet has called him, to pursue and woo and finally win me. You might say Jesus followed me before I followed him.

But no one was ever more joyously born again. No haughty heart was ever more abjectly humbled. It was the defining event of an eventful life. I'm writing about it here at length for the first time because, as the old hymn says, “I love to tell the story” – and because of what my experience can teach us about the big lie of self-salvation.

For self-salvation takes many subtle forms in these hubristic times of ours. As old as the Tower of Babel, as new as the Freedom Tower, it's really most people's mode of coping. The Religion of Me is all around us, much of the time in attractive non-religious guise.

But whether packaged as lifestyle, politics, faith, or some hip hybrid, this individualistic mass cult can't fulfill its promises. I learned the hard way that self-salvation is ultimately a fraud and a failure.

Deceptive Veneer

Early on, though, things were great. My boyhood and early adulthood had been a happy and rewarding time. Friends knew me as a spiritually engaged, morally serious, materially successful young guy. I was active in church and devoted to my wife and our three children. I loved my life and everything about it.

Not really knowing Jesus, I still revered God, lived by prayer, and studied the Bible every day. That's because four generations of my family and three generations of Donna's had been faithful churchgoers in the tradition

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About the Author

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of Mary Baker Eddy, a self-taught prophetess who left Congregationalism in 1875 to found her own new church, Christian Science.

The tenets of Christian Science as presented in Eddy's textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, have a deceptive veneer of similarity to what true Christians believe. They deny key elements of the gospel, however.

Despite professing that "we take the inspired word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal life... we acknowledge God's forgiveness of sin... [and] we acknowledge Jesus' atonement," Christian Scientists redefine or qualify those familiar concepts to the point of meaninglessness.

Eddy twists Scripture to ostensibly prove her depiction of God as impersonal and unitarian ("divine Principle") and of humanity as sinless but deceived (asleep in an "Adam dream"). She claims to have discerned rules and examples in the Bible by which the individual can wake himself from dreaming and begin exercising the dominion granted mankind in Genesis 1.



Mary Baker Eddy

By deeming Christ's statement, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30), applicable to anyone thus awakened, she demotes Jesus from God the Son to something like our peer, "the highest human concept of the perfect man."

The resulting belief system is a heady mixture of ancient Gnosticism, liberal Protestantism, the higher criticism, and New England transcendentalism with its fashionable Eastern mystic tinges. Today's prosperity gospel, designer spirituality, and New Age self-help movements are foreshadowed even in the pre-1900 beginnings of Christian Science.

No Sin, No Savior

I have to stress, though, how earnestly (if shallowly) biblical and conventionally American our way of life was when I was growing up in the Eisenhower years. Our family was steeped in Scripture, regular at church on Sundays and Wednesdays, faithful with the Lord's Prayer, abstinent from drugs and alcohol, spiritually devout in every way.

We thought Christian Science was just another religious denomination, though more correct because we met health needs by prayer, not medicine, and more Christlike because we had the supposed key to the Scriptures with its "final revelation" of God and man and truth.

What that so-called revelation told us, told me, was that by knowing this truth I could think my way to health, happiness, and holiness in this world, and guarantee myself heaven in the next. In other words, self-salvation. They didn't call it that, but that's what it amounted to.

Christian Science, despite its occasional odd references to Jesus as the Savior, assured me I was in no way a sinner in need of a savior. And it waved off the superstitious notion that our Lord's death on the cross had redeemed me or anybody from a lost condition. All that was "old theology."

So was Jesus God incarnate? Certainly not, we were taught. Nor did Jesus even really die. His death was but a "seeming." Nor was that atonement mentioned in our tenets an actual substitutionary sacrifice. It was merely a "demonstration," a sort of how-to lesson for our benefit, carried out by a "Way-shower."

Self-Salvation

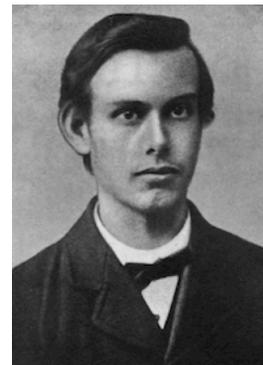
As strange as this belief system might seem, viewed with a secular perspective from outside; as obvious a spiritual counterfeit as it might be to the well-taught Christian, it felt like a satisfying and rewarding way of life most of the time to those of us living it from the inside.

Maturing into marriage and military service soon after college, I happily went with the flow of a religious subculture imbued in me by having gone to school with fellow Christian Scientists in Missouri and Illinois for 16 years and to summer camp with them in Colorado for 12 years.

I taught Sunday school, took on church leadership duties, received class instruction, wrote for the church periodicals, and joined the staff of Adventure Unlimited, the Christian Science youth ministry my parents had founded. I was all in for Christian Science; all in for self-salvation.

What I didn't realize, during those years of my twenties and thirties, was how patiently and purposefully Christ was pursuing me all the while. My heart was haughty indeed; not with harsh arrogance, perhaps, but with a quiet, complacent sort of spiritual superiority and smugness, rooted in the Mary Baker Eddy assurance that with sufficient mental discipline I would always be captain of my own destiny. No flicker of doubt or inadequacy disturbed that certitude.

So sure of who God was and was not, I didn't hear behind me what Francis Thompson, in his long impassioned poem about the Hound of Heaven, calls "those strong feet that followed, followed after with unhurrying chase, deliberate speed, majestic instancy." It was always there, the relentless tread of God the Son, Jesus our elder brother, implacable in his loving design to corner me and rescue me – but I was deaf to it.



Francis Thompson

Chain Links

The Lord providentially used people and experiences and books, inward longings and outward circumstances and little moments, to weave a net of necessity and logic around me that gradually drew closed until I was broken and taken.

My conversion (to vary the metaphor) needed many links in the chain, many blows of the ax. I emphasize this to encourage believers in the small acts of witnessing that may become links in the conversion chain for someone else – someone whose new birth we ourselves may never see, but whose soul God will never abandon.

So as I look back now, there are all these snapshots in my treasured album. An encounter with someone, a sentence from a book, a verse in Scripture that nagged at me, an hour alone when ugly self-knowledge became unavoidable, burn in my memory down the years. Each was a waypoint along the winding path of a lost sheep's dumb refusal to face and follow the Savior, and his gracious refusal to stop following me. Here are a few of my chain links:

The Cadet

One evening at naval officer school, I'm confronted by a fellow cadet who asks if I have any idea how blatantly the Christian Science textbook, open on my desk, falsifies the Gospel. I am lost and will remain so, he tells me, until I place the crucified and risen Lord Jesus at the center of my life.

It was, I saw later, rather like the scene in Acts 8 where Philip asks the queen's treasurer if he understands the messianic prophecy in Isaiah. But unlike that teachable Ethiopian, I was nowhere near ready to be evangelized, let alone baptized.

Our exchange, two or three uncomfortable minutes at most, ended inconclusively. I never forgot it, though. I never will.

The Convert

Years pass. One morning in Washington, I'm present at a small prayer breakfast in the White House staff mess where Nixon hatchet man Chuck Colson, facing indictment by the Watergate prosecutors, movingly recounts his conversion from lapsed Catholic to born-again evangelical Christian.

Colson in tears? Could it be? I meet with him later to learn more of the story. It's Jesus, he tells me. "I needed him and so do you. Get to know Jesus, John."

**Colson in tears?
Could it be?**

Chuck sends me home with a copy of *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, a book and an author I had never heard of before. But I didn't read a word of it, not then and not for a long time after. I kept it, though. I always will.

The Youth Worker

The scene shifts to Colorado. Leading the Adventure Unlimited youth organization, I struggle with how to get teenagers interested in the abstruse, abstract teachings of Christian Science.

Brushes with winsome evangelical leaders such as Jim Groen of Youth for Christ, Denny Rydberg of Youth Specialties, and Don Reever of Young Life start me thinking that one

thing our programs need is more of Jesus. But my tentative efforts in that direction meet resistance. I back off and try another angle, taking a friend's dare to write a lesson plan on 100 ways our volunteers could engage kids with the Bible. "Chart of Life," it was called, echoing an Eddy phrase. More resistance.

Vexed and perplexed, I find myself wondering who these people are anyway, these Christian Scientists. This church I grew up in and am now trying to serve, ostensibly part of the Body of Christ; really?

The Authors

Next begins the attack of the authors. I'm gripped with a strange new hunger for wider and deeper views of God. *Mere Christianity* comes off my shelf, onto my desk, and is devoured. Why wasn't I told about this sooner?

Then more of C. S. Lewis, then George MacDonald, John Henry Newman, G. K. Chesterton, Malcolm Muggeridge, Josh McDowell. Then J. B. Phillips' *Your God is Too Small*. The more I read, the more I have to read. Why have the Trinity and Jesus in his fullness been kept from me for so long?

Then I attend a week of lectures by Carl F. H. Henry at Denver Seminary; an odd place for the local Christian Science first reader to turn up. The eminent theologian's quiet intensity arrests me. There is something humbly holy about him; disturbing yet irresistible.



Carl F. H. Henry

We must know Jesus in the exact way Scripture presents him, or not know him at all, Henry insists in one talk. The earnest young student of Mrs. Eddy's Christological revisionism goes home unsettled.

But New Age tempters are hounding my other flank. Free-thinking Christian Science friends introduce me to the likes of Teilhard de Chardin, Barbara Marx Hubbard, and the *Course on Miracles*. Tasting their racy allure, at once magnetic and repellent, I begin to see the easy corruptibility of Eddy's self-invented spirituality. Have I built my life on rock or sand?

The Serpent

Things are coming to a head. About this time, the serpent finds another entry into my ill-defended citadel: the lust of the flesh. An office friendship crosses the line into marital infidelity.

She and I both "knew better," but neither of us recoiled much from "sinning against God." Those scare quotes suggest the bland detachment from the horrific reality of sin that we both had as Scientists.

Found out, ashamed, facing divorce, devastated but not really broken, I am unable to identify any longer as God's perfect child, untainted by matter and evil. Looking within, I see only dark depravity. I have failed my family, and self-salvation has failed me.

The Sisters

That's where matters stood in July 1980, the summer of my 37th year. "Nought shelters thee who wilt not shelter Me," Thompson's Hound of Heaven warns the fugitive soul. I was reaching that point without fully realizing it. Christian Science was losing its power to meet my needs or explain my world, let alone wash me clean.

"Lost indeed, escape is none," cries another of the old devotional poets, George MacDonald, when the Good Shepherd's dogs finally corner him. Just so: confident John had run out of options, and one ringing telephone was soon to prove it.

"Line 1 is for you," the receptionist at our Adventure Unlimited headquarters office told me. "It's Carol Wilson in Pasadena. Her daughter is at camp right now." But the distraught mother wasn't calling about Annie, 16, then attending the A/U Ranches in Buena Vista, Colorado, with hundreds of other Christian Science teens. It was her older daughter, Laurie, 19, that Mrs. Wilson urgently hoped I could help.

Laurie, she explained, had been to our camp in past years, but was spending this summer in Boulder with a group of fellow Stanford students, doing street evangelism for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The girl had gone off to college last fall as a devoted young Christian Scientist, Carol told me, but then "the fundamentalists captured her."

Would I, as a favor to the worried family, make contact with Laurie and take her to visit Annie at camp, thus hopefully "waking her up" to return to the Christian Science fold? Doubtful as the errand seemed, the mother's anguish touched me. I agreed to try.

To Boulder

Mark Reed, the young Presbyterian pastor leading the InterVarsity group in Boulder, was friendly and relaxed when I reached him by phone and outlined the situation. Could we meet and explore options? Sure, he said; come Thursday about 5:30. (Mark, Carol, Annie, and Laurie are pen names used here to protect those individuals' privacy.)

I assured him my approach would be respectful of Laurie Wilson's autonomy as a young adult, "and by the way, I happen to be a Christian Scientist who considers himself a Christian first and foremost." Mark voiced polite skepticism at this, having roomed with a Christian Scientist in college. "You'll see," I promised. But the one who was destined to see was me.

It was I who was destined to see.

Spaghetti and salad were being served on paper plates to Mark's gang when I found my way into the big rented house near the University of Colorado campus. Laurie seemed sweet, serious, a little shy. Mark was just as he had been on the phone, engaging and talkative, never met a stranger. The kids were quick to make me welcome, though I could sense their curiosity about this guy from a church many regarded as a cult.

But I hadn't been there five minutes when a feeling I had never experienced before shot through me like high voltage – as tangibly as if I'd put my finger in a light socket. Joining hands in a circle, they prayed aloud for Jesus to be present at this meal and all

evening, and at that moment I knew him to be real and near in a whole new way. “Whatever it is you people have,” I heard myself thinking, “I need it and I want it.”

As dusk came on, Mark divided everyone into teams and we fanned out along the Pearl Street mall to strike up conversations with whoever might be willing. Nothing sticks with me from what was said that night – or the next night either, for they prevailed on me to come back, all unplanned.

But there was a mounting sense of destiny, tectonic plates inexorably shifting, as my complacent certainty that I understood the Bible much better than they did, gave way inch by inch and hour by hour in our moonlight discussions on the grass beside the mall.

To Camp

After two evenings together, it was agreed. Laurie and Mark would come with me the following Tuesday for a day trip to visit Annie at the A/U camp. More hours together on the road; more theological jousting; and again, there was no decisive exchange I could point to, but simply that ever-greater longing to come in from the cold and have the kind of personal relationship with Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord, that these new friends of mine had.

Round-Up Ranch campers were thronging in to lunch when we arrived. The sisters hugged, giggled, and chattered as girls will do. It was clear to me there was to be no going back by Laurie from her newfound faith, nor by then did I want her to. God’s target all along in this rescue operation had been John, the ostensible rescuer, I was starting to see. And right there in the dining hall, the net closed around me at last.

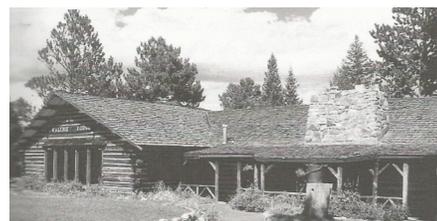
Camp activities on Tuesday afternoon always paused for a youth-led testimonial meeting (similar to the Wednesday evening service in Christian Science churches) at which teens would tell what God was doing in their lives. Sitting near the back with Reed and the Wilson girls, I squirmed uncomfortably as the reader presented Bible selections out of context and *Science and Health* passages of blurry metaphysics, followed by several campers’ simple accounts of how “knowing the truth” had helped them.

Afterward, when Annie had said her goodbyes and the lodge had emptied out, I felt too awful for words. My Christian Science kids had shown so poorly. This wasn’t really them at their best, I stammered to my friends. Mark must have sensed I was at a tipping point. His gentleness right then will stay with me as long as I live.

Finally Ready

“Don’t be hard on yourself, John, or hard on them. Listening to them, I can tell they are good kids. Great kids. But what’s missing when they talk, don’t you think, is Jesus. You just need to help them put Jesus at the center.”

Right there at the Colorado camp, my family’s own camp, where so much of my spiritual formation



The Lodge at Camp

had happened since boyhood, Mark Reed was making the very same appeal that Chuck Colson had made to me in a Washington law office seven years before – “Get to know Jesus; you need him” – but now I was finally ready to listen.

And more than listen; I was ready to submit. After Mark said that, the dam of my emotions broke, and with it my will to resist. I just put my head in my hands and sobbed.

They didn’t lead me through the sinner’s prayer, nor did I physically kneel. The place was too public. But then and there I did ask Jesus to be on the throne of my heart. I accepted him as Lord of my life. I prostrated myself spiritually to the God-man, and my world has never been the same from that moment on.

Unheard Of

Wednesday: the first day of the rest of my life. The Hound of Heaven had run to ground my haughty heart. In the poem, Thompson speaks of being driven to his knees and left “defenseless, utterly,” by the severity of God’s all-demanding love. That’s where this born-again Christian Scientist woke to find himself.

My shattered self-sufficiency echoed the brokenness of the Psalmist: “So foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee” (Ps. 73:22). Jesus hounds us down, though, only to lift us up. I at once saw his pierced hand “outstretched caressingly,” as Thompson puts it, and heard his invitation: “Rise, clasp my hand, and come.”

My next chapter, soon to slow like a glacier, unfolded initially at lightspeed.

Rashly, but unable to do otherwise, that very Wednesday evening I challenged our Christian Science congregation at the close of the testimonial meeting to do better in rendering Jesus the “endless homage” that Mary Baker Eddy says we owe him.

My outburst from the first reader’s desk had violated a taboo, and there was a storm. Despite Eddy’s assertion on the first page of her textbook that “the time for thinkers has come,” doctrinal disputation and correction among Scientists outside the Boston hierarchy is unheard of.

***‘Time for thinkers’
hasn’t come after all.***

By Thursday evening, my resignation as reader had been demanded by the local members. I willingly gave it – feeling, by then, no more in command of events than a leaf in a hurricane. The congregation needed someone more docile in that role, and I needed some time away to make sense of the past week’s spiritual upheaval.

Long Goodbye

So was I finished with Christian Science? Not yet; not nearly. The Hound of Heaven still had years of hard lessons to teach me, before I would come to the point of renouncing the Eddy fallacy entirely.

But my fateful encounter with the Wilson family and Mark Reed during that week in July had brought the breakthrough. After a lifetime of denying I was a sinner in need of a savior, I had bowed to own myself exactly that. From the haughtiness of rejecting what the Apostles' Creed proclaims about Christ and his Cross, God and his Church, I had meekly embraced it all. Or much of it, anyway.

However, because something in our human makeup wants to say with Paul, "so worship I the God of my fathers" (Acts 24:14), and because my whole way of life was woven in with Christian Scientists and the Christian Science movement, disengaging from all that took time.

Thus Donna and I and our children continued attending Sixth Church, ignoring fellow members' unspoken questions about my weird new views. I continued seeking to teach Sunday school and publish in the periodicals, meeting a wall of unexplained rejection that I later learned was purposeful. John Andrews Jr. was blacklisted.

I did leave my job at Adventure Unlimited within a few months, too torn about the claims of Science to go on advocating them to young people. Yet I found myself studying *Science and Health* more avidly than ever, determined to somehow reconcile it with the biblical truth I now placed uppermost. I even ventured into the tall weeds with maverick Scientists working to validate prayer-treatment through lab experiments.

And all the while I read more and more of everything I could find by G. K. Chesterton, George MacDonald, and C. S. Lewis. My conversion in its fullness occurred, I guess you'd say, with a slow-motion pace similar to Lewis's own, as narrated in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*.



C. S. Lewis

Tower of Pride

The road I walked during that decade of the 1980s, often in spite of myself, is well described in Lewis's mordant observation from that book:

Really, a young Atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully. Dangers lie in wait for him on every side. You must not do, you must not even try to do, the will of the Father unless you are prepared to "know of the doctrine."

Not from atheism as such, but from a self-made tower of intellectual and spiritual pride that was no less God-defying in its own way, I had thought to approach the Father on my terms, not his, retaining ultimate control. It was impossible.

Yet even after taking its decisive fall in the lodge at camp, that foolish project kept hold of me much longer than I like to admit. Looking back, I can see that my situation in those years was like Thompson's description of himself in the first stanza of "The Hound of Heaven":

For though I knew His love who followed,
Yet was I sore adread, lest having Him,
I should have nought beside.

My fallback position, after haughtily resisting the Lord Jesus for so long and at last (conditionally) yielding, was to bargain for terms with him in hope of hanging on to at least some part of the old familiar Eddy beliefs. Only very gradually did it become clear that he would not take less than all of me.

What Jesus says about one's inescapably coming to "know of the doctrine" about the Son – the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement – as a result of trying to obey the Father (quoted above by Lewis from John 7:17) came gloriously true for me.

The more I embraced that doctrine, the less I was able to stomach Eddy's contrary metaphysics when reading her book or attending services. Cautiously seeking the ear of fellow Scientists, I was everywhere ignored or rebuffed. Restlessly sampling the worship experience at churches of other denominations, I was on some Sundays a hungry man finding bread, on others merely an idler, a spiritual tourist.

The sharp turn in my faith left Donna wondering who her husband was now anyway, and I couldn't blame her. And just when our marriage seemed reborn, my weakness triggered another crisis and forced us to start over yet again. It was a strange, uncertain time for our whole family.

Vertical & Horizontal

But I sensed a bigger picture coming into focus as my work in public policy engaged me more deeply with the foundations of a free society and the sources of collectivism. I began to see how the self-salvation temptation in human affairs is all of one piece.

Whether we are participating in religious life or political governance, making a living with our work or making a life with our families and communities, the false confidence that "I've got this" or "we can do it" keeps obscuring our radical need for God's truth and love, God's presence and power. We cannot, in fact, "do it." Not by ourselves, not humanly, for the things that matter most.

The same utopian illusion of human perfectibility in an imperfect world that anciently lured Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, and later enticed the builders of Babel to erect a tower to heaven, operates today in the hubris of progressive politics and scientism, the seductions of hard and soft Marxism, and the subjectivity of liberal theology in its many guises, Christian Science included.



Tower of Babel (Breugel)

Self-salvation is always a cheat. Always. The horizontal possibilities of mankind's innovation and cooperation, vast and marvelous as they are, face not only the frustration of failure but ultimately the doom of disaster unless they are supernaturally steadied and secured by the vertical authority of a sovereign and saving God.

Horizontal and vertical, intersecting and interacting: the coordinates of the Cross confront us here, and it's no accident. They are inescapable. Christian Science or Eddyism or self-salvation held less and less sway over me with the dawning of these realizations.

Marks of a Gnostic

My driven sense of mission to tell Scientists about Jesus was the last thing to yield. Subtly the impulse of being a savior to others had replaced the notion of saving myself. I was still stuck on the horizontal plane, and dogged about it.

There had to be a way. I wrote a little book about how the Savior's person and teachings permeate Mary Baker Eddy's seven poems at the center of the Christian Science hymnal. I created the fictional Tim Ryan, a young rebel with one foot in the Christian Science healing practice and the other in Catholic spirituality, and spun a series of short stories about him. All in vain.

How repulsive, one day after long years of this, to recognize in myself all the marks of a Pharisee or a Gnostic – less a beneficiary of grace than a violator of it. So proud was I of knowing what they didn't; so scornful of them for not seeing in the Bible what was plain to me on every page.

The ugliness brought me up short. I had become the very hypocrite that Christ died to save me from being. That did it. No more ingesting poison. This needed to stop.

***Being others' savior
doesn't work either.***

I needed to cut cleanly and get out. One November day in 1992, a full dozen years after the July day at camp, I at last resigned my membership in the Christian Science mother church and our local branch.

Homecoming

One April night in 1993, now worshipping with a small Anglican congregation near my home, where the rector, Father John Andrews (God's sense of humor is so divine), explained I couldn't have communion until baptized, I tearfully received baptism and formally joined the Body of Christ, aged 49 years.

So ends this fugitive's story of what Francis Thompson calls "that long pursuit" by the Hound of Heaven. It was for me exactly as he tells it in the poem's closing lines, a tender homecoming to the Savior's arms and a declaration in the Lord's own words as direct as what he gave the man born blind, the woman at the well, or Moses at the bush: "I am He whom thou seekest."

Nothing can express my abounding joy, then and ever since then, at having been pursued, turned, taken, and made new as I was by our implacably gracious Redeemer. "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift" (II Cor. 9:15).

Now in closing, let me address a couple of final questions: What's the rest of the story, two decades on? And what are the takeaways, the lessons from all this?

Further Up

The adventure of following Jesus never really ends or even pauses. To that extent, my father and mother were indeed divinely guided in naming their youth ministry for Christian Scientists, Adventure Unlimited. More's the pity that they scarcely glimpsed its full and glorious meaning for lost souls rescued by God incarnate, far transcending Mrs. Eddy's metaphysical abstractions.

My life-experience since coming to the Cross has followed the arc suggested by Lewis in a chapter title from one of his Narnia stories: "Further Up and Further In." God's fourfold call on my life – politics, education, media, and ministry – has deepened and borne increasing fruit.

Walking in prayer together, Donna and I finally got marriage right. She gave her life to Christ a few years after I did. So did all three of our grown children, and now our grandson. A series of Presbyterian churches and parachurch ministries have blessed us with a strong spiritual sense of home and community.

We take every opportunity to witness of our faith to Christian Scientists, though receptivity is minimal. Sadly, few within our extended family on both sides have yet come to know the Lord.

We don't doubt, though, that the Hound of Heaven is tirelessly pursuing all of them even now, just as he pursued us. "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

Where the path led for Carol Wilson and her daughters, I don't know. I'm sad to say that Mark Reed, with whom I am still in touch, left the church after encountering a personal crisis. He will always have a cherished place in my heart as the Ananias of my Christian conversion.

Mark Reed was my Ananias (Acts 9:10).

The Christian Science church and its prominent supporting institutions such as Principia and Adventure Unlimited remain on the scene, bravely fighting a slow decline. The wider sphere of self-salvation offerings has never been busier, though. As G.K. Chesterton observed, "When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they become capable of believing in anything." Our times exactly.

Six Lessons

It has taken me well over a year to ponder out this narrative and get it in writing. Slow and steady. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," says Jesus (Mark 4:28).

Summing everything up in terms of lessons learned, here are half a dozen action points and attitudes, reminders to myself, that I'll offer to the reader as well.

1. **Be encouraged.** Jesus is constantly in pursuit of souls. There is unseen drama in every life, a contest for ultimate allegiance. Aslan is on the move.

2. **Be ready.** You may be called on as a link in the chain of someone's conversion to Christ, their own Ananias. The opportunity may never recur. Who needs you and when? Is it today?
3. **Be introspective.** The illusion that you can command yourself, sustain yourself, advance yourself, and save yourself (or be another's savior) takes many subtle forms. How is your heart haughty? Where are you vulnerable?
4. **Be alert.** The Hound of Heaven desires you and will not be denied. His design for you is a surrendered life, lifelong. Can you sense him near?
5. **Be insightful.** Have eyes to see. Self-salvation is the serpent's original lie and universal poison. False horizontal schemes for utopia are everywhere. The vertical power of the Cross defeats them all. There's a role for you. Don't miss it.
6. **Be bold.** Have a tongue to testify. Religion and politics and economics and technology and culture aren't separate things, but facets of one thing: the human condition called fallenness. Pray the Holy Spirit gives you vision and voice to attest the one and only answer: Christ and him crucified.

'Love Wist to Pursue'

There is much more that could be said about my story and its lessons. Why does self-salvation enthrall so many people in so many forms, despite its manifest bankruptcy? Why are spiritual counterfeits gaining in America and across the affluent West, even as spiritual truth in the person of Jesus Christ gains dramatically in the global South?

And here amongst us, what makes one person – myself, for example – susceptible to the pursuing Hound of Heaven when others all around him resist effortlessly and heedlessly, as it would seem?

I don't know the answer. But I pray daily that lost souls still fleeing him “down the arches of the years... down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind,” as Francis Thompson puts it, will find that flight as futile as I did.

May the poet's ultimate realization that “Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue,” played out so dramatically in my experience, become the experience of countless others as well.

And if you have not read “The Hound of Heaven” by Francis Thompson, I urge you to find the poem today with a quick web search and take a few minutes with it.



Its 180 lines of florid and sometimes difficult Victorian verse, though exotic to contemporary tastes, will richly repay your effort. I'm betting it will haunt you as it has me – a vivid retelling of the Greatest Story Ever Told.

