

STEPS TO CHRIST

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CONTENTS

The Sinner's Need of Christ
Repentance
Confession
Consecration
Faith and Acceptance
The Test of Discipleship
Growing up into Christ
The Work and the Life
A Knowledge of God
The Privilege of Prayer
What to Do With Doubt
Rejoicing In the Lord

A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Many are the ways in which God is seeking to make himself known to us and to bring us into communion with him. Nature speaks to our senses without ceasing. The open heart will be impressed with the love and glory of God as revealed through the works of his hands. The listening ear can hear and understand the communications of God through the things of nature. The green fields, the lofty trees, the buds and flowers, the passing cloud, the falling rain, the babbling brook, the glories of the heavens, speak to our hearts, and invite us to become acquainted with him who made them all.

Our Saviour bound up his precious lessons with the things of nature. The trees, the birds, the flowers of the valley, the hills, the lake, and the beautiful heavens, as well as the incidents and surroundings of daily life, were all linked with the words of truth, that his lessons might thus be often recalled to mind, even amid the busy cares of man's life of toil.

God would have his children appreciate his works, and delight in the simple, quiet beauty with which he has adorned our earthly home. He is a lover of the beautiful, and above all that is outwardly attractive he loves beauty of character; he would have us cultivate purity and simplicity, the quiet graces of the flowers.

If we will but listen, God's created works will teach us precious lessons of obedience and trust. From the stars that in their trackless course through space, follow from age to age their appointed path, down to the minutest atom, the things of nature obey the Creator's will. And God cares for everything and sustains everything that he has created. He who upholds the unnumbered worlds throughout immensity, at the same time cares for the wants of the little brown sparrow that sings its humble song without a fear. When men go forth to their daily toil, as when they engage in prayer; when they lie down at night, and when they rise in the morning; when the rich man feasts in his palace, or when the poor man gathers his children about the scanty board, each is tenderly watched by the Heavenly Father. No tears are shed that God does not notice. There is no smile that he does not mark.

If we would but fully believe this, all undue anxieties would be dismissed. Our lives would not be so filled with disappointment as now; for everything, whether great or small, would be left in the hands of God, who is not perplexed by the multiplicity of cares, or overwhelmed by their weight. We should then enjoy a rest of soul to which many have long been strangers.

As your senses delight in the attractive loveliness of the earth, think of the world that is to come, that shall never know the blight of sin and death; where the face of nature will no more wear the shadow of the curse. Let your imagination picture the home of the saved, and remember that it will be more glorious than your brightest imagination can portray. In the varied gifts of God in nature we see but the faintest gleaming of his glory. It is written "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love

him." **1 Corinthians 2:9.**

The poet and the naturalist have many things to say about nature, but it is the Christian who enjoys the beauty of the earth with the highest appreciation, because he recognizes his Father's handiwork, and perceives his love in flower and shrub and tree. No one can fully appreciate the significance of hill and vale, river and sea, who does not look upon them as an expression of God's love to man.

God speaks to us through his providential workings, and through the influence of his Spirit upon the heart. In our circumstances and surroundings, in the changes daily taking place around us, we may find precious lessons, if our hearts are but open to discern them. The Psalmist, tracing the work of God's providence, says, "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." **Psalm 33:5; 107:43.**

God speaks to us in his word. Here we have in clearer lines the revelation of his character, of his dealings with men, and the great work of redemption. Here is open before us the history of patriarchs and prophets and other holy men of old. They were "men subject to like passions as we are." **James 5:17.** We see how they struggled through discouragements like our own, how they fell under temptation as we have done, and yet took heart again and conquered through the grace of God: and beholding, we are encouraged in our striving after righteousness. As we read of the precious experiences granted them, of the light and love and blessing it was theirs to enjoy, and of the work they wrought through the grace given them, the spirit that inspired them kindles a flame of holy emulation in our hearts, and a desire to be like them in character,--like them to walk with God.

Jesus said of the Old-Testament Scriptures,--and how much more is it true of the New,--"They are they which testify of me," **John 5:39**, the Redeemer, him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. Yes, the whole Bible tells of Christ. From the first record of creation,--"for without him was not anything made that was made," **John 1:3**--to the closing promise, "Behold, I come quickly," **Revelation 22:12**, we are reading of his works and listening to his voice. If you would become acquainted with the Saviour, study the Holy Scriptures.

Fill the whole heart with the words of God. They are the living water, quenching your burning thirst. They are the living bread from heaven. Jesus declares, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." And he explains himself by saying, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." **John 6:53, 63.** Our bodies are built up from what we eat and drink; and as in the natural economy, so in the spiritual economy: it is what we meditate upon that will give tone and strength to our spiritual nature.

The theme of redemption is one that the angels desire to look into; it will be the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Is it not worthy of careful thought and study now? The infinite mercy and love of Jesus, the sacrifice made in our behalf, calls for the most serious and solemn reflection. We should dwell upon the character of our dear Redeemer and Intercessor. We should meditate upon the mission of him who came to save his people from their sins. As we thus

contemplate heavenly themes, our faith and love will grow stronger, and our prayers will be more and more acceptable to God, because they will be more and more mixed with faith and love. They will be intelligent and fervent. There will be more constant confidence in Jesus, and a daily, living experience in his power to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

As we meditate upon the perfections of the Saviour, we shall desire to be wholly transformed, and renewed in the image of his purity. There will be a hungering and thirsting of soul to become like him whom we adore. The more our thoughts are upon Christ, the more we shall speak of him to others, and represent him to the world.

The Bible was not written for the scholar alone; on the contrary, it was designed for the common people. The great truths necessary for salvation are made as clear as noonday; and none will mistake and lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God.

We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves. If we allow others to do our thinking, we shall have crippled energies and contracted abilities. The noble powers of the mind may be so dwarfed by lack of exercise on themes worthy of their concentration as to lose their ability to grasp the deep meaning of the word of God. The mind will enlarge if it is employed in tracing out the relation of the subjects of the Bible, comparing scripture with scripture, and spiritual things with spiritual.

There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God's word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose that is rarely seen in these times.

But there is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the whole Bible through, and yet fail to see its beauty or comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind, and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained. Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory. Even while you are walking the streets, you may read a passage, and meditate upon it, thus fixing it in the mind.

We cannot obtain wisdom without earnest attention and prayerful study. Some portions of Scripture are indeed too plain to be misunderstood; but there are others whose meaning does not lie on the surface, to be seen at a glance. Scripture must be compared with scripture. There must be careful research and prayerful reflection. And such study will be richly repaid. As the miner discovers veins of precious metal concealed beneath the surface of the earth, so will he who perseveringly searches the word of God as for hid treasure, find truths of the greatest value, which are concealed from the view of the careless seeker. The words of inspiration, pondered in the heart, will be as streams flowing from the fountain of life.

Never should the Bible be studied without prayer. Before opening its pages we should ask for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and it will be given. When Nathanael came to Jesus, the Saviour exclaimed, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Nathanael said, "Whence knowest thou me?" Jesus answered, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." **John 1:47, 48.** And Jesus will see us also in the secret places of prayer, if we will seek him for light, that we may know what is truth. Angels from the world of light will be with those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance.

The Holy Spirit exalts and glorifies the Saviour. It is his office to present Christ, the purity of his righteousness, and the great salvation that we have through him. Jesus says, "He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." **John 16:14.** The Spirit of truth is the only effectual teacher of divine truth. How must God esteem the human race, since he gave his Son to die for them, and appoints his Spirit to be man's teacher and continual guide.