

## ***Adoniram Judson Gordon: The Disciplined Life***

Paraphrased and expanded by Dan Trygg from *They Found The Secret*, by V. Raymond Edman, with additional information from biographical articles by Rev. Clinton Macomber, from Wikipedia, [www.higherpraise.com](http://www.higherpraise.com), [www.familytreemaker.com](http://www.familytreemaker.com), and from the website for Gordon College

**Boston's Adoniram Judson Gordon was a man mighty in word and in deed.** Massive in appearance, masterful in intellect, he was ceaselessly active in the Savior's service, always willing to help a good cause or a downtrodden sinner. He was of a radiant sweet spirit, saintly, patient, exemplary, a lover of humankind, and especially of little children. Delivered from contentiousness, he contended, as a true saint, for the faith "once delivered" (Jude 1:3). He endured criticism with a courage and calmness that seemed like complacency.

**Adoniram Judson Gordon was born in the tiny village of New Hampton, New Hampshire on April 19, 1836** to John C. and Sally R. Gordon. **His parents were very devoted Christians.** His father even served as a deacon in the local Baptist church. Adoniram was third in a brood that eventually became ten children. He was the first male child to be born to the Gordons. John's parents had named *him* after John Calvin, the famous theologian. In a similar way, **Mr. and Mrs. Gordon named their son after Adoniram Judson, the well-known Baptist missionary** who was the first Protestant missionary to establish a long-term outreach in Burma. Thus it is clear from the outset the values and priorities A. J. Gordon was surrounded by in his upbringing.

**His father owned a woolen mill.** This was not some large manufacturing facility, but a small family business. Processing wool in those days was very labor intensive. It required washing and cleaning the greasy shearings, and carding the wool to separate the fibers into a light fleecy mass, similar to cotton batting. After carding, the wool was formed into rolls, from which it was spun into yarn, and woven into cloth on a loom. Often, either the cloth or the yarn would be dyed, as well, ...another step in the process. All of this work used to be done on the family farm by the farmers themselves. With the advent of a water powered mill, the farmers could bring their raw wool to the Gordon mill, and *they* would process it. Even though the machinery, powered by the water, allowed for somewhat larger batches to be processed, the steps were the same, and the process still required a significant amount of hand labor. **Young Adoniram, and his sisters and two brothers, would have all spent much time working in and around the mill,** either in the actual production process, or in the administration of the business, keeping accounts and dealing with customers. In addition, the Gordon family also raised some animals and planted crops on their farm, which required further care and attention. There was more than enough work for everyone to have their share of chores. In those days, it was expected that you would become proficient in *all* aspects of the business, not specialize in one task. That had the advantage of developing a number of skills, along with learning what hard work entailed. **This work ethic and discipline served to make him productive, diligent, patient and precise in what he put his hand to later in life.**

**The Gordon family took their faith quite seriously. In addition to attending church, the family had regular devotions and prayer together each morning at home.** Both mother and father gave themselves to nurture the spiritual development of their children, both by teaching and example. **At age 15, Adoniram began to become concerned about his own soul, and after a sleepless night in prayer and conversation with his father, committed himself to faith in Christ as his Savior.** Soon after, he and two of his sisters were baptized in the waters of the mill creek, after giving testimony to their faith. Previous to his conversion, books had been of little interest. He only read what he was required to for school work. Now, however, *he found a new desire to read and study.*

**A year later, Adoniram appeared before the church leadership to awkwardly declare his intention to devote his life to the ministry.** *The deacons thought he was a "good boy", but felt that he lacked the energy to become a good minister, mistaking his quiet demeanor for lack of purpose and drive.* The Spirit, however, drove him onward. **The next step was to attend a college preparatory school** in New London, NH, some 34 miles away. **He was well behind the other students, and had to work hard to catch up.** In order to help defray the costs of school, he did odd jobs that he became aware of. He also contracted to paint the school building, a structure four stories high! His roommate volunteered to help without pay, and the two of them painted the entire school over spring recess. From New London, **he went to Providence, Rhode Island to attend Brown University at age 20,** several years older than most of the other students. By this time, **even though he was only a mediocre student, his outside reading became quite extensive. He especially loved to read devotional writings.** This later would supply the treasure trove of illustrations and quotes which later characterized his sermons and writings. During these years, **he began to be recognized for his writing,** even winning a writing competition. It was at Brown that he also met Maria Hale, who would later become his wife.

Having graduated from Brown, **he went on to three more years of studies at the Newton Theological Institution, just outside of Boston, MA.** His favorite classes were on exegesis, learning to rightly interpret the Bible. He graduated from there in 1863, at age 27. He and Maria were married and he took a call to the Jamaica Plain Baptist Church in Roxbury, MA. After six years there, **he became pastor of the affluent Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston. Under his leadership, this church was transformed from being worldly and spiritually dead to become one of the most spiritual and evangelistically aggressive churches in the country.** His church worked extensively among Boston's poor—white, black, and immigrant—and also campaigned against the misuse of alcohol. **He became a leading evangelical in the transitional period between nineteenth-century Protestantism and twentieth-century fundamentalism.** *As a defender of orthodoxy against modernism, Gordon wrote widely used books on Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the church.* He was also a leader in the important prophecy conferences of 1878 and 1886, and **a close friend of D. L. Moody.** With other Bible students in the late nineteenth century, Gordon put new emphasis on the literal interpretations of Scripture. **He founded the Boston Missionary Training**

**School (later Gordon College and Divinity School)**, which for many years met within the church building. He also helped compile two hymnals and wrote gospel songs, including the music to "My Jesus I Love Thee."

Dr. Gordon was always reticent in telling of God's deep dealing with his own soul, and particularly in regard to the crisis of the deeper life. One summer at a conference at Northfield, MA, Dr. Gordon with Dwight L. Moody spoke to a group of college students at a consecration service. In a letter to Mrs. Gordon he reported, "**The questions which they asked about the work of the Holy Spirit are the hardest I have to answer. Questions of experience are so much more difficult than questions of doctrine.** For while 'the testimony of the Lord is sure', the testimony of consciousness is variable, ...like the impressions on an ocean beach, which the next wave may change. So after Mr. Moody had given his experience of the baptism of the Spirit because the students called for it, I confessed to much shrinking and reluctance when they made the same demand of me. The boys would have all that could be known, both of doctrine and experience. A hungrier crowd one rarely finds. May the Lord give us more and more to tell .... "

**In his spiritual autobiography, *How Christ Came to Church*, Dr. Gordon referred to the growing frustration and desperation of spirit that was his experience in the ministry.** He wrote, "Well do we remember those days when drudgery was pushed to the point of desperation. The hearers must be moved to repentance and confession of Christ; therefore more effort must be devoted to the sermon, ...more hours to elaborating its periods, more pungency put into its sentences, more study bestowed on its delivery. And then came the disappointment that *few, if any, were converted* by all this which had cost *a week* of solid toil. And now attention was turned to the prayer meeting as the possible seat of the difficulty -- so few attending it and so little readiness to participate in its services. A pulpit scourging must be laid on next Sunday, and the sharpest sting which words can effect put into the lash. Alas, there is no increase in the attendance, and instead of spontaneity in prayer and witnessing there is a silence which seems almost like sullenness! Then the administration goes wrong and opposition is encountered among officials, so that caucusing must be undertaken to get the members to vote as they should. Thus the burdens of anxiety increase while we are trying to lighten them, and should-be helpers become hinderers, till discouragement comes and sleepless nights ensue: these hot boxes on the train of our activities necessitating a stop and a visit of the doctor, with the verdict, 'Overwork,' and the remedy 'Absolute rest.'

**"It was after much of all this," he continued, "of which even the most intimate friends knew nothing, that there came one day a still voice of admonition, saying, 'There stands one among you whom you do not know.'** And perhaps I answered, 'Who is he, Lord, that I might know him?' **I had known the Holy Spirit as a heavenly influence to be invoked, but somehow I had not grasped the truth that he is a Person of the Godhead who came down to earth at a definite time and who has been in the church ever since,** just as really as Jesus was here during the thirty-three years of His earthly life.... "

With lightening heart came the climax: "... how many true Christians toil on, bearing burdens and taking on responsibilities far too great for their natural strength, utterly forgetful that **the mighty Burden-bearer of the world is with them to do for them and through them that which they have undertaken to accomplish alone!** Happy are they, if some weary day the blessed Paraclete, the invisible Christ, shall say to them, 'Have I been so long time with you and yet you have not known Me?' So it happened to me. **The strong Son of God revealed Himself as being evermore in His church, and I came to experientially know Him,** ...not through a sudden burst of revelation, nor through some thrilling experience of instantaneous sanctification..., but **by a quiet, sure, and steady discovery of realization, increasing unto more and more.** Jesus, in the Spirit, stood with me in a kind of spiritual epiphany and **just as definitely and irrevocably as I once took Christ crucified as my sinbearer, I now took the Holy Spirit for my burden-bearer.**"

A close personal friend, the late George C. Needham, gave the only first-hand account, of which I know, about the "endowment for service" for God's servant. **"Dr. Gordon, unlike some Christians, believed there was something always beyond. This he ever sought to attain.** Fifteen years ago, **during the first Northfield convention (led by D. L. Moody in 1880), he was desirous to secure what he yet needed as a saint and servant of Christ.** *Toward the close of those memorable ten days, ...spent more in prayer than in preaching..., my beloved friend joined me in a midnight hour of great heart-searching and infilling of the Spirit.* He read with peculiar tenderness our Lord's intercessory prayer of John 17. The union of the believer with Christ and the Father, as taught by our Lord in that chapter, drew out fervent exclamations, while with deep emotion he continued reading. During united prayer which followed, the holy man poured out his soul with a freedom and unction indescribable. I never heard him boast of any spiritual attainment reached during the midnight hour. Soul experiences were to him very sacred, and not to be rehearsed on every ordinary occasion. **But I have no doubt that he received then a divine touch which further ennobled his personal life, and made his ministry of ever-increasing spirituality and of ever-widening breadth of sympathy.**"

After thus meeting the risen Savior and receiving by faith the filling of the Spirit, Dr. Gordon hurried to a preaching appointment in Seabright, New Jersey. One who knew him there has left for us this further word:

"I remember his once coming from Northfield after the August conference. *He seemed filled with the Spirit.* He could not talk commonplaces. *He said he had had a great blessing.* He went to his room, and came out shortly after and said he was going down to the fisher village, and asked the way. He did not come back until we were at dinner -- that hot afternoon. *He had visited the beer and liquor saloons and prayed with the men there, and had been among the shanties. I know more than one family saved that day.*" The infilling of God's Spirit was not an ecstasy to be kept selfishly; rather, *it was the dynamic of discipleship that constrained a Great Heart to seek humble fisher folk and hopeless drunkards that they might know the living Savior as their own.* **Few preachers and teachers of the Word have been more clear and convincing on the crisis of the deeper life than was Dr. Gordon.** Let him speak for himself:

**"Then you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, did you?' some one will ask. Well, we prefer not to use an expression which is not strictly biblical.** The great promise, 'You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1:5) was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost *once for all*, as it seems to us. At that time, the Paraclete was given for the *entire* dispensation, ...the

*entire remainder of the church age.* At that time, the whole church present and future was brought into the economy of the Spirit, as it is written: 'For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body' (I Corinthians 12:13, R.V.). **But for God to give is one thing; for us to receive is quite another.** 'God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son,' is the word of our Lord to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:16). But it is written also: 'As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the children of God' (Jn. 1:12). **In order to realize regeneration and sonship, it is as absolutely essential for us to receive as for God to have given.** So, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit, as the Comforter, Advocate, Helper, and Teacher and Guide, was given to the church. The disciples who before had been regenerated by the Spirit, as is commonly held, now received the Holy Spirit to qualify and empower them for service. It was another and higher experience than what they had previously known. It is the difference between the Holy Spirit for renewal, and the Holy Spirit for ministry. **Even Jesus, begotten by the Holy Spirit, ...and therefore called 'the son of God'..., did not enter upon his public service till he had been 'anointed,' or 'sealed,' with that same Spirit** through whom He had been begotten. So of His immediate apostles: so of Paul (9:17), who had been converted on the way to Damascus. So of the others mentioned in the Acts, as the Samaritan Christians (8:15-17) and the Ephesian disciples (19:1-8). And not a few thoughtful students of Scripture maintain that the same order still holds good: that **there is such a thing as receiving the Holy Spirit in order to be empowered for service.** It is not denied that many may have this blessing in immediate connection with their conversion, from which it need not necessarily be separated. Only let it be marked that **just as the giving of the Spirit by the Father is plainly spoken of, so distinctly is the receiving of the Spirit on the part of the disciples repeatedly expressed in Scripture...**

"God forbid," said Gordon, "that we should lay claim to any higher attainment than the humblest. We are simply trying to answer, as best we may from Scripture, the question asked above about the baptism of the Holy Ghost. On the whole, and after prolonged study of the Scripture, we cannot resist this conviction: Just as Christ, the second person of the Godhead, came to earth to make atonement for sin and to give eternal life, and as sinners must receive Him by faith in order to have forgiveness and sonship, so the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, came to the earth to communicate the 'power from on high'; and as believers in like manner we must receive Him by faith in order to be qualified for service. Both gifts have been bestowed, but it is not what we have, but what we know that we have by a conscious appropriating faith, which determines our spiritual wealth. Why then should we be satisfied with 'the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace' (Ephesians 1:7), when the Lord would grant us also 'according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power by His Spirit in the inner man'? (Ephesians 3:16)."

With his usual felicity of expression, Dr. Gordon gave a very apt illustration:

"Just in front of the study window where I write is a street, above which it is said that a powerful electric current is constantly moving. I cannot see that current: it does not report itself to hearing, or sight, or taste, or smell, and so far as the testimony of the senses is to be taken, I might reasonably discredit its existence. But I see a slender arm, called the trolley, reaching up and touching it: and immediately the car with its heavy load of passengers moves along the track as though seized in the grasp of some mighty giant. **The power had been there before, only now the car lays hold of it,** or is rather laid hold of by it, since it was a touch, not a grip, through which the motion was communicated. And would it be presumptuous for one to say that he had known something of a similar contact with not merely a divine force but a divine Person? The change which ensued may be described thus: **Instead of praying constantly for the descent of a divine influence, there was now a surrender, however imperfect, to a divine and ever-present Being.** Instead of a constant effort to make use of the Holy Spirit for doing my work, there arose a clear and abiding conviction that **the true secret of service lay in so yielding to the Holy Spirit that He might use me to do His work ....**"

**The dynamic for discipleship is indeed the gift of God, even the Holy Spirit; yet it is costly to our human nature, even death to self.** Said Dr. Gordon in one of these convention addresses, **"It costs much to obtain this power.** It costs self-surrender and humiliation and the yielding up of our most precious things to God. It costs the perseverance of long waiting and the faith of strong trust. But **when we are really in that power, we shall find this difference: that, whereas before it was hard for us to do the easiest things, now it is easy for us to do the hardest."**

Dr. Gordon added: **"As we become deeply instructed in this matter, we shall learn to pray less about the details of duty and more about the fullness of power.** The manufacturer is chiefly anxious to secure an ample head of water for his mills; and, this being found, he knows that his ten thousand spindles will keep in motion without particular attention to each one. It is, in like manner, the sources of our power for which we should be diligently seeking, and not the results."

***This is the dynamic for discipleship!***

Adoniram Judson Gordon remained at the Clarendon Street Church until his death on February 2, 1895. He took ill and succumbed to influenza and bronchitis at age 59. The last audible word heard from his lips was "Victory!"

## **Observations From Adoniram Judson Gordon's Life:**

Born into a fairly poor, but devout Christian family.

Named after a missionary pioneer.

Raised with consistent, practical religious instruction and example.

Converted to Christ at age 15.

Felt called to the ministry at age 16.

Appeared slow and awkward. Was thought to be lazy, when he was just quiet and reserved.

Before conversion, never cared much for reading. After, he was devoted to Bible study and read widely.

Was way behind his peers in his studies and academic abilities.  
 Went to a college preparatory school, and on to Brown University and Newton Theological Institution.  
 Started as a mediocre student.  
 Became a skilled scholar of Greek, biblical exegesis, and was recognized as a good writer.  
 A champion of biblical truth, he wrote books defending the faith which were widely utilized.  
 Became a skilled preacher and pastor. Secured a position at affluent Boston church.  
 Under his leadership, this spiritually dead church was revitalized and became effective in evangelism.  
 Went through a period of severe frustration, desperation and “burn out”.  
 God began to show him that there was something missing. He did not really “know” the Holy Spirit.  
 Came to see that the Spirit *was given* once for all, but needs to be *personally received* by faith.  
 By a definite act of faith, chose to accept the Holy Spirit as the “burden bearer”, the source of power.  
 Was always seeking to go deeper with God.  
 At Northfield conference of 1880, sought diligently for ten days, then received a “touch from God”  
 This experience “ennobled his life” and made his ministry deepen and expand.  
 The immediate response of this “touch” was to visit the bars and shanties of fishing village to evangelize.  
 He clearly understood and communicated the truth that the Spirit *was given* once for all at Pentecost, but  
 has to be *personally received by faith* for empowerment.  
 The true secret of effective service is to *yield to the Spirit* to let *Him* use *me* to do His work.  
 This gift of God’s power is *very costly* to receive. We must *die to our self-agenda* and *self-will*.  
 When we are in God’s power, even the hardest things become easy.  
 In 1889, started the Boston Missionary Training School in the Clarendon Street Church.  
 Became a popular speaker and widely-read author.

## God Hunt 11: God is Both *El Shaddai* and *Yahweh*

**Exodus 6:2-8** - God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD; <sup>3</sup> and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.* <sup>4</sup> "I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. <sup>5</sup> "Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. <sup>6</sup> "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. <sup>7</sup> "Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup> "I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you *for* a possession; I am the LORD."

**Mk. 14:24** - And He said to them, "This is My blood *of the covenant*, which is poured out for many.

**Acts 10:34,35** - Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand *now* that *God is not one to show partiality*, <sup>35</sup> but in *every nation* the one who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

**Lk. 11:9-13** - I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. <sup>11</sup> Suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? <sup>12</sup> Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? <sup>13</sup> "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*"

In Ex. 6, the Lord ("LORD" = Yahweh) told Moses that He had revealed Himself to the patriarchs of Israel as *El Shaddai*, which means "God Almighty". God showed that *He could do anything*, whether to miraculously provide, protect, deliver from trouble, prosper, or even give the fruit of the womb. *If you had God on your side, you had it made.*

Some 400+ years later, however, it did not seem that God was near, at all, much less interested in Israel's behalf. The powerful deliverance of Israel from their bondage in Egypt was to begin to teach them that God was a *faithful covenant-keeping God*, One who would keep His word to His covenant people. The unchanging "I am" would be the same powerful God for them as He had been for their forefathers.

The application to us comes with Jesus' establishing a *new covenant* with "many", Jew and non-Jew alike, which *extends the care and promises of God to us all*. The fact that God is not a respecter of persons means that He will be there for you and me without partiality, *if* we are willing to come under His covenant Lordship. We have only to take hold of His promises, and expect Him to work (Col. 2:10-12). In seeking the Spirit, *depend on God to grant what He has promised*.