

Walter L. Wilson: The Yielded Life

Paraphrased and expanded by Dan Trygg from *They Found The Secret*, by V. Raymond Edman, with additional information from biographical articles by Stephen Ross at www.wholesomewords.org, by Clinton Macomber at Christian History Institute, a blog at <http://liberty-virtue-independence.blogspot.com> and from an article at www.higherpraise.com.

Dr. Walter L. Wilson, the "beloved physician" of Kansas City, was an excellent teacher of God's Word and preacher of the Gospel. Throughout his life he became a medical doctor, businessman, salesman, preacher, college president and author. Beyond these accomplishments, which include, of course, his effective ministry of healing as a physician, he was especially a winner of souls. He became known throughout the world because of his writings and Bible conference ministry.

He was born on May 27, 1881 in Aurora, Indiana. His mother died the year after his birth, so he was raised by his grandmother. **He became a Christian in December 21, 1896, when he was fifteen years old.** Just months later, after his sixteenth birthday, **he began to have evangelistic street meetings, hoping to lead others to the Lord.**

He worked at his father's tent-making business while he attended college pursuing a medical degree. He was educated at the University Medical College and Northwestern Medical College in Chicago. After graduating from college in 1904, he opened a medical practice in Webb City, Missouri. He also married Marion Baker, the daughter of a tent-maker who worked for his father. They proudly raised a family of eight children: Elizabeth, Walter Jr., Margaret, Marion, Norman, Martha, Nathaniel, and Catherine.

Because of his father-in-law's failing health, and to meet the needs of his growing family, Walter worked full time in the tent-making business, in addition to the duties of his medical practice. He continued to work in this manner for 25 years from 1904 to 1929. During World War I, he devised a method of camouflaging and waterproofing tents which greatly assisted the war effort. Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show was another important customer for whom he provided tent canvas during those early years.

After he was converted that December night in 1896, he became a lover of the Scriptures. **He earnestly studied the Bible and applied himself to do as God had commanded** throughout the inspired Word of God. **He became diligent in teaching, preaching and distributing tracts. Much effort, however, seemed to produce little results.** He was concerned that his life did not bear the spiritual fruit which he believed should be evident. Others assured him "*not to look for results, but only to be busy at seed sowing.*"

He continued to press on as a fine doctor and lay preacher. Dr. Wilson realized that it wasn't enough to heal the bodies of his patients. *He wanted to be the conduit through which Jesus Christ could heal their souls.* **He regularly took advantage of opportunities to share his faith, but, again, was frustrated that so often his efforts were ineffective.**

God answered the longings of the good doctor's heart. Through a series of steps, He brought him to a crisis of faith, and a transformation in his life. Dr. Wilson later wrote, "With regard to my own experience with the Holy Spirit, I may say that the transformation in my own life on January 14, 1914, was greater, *much greater* than the change which took place even when I was saved on December 21, 1896." **What happened to bring about this transformation of his inner self, and the resulting new effectiveness and fruit in his life?**

First, as is so often the case for the Lord's people, God brought a great challenge into his life. Just as a white-haired old man in Brooklyn admonished the energetic Moody to honor the Holy Spirit, ...and an elderly friend wrote a steamer letter to the young missionary, John Hyde, to seek the fullness of the Spirit..., just so a man of God was used by the Almighty to stir the heart of Walter Wilson. In 1913, a servant of the Lord from France was visiting in the Wilson home, and inquired, "What is the Holy Spirit to you?" Dr. Wilson's answer was orthodox: "He is one of the Persons of the God-Head, ...a Teacher, a Guide, ...the third Person of the Trinity."

The missionary corrected Dr. Wilson by pointing out that he had given to the Holy Spirit a place of insignificance and inferiority. "He is *just as great*," said the missionary, "*just as precious, just as needful* as the other two Persons of the Trinity. But still you have not answered my question, what is He *to you*?"

To this, Dr. Wilson had to reply honestly, "He is *nothing* to me. I have *no contact* with Him, no personal relationship, and could get along quite well without Him."

The doctor was surprised and grieved by the answer he had given so truthfully. His friend's reply filled him with alarm, because he said, "It is *because of this* that your life is so fruitless, even though your efforts are so great. ***If you will seek personally to know the Holy Spirit, He will transform your life.***"

Throughout the next year, Wilson was haunted by the missionary's words. Wilson sincerely desired to bear the fruit of the Spirit, but feared following the advice of his missionary friend. **Other Christians had warned him to have nothing personally to do with the Holy Spirit lest he become a fanatic.** He was fearful, too, of giving an inferior place to the Savior by exalting the Spirit above the Son of God. **What was the truth? How could he know what to believe?** He shared

these doubts and questions with a fellow Christian teacher. **His friend explained to him from the Bible that it was the Holy Spirit's job to reveal Jesus to us.** It was only the Holy Spirit who could reveal Christ more intimately and personally to him. **Furthermore, it was the Spirit who would empower Him to be more effective with others.** Jesus had told the apostles to wait until they were empowered by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4-8). The book of Acts repeatedly referred to them being filled with the Spirit when they preached the gospel.

Shortly thereafter, He attended a medical convention where **he found a tract** which an office nurse slipped into his briefcase. **It showed that while Jesus had a physical body, the Holy Spirit had none. Christians are to be His body.** The Holy Spirit utilizes each Christian to touch the people that God brings into our lives.

Then came January 14, 1914. Dr. James M. Gray, at that time a clergyman of the Reformed Episcopal Church, and later the beloved and revered president of Moody Bible Institute, was speaking in Kansas City on Romans 12:1:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Dr. Wilson recalls the impact of that message:

"Leaning over the pulpit, he said, 'Have you noticed that *this verse does not tell us to whom we should give our bodies?* It is *not* the Lord Jesus Who asks for it. He *has* His own body. It is *not* the Father Who asks for it. He remains upon His throne. *Another* has come to earth *without* a body. God *could* have made a body for Him as He did for Jesus, but He did not do so. **God gives you the privilege and the indescribable honor of presenting your bodies to the Holy Spirit, to be His dwelling place on earth.** If you have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, then yours *is* a holy body, ... washed whiter than snow..., and *it will be accepted* by the Spirit *when* you give it. Will you do so *now?*'"

At the conclusion of the service, Dr. Wilson and his father-in-law, who had attended the meeting with him, returned home. Each went at once to his own room. Utterly heartbroken over his fruitless life, yet filled with a great hope because of the message he had heard from a teacher in whom he had all confidence, Dr. Wilson lay upon the carpet of his study, face down in God's presence. Hear his testimony:

"There, in the quiet of that late hour, **I said to the Holy Spirit, 'My Lord, I have mistreated You all my Christian life. I have treated You like a servant.** When I wanted You I called for You. When I was about to engage in some work, I beckoned for You to come and help me perform my task. I have kept You in the place of a servant. **I have sought to use You only as a willing servant to help me in my self-appointed and chosen work. I shall do so no more. Just now, I give You this body of mine.** From my head to my feet, I give it to You. I give You my hands, my limbs, my eyes and lips, my brain. **All that I am, inside and out, I hand over to You for You to live in it the life that You please.** You may send this body to Africa, or lay it on a bed with cancer. You may blind the eyes, or send me with Your message to Tibet. You may take this body to the Eskimos, or send it to a hospital with pneumonia. **It is Your body from this moment on. Help Yourself to it.** Thank You, my Lord. *I believe You have accepted it,* for in Romans 12:1 You said, "acceptable unto God." Thank You again, my Lord, for taking me. **We now belong to each other."**

And what were the results of that surrender of body, and appropriation of the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

The very next morning two young ladies came to the office to sell advertising, as they had done previously. Up to that time, the doctor had never spoken to them about the Lord Jesus. His lips had been *his own*, and he had used them for *business purposes*. Now that his lips had been given away, the Holy Spirit was free to use them, and He did so *at once*. Out of brief conversation and testimony to his visitors, Dr. Wilson led both of them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. They were the first fruits of a great harvest of souls that Dr. Wilson won for the Savior. On another occasion, he was urged to speak to a drug store attendant about Christ. After a moment of inward protest, he yielded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. As a result, three people knelt and asked Christ into their lives after he spoke to them.

Hundreds of thousands have been thrilled and challenged by the doctor's experiences in soul winning, such as he had recounted in his book, *The Romance of a Doctor's Visits*. For example, in the account of "The Little Man in a Big City" he tells of his being alone in the great city of New York. Before he went out for a business appointment, he had prayer in his hotel room. He requested, "My Lord, this is a large city of seven million people, and I am just a weak, unknown servant of Yours. I have no knowledge of the city, and no acquaintance with the hungry hearts that may be there. *You alone know whom You have been dealing with.* Here is my body -- my feet and my lips. Will You take them today to some troubled heart, and speak through me Your Words of light and life"? Thank You, Lord, *I believe You will do it.*"

As he walked eastward on Thirty-second Street he passed a stationery shop and noticed a small leather-covered notebook in the window. This brought to mind his need of a book in which to keep his prayer list. Upon entering the shop, he inquired of the little German owner about the notebook. The size and the price were satisfactory, and the shopkeeper began to wrap it up. Just then Dr. Wilson said, "Do you know what I expect to do with this little book?"

The storekeeper did not know, and was astonished to learn that it was to be used as a prayer book. Thereupon he began to unwrap the package saying, "I am sorry, my friend, but this is a *blank* book. It is not a *prayer* book."

That was just the opening Dr. Wilson needed. He explained that *he made his own prayer book*, using the left-hand pages for petitions and the right-hand ones for the answers. Then he added his testimony of knowing the Lord Jesus as His Savior, and invited the shopkeeper to do the same.

The reply was not surprising. "Mister, I have tried to find Gott for many years. I have gone about Manhattan and Brooklyn and the Bronx, night after night, attending many services, but failed always to find Gott. Can you tell me how to get to Him?"

After explanation of the Scripture that the Lord Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6), Dr. Wilson led his new friend to the Savior. The quest of the years had come to an end, for now the shopkeeper knew the Lord Jesus for himself. And for the soul winner *only twenty minutes* had elapsed from the prayer in the hotel room to the winning of another soul to Christ, because the life and lips of the servant belonged to the Holy Spirit.

The quiet impact of the Spirit of God through Walter L. Wilson, both in his teaching and his writing, has been felt the world over. For another example, a missionary had served many years in Tibet with such little effectiveness that he determined to return to the homeland. As a result, he finally packed his belongings, said farewell to his new friends in that far-off roof of the world, and prepared to leave for the United States. This is his story:

"A short time before I was to leave the country, I took a journey across the hills to the post office to leave a forwarding address and to obtain what mail might be there. In the mail which I received was a copy of *'The Evangelical Christian.'* I opened the magazine in the post office and was struck by the title, *'Whose Body Is Yours?'*, by Dr. Walter L. Wilson. ...I read the article through carefully, and then read it through *again.* I went back home slowly, thoughtfully and deeply stirred in my spirit. There, kneeling among my goods, I gave *my* body to the Spirit, and received *Him* as the Lord of *my* life. At once, my spirit was relieved. Hope sprang anew in my heart. *The work of my Lord looked quite different. I had found the power for service.* I unpacked my things, and told the Lord that since my body was His, I could now *expect* that He would use it. The results were wonderful! The transformation was indescribable! God began to make my ministry fruitful, and I can testify to you that this really *is* God's path of blessing."

Dr. Wilson's testimony in *The Evangelical Christian* brought many letters to the editor, among which was this one:

"In one of the issues of your magazine there was printed an article entitled *'Whose Body Is Yours?'* It was written by a man who explained how one day he came to the place where he made an absolute surrender to Christ -- his hands, his feet, his whole body, his *plans, his future, everything!* He placed it *all* at Jesus' feet. At the time I read this article, *I* was in great difficulty, spiritually, and did not have a single soul to guide me out here. There was not a soul, it seemed, who had either *the desire or the time* to talk about spiritual things with me. And then I picked up your magazine and read this article. For a whole day I walked up and down my room hardly able to contain myself from *shouting* -- the relief was almost more than I could bear! The problem had been *solved* for me. Just then and there, I did exactly what that man did, repeating to Christ his very words and making the same bargain. What this article meant to my soul eternity will show. *The fruit of that man's life is surely very, very precious fruit.* Since that day I have never looked back, but am pressing onward. After these days of chastening, which I am going through, are over, I trust I shall likewise be as fruitful as he."

The doctor's secret of soul winning is the simplicity of taking God at His Word. In his case it was obeying implicitly the exhortation of Romans 12:1 -- "that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." In so doing this, he found that his body *did* actually belong to the Holy Spirit, who could use it when and where He desired. **Since that January night, Dr. Wilson has proved in a multitude of ways the authority and power, the wisdom and knowledge of the Holy Spirit as the leader of one's life,** and as the Lord of the harvest. We would do well to take heed to Dr. Wilson's exhortation: "I entreat each of you to *go directly to the Holy Spirit* Himself, to *give Him your body,* and *then look to Him constantly to do what He wants with that body* for the glory, and honor of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This was the beginning of the mighty ways in which God began to utilize Dr. Walter L. Wilson.

He was never ordained, but he eventually became the pastor of the interdenominational Central Bible Church of Kansas City, Kansas in 1920. He became a co-founder and first president of the Kansas City Bible College, which is now Calvary Bible College. Furthermore, Dr. Wilson established the Flagstaff Indian Mission to the Navajos in Arizona. Dr. Wilson became a much sought after Bible conference speaker. He traveled to the British Isles, Europe and the Near East for various speaking engagements. He led many to put their trust in Jesus, winning his audiences with wit and homely stories that illustrated what it meant to be saved, and how to *know* one was truly a born again child of God. He became the author of a series of books giving instruction and encouragement to others in the work of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He also wrote numerous pamphlets, and his writings were published in several Christian periodicals. Among the more than twenty books he authored are these works: Soul Winning Stories, Miracles in a Doctor's Life, The Romance of a Doctor's Visits, Strange Short Stories, The Doctor's Best Love Story, Let's Go Fishing with the Doctor, A Sure Remedy Prescribed by the Doctor, Remarkable New Stories Told by the Doctor, Wilson's Dictionary of Bible Types, Just What the Doctor Ordered, and True Stories Told by the Doctor. In 1924, he helped to pioneer Christian radio in the Kansas City area. In his daily shows, he spoke on various medical topics, as well as about hardware, carpentry and other home-spun wisdom, always leading to a clear presentation of the gospel.

His wife Marion died on September 25, 1962. He affectionately called her "*Sweetheart*" throughout their 58 years of marriage. At 82 years of age, Dr. Wilson married Ruth Selders of Kansas the year after his first wife's death. She had been a member of the Central Bible Church for forty years, and was herself an alumna of the Kansas City Bible College. Walter and Ruth enjoyed six years together until his death in 1969.

Observations From Walter Wilson's Life:

Converted to Christ at age 15.

Within months, was attempting to witness for Christ in street meetings.

Was very industrious and hardworking.

His broad range of experiences, as a student, medical professional, a blue collar laborer and businessman, as well as a home owner, husband and father, provided abundant wisdom, insights and illustrations for his ability to communicate the gospel.

He diligently studied the Bible, and tried to apply its teachings in his life.

He regularly and earnestly tried to share his faith, through preaching, teaching and distributing Bible tracts.

Began to see that, in spite of the great efforts he was making, he had little results.

Others told him not to worry about that. "Just be faithful to sow the seeds. Leave the results up to God."

Became increasingly frustrated by the lack of fruit in his life.

God used a missionary to challenge him about his lack of relationship to the Holy Spirit.

Others told him to beware of seeking the Holy Spirit, lest he become a fanatic.

Was shown *from the Bible* that it was the Spirit's job

to reveal to us more of Jesus,

to empower us for living,

and to make us bold and effective in ministry.

Found a tract that described how *we are to be the Holy Spirit's body* on the earth.

Heard a sermon on Romans 12:1 that called him to present his *own* body to the Holy Spirit.

At age 33, more than 17 years after having been born again, he consciously gave his body to the Holy Spirit to utilize however *He* may desire to put him to use.

Believed that since this was "an acceptable offering" to God, the Spirit would indeed take him.

From that day on, he chose to yield his body to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

He found the results to be *amazing*, ...both in transforming him, and in effective ministry.

From that time on, his ministry grew and expanded dramatically.

God Hunt 9: God's Power Becomes Operative As We Yield To Him

Jesus watched for what God was prompting, and actively engaged in doing His will –

Jn. 5:19,30.

Jn. 8:28,29,38.

God will work in us the desire and ability to do His will,

but we must "work out" what He "works in" us –

Phil. 2:12,13.

God has made us *co-laborers* with Him, which requires our *active involvement* –

I Cor. 3:9.

II Cor. 6:1.

The Holy Spirit is given to those who *obey* Him -- Acts 5:32.

Jesus promised to disclose Himself to those who *love* and *obey* Him -- Jn. 14:21.