

# The Pointed Personal Worker

by R.A. Torrey

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*R.A. Torrey emphasized the importance of personal evangelism through direct engagement with individuals and reliance on Scripture and prayer.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 53:6, Matthew 28:19, John 6:37, Acts 13:39

**Topics:** "Assurance of Salvation", "Personal Evangelism"

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## Description

R.A. Torrey emphasizes the vital role of personal evangelism in his sermon 'The Pointed Personal Worker,' recounting his own experiences of leading individuals to Christ through direct engagement with Scripture. He passionately believes that every Christian can and should participate in soul-winning, using the Bible as a tool to illuminate the path to salvation. Torrey's method involves asking probing questions that guide seekers to understand their need for Christ and the assurance of their salvation. His dedication to prayer and his ability to connect with skeptics further highlight his commitment to evangelism. Ultimately, Torrey's life and work serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of personal outreach in the Christian faith.

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## Transcript

He sought to win to Christ the young lady whom he had been taking to dances the first time he saw her after his conversion. He says, "The first time I saw her after my conversion, I commenced to reason with her out of the Scriptures. It took two hours of talking to her, but she accepted Christ." [1] This experience seemed prophetic of the way Torrey was to spend the rest of his life - winning people to Christ.

Reuben Archer Torrey (1856-1928), the successor to D. L. Moody in world evangelism, also rated high as a teacher, a writer, a champion of the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and especially as a personal worker. In the writer's opinion, Dr. Torrey did more to emphasize and promote personal evangelism than any other one man since the days of the apostles.

Possessed with a brilliant, well-trained mind, he was logical, penetrating, positive, thorough and convincing, whether preaching, teaching or doing personal work. He held degrees from Yale University and divinity school and did postgraduate work in the Universities of Leipzig and Erlangen in Germany. His faith was sometimes imperiled as he battled rationalism and the higher criticism in these schools, but the grace of God and the prayers of a Christian mother brought him safely through.

From the pastorate of a Congregational church in Garrettsville, Ohio, he went to Minneapolis in spiritual stature, mastery of the Bible and evangelistic fruitfulness. D. L. Moody heard of him and brought him to Chicago in 1889 as superintendent of the Bible Institute. Here he remained until 1908, also serving for twelve years of this time as pastor of the Moody Church. In 1912 he went to Los Angeles as dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles for 1912-24 and pastor of the Church of the Open Door from 1915-24.

He frequently took time out to conduct large evangelistic campaigns in the major cities of America and other lands. But he always kept busy in personal evangelism. George T. B. Davis, who spent ten months in 1904-05 studying the work and methods of Dr. Torrey wrote:

Another characteristic of Dr. Torrey which strongly impresses one in close touch with his work is his enthusiasm for personal work. He believes thoroughly in doing personal work, not merely in the meetings but on the streets, in street cars, on buses, on trains and steamers - everywhere. Many of the most striking parts of his sermons are the stories of his experiences in soul-winning in all parts of the world.[2]

His highest ambition was to win souls. Mr. Davis gives us these words from Dr. Torrey in the South London Tabernacle:

I would rather win souls than be the greatest king or emperor on earth; I would rather win souls than be the greatest general that ever commanded an army; I would rather win souls than be the greatest poet, or novelist, or literary man who ever walked the earth. My one ambition in life is to win as many as possible. Oh, it is the only thing worth doing, to save souls; and, men and women, we can all do it![3]

Undoubtedly his most widespread and lasting contribution to personal evangelism has been made through his books. He published HOW TO BRING MEN TO CHRIST in 1893, perhaps the first real textbook on the subject to appear in America. This book was revised and enlarged as Part I of HOW TO WORK FOR CHRIST in 1901, a book of 518 pages. No better book on practical methods of personal and public evangelism than this has ever been written. Fleming H. Revell Company has issued 21 printings of this book, and Part I, printed separately under the title, PERSONAL WORK, has gone through 24 printings. The intensely practical power of these books lies in the fact that the author tells exactly what Scripture passages to use with various types of inquirers, how to use them, and illustrates with specific cases out of his own experience.

His method of using the Scriptures in personal evangelism was to put the Bible in the hands of the inquirer and have him read a selected passage. Then Dr. Torrey would ask questions about the words and phrases of the passage until the seeker understood it. He believed that the Holy Spirit would take the Word as His sword and cut through the darkness of the unbelieving mind, bringing light and conversion.

For example, in telling how to deal with those lacking assurance of salvation, Dr. Torrey relates this experience:

I was dealing one night with a young woman who was in great distress of soul because she could not see that she had forgiveness of sin. I went carefully over the ground to find if she really had accepted Christ, and it appeared clear that she had. Then I read to her Acts 13:39, "By him all that believe are justified from all things."

"Now," I said, "who does God say in these verses are justified from all things?"

"All that believe."

"Believe on whom?"

"Believe on Christ."

"Do you believe on Christ?"

"I do."

"Have you really accepted Him as your Saviour and Lord and Master?"

"Yes."

"Then you are sure you believe on Him?"

"Yes."

"And what does this verse say that all who believe are?"

"Justified."

"What then are you?"

She would not say, "I am justified," but wept over the thought that her sins were not forgiven. I went over it again and again and again. At last the simple meaning of the words seemed to dawn upon her darkened mind. I asked her as before, "Who does God say are justified?"

"All that believe."

"From what are they justified?"

"From all things."

"Who is justified from all things?"

"All that believe."

"Who says so?"

"God says so."

"Do you believe?"

"I do."

"What are you then?"

A joyous light spread over her countenance, and she said, "Why, I am justified from all things," and immediately she turned toward her friend standing near and said to me, "Now won't you speak to my friend about Christ?"[4]

His approach to individuals in personal work was sometimes brusque and always direct and pointed. While he tried to avoid offense and make a wholesome impression, yet there is no record that he ever tried to win people to himself first as a means of winning them to Christ. Perhaps his piercing gray eyes

and somewhat stern and cold personality made it difficult to win people to himself. Apparently he always sought to win men directly to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

In complete reliance on the Holy Spirit, Dr. Torrey used the Word of God to bring lost sinners to conviction, conversion and assurance. To him the Scriptures were always in place. Whether the prospect was interested in the Bible or not, whether he believed it or not, Dr. Torrey faced him with the Word of God, stood firmly on it, and virtually drilled him through with it. One of his favorite verses was John 6:37, and a good illustration of his skill and persistence in using Scripture is his story of how he used this verse with a young man who thought he had committed the unpardonable sin. He writes:

One time I received a letter, a very heartbroken letter, from a father who was a Presbyterian minister. He wrote that he had a son who was in awful spiritual darkness. The son thought that he had committed the unpardonable sin, and he was plunged into absolute despair. Would I take him in at the Bible Institute? I replied that though I had every sympathy with him in his sorrow, the Bible Institute was not for the purpose of helping cases like these, but to train men and women for Christian service.

The father continued to write, beseeching me to take his son, and got other friends to plead for him. Finally I consented to take the young man. He was sent to me under guard, lest he might do some rash thing by the way. When he was brought to my office, I showed him a seat. As soon as the others had left the room, he began the conversation by saying, "I am possessed of the devil." "I think quite likely you are," I replied, "but Christ is able to cast out devils." "You do not understand me," he said, "I mean that the devil has entered into me as he did into Judas Iscariot."

"That may be," I answered, "but Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. Now He says in John 6:37. 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.' If you will come to Him, He will receive you and set you free from Satan's power." The conversation went on in this way for some time: he constantly asserting the absolute hopelessness of his case, and I on my part constantly asserting the power of Jesus Christ and His promise, "'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" After a while I sent the young man to his room.

Days and weeks passed, and we had many conversations, always on the same line, and I always holding him to John 6:37. One day I met him in the hall of the Institute, and made up my mind that the time had come to have the battle out. I told him to sit down, and I sat down beside him. "Do you believe the Bible?" I asked. "Yes," he replied, "I believe everything in it." "Do you believe John 6:37?" I asked. "Yes, I believe everything in the Bible." "Do you believe that Jesus Christ told the truth when He said, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out'?"

"Yes, I do; I believe everything in the Bible." "Well, then, will you come?" "I have committed the unpardonable sin." "I replied, "Jesus does not say, 'Him that hath not committed the unpardonable sin that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' He says, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in on wise cast out.'" "But I have sinned willfully after I have received the knowledge of the truth." "Jesus does not say, 'Him that has not sinned willfully after he received the knowledge of the truth that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast our.'

He says, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "But I have been once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have fallen away, and it is impossible to renew me again unto repentance." "Jesus does not say, 'Him that has not tasted of the heavenly gift, and has not fallen away, if he cometh to me I will in no wise cast him out.' He says, 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.'" "But I am possessed of the devil," he answered. "Jesus does not say, 'Him that is not possessed of the devil that

cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'

He says, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "I mean that the devil is entered into me as he did into Judas Iscariot." "Jesus does not say, 'Him that the devil has not entered into, as he did into Judas Iscariot, that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.' He says, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "But my heart is hard as a millstone." "Jesus does not say, 'If a man's heart is soft and tender, and he come to Me, I will in no wise cast him out.'

He says, 'Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.'" "But I do not know that I have any desire to come." "Jesus does not say, 'Him that hath a desire to come, and comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out. He says, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "But I do not know that I can come in the right way." "Jesus does not say, 'Him that cometh to Me in the right way, I will in no wise cast him out.' He says, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "Well, I don't know that I care to come."

"Jesus does not say, 'Him that careth to come to Me, and comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.' He says, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" The man's excuses and subterfuges were exhausted. I looked him square in the face and said, "Now, will you come? Get down on your knees, and quit your nonsense." He knelt and I knelt by his side. "Now," I said, "Follow me in prayer." "Lord Jesus," I said, and he repeated, "Lord Jesus." "My heart is as hard as a millstone."

"My heart is as hard as a millstone," he repeated. "I have no desire to come unto thee." "I have no desire to come unto thee." "But thou hast said in thy Word." "But thou hast said in thy Word." "'Him that cometh to Me I will no wise cast out.'" "'Him that cometh to Me I will no wise cast out.'" "Now the best I know how I come." "Now the best I know how I come." "Thou hast said, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "Thou hast said, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "I believe this statement of Thine."

"I believe this statement of Thine." "Therefore, though I don't feel it, I believe thou hast received me." "Therefore, though I don't feel it, I believe thou hast received me." When he had finished, I said, "Did you really come?" He replied, "I did." "Has He received you?" "I do not feel it," he replied. "But what does He say?" "'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "Is this true? Does Jesus tell the truth, or does He lie?" "He tells the truth." "What then must He have done?"

"He must have received me." "Now," I said, "go to your room: stand firmly upon this promise of Jesus Christ. The devil will give you an awful conflict, but just answer him every time with John 6:37, and stand right there, believing what Jesus says in spite of your feelings, in spite of what the devil may say, in spite of everything." He went to his room. The devil did give him an awful conflict, but he stood firmly on John 6:37, and came out of his room triumphant and radiant.

Years have passed since then. Though the devil has tried again and again to plunge him into despair, he has stood firmly on John 6:37, and he is today being used of God to do larger work for Christ than almost any man I know.[5] Still another example of Dr. Torrey's method of using Scripture verses is in order, because anyone can use this particular passage the same way. Concerning the use of Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," with those desiring to be saved, Dr. Torrey says:

Get the inquirer to read the verse himself, then say to him, "The first half of this verse shows you your need of salvation, the second half shows you the provision God has made for your salvation. Read again the first half of this verse.

"Is this true of you? Have you gone astray like a sheep? Have you turned to your own way?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you?" Get the inquirer to say, "I am lost."

"We will now look at the provision God has made for your salvation; read the last half of the verse.

"Who is the one in this verse upon whom our iniquity has been laid?"

"Christ."

"What then has God done with your sin?"

"Laid it on Christ."

"Is it then on you any longer?"

Go over it again and again until he sees that his sin is not on him but that it is on Christ, and has been settled forever. I often use a simple illustration in making the meaning of the verse plain. I let my right hand represent the inquirer, my left hand represent Christ, and my Bible represent the inquirer's sin.

I first lay the Bible on my right hand and say, "Now where is your sin?"

The inquirer replies, of course, "On me."

I then repeat the last half of the verse, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all," and transfer the Bible from my right hand to my left, and ask, "Where is your sin now?"

The inquirer replies, "On Him, of course."

I then ask, "Is it on you any longer?" and he says, "No, on Christ." Very many people have been led out into light and joy by this simple illustration.[6]

Dr. Torrey was able to get others to do personal work, especially in his pastorates. He said:

The fourth church, of which I am now pastor, is a metropolitan church in the heart of a great city, with a membership when I took it, of eight hundred. Each one of these four churches was as different as churches could be. I started out in each by going to work to train my people to be intelligent soul-winners, so that if a revival ever should come, I would have people ready to lead others intelligently to an acceptance of Christ.

The revival did come at the end of the first year in the first church, and it has been going on ever since. From that day to this I have lived in a revival. Some people say they believe, not in spasmodic revivals, but in perpetual revivals. So do I. I not only believe in them, but since the first year of my ministry I have had a perpetual revival, and that has been due largely to the fact that I have had a trained membership.[7]

Torrey's power in soul-winning was in large part due to his deep and constant life of prayer. When Dr. Will H. Houghton preached Dr. Torrey's funeral sermon, he said in part:

But those who knew Dr. Torrey more intimately knew him as a man of regular and uninterrupted prayer. He knew what it meant to pray without ceasing. With hours set systematically apart for prayer, he gave

himself diligently to this ministry.[8]

One of Dr. Torrey's specialties in personal evangelism was dealing with atheists, infidels and skeptics. So well did he know their arguments and excuses, and so well did he know the Scriptures, that few of them could stand long before him. Regarding this matter, he wrote:

My ministry has been largely a ministry to skeptics, agnostics and infidels. I have had their confidence, and I have yet to meet the first infidel that was made better by infidelity. I have known men whose characters have been undermined by infidelity - countless men...

One night I went down into the audience to speak to individuals after a meeting like this. I went down to a man who sat in the last opera chair. I said, "Are you a Christian?"

"No," he said, "I should say not. I am an infidel."

I said, "What do you mean?"

"Well," he said, "I don't believe in the divinity of Christ."

I said, "You don't believe in the divinity of Christ?"

"No," he said, "I don't."

"Well," I said, "let us kneel right down now and tell God so." And he turned pale. "You go and tell God what you would like to tell me." [9]

Robert Harkness, for many years Dr. Torrey's pianist, wrote: "He was skilled in the art of meeting the difficulties of the unbeliever. He was powerful in answering the hackneyed arguments of the infidel." [10]

Dr. Torrey believed in thorough dealing with inquirers, as is already evident. He wished the inquirer to be saved and know it, and know why. The writer attended a meeting one time in the old Moody Church when Dr. Torrey preached. The only person answering the invitation was a little boy about eight years old. Dr. Torrey lifted him up on the platform and dealt with him kindly but firmly so the whole audience could observe and hear. His clear explanations and searching questions brought the little lad into such assurance of salvation that he gave his testimony before the whole congregation before the meeting was dismissed.

Reuben Archer Torrey excelled in every form of Christian service he undertook. He could be satisfied with nothing less. Believing that those without Christ were doomed to endless darkness and eternal punishment, he gave himself unstintedly to use every means at his disposal to bring them into the full experience of personal salvation.

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## NOTES

1. The Moody Monthly, Oct., 1937, p. 65, article entitled, "Personal Work" by Rev. Reuben A. Torrey, D.D.
2. George T. B. Davis, Torrey and Alexander (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), p. 245

3. *ibid*, p. 209-210
4. R. A. Torrey, *How to Work for Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1901), pp. 111-112
5. R. A. Torrey, *Real Salvation and Whole-Hearted Service* (London: James Nisbet & Co., Limited, 1905), p. 132-137
6. *How to Work for Christ*, p. 39-40
7. Davis, Torrey and Alexander, p. 35
8. Will H. Houghton, *The Moody Monthly*, Oct. 1936, p. 57
9. *Real Salvation and Whole-Hearted Service*, pp. 104-105
10. Robert Harkness, *Reuben Archer Torrey, The Man and His Message* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Assn., 1929), p. 52

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