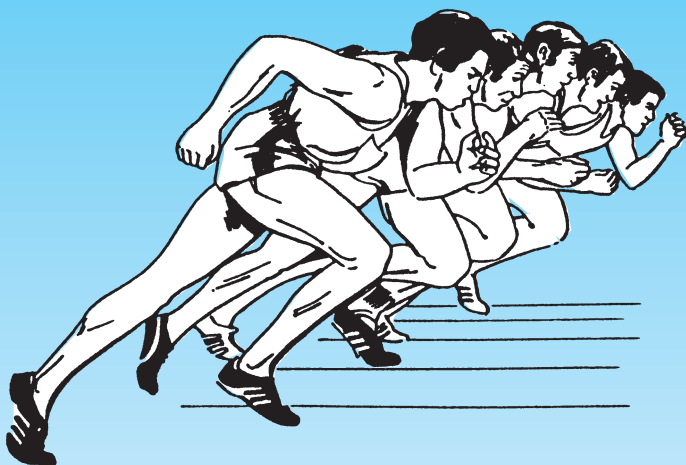


How To "RUN WELL"

By F. B. Hole



"You ran well. Who hindered you?"

Galatians 5:7

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A GOOD START

• **Conversion.** If you have just been converted, you stand on the doorstep of an absolutely new era in your life. No doubt things seem new to you, and the path you now begin to walk is a little mysterious. I want to point out a few things which may, with God's blessing, help you at the start of your Christian career.

We will not say much about your past – that is settled; nor about your future – that is secure: both through the value of the precious blood of Christ. Our thoughts will be concentrated on *the present*. You are a total loss to Satan for eternity, and he knows it. He will therefore concentrate his efforts on spoiling your testimony for the Lord here on earth.

If he can cause you to dishonor Him, so much the better from his point of view. If not, he has some very successful ways of stunting spiritual growth and making his poor victim anything but a successful Christian.

The animal kingdom is divided into two great classes: the *vertebrate* (with backbone) and the *invertebrate* (without backbone). Believers also may be classified in the same way. We hope that you would be a *vertebrate* Christian – having backbone and being marked by decision and spiritual vigor, not by stagnation and decay.

Be warned at the beginning against the idea that in your conversion you have reached the summit of Christian experience, the goal of the Christian race. The truth is, conversion is just the *starting point*; the race is just beginning! It is definitely not the time for you to take things easy, but rather to prepare for action. It would be well if every convert asked the same questions that Saul of Tarsus (later the Apostle Paul) asked at his conversion: "Who are You, Lord?" and, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:8,10).

Jesus is not just your Savior – He is also your Lord. Of course you acknowledge this, unless you are not a true convert. So prepare to get up and follow His direction like Saul did. In the epistle addressed to converts from the Jewish religion to Christianity, we find the exhortation: "Let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1). Take these words, "*Let us go on,*" as a motto, and think continually on them. Just as a bicyclist must *go on* if he would *keep on*, so we must advance if our Christianity is to be much more than a meaningless name.

You want a good start; then first of all *be real*. If you still have lingering doubts and fears about your standing with God, have courage to admit it. Don't say everything is all right if you are not sure. Don't worry if you have told a preacher or friends, even many times, that you are saved. Your doubts should not surprise them if they know their own hearts, and they may be able to encourage you. At all costs, *be*

real. Don't say, "I see," if you don't see. Don't go one inch beyond where you are to please your best friends. Take time to get a firm foothold or you will never start well.

• **Confession.** Once you have taken your stand on the Word of God and have assurance, confess Christ *immediately*; don't let anything hold you back. This proverb is all too true: "He who hesitates is lost." The Scripture says, "*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*" (Romans 10:9). You will not be happy without it, because you will be a hypocrite: inwardly a Christian, outwardly still a man or woman of the world; drifting with the tide, doing as others do; weakly smiling when unbelievers direct their humor at sacred subjects, for fear of making yourself conspicuous; and hating yourself for acting so cowardly. How miserable this is!

Don't stand shivering on the shore – plunge bravely in. Never mind the shock, the ridicule, the sneers, the cold shoulder. They will not be half as bad as you imagine, and will be followed by the after-glow of divine peace and joy you never knew before. Begin at home: "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you" (Mark 5:19).

Having confessed the Lord, you have made a good start as a Christian. Now do you know

what will give vigor to your Christianity and ensure a successful and God-glorifying career? *Be whole-hearted.*

You may have heard of the General who, having disembarked his men, burned the ship from which he had landed, deliberately throwing away his only chance of retreat. He did it so that none of his men might be tempted to look longingly behind him. Act on this principle yourself; make a clean break with the world behind you.

Make up your mind that by the grace of God, Christ and His claims will be supreme – your chief consideration in every circumstance. In the world, the man succeeds who follows his pursuit (whether money, education or power) unwaveringly and persistently. His object controls him; everything else submits to it. Eventually he becomes a millionaire, a great scientist, or a prime minister, as the case may be. If you make Christ your object, He will control you. You will be able to make everything count for His interests, and ultimately you will get the greatest of all rewards from His own lips: “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

HINDRANCES

• **The First Fall.** Shortly after your conversion you will discover that there are many traps. Let me point out some of them, so that being

warned you may be prepared, with God's help. The first fall (sin) after conversion is very frustrating and disappointing, especially if you had previous addictions or sinful habits. Not one of us escapes this experience. The joy of salvation is in our hearts and it seems as if no sorrow or clouds will cross our path again. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, we sin! Bitter shame and sorrow fills our hearts. Perhaps some of you have that sorrow and shame in your hearts right now. To make matters worse, your worldly friends may have noticed it, and are amused at your defeat; your Christian friends are none too sympathetic; and you don't know what to do!

This is Satan's opportunity, and he will suggest to you, "A nice mess you have made, trying to live as a Christian. Wouldn't it be better to give up and save further disgrace to yourself and dishonor to the Lord?" He will tempt you to distrust God. "*Give up,*" is always his word.

Friend, let me tell you what not to do: do not give up, but *get down* and *go on*.

Get down in humiliation and self-judgment before God, remembering that even though you have changed, He has not. This sin of yours is one among the many for which Christ suffered on the cross, and He has now gone into heaven to be your Advocate (see 1 John 2:1). God is still your Father, and the message to you is:

"If we confess our sins, He (the Father) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Get down then in confession to God and He (as your Father) will forgive you. The very process itself will have a cleansing effect on you; and with greater confidence in Him and less in yourself, *go on*.

• **Old Associations.** *Beware of old companionships and associations!* Sometimes when the convert himself starts brightly, confessing the Lord, seeking to leave his old companions, they are not willing to part with him, and move heaven and earth to retain him. Sometimes it happens that years later love grows cold, and the believer begins slowly (more rapidly as time goes on) to drift back to people and to things he once left behind. Sometimes, most subtle and dangerous of all, we think that by joining our former ungodly associates we will gain their confidence and influence them for good.

This is a great mistake. *We will not lift them up. They will drag us down.* Experience universally confirms this statement, and so does Scripture.

Jehoshaphat was one of the best kings of Judah, while Ahab was the very worst king of Israel, and yet we read, "Jehoshaphat ... allied himself with Ahab" (2 Chronicles 18:1).

What was the result? Did Jehoshaphat elevate Ahab to his own level, so that he could say with satisfaction, "You have become as I am"? By no means – the very reverse! In verse three of the same chapter Jehoshaphat said, "I am as you are," and was not ashamed to admit it.

This was followed by the battle at Ramoth-gilead, in which Ahab lost his life and Jehoshaphat escaped by the skin of his teeth. God confronted him with a very serious message through Jehu the prophet: "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you" (2 Chronicles 19:2). The final outcome of all this was that Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram married Ahab's daughter (2 Chronicles 21:6) – the notoriously wicked Athaliah, a true daughter of her mother Jezebel, and the cause of much misery to Judah.

If you want more evidence from Scripture, read carefully Genesis 13, 14 and 19, which tell about Lot's sad downfall because of his friendship with the men of Sodom. He did not elevate them – they degraded him, so much so that no one paid any attention when he warned of Sodom's impending judgment. We ourselves would not know whether he was a true saint of God if the Spirit of God had not called him "that righteous man" in the New Testament (2 Peter 2:8).

Of course you will meet your old companions, but let them know right away that the old relationships no longer exist. Speak to them about Christ. Whatever you do, don't descend to the old level. If you do, your power, like Samson's, will have left, and you will easily fall.

In most cases, one good, bold confession of Christ is enough. Some friends may eventually

be converted; others may just leave you. If not, you will find it best to leave them. If you can't *help* them, they will *harm* you; don't give them that opportunity.

These remarks apply equally to the *forming of new links and associations*. This principle should guide you in your Christian life:

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14; read through v. 18). Pray with this text in mind, and keep it in a prominent place in your heart and memory. If obeyed, it will save you from a world of sorrow. You need it, because you cannot go through life without forming many kinds of associations.

Beware of the "unequal yoke" in society; beware of it in business. Many a Christian has had his testimony ruined through partnership with an unconverted man and involvement with his questionable practices. But above all, beware of it in marriage. Unequal yokes in society or in business can be broken, but marriage is life-long. How many promising young lives have been voided and how much sorrow has resulted from disobedience to this divine command! I wish I could shout like a trumpet blast and warn every young convert in the country.

• **False Teachers.** Be warned also about false teachers and their doctrines. Do not be surprised that they exist. Satan, as well as God, has his servants, but he works by *imitation*. The Apostle Paul said this about some of Satan's

agents: "Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). Most likely, before long you will discover men or women with strange doctrines, seemingly credible and covered with a thin veneer of truth.

Here are one or two hints:

If they present doctrines that contradict the simple gospel you have received, diminishing the death and resurrection of Jesus, refuse and avoid them; they are false (see Galatians 1:6-8).

If they do not acknowledge Jesus as their Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3), or that He – a divine Person – has come in flesh (i.e. has become man); if they do not confess His deity and manhood (1 John 4:3), they are not of God.

If Christ is not the center of their teaching, but rather some religious fad; or if they demand your subjection to the teaching of some man or woman who assumes the place of prophet, or to some new revelation which someone professes to have received, you may safely turn from them. If tested, they will prove to be liars (see Revelation 2:2).

If the teacher himself is unconverted, don't listen to him. Of course he *may* say what is right, just as a parrot sometimes makes very appropriate remarks. Scripture, however, is very decisive: "The natural man (i.e. man in his natural or unconverted state) does not receive the

things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Don't pay attention to unbelievers' theories, whether honestly advanced by themselves or dishonestly cloaked as "Higher Criticism" and "Modern Thought" by religious leaders. The poor authors of these soul-destroying delusions do not have the Spirit of God, and even though possibly very intelligent, are not Christians, and know nothing of *true heart religion*.

Again, if anyone comes to you with doctrines which he must support by twisting Scripture, either by re-defining words in our English version or by continually referring to the Greek or Hebrew original and translating to fit his ideas; or if he takes texts out of their contexts – you have every reason for being suspicious of his doctrines. "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). Remember that the Bible is a whole: one part dovetails into the rest, not only agreeing with it, but explaining it as well.

• **Hobbies.** Seek grace from God not to spend all your spare time on hobbies.

Many Christians, both young and old, are sadly lacking in freshness. This is frequently not because of sin or even worldliness, but because of some interest or hobby that occupies too much valuable time and thought. Common hob-

bies include recreation and entertainment in their multiple forms, as well as many “harmless” activities and pursuits.

Do not misunderstand me. I don’t want to impose legal requirements on you. If we merely force you to show a false godliness and wear a “holy” expression, you have only gone “out of the frying pan and into the fire.” Of course you must have exercise and recreation, especially if you are young; otherwise your health will suffer. The point is: keep them in a secondary place, subordinate to Christ and His interests; don’t let them become prominent. If you do, they will become weights.

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance” (Hebrews 12:1), the apostle directs us. Notice it is the “weight *and* the sin” (i.e., weights are something additional to and distinct from sin). “Sin” is like some entanglement across the racer’s path: if he catches his foot in it he goes down. A “weight” may be something very useful and excellent in itself, but if the race is to be won, it must be set aside. The athlete does not even carry valuables; he has no pockets in his brief uniform.

If you find anything in your Christian life becoming a weight to you, however good it may be, have the courage to let go of it. We want you to get the maximum joy and blessing out of your knowledge of Christ.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RESOURCES

• **Support.** Some may be thinking that it is difficult (if not hopeless) work to be a Christian! You need to discover that it is *hopeless work in your own strength*. Do not forget that the power of God is behind you. There certainly are lions in the war, but do not be intimidated by them, especially since God Himself has provided you with the greatest helps.

You have not believed on a dead Savior, but on a living One. He may be out of sight, having left this world, but He is your *great High Priest in heaven*. He has entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24).

There He manages your concerns. Use Him; make Him your Friend; confide in Him. Keep no secrets from Him, but let Him have the key that opens every room of your soul.

You will meet many temptations. "He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

Weakness and infirmity will sometimes overcome you. He is able to "*sympathize with our weaknesses*" (Hebrews 4:15).

Difficulties and dangers may wash over your soul and threaten to drown you. "He is also able to save to the uttermost (i.e., right through to the end)" (Hebrews 7:25).

Your Christian friends *may* help and sympathize with you; we trust they will. But if you want absolute certainty, look to Him!

• **Power.** The Holy Spirit of God, a divine Person, is on earth. If you are a believer, *you have received the Holy Spirit.* "But," many young converts say, "I have not felt anything special. Is it possible to receive the Holy Spirit without some great and unique experience?"

It is certainly possible, for two reasons. First, the outward and visible signs which once accompanied His coming, such as tongues of fire or speaking foreign languages, are no longer used. Second, His mission is emphatically *not to call attention to Himself*, but to glorify Christ (see John 16:13-14).

Silently, noiselessly, He takes up residence, but soon the effects of His presence are felt. Perhaps it never occurred to you that the very glimpses you get of Christ and His preciousness, and of the love of God; the Bible becoming a new book to You, and prayer becoming delightful instead of irksome – are some evidences of His presence.

"But in my case," someone may say, "these results are conspicuously absent, and yet I do believe in Jesus. I doubt I have received the Spirit." The explanation probably is not that you have never received Him, but that having received Him, you have grieved Him.

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption," the Apostle Paul said to the Ephesian believers (Ephesians 4:30). *The practical benefits of*

His presence are lost when we grieve Him. He then grieves you; and since He is the Teacher in the things of God, and the power for worship, communion, and service – no wonder you are unhappy!

Always remember that “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Avoid everything that defiles, for with the Spirit of God ungrieved you have greater power than any that can be brought against you (1 John 4:4).

THE CHRISTIAN'S HELPS

There are four greatly practical helps for the Christian, whether he is young or old. The Spirit of God will certainly lead you to use them diligently.

• **God's Word.** First and foremost is the *Word of God*. Read your Bible, and read it well. Make it absolutely the most important book in your library. Other books may be helpful, especially if they continually refer you to the Bible; but never allow them to displace your reading of the Word of God itself.

We live in days of much unbelief. One of its greatest strongholds is ignorance of the Scriptures (see Matthew 22:29). We need to arm ourselves by close and prayerful acquaintance with the Book. A certain well-educated unbeliever was warned by his doctor of impending death by a terminal disease. He wanted to investigate

seriously for himself the claims that the Bible is a revelation from God. Meeting a Christian friend, he asked what books he should read to enable him to judge the Bible's merits. The terse answer was, "The Bible." Astonished, he repeated his question, but received the same answer. He was advised to start at the beginning and read straight through. He did, and before he completed the five books of Moses he became convinced that its origin was divine. He was ultimately converted to God!

If you are unfamiliar with the Bible, it would be good for you to start reading in the New Testament. This is the part that tells about the life of Jesus Christ.

Yes, if there is a royal road to understanding the Bible, it is reading the Bible itself – prayerfully, and in dependence on the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

• ***Read consecutively***; don't jump around here and there, and don't have favorite Scriptures that you read over and over again, neglecting other parts.

• ***Read comprehensively***; don't read too fast to think about the material, but fast enough to get an overview of the passage, to get a bird's-eye view of the whole.

• ***Search the Scriptures***, as well as read them. Situations will often arise in your life which drive you to seek the mind of God. Sometimes you will find a Scripture dealing with the point in question, but sometimes you will not. Then

you must search for some God-given principle which applies to your case and sheds light on your pathway. The Bible is pre-eminently a book of principles. Be like the Bereans, who "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Meditate; develop the habit of diligently turning over the Scriptures in your mind. To be well nourished, it is necessary not only to eat but to digest. Cattle must not only browse on the fresh grass, but also chew the cud. So do not only read and search, and thereby gather information; but having done so, turn it over and over in meditation, that it may really soak into and prosper our souls. Paul said to Timothy, "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Tim. 4:15).

• **Prayer.** Second only in importance to the Word of God is *prayer*. If you want an idea of how necessary it is, take your Bible and read Luke's Gospel, underlining every place where Jesus prayed. Notice that He, a divine Person, frequently prayed when here on earth.

Read Paul's Epistles and see what he says about prayers: "... night and day praying exceedingly." If Paul had to pray, surely you and I must.

You may simply pray about anything and everything (read Philippians 4:6-7). *Nothing is too small*. Our God is great enough to attend to your smallest need.

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Unburden your heart, and make your request with thanksgiving. Whether you get the answer you want or not, you will get at least His peace in your heart.

Don't forget intercession; i.e., praying for others – both saved and unsaved. There is a danger of becoming cramped and narrowed in our thoughts and prayers. There is always a great blessing in thinking of others.

In any event then, *let us pray*, and that “without ceasing.” Keep in an attitude of continual dependence and waiting on God. Keep your heart always in the spirit of prayer, even though you cannot always be on your knees. Besides being helpful, it is *safe*. The old rhyme is very true:

Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.

• **New Associations.** There is great importance in *keeping Christian company*. Much of what has been said about old companionships and associations would apply here. The best way to keep away from old associations is to form and cultivate new ones.

David said, "I will not know wickedness ... My eyes shall be on the faithful" (Psalm 101:4,6). He was without doubt a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. To avoid evil and to cultivate good was always *His way*; and if so, we should make it *ours*.

The very first decision for which Moses is commended is that, having come of age, he whole-heartedly identified with the despised people of God: "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11: 25).

Don't start with the idea that Christians are perfect or you will be greatly disappointed. They are far from it! But you will find among them a warmth and a love which you will never find in the world. Stick with them, even if they don't meet your expectations or act like you think they should. If they give you the "cold shoulder," return the gesture by giving them a warm heart, and you will soon get your investment repaid with interest.

Generally, however, things are the other way around. I have heard many complain that their fellow-Christians are so unfriendly that they never get spoken to after the service or meeting. On closer investigation, I nearly always find that these very people are known to jump up instantly after the meeting and leave without giving anyone the chance to befriend them. They are cold – not their associates! A frequent symptom of disease is that one complains of cold when really it is quite warm.

To avoid the company of Christians is an early symptom of spiritual disease. When shepherds see one sheep standing in a field away from the rest, they conclude that it is ill. When well, sheep keep together. Beware of sulking alone; stragglers become easy prey for the cunning enemy.

Some people may desire advice about where to meet, since even true Christians are divided into many groups – small and large – meeting in various places.

My advice is: Go where the Word of God leads you.

But remember – personal preferences or your parents' practices have nothing to do with this matter. The question must be decided absolutely by God's Word as if your salvation were at stake. You must search the Scriptures prayerfully on this point.

Do not become a "rolling stone"; such practice indicates a lack of principle. It is better to stay where you are as long as the Word of God, a good conscience, and true-hearted love for our Lord Jesus Christ will allow you.

• **Service.** Last of all, do not forget to *serve the Lord*. By this I don't merely mean that you should do everything, including your regular daily work, to the Lord (see Colossians 3:22, 24); but that you should take up some further interest and work directly for the Lord Jesus Christ, even though it may be very small.

“What shall I do?” is often asked. Ask your Master, who alone has authority to answer it, and you will soon discover what you should do. Opportunities are all around and needs are great.

Possibly you are already serving the Lord, almost without knowing it.

Like Andrew, you may be trying to bring some relative or friend to Jesus (see John 1:40-42). Having found the Lord yourself, you did it without being told, just like a newly-hatched duckling instinctively waddles to the pond. If so, thank God, and do not get tired of this blessed work. Go on, and in seeking to bring your friends to Jesus, enlarge your borders and keep going on!

There are many ways of serving the Lord: by personal conversations, anywhere and at all times; by distributing tracts, by visiting the sick, by teaching a Sunday School class; by public preaching of the Gospel and ministry of the Word to believers. Ask the Lord what you should do, and having found out, DO IT.

- Do it in obedience to the principles in the Word of God.

- Do it prayerfully, and

- Do it in cooperation with your fellow Christians; but I repeat, *DO IT*.

Healthy bodies are impossible without work. Solomon observed this and said, “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet ... but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

Many famous socialites suffer from “nerves” and similar complaints, often simply from lack of something to do. Even Christians may be found who do not fare well for the same reason: they are unemployed, except perhaps with what is profitless or even mischievous. The old saying is as true as ever:

“Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.”

We should be like the Thessalonian believers, to whom it was said, “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

If that verse becomes a truthful summary of our lives, they will have been lives well worth living.

May you richly
 BE BLESSED,
and may you thereby
 BECOME A BLESSING.

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Grace & Truth

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