

# Hannah W. Smith

• A Discovery of God •

“It was all the work of  
Another done for me.”



(1832-1911)

*Hannah Whitall Smith's book, The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life, is a spiritual classic and has helped countless numbers of Christians to understand the true nature of the Christian life. Hannah, along with her husband, Robert Pearsall Smith, is also known for founding the famous Keswick Convention for the cultivation of the "higher Christian life."*

*Hannah's personal discovery of God came after a process of searching that began with what she called "the aching void in my heart." This aching void was temporarily satisfied by the aid of a teacher named Anna. Anna spoke to her of giving up all to the Savior, but she did not show Hannah the way, except to admonish her, "Let us struggle for a portion of His Spirit."*

*Because of this kind of inner realization, Hannah was feeling deep desires for God but did not know how to find Him. Thus, she was plunged into a period which she called “morbid self-introspection.” Her daily cry became “How do I feel?” not “What does God say?” She characterized her relationship with God at that time as being based on how she felt toward God, not on how God felt toward her.*

*After being in this state of introspection for a few years, Hannah was driven into skepticism for a period of two years. She then went through a season where she was “cold and dead again and full of pride!” Her idol was the pride of human reason, and she confessed that she was in “a state of sad perplexity.” At this point, when she was about to speak out her skepticism and doubts to others, an event took place that changed the whole course of her life. She tells about this event in her own words, revealing how she found Christ:*

**I**T WAS IN THE YEAR 1858 and I was twenty-six years old. I had just lost a precious little daughter five years old, and my heart was aching with sorrow. I could not endure to think that my darling had gone out alone into a Godless universe; and yet, no matter on which side I turned, there seemed no ray of light.

It happened that just at this time the religious world was being greatly stirred by the inauguration of daily noonday meetings, held from twelve to one, in the business part of the city [Philadelphia], and crowded with businessmen. I had heard of these noonday meetings with a very languid interest, as I thought they were only another effort of a dying-out superstition to bolster up its cause. However, one day I happened to be near a place where one of these meetings was being held, and I thought I would go in and see what it was like. It was an impressive thing to see such crowds of busy men and women collected together at that hour in one of the busiest parts of the city, and I remember wondering vaguely what it could all be about.

Then suddenly something happened to me. What it was or how it came I had no idea, but somehow an inner eye seemed to be opened in my soul, and I seemed to see that after all God was a fact — the bottom fact of all facts — and that the only thing to do was to find out all about Him. It was not a pious feeling, such as I had been looking for, but it was a conviction — just such a conviction as comes to one when a mathematical problem is suddenly solved. One does not *feel* it is solved, but one knows it, and there can be no further question. I do not remember anything that was said. I do not even know that I heard anything. A tremendous revolution was

going on within me that was of far profounder interest than anything the most eloquent preacher could have uttered. God was making Himself manifest as an actual existence, and my soul leaped up in an irresistible cry to know Him.

It was not that I felt myself to be a sinner needing salvation, or that I was troubled about my future destiny. It was not a personal question at all. It was simply and only that I had become aware of God, and that I felt I could not rest until I should know Him. I might be good or I might be bad; I might be going to Heaven or I might be going to hell — these things were outside the question. All I wanted was to become acquainted with the God of whom I had suddenly become aware.

How to set about it was the one absorbing question. I had no one I cared to ask, and it never occurred to me that prayer would help me. It seemed to me like the study of some new and wonderful branch of knowledge to which I must apply with all diligence, and I concluded that probably the Bible was the book I needed. “This book,” I said to myself, “professes to teach us about God. I will see if it can teach me anything.” I was going with my family to spend some weeks at the seashore, and I decided to take no books but the Bible, and to try and find out what it said about God. In my diary I wrote under the date of July 16, 1858 —

I have brought my Bible to Atlantic City this summer with a determination to find out what its plan of salvation is. My own plans have failed utterly, now I will try God's if possible....I am trying to believe Him simply as a little child. I have laid aside my preconceived notions of what He ought to do and say, and have come in simplicity to the Bible to see what He has done and said; and I *will* believe Him.

Someone had remarked once in my hearing that the book of Romans contained the clearest and fullest statements of Christian doctrine to be found in the Bible, and I set myself to read it. What I should have made out of it without any guidance I cannot say, but one day I mentioned to a lady, who was visiting us, how interested I was in trying to understand the teaching of the Book of Romans, but how difficult I found it. She said she had a little book which had explained it to her, and asked if she might give it to me. I accepted it eagerly, and found it most enlightening. It set forth the plan of salvation as described in the third, fourth and fifth chapters of Romans in a clear businesslike way that appealed to me strongly. It stated that mankind were all sinners, and all deserved punishment — that all had sinned and come short of the glory of God, and that there was none righteous, no not one; and it declared that therefore every mouth was stopped and all the world had become guilty before God (Rom. 3:1-19). It went on to show that there

was no escape from this except through the righteousness of Christ, which was “unto all and upon all them that believe”; and that Christ was our propitiation, through whom we obtained the “remission of sins that are past” (Rom. 3:20-26). And then it pointed out that by this process all boasting on our part was shut out, and we were justified before God, not by anything we had done or could do, but by what our Divine Savior had done for us (Rom. 3:27-31). It declared that Christ was the substitute for sinners — that He had in their place borne the punishment they deserved, and that all we had to do in order to secure the full benefit of this substitution was simply to believe in it, and accept the forgiveness so purchased.

Of course this was a very legal and businesslike interpretation of these passages, and was not at all the interpretation I should give to them now; but I want to tell, as truthfully as I can, the way things impressed me then. The very crudeness and outwardness of the interpretation made it easy for my ignorance to grasp it, and it struck me at the time as a most sensible and satisfactory arrangement. It was a “plan of salvation” that I could understand. There was nothing mystical or mysterious about it — no straining after emotions, no looking out for experiences. It was all the work of Another done for me, and required nothing on my part but a simple common-sense understanding and belief.

Baldly stated, it was as follows. We were all sinners, and therefore all deserved punishment. But Christ had taken our sins upon Himself and had borne the punishment in our stead, and therefore an angry God was propitiated, and was willing to forgive us and let us go free. Nothing could be more plain and simple. Even a child could understand it. It was all outside of oneself, and there need be no searchings within or rakings up of one's inward feelings to make things right with God. Christ had made them right, and we had nothing to do but to accept it all as a free gift from Him. Moreover, a God who could arrange such a simple plan as this, was understandable and get-at-able, and I began to think it must be true.

This all sounds very outward and very crude; but, after all, crude as it seems, there was behind it the great bottom fact that God was, somehow or other, in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; and it was this vital fact of the reconciliation between God and man that had laid hold of me. And I believe it is this fact, however it may be expressed, that is the one essential thing in the outset of every satisfactory religious life. The soul must know that all is right between itself and God before it can try, with any heart, to worship and serve Him.

I had discovered this vital fact, and the religious life had begun for me with eager and enthusiastic delight.

In my diary I find in 1858 the following entries:

#### RESTORATION OF BELIEF.

August 20, 1858. Am I really coming to Christ? I ask myself this question with wonder and amazement. A month ago it seemed so utterly impossible. But I believe I am. It seems as if these truths in the New Testament have taken hold of my soul, and I cannot gainsay them. God only knows what the end will be.

August 21, 1858. Many passages of Scripture have been impressed on my mind in my reading, and, having made up my mind simply to believe and not to reason or question, I *do* find myself inevitably brought to Christ as my Redeemer. My watchword for the last few weeks has been "Thus says the Lord" as a conclusive argument in every case.

August 30, 1858. I am resting now simply on God's own record as the foundation of my hope. He says Jesus Christ is His well beloved Son, and I believe it. He says further that He gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, and I believe this also. He *is* my Savior, not only my helper; and in His finished work I rest. Even my hard heart of unbelief can no longer refrain from crying out, "Lord, I believe. Help Thou my unbelief."

September 13, 1858. My heart is filled with the exceeding preciousness of Christ. And I am lost in wonder at the realization of His infinite mercy to me, who am so utterly unworthy of the least favor from

His hands. How could He be so tender and so loving! I can write the words, "It is all of free grace," but they only feebly convey the deep sense I have of the infinite freeness of this grace. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Could anything be more free than this? I have so long bewildered myself with trying to work out my own righteousness, and have found such weariness in it, that I feel as if I could never appreciate deeply enough the blessed rest there is for me in Christ. "He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." No wonder the Apostle cried out from a full heart, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!"

My diary is full of similar records, but these will suffice to tell of the wonderful discovery I had made. I want it to be clearly understood that it all came to me as a discovery, and in no sense as an attainment. I had been seeking after attainments in the past, but now I had lost all thought of any attainment of my own in the blaze of my discoveries of the salvation through Christ. It was no longer in the slightest degree a question of what I was or what I could do, but altogether a question of what God was and of what He had done. I seemed to have left myself, as myself, out of it entirely, and to care only to find out all I could about the work of Christ.

The thing that amazed me was how I could have lived so long in a world that contained the Bible, and

never have found all this before. Why had nobody ever told me? How could people, who had found it out, have kept such a marvelous piece of good news to themselves? Certainly I could not keep it to myself, and I determined that no one whom I could reach should be left a day longer in ignorance, as far as I could help it. I began to buttonhole everybody, pulling them into corners and behind doors to tell them of the wonderful and delightful things I had discovered in the Bible about the salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. It seemed to me the most magnificent piece of good news that any human being had ever had to tell, and I gloried in telling it.

So little however had I known of Christian ideas and Christian nomenclature, that I had not the least conception that what I had discovered made any difference in me personally, or that my belief in all this made me what they called a Christian. It only seemed to me that I had found out something delightful about God, which had filled me with happiness, and which I wanted everybody else to know. But that this discovery constituted what was called “conversion,” or that I personally was different in any way from what I had been before, never entered my head.

One day, however, a “Plymouth Brother” friend, hearing me tell my story, exclaimed, “Thank God, Mrs. Smith, that you have at last become a Christian.” So little did I understand him, that I promptly replied, “Oh, no, I

am not a Christian at all. I have only found out a wonderful piece of good news that I never knew before.” “But,” he persisted, “that very discovery makes you a Christian, for the Bible says that whoever believes this good news has passed from death unto life, and is born of God. *You* have just said that you believe it and rejoice in it, so of course *you* have passed from death unto life and are born of God.” I thought for a moment, and I saw the logic of what he said. There was no escaping it. And with a sort of gasp I said, “Why, so I must be. Of course I believe this good news, and therefore of course I must be born of God. Well, I *am* glad.”

From that moment the matter was settled, and not a doubt as to my being a child of God and the possessor of eternal life has ever had the slightest power over me since. I rushed to my Bible to make myself sure there was no mistake, and I found it brimming over with this teaching. “He that believes *has*,” “He that believes *is*.” There seemed to be nothing more to be said about it. Three passages especially struck me: 1 John 5:1, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”; and John 5:24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”; and above all, John 20:30, 31, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are

written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life through His name.”

There seemed nothing more to be said. There were the things about Christ, written in the Bible, as clear as daylight, and I believed what was written with all my heart and soul, and therefore I could not doubt that I was one of those who had “life through His name.” The question was settled without any further argument. It had nothing to do with how I felt, but only with what God had said. The logic seemed to me irresistible; and it not only convinced me then, but it has carried me triumphantly through every form of doubt as to my relations with God which has ever assailed me since. And I can recommend it as an infallible receipt to every doubter.

Of course at once, on having made this further discovery, of the fact that I was a Christian, I began to add it to the story I had already been telling, always ending my recital with the words — “And now, if you believe all this, you are a Christian, for the Bible says that he that believes *is* born of God, and *has* eternal life.”

I had got hold of that which is the necessary foundation of all religion, namely, reconciliation with God, and had had my first glimpse of Him as He is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. All my fear of Him had vanished. He loved me, He forgave me, He was on my side, and all was right between us. I had learned moreover that it was from

the life and words of Christ that my knowledge of God was to come, and not, as I had always thought, from my own inward feelings; and my relief was inexpressible.

I can see now, in looking back, that in many respects I had only touched the surface of the spiritual realities hidden under the doctrines I had so eagerly embraced. I was as yet only in the beginning of things. But it was a beginning in the right direction, and was the introduction to the “life more abundant” which, as my story will show, was to come later. Meanwhile I had got my first glimpse of the unselfishness of God. As yet it was only a glimpse, but it was enough to make me radiantly happy.<sup>1</sup>



As Hannah Whitall Smith found, salvation is a discovery and not an attainment. If salvation were an attainment, then we would be thrown back on our record, our history, our performance, our own righteousness, our states of mind, our feelings, and our own ability to measure up to a standard. Salvation based on man’s attainment is completely discounted by the following verses:

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us”  
(Titus 3:5).

<sup>8</sup> “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6).

Such verses disarm us from seeking to attain salvation based on anything we can do. Salvation is totally a discovery — a revelation — a seeing of what Christ has done for us! It is all the work of Another, done for us even when we were dead and enemies of God. Romans 5:10 declares, “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved in His life.” Thus, to be reconciled to God is altogether the *work* of Another, and to be saved is altogether a matter of the *life* of Another. It is all in the realm of discovery, not attainment.

You can make this wonderful discovery by simply stopping yourself from establishing your own righteousness, and submitting yourself to the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God is Christ! Period! That is all. You need do nothing else. You need look no further. Romans 10:4 tells us, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Christ is now

waiting to come into your heart. He is waiting for you to discover Him. Let Romans 10:8-9 lead you to this awesome discovery of Christ:

<sup>8</sup>“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach): <sup>9</sup>that 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.”

