

## He Hid Behind the Stove

by Walter Lewis Wilson, M.D.

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A MEETING was in progress in a small country church which was heated by a large stove at the back of the room near the door. The stove was usually kept fairly hot during those cold days, so that the visiting friends could not sit very near to it. One young man, however, preferred to sit directly behind the stove where he would be hidden from the preacher.

Everett, for that was his name, was about twenty-eight years of age. He was a well-built young man with a large shock of curly hair. He was a bachelor and lived alone in a cottage just outside the little town. He had a cow and some chickens, also a small garden, and by selling the products of these, he was able to keep soul and body together.

Everett was not known for his spirituality. He had the reputation around the village of being quite the opposite in character—rough, ungodly, and given to wicked practices.

The services in the little church attracted quite a bit of attention in the neighborhood, and almost the whole village was coming. This attracted our friend, and so he decided he would see what was going on at the church. A number of his friends were coming and some had been saved. All of them had been stirred, and the meetings were the talk of the neighborhood. He therefore attended, but of course did not feel at home, and so sat in an obscure place in the back of the church behind the stove.

As I gave the message, some portions would be of unusual interest to him, and he would lean out from behind the stove to see me. I was quick to take advantage of this and would say something especially intended for him, but which was in connection with the message. He would soon draw back out of sight and remain hidden for a while. This continued throughout the meetings.

One night the subject of the message was John 5:24—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." I sought to make it clear to the audience that our manner of life revealed whether we were dead in sins or whether we were alive in Christ. As I explained the symptoms of a dead sinner, Everett became quite interested. His shock of hair

appeared frequently from behind the stove. He would listen a moment and then pull his head back. Again in a few moments it would appear and then disappear. I knew that something unusual was taking hold of his soul. I hoped that he would come and speak to me at the close of the service.

At no time did Everett remain behind for a personal conversation. He would bolt out of the door as soon as the message was finished, and no one was able to stop him or converse with him. He kept out of the path of the Christians during the day and avoided contacts with those who could help him spiritually. He was naturally shy, but now he was far more so, because of his soul trouble.

The following Sunday night, when I came to the front of the church, imagine my great surprise to see Everett sitting on the front seat, holding in his lap the largest Bible I had ever seen in the hands of any person. It was a pulpit Bible, and an unusually large one. I immediately went to him and said, "Everett, I cannot understand this situation. Last Sunday you were behind the stove. Now you are on the front seat. Last Sunday you had no Bible, now you have the largest Bible I have ever seen in anyone's hands. What has happened that has caused this wonderful change?"

His face glowed with joy as he told the following story:

"Last Sunday night, I sat behind the stove, listening to your sermon about Jesus making us alive. I had never heard anything like that in my life. I knew something was wrong with me, but did not know what it was. As you described the symptoms of a dead sinner, I saw right away that you were talking about me. You said that the dead sinner did not care for God, and certainly I never have. You said that the dead sinner did not understand the Bible, and I know very well I never did. You said that the dead sinner did not care whether others went to heaven or hell, and I never have cared a bit where anybody went. You said that anyone that was dead in their sins did not care very much whether they sinned or didn't, and I never have cared—really I loved to commit some sins. You certainly hit me right square on the head when you told those symptoms.

"When you closed the service, I beat it for home. I did not want to talk to anybody. I wanted to fight that thing out and see if I could understand it and get it straightened out. When I arrived at my little house, I lit my lantern, got out a little Testament that I had, and tried to find the place that you preached about, but I could not find that verse. I knew it was somewhere in John, and so I started reading from the first

verse in John until I found it. I never went to school very much, so I cannot read very fast, and have to spell out some of the words. It was half past two in the morning before I got to John 5:24, where I found the verse I was looking for. I read the verse over and over again. I did not want to stay dead and be lost. I wanted Jesus to save me.

"After reading it several times, I got down on my knees and said, 'Jesus, God sent You to save me, and I am going to let You do it. You said if I believe, I would have everlasting life, and I do believe on You, and I am taking You for my Saviour right now. I am going to be Your man and live for You, because You died for me.'"

"After praying, I got a wonderful peace in my heart, and I said to myself, 'If reading one verse will give so much peace, reading more verses will give me more peace.'

"I sat down beside the lantern and read on until I came to the verse that says that no man does anything in secret, if He wants people to know Him openly: "For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world" (John 7:4). I thought surely that is right. So I took my lantern and started out to tell the folks.

"When I knocked at my neighbor's house, he called out the window and wanted to know who was there. I told him it was me and that Jesus had just saved me, and I wanted him to know it."

"He said, 'Oh, is that so?'

"And I went on to the next house. I knocked at the door and pretty soon Jim stuck his head out upstairs and said, 'Who is down there?'

"And I said, 'It is Everett. Jesus saved me a little while ago, and I want you to know about it. Goodbye.'

"I went all around the village, Dr. Wilson, and told everybody in town, because I did not want Jesus to say that He saved me in secret and I did not tell it openly."

This wonderful story of faith and confession stirred my heart greatly. I rejoiced with him in the blessed relationship he had found with Christ. Still, however, I could not understand the secret of the big Bible, and so I asked him to tell me why he had such a big book. He told me the following story:

"You see, Doctor, all I had at home was a little Testament, and the

print was not very good in it, and the only light I had was a lantern. I wanted a whole Bible, one that had the old Bible in with the new Bible, so I could read it over. I wanted print big enough so I could read faster when I did not have a very good light.

"Monday morning I went over to the book store in the next town, and I said to the book manager, 'Mr. Mack, I want to buy a big Bible.'

"Then he brought me out a Bible that had maps in it and a lot of writings about the Bible and a thumb index for blind people to find the books, but I did not want that either, and I told him so.

"I told him that I wanted a great big Bible, the biggest Bible he had in the store, so he brought out this one, and I said, 'That is just what I want. Wrap it up for me.'

"Mack said, 'It will cost you \$12.50.'

"I said, 'That is all right. I never did buy a Bible, so I never spent any money on a Bible, and I might as well spend a whole lot now.'

"He wrapped it up, and I paid him for it, and started out of the door. Then he called me and said, 'Everett, I cannot understand what you want with a Bible. Everybody around here knows that you have not been a church member. You have always run with a tough bunch, and you have kind of a bad reputation around here. How does it come that you want a Bible and such a big one?'"

"I was glad to tell Mack how that Jesus had saved me, and now I was a Christian. I knew Christians ought to read their Bibles and not be ashamed of it.

"I said to him, 'Mack, you are right. Everybody knows that I have been a tough fellow and never cared anything for the Bible, but now you see I belong to Jesus, and I want to carry a Bible everywhere I go. Now if I only had my little Bible, the New Testament that I have at home, I might be walking along the street with it, and I would see some of the old gang coming up the street, and the devil would say, "Everett, here comes the gang. Better put that Bible in your pocket." Mr. Mack, I want a Bible I cannot get in my pocket. That is the reason I got this great big one. The devil is not going to get me to hide a Bible in my pocket after Jesus died for me and saved me.'

"And that is the reason, Dr. Wilson, I have this big Bible. I want everybody to know that Everett has been converted and loves the Bible, and wants everybody else to know and love it."

What a rebuke this new convert is to many who know and love the Lord. May this incident lead each one to honor the Scriptures more, to confess Christ better, and to be an out-and-out testimony for the Saviour of men.

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Copied by Stephen Ross for [www.WholesomeWords.org](http://www.WholesomeWords.org) from *Remarkable New Stories Told by the Doctor* by Walter Lewis Wilson, M.D. Chicago: Moody Press, ©1940. (Moody Colportage Library; 180).