

every Sunday he dutifully deposited hard-earned pennies in the offering plate in atonement for his transgressions that week. Then in July 1896, at the invitation of his neighbor, Caleb Baker, he attended a tent meeting sponsored by the Plymouth Brethren. There the preacher hammered home the truth that no man can attain righteousness before God by his own works. Young Wilson had to admit that the Bible seemed to teach what the man said, yet he struggled with the idea. Six months later he showed up at another tent meeting. On his way home after the service, having sat down on a bench in front of a saloon to mull over the message he had heard, he gave his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wilson's life was never the same, and he began thinking seriously about the ministry. A preacher from Scotland named Donald Ross befriended the teenager with spiritual advice and encouragement and, on his deathbed, prayed that God would raise him up to succeed him. The next year, still in high school, Wilson began holding street meetings in Kansas City, and he soon demonstrated the creative approach to evangelism that would mark his entire ministry. One day, for instance, he placed a derby hat upside down on the sidewalk and covered it with a white handkerchief. When a crowd had gathered in curiosity around the unusual object, Wilson began to preach. He followed the same method in personal soulwinning, often making some out-of-the-ordinary comment or mentioning an obscure passage of Scripture in an unusual context to excite the listener's curiosity. He would then lead into the presentation of the gospel.

After high school Wilson studied to be a doctor at the University Medical School of Kansas City. Because he was colorblind, he had to take an additional year at Northwestern University Medical College in Chicago before he could obtain his license to practice. Lack of financial help from his family made his student years difficult, but by dint of hard work, economizing, and native business sense he made it through.

He married soon after graduation and set up practice in Webb City, Missouri. His bride was Marion Baker, youngest daughter of Caleb Baker, the neighbor who had persuaded

Wilson to go to the tent meetings where he heard the gospel. The courtship, which lasted eight years, had begun after Marion's older sister Jessie had refused to date Walter any more because he had shown up for a date wearing a tie that clashed horrendously with his suit. Poor colorblind Walter had had no inkling of the reaction his outfit would receive, but he was able to put his grief aside when Marion showed a willingness to replace her sister.

Wilson's relationship with the Baker family had other far-reaching results. Marion's father was involved in the tentmaking business, the Baker-Lockwood Manufacturing Company to be specific. A few months after his daughter's wedding, Baker became bedridden with osteomyelitis. He then requested that Wilson, who had worked with him part-time while in college, come help out at the plant during his illness. Wilson assented reluctantly, but by the time Baker recovered he had become an integral part of the company. So for twenty-five years Wilson helped manage and served as an agent for the Baker-Lockwood Company, and this occupation forms a backdrop for many of the soulwinning experiences he relates in his books. His extensive traveling in this capacity brought him into contact with people of all walks of life, including some famous ones like "Buffalo" Bill Cody and John Ringling of the Ringling Circus.

Although he never received ordination or even formal Bible training, Wilson eventually became well known as a Bible teacher. His connection with the Lord's work came in many ways. In 1920 he was a leader in the formation of Central Bible Hall in Kansas City, a nondenominational church organized somewhat along the lines of Plymouth Brethren assemblies, and eventually he served as its pastor. He also led in the establishment of the Flagstaff Indian Mission, which the church sponsored to bring the gospel to the Navahos in the Southwest. In 1924 he became a pioneer in the field of radio preaching when WOQ of Kansas City began broadcasting a live, half-hour lesson by Wilson every Sunday. The next year it became a daily program at breakfast time six days a week. He also helped in the founding of Kansas