Excerpts from 'Devotional Classics' edited by Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith

E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973)

Introduction to the Author

E. Stanley Jones devoted his life to the subject of Conversion. He was one of the best known missionaries and religious writers in the first half of the 20th century. Beginning in 1908, Jones lived and worked among the high caste Hindus and Muslims in India. Later in his life, he divided his time between missionary work in India and evangelistic missions in the United States.

One of his great accomplishments was the establishment of the Ashram, a Hindu word that means 'retreat'. This movement spread across the United States in the middle part of this century and continues in some measure today. The Ashram is a week long structured Christian retreat that focuses on solitude and community building.

E. Stanley Jones had a keen understanding of the spiritual life and the means of spiritual renewal. The following selection discusses the delicate balance between the activity of God and the response of His children in the establishment and cultivation of conversion.

Excerpts from 'Conversion'

1. Receptivity and Response

Conversion is a gift and an achievement. It is the act of a moment and the work of a lifetime. You can not attain salvation by disciplines - it is the gift of God. But you can not grow in your conversion without disciplines.

If you try to attain salvation by disciplines, you will be trying to discipline an unsurrendered self. You will be sitting on a lid. The result will be tenseness instead of trust. You will wrestle instead of nestle. While salvation cannot be attained by discipline around the unsurrendered self, nevertheless, when the self is surrendered to Christ and a new center formed, then you can discipline your life around that new center - Christ. Discipline is the fruit of conversion - not the root.

The passage 'As therefore you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith' (Col. 2:6-7, RSV) Note: 'received' = receptivity  'so live' = activity; 'rooted' = receptivity 'built up' = activity.

The 'rooted' means we receive from God an the roots are fed by the soil; the 'built up' means we build up as one build a house, a character and life by disciplined effort.

We trust as if the whole of conversion depended on God and work as if the whole of conversion depends on us. The alternate beats of a Christian heart are reception and response - receptivity from God and activity in work from us.

2. Simple Habits

Jesus is our example of receptivity and response. No one so utterly depended on God and no one was more personally disciplined in His habits. Jesus did three things by habit:

1. 'He stood up to read as was His custom' - He read the Word of God by habit.
2. 'He went out into the mountain to pray as was His custom' - He prayer by habit.
3. 'He taught them again as was His custom' - He passed on to others by habit what he had read.

These simple habits were the foundation habits of His life. They are as up to date as tomorrow morning. No converted person can live without those habits at work vitally in his life.

3. God Interpreting Himself

First, the habit of reading the Word of God daily. The New Testament is the inspired record of the revelation - the revelation is the person of Jesus Christ. He moves out of the pages of this Book and meets us with the impact of His person on our persons. The impact is cleansing. 'Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken to you' When you expose your all to His everything, then you submit yourself to a daily cleansing of the mind, of motive of emotions.
When Christians go to daily devotions without their Bibles, they interpret God by their own thoughts. God’s Word is the revelation and interpretation of God. God interprets Himself though the revelation of Jesus Christ in His Word. When you expose your thinking to God’s Word, you expose yourself to God Himself. No Christian is sound who is not scriptural. Who is not committed to the habit of reading God’s Word.

4. Perennially Fresh with God
   Second, pray in private by habit. When we read the Scripture, God speaks to us. In prayer, we speak to God. The God speaks to us, no longer through the Word only but directly in words to us.

   Abraham Lincoln said ‘I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere to go; my own conviction and that of those around me seemed insufficient for the day’.

   Lincoln had the habit of spending from 4-5 am each morning reading his Bible and praying. he was perennially fresh with God. there is no experience of conversion which will make you immune against the lack of reading the Word of God and prayer. When prayer fades out, power fades out. We are as spiritual as we are prayerful; no more, no less.

5. The Converted, Convert
   Third, pass onto others what you have found. The third habit is the passing on to others what has been given to us in the reading of God’s Word and prayer. It is the law of the mind that that which is not expressed dies. If you don’t share it, you won’t have it.

   Paul says ‘He who supplies seed to the sower’ (2 Cor. 9:10 RSV) He gives seed only to those who sow it. Those who do not pass on to others are themselves empty. The converted convert, unless you are evangelistic you don’t remain evangelical.

   These three things are basic in the cultivation and growth in the converted life. Without them the converted life is something other than converted. In addition certain auxiliary suggestions must be made.

6. Keep the Fire Burning
   First, cultivate the new life by daily disciplines. Commissioner Brengle of the Salvation Army suggests three things to keep the fire burning: ‘Keep the draught open; clean the ashes out; keep putting in fuel’.

   Second, keep honest at any cost.

   Third, keep confessing your sins after conversion. Don’t be afraid to say; ‘I am sorry. I was wrong’ The rule about confessing your sins should be, the circle about confession should be the circle affected by sin. If the sin has been against an individual, confess it to that individual; if against a family, to a family; if against a group, then to a group and if against a church, confess it to the church.

7. Conversions, Unlimited
   Fourth, pray for those who have wronged you. That will be an antidote for resentments and bitterness.

   Fifth, constantly enlarge the area of your conversion. Make your conversion take in more and more areas of your life. Is your conversion limited to a comfortable place in your life. Some let their conversion only influence certain parts of their lives. While others have conversion unlimited and their conversion is free to challenge and enfold every area of their life.

8. Habits that Cannot be Christianized
   Sixth, give up habits that cannot be Christianized. If they cannot be given over to God while being practiced, they are not godly and must be given up.

9. Seven Vital Virtues
   After partaking of the divine nature add these things...

   ’Supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control and self-control with steadfastness and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection and brotherly affection with love. (2 Peter 1:5b-7)

   Sin down every day and go over these seven things and ask yourself if you are adding them to your life of faith - virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love. Check up to see
whether you are going up or down in each of these qualities - especially the last one.

Enlarge your area of conversion, taking in fresh territory every day.

Read: Colossians 2:6-7

Reflection

1. Conversion, writes Jones, is both receiving the work of God and responding to this gift by disciplined effort. How have you learned to keep both of these in balance?

2. The Bible is a central medium of communication between God and His people, especially in regard to personal transformation. Jones even compares the daily reading of the Bible to taking medicine. How has the Bible shaped your thoughts, your actions and your beliefs?

3. 'In prayer we speak to God. Then God speaks to us' writes Jones. Does God speak to you in your times of prayer? Describe.

4. According to Jones, what will happen to us if we do not pass on to others the insights and teachings that God has given to us?

5. According to Colossians 2:6-7, our life with Christ is like a tree. Using this metaphor, how would you describe the tree of your spiritual life? How are its roots? Its branches? Its fruit?

6. Develop the habit, if you have not already done so, of reading the Word of God daily. Establish a consistent time, place and pattern. Make this a high priority this week.

7. In a similar way, establish a habit of regular prayer. A consistent time, place and pattern.

8. Scatter some seeds this week by passing on to others some of the things God has been teaching you.