

Sermon for Sunday, January 29, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor  
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### "TIPS FOR TODDLERS"

Text: "Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." I Timothy 6:12

Last Sunday I preached a sermon on how to be born again. If there is any question in your mind as to whether or not you are truly saved--any question as to whether or not you have eternal life--I hope you will get that sermon and read it. In one sense of the word, it is a very simple thing to become a Christian. All you have to do is to understand what God has done for you, accept his grace of forgiveness as a free gift--and then give him the control of your total life! So, as an individual begins his new life in Jesus as a born again person, he is just like any other new-born thing. This morning I want to give some helps for those who are new Christians, who are just beginning their new walk with the Lord. That's why I've called my sermon "Tips for Toddlers." In the beginning, all of us have to learn how to walk in the Lord.

The first thing I want to say this morning is this: once you make a commitment to Jesus, once you decide for him, you must begin to act out that faith. Do you remember the story of Zacchaeus? Jesus was going through Jericho and a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus lived there. Now, from what the Bible says about Zacchaeus, we learn a lot about him. For example, we learn that he was a successful man because the Bible says he was a chief tax collector. Again, not only was he successful, he had also gained a lot of wealth because the Bible says he was rich. Yet, achievement and money didn't meet the needs of Zacchaeus. He was a driven man. Somehow his deepest needs were not met and he turned sinful things to satisfy whatever was driving him. We know that because the Bible says that the people of Jericho called him a sinner. Another thing we know about Zacchaeus is that he didn't think much of himself. We know that because we find out later that he stole--that he took dishonest taxes from people. And when you despise yourself, when you are always trying to prove to yourself that you are okay, you always do so at the expense of other people. You see, the thief not only hates himself, he hates and despises other people because of it. Recently we had a robbery in our neighborhood and after stripping the home of the people who were away, the thief fouled the living room of the home. To my amazement, I discovered this is frequently the case. Having robbed a home, frequently a thief will do some malicious damage which is an expression of his hatred of the people he has stolen from. So Zacchaeus had that problem, too.

Do you know people like Zacchaeus? They have some desperate needs in their hearts--they are driven by some inner compulsion. They achieve, but that doesn't satisfy, they make a lot of money, but that doesn't meet their needs, they begin to do sinful and shameful things hoping that somehow that hunger, that need, in their hearts will be met. But somehow nothing seems to satisfy. No matter what, they feel unfulfilled, dissatisfied, longing for something to give meaning to their lives. Do you see anything of Zacchaeus in yourself?

Well, Zacchaeus finally found the one thing that could give meaning to his life and satisfy his deepest needs, his deepest longings--that something was Jesus! But the reason I have told you all of this about Zacchaeus is to show you how he began to act out his commitment of Jesus. Now, Zacchaeus could have said, "Well, I believe in Jesus. I believe he is the Messiah that God promised to Israel. I accept him as my Saviour," and let it go at that.

Now a lot of us do that. We believe, we accept Jesus, and then we stop. We let it go at that. And when we do that we discover that our needs really haven't been met after all. We still need something more. Well, the something more that we

need is to begin to act on our new faith. Isn't that what Zacchaeus did? The Bible says that Zacchaeus stood up and said, "Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." Do you see? Zacchaeus surrendered his life to Jesus and then he began to live out that surrender. Are you living out your surrender to Jesus this morning? Let me suggest a few tips for toddlers as we begin to act on our faith, to live out our surrender to Jesus.

A first tip is your money. That's where Zacchaeus started. Your commitment to Jesus ought to affect your financial life--what you spend, how you spend it, where you spend it. The Bible says that where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also. So, if loving Jesus doesn't affect your money, you love your money more than him. Acting out your commitment by what you do about your money is an important tip for toddlers. Most of us, in the beginning, can't afford to give our money we think. We think, "Lord, when I meet my obligations, get my bills paid, get my debt out of the way, then I'll give you my money. Unfortunately, that rarely happens. So, if you mean business about Jesús, let it start with your money. Give the Lord what is his and let yourself make do with what's left over.

A second tip for toddlers is to read your Bible daily in a devotional sense. We have a lot of Bible study groups and classes and it is a good thing to learn more about the Bible and more about the people of the Bible. But sometimes I'm afraid we are so busy studying the Bible we don't take time to let the Bible speak to us in a very direct and personal way. So just studying the Bible--as important as that is--is not enough. We need to find a quiet time every day just to read and let God's word speak to us. Do you do that? If you don't it will be hard for you to grow as a Christian. When I have trouble and problems I like to roam through Psalms. The writers of the Psalms often wrote out of desperate need and at difficult times in my life the Psalms speak to me. I like to browse through a Psalm until I find something that speaks to my need, that is a word from God to me, and I get that verse fixed in my mind and make it my marching order for that day. Try that in your life and see if it won't work for you.

A third tip for toddlers is to find a fellowship of other believers. We Christians need one another. We need the mutual support, the mutual encouragement, the mutual prayers of one another. Do you remember what happened when the Holy Spirit fell on those first believers at Pentecost? Why, they banded together. They needed one another. You see, if you stay with the same old crowd you always ran with before Jesus, it will weaken your own faith and commitment. So, being a Christian may mean that you need to change some of your friends, to change some of the patterns of your life in terms of what you do and who you do it with. Is that true in your life as a Christian? Are the people you associate with people who build up your faith, who encourage you to be a better person? Is there some need in your life to develop some friends who will strengthen you in Jesus. Especially when we are toddlers in the faith do we need these sorts of friends.

A fourth tip for toddlers is prayer. Do you pray much? Or often? Or do we usually do most of our praying when we are in trouble? The Bible says to pray without ceasing; it says to pray always; it says in all things to give thanks; it says in prayer and supplication to let our needs be made known to God. As you invite Jesus into your heart, begin to talk to him. You don't have to set a special time to pray. Pray at stop lights--pray when you are walking to your car--pray while you are waiting for the phone to ring. There are all sorts of times and places to pray. Now, this doesn't mean you shouldn't have a regular time to pray, it just means that isn't the only time you pray! Make a list of people who need prayers and begin to pray for them. You'll be amazed how you can scratch their names off your list as God answers your prayers. Pray with your family--let your prayers at meals be more than a little ritual prayer that you rattle off and instead add something special

about your day or your family. Find a time when you and your mate can pray together. Sydney and I started our marriage together praying every night. And even when we are angry with each other, we still pray together.

A fifth tip for toddlers is worship. I don't know about you, but my heart is like a spiritual sieve. It leaks badly. For that reason I need to keep on coming back to worship with fellow believers. You know, if you take a sieve and dip it in the water again and again, you'll notice two things. First, you will notice that you aren't catching much water! But second, you will notice that the sieve gets clean. That's the way it is with worship. You may not remember what the preacher preached on last week and surely not last month because your spiritual sieve leaks. But the fact is, you keep your heart clean by dipping it again and again in the stream of worship. God has made us a promise. He promises that where two or three of us are gathered together in his name, that he will be in the midst of us. At worship God's presence comes to us in a special way. There is nothing else quite like it. If you establish the habit early in your new life as a Christian of regular worship, it will bless you all of your days.

A sixth tip for toddlers is to share your faith. If you inherited a million dollars, would you tell your closest friends about it? If you were healed of a disease like cancer, would you share the news with your friends? Back when you fell head-over-heels in love with your mate, did you tell your best friends about him or her? Well, if you found someone who could save your soul, give you eternal life, meet your deepest needs, would you tell that good news to your best friends?

Aren't we funny? Why do you suppose we are so reluctant to tell others about something that means a lot to us if it's something religious? Do you think we don't want the other person to know--or is it we are afraid of what he will think of us? But do you know, the more you give your faith away, the more you have! Do you remember the story in the Bible when Jesus healed a mentally deranged man? After he was healed, he wanted to go with Jesus. But Jesus said to him, "go home and tell your friends what God has done for you." And remember the story of the Woman at the Well? She went back to town and told everybody about Jesus, so much so that they went out to see for themselves. And when they came back they said to her, "Now we believe not only because of your word, but we have seen for ourselves." Yes, an important tip for a new Christian toddler is to share what God is doing in his or her life.

So, when you decide for Jesus, you must begin to act out that decision. These tips are ways you can begin to do that so that you will grow as a Christian. But let me add one final tip. In our text for this morning St. Paul writes to a young man who is a Christian. He tells him, "fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called..." Now, the Greek words for fight and for hold are the present imperative. They mean "fight and keep on fighting...hold and keep on holding." So the last tip is this: keep on keeping on. One morning you will wake up and you will say, "Well, life is going well and I feel fine. I don't need Jesus as much as I thought. I'm not sure about all this religion business anyway. Maybe it is just for weak people and I'm feeling pretty strong." Or one day you will say to yourself, "Hey, I can be a Christian and worship out in nature. I don't have to read the Bible and I don't need to pray to be a Christian." Then, on another day, you will suddenly discover that your heart is cold, your faith is weak, and you really need Jesus but he isn't there. He isn't there because you closed the door in his face.

St. Paul tells us in one of his letters that a dear friend traveling with him is a man named Demas. Later on, in another of his letters, he writes, "Demas in love with this present world, has deserted me..." If you put these tips for toddlers into practice in your life, Jesus will never say of you that because you were in love with this present world, you deserted him.