

# Starting My Ministerial Career

*How a Young Man Early Learned a Valuable Lesson*

By Charles Fry

**F**ROM the time of my baptism and confirmation into the church until I was ordained to my first office—a period of ten years—frequent prophecies were given through different individuals, indicating that my life work would be in the ministry. The first of these given at my confirmation when I was fourteen years of age was so at variance with my previous training and belief and so improbable that it could scarcely be believed, though with its repetition, and having a growing knowledge of the gospel with its spiritual manifestations I came to accept it as divine.

Up to the age of twenty-one the years were spent mostly upon the farm where there was little opportunity for education, but at that age I came to the parting of the ways where I was to decide whether to remain with the farm or choose a course which would open the way for me to take up the work of the ministry. I chose the latter. Gathering such means as were available I attended a normal school in Des Moines, Iowa, and later at Shenandoah, Iowa, spending somewhat less than a year at each place. Securing a teacher's certificate I commenced teaching school near Tabor, Iowa, which profession was followed for five years.

It was during the second winter of my teaching that I was approached by the missionary in charge of the district, Brother Henry Kemp, a man who was greatly beloved by all the Saints, who assured me on several occasions that he had received evidence by the Holy Spirit that I was called to the office of priest in the church. It was not with any disposition to question the correctness of his statement, but from a sense of my own unworthiness and lack of qualification that I declined to accede to the call, preferring to wait until such time as I should feel that these disqualifications were removed. My answer was decisive. I may add that some years previous to this the Thurman Branch of which I was then a

member had passed a resolution recommending me to the district conference for ordination to the office of priest, but this I declined.

Brother Kemp accepting my answer as final made no further effort to persuade me to accept. But I soon discovered that there was a growing change in my feelings and attitude, and under an enlightenment of the mind I was made to know that the time had now come for me to begin the work which had been pointed out in past years as being mine. I was still left to know that I was unworthy and unqualified as my own judgment had indicated, but was also brought to see that by diligent and faithful service I could grow in both worthiness and qualification until I would be fully acceptable to God, and this I could do in no other way. The possibilities of immediate work and development were made clear to my mind. In all these things there was no outward spiritual manifestation, no voice, no dream or vision, but the silent workings within my own soul which satisfied me as to my duty.

Accordingly I went to Brother Kemp, telling him that if the church was willing to accept of my services I was willing to accept of the office. Being approved of the branch and the Fremont District conference I was ordained at the February conference, 1896, at Shenandoah, Iowa, by Elders O. B. Thomas, Henry Kemp, and W. W. Blair. Divine evidence of my acceptance was given when after my ordination and before the hands were raised from my head Elder Blair gave utterance to the mind of the Spirit and said, "The Lord accepts you, brother." Subsequent evidence was also given in the blessings received while engaged in the work of my office.

I was already engaged in Sunday school work and held office as local superintendent as well as a district office. My school teaching gave me free opportunity to use my Sabbaths in gospel work, and I was

soon filling a local appointment in association with another at first and later alone at a rural settlement called Egypt, later changing to Bartlett, a small town nearby, which I continued about three years. Here I organized a Sunday school, and later assisted in the organization of a branch both of which remain to the present. During those three years I was actively engaged in district and local work in both the church and auxiliaries. Among the few Saints of those days there was a young brother who had been baptized by Brother Kemp and who was destined to become an active minister of the church. We sought to arouse in him a desire for a better education and not without success, for he afterwards went from the farm to Graceland College. He now occupies as president of the Lamoni Stake—Brother John F. Garver.

During the year 1899 intimation was on several occasions given by the Spirit that I should take up the active work of the ministry, and the promise given that should I do so I should be given health and strength. This promise was especially refreshing since with my work in the schoolroom my health had declined until my mind became troubled because of it. I hesitated to offer myself for active service from a sense of my own weakness which was both physical and spiritual, and not until some striking experiences came that thoroughly convinced me that I could not prosper in any other work did I promise the Lord that I would heed his call. Being in debt at the time I could not consistently go until my debts were paid, and in answer to prayer I was prospered in temporal things until this was done.

The General Conference of 1900 gave me an appointment to labor in the Fremont District, and in July I entered upon the work. During the time of my hesitancy I had opportunity on one occasion to seek the counsel of the Presiding Bishop—E. L. Kelley, assuring him that I did not wish to begin the work until conditions were proper but that when I did begin that it should be for life. His wise and kindly counsel helped me in forming the final decision.

After about two months of labor I attended the district conference of which I was secretary, returning home at its close.

At this time there came to me an experience which proved in a definite and practical way that the Lord had not only accepted my offering of service but that he required of me to make that offering a complete one. I had promised that it should be for life, though it had not occurred to me that the lapse of a few days, or weeks, in which I should engage in other consistent work would necessarily be in violation of that promise, or displeasing to the Lord. But the importance of the Lord's work was impressed upon my mind.

Being single at the time, my home was with Brother Frank and Sister Rachel Goode, now of Knobnoster, Missouri, but then near Tabor, Iowa. Brother Goode was exceedingly pressed with work upon the farm, and feeling somewhat obligated I arranged to remain at home several weeks to furnish the needed help. Upon awaking from my slumber the next morning I was made keenly conscious that my plans were disapproved of God and that I should not be permitted to fulfill them, but that on that day something would occur to stop my work. Notwithstanding extraordinary precaution and care I met with an accident before the day was over causing a severe wrenching of my left ankle. It was apparent that no work could be done on the farm by me for many weeks at least, if ever.

That night the intense pain banished sleep, and in the early hours of the morning there stole over me the spirit of prayer. I poured out my soul in silent prayer to God in behalf of my life work. It was the prayer of faith which I knew was heard by my heavenly Father. Remembering that as district secretary I had perhaps more than a day's work upon the records awaiting me, and also as district historian the writing of the history of the district which would require a week or more, I reasoned that could I be relieved of the pain I could do this work for the church notwithstanding my injury. I therefore asked the Lord to take away the pain from my limb, and that he would cause the injured ankle to heal as rapidly as was possible and consistent with the laws of nature and that no permanent injury or weakness should remain, promising at the same time that should this be done I would immediately proceed to do the

literary work and as soon as I was able would again enter upon my missionary work. While the prayer was yet in my heart the pain, which reached to my body, moved down and departed from my foot, bringing wondrous relief.

on an occasion of reading a rather lengthy book of fiction which had been recommended to me as good, those words were again given me by what I believed to be the prompting of the Spirit.

My literary work was completed quickly,



ELDER CHARLES FRY

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The lesson of complete consecration of my life to the service of God was thus fixed in my mind in a way that left no doubt as to what God required of me. But the lesson was given further emphasis when a night or two later the voice of the Spirit came to me in a dream saying, "It is not the Lord's will that you should be spending your time with trifles." This counsel I have tried to observe, not permitting myself to forsake the gospel work for any secular labor, though I did not apply it in other ways until

and my healing was so rapid that by the eleventh day I was again in the field though somewhat lame. From the time when that healing was complete, which was not long after the accident, to this day I have felt no trace of weakness in that ankle.

The calls have come for me to occupy in other offices and in various places and callings, but my services have continued in and for the church of Jesus Christ. That my whole life may be fully consecrated to the service of God is my desire and purpose.