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Dramatic Publishing

In His Steps



**Stage adaptation by Philip Grecian.
Based on the novel by Charles M. Sheldon.**

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“It’s not too often you run into something that’s not only entertaining and uplifting, but which might change your life—and perhaps your entire community, too.”

—*The Topeka Capital-Journal*

In His Steps

“An exciting play ... filled with beautiful, classic and much-loved hymns.”

—*The Jefferson County Post*

Drama. Stage adaptation by Philip Grecian. Based on the novel by Charles M. Sheldon. Cast: 10 to 15m., 7w. This version is the only authorized stage adaptation of Charles Sheldon’s best-selling novel. It was commissioned by Sheldon’s church, Central Congregational, where it was first written in 1897. In the summer of 1895 in Raymond, Kansas, a tramp knocks at Reverend Henry Maxwell’s door looking for work. With regret, Maxwell turns him away, but the tramp’s visit has inspired Sunday’s sermon from *1 Peter 2:21*: “For hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow in His steps.” As Maxwell speaks, the tramp enters from the back of the church and questions the integrity of the sermon, after which he collapses and dies. Maxwell calls for volunteers to join a special group, pledging never to take any action without first asking, “What would Jesus do?” and then following in His steps. *Unit set, area staging. Approximate running time: 2 hours, 20 minutes. Code: IF4.*

Cover photo: Central Congregational Church, Topeka, Kan., featuring (l-r) Amy Bixler, David Mitchell and Amanda Murphy. Photo: Jeff Taylor. Cover design: Molly Germanotta.

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In His Steps

Adapted by
PHILIP GRECIAN

From the novel by
CHARLES M. SHELDON



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(IN HIS STEPS)

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ABOUT THE PLAY

In 1889, Charles Sheldon, the new minister at Central Congregational Church in Topeka, Kan., was told that he must deliver two sermons each Sunday. “I’ve told them everything I have to say in the morning,” he complained. “There’s nothing left for the evening.”

Then he found a solution: He wrote and read stories a chapter at a time on Sunday evenings, each one a “cliffhanger” to assure attendance the following week. On Oct. 4, 1896, he began his seventh story, *In His Steps*. It was printed in a magazine in weekly chapters, and then published as a book and became an instant best-seller. *In His Steps* has never been out of print since that time. Tens of millions of copies in 45 languages have been sold around the world. It is one of the the best-selling novels of all time and is the origin of the “What Would Jesus Do?” (WWJD) movement.

One evening, some years back, I received a call from the board of Central Congregational. They wanted to contract me to write and direct a stage version of *In His Steps*. So we built a stage over the sanctuary, hauled in trusses, black velvet curtains and lighting equipment, and Charles Sheldon’s church became a theatre. The company of actors and technicians was a polyglot of faiths: Protestants, Jews, Catholics, agnostics and atheists. Sheldon’s theme transcended our religious differences, and his book did not proselytize. The WWJD message is easily translated as “do unto others.” You can’t get more universal than that.

We opened to full houses, presented the show annually for three years and then toured the state for several more years. This is the only stage adaptation of the story that is authorized by Charles Sheldon’s church. It is the official dramatic representation.

In His Steps endures because it has a power and life of its own, and because it cuts to the heart of who and what we are—people who must help one another. And we must help one another because, well, because it’s what Jesus would do.

—Philip Grecian

The author dedicates this play to those who were on the front lines during the premier production, including Wayne Potter, who will always be Pastor Maxwell to me; Don Miller, who was pastor of Charles Sheldon’s church; and the cast and crew, who persevered against astonishing odds.

The author further dedicates this play to the company members who followed, and have continued to follow, in our productions through the years. Special attention must be paid to those we lost: Jim Claussen, who believed we could achieve a miracle; Dick Peach, who loved and understood Lucien Sterling, asking that several of his lines be changed because, “Sterling would never say that”; Otis “Bud” Hill, who embraced this play and died with it in his arms and in his heart; Richard Feleay, who often said, “If you call and say, ‘Let’s do the show again,’ I’ll be there!”; Joe Martin, whose ferocious look concealed a gentle heart; and Michael Robinson, who, until the day he passed away, suddenly and unexpectedly, took a deep and abiding pride in being a burglar.

And an acknowledgement to The Legacy Theatre in Jefferson City, Tenn., one of several companies that have sought out performance rights and whose special enthusiasm for the play (and two separate productions of it) inspired me, finally, to make *In His Steps* widely available after all these years. Thanks to them and thanks, especially, to their director, Peggy Horton Price.

In His Steps was first produced in October of 1994 at Charles Sheldon's church, Central Congregational, in Topeka, Kan., under the direction of Philip Grecian, with the following cast:

HENRY MAXWELL.....	A. Wayne Potter
A TRAMP	Philip Grecian
FELICIA STERLING	Lynda Ridgeway-Morrison
ROSE STERLING	Ladonna Potter
MARY MAXWELL.....	Arlyn Johnson
DR. MATTHEW WEST	Allan Hazlett
MILTON WRIGHT.....	Dick Bixler
EDWARD NORMAN.....	David Timpany
JASPER CHASE	Don Lambert
MADAM PAGE.....	Lee Claussen
VIRGINIA PAGE	Amy Bixler
LUCIEN STERLING.....	Dick Peach
ALEXANDER POWERS.....	Richard Feleay
RACHEL WINSLOW.....	Elizabeth Moran
DR. CALVIN BRUCE.....	Mark Johnson
PASTOR JOHN GRAY.....	Rick Gallion
LOREEN MARCH	Amanda Murphy
ROLLIN PAGE.....	David Mitchell
WILLIAM BURKE	Joe Martin
THE BISHOP.....	Jim Claussen
MIKE	Mike Robinson
PAT	Pat Murphy

Crew:

Producers.....	Nathan Barr, Jim Claussen for Central Congregational Church
Stage Managers.....	Gayle K. Hassler, Denise Butterfield
Lighting Design	Dave Seamon
Lighting Board.....	Brady Cooper
Costumes.....	Peg Sullivan
Hairstyles	Kathy Morris
Construction.....	Warren Tevis, Wilbur Glenn, Burt Edson

In His Steps

CHARACTERS

HENRY MAXWELL: Pastor of First Church, the richest church in Raymond, Kan.

MARY MAXWELL: His wife.

A TRAMP: A stranger in town.

FELICIA and ROSE STERLING: Privileged daughters of the town's wealthiest man.

DR. MATTHEW WEST: Henry Maxwell's physician and friend.

MILTON WRIGHT: A merchant. He owns "the largest store in town."

EDWARD NORMAN: The editor and publisher of *The Raymond Daily News*

JASPER CHASE: Assistant editor and reporter for *The Raymond Daily News*.

VIRGINIA PAGE: A wealthy young woman.

ROLLIN PAGE: A profligate and wealthy young man; Virginia's brother.

MADAM PAGE: Grandmother to Virginia and Rollin.

LUCIEN STERLING: Businessman; industrialist; pillar of the Raymond, Kan., community; father to Felicia and Rose.

ALEXANDER POWERS: Superintendent of the railroad machine shops.

RACHEL WINSLOW: A young woman who sings with "the voice of an angel."

DR. CALVIN BRUCE: Pastor of the Nazareth Avenue Church in Chicago.

PASTOR JOHN GRAY: Pastor of The Tent Church in The Rectangle.

LOREEN MARCH: A former prostitute. Barely more than a girl.

THE BISHOP: A church official from Kansas City.

WILLIAM BURKE: A hired thug.

PAT: A burglar.

MIKE: A burglar.

PLACE: The American Midwest: Raymond, Kan.; Kansas City, Kan.; Chicago

TIME: 1895–1896

SCENES

ACT I:

Scene 1: The Maxwell home. Friday morning.

Scene 2: The First Church of Raymond, Kan. The following Sunday.

Scene 3: The Page home. Sunday morning, three weeks later.

Scene 4: The First Church of Raymond, Kan. Later that same morning.

Scene 5: The First Church meeting room. Later.

Scene 6: The Tent Church in The Rectangle. That evening.

Scene 7: The First Church meeting room. Three weeks later.

ACT II:

Scene 1: The Tent Church. The following Friday evening.

Scene 2: The Page home. Later that same evening.

Scene 3: The Tent Church in The Rectangle. Three months later. Election night, after services.

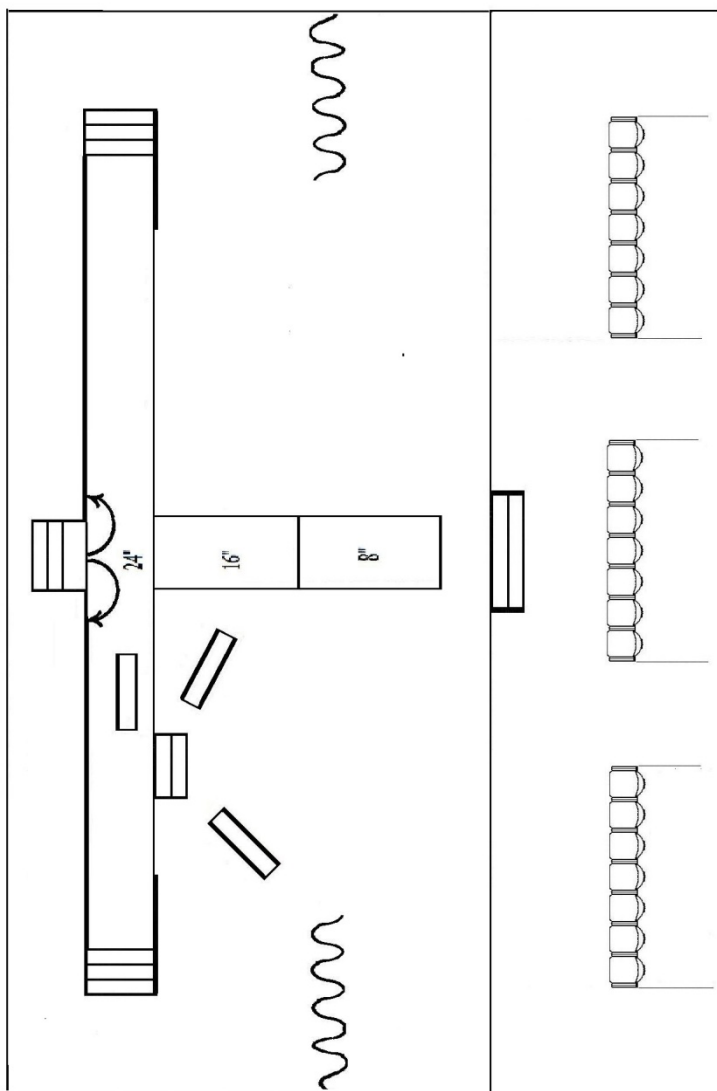
Scene 4: The Tent Church. The following evening.

Scene 5: The Kansas City Settlement House. Three months later. Night.

Scene 6: The First Church of Raymond, Kan. That same night.

Scene 7: The Nazareth Avenue Church. Sunday morning. One year later.

SET DIAGRAM



In His Steps

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: *A platform 24" high runs from UL to UR. A short step unit R connects the platform with the stage proper. Another platform runs at C, at a right angle, and straight downstage, stair-stepping down from the 24" platform, first 16" and then 8", with clearance around the downstage end. There are step units allowing access from the orchestra to the stage. There is a door UC. This is the house of Henry Maxwell, pastor of First Church; Raymond, Kan.*

AT RISE: *Friday morning. In darkness, the sound of knocking at the door.*

MAXWELL (*offstage*). Just a minute!

(Now, a pool of light comes up on the door. Knocking again. MAXWELL enters the pool of light. He wears the vest and trousers of a dark suit. No coat. His shirtsleeves are rolled up; his collar and tie are loose. He carries a Bible in his right hand, his index finger marking a passage.)

MAXWELL (*cont'd*). I'm coming! I'm coming!

(He opens the door to reveal THE TRAMP.)

MAXWELL (*cont'd*). Yes?

TRAMP. Pastor Maxwell?

MAXWELL. That's right.

TRAMP. May I come in?

(A moment while MAXWELL considers.)

MAXWELL. Certainly.

(He steps aside, and THE TRAMP enters and crosses downstage on the platform, passing MAXWELL.)

MAXWELL *(cont'd)*. What can I ... ?

TRAMP. I'm out of a job, sir, and I was wonderin'—

MAXWELL *(closing door and moving down)*. I'm sorry; I don't think there's any way—

TRAMP. Maybe you could give me a line to the railway ... or—

MAXWELL. I'm not—

TRAMP. Or something. I can build, and—

MAXWELL. Jobs are scarce. I really can't be much help.

TRAMP. I'm not afraid of work, sir. I've been a carpenter ... and ... and the last few years a printer, but I'll do anything that—

MAXWELL. Please don't misunderstand, but I'm very busy this morning and I ...

TRAMP. You reading?

MAXWELL. Yes ... and ... working ...

TRAMP *(cocks his head to see the book)*. Bible.

MAXWELL. That's right. *(Awkward pause.)* I'm sorry; I'm trying to write my sermon ...

TRAMP. For Sunday.

MAXWELL *(growing impatient)*. Yes.

TRAMP. Not much time. Day after tomorrow.

MAXWELL. I ... I'm really very busy. If you'd like to make an appointment at my—

TRAMP (*moving farther DR on the platform*). Know my favorite Bible verse? (*Pause.*) “Jesus wept.” (*Turns.*) Easy to remember. Whole thing. “Jesus wept.” John eleven, verse thirty-five.

MAXWELL (*crosses down, his hand in his pocket*). Please, let me give you some ...

TRAMP (*sharply*). No!

(*MAXWELL stops. THE TRAMP is suddenly seized by a spell of coughing. It passes.*)

TRAMP (*cont'd, calmer*). I ... I don't want empty charity. It's no good for either one of us. It's too easy for you ... and ... I could get used to it. I'll leave.

(*He crosses upstage as MAXWELL speaks.*)

MAXWELL. I hope you find something.

TRAMP (*turns at the door, crosses back down, thoughtfully, his eyes on MAXWELL*). Yes. Yes, I think you do.

(*He moves back to the door. MAXWELL crosses up. THE TRAMP stops, his back to MAXWELL.*)

TRAMP (*cont'd*). First Peter two, twenty-one.

MAXWELL. What?

TRAMP (*turns*). Another favorite Bible verse of mine. First Peter two, twenty-one.

(*They remain for a moment in silence, their eyes locked.*)

TRAMP (*cont'd*). Well ...

(THE TRAMP takes MAXWELL's hand.)

TRAMP *(cont'd)*. Goodbye.

(THE TRAMP releases MAXWELL's hand and exits. MAXWELL stands looking at the door and then examines his own hand. He turns downstage, thinks. He is suddenly aware of the Bible in his other hand. He brings it to chest level, opens it and leafs through.)

MAXWELL *(mumbling)*. First Peter ... First Peter ... First ... Peter ... two ... twenty-one ... ah! *(He reads aloud.)* "For hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow in his steps." *(To himself, a thought.)* Follow ... follow in his steps.

(A shrug of happy surprise. Here is the topic for his sermon. Lights up on aisles in the audience and down on the door as MAXWELL crosses to meet MARY MAXWELL, who carries his coat and satchel. He rolls his sleeves down. The CHOIR fades in under, singing "Nearer My God to Thee." The hymn grows in volume as the lighting transitions. The door is opened out and is now a part of the sanctuary. There are now stained glass windows upstage of the 24" platform. A pulpit is brought in DR. The theatre is now The First Church of Raymond, Kan., and the audience is MAXWELL's flock. There are seats in the first row reserved for the actors.)

Scene 2

(The following Sunday. The CHOIR reaches the end of a verse and continues humming the melody under the dialogue as the members of the congregation enter from the back of

the house, moving down the aisle to the front pews. FELICIA STERLING enters first and sits on the aisle in the front pew, R. ALEXANDER POWERS enters and sits in the front pew L. JASPER CHASE enters and goes to the R pew. MILTON WRIGHT enters and crosses to sit and talks with POWERS. If extras are used, CHURCH MEMBERS may stand in the aisles or wander around the orchestra section conversing quietly. There is an atmosphere of bustling community. ROSE STERLING enters down aisle. FELICIA has been watching for her. Now FELICIA stands and waves.)

FELICIA. Rose!

(FELICIA leaves her wrap behind and crosses into the mouth of the aisle to meet ROSE. MARY moves to speak with WRIGHT as POWERS moves to speak to MAXWELL onstage.)

FELICIA *(cont'd)*. I saved you a place!

ROSE. Has Rachel sung yet?

FELICIA. No.

ROSE. Oh, I *love* her voice! And just listen to that choir!

FELICIA. The best music money can buy!

ROSE. It makes me proud to belong to First Church!

FELICIA. The best in the city! The best choir—

ROSE. The best membership!

FELICIA. Cream of society! And the Reverend Maxwell!

ROSE. The best preacher! Remember last Sunday when he shouted “Redemption! Redemption!” And pounded the lectern! *(She pounds the air.)*

FELICIA. I swear ... it made me lightheaded!

ROSE. Felicia, I nearly fainted!

FELICIA. I'll remember that sermon till the day I die.

ROSE. Oh, I will, too. *(A moment.)*

FELICIA. What was it about?

ROSE. Ah ... mm ...

(Another moment while they try to remember.)

FELICIA. Well! The pounding!

ROSE. Yes, the pounding!

FELICIA. Till the day I die, Rose ... I swear ... till the day I die.

(ROSE and FELICIA move to their seats as lights come up on MAXWELL onstage. MARY moves back toward MAXWELL. POWERS nods awkwardly and moves back into the audience pews.)

MARY. I hope I didn't frighten Mr. Powers away!

MAXWELL. No, of course not.

MARY *(moving to look out over the audience)*. Well! You certainly have a full church this evening.

MAXWELL *(crossing to her)*. That's good. I do my best with a full church.

MARY *(turning and fussing with his tie)*. You always do well, Henry. That's what I hear, anyway.

MAXWELL. You do?

MARY. Of course.

MAXWELL. What exactly do you hear?

MARY. "Oh, that Pastor Maxwell, he paints such pictures! Never vulgar! So dramatic!"

(DR. MATTHEW WEST enters at the back of the house.)

MAXWELL. Dramatic ... ?

MARY (*she finishes with his tie*). They say your sermons are seasoned with it. Like salting a stew. (*Pantomimes shaking salt.*) Just enough.

MAXWELL. Ah.

MARY. Last Sunday, for instance ... (*Crossing away, then turning to mime a broad movement with her arms.*) “Redemption! Redemption!” (*He looks around, embarrassed, moves to silence her.*) I swear, some of the young ladies were near fainting.

MAXWELL. You know, Mary ... a fellow came to the house Friday while you were out, and he ...

MARY. A fellow?

MAXWELL. Yes.

MARY. From the church?

MAXWELL. No, but he set me to *thinking* about the church, and ... (*With an embarrassed laugh.*) this idea came to me that I ...

(DR. WEST has come down the aisle and has reached the orchestra.)

DR. WEST. Henry!

(The MAXWELLS cross down to meet DR. WEST. MAXWELL remains on the stage while Mary continues her move into the orchestra.)

MAXWELL. Ah, Matthew! Still coming to supper?

DR. WEST. Wouldn't miss it!

(WRIGHT stands and waves to catch DR. WEST'S eye.)

MARY. Now, what were you saying about ...

MAXWELL. It's not important. You two had better find places to sit before all the good spots up front are taken.

(DR. WEST turns to look for a seat, sees WRIGHT.)

DR. WEST. Save me a place, Mary. I see Milton Wright waving at me.

MARY. Certainly.

(MAXWELL shows MARY to a front pew next to ROSE in the R section and gives her his satchel. He then moves up the side aisle, shaking a few hands, heading for the back of house. DR. WEST crosses toward WRIGHT. POWERS crosses to R pew section and sits far R. WRIGHT moves a few steps toward DR. WEST, meeting him in L orchestra.)

WRIGHT. Doctor, about that medicine you prescribed ...

DR. WEST. Yes?

WRIGHT. Well ... my stomach isn't as sour as it was, mind you ... but it makes me belch.

WEST. Well, that can certainly ...

WRIGHT. It's frightful ... just ... wooob! No warning!

DR. WEST. Hm.

WRIGHT. I wouldn't have stomach problems in the first place if it weren't for the store.

DR. WEST. That right?

WRIGHT. Absolutely. Good help is so hard to find. They're all lazy, you know.

DR. WEST. No, I didn't.

WRIGHT. Oh my yes ... and they steal me blind! It's a wonder a sour stomach's my only problem.

(EDWARD NORMAN enters from the back of the house and crosses down an aisle.)

DR. WEST. Well, I can't help you with the store, but I can probably do something about that bel ...

WRIGHT *(looking around anxiously)*. Sh sh sh sh sh!

DR. WEST *(whisper)*. See me in my office Monday morning.
(He moves R.)

WRIGHT. Thank you, Doctor.

(DR. WEST waves acknowledgment, moves to MARY and sits. WRIGHT spots NORMAN coming down the aisle and moves up the aisle to meet him.)

WRIGHT *(cont'd)*. Edward!

NORMAN. Milton ...

WRIGHT. Yesterday your newspaper printed my advertisement right next to one about a new saloon!

NORMAN. I don't see that it ...

(JASPER comes up behind WRIGHT.)

JASPER. There's always a new saloon opening down in The Rectangle, Mr. Wright. We have to put their advertisements somewhere.

NORMAN. You know my assistant editor, Jasper Chase ...

WRIGHT *(quickly)*. Yes, I do.

(He moves NORMAN back up the aisle, away from JASPER.)

WRIGHT *(cont'd)*. I own a family business, and it doesn't look good to be right next to ...

JASPER (*crossing to them*). You sell those big bottles of patent medicine at your store, don't you, Mr. Wright?

WRIGHT. Well, yes ...

NORMAN (*moves WRIGHT up the aisle and comes back down to JASPER*). Jasper, why don't you find a place to sit before the church fills up.

JASPER (*moves NORMAN down aisle and points toward the R seating area*). No problem, boss, I left my hat in a place over there.

(He moves back up the aisle toward WRIGHT as NORMAN pauses for a moment, looking R.)

NORMAN (*dryly*). Good.

JASPER. Mr. Wright, you know those patent medicines are mostly alcohol, don't you?

WRIGHT. It's a different *kind* of alcohol. It's *medicinal!*

(JASPER bursts into laughter. WRIGHT is angry and embarrassed. MADAM PAGE enters from the back of the house.)

WRIGHT (*moves down the aisle to NORMAN, followed by JASPER, who is proud of himself*). Good morning, Edward! (*Moves to the L pew position.*)

NORMAN. There was no call for that, Jasper.

JASPER (*insincere*). Sorry, boss.

(NORMAN follows WRIGHT to his pew to apologize. JASPER turns to face up the aisle, sees MADAM PAGE and waves, raising his voice.)

JASPER. Madam Page!

MADAM PAGE (*bustling down the aisle to him*). This is God's house, Jasper Chase! I'll thank you to keep your voice down!

JASPER (*elaborate stage whisper*). Sorry. Where's Virginia?

MADAM PAGE. She's coming. Mr. Sterling's introducing her to some of his friends. (*She crosses down the aisle.*)

JASPER. I didn't know Mr. Sterling *had* any friends. Ah! He must have *purchased* some!

MADAM PAGE (*turns*). You are a very rude young man.

JASPER (*moves to her*). Your Mr. Sterling was more than rude last year when he sent thugs in to break up the railway strike.

MADAM PAGE. Those people were in the wrong. President Cleveland said so.

JASPER (*crossing past her, toward the orchestra*). Ah! Must be true, then.

MADAM PAGE. Besides, Lucien had nothing to do with it. He wasn't even in town when ...

JASPER (*whirls*). He had *everything* to do with it! He's the president of the railroad. He gave the order, then ran to Chicago to keep his shirt clean.

MADAM PAGE. He didn't run to Chicago! He owns businesses there! They needed his guidance!

JASPER. Convenient. I don't see why Virginia has any truck with him.

MADAM PAGE. Mr. Sterling enjoyed a close, personal relationship with the children's late father, and his bank handles the family finances.

JASPER. Mr. Sterling enjoys a close personal relationship with the children's *money!*