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Road To Victory

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Hal climbed the stair steps slowly, his mind extremely thoughtful and, much as he hated to admit it, far too morose for one who professed to love the Lord with all his heart.

With a feeling of utter dejection and defeat, he entered the little study at the top of the stairs and settled himself behind the old but good and sturdy second hand desk the room. "Failure! Failure!" a voice harassed from somewhere near by.

Hal heaved a heavy sigh then buried his face in his hands. He was a failure, he conceded silently, opening wide the door for further taunting from the enemy.



"Oh, Hal, it hurt you!" Betty said.

"You may as well quit the ministry!" the voice across his shoulder seemed to shout in his ears. "You'll never amount to anything. Quit the ministry and go back where you belong.., to selling insurance."

The words came with such force and power until Hal trembled. How could he ever have thought he was called to preach!

His mind did a quick back-turn to Bible School. He remembered those years of preparation. Happy years they were, really; and he had met Betty there too!

He remembered how God had blessed him and anointed that first message he had preached. "A natural preacher!" many had exclaimed.

Not once during school had he ever doubted his call to preach. But now . . . ! He remembered how the teachers and fellow students had bragged on him and his messages. He had been pampered and coddled and didn't need to worry about preaching engagements . . . they were his for the taking. He was always in demand. But that was in school! He was considered great and wonderful and all the flowery speeches and bragging on him had seemed to inspire him on to do his very best in preaching and sermonizing -- in school.

A loud moan escaped his lips. Why the change? he wondered silently, miserably.

"Look at your last pastorate!" the voice hurled. "Few converts and no pianist nor song leader, and little if any life in your services. An identical pattern is emerging here . . . ! Resign! Start packing! Leave! Leave!"

With pinched lips and a set jaw, Hal stood bolt upright. That's exactly what he would do. Start packing! He'd had his fill. The once-thrilling experience of preaching the gospel was no longer challenging and thrilling.

Hastily, almost gleefully, he began pulling books off the shelves and stacking them according to authors in neat piles on the floor. Next he tackled the desk drawers, marveling at the amount of "junk" and useless materials he'd accumulated in less than a year's time.

He came across a small notebook of sermon outlines. He paused momentarily and leafed through them casually, his mind going back to the very time and place when each had been preached. Mostly, they were the work of his sermonizing in Bible School . . . Those good years! It had been exciting to preach then. Ah, yes. Almost any man could preach with the School President, faculty and student body Amen-ing and encouraging him!

He shut the book in disgust, trying desperately to close the door of memory as well, then resumed the tedious, time-consuming task of cleaning out his drawers. He would resign the church Sunday and take Betty and go back to Hillside... to selling insurance with his old company.

He would go away forever from old Brother Longs' criticism and Sister Broadheart's well-meaning but uncouth advice and counsel. He didn't need to endure such indignities. He could preach alongside any preacher. They had told him so in Bible School!

In the midst of his thinking, soft, cool hands stole caressingly across his eyes and a still softer voice teased, "Guess who?"

Hal reached grimy hands up and gently released the hands across his eyes. "Betty!" he exclaimed. "You're home early, aren't you?"

"I just had the strangest kind of feeling that you might be lonely, Hal dearest; so I asked to be excused from the baby shower. The women were wonderful. Like always. They said, of course I must come home. Oh, Hal, God has given us wonderful people to pastor and shepherd. We are so fortunate!"

Wonderful people, Betty said! Hal felt he was choking on the lump that came unannounced and unwanted in his throat. "I... I'm glad you're home, Betty," he stuttered.

"It looks as if we're moving!" Betty teased, eyeing the stacks of books and the messy looking pulled out desk drawers.

Hal swallowed hard. He hadn't given one bit of thought to Betty and her reaction to his plans. Suddenly, he wished he had her faith; her sweet spirit of optimism. She seemed never to see any obstacle that was either too large or hard for God to move and no circumstance that He couldn't change ... through earnest praying.

"While you restore order to the study," she was saying softly, bursting into his thoughts like a cool, rushing mountain stream on a hot, burned out desert, "I'll hurry downstairs and fix us a little snack of something delightful and refreshing."

"Betty," Hal stood up suddenly and raised himself to his full six foot one, "we're leaving Danbury. I'm resigning on Sunday. I'm through preaching."

All the blood seemed to drain out of Betty. She turned an ashen-white. "Why... Hal, whatever can you mean, through with preaching? You can't be serious! 'The gifts and callings of God are without repentance.' "

Hal faced his petite wife. "Don't try preaching to me," he said sharply. "I'm dead serious. I'm quitting the ministry, Betty. I'm fed up with Brother Long's criticism and Mrs. Broadheart's advice. I guess I'm no longer an infant needing everyone else's advice. I'm an adult. A full grown adult!"

Betty stared at the floor for a long while then she cast pleading eyes upon her husband. "Hal, I . . . I hardly know how to begin but for a long time I... I've wondered. . ."

"About what?" he asked almost impatiently.

Betty's head dropped again and a sudden burst of tears sprayed her cheeks and ran heedlessly on to the floor. "Hal," she asked it softly, "are you sanctified? Truly, wholly and entirely sanctified?"

Hal stood as one petrified. It was plain to see that the words had shocked him . . . shook him. "Betty!" he ejaculated unbelievably.

"Forgive me, Hal; I haven't meant to hurt you -- but your life..."

"What about my life?" he asked curtly.

Betty dried her tears and faced her tall husband. "Oh, Hal, it didn't help you. It **hurt** you!"

"**What** hurt me, may I ask?"

"All that bragging on you at school. It hurt you! It was bad for you. I was afraid of that."

"Why, Betty, are you inferring?"

"Too much bragging can puff one up, Hal, and make him vain. He becomes self-reliant instead of relying upon the blessed Holy Spirit for help. It's dangerous, this 'inflation'... when one is not wholly sanctified especially. Paul mentioned something about it in I Tim. 3:6, 'Not a novice, lest **being lifted up with pride** he fall into the condemnation of the devil.' It was easy and delightful for you to preach at school because everybody bragged on you and told you what a great preacher you were. You loved it then. But now . . . well, you're preaching's all gone. You're through, you say. Well, I can say only one thing, God can never, never use you so long as you're unsettled and unstable and need the applause of men to keep you preaching rather than the anointing of God. Oh, Hal, I wish you'd allow the Holy Ghost to crucify your self life. The road to victory and power is a total and complete death to all of self."

"Who made you a judge, may I ask?"

"God forbid that I should ever be guilty of sitting on the seat of judgment, Hal; but your fruit is not Canaan fruit! And we can never do anything for God and His cause so long as any of self remains and needs puffing up before we can preach or sing. I thank God for Brother Long and Sister Broadheart. They're not critical; they're wonderful! They've traveled far down life's road and have a wealth of valuable and helpful information and experience for us if we but take it and utilize it to our advantage. All they've said has done nothing for me but help me. I have grown spiritually since coming here."

Hal shook his head in complete bafflement. "I can say only one thing, Betty, you and I are two different people. Totally and completely different!"

"But when you belong to the Lord He makes 'all things work together for good.' Oh, Hal, please get alone somewhere with the Lord and pray until you know you are entirely sanctified. Don't do anything brash -- anything you'll regret later on. Think over what I've said, dear. I'll leave you now and go downstairs. I'll have a snack ready for you in a little while."

"Forget about the snack. A fellow's not overly hungry after a lecture!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't intend for it to be a lecture. Really I didn't. I love you so; but I desire above all else to have God's smile upon our life and your ministry. Promise you'll pray about this!"

For answer, Hal gave a surly grunt.

Betty slipped quietly down the stairs and shut herself away inside the roomy pantry. Hal was facing a crisis; she must help him through it.

Upstairs in the study, a troubled young man paced back and forth between the stacked books and the desk clutter on the floor. "Are you sanctified, Hal?" Betty's words, full of kindness and love, pounded their way into his heart. "Really and truly sanctified?"

Between spurts of inward uprisings and Betty's questions, Hal came face to face with his trouble ... and it wasn't Brother Longs nor Sister Broadheart either! Ah, no. He **wasn't** sanctified. He had professed; but that which he had professed to having had didn't work -- never had! Betty was right: he had to be "puffed up", bragged upon and about, and his ego inflated and bolstered high before he could preach, or even cared about preaching. He had consecrated himself but he had never had the death blow to his vain self life . . . the old man about whom the Apostle Paul wrote. Consequently, this had made him both irritable and "touchy", as well as easily offended.

Waiting to learn no more, he dropped on his knees among the clutter. He must die., to all of self and people and peoples' opinions.

Never in all his life did Hal pray and agonize like he did in the study that night. Betty, all the while was lifting from her secret closet inside the pantry. Suddenly she broke through in victory. Hal was going to be sanctified!

Shouting joyously, she rushed up the stairs to the study. Hal met her in the doorway. Claspng her in his arms, he raced back and forth across the room. "He's come! He's come, Betty! The Holy Ghost has come!" he shouted, beside himself with holy joy. "I'm sanctified wholly! My heart's clean. So clean and pure!"

For a long time they rejoiced together then Hal spied his books piled on the floor. "Guess I'd better get these back on the shelf where they belong," he said, his face shining.

"Good idea!" Betty commented. Pointing to the desk she said softly, "And that cleaning job was long over-due!"

Hal gave his pretty wife a tight little squeeze as he began work on the books. "You're a smart little woman," he exclaimed. "You have excellent vision too. Especially where spiritual things are concerned!"

"Perhaps you'd like that snack now, Mr. Hal Borstrom?"

"Sounds ambrosial."

"It won't take me long," Betty laughed as she hurried downstairs.

Hal's mouth turned pleasantly in a heavenly smile. He began singing lustily, "The Comforter Has Come." His ministry was just now beginning, he was sure. He was now a full-fledged soldier in the Lord's army..., a soldier wearing the "whole armor" of God!

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THE END