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A Promise Made

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Matthew swung his leg easily over the handlebar of his bicycle and started down the street at full speed. He liked the feel of the wind in his face and the way it ruffled his hair. It made him feel very much alive and alert. His father often said that the wind seemed to clear the cobwebs from one's mind, and Matthew agreed whole-heartedly with the statement as he turned down Potter Street.

"Hey, Matt, not so fast!" Gary Spade called, pedaling for all he was worth to catch up with his friend.



"What do you mean, supposed to be working?" Matt asked.

Matthew turned his head and looked back. Seeing Gary, he brought his bicycle to a sudden, screeching halt.

"Sorry, Pal," he said when Gary drew up alongside him. "I didn't even know you were anywhere near me or I'd have asked you along. Aren't you working today?"

Gary's lips parted in a wide smile. "I'm supposed to be working . . ."

"What do you mean, supposed to be working?" Gary slapped a hand on his knee and laughed. "Like I said," he repeated, "I'm supposed to be working."

Matthew's face took on a serious, much-perplexed expression. "Then why aren't you working?" he asked quickly, not understanding the meaning of Gary's statement at all.

"When the fish are biting! Are you crazy, Matt?" Light dawned on Matthew.

"But Mr. Malloy's depending on you, Gary! This is his busy time at the roadside stand. And you promised you'd . . ."

"Poof!" Gary interrupted. "Who cares about a promise when fishing's perfect! I believe in looking out for myself. If I don't feel like going to work, I don't go; I call Mr. Malloy and tell him I'm not feeling well, that I won't be at the stand. And when the 'fishing bug' nibbles at my innards, well, I just go fishing -- like today. Why not go along? Randy's going; so is Skip. You'd make it a four-some, Matt, and we'd have fun."

"No, thanks, Gary. I'm a stickler in keeping a promise and being a man of my word. Mr. Grady's lawn needs mowed and I promised him I'd do it today."

"You could do it when you get back from fishing; he'd never know the difference. Besides, that's not a big promise. You could let the lawn go for a couple days and it wouldn't matter -- so long as you finally got it mowed."

"O yes it would matter. So far as I'm concerned there are no little promises; a promise is a promise, regardless of what you say, and a promise made should be a promise kept. In God's sight, we lie if we make a vow or a promise and then don't intend to keep it. And you know where all liars go, Gary. That goes for your story of not feeling well, too. God hates a lying tongue."

Gary's face flushed red. Leaning forward on his bicycle, he pedaled away, shouting over his shoulder as he went, "Go ahead, Matt, slave away. As for me, I mean to do some of the things I really like doing -- things like going fishing on a summer day."

Matt watched till Gary disappeared down the street. Then he headed for Mr. Grady's old but well-kept house near the edge of town. His heart felt sad and grieved over Gary's attitude, and he felt sorry for Mr. Malloy, too; he needed Gary. Really needed him.

Matt recalled how he had gone to Mr. Malloy when he heard that the man was looking for three or four trustworthy and dependable young men to help him at his thriving fruit stand. Mr. Malloy was a kind, gentle man. His voice trembled slightly when he told Matt that he had already hired all the help he needed, adding that next year, the Lord willing, Matt would be the first to be hired.

That's when Matt had gone around the neighborhood getting lawn jobs. It was tiring but rewarding work, he mused silently as he pulled into Mr. Grady's driveway and parked his bicycle.

Mr. Grady was waiting for him, wearing a pleased smile as he consumed his faithful timepiece which told him that Matthew Harney was not merely on time but that he was ten minutes early.

How terribly disappointed the retired railroad man would have been had he not kept his promise to be there, Matt thought, exchanging a few pleasant words with his employer before starting the lawn mower and getting to work.

Poor Gary, Matt thought, as a sob tore his heart over his friend's undependability and his frivolous, careless attitude toward the promise he had made to Mr. Malloy and the vow he had made to God.

A vow could be a costly undertaking, he knew. Case after case of men in the Old Testament making a vow came to Matthew's mind as he followed the mower around the yard. Frequently these vows were made in an hour of approaching or impending crisis -- like Jacob. But they were vows nonetheless. Vows which God heard and took note of.

How like Jacob was Gary in making a vow or a promise, Matthew soliloquized pensively and sadly: "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come to my Father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God."

Jacob's vow began with an if; so did Gary's: "If you'll give me this summer job, Lord, I'll go to church with Matt on Sundays; I'll be dependable, too; (an area of weakness for Gary) and . . . Lord, I may even get saved."

Tears stung Matthew's eyes as he recalled Gary's vows.

He and his parents prayed earnestly for his friend's salvation, and when he attended Sunday School and church with them for three consecutive weeks Matthew was exceed; Gary was soon going to become a real Christian, washed in the Blood of the Lamb, he was sure.

But it never happened that way at all. After his third Sunday of church attendance, Gary never returned. When asked what had happened -- why he didn't abide by his vow -- Gary retorted with, "I did; I came three Sundays in a row . . . enough church to last me for the rest of my life."

And that was the. No amount of reasoning or persuasion could change Gary. Not even the fact that he, Matthew Harney, had informed his friend kindly that a vow always

costs more than a resolution, for the sufficient reason that it was made to God who would not be Lord at all unless He was Lord of all.

Matthew drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his tears and the perspiration from his brow, thankful that in his vowing to God there had been no "ifs" or "but's." Only those who had calmly and quietly vowed to choose the divine way in everything, and who loved their Lord with a deeper devotion than is possible in a human relationship, could understand the strength they had found in a glad and willing surrender, he mused silently. Each and every vow made to God must be totally and completely unconditional. No stings attached! In God's presence men are suppliant, he knew, not bargainers.

"Time for a break, my boy!"

Mr. Grady's words and the light touch of his hand on Matthew's shoulder startled the willing worker.

"Sorry, Matt, I didn't mean to frighten you," Mr. Grady said kindly. "Mrs. Grady has a snack prepared for us. It's to the patio with you," the man teased, adding, "Anyone who works as hard as you deserves a treat."

Matthew cut the motor and followed Mr. Grady to the shaded patio where flowers of every color and hue blossomed and thrived in their hanging baskets above his head. It was sort of a Garden of Eden, he thought, looking intently at the kaleidoscope of colors. "Like them?" Mr. Grady asked quickly. "They're beautiful. Beautiful!" Matthew exclaimed, deciding to bring his father and mother by some day to see the 'hanging gardens,' as he had called them secretly and silently.

Mrs. Grady was a congenial hostess, and Matthew felt honored and privileged to work for the pair.

Long after he had finished the Grady's lawn and was busy mowing Mrs. Tolliver's, Matthew thanked God for giving him six different lawns to take care of during the summer. Aside from Mrs. Tolliver, whose lawn he mowed gratis, (a love-favor to the widow) he made good money, he thought, thanking God for the extra two dollars Mr. Grady had insisted that he take "for a job well done" -- the former railroad man's words.

It was mid-afternoon when he arrived home, hot and perspiring and tired, but happy and thankful.

"Mr. Malloy wants to see you," his mother informed him as he got a drink of water.

Matt almost choked on the water. "Me?" he asked, swallowing the mouthful of water. "He wants to see me Mother? Are you sure?"

"Positive. He said for you to come by as soon as you got home. Seems he's in some sort of bind."

Oh, Oh! Matt thought, putting "two and two together" and coming up with the sum total of his mental calculations. Now what? he wondered, feeling certain that he knew Mr. Malloy's reason for wanting to see him.

He hurried to his bedroom and prayed before mounting his bicycle and pedaling to the roadside stand where customers almost jammed the driveway.

"Am I ever glad you're here!" Mr. Malloy exclaimed, breathing a sigh of relief. "Take care of the customers to my right, will you, Matthew? Some of them are in a hurry and I can't wait on them fast enough."

Without being told a second time, Matthew checked the pace list of each item and set to work with a will. His infectious smile, courteous manner and polite conversation put the people in a better frame of mind, and one by one they drove away with their garden-fresh vegetables and fruits, wishing Mr. Malloy and his new recruit a good day.

In a brief lull, Matthew said, "Mother told me you called; said you wanted to see me as soon as I got home from my lawn-mowing jobs, Mr. Malloy. What did you want?"

Looking at Matthew with admiration and gratefulness, the aging man replied, "I just fired that lazy, undependable Gary Spade; you're hired, full-time, if you'll take the job."

Matthew gulped. Gary was his friend; he didn't want any ill-will nor hard feelings between themselves.

As if reading Matthew's thoughts, Mr. Malloy added, "I told him that I was going to hire you -- that you had been first on the list for next year's rush season, the Lord willing. So what about it, Matthew? Will you accept the position? It will be Tuesday through Saturday -- my buyer days. I know you're dependable and honest and trustworthy."

"I'll take the job, Mr. Malloy, and by God's grace I promise to give you a full and honest day's work."

Tears of relief sprang to Mr. Malloy's gray eyes. For answer, he slapped Matthew's shoulder gently, saying, "I knew I could depend on you. I knew it. Thanks much. Yes, much, Matthew. You're a God-send to me!"

Waiting on a customer, Matthew smiled. The Lord was good to him. Yes, so very good. He would give Mr. Malloy a full 8-hour day and set up new hours for mowing the lawns in his care. One thing certain: a promise made would be a promise kept, where he was concerned.

Handing the customer her sacked up produce, Matthew began whirling.

Mr. Malloy, heaving a tired sigh of relief, resoled to the little room in one corner of the stand and sat down. "Thank You, Lord, for Matthew," he said softly. "Yes, I thank You, from the bottom of my heart!"

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THE END