

Copyright 2001 By Lucille King
All Rights Reserved and Duplication
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,
Except For Personal Use

* * * * *

Digital Edition 09/01/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

First Things First

By Mrs. Paul E. King

From the October 4, 1981 Sunday School Beacon

Mildred Atkins brushed the last unruly strand of hair in place, making sure it was tucked in securely with the bulk of her heavy, long hair, done up neatly on her head; then she headed for the kitchen. There was always so much to be done, she reasoned as she prepared breakfast for her rapidly-expanding family whose stomachs seemed like deep, empty caves without bottom.

She sighed, adding milk to the almost-finished pancake batter, at the same time turning the slowly-simmering smoked sausages in the skillet before summoning the children to breakfast.

She breathed a prayer of thankfulness as she watched the last of her five children step inside the yellow school bus and disappear down the road. Then she turned to the sink where a small mountain of dirty dishes stood waiting to be washed and dried and put inside the cabinets.

"How mundane!" she exclaimed. "How utterly mundane! My life is one great, total bore: prepare breakfast, wash dishes, make beds, clean floors, dust furniture, bake, bake, bake . . . endlessly."

By now she was in tears. How could she ever have imagined (when she married Randall) that home-making would be more exciting and rewarding than working for Milliken and Son, Attorneys at Law! How? She was blind, she decided quickly, blind, over the love she had for Randall.



Fiercely, she tackled the dishes, soaking egg-encrusted plates in hot sudsy water while scraping bits of food into a nearby pan.

The kitchen took on an appearance of utter neatness and orderliness as she closed the cupboard which held the now-clean dishes on lacy-edged, paper-lined shelves in neat rows.

Cleaning was next, she mused silently, hurrying to the laundry room closet for a dust cloth and the vacuum cleaner. "May as well wash a load of clothes," she said aloud to herself. "It can be washing while I clean. My, oh my! At least four loads to be washed today! What a never-ending job!"

While the clothes washed, she brought order out of chaos in the bedrooms, living and dining rooms and the family room. Ah, the family room, she thought, rushing into the laundry room and putting a load of clothes in the dryer, reloading the washer with set number two of dirty clothing, then making her way into the enormous family room with its ceiling to floor windows looking out on to the acres and acres of rolling hills and forests beyond.

How many times a day did she come here for strength to carry on, she wondered, feeling her anxiety over the endless duties of being a housewife melt away and drop off to be swallowed up somewhere among the trees in the dense forest or to be lost among the beautiful rolling hills outside her window.

She stood for a long while, looking, lost in wonder and amazement at the beauty all around her and remembering David's words when he said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

"My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2).

The bell rang on the dryer, signaling her that the first load of clothes were dry and ready for removing. She hurried away to fold what needed folding and to hang on hangers those that belonged on hangers, her mind dwelling upon the Scripture about one lifting up the eyes unto the hills. It was not the hills that brought the help, she realized suddenly, but the Lord of the hills... "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" . . . the hills. And to obtain the needed help and strength, one had to look upwards, toward the hills; toward God.

With shamefacedness and a guilty conscience, Mildred, tossing a third load of clothes into the washer and putting set number two into the clothes dryer for drying, admitted that her trouble and her restlessness and the over-anxiousness of her heart lay in the omission of doing those necessary spiritual things. Jesus had admonished, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:33-34).

She had put everything else first . . . husband, house, family, household duties -- everything. God had been relegated to whatever time (if any) was left-after all else was finished and put in perfect order. She had been working opposite of the divinely-inspired, God-given injunction, she thought, smitten in her heart.

Randall's present night-shift duty afforded little real togetherness for the family. When he left for work, it was too early to call the children in from play for family devotions, and when he returned at two or three in the wee morning hours, they were sound asleep in their beds; when they left for school, Randall had to sleep. Thus the vicious cycle had gone on, week after week and month after month, without an established family altar. Oh, they had tried it during the supper hour, but somehow it never seemed to be the right time for such, and so it was discontinued altogether.

Standing in the laundry room in deep meditation and pensive thought now, Mildred suddenly realized that God would not excuse her for what she could have been doing . . . should have been doing, really. She had an equal obligation to her children's spiritual welfare and upbringing. It was not fault of Randall's that his work schedule was as it was. She should have taken the initiative and called the children around her knee for family devotions before they left for school and, again, before they retired at night. When her life here was done and her race over, God would not ask for a resume of her husband's work schedule to prove her worthy and eligible for an excuse of those "first things." Ah not The divine injunction left no room for excuse-making. In God's sight, she was guilty of the sin of omission.

The sudden realization had a startlingly-shaking effect upon her. She looked over her neat and now-orderly and well-kept house, hearing again the Word, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).

She was guilty, she knew, and she needed no earthly judge to pronounce the sentence upon her. The blessed Holy Spirit had uncovered the seat of her affections and it didn't look good. No, not at all. She had become so absorbed with her work . . . so concerned and pre-occupied with being the best housekeeper... that her heart had suffered from this unholy obsession. It was now dusty and dead and dry; spiritual cobwebs hung from every nook and corner of her never-dying soul and she was miserable.

Unconcerned now over the last of her unfinished laundry, she hurried into the bedroom and shut the door. It was equally as wrong and as sinful to "omit" God's "first things" as it was to commit His "don'ts," she thought, smitten in her heart.

Falling to her knees, the pattern of her life unfolded clearly before her: they went to church, Randall and the children and she, never missing a single service unless illness prohibited, but she hadn't gotten much out of the services anymore. Always, what she had to do when she got home, either that night or the following day, was before her. She heard the minister's opening prayer and his final "Amen," to be sure, but what was said in between -- the message--was usually lost; she was too busy planning what jobs would be done first when she arrived back home . . . maybe she could finish sewing Amy's new dress, after all it wasn't too late; prayer meeting didn't go on as long as Sunday services did. Or she just may be able to get her baking out of the way so she could begin cleaning and washing the first thing in the morning.

The same process happened when she read her Bible each morning in a semblance of private devotion. She turned the pages and followed the Scripture with her eyes. However, once that was done, she didn't remember anything she had read; her mind was too occupied with the many duties and obligations of being a wife and mother.

In brokenness of heart and contrition of soul, Mildred wept. Confessing her sins of omission and asking for forgiveness, she felt a wonderful peace and rest come into her heart. She was forgiven. She knew it. She knew it! The knowledge was blessed and wonderful. Her heart began to praise and sing and rejoice. Immediately she sought her Bible and began to read. Its pages fell open to 2 Corinthians 10:5: "Casting down imaginations . . . bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Her eyes were opened as if by some miracle; the scales fell off, as it were. Satan's pet project was to distract her from learning about the Lord and His will and His ways. He was not necessarily always against church attendance, she now realized, so long as he could bring things into one's mind to distract from hearing and getting the Word -- like in the parable of the sower and the seed where, as soon as the seed was sown, the fowls of the air came and plucked it up. Satan had been doing just this to her heart, she saw.

"Casting down imaginations" meant taking one's wandering thoughts and forcibly throwing them from the mind, like something vile or fearful would be thrust away. At the same time that the wandering thoughts were being cast out, the attention must be focused on and set upon what one was reading or hearing. This was the meaning of the "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," she saw clearly now.

Suddenly Mildred made a decision: from now on, beginning this very hour, her work could wait until she had really benefited from doing God's "first things." No matter how long it took, she would remain alone with God until she knew she had touched Heaven's throne on her knees and until her soul was refreshed and bathed and blest and ready to start the day's round of household duties.

A wave of glory rushed over her. She was on the right track this time, she knew, feeling a sudden hunger and urge to pray for deliverance from the carnal thing within her which had pulled her down in the first place.

In earnestness of soul, she began praying again; this time for holiness of heart . . . to be purged and cleansed from that inbred, besetting sin. And she was not denied; God was there, waiting all the time to cleanse her heart and fill it to overflowing. It was glorious and wonderful. Yes, glorious indeed!

* * * * *

THE END