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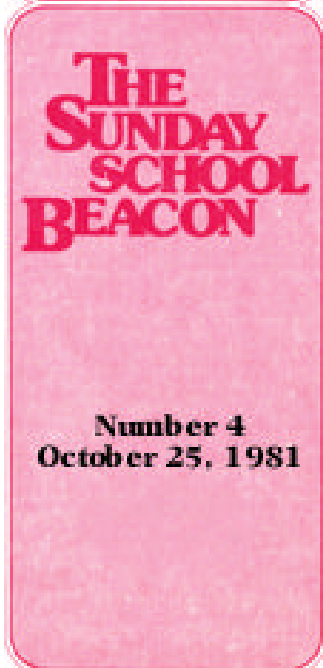
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## Dad, Please Listen To Me

By Mrs. Paul E. King

From the October 25, 1981 Sunday School Beacon



I sit alone tonight -- just as I have done for months now-endless-seeming days and nights, all of them the same. So much the same so that at times I fear for my sanity! I feel that I shall go mad with their sameness. What is there left for me? What, I ask you, Dad? Nothing. Nothing/Desolation? Yes. Indeed yes! Hope? (Don't mock me with the word!) You, Dad, long ago destroyed and burned away every last spark of hope that lingered longingly in the inner recesses of my being, watching eagerly -- longing even -- for a change in you, in your attitude toward me. Hoping, hoping, ever hoping. But it burned out; you caused it to die. (Even a good fire bums itself out in time unless it is tended and cared for, you know that!)

Bitter? Desperately so! Wretched? More than you will ever know. Cynical? You made me this way. You see, Dad, when I needed you and wanted you, you were always too busy; you had no time for me. The girls., my two sisters., they meant everything to you. Oh, how I used to wish I were a girl! Then, (perhaps) I thought, you would notice me -- notice that you had a son., an only son, to be sure. But such was never to be.

I sit here in my dark, dismal cell, thinking. Thinking. Recalling the time when I was four or five and my little tricycle broke down. "Please, Daddy, fix it for me," I pleaded; not once nor twice but dozens of times. Each time the answer was the same: "I'm too busy, Charles; perhaps another time."

Always, though, you managed to find the time to mend any and all of my sisters' broken toys and to romp and play and laugh with them and to hold them on your knee, even going into their room at night and telling them bedtime stories before kissing them goodnight. I well remember the night when I stole out of my bed and tip-toed down the hallway into their room, wanting to hear the story and share in the before-going-to-sleep fun. Dad, I can still feel the sting of your hand on my cheek; it hurt -- deeply. The greater hurt and pain, however, was inside my little heart. I wet my pillow with boyish tears that night, a process which was oft-repeated thereafter.

What had I done to make you dislike me so? I wondered. Or what was I doing to cause you to so ignore me? I needed you, Dad... oh, how I needed you! But you seemed never to need me... nor want me, even.

In church (yes, you were always there) you bragged on the girls from behind your pulpit, relating some cute or accomplished feat they had done. They beamed with pride; I shrank lower in my seat. Hadn't I mowed the enormous parsonage lawn and bought groceries for widow Sutter out of my hard-earned neighborhood lawn-cutting money! ('You can earn your room and board and buy your own clothes,' you had told me on my twelfth birthday in a stern and uncharitable way.) I can never, (in a/1 my years of natural life) remember once hearing you commend me for my obedience or a job well done, and never once did you tell me you were proud of me, proud that I was your son. Why, Dad? Why? This hurts, Hurts!

When I was somewhere between fourteen and sixteen years old and my mind was having difficulty keeping pace with my rapidly developing body, I came to your study seeking your counsel and your advice.., what was happening to me? I was neither boy anymore nor was I a full-grown man.

I needed your help, Dad, more than you will ever know. I was frustrated and frightened and I felt so mixed-up on the inside. At times, I wanted to do things and play games such as I used to do... the boy in me... and then again, I didn't. My being would feel all grown-up and mannish and I would become extremely sober, thinking deep mannish thoughts and feeling a heavy responsibility settling in upon me.

Sometimes, too, the world seemed all upside-down to me; other times it was beautiful and perfect and wonderful. I needed you to explain my feelings-to tell me this was a phase of "growing up," and to reassure me (by a word and a gentle pat on my shoulder) that someday soon it would all settle down and be all right and that I would take my place in society, a noble and worthy specimen of godly manhood. But you didn't. Whenever or wherever I sought you out, begging for just a few minutes of your time, I was snubbed (sometimes ignored even) and put off with, "Some other time, Charles; I'm too busy now."

"Some other time" never seemed to come for me. I became more lonely and introverted with every passing year. You shunned my company; I withdrew into my shell.

It was like you were spinning a tight little cocoon for me, a cocoon which, little by little, strangled the last bit of hope I had of ever getting you to notice me -- to instruct me personally -- on that vital person to person, father to son basis.

My sisters, meanwhile, (and through no fault of theirs) had become more important to you than ever. They became your earthly idols. All of your spare time . . . and not spare time . . . was taken up pleasing them and doing nice things for them and with them. I was left "out in the cold," shivering, lonely and miserable.

You fussed and griped at me when Butch became my close friend... "He's too old for you!" you said sternly. And "he's too rough and tough." Yet Butch took time to listen to me -- to hear about my problems and the myriad things which were bothering me . . . you, included.

I took his advise, followed his counsel . . . his footsteps, too. Suddenly I felt big, full-grown, all-man. At last, I had a patient listener, an understanding friend and a compassionate companion. I was no longer alone.

Sure, Butch did things I was taught were wrong, but he included me in everything he did. I needed this; desperately so. To feel "included," I mean. And while I'm sitting here, being part and parcel of the crime, (though not having committed it myself) I'll always cherish my memories of Butch. He became the father-who-ignored-me, to me; the "father" who listened.

My heart bleeds most for mother and my sisters, who have grown up to be the well-respected citizens I myself could have been and should have been.., and would have been.., had you, Dad, listened.

My heart was tender When I knocked on your study door that cold January night. So very tender; and so hungry, too.., for God. "Please, Dad!" I begged. "I must talk to you. Please! Just an hour."

"Go away, Charles; some other time . . ."

I left your door, feeling more desolate than ever, and more alone and left out. That was my night, Dad and because again you were too busy . . . "some other time, Charles"... the tender, fertile soil of my heart turned suddenly hard and sour and bitter. Cold, too. Especially so when, later on, I saw you giving your church members' sons attention and heard your complimentary remarks to them while I slunk around in the shadows begging for the mere crumbs of your friendship, attention and affection.

I'm sorry if I have caused you grief by leaving home; I didn't do it to hurt you. (I know how it pains and feels to be hurt). But I felt it was the best and only thing to do under the circumstances... I was so much in your way. And, sitting here now, thinking, (I

have so much time for this) I wonder, oh, I wonder: what could I have been had you only listened, Dad!

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THE END