ALMOST
By Mrs. Paul E. King
From the January 9, 1983 Sunday School Beacon


"Right!" Denise added emphatically. "I thought an engagement was a time of rejoicing. What's wrong? You look like you've just come from a funeral."
Sue smiled wanly. "Really!" she said, trying to sound light and gay and a bit frivolous. But it fell short of its mark-of. its intent.

"Why are you sad?" Denise asked, shifting her load of books to the opposite arm. "Honestly, Sue, I did think an engagement was a time for celebrating, not mourning."

"It is," Sue admitted dryly. "A time for celebrating and rejoicing, I mean."

"Then wipe that mournful, woe be- unto-me look off your face."

"Thanks for the advice," Sue replied, hurrying into the dorm to her room. She closed the door securely behind her, thankful that this was Myrna's half-day to work and that the room was all hers. She needed the quiet and the privacy to think, to sort out her thoughts and her feelings.

Sitting in the lone chair in the room, she reached for her Bible on the dresser. Clutching it to her heart, she let the tears flow freely. What was wrong with her? she wondered seriously. She recalled her marvelous conversion as a twelve-year-old girl, and the night when the Holy Spirit took up permanent residence in her cleansed heart shortly after the beautiful and wonderful first work of grace. Through all of her Christian years, she had had an unbroken fellowship with Jesus. Her joy knew no bounds and her inner peace flowed on unceasingly. All through her high school years God the Holy Ghost had helped her to live a victorious life. The same in Bible School, until she told Todd she'd marry him, a few days ago.

The girls were right, she reasoned; she should feel happy, excited and elated. But she didn't. Instead, she felt heavy-hearted, almost like a condemned soul.

Her mind drifted to Todd. He came to Bible School last year, like she had done. They became good friends, but nothing more. This year, however, things changed. Todd declared that the summer vacation time made him realize how much she had meant to him. They had started dating in October, and during the Christmas holidays, Todd proposed to her. What was the reason for this horrible fear? Sue wondered, trying desperately to put her finger on something tangible, some reason for her feelings. Todd was preparing to be a missionary, he said. Again, this blended in with her definite call, the thing for which she was preparing.
"What is it, Lord?" she asked aloud in desperation. "I want to know. Please. Please!"
She was off the chair and on her knees, weeping, praying and pleading for God's will.

How long she remained thus, she had no idea. Her heart was too burdened. Too troubled. What was this thing that had cast a cloud over her? she wondered. This thing that had disquieted her beautiful inner peace? One of the great holiness writers of another era had stated that anything which would disturb the soul was to be heeded, and an honest and diligent searching of the heart should be made as to the reason or reasons for the disturbance and the unrest. Well, if it took her all day and all night, she was determined to stay on her knees until she discovered the reason.

On and on, she prayed and always, when she came to Todd's name and her promise to be his wife, the cloud hung darkly over her soul. It felt like a heavy funeral shroud which was all but choking the life out of her.

"My Lord and my God," she cried aloud, "if Todd's not for me, make it plain as day. Please! And do forgive me for giving him my promise."

A fear of such force and proportion seized her that her entire body trembled beneath its impact. She felt she was being squeezed to death. Gloom and darkness blacker than the blackest night possessed her soul and she felt she was sinking. Sinking.

"Thank you, dear Lord!" she cried, lifting her hands upward. "I'll break off with Todd. Right now!"

Instantly, the dark cloud lifted and the cloud of gloom and despair vanished. Peace like an unending river flowed over her soul. It was God's answer, His way of showing His approval over her decision.

Without even taking time to wash the tears off her face, Sue rushed out of the dorm in search of Todd. She found him in the foyer of one of the buildings.

"Sue," he cried, "what brings you here? I thought you had a music class this afternoon."
"It's tomorrow, Todd," she corrected. "May I speak to you alone, please?" she asked. "It's urgent."

His face paled. "Sure," he said. "Sure. Nobody'll be listening to us over in that corner. Don't look so sober, Sue; it frightens me."

"Todd, listen to me, please. What I have to say isn't pleasant; but I've got to do it. I must obey God. The Bible says it's better to obey God than man."

"In some things, perhaps."

Sue gasped. "Todd! You can't mean that. One must always obey God rather than man. Always! Not merely in 'some things.' And there's never a 'perhaps' where God is concerned."

"Go on," Todd said impatiently. "I believe you had something 'urgent' and 'unpleasant' to talk over with me. Would it be about our engagement?" he asked indifferently, nonchalantly.

"Yes, it is."

"You wish to prolong it?"

"I wish to be released from my promise, Todd. Ever since I said 'yes' to you last week, I've had a cloud over my soul; like I've been out of the will of God. So today, I settled it, on my knees. I asked the Lord to show me... to make it plain as day..., if you weren't meant for me. And He did. I never again want to go through what I came through after I asked Him this. It was horrifying. Frightening. As soon as I told Him I'd break off with you, the Heavenly light broke through on my soul again and the clouds and gloom were removed.

"I'm sorry, Todd, if I've hurt you. But I must obey God. In fact, I choose to obey Him. Delight may be an even better word to use, for I find it most delightful to obey Him and His checks and commands."

"Thanks, Sue, I'm glad you leveled with me. You won't be sorry that you did. You'll always be very special in my book of memories. And Sue, when
you pray, call my name off, too, will you? It's awful to have a weakness which you can't overcome."

"I don't know what you're driving at, Todd, but I know this much, that if you'll yield yourself, body, soul, mind, strength and spirit, to the God I serve, He'll make you more than conqueror through Christ Jesus. You can't; He can! Never forget this."

"I wish I had your kind of faith, Sue . . ."

* * * * * *

My Dear Sue,
I see by the news in our missionary paper that God is using you greatly. Do you ever get lonely? This must sound like a foolish question to you. But I'm just wondering. After all, do you get lonely? I mean, do you have the time to get lonely? You stay endlessly busy--by the reports in the paper. What a rich, rewarding life you lead. And that baby you've adopted! (What will Derek think when he arrives? or have you had any way to get the news to him?--your mother told me about the baby.)

Whether Derek wants to assume the duty . . . duties... of parenthood or not when you get married upon his arrival there will be no choice of his; it will be thrust upon him. Ha, ha. If he makes as great a father as he is a doctor, you'll be proud of him. Honestly, Sue, the hospital staff here felt they couldn't do without him. Talk about empathy and compassion! That's Derek. And am I ever proud that he's my cousin. Not carnally, of course, as you know.

Sue, remember the day Jen and I teased you over how sad you looked, right after you told Todd you'd marry him? Frankly, I couldn't understand why you were sad. And then, when you broke the engagement, while I had implicit and unbounded confidence in you and your relationship with God, I couldn't understand why you did it nor what compelled you to do it. The big consolation I derived from the fact that you did it, was that the shine and the glow and the glory of God seemed far more manifest in your life than before you told him. This revealed to me that you had the favor and approval of God upon you by taking the action you did. And smart girl you were, too!

Did you know that Todd... yes, I said Todd... is a real alcoholic? This crushes my heart. Some who've seen him declare that we'd hardly recognize
him. He is rarely ever at home. (Poor Myrna and the children!) Bryan Arnsby (you remember him; he came to Bible School our last semester there) said that Todd sneaked out of the dorm on more than one occasion and went to a bar. Paul Norman knew it for every bit of a semester or more. Imagine! He said he kept praying and hoping that Todd would make a total and complete surrender to Christ; that's the only reason he didn't report him. Whenever he told Todd he'd better straighten up or he'd have to report him, Todd promised to change, going to the altar and asking Paul to pray with him.

Oh, Sue, God was so good to give you that cloud of darkness! It was His cloud of warning. And I am so happy and thankful that you didn't ignore it (you'd have backslidden if you had!) but that you did what you did. That took real courage. And while many of us (girls especially) couldn't understand why you did it, it has made me realize just how important it is that I say nothing and do nothing that would hinder another from obeying God's perfect will for his or her life. We are individual creatures and God deals with us accordingly. Not stereotype, nor a mass kind of dealing thing, but as individuals, according to our personality, our weaknesses, our makeup and our temperament. Oh, may God help me to be more careful than ever to never meddle nor interfere with another's choices and decisions when God is giving the orders and the directions. This is a serious thing; one no one should trifle with. (Do I sound like a preacher's wife? I'm really getting a lot of experience, if I do. Living with John is beautiful. Even our two-year-old Robert will agree to this! It's a veritable heaven on earth. All thanks be to God. And I love living in "the parsonage.")

Back to you, Sue. Jennifer and I both agree that it was your manner of careful living..., of heeding and being sensitive to the checks of the Spirit... that have helped us to find the happiness we've discovered with (my) John and her Philip. When you broke off with Todd, I began watching Chad more closely... was he really spiritual and Spirit-filled? Could I tolerate his peculiar habits? (Ugh!) etc., etc. When I had fully evaluated him (poor fellow), I came to the conclusion that he was not my kind. So I broke off as his "steady." And what a blessing! John and I were truly meant for each other.

Mother wrote and said we had a real revival in our home church. Not just another "warm over" type meeting of mediocrity but a genuine, Heaven-sent, prayed-down, Holy Ghost revival. I've just shouted and praised God for that super-wonderful news and John and I have banded together in oneness and a unity of faith in God that we won't give God rest until our church
experiences the same. ("If two of you shall agree..." Remember that soul-inspiring, challenging Verse in Matt. 18:19? Whenever I read it, or think of it even, I feel as though God was just holding the answer right before me at arm's length, saying, "Will you receive the answer to your prayer? Here it is... if two . . . shall agree." Well, we've "agreed" and we're "expecting." This is faith. Praise the Lord!)

I'm sorry my letter has become so lengthy again (I never know when or where to stop when I write to you, it seems) but I love "talking" to you this way and welcome each and every one of your letters with open hands and fondness of heart. You're a dear friend and sister in the Lord.

Always stay the same . . . yielded to Christ -- fully and unreservedly -- compassionate, kind, prayerful and full of love and praise.

I love you, and John and I call your name off to God every day.

Lovingly,
Denise

* * * * * *

It had been a tiring and exhausting day, but so extremely rewarding, too, Sue soliloquized, settling into a homemade, hand-woven reed chair and closing her eyes for a brief rest. Then she remembered the letter. She had been so busy at the mission compound that she hadn't been able to read Denise's letter. Shame on her! she exclaimed mentally, silently.

Reaching in her nurse's uniform pocket, she brought the letter out. Quickly, she opened it and read it through, not once, but twice. Todd, an alcoholic!

She shuddered and, despite the muggy heat outside, she felt cold chills steal stealthily up and down the length of her vertebra. Todd, an alcoholic! Now she saw clearly and plainly the reason for God's strong check on her relationship to Todd. Oh, how good, how gracious and all-wise He was!

Suddenly, dozens of questions were crowding her mind, wanting answers for which she had none: Why had Todd come to Hebron School of the Bible (in the first place) if he was living in sin? Had he hoped he'd derive
strength from the holy lives of his classmates and peers? Was he called by God to be a missionary, or did he choose his own vocation? And how could he have concealed his sinful habit from so many? Had he ever really been born again? Why had she consented to be his wife? Was it because he had told her he wanted to be a missionary, too? Had he told her of his missionary aspirations merely to get her?

Questions. Questions. Would they never end? Sue buried her face in her hands and sighed, realizing that with nine hundred to a thousand students in a college, it was easier to "hide" certain things than in a college of lesser students. That may have been the answer to how his sin had not been brought completely out in the open. Then, too, Todd was a loner; he wasn't one to mingle. And she had heard that he had a room of his own in the dorm--that he was paying extra to have his own room.

Little pieces of remembrance now came together like a puzzle. Then, like one casting dirty, soiled linens aside, she got to her feet and began to praise the Lord for His great and mighty deliverance in her life.

Almost, she had been tripped! Almost; but for God!

Another wave of praise washed over her and, lifting her face and hands heavenward, she reveled in the glory of His presence and in the peace-keeping knowledge of the fact that so long as she kept pace with the Holy Ghost and the will of God, she would never be led astray. Never!