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LEAN INTO THE WIND

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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A fine, thin mist encircled the hazel trees growing on the bank across from the parsonage kitchen window. Silvery spider webs shone like diamonds on the hedges below, and looking up towards the heavens, Margaret Eastwood saw a faint suspicion of blue sky emerge slowly through the haze.

On the road beyond the parsonage lawn, nutshells were cracked and scattered by cars passing down the lane, taking children to school. Birds and squirrels were having a feast, eating the crushed fragments of nutmeats.

The morning was one of those peaceful times of early autumn, and while she knew she should have been blissfully happy, nagging thoughts kept troubling the humble minister's wife. What was bothering her husband? she wondered, heaving a sigh while her tears fell into the hot sudsy water in the dish pan. Ted had been up and gone since four o'clock.

She checked the clock above the sink and then she saw him. With stooped shoulders and bowed head, Ted emerged from the study door inside the church and crossed the lawn to the parsonage.

Margaret turned the burner on to fry the bacon and eggs, at the same time popping a pan of freshly-made biscuits into the oven for baking. Then she hurried to the door to greet her husband.

"You had me worried for a minute," she said, reaching out to touch his hand.

Ted slumped into the rocking chair, which Margaret had insisted when they were newly-married, that every kitchen needed. Looking depressed, he turned to Margaret and with what sounded to her like a blend of sarcastic humor and despair, he remarked, "Well, another Sunday gone and the congregation had about as much fire and spark as a firecracker in a typhoon. When will something happen around here? I'm ready to quit."

Margaret gasped. She felt the color drain from her cheeks. "Quit? Why, Ted, you can't do that. What about your call? 'For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance' (Rom. 11:29). You'd lose your soul; you know you would. You often told me it was either preach or burn for you."

"I know, Margaret, I know," Ted said wearily, brushing a hand across his tired eyes. "If they'd just say something! Or laugh! Or criticize even! Everything is so humdrum! I'm sick of it!"

Margaret was plainly in a state of shock. This man, whom she had deemed so strong, so 'well-able' for every crisis and each situation, what was wrong with him? He had seemed like a superman with an invulnerable body,

a serene soul, and a sublime spirit having a private line to God. In fact, each time trouble had arisen or struck, he seemed the indomitable, electrified leader who was able to stave off wind, hail, and the terror by night!

"They love you, Ted," Margaret said simply, not knowing what else to say. "They love us; they really do: I can feel it."

"I wish they'd demonstrate a bit of love for God," Ted stated emphatically. "I hate a dead church!" It was an exclamation needing no further explanation.

What could she say? Margaret wondered. The people were dead and lifeless, it was true. But wasn't this why God had needed pastors; to stir and prod and probe around dying embers of the soul? Suddenly Margaret remembered something.

"Ted," she said gently, "let's lean into the wind. Please!"

He put up a hand of restraint, but Margaret said, "Years ago, while doing visitation work in my hometown, I encountered a terrible storm while walking. I leaned into the wind. It was blowing hard. The storm clouds churned and tumbled and turned above me. The tide rolled in and lapped furiously across the rocks. My refuge was waiting ahead. I had to get there. Debris, flying with the speed of the wind, was caught up and whirling through the air. I knew I had to lean into the wind in order to be able to walk. I dare not turn back, though it would have been easier; for in turning back, I'd have been going in the direction of all the elements around me.

"A sweet Voice whispered for me to go on, though all was against my progress. It took courage, Ted, but I leaned into the wind. The storm battered me from all sides and my body ached with the intense effort of fighting the wind. My lungs hurt and my heart pounded inside my chest. Then my refuge came into view; faintly at first, then clearer. I knew I must go on. There was no turning back now. Soon I reached my place of safety. Storms are given to strengthen us, dear. God sent you here; you told me He did. And now, in the midst of this spiritual drought, we shall 'lean into the wind' of this crisis and trust God for the spiritual awakening and revitalizing.

Ted sucked a deep breath into his lungs. "I know, Margaret dear; I know. All that you say is true. But I must see life~ Life among the members

and then, new life~ In these six weeks since our coming here, we haven't seen a single new convert. Why? What is wrong? I tell you, I'm troubled. The church is to reproduce. And a church with holy fire and zeal just naturally does reproduce. God planned it this way; His saints are to be soul winners. We seem to be stagnating. I can't stand a lifeless, burdenless church."

Placing a gentle hand on his arm, Margaret said softly, meaningfully, "Lean into the wind, dear. 'The battle is not yours, but God's' (2 Chron. 20:15). Together, we'll face it, on our knees. Like we have always done. This is not time for quitting nor running away. Prayer and fasting have always brought results, Ted."

Ted sighed. "O Margaret," he cried, "I don't know what I'd do without you. You are truly God's gift to me."

"Perhaps things will look different after you've had your breakfast, dear. Let's eat. We can always talk over hot biscuits and bacon and eggs . . ."

Long after breakfast was over and the dishes cleaned and put away, Margaret watched the door to the study at the church. Ted was praying, she was sure. Tears swam in her eyes. Never could she remember her husband being so discouraged. It troubled her: she knew discouragement was one of the devil's strongest and mightiest weapons for defeat used upon God's saints. A discouraged soul was vulnerable to other subtle attacks from the arch-enemy of man's soul, she realized.

Slipping into the bedroom, Margaret agonized before the Lord for both her husband's victory over discouragement and for a Holy Ghost revival in the church, and before the next Sunday's service began, the Heavens were opened and revival was on. Ted's discouragement fled like dust in a mighty downpour. The church was revived and refired.

"O Mother," Elizabeth Ann cried, leaning heavily on to her mother. "What will I do? What will I do? The doctor said Jo's chances of living are slim. We love her so, Wayne and I! I can't live without her! I don't want to live; if she dies, I want to die, too. Please, Mother, can't we pray again?"

Margaret Eastwood groaned inwardly. "Of course, we can pray again, Elizabeth. But this time, let's say 'Thy will, not mine be done, dear Father.' "

"Oh, I can't. I can't do it, Mother! God sent us Joanne. Why would He take her away so soon? I can't stand it! I can't! I want to run; to get away; make myself believe it's not real. That it isn't happening to Wayne and to me."

Margaret held her daughter at arm's length. "But it is happening to you, dear!" she exclaimed soberly. "You can't run, Elizabeth. Lean into the wind. With sincerity and utter resignation say, 'Thy will, oh God, not mine, be done.' Please dear, it's the only way to peace. He 'knoweth the best' and He 'doeth all things well.' "

Elizabeth faced her mother, her eyes red with weeping, her countenance forlorn and haggard looking from loss of sleep. Worry lines etched every part of her ordinarily sunny face. With trembling lips, she said resignedly, "All right, Mother, I'll say it: 'Thy will, not mine, dear God!' "

The fountain of her tears gushed forth in a mighty torrent. The prayer was sincere and from the heart, allowing God's healing balm to flow in and do its mighty work of 'binding up the broken heart.' Joanne's healing was swift and complete.

"Are you not feeling well, dear Margaret?" "Just tired, Ted. Why do you ask?"

"I've noticed you must rest a good deal more than you used to. How about me making a doctor's appointment for you?"

Brushing a wisp of stray hair off her temple and securing it in among the others on her head, Margaret laughed softly. "I don't suppose my dear husband has paused long enough from his busy schedule to reflect on the fact that life does catch up with one when they're in their sixties," she teased. "Just barely in, for you!" Ted countered with a smile. "And I still think a good physical checkup's not a bad idea."

"I'm just tired most of the time anymore, Ted. Don't worry about me--I'm God's--my times are in His hand. We've worked hard, you and I, and I guess it's just catching up with me, now that I'm sixty."

"But sixty isn't old, Margaret! Look at Ben and Helen Conant: Going like middle-agers at seventy-four! I still think you should see a doctor."

Margaret's ripply laughter, so much like when she was a young woman, set Ted's heart at ease. "It's not the years so much, Ted," she teased, "but the miles one puts on. We've gone at a pretty hard pace for almost forty years. But I have no regrets; nothing but praise to God. They've been good years; full years. ' '

"Years of blessings and triumphs," Ted added reminiscently as he left to make a hospital call.

The house was silent and still when he arrived home. No sound of activity at all inside. Margaret had gone to the store, no doubt, he thought, hastening into the bathroom to wash his hands before hanging his coat in the bedroom closet.

He was barely inside the bedroom door when he saw her. Lying on the floor, beside the bed, was Margaret, pale and still as death.

"Margaret! Margaret dear!" he called, dropping on his knees and gently lifting her head.

Her eyes fluttered faintly. "T . . . Ted!" she whispered, so feeble and low that it was almost indistinguishable.

"I'll call an ambulance," he stated quickly. "Get you to the hospital." He felt panic boil up inside him.

Her lips moved. "Too... late, Ted. Don't move me. Please!"

"Margaret! Margaret, my dear, what are you saying? No! No! No!"

He felt a gentle pressure on his arm. It was her hand. Like on so many other occasions, when he didn't know which way to turn nor what to do, the touch of her dear hand on his arm . . . so light, so gentle, so reassuring . . . gave him the courage he needed to go on.

She was speaking now. It was little more than a whisper. "I'm at the crossing, Ted." She struggled for breath. "The Saviour's come to take me across. Lean into the wind, dear; lean into the wind. I'm almost Home . . . Lean into the wi..."

"Margaret! Oh, Margaret. No! No!"

His tears flowed until there were no more to shed. Placing her head gently on a pillow, he got to his feet and headed for the phone. "Lean into the wind," he said as he dialed.