I sat there, stunned and speechless. Too surprised to emit a squeak even. I'm sure, thinking back now, that my mouth gaped wide open too; much like I had seen a baby robin's mouth do when one of the parent birds flew to the nest with a squiggly, wiggly brown earth-worm dangling from its bill. I felt almost dizzy with joy and elation. I could scarcely believe my ears: I was to go to the general convention (along with Sue and Walt and Bettina) to
represent our youth. Wait till I'd told Dad and Mom the news! Kate and Kurt, too. They'd all say, "Hey, that can't be; not you! Somewhere, someone made a mistake. A sure enough mistake!"

Now, I wasn't a bad fellow. Believe me, I wasn't. I did my chores in the house . . . kept my room almost half-decent (so long as Mom niggled me, that is) emptied the waste basket (especially when I couldn't get anymore in it), and kept the lawn moved, with Dad's weekly proddings. I got my school work done after a fashion and went to church as regularly as those doors swung open on Wednesday night and Sunday, a law enforced by Dad and practiced religiously by all five of us Lamberts, Mom, Dad, Kurt, Kate and me.

By Mom's constant pecking and prodding, I was always on time for church, too. Sometimes I had to tie my shoes in the car. The same with my necktie. But at least I was on time, which is more than some of my friends could say. Once inside the church pew, I became totally relaxed and absorbed. Quiet too. More often than not, I forgot I was inside the church. My mind faded away to other things -- things outside the church, like the smart new motor bike my friend Don just bought. Or that sharp, snazzy yellow convertible Jack got from a banker's son "for a song." Or Bill's vacation to Yellowstone and Glacier National Park. Or Peg's "try-out" for that new musical group at school.

I was tuned in and tuned out. Tuned in to bikes, cars, vacations, and even a good book I had read or was reading; tuned out . . . completely . . . to what the minister was saying and what was going on around me. I'd relax, and lose myself in my world of thinking, planning and wondering.

What was wrong with me? Nothing much . . . except in my backbone. That "main bone along the middle of the back in vertebrates; the most important part; chief support. Strength of character," as the dictionary defines the meaning of a back-bone. I just didn't seem to have a backbone! I was sort of a clinging ivy. A too good follower, when I should have been a standing, unyielding stalwart oak. Maybe I could even be classed as a chameleon, changing my colors to match my surroundings. When I was with the young people at church, I was a Christian . . . or so I thought. Around them, I was a "verbal" follower of Jesus Christ, actually wishing I could be as solidly-stable as some of them were. But just let me get with Kip and Woody and in no time at all their off-color jokes didn't even niggle me inside nor bother me. I just didn't seem to have any convictions of my own.
Like the time Woody met me in the cafeteria at school. Grabbing me by the arm, he pulled me into his circle of friends, saying with a positive voice, "You can count Kent in on it, too." Just like that! Without asking me even, or telling me about whatever it was I could be counted in on.

"Hey, what's all this about?" I demanded, hoping my voice carried a hint (at the least) of authority, an I'm-my-own-boss sort of air to it.

"Tomorrow night," Woody said, winking at me and giving me one of his wait-till-you-see looks, "Kip's picking up the girls, and we're all going out to Herman's place. His folks are away, you know. We'll have a blast. Everybody'll pitch in to buy the drinks and the eats. There'll be dining, wining, and dancing. How about it, Kent? You game?"

"I . . . I don't know," I stammered, wavered, wishing my backbone were like June's or Kendall's in our church.

"Oh, come on Kent, you know you're not spotless. You have a few marks against you already; might as well enjoy yourself by chalking up a couple more."

I felt my face get hot and flush by the truth of the words. Instead of standing firmly on my two feet and telling Woody and the gang why I couldn't do what they were asking, I felt myself squirming and searching for an answer. And, yes, you guessed it; I went to that sneaky little shindig and felt wretched and miserable inside for going. To my credit, if I do say so, I did not dance; mainly, because I knew this was wrong - wrong, and because I didn't know how to dance. Marlowe and Glenna and a couple others seemed almost "dying" to teach me. But I remained adamant. I didn't touch a drop of booze either. This, to my credit. But Woody and Kip didn't seem to mind that I turned out to be a "prohibitionist." So long as I didn't meddle in their affairs and try to tell them what was right and what was wrong, they couldn't have cared less what I did or didn't do.

I left early that night. The party was getting out of bounds and I didn't want to be around when the neighbors reported the noise and the cops came out to investigate. Neither Kip nor Woody noticed when I slipped away and left for home.
I had a restless night that night, thinking and remembering. Wishing, too. Wishing that I could be one whom God could count on and depend upon. But I wasn't; and He couldn't. When I was in church, I felt religious. When I was at home I felt lazy and sort of unconcerned. When I was with Kip and Woody and their gang, I felt daring, wanting to do some of the things they did but loathing others.

Sometimes I felt so torn apart by my myriad and varied personalities that I thought I'd "go bananas" (as my peers phrase it). I wanted to be one person, one total and complete person -- the person Jesus Christ wanted me to be. Being backboneless isn't fun, believe me! You're vulnerable to attack from both sides of the battle when you're a fence-straddler. I sometimes felt like a tumbleweed, blown and tossed about whichever way the wind blew me. If the church group said, "Kent, go with us to the rally," I went. Gladly and willingly. If Kip and Woody wiggled their worldly bait beneath my nose, I followed just as eagerly and obediently.

And suddenly I was tired of being the vacillator, of moving first one way and then another, of wavering in mind and opinion. I wanted something that would hold me steady and unmoveable and true to Christ I was sick and tired of being the devil's puppet when God had something so much better for me. What a fool I had been! And what a reproach I had brought upon the name of Christ, too.

I saw it all with such force and such clarity that I shut myself in my bedroom and, there on my knees, I fought it out with the enemy of my soul once and for all. Starting at the beginning . . . so I'd have a solid foundation upon which to build the super structure of my experience . . . I confessed my hypocrisy and sham to God, telling Him that I was a liar and never really had been born again. (A thing He already knew, but which needed confessing in order to get the victory). I told Him that all I had ever had was a shallow head knowledge with no salvation, but that I meant to stay on my knees until I knew without any shadow of doubt, that every last committed sin of all eighteen years of my life were forgiven and washed in His Blood.

I couldn't tell you how long I prayed; I wasn't thinking in terms of hours and minutes and seconds but in terms of eternity and forever. One thing I know; I was made new in Christ. In an instant of time I passed from death unto life. I felt fight and happy and so free that I almost wondered if, perhaps,
I could fly. The horrible weight that I had carried for so long was lifted off my heart and vanished like a vapor or a bursting bubble.

Now I knew I was ready for the superstructure of purity of heart: sanctification, holiness, pentecost. Even the terms given to this wonderful experience of having the heart cleansed from every trace of inbred sin made my soul happy and blest as I again went to God on my knees for this second definite work of grace subsequent to regeneration.

The devil had his forces from hell stationed inside that bedroom. But God had His army! As I travailed in prayer, confessing each and every hideous, ugly, evil carnal trait as the Holy Spirit revealed them to me, I felt strength coming from Heaven to keep pushing on until the final death blow was dealt to the "old man" . . . the carnal nature. Every part of me had to be crucified! Agag had to die, hewed to pieces.

On and on I wrestled, I was determined not to get off my knees nor to leave my room until Pentecostal fire had fallen upon my heart and "consumed the sacrifice" and I knew I was dead to self and the old self-life. And He came. Oh, how He came! The fire fell; the glory rolled . . . billows and billows of glory! And I was filled to overflowing with divine love.

Kip and Woody? Oh, they don't ask me anymore. They act like they're scared of me since I've been saved and sanctified wholly and have passed from vacillation to victory in Christ. Total and complete victory in Christ. Each day I'm learning a fuller, deeper meaning of Micah 6:8 -- "He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

That "justly" refers to my actions toward others: meaning, to be honest, considerate, respectful and obedient, especially to those over me . . . my parents, teachers, police, etc. I actually find delight in fulfilling this now. And do my parents and teachers ever see the difference in me!

It's even easy now to "love mercy" . . . to be thoughtful and compassionate toward others. (Does Kate ever appreciate me since this blessed change -- transformation took place)! This real love is not sloppy, sentimental mush and gush, but it is that something inside me which very naturally and automatically treats each and every person I know with kindness and thoughtfulness and sincere Christian love.
My greatest delight, I guess, is in this "walk humbly with thy God" part. So long as I'm walking (humbly with my God), I'm making progress. Spiritual progress. Where? On the upward road toward God and Heaven. This close, constant walk with Jesus Christ keeps me living consistent day by day. Now I possess an eager willingness to learn and to obey. I want to do nothing . . . nothing . . . that will interrupt my walk with God. And please believe me when I say that I'm the happiest, most fulfilled fellow in the world. I found everything I need in Christ. You can, too.