Brandon John Hill swung his too-many-years-old Volkswagen into a parking space at the fast-foods restaurant and stepped gingerly out, a fervent prayer in his heart. He had to find a part-time job -- that's all there was to it.

"Hi, Bran," a voice called from the dumpster at the back of the lot. "Fancy seeing you here!" And Chip Landry hurried toward Brandon, swinging
an empty garbage can on his hand and adjusting the chain store's trademark hat at just the right angle on his chestnut-brown hair. "You want a hamburger?" Chip asked, falling in step beside Brandon. "If you do, I want the honor of serving you. After I scrub my hands, that is." And Chip laughed in his usual pleasant manner.

Brandon smiled at Chip, whose laughter and enthusiasm was always contagious and seemed almost effervescent.

"No kidding, Brandon, I want to serve you. I know how to make a super-super burger. And their pork tenderloins! Um-m! No words can describe how delectably-delightfully-delicious they are. How about a tenderloin? It would give me great pleasure to serve the valedictorian of our class what I consider high class sandwich eating."

Brandon slapped Chip lightly on his shoulder. "Valedictorian or not, I'm right down on your level, Chip. Yours, and everybody else's, too. There are no 'big I's' nor 'little you's' when one loves the Lord. Calvary and Calvary's cross puts us all on the same plane. Perhaps I should have said Calvary's Christ, for it was the Person on the cross and not the cross itself."

"You can say that again, Brandon. Now, how about a sandwich and some of our yummy, golden-brown french fries? And say, our french-fried cauliflower just can't be matched anywhere. Sprinkle a dash of grated Parmesan over it and you have eating fit for royalty."

"You should be paid for promotion, Chip. Talk about salesmanship! You've got it! I believe you could almost -- if not altogether -- persuade a man who's stomach was full that he was hungry. You're sold on the foods they sell here, it's obvious."

"I guess that's because I know our products, Brandon. We were always told that before one can be a successful salesman, he must personally be sold on the product he's promoting and trying to sell. So, yes, I guess I'm really sold on this company. Their sandwiches are great, and now that they put a salad bar in, we've almost doubled our business. Mr. Handford's a great guy to work for, too."

"That's why I've come, Chip -- to try to get a part-time job till I graduate. I'll be looking for full-time work after graduation, God willing. I told my folks I'd try to
work for a year before going to Bible school. This way, I should have something saved toward that first semester's expenses, at least. With God's help, that is."

Chip's brow furrowed in concentration. Then a frown crossed his face. "I can tell you before you go in Brandon, that unless you package up your old-fashioned ideas and leave them somewhere outside this door, you're not going to get a job. Not even a part-time job. Mr. Handford's big day is on Sunday and, as I recall, you won't work on Sunday."

"That's right, Chip. God's Word hasn't changed. Not ever. We are told 'Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work:' I would be breaking the law of God if I failed to abide by the injunction. And no man can escape the judgments of God if he violates His holy laws and commandments."

"Then you'd just better not go in and apply. You won't get hired. Believe me, I know; I tried it. Mr. Handford told me I had only two choices: either to work for him, under his standards, or not to work at all. I needed the job; so I decided my 'ox' was 'in the ditch' and I got the job. And, like I said a while ago, Mr. Handford's a great guy to work for."

Brandon studied Chip thoughtfully for a while, then he said, "You mean you're working on Sunday?" Incredulity registered in his honest, blue-gray eyes.

"Well, like I said, I needed work, and my 'ox' was 'in the ditch'. . ." Chip's sentence trailed. His face flushed red.

"Not so, Chip. But that's your business to settle with God. The Sabbath was made for rest. God never had this kind of thing in mind when He said that about the ox being in a ditch." Brandon's eyes were moist with tears when he finished speaking. He was disappointed in Chip. Although Chip didn't go to the same church as he, there had been a beautiful and radical change in his best friend when he was converted. And now this!

"Don't look so sad, Bran! I can't help it that things turned out this way. You're disappointed in me; I can tell by the look on your face and the pain in your eyes."
"I want only God's best for you, Chip, and this isn't God's best. The Bible says it's 'the little foxes' (seeming little things) 'that spoil the vines.' Nothing is 'little,' nor insignificant, when God condemns it and says, 'Thou shalt not,' or 'Thou shalt,' as the case may be. You have been growing spiritually; don't do anything to thwart and stunt this growth. I'm sure your pastor doesn't approve . . ."

"No. No, he doesn't. He told me, basically, what you just said. But I've got to earn money, and part-time jobs aren't easy to come by in our small community."

"Maybe not; but God knows this, and He is able to direct us to the right place at the right time. He said 'They that honor Me, I will honor.' Well, I'll see you later, God willing. Like you said, there's no need filling out an application even -- not if Mr. Handford expects Sunday work out of me. Take care, Chip."

"Uh . . . Brandon, if you find a job minus the Sunday work, and if they need another helper, will you let me know? I haven't felt right about this at all. And . . . and my prayers seem to go no higher than the ceiling in my bedroom."

"You can count on me, Chip. I'll do everything I can to get you out of here. I've prayed too much and worked too hard toward seeing you born again to allow the devil to draw you back."

"Thanks, Brandon. I wish I could come with you right now, but I can't; I'm to be working on the grill in ten minutes and, believe me, at this hour, we fry more hamburgers than I care to remember. A terrific business. But Mr. Handford is business through and through. And he has an eagle eye for only the best meats. That about sells his products."

Brandon bowed his head over the steering wheel of the faded-yellow VW and prayed after he left Chip. The Lord knew how to direct and where.

He smiled as he drove through Chip's "small community." Chip had moved into their small city of fifteen-plus thousand two years earlier with his family. They had come from a city with three hundred fifty-eight thousand. So he was sure that to Chip fifteen thousand seemed like a small community in comparison. For himself, he preferred the smaller size.
He drove along the outer drive of their city, trying to avoid as much as possible the downtown area when a strong impression came for him to turn down the main street. He whipped the little VW down a side street, took it until he saw Main Street cross the one he was on, then swung down Main Street into the heart of the town, asking God to direct him each block of the way.

For a reason he couldn't explain at the precise moment, he swung the small car into a parking space along the curb in front of Maynard's Hardware. The store and store front was as old as the downtown area itself, his father had once told the family during a Saturday shopping trip to the still thriving big Farmer's Market housed nearby. But so were nearly all the downtown stores, Brandon knew.

He opened the door and walked inside. Mr. Maynard, white-haired and stooped, looked over his drooping spectacles and smiled his usual, warm greeting in his customary way. "Well, well, if it isn't Brandon John Hill!" he exclaimed cordially. "What can I do for you?" he asked. "Your father needing more light fixtures or plumbing fixtures? How's he doing, helping on old Clayton's house?"

Brandon's mouth opened. "I . . . I guess I didn't know he was the one doing the work on Mr. Clayton's house," he confessed honestly.

"No. No, I guess you wouldn't know. He blows no trumpets when he does his 'alms.' Bless him! Well now, what is it you need?"

Brandon eased half of his body onto the wide, sturdy, much-used oak countertop. "I'm needing part-time work, Mr. Maynard, and why I've come here I can't explain. I only know that I've asked the Lord to direct me and I felt a compelling something inside that I should drive down Main Street. And here I am. Do you know if they're needing help at the Farmer's Market? Or maybe one of the smaller shops here on Main Street? With the Market closed today, I'll have to wait till the days they're open to contact Mr. Holliger."

"Well now, if this isn't something! Yes, if this isn't something! " Mr. Maynard exclaimed, repeating himself. "It must be the miracle Amanda told me God was going to do for us!"
"You're a Christian, Mr. Maynard? You know the Lord Jesus?" Brandon asked joyously.

'Well, I can't say that I am, nor that I do, Brandon. But Amanda sure does. She's real. And one of these days, I'm going to do something about this. Now, back to Amanda's miracle-answer. No one knows that I've been needing help. Amanda said, 'Charlie, don't advertise in the paper. Let's put this need in God's hands. That way, we'll know that He has sent you His man.' And now, here you are, Brandon John Hill. Why, I could walk away and trust you with everything in here. When can you begin to work?"

"Right away, Mr. Maynard. I'll have to learn your business and . . ."

"No problem. No problem at all. I'll train you and teach you by myself. Amanda and I had hoped our only child would take the store over, but he's not interested. Got in with electrical engineering and likes that big money too well. Let's see, you'll soon be graduating."

"The Lord willing, that's right. I will."

"Good. Good!" the old gentleman exclaimed. "You'll be on full-time then, Brandon. Summer's a busy, busy time in here. Winter's not bad, either. Well, come with me; I'll begin the first teaching lesson by acquainting you with what we sell and handle. Then I'll take a break and call home to Amanda and tell her the miracle's happened and she can cease her praying for help and begin to thank the Lord. And know what, Brandon? I'm going to make her the happiest woman in all Pines City by getting right with God. I'm a believer. A real believer!"

"Why not get saved now, Mr. Maynard? Jesus can forgive your sins right now. He said He'd do it if you'd confess those sins and forsake them."

"Well, I'll do it! That'll sure make Amanda happy. I've been straightening up crooked backpaths for a long time, Brandon, so there's none of that left to be done. Now, come with me into the back room and pray for me while I confess that I'm a wicked sinner on his road to hell -- a wicked sinner for rejecting Christ all these many, many years, but wanting mercy and pardon now more than anything else in this world . . ."

Brandon followed the sobbing man. His soul did flip flops of holy joy.