Joel shuffled mechanically through the stack of papers on his desk, his mind in a turmoil of confused thoughts as he stared through the big window with its tinted glass to the towering buildings directly in front of his view. A tear slid unasked-for and unceremoniously out of the corner of his eye. So near to retirement, he thought -- so very near.
He ran his hand over the familiar desk, its very presence and sight almost as comforting and as consoling as a friend. It would seem strange not to be seated behind the enormous, sturdy, solid oak desk -- especially since he had done so every weekday for nearly twenty-three years.

He ran trembling fingers through his still thick but slightly graying hair and sighed heavily. Surely -- surely good must come from this . . . this nightmare! "Let go," Hiram Taylor had termed it when he had called Joel into his office. He wasn't fired, just "let go." Well, at least Hiram's term didn't sound as harsh nor as threatening as "fired" did, though each meant the same.

Joel shuffled through the papers, trying to sort out all unnecessary ones and, at the same time, recalling with all too painful and vivid memories the news that eventually all work by Lamon in the Towers would be phased out. How long the Corporation would function as a Corporation was not clear. A few at a time, the older employees were being "let go."

It was frightening in a sense. Especially when all one's life one had worked exclusively for Lamon in the Towers, like Joel and Holten Kemp and Vick Sodders and Bud Mull and others had.

Tossing the last scrap of waste paper into the already bulging wastebasket and dusting the top of the now cleared desk with a chemically treated cloth, Joel stood at a distance and gave the familiar room a long, lingering last look; then, snapping the catch shut on his briefcase and holding his shoulders erect, he turned and walked quickly toward the elevator.

Once behind the wheel of the car, he sighed with relief. It was like a very beautiful and meaningful chapter of his life had come to a sudden and abrupt close. But this was not the end, he soliloquized. It was merely the beginning. The beginning of something new and different, though as yet he knew not what.

The impact of it all settled in upon Joel as he prepared a hasty supper and sat down to the table to eat. Oh, how he missed Julie! Her sudden passing had left him with an ache in his heart and a void and emptiness in the home beyond any describing. Julie would have had just the right words for him if she were living, he thought. Very definitely, she would have
informed him that "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

He sighed heavily. Tears slid down his cheeks. Julie had died so young. So very young. To Joel, it seemed that her life had ended just when it was in its prime -like a lovely flower when it has opened and its beauty and fragrance has just begun to be seen and felt.

"Oh, my darling! My darling!" he cried aloud into his hands. "I miss you so! Why...?"

From on her death-bed, her voice came to him even now: "Don't trouble God with questions, Joel dear," she had requested in a weak and dying voice. He knows the why's and the wherefore's. Thank Him for the 36 wonderful years we've had together and then remember that He's all-wise. His wisdom is past finding out and His ways are perfect. He's our ever-present Rock."

Brushing the tears away, Joel began praising the Lord for all His benefits and for His innumerable blessings. It was his wonder-working antidote to the "why's" that popped up occasionally somewhere inside his brain -- like now. Next he dropped on his knees and with upraised arms and hands he entrusted his predicament and seeming dilemma into God's care. Like Julie had said, no matter how bitter the circumstances nor how dark and severe the trial, God stood by. An ever-present Rock!

He had just put the last washed and dried dish in the cupboard when the telephone rang noisily. Its loud jangling gave him a momentary start. Picking the receiver up he recognized the impatient voice of Theodore Lamon on the other end of the line.

"Astor!" He bellowed Joel's last name in typical Lamon fashion.

"None other," Joel replied quickly, wondering why the head of Lamon in the Towers would be calling and what he wanted.

"Sorry about Taylor's slip up," he began.

Joel swallowed. His pulse raced. Slip up! Perhaps he wasn't "let go" after all. Maybe Hiram had made a mistake. Maybe...
"The work is indeed being phased out here, as you know. However, it will be resumed, in fuller operation, abroad, at far less cost to us. I offer you two choices. Joel's heart raced fiercely and pounded madly.

"I'd like to see you move with the company, Astor. You're an invaluable man to the corporation, having been with it from its beginning. Your salary would be substantially increased and all expenses cared for. . . ."

Joel's heart beat like a giant hammer inside his chest now. The feeling of being needed was stimulating and wonderful.

"Your other alternative . . . Astor, are you still there?" Theodore Lamon shouted.

"Still here and listening," Joel answered calmly in spite of his hammering heart.

"Speak up then!" was the impatient rejoinder. "I was listening, Mr. Lamon."

"Well, as I was saying, your other alternative is retirement. And, since you'll soon be eligible for these benefits, I'd see that you got everything that was coming to you. The choice is yours. Personally -- and I repeat -- I'd like to see you move abroad with the Corporation. You'd be promoted, of course. . . ."

"I'd like time to pray about it, please. . . ."

"Fine, fine. Just so you let me know your decision no later than the 20th of this month -- that will give you 10 days."

"Thank you, Mr. Lamon, you'll have my answer before the deadline, Lord willing."

Joel put the receiver in place and leaned against the wall. He felt weak and trembly from excitement. The sudden turn of events was almost more than he could take. God was good! Yes, so very good. His ever-present Rock had caused the tide of disturbing events and frightening happenings to do an
about face and bring good tidings his way. Walking quickly to the back porch, a voice reached his ears; it was Milton Sealey.

"Do you suppose you'd have time to repair my porch, Joel? My wife nearly fell on that upraised board," he said. "And Curtis Brown's house needs a paint job. I told him you may be able to do it for him, now that Lamon's closing shop."

Joel looked at the aging Milton Sealey and in that instant he had his answer for Theodore Lamon: he would take his retirement and not move abroad with the Corporation. His roots were down too deeply to be pulled up so suddenly and to be transplanted in another soil alien to his upbringing. What about church?

Would he have found one that was spiritual and old-fashioned should he have moved? One that preached and taught the blessedness of entire sanctification and purity of heart?

"What about it, Joel? Think you'd like doing odds and ends jobs? You'd be kept pretty busy. . . ."

"I'll do it, Milt, and at scarcely any cost to you and the others in this community."

"Thanks, Joel. I told Hilda I was sure you'd do it. Never did see anybody handier with carpenter tools than you. Julie always said you were the best carpenter in the city. . . ."

Joel watched until Milt disappeared inside his house -- to give Hilda the good news, he was sure -- then he hurried out to his own garage where he kept his carpenter tools, a satisfied smile creasing the corners of his mouth. What better way to begin retirement, he mused silently, than to help one's neighbors, especially since most of those neighbors were elderly and were subsisting on a meager pension!

Joel began humming softly. He had found the corner in which God wanted him to work; he would brighten that corner by lifting the load and easing the burden for those in more dire circumstances than he. And who could tell, his carpenter tools and paint brush may be just the instruments
needed (to be used of God) in winning Curtis Brown to the Lord! Yes, who
could tell!

   With a happy note of excitement and holy joy washing over his soul, Joel readied his tools and the paint brushes for working.