

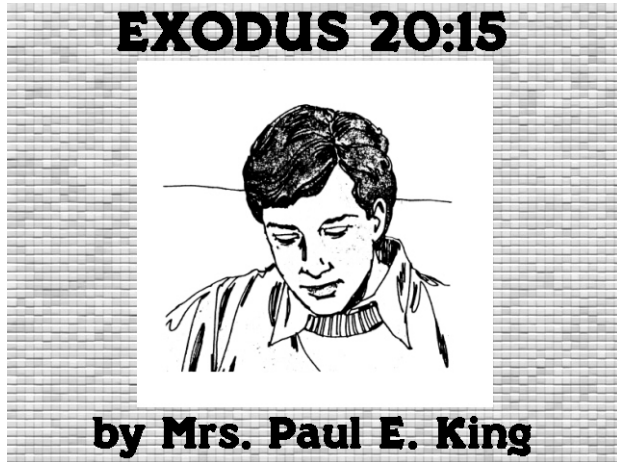
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EXODUS 20:15
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Ryan's mind was in a whirl of thoughts as he pedaled his bicycle down the road toward Fallwell's Grocery, where he was working full time since school was out for the summer. Carlson and Hadley and Bryan had made fun of him and his very old bicycle, stating that if he were smart like they were, he wouldn't need to work and slave away in an old grocery store. And he would have a shiny-bright, brand new ten speed, too.

He glanced down at the spinning wheel before him and offered a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God for the tires on his bicycle. They were new, and they were paid for. In full. This was something to be thankful for.

His full-time work was allowing him to get not only the things he needed, but things for his wonderful parents, as well. And, always, he paid for the things in cash: no credit. He was trying to establish a pattern-habit for his life; one which he would adhere to strictly for all his later years, with God's help. He may have to go the credit route for buying a car, he knew, or something big like a house, when that time came, but for the other things, he would do his best to pay cash or he would do without until such a time when he would have the cash to buy what he needed.

The warm breeze ruffled Ryan's hair and cooled his perspiring face. Bicycling had its own rewards and compensation, he mused as he sped ahead. The exercise was A-1 for fitness and the added benefits were hearing bird songs and feeling the gentle breezes. He enjoyed both immensely. What's more, he appreciated each with profound appreciation, even though Carlson and Bryan and Hadley made fun of him.

Ryan's thoughts flitted to what Carlson had told him as he pulled out of Fallwell's parking lot the night before: "If you'd wise up, you dupe, you wouldn't have to slave away like you do."

"Yeah," Hadley added. "There's more than one way to get what you want."

"He means, without working," Bryan said, wearing a knowing smile on his face.

"It's a noble thing to work," Ryan had countered in his soft, well-modulated tone of voice. "I'm thankful I can work. Some people are so incapacitated they can't work. God has been good to me; I'm physically able to work. And, too, the Bible says, in essence, that if a man is too lazy to work he shall not eat."

That had done it; the trio laughed uproariously. They told him he was a sure-enough dupe who believed like people believed in the long-ago past and that if he wanted to continue being a fool, that was his business.

"We work an easier way," one of them had added, and the other two had nearly screamed with laughter, adding, "And just look at all the new things we always have."

Ryan felt a wave of nausea wash over him as he recalled the scenario now. They had actually made fun of him for working. Well, little matter. He was following God's pattern for him as a young man and he was working: a healthy, wholesome, and right thing to do. Furthermore, he was happy doing his work. He felt fulfilled, and it gave him a feeling of worth and worthwhileness.

He pulled into Fallwell's parking lot and parked the bicycle in its customary parking space near the store and, whistling, he hurried into the store. He liked the familiarity of the place -- Mr. Fallwell's pleasantly plump, ever-smiling face and his soft-spoken, "Good morning, Ryan. I see you're ten minutes early again this morning. I like that, my boy. Yes, I like that!" And Mrs. Bidding's, "There's my favorite young man! How's the world treating you, Ryan?"

Then there was old Frank Baker, the handyman, as everyone tagged him. It seemed Frank was into everything at the store. Wherever he was needed most, Frank was there. Sometimes, Ryan thought the slender, very agile old man was everywhere at once. Frank lived grocery business. He talked grocery business. He knew grocery business. Like an encyclopedia, it seemed. And, old though he was now, Frank could work circles around some of the younger men in the store.

Mr. Fallwell considered him his most valuable man. No matter what crisis arose in the store, Frank knew how to handle it. And right well he should; he had been in the grocery business all the years of his life. Not until his two sons insisted that their father sell his chain of privately-owned stores did the old gentleman settle down to a more sedentary way of life. And then not long: he contacted his old friend, Jacob Fallwell, and asked if he would give him something to do, declaring that he'd go "stark crazy just doing nothing." And he'd been working at Fallwell's ever since, happy as a lark on the wing, as he bustled through the store, helping out here, lending a hand there -- all the while humming or singing in a kind of muffled, off-key undertone.

Ryan's heart lifted in thanksgiving and praise to God for the work He had given to him. He could not have given a better place for him to work. But God was like that: always giving only what was best for one if and when they left the choice with God. Here, too, many of his peers thought him extremely different: he, a young man, serving God and living only for Him! But he had

taken the way by choice. Willingly, too. And he was completely satisfied. Being a follower of the lowly and meek Christ was a life filled with peace and contentment, joy and soul rest.

The familiar sights and sounds and smells greeted him as he punched in for work, and a tremendous sense of being where God wanted him overwhelmed him. Tears sprang to his eyes and danced merrily down his ruddy cheeks. His soul was blest and happy. Some would have told him that he was a sissy for crying. He knew better, however: even Jesus cried. And He was no sissy. He was every inch a Man; human, but oh, so Divine.

Mr. Fallwell came back to where Ryan was working and slapping a friendly hand down upon his broad wide shoulder, he said, "I need you in the dairy department today. Shawn's not coming in. Seems his condition is worsening. His mother called earlier and told me. A good boy, Shawn, and not afraid of work. I wish I could do something to help him."

"We can pray, Mr. Fallwell. More things happen through prayer than through any other means."

Tears sprang to the store owner's eyes. "I know. I know, Ryan. Thanks for reminding me. Since you began working here I rebuilt my prayer altar. I'm afraid I had allowed it to get into a rather sorry state of ruin, I must confess. Then God sent you along and, now, thanks be to God, it is in wonderful 'working' order again. Yes, we can pray. And we will!"

Ryan hurried over to the dairy department just as Mr. Baker bustled through the doors, smiling and greeting everyone in his usual pleasant and cheerful manner. He was a real asset to Fallwell's Grocery, the young man thought, smiling. Mr. Fallwell chose his help carefully. Good business was contingent, in part, upon one's store help. Courtesy, kindness, and cheerfulness were absolute musts, where Mr. Fallwell was concerned.

The morning passed swiftly by in a bustle of business as customers with loaded grocery carts checked out through the check-out counters. The busy cash registers bespoke of a good day for Fallwell's Grocery. Ryan was always glad for this.

The twelve o'clock news was broadcast through the store and Ryan, busy at his work, paid little attention to what was being spoken. It was the local news that captured his attention.

"Three young men were arrested for shoplifting," the announcer was saying, "in Grady's Department Store. Found inside the jacket of Carlson Mann and Bryan Derry, was a sport shirt and some fishing lures. A third boy, Hadley Fisher, had taken an expensive pocket knife, a box of Bests Chocolates, and a sweater. The three are being held in. . . ."

Ryan could scarcely believe what he was hearing. Sudden illumination dawned upon him. "There's more than one way to get what you want," Hadley had remarked. "He means without working," Bryan had declared. Their words played back to him.

Now he understood. Now he knew. It gave him a sick feeling deep in the pit of his stomach. The three had no doubt been shoplifting for years and this had been their method of getting all those new things. What a way to get them! he thought, with a heavy heart. And they had thought they were getting away with it; that no one knew or saw or suspected!

Ryan lifted his heart in prayer to God for the three young men. Sin always found one out. Always! Without exception!

He worked industriously. It gave him a good feeling; a feeling of real manliness and uprightness. He would go to see the trio as soon as he could. They might make fun of him and not want to see him, but he would do his Christian duty and leave the rest with God.

He hurried back to the stock room for more milk, cheese, and butter, thankful that each earthly thing he possessed was rightfully and honestly earned and obtained.