

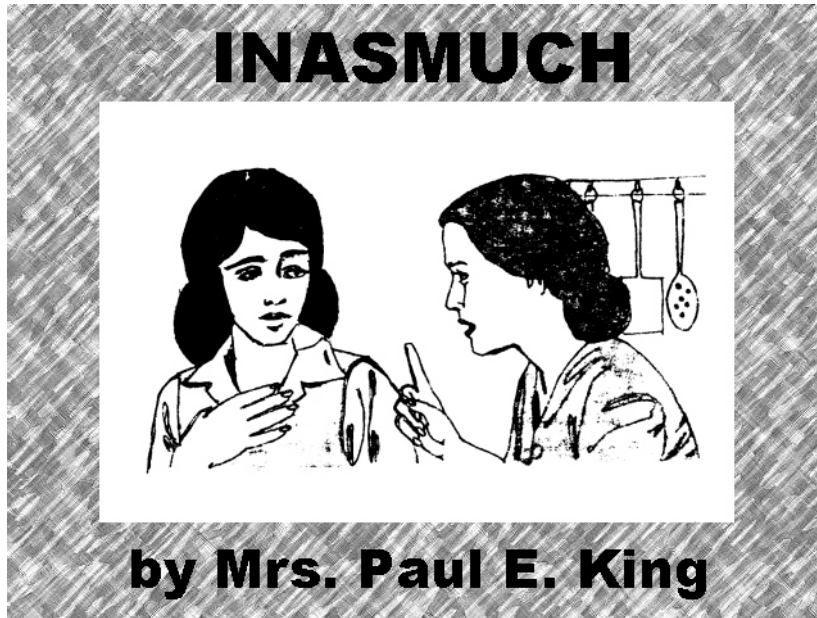
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Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

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The Sunday School Beacon
August 14, 1988



INASMUCH
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Jerri felt like locking herself in her bedroom. Picnics! She hated them. Well, almost hated them. Oh, maybe not exactly the picnic for itself but everything that accompanied the picnic. Not everybody's picnic, but only her mother's and father's. Lately, that is.

She threw herself across the bed in her room and let the tears fall at random. Why did her dear mother always invite Tiffany? Why? Couldn't they have a picnic, just for one time, without having Tiffany and Carlson and Mittie there? Carlson and Mittie weren't so bad, but Tiffany. . . .

She buried her face in the softness of the pretty bedspread. Her mother had made the spread just for her. She, Jerri, had picked out the material that she wanted, and with Mother's skill and expertise in sewing, the spread had become a reality. It looked exactly like the one she had seen in the catalog, only, its price-cost was far less expensive than the one pictured in the catalog.

She jumped up off the bed and straightened the spread, smoothing it out carefully. She should be ashamed of herself, she realized, thinking such horrible thoughts. But for once, couldn't just their family go on this picnic? Why did her parents always . . . and she meant always . . . feel it was their duty and obligation to take others along? Like Carlson, Mittie, and Tiffany? Tiffany especially?

There it was again, the horribly troubling, peace-disturbing thought! Oh, if only she could thrust it out of her mind and act like it didn't matter at all. But she couldn't. She was not a hypocrite. Neither a pretender that a thing wasn't real and didn't exist when it was real and did exist.

"Please, dear Heavenly Father," she implored, looking heavenward, "help me! I need to gain the victory over this thing. Help me, again I ask. I love Tiffany and Mittie and Carlson. I really do. It's just that. . . ."

"Jerri, I need your help." Her mother's voice interrupted her praying.

Obedient since childhood, Jerri hurried from the bedroom down the hallway and into the kitchen to help her mother.

"Finish preparing the potato salad, honey," Mrs. Brown said, smiling at Jerri and wiping perspiration from her forehead. "You make such delicious potato salad. And you will recall how very much Tiffany loves your potato salad. Put an extra 'dose' of love into it again, dear. Love seems to shine through in everything you do. And to Tiffany, you are love. In action, and every way. She's watching you, Jerri. And she's beginning to see the real

meaning of 'God is love.' She is seeing God's love as it is displayed in you and through you."

Tears swam in Jerri's hazel eyes. "Oh, Mother!" she cried, "I feel awful. Tiffany has been a real trial to me. A . . . a burden."

Mrs. Brown spun around and looked at her lovely daughter. "Jerri!" she exclaimed, shocked. "What do you mean? What made you say this?"

The tears fairly chased each other down Jerri's face now. "I . . . I was just praying about Tiffany, Mother. I want to be completely victorious over her."

"Victorious over her! What do you mean? I thought you loved Tiffany and Mittie and Carlson for their 'differences.'"

"I do. And . . . and I did, Mother. It . . . it's just that I'm always tied down when Tiffany's around. Always! It is I who must help her and entertain her. Our picnics are becoming unlooked-forward-to affairs for me anymore. I know I shouldn't feel this way. That's why I was praying. Always, the Lord has helped me to gain the victory over each and every other unliked and distasteful situation and circumstance, and I know He's going to either change my attitude or help me to surmount my obstacle. Or maybe He'll do both for me. He is able, I know."

Mrs. Brown stood in shocked silence for a while. Then, placing a gentle hand on her daughter's shoulder, she said, "I'm sorry, Jerri. I never realized that you felt this way. I guess your father and I thought that each of you children enjoyed the company of these handicapped young people. At least you have brought much happiness and sunshine into their otherwise dull and drab lives by giving of yourselves so unselfishly and willingly. And we really do appreciate this."

Jerri felt like crying. "I'm truly sorry, Mother," she declared humbly. "Is it selfish of me to feel this way? I am trying to sort out my feelings: The whys of how I feel, I mean. If I know my heart, I know I'm saved and sanctified wholly. So, if this is true, I can rule out selfishness, for selfishness is definitely a trait of carnality. Right?"

"Yes, you are right, dear. But I'm beginning to wonder if, perhaps, you haven't given me something to think about. . . ."

"In what way, Mother dear?"

"That perhaps your father and I need to plan somethings that are strictly for the family only. It isn't quite fair to you children, now that I think about it, to always have others in on what should be a family outing. And what you just said is true: Always, you are tied down with Tiffany. You never get to do the things normal teenagers do at a picnic. I'm sorry, Jerri; your father and I should have been more considerate of you. I'll mention this to your dad and we'll see about having some functions for only our family."

"I wouldn't want us to neglect the others, Mother," Jerri said quickly. "They need the sunshine and the happiness which we can help to put into their lives. It's just that I . . . I . . ."

"I know what you mean, honey," Mrs. Brown declared sweetly. "You need not try to explain anything. It was extremely thoughtless of your father and me not to think of this ourselves. Now, finish the salad, then frost the cupcakes, please. The chicken's finished and ready for packing."

The drive along the shore was delightful. Jerri, seeming to see Tiffany through new eyes, was especially solicitous and kind to her.

Tiffany, sitting slumped over in the car seat, the seat belt supporting in a small way her deformed body, smiled continuously at Jerri. Once, she "crawled" her crippled hand over and touched Jerri's hand lightly, saying, as she did so, "You are so good to me, Jerri, and I love you. This is the favorite time of all my days; picnicking with you and your family. I always feel happy when I'm with all of you. My family seems to have forgotten that I exist. But the hurt isn't nearly so bad since your folks began taking me away with you all. And . . . and Jerri, I've been praying. Jesus saved me. Thanks for being His witness."

Jerri swallowed the lump that came into her throat. "Th . . . thanks, Tiffany," she said softly. "Th . . . that's wonderful!"

"I'm sure I've been a real burden on you at times, Jerri. But I really do appreciate all the time you take out for me; to help me and to teach me things. Thanks, Jerri. I'm practicing the things you've taught me."

"So are we!" Mittie and Carlson exclaimed, listening in on Tiffany's conversation.

"If Jim hadn't helped me," Carlson was saying, "I'd still not know how to swim. But I do know how now. Jim's taken me down to the pond, just the two of us, and he has spent hours in showing me how to use my almost-useless arms. Because of him, I can swim. And, as an added bonus and compensation, I'm able to use the arms to do other things, too. Talk about patience; Jim Brown's got it sticking out his ears! He's every bit as patient as his sister Jerri."

"That's because the Browns are very special people!" Mittie declared. "Who has ever cared for us, besides them?"

"No one," came Carlson's and Tiffany's reply.

Jerri flushed with shame and humiliation. She was sure that Jim felt as unworthy of their praise as she did.

Mr. Brown left the shoreline and began climbing toward the shady knoll overlooking the green-blue waters. The car purred along smoothly. Everybody seemed to enjoy this part of the scenery extremely much and expressed their feelings with loud exclamations of delight and joy. Mr. and Mrs. Brown, hearing the joyous outbursts, smiled at each other. At the top of the knoll, Mr. Brown stopped the car. "This is it," he said, getting out of the car. "Like the view?" he asked, with a smile on his face.

"It's super!" Carlson exclaimed, getting out of the station wagon as fast as his partially crippled body would allow.

"It's fantastic!" Mittie declared, straightening her body as much as possible and staring out across the waters while she "drank" in long, deep breaths of the pure-smelling, freshly-cool ocean water.

As soon as Jim and Mr. Brown lifted Tiffany out of the vehicle and placed her in the wheelchair, Jerri had her hands on the chair's handles,

guiding it safely and carefully to a picturesque spot beneath some shade trees. "You'll be able to enjoy the scenery from here," she told the handicapped teen, "and you'll also be out of the sun's bright glare. How do you like it?"

"Oh, Jerri," Tiffany cried, "I believe this is the most spectacular view yet! Your folks know ever so many lovely places to come to. And I'll be forever indebted to you all for including Mittie and Carlson and me in the family. My whole outlook on life has changed since God laid it upon your parents' heart to do something special for those of us who have no one who cares much at all for us; nor what happens to us. I may look mature externally, but in my inner person I was all shriveled up and shrunken, dying and starving for love. And . . . and for someone who would care. I wanted to have a family, like natural people do. Then along came the Browns."

"Did you ever pray for God to send you a family, Tiffany?" Jerri asked quickly.

"You can believe or disbelieve me, Jerri, but I did pray for a family to come along and adopt me. Well, I'm not adopted, but who cares! When a family as wonderful as yours makes you feel you're a part of that family, well, who needs to be adopted!"

"Thanks, Tiffany. I guess you've opened my eyes to a lot of things today, not the least of which is to remember God's 'insamuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . ye have done it unto Me.' Now, while I fill your plate, enjoy the view and listen to the gulls." And Jerri hurried away after the food. Never again would she say anything about being tied down, and such like things. She had so much for which to be thankful. Yes, so very, very much. Why, just the fact that she could walk, and go anywhere she wanted to go, was blessing enough in itself, she realized. She was able to come and go as she pleased; she wasn't incapacitated in any way, shape, or form. And she wasn't about to become crippled nor incapacitated in her thinking, either. No indeed! Through the power of Christ, she would go beyond her desires and, like her parents, she would do all she could to reach out, in the love of Christ, to others . . . like Tiffany and Mittie and Carlson. Tiffany especially.

She began to hum one of the old hymns. It took special people to reach out and go beyond the normal round of duty and, in love and compassion, to

help the class of special people like the three whom her parents had included in the family outings. Yes, it did, she realized. And though she hadn't thought of it as such, she and Jim and the others in the family were rendering a special service unto God.

Suddenly, Jerri's heart felt unusually light and happy. The "inasmuch" of Jesus' spoken words put a spring into her step as she poured the tall glass full of Tiffany's favorite iced tea then started toward the wheelchair with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. And a smile.