

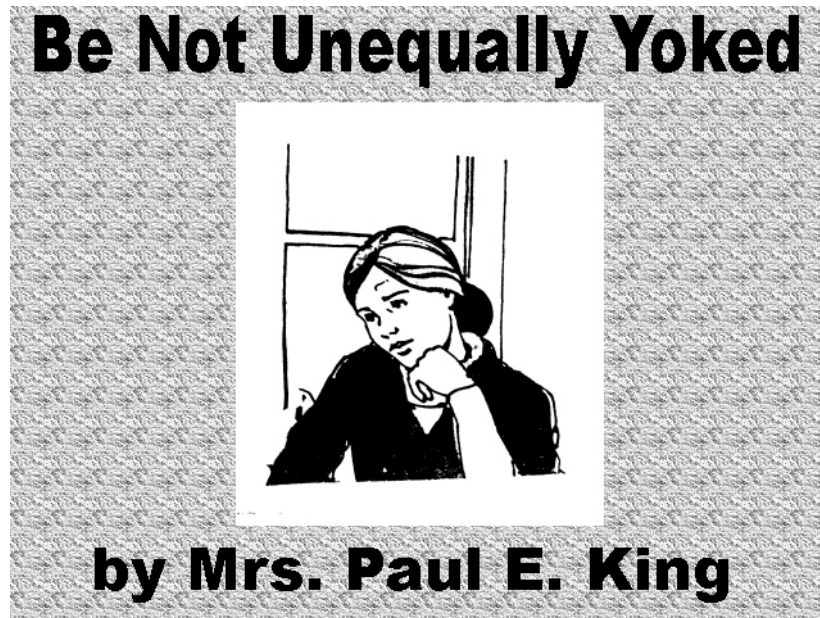
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BE NOT UNEQUALLY YOKED
By Mrs. Paul E. King

I walked into the kitchen, donned an apron and began peeling potatoes for supper when LoJuana's voice sliced into my quiet mood. She was speaking to someone on the phone. I couldn't help but hear what she was saying.

"So I won't be helping anymore, Mrs. Crockett," my daughter said. "Yes, I love the little children. No, it's nothing you've done, nor the children. I've loved every single minute of teaching. Why am I giving the class up? No! No! Honest, it's nothing anyone has done. Sunday is Rodney's only day off; I feel I owe this time to him. What? Oh no, don't cry. I'm sorry this is such short notice. Thanks for understanding. And do tell your husband.'

So Mrs. Crockett understood; I did not.

Rodney Parker was a tall, handsome young man who was gainfully employed and had a promising future. By all worldly standards, that is. He was every inch and pound of him a gentleman around our daughter, treating her only with utmost respect and courtesy. Everyone was impressed by him. They made a "perfect couple," so our friends said. Even Terry, my husband, thought Rodney was special.

"Look, Ann," Terry remarked the night of their engagement, "she loves the guy. She could do a lot worse. . . ."

His sentence trailed into my stunned silence.

"Give her time to work on Rodney, Ann. It's not like he's an atheist. He doesn't smoke nor drink; that's something worthy of commendation."

That was true, I had to admit, feeling another shock-wave rush over me. So I smiled, trying not to reveal my inmost fears and pain to those who had come to celebrate our daughter's good news of the engagement. Too, the wedding was still three months away. I would pray; God could do what I could not do.

Rodney had attended services with our daughter twice, but only to please LoJuana. He fidgeted all the while the service was in progress and leafed through the hymnal numerous times.

He turned repeatedly to see the clock on the back wall, what time it was and how soon the service would be dismissed.

Putting it mildly, I felt uncomfortable because of his all too-obvious distaste for and of our services. I prayed for God to open LoJuana's eyes and

allow her to see what lay ahead for her if she married this handsome but spiritually-devoid young man.

"How come you kept looking at the clock?" I overheard our daughter ask in a quiet voice as soon as church was dismissed. "You have a watch, Rodney." Her inference was unmistakable.

"I wanted that long-winded preacher to take the hint," came the quick reply. His statement was loaded with sarcasm and contempt.

Needless to say, I went home from the service with an exceeding heavy burden on my heart.

LoJuana had met the dashing young businessman at a meeting for all the employers and employees of the various J. C. and L. Stewart Enterprise Corporations in and out of our state. Since her graduation from college, where she majored in business, LoJuana had been employed as a private secretary to J. C. Stewart himself. Too, she had been teaching the children in our Sunday school -- ages five and six -- since her return home from college.

Tears ran saltily down my cheeks now. I could scarcely see what I was peeling or, even, if I was peeling at all. I was going through the motions, to be sure, but my heart was too crushed and my eyes too moistly wet to see what I was doing. Giving up her class? It seemed unreal to me.

Each week, our daughter spent hours in prayerful study and preparation for her class. The children loved her, and many had come to know the Lord because of her teaching ministry and her Godlike example. The class had grown numerically and spiritually. Mr. Crockett, our Sunday school superintendent, looked on in awe and amazement. His wife, who had had the class before LoJuana's graduation from college, felt it was time to "pass the reins" on to younger hands; she suggested our daughter. It was all in God's timing. And now this!

"Mom," LoJuana called as her hand rested on the doorknob, "I'll see you later. I have to run over to. . . ." Her voice trailed off. "Mom, what's wrong? You're crying!"

"I overheard you on the phone a few minutes ago," I managed, stopping to brush the tears away. "Oh LoJuana, giving up your Sunday school class --"

"Sunday is Rodney's only day off," she explained. "He wants to spend it with me. Mom, don't cry. One of these days Rodney will become a Christian."

"LoJuana, honey, you're disobeying what God's Word says," I cried, as tears ran in streams down my face. "You're becoming unequally yoked with an unbeliever! We can't violate God's Word and get away with it."

"But that doesn't mean he'll always be an unbeliever," my daughter replied. "He knows how important and wonderful my faith in God is to me."

"So important that you're willing to quit teaching your Sunday school class and even miss church some Sundays!" I exclaimed. "What do you think that tells him about, your faith and your once-total commitment to God?"

"Mom, you just don't understand," she said. "I'll see you later."

Then she was out the door and I was still at the sink, my eyes red with weeping. Needless to say, supper preparations were not on my mind. But, knowing that Terry would come home with his usually-always ravenous appetite, I managed to finish the potatoes and get them on a burner for cooking preparatory to mashing. Then I slid pork chops into the lightly-sizzling Crisco in a skillet and, while they browned then simmered gently in their rich juices, I tossed a salad and readied the biscuits for baking. Frozen peas and little onions, simmered in a succulent butter sauce, and applesauce and cole slaw finished up the meal preparations.

"A great meal!" Terry complimented profusely at supper. "You're a great cook, hon," he said, as he reached over and gave my hand a tight little squeeze. His eyes were still like shining lights when he looked at me. And after twenty-six years of married bliss! I thought, thankful for my husband who shared my faith in God.

I looked over at LoJuana. She wasn't listening to her father. She seemed preoccupied with other things.

She was eating a bit too fast, I thought.

"I hate to eat and run," she finally said as she wiped her mouth daintily, "but Rodney's picking me up in five minutes."

"Something big going on?" I asked. "No banana cream pie or apple dumpling for dessert?"

"Nothing. Thanks, Mom. We're going checking out wedding chapels," she answered hesitantly.

"Wedding chapels?" Terry repeated. "What's wrong with our church?"

"It's a beautiful place to be married in," I said, deep in shock. "You've always wanted to be married there!"

"I know," she admitted. "But Brother Browning won't marry us until he talks to us and gives us some premarital counseling. And, too, he . . . he says he can't marry a believer to an unbeliever."

"Right," Terry said. "And for good reason. What's wrong with that? The Bible's still the only true Book."

"Rodney says if two people are in love, they don't need anything else, nor anyone telling them how to run their lives nor what they can or can't do," LoJuana answered. "I really must go now. Thanks for the supper, Mom."

Terry and I just sat there looking at each other for a few seconds after she left. "How do you feel about Rodney now?" I asked quietly. Brokenly.

"I hardly know what to say," Terry replied. "I'm thankful he doesn't smoke nor drink. . . ."

His sentence trailed in meaningful silence; a silence that revealed my husband's doubts and fears about our future son-in-law.

I almost told Terry about LoJuana giving up her Sunday school class, too, but somehow I couldn't. I felt too keenly the aching pain of it in my own heart and I wanted to spare my husband of the same hurt for as long as I could. It would come out eventually, and sooner or later he would hear about it, but for now I would say nothing to him.

It was late when LoJuana came home that night, so nothing was said until the next morning. "How did it go last night?" I asked. "Did you find a suitable place; a chapel?"

"Nothing we both liked," she said, sipping her orange juice and nibbling at her toast. "Some are really awful! One even uses chintzy looking . . . and I mean chintzy . . . artificial flowers and recorded organ music. I wish we could get married at the church."

"That's up to the bride," I reminded her.

"Mom --"

"Let me finish," I went on. "I know you want to make your own decisions, you and Rodney, but it sounds to me like he's making most of them."

"What's that supposed to mean?" she asked.

"First, you're giving up your Sunday school class," I began.

"That was my decision," she declared.

"You're giving up a Sunday school class you love, and upon which God has put His special blessing from the very beginning of your teaching, because Rodney wants to spend Sunday with you," I continued. "And you can't get married in your church because Rodney won't agree to talk with and to the minister, who can't marry you two because God's Word forbids it. And when you have children of your own Rodney will probably decide he doesn't want them attending Sunday school or church, either, LoJuana! Remember, they will be his children, too. Is that really what you want?"

"Mother, you don't understand!"

"You're right, my dear, I don't," I answered brokenly. "How can you possibly consider spending the rest of your life with a man who cares nothing at all about spiritual things and who doesn't share your love for the Lord? Oh,

my dear, dear LoJuana, you're headed for heartache and heartbreak and sorrow. Can't you see this?" I was weeping by now. She didn't answer.

"You say that in time he'll become a Christian. How? If he won't so much as attend services now with you? How do you think he'll feel after you're married?" I asked. "And husbands don't appreciate being witnessed to by their wives."

She sat in silence; total silence.

"Life is a series of choices," I continued. "And choices can be made by answering questions -- "

"I have to get to work," she said quickly.

"Is it God's will for you to marry Rodney?" I asked, as she got up from the table.

"Good-bye, Mom," she said.

"Who is coming first in your life right now," I asked, "God or Rodney? You're giving up a lot for Rodney," I called after her. "What has he given up for you?"

Suddenly I was alone in the kitchen. Trembling, I sat down on the nearest chair and sobbed my anguish and pain and grief out to God Who alone could intervene.

LoJuana was a free moral agent. God could woo and warn and impress, I knew, but unless she heeded His strivings and wooings and warnings, she would rush pell-mell into the marriage and, ultimately, pay the consequences of being unequally yoked. My heart seemed crushed beneath the burden it was carrying for her.

She was unusually quiet when she came home from work that night, and she spoke very little around the supper table. Terry and I both kept the conversation geared to pleasant things that happened throughout the day. Rodney picked her up shortly after the dishes were washed and dried but she returned home early.

For two weeks she followed much the same pattern as the one previously stated. Her quiet mood and early home from her dates with Rodney made both Terry and me wonder what was going on, but we said nothing. We kept praying, however. Earnestly. And fasting, too.

One Saturday night shortly after, she came into the kitchen where I was frosting a chocolate cake for Sunday's dessert, and said, "I'll be going to church with you and Daddy tomorrow, Lord willing, if you don't mind."

If I didn't mind! Why, I was so happy and thankful that I almost dropped the pan of cooked chocolate frosting. Turning, I said, "Why, honey, you know we don't mind! We'll be happy to have you ride with us again. Is something wrong with your car?" I asked quickly as the thought of car trouble entered my mind.

"No, nothing's wrong, Mom. I just thought it would be nice to do like we always did.., go to church together."

"Oh LoJuana, you make me so happy when you talk like this!" I exclaimed as I gave her a quick kiss on the tip of her nose. "But what about Rodney?" I questioned, sensing that there was more to this than met the eye and passed to my happy listening ears.

"You . . . you . . . Oh Mom, thanks. Thanks!" And my daughter put her arms around me and clung to my neck, sobbing.

I said nothing. I waited. Patiently. My tears mingled with hers.

"Mom," she began. Her voice trembled ever so slightly.

I knew it took courage for her to humble herself in the manner which was being displayed now.

"I thought it wouldn't hurt to skip church occasionally," LoJuana was saying, "after all, I reasoned, God knew Rodney and I were in love with each other and He wouldn't mind for this every-now-and-then absence. But Mom, I've been miserable. I felt so condemned that I couldn't stand it. I told Rodney that I couldn't live that way; that God would always and forever come first in my life and that he would have to take me as I am, and get his own heart

fixed up right with God or I couldn't and wouldn't marry him. The Lord is my God! He means more to me than anybody, Mom."

My heart was beating rapidly; I was overjoyed with what I was hearing. God had answered prayer!

"I told Rodney I had to have his answer, that I was going to follow the Lord regardless of the cost or the cross. I got it: he's through with me. He said he'd never go this way. Never! He thinks it's all a lot of 'nonsense' -- his word for what we believe and feel and know is real and right."

I couldn't see for the tears in my eyes.

"Thanks, Mom, for what you said to me a few weeks back. It got me to thinking. And praying, too. And the more I prayed and searched the Bible, the heavier came the conviction to my soul that Rodney wasn't God's will for me. I'm glad it's settled. And it's final! I'm taking God's way."

Between my tears and frequent praises to God, I said, "Have you thought any about your Sunday school class, honey? Brother Crockett said he'd keep it open a while until God would open your eyes and let you see your mistake. Mrs. Crockett's filling in for you."

"I'll call them, Mom. Right now. I prayed until I knew the Lord forgave me and then, later, cleansed my heart, so there's nothing standing in the way. Not even Rodney. Oh, it's wonderful to be free again. And in the will of God!"

I wept for joy as LoJuana hurried to the phone. She was singing "I'd Rather Have Jesus Than Anything." And it came from the very depth of her soul.

I raised my hands heavenward and offered the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God. He had answered prayer. Marvelously!

The End