A soft breeze stirred the grove of cottonwoods, shaking their leaves and ruffling the young man's unruly red-brown hair as he sat on the damply-cool earth floor thinking, wondering why he was ever born.
He had wanted to believe that his father loved him, and he had even tried saying the phrase out loud when he was alone and was a lot younger than his now almost nineteen and a-half years of age. Several times, he thought he had his heart convinced of the fact, then something always happened to shatter his hopes and instill new fears and doubts inside him.

A tear slid from his blue-gray eyes and wet his sun-browned cheek. He brushed it away almost fiercely. He must not cry. No, he must not cry. But, still, the pain and the hurt deep inside his chest made it almost impossible for him not to cry. If he hadn't overheard his parents' conversation a few mornings ago he could have gone on trying to believe his father loved him. Now he knew. There was no hope left in him. None whatever. He felt desolate and destitute and empty.

He leaned his head against the trunk of a cottonwood and closed his eyes. How he wished he had not come back into the house when he did! But he had. Out of necessity and duty he had come in to tell his father about the problem with the tractor. They hadn't heard him enter the kitchen. It sounded like his mother was crying.

"I'm sorry I couldn't have borne you a girl, too," he heard his mother say softly-kind from the living room.

"You got your boy," came his father's quickly-terse rejoinder. "I despise children. Boys especially."

And he had waited to hear no more. Like a wounded dog, he had stolen silently away. His hearthammered fiercely-wild in his chest and his eyes stung and burned from salty tears.

He had run to the hay loft and buried his face in the sweet smelling hay and cried till there were no more tears to shed. But deep inside was a pain and a hurt like he had never known before. Nor would it leave him. He went to sleep with it and he awoke with it. Sometimes he even dreamed about it.

Or was it a dream? he wondered now. Could it not have been the inner subconsciousness of the inflicted wound, already so deeply ingrained, that it haunted him even in his sleep? He was convinced it was this.
If he had been a disobedient, wild and unruly young man he could better have understood his father's cool aloofness toward him; but he was none of these. All his life he had wanted nothing more than to please his father and to hear words of commendation, love, and praise from those lips. But such was not the case. On the contrary, he was verbally castigated and put down, no matter how well he did his work. And yet his parent professed to be a Christian.

He drew his knees upward and cradled them with his long arms. He must not dwell upon the inconsistency of his father's profession of faith and his ill treatment toward him, he decided quickly. His mother's salvation and sanctification was genuine. She was like an angel of God, always kind and loving and gentle and holy. She loved him. He never doubted her love.

How he wished he could do more for her; buy her those necessary things. She was so deserving, yet she had so very little. But his father always got what he needed and wanted.

This had always seemed so unfair and selfish of his father, the young man remembered now. Marriage was a partnership, was it not? he thought, wondering what his father was doing with his large weekly pay checks and why his mother was so deprived.

He pressed his head against the trunk and squeezed his eyes shut. He longed to talk to someone; someone in whom he could confide.

"Katy!" he exclaimed aloud. Why hadn't he thought of her before?

He opened his eyes and got to his feet. He would talk to Katy. She would not only listen to him, she would tell him what to do. Katy and he had gone together to all twelve grades in school, first to the little brick school house nearby their parents' farms, then later, to the new modern consolidated school twelve miles distant.

Katy was a sweet little girl. She let him pull her teeth as each had loosened and made way for her permanent ones that were coming in. She declared he was gentle and would make a good dentist someday. She always brought an extra orange to school (for him) whenever she had one. She giggled a lot, those little-girl years, and told him that he was her very truest-best friend.
Katy had a way about her that made him feel important. Where his father shortchanged him in praise, Katy was effusive and generous. She seemed to feel there wasn't anything he couldn't do. Like himself, she was an only child. She had her girl friends like he had his boy friends, but whenever she wanted to share a secret she came to him. "I know I can trust you," she always confided.

She was on the honor roll all through high school; so was he. They graduated together, she the valedictorian, he the salutatorian.

Katy's ambition was to be a nurse, so all her future plans for the new school year pivoted around nurse's training. She would make an excellent nurse, he knew; she loved people and she had a compassionately-kind heart, full of sympathy and, always, she had a listening ear.

His plans? They were as unsure as he was of his father's love and devotion. Oh, he had plans, to be sure, but they lay buried deep within his young, manly bosom. His were nothing at all like Katy's: hers were real. So real that, in a very short while, she would be leaving to pursue her ambition, God willing. His were dreams; longed for and much-desired dreams. But dreams which could never be fulfilled and become reality without God's intervention and help: his father needed him to work the land on the farm, he said. He was the sole farmer; his father's job in the town took all of his time.

He shuffled down the long lane, his mind deep in thought. His wages were indeed meager, working for his father. Extremely meager. He would never be able to put himself through college on his earnings. This was an indisputable fact. And what hurt most was that his father had told him he must remain home and work the land, that there would be no money for college coming from his pocket.

How he did hurt! The pain in his chest seemed like it was going to crush him. He wanted to be loyal to his parent. He felt duty bound, from God's Word, to honor him, but it was so hard to do so at times.

It was this very thing that was slowly but surely eroding and eating away at his spiritual life until he felt empty and dry. He had tried to rise above it all; oh, he had. He had! True, he still read the Bible and prayed, but his soul
felt devoid of the joy and the victory which once was his. This should not be, he knew. But he must not go by feelings, either, for the just lived by faith.

The lane was dusty and dry; so dry, in fact, that each footstep sent puffs of dust swirling around his feet. He gazed to the left and the right and marveled how well the crops looked and how wondrously well they had grown and matured in spite of the dryness. True, there had been rain earlier in the year, but none for quite some time now. Still, he reasoned sensibly and knowledgeably, the moisture from those rains must have remained in the earth, providing what was necessary and needful for the plant growth.

He looked down at his hands, sun-bronzed and callused, and a sudden, sickening feeling hit him in the pit of his stomach. Could his dreams never be fulfilled? he wondered suddenly. Must he remain forever a tiller of the soil while his whole being cried out after a different profession? A profession not of his making or calling, but of God.

He stopped abruptly in the road and, turning, he looked across the land, following the boundary lines of the farm's extremity with his eyes to the well-kept house and neatly-painted barn and storage shed. It was a lovely farm indeed; a good place for a boy's upbringing. But even the most beautiful farm in the country could never compensate for love, or lack of it. Love was the most important of all things. Parental love especially. It was the one thing every child craved and needed most to establish within his young heart that he was needed in the family and, too, that he was important to those within the household.

He looked toward the house, well concealed from most points by the tall, beautiful rows of wind break trees, protecting it from winter's blast on both sides and at the rear. Its chimney stood tall and straight like a lone sentinel on a constant lookout vigil above the rooftop. This was his home. He had loved the buildings and the land; loved, too, the care his father took of each building. Commendable, that was. If only his dear parent would have been as concerned and as diligent about the feelings and the deprivations of his only child's emotions and his life, he thought longingly and sadly.

He must not brood over these things, the young man told himself fiercely; brooding could bring on self pity and harbor bitterness of soul. This, he decided firmly, he would never do. Bitterness always hurt most the one
The thought of becoming bitter frightened him. Bitter people were unhappy people. The very bitterness in their souls seemed to make them hard and harsh and unkind and uncharitable. Unforgiving, too. Or so it seemed to him. Bitterness of soul tended to hinder one's healing power also. He recalled of having read or heard about a young man near the point of death, lying in the hospital's intensive care unit because of a gunshot wound by a drunk man, who, in his miserable drunkenness, fired the shot as the young man was walking down the street on an errand for his mother.

The young man, rallying occasionally, had whispered softly, "Tell him I forgive him. I harbor no bitterness. He does not know my God. Jesus forgave me; I forgive him."

Instead of dying, as everything seemed to indicate he would, the young man began to mend and to improve. Upon his return home to recuperate fully, the doctor's words were unmistakably clear: "Young man," he said, "you are a miracle. Everyone in the hospital knows this. By all standards, you should have died and been buried long ago."

The young man smiled from his chair in his family's living room. "God still works miracles, Doctor," he replied. "I belong to Him."

"You would have died long ago," the doctor affirmed positively. "But for one thing. . . ."

"God," the young man answered quickly with a radiant smile.

The doctor studied the calm, serene face before him. "Your total freedom from any and all bitterness was your savior," he stated hoarsely. "Even in your lowest moments, when we thought each breath would be your last," he continued, "your whispered 'I forgive him' kept you going.

"You see, son," the doctor said, "a forgiving spirit helps not only the inner man -- the soul -- but the physical man as well. It helps the healing process to accelerate. Bitterness and unforgiveness, on the other hand, hinder the healing process. Not only spiritually but physically, too."
And now, recalling the story, the young man determined and purposed within himself that, loved or unloved, wanted or unwanted, appreciated or unappreciated, he would not allow bitterness to reside in his soul. No indeed. It would do nothing to help the situation and it would serve only to thwart and hinder the noble man he had always wanted to be. He knew of others who had made good in life not because of their circumstances and hardships and setbacks, but in spite of them. He could too. With God's help, he would!

He lifted his head and squared his shoulders. His life had a purpose for it; there was a reason why he was born. Yes, there was! And this, in spite of his painful memories and knowledge. He must try to fulfill the purpose.

Quickly, he walked on toward Katy's house.

Chapter 2

He topped the little knoll and Katy's parents' farm came into full view. Like his father's farm, the Berringers kept theirs neat and meticulously clean. The land, too, was well cared for and looked after, receiving its share of nitrogen and fertilizer. And lime, when needed. Crop per crop and acre per acre, each farm ran a pretty close yearly average yield. A good average yield, that is.

The young man felt a sense of pride surge through him as he realized that he had been a co-laborer with God in bringing the farm's average yields up till they were running neck to neck with Mr. Berringer's. This in itself was nothing short of a miracle: Mr. Berringer had been voted the All American Farmer one year.

He thought back upon the years when the land on his father's farm had seemed unyielding and anything but productive. It had troubled him. He had gotten books from the library on how to build up the soils and he had spent hours reading and studying their contents. After he had read and absorbed, and had talked with their county agent, he set about to correct the problem, with the Lord's help, staying as close to everything organic and natural as was possible. His reward had come when he saw the soil give back to him an abundant harvest, not one year only but year after year until, now, it was considered to be among some of the richest soil for many miles around.
He recalled the meadow and its adjacent grazing land, once little more than impacted wasteland. Now it was lush and green and supplied his father's small herd of steers with an abundant supply of summer grazing. The radical change came about with hard work and careful planning, and sowing of various grasses. But it was worth every minute of his time and effort; worth every part of his trial and error, yielding, ultimately, the thick, green carpet-field in which the steers now grazed contentedly.

He saw a large herd of cattle grazing on the Berringer farm. Mr. Berringer, ever a lover of cattle, had increased the number by a substantial size, the young man noticed. He wondered if someday their near neighbor wouldn't, perhaps, go in completely for cattle raising. Still, he remembered that Mr. Berringer was a man of the soil; he loved the land and he loved working it. Indeed he did. So much so that Katy had once told him, laughingly, that her mother said she believed he loved the land more than he loved her.

Mrs. Berringer was a good woman. He knew the remark about her husband's love for the land was only one of teasing. The Berringers got along well. They loved each other and they loved Katy, too. They not only told her they loved her but they displayed and demonstrated it in myriad ways. Katy was one fortunate girl! he thought.

He crossed the duty road to the tree-lined shady side leading down the small rise, noticing the freshly painted wood fence surrounding the pastures for the horses. It was a beautiful sight. Especially so from the top of the little hill. He had always delighted in and enjoyed the view from the first time he had met Katy at the end of his father's lane and they had walked together to the small brick school house a quarter of a mile away.

How rapidly the years had gone by! he thought now. Why, Katy was so tiny and dainty and delicate then that each morning he had taken her small little hand in his and guided her carefully around the stones and the mud holes in the road. He had felt responsible for that tiny but effusive little bundle of humanity who had looked far too small and fragile to be in the first grade of school with him.

Thinking back now, he recalled his surprise over the wisdom and the quick understanding and brilliance that was almost instantly revealed and displayed in and through and by that diminutive first-grader. It seemed to him
that everything she read, heard and looked at at school was stored at the edge of her memory for instant recall and complete comprehension and understanding.

Katy excelled in all of her lessons. What was even more amazing was the fact that she loved all her lessons. Even math. This was a pattern never once altered or deviated from throughout all twelve years of schooling for her. Katy took full advantage of each of her school years, utilizing her study time to its best and fullest advantage and taking her lessons seriously. She was a student in the fullest and greatest meaning of the word.

And now, within a short while, she would be going away for nurse's training, he realized, feeling a strange kind of sadness wash over him. Outside of church and youth gatherings and camp meetings, Katy hadn't been away from home much. Once, he recalled, she had gone to spend a week with a cousin in the city; but she had come back home before the week was up, stating she missed the country too much.

He stopped abruptly and leaned a leg on the wood fencing. How would Katy ever stand being away from home for training in the city when she couldn't stay the full week with her cousin? The thought troubled him. True, she would get to come home a few times during the year. Still, it would not be like when she had been at her cousin's and could just tell her that she wanted to go home; that she missed the sights and smells and sounds of the country. And her parents, too.

A year was a long time to be gone, he realized. Especially when one was not accustomed to being away for any length of time. Surely Katy had thought of this, he told himself. She was not one to do a thing hastily nor to make an unwise decision.

He continued down the Berringers' lane, stopping at the mailbox to check for mail, a thing each family did for the other if they were en route to the other's house after the mailman had delivered the mail.

"He collected the mail and walked quickly the rest of the way to the large white brick house, shaded well on all sides by lovely, old spreading trees, with a large lawn sprawling away in all directions."
It seemed quiet as he walked up the flagstone walk to the big front porch. From a nearby tree he heard a wren trilling a special song for its young. He knew that, soon, the singer and the song would be gone, for the time of nesting and hatching was almost over for another season.

He tapped lightly on the door and called Katy's name softly, then he waited. Getting no response, he knocked again, more loudly this time.

"Katy. Mrs. Berringer," he called. But no one answered.

He walked off the porch and followed the flagstone walk to the back of the house where it joined on to the beautiful patio, well designed, large and totally restful looking.

He knocked on the back door and even pushed the door bell this time, hoping to hear a soft footfall from within and a responding voice. When he heard neither, he deposited the mail (which he had brought) between the storm-screen door and the kitchen door, then he sat down in a chair on the patio, feeling keenly disappointed over not having gotten to talk to Katy.

Loneliness possessed him now. Suddenly and totally unannounced, it seemed to have gripped him and taken hold of him. It gave him some kind of strange, new, and sickening feeling. This was going to be how it would always be at the Berringers after Katy was gone, he realized -- lonely and much too quiet.

His eyes took in the well cared for blooming plants surrounding the patio, the carefully-trimmed shrubs, the beautifully manicured lawn and the many hanging baskets of blooming begonias, fuchsias, and geraniums. It spelled beauty and loving care. Everywhere he looked, it was there, displayed for all to see who had eyes for a thing of beauty. But in spite of the exquisite beauty, something was missing -- the caretakers of the things beautiful.

He stood to his feet and started to leave, then changed his mind and started down the path to Mrs. Berringer's garden. From the garden he could view the countryside for quite some miles around. He would do that, then he would go home, he decided, wondering what he would do after Katy was gone. Whom could he talk to? Katy kept his confidences the way he kept hers.
He could talk to Matt or Don or Reuben, he knew; they were his friends. But he had never felt free to divulge his inner feelings or fears to them. Why? He guessed it was because each had told him something one or the other of the boys had told him in confidence and had asked that it not be repeated to anyone. He knew that if they broke a confidence with each other they would do the same with him. Consequently, he was always careful of his words when he was with them. And he was not sorry that he was; he had never been hurt by words that he had never said or uttered. Never. He wanted it kept this way, by God's help and His grace.

He stood by the well-tended garden and took in the spectacular agriculturally-filled countryside from the Berringers' point of view. He saw how beautiful a harvest the earth seemed to be promising for most of the hard working farmers and his heart felt truly grateful and thankful. He knew the many long hours of hard work that went into those beautiful, healthy looking fields of grain and grass. How well he knew! Knew, too, the anxious days of waiting for the much-anticipated rain or, in some instances, for the rain to cease and the sun to shine.

Following the path back to the patio, his heart and mind reminded him that every single crop was dependent entirely upon God for its germination and its growth and for its maturity. Unless God sent the rain and the sun and the warm weather at the proper time, all was lost. And what a loss!

He was deep in thought, wishing that he could sense the nearness of God's sweet presence as he once did. He longed for it. How he did long for it! But the home environment, where his father was concerned and entered the picture, was just, well, he didn't want to think of it now. It was too hurtful and too painfully crushing. And even though he could not sense God's presence, he purposed to pray on.

He had started around the house toward the road when Katy's voice sliced into his thoughts.

"Jon. Jon," she called, "where do you think you're going?"

Turning quickly, he saw her running down the path toward him, holding the mail in her hands.
"Where did you come from, Katy?" he asked, feeling suddenly overjoyed by her presence.

Katy laughed softly. Jon often thought it reminded him much of a ripply brook, bubbling, gurgling and rushing on its way.

"What a silly question!" she replied, still laughing. "I came from inside the house. Why didn't you knock?"

"I did knock, Katy. Several times. And I rang the door bell once. No one answered."

Katy's merry laughter now seemed to fill the whole yard with music. "So I did hear something!" she exclaimed. "I thought I did. But way back in that far corner of the attic you can't hear anything like a doorbell or a knock on the door. Perhaps if one pounded on the door it might come through. But I'm not sure."

"The attic! Whatever were you doing up there?"

"I'm soon going to be a traveler, Jon. Or have you forgotten about this?"

"Forgotten about it? How could I? It seems almost hauntingly unreal. But what were you looking for in the attic, may I ask?"

"Come, let's go to the patio, where we can talk. And thanks for the mail. It saved me a trip to the box. That's how I knew you were here. When I opened the door to see if someone had been here, I spied the mail. I knew then that I had actually heard something. And, in answer to your question, I was up there looking for a piece of luggage Mother said is there somewhere."

"Did you find it?"

"Not the piece I'm looking for. Sit down, please, Jon. I'll take this mail into the kitchen so it doesn't get blown away or lost. Would you like a glass of icy-cold, just-made-before-going-to-the-attic lemonade?"

"Don't tempt me, Katy. Thanks!"
"Oh, Jon, you're ridiculous," Katy teased. "I'd invite you inside where it's nice and cool, but Mother's not here. And since the Bible tells us to abstain from the very appearance of evil I guess we'd better stay out on the patio."

"That's right, Katy. Thanks just the same. I love it out here, and it's pleasantly cool."

Katy was soon back with a tall pitcher of lemonade and two glasses. She poured Jon's and handed it to him, then she said, "Something's wrong, Jon; tell me what it is. You came here for a purpose. Something's bothering you."

"Hadn't we better give thanks for this first?" he asked, holding the frosty-cold glass in his hand.

"Oh, I forgot. Forgive me, please. I'll offer the thanks since you seem so troubled."

"Thanks, Katy. Thanks much. I don't know how I'll make it when you're gone."

Jon's voice sounded more serious than Katy had ever heard. She not only gave thanks for the refreshing lemonade but she also prayed for God's holy and Divine presence to comfort and surround and fill Jon's heart in a greater and larger than ever measure.

When she said amen and opened her eyes, she saw that Jon was weeping. Setting the pitcher down on a table nearby, she stood in front of him. "What is it, Jon?" she asked, her voice shaking with emotion.

Chapter 3

Jon raised his bowed head. Tears ran down his cheeks unashamedly. Katy appreciated him and would not deem him a weakling for crying, he knew.

Katy sat down on the edge of the small wrought iron stand beside Jon's chair. "When you feel you can do so, Jon, please tell me what is troubling you. I feel as if my own heart is breaking over whatever it may be."
"My . . . my father doesn't love me, Katy," Jon blurted the statement-sentence out quickly and brokenly.

"May . . . maybe . . . he does . . . in his . . . way," Katy stammered.

"No, Katy, no. He . . . he wanted a girl, not a boy."

Katy's hand flew to her heart. "How . . . how did you find out, Jon? Who told you? When did you learn. . . ?"

"I overheard a . . . a. . . ." Suddenly Jon looked full in Katy's face. "Did you know?" he asked, touching her hand lightly and seeing the color drain from her cheeks. "Did you know, Katy?" he asked again.

"Oh, Jon, why did you have to find it out?" Katy cried, feeling as though the pain inside her chest was going to crush her. "Yes, I knew. I wish I hadn't heard it." She covered her face with her hands and wept.

"Who, Katy? How? Please tell me."

"You know I would never have kept it from you, Jon, if it would have profited and benefitted you and been something good and uplifting. But I couldn't tell you! No, I couldn't! I knew how deeply it would crush and wound and hurt you. Don't hold it against me, Jon. Please!" Katy begged.

"Katy, you know I won't do such a thing. Never! It's a promise. But please tell me who told you and how you found it out." Jon's voice shook as he talked.

"I wasn't eavesdropping, Jon; believe me, I wasn't. Your dear mother and mine were working on a quilt -- mine, my mother told me when it was finished and when she gave it to me. I was sitting in Father's office just off the room where the quilting was going on, studying. Your mother began to sob as they were discussing how each had hoped for more children than one. They were unaware that I was near. Mother said she was so very thankful for me and that God had answered her and Father's prayers and had sent them their little girl.

"Your mother sobbed again. Then I heard her tell my mother how she had prayed for God to send her a little boy whom she could give back to the
Lord in full time Christian service when he was grown. She prayed for you, like Hannah did in the Bible, and asked God for a son.

"Your father, your mother said brokenly, had wanted no children. But, since one was on the way, it must be a girl! He would not accept a boy. Nothing but a girl! Imagine it, Jon! It sounds unreal, doesn't it? As though your mother could alter or change what God was already creating and forming!

"When you arrived, I heard your mother say, and when your father learned you were a boy, he turned and walked out of the room in anger. He never did look at you, so far as she knew, unless it was unavoidable.

"I wanted to run from the office-room but knew I dare not, lest your dear mother grieve herself to death over knowing that someone's ears besides my mother's had heard of the dreadful and dreadfully-wicked happening.

"My heart hammered wildly inside my chest. It beat so loudly that I was afraid our mothers would surely hear and would come looking for the strange noise and discover me there. Needless to say, I could study no longer. I sat deathly still, numb with shock and dumb with grief over your father's attitude, actions and feelings towards you. Oh, Jon," Katy cried in agony of spirit, "I can't believe that a father could or would treat an innocent baby this way! It . . . it boggles my mind and baffles my reasoning."

"Did my mother say anything else, Katy! I mean, did she tell your mother that she loved me; for I know that she does."

Katy brushed a hand across her eyes as if trying to erase the memory and the stark revelation forever from her thoughts. Taking a napkin from beside the pitcher of lemonade, she wiped the tears from her eyes and her face.

"Jon, when your mother opened her soul to my mother it was as though she couldn't stop. And oh, how she sobbed! I shall never forget it. I wept with her, allowing my tears to soak my hands and the sheets of paper beneath them, knowing full well that I would have to rewrite the already finished lesson, but not caring. In that hour, I felt like I had never ever had a truly anxious moment or known what a heavy, soul-crushing burden really was, although I had come through a few of each in my young life."
Jon's eyes, flowing with tears, never left Katy's face. "My mother wanted me, though, didn't she? And she loved me. . . ."

Jon's sentence trailed questioningly, as though everything depended upon Katy's answer. He watched her face eagerly. Longingly.

"Oh, she did, Jon! She did! She loves you very much. She told my mother that you were God's greatest and most wonderful earthly gift. She called you her 'gift from heaven' and her 'brightest earthly spot.'

"She wept afresh when she said how extremely selfish and unkind your father has always been toward and with you. She would want you to go to college, Jon."

"Do you think so, Katy?"

"I'm sure of it. For while she was praying--my mother suggested that they go to prayer for your father -- I heard your mother cry out to God to open His door and make a way for you to prepare for the 'greater, higher, spiritual work' He has for you. Those three adjectives regarding the work were her exact words, Jon.

"Your father, it seems, is filled with an uncontrollable passion for things for himself and with an unrestrained jealousy. If only he knew how wonderful and glorious it is to be totally rid of, and delivered from, these things! Does he profess to be a Christian at all, Jon? I've never heard him testify in church."

Jon took a deep breath. Then he sighed. "It's painful for me to say this, Katy," he replied. "It's extremely painful; but you and I have always been close to each other, where expression of words is concerned particularly so -- so I feel I can tell you this and know that it will go no farther. Yes, my father professes to be a Christian. But his daily living and his profession of faith in Christ are two different things; they are not synonymous. It's grievous for me to admit this, but every word of it is the truth."

Katy let out a little cry as he continued.

"Dad rarely ever speaks to me unless it's to criticize me for not doing something the way he felt it should be done. And this, after I have completed
and finished the job. Mother and I comprise our family altar; Dad is never with us for this."

Again Katy let out a soft little cry. Tears shimmered afresh in her soft eyes.

"My earnings are meager," Jon continued. "So meager, in fact, that I have been unable to save but very little towards a college education which, incidentally, my father let me know he would in no way pay for or help me out. Even worse, he said I must remain home and care for the farm.

"Oh, Katy, emotionally I am torn beyond any describing; trying, and wanting to honor and respect and obey my father but wanting to further my education, too. Something inside me seems to compel me this way. God has something else for me to do besides farming. But I am strapped, bound by a sense of duty to my parent, whose wages prohibit any kind of further education. I've developed a profound sympathy for Jacob, whose wages were changed ten times by Laban, as stated in the Bible."

"Oh, Jon!" Katy cried. "I had no idea that you were suffering this way. But, then, until I overheard what your mother unburdened to my mother a little over two years ago, I had no idea that your father resented your arrival, either. He is such a courteous, seemingly kind man when out in public. And he's quite a business man, so I hear. Maybe that's part of his problem--the pressure he's under. Although God has the remedy for this, when one's carnal nature is eradicated and destroyed and he is filled with the Holy Spirit."

Jon sighed. He felt weary with the heavy burden; weary with not knowing what to do.

"What can I do, Katy?" he cried suddenly. "I am still a young man. I have dreams and ambitions, too. Am I to suppress and stifle this which hammers inside my being? Will God not hold me responsible and accountable if I thwart that which I perceive to be His will for my life?"

"You and I both know the answer to that question, Jon. Are you relying solely and completely upon God, even though there seems to be nothing but a great, dark tunnel for you now; a tunnel through which you can see no end?"
Jon's shoulders shook with great, heaving sobs. "Oh, Katy," he cried, "it seems so hard to pray! So hard to stay above my father's utter dislike for me. I try. Oh, I do! But God's sweet presence seems far removed from me. I search for Him, but, like Job, I can't seem to feel Him."

"Keep holding on, Jon," Katy admonished tearfully.

"I am, Katy. I have no one else to whom I can pour out the grief and the agony of my soul. Since overhearing the conversation a few days ago regarding me, I have been going through a valley so deep and so long that I haven't been able to see even the faintest glimmer of hope, nor even a speck of light and sunshine. You can't imagine how my heart was cut and shattered. To know, finally, and hear, that what you had wondered about and sensed for all of your life, was and is, indeed, the truth! It has a terribly devastating effect upon the total man.

"I had tried to convince myself that Dad loved me; tried with all that was within me. Ever since I can remember, I've been working at this. I wanted my father to love me the way yours loved you. I hoped for this. I longed for it, Katy. And then to hear that I was not wanted or desired...! It was like plunging a dagger into an already bruised and broken heart."

Katy wept softly. Looking kindly and sympathetically into his face, she said softly, "But Jon, God loves you. And so does your mother. And you know that, to me, there is no one else equal to you. I believe God has something very special for you. You are in the furnace of affliction and testing, presently. But this will not last forever: The Great Refiner will allow only so much; and when the purpose and the reason for the refining process is complete and fulfilled, He will lift this from you. Then, again, you will feel His wonderful presence. The only thing that can separate you from God is sin. You haven't committed any sin, have you? It is the only thing that can separate us from God."

"No, Katy. No! My heart has no drawing toward sin nor anything worldly and sinful. I do have a battle though, and I am struggling and wrestling in prayer, trying to remain victorious over my father's cool aloofness to me and his verbal abuse of both Mother and me. Too, he withholds, many times, the necessities of life from Mother, and this keeps me on my knees, trying to stay victorious over it and above it.
"If we were poor, Katy," Jon cried, "I could understand and it would be no battle. But I know what the land alone brings in for Dad. And believe me, it is no little sum. True, a lot goes out in the initial output but the net profit is large. And all this besides his weekly earnings at the office. I can understand why he chooses to treat me as he does since learning that I was unwelcome by him; but why does he thus deprive and hurt my mother? She doesn't deserve this. Mother is a saint. It is because of her and her influence that I am a Christian. She walks close to God."

"I guess everybody who knows her realizes this, Jon. And one would never imagine the sorrow her heart must feel, and be carrying over the home situation. She is one woman who truly does carry her cross with a smile. And as for you, Jon, you keep right on trusting in the Lord and praying, and one of these days you are going to find out that God has been with you all the time. He is just hiding His face for a little while to see if you will trust Him even though you can't seem to feel Him. Feelings fluctuate; they come and go; circumstances affect them. But faith, never! Faith remains unshakable and unmoving, steadfast in its God. And, always, faith triumphs."

Jon squeezed Katy's hand. "Thanks much," he said softly. "I don't know what I'll do when you're gone," he added. "For I certainly wouldn't dare to tell things like we have just discussed to my friends: it would be spread far and wide, I'm afraid. My dad's good reputation would be ruined. And I wouldn't want this to happen for anything in the world."

"I'll really be praying for you, Jon; praying for God to make a way out for you or to show you what to do."

"What do you think I should do, Katy? You have always seemed to be endowed with good and wise judgment. I felt I just had to talk to you today. Something seemed to prod me when I thought of you."

"I think you should make arrangements to further your education and prepare for whatever God's calling is for you. Have you tried talking it over with your father at all?"

"Several times. This is how and when I received the command that I must remain and care for the farm. Whatever will I do?" Jon cried.
"God will show you, Jon. He will open His door -wide, Now let me think. Say, I just remembered something!"

Katy’s eyes brightened. Then she exclaimed quickly and excitedly, "Jon! Jon! I believe this is of God. I honestly feel it is."

"What is it, Katy?" Jon asked quickly as her joy reached even to him.

Chapter 4

Jon got up from where he was sitting and stood in front of Katy, whose eyes were shining brightly. A ray of light glimmered faintly and a spark of hope surged up within him. "What is it, Katy?" he asked eagerly.

"One of my uncles is needing a man to help him in his small business." Katy's voice held a note of excitement in it. "You could work for him and go to school, too. Oh, Jon, I do believe God reminded me just now of this. Uncle Thomas would pay you well."

"Where does he live, Katy, and are you sure he'd take me?" Jon asked eagerly.

"You'd have to move away," Katy said thoughtfully. "My uncle and aunt live in Washington."

"Then maybe your uncle has already found a man to help him. I mean, being that far away, and your folks and you not seeing him nor knowing his business affairs, well, it's just possible that the position has already been filled. Right?"

"Wrong, Jon; Uncle Thomas just called here last night and told us. He's quite ingenious and talented. He has his own small but thriving business -- something to do with machinery. I don't know enough about it to tell you what it is, but I do know that it's something my uncle made and has had patented. He supplies numerous machine shops with this patented thing, whatever it's called.

"He said he's praying for God to lead him to, or send him, the right man to help him; someone trustworthy, reliable and honest and dependable. He asked us all to pray about this. And Jon, there's a Bible college out there near
them, and also a business college. Oh, I'm so excited and happy I could cry. Are you interested, or would you rather wait?"

"Oh, Katy, I believe this is indeed of God. May I have your uncle's address and phone number, please?"

"You certainly may, Jon. But I believe it would be best if we'd call him first and tell him his man is here and he's ready to begin work as soon as he can get there, God willing. We would recommend you highly to him and, knowing Uncle Thomas, I know he'll hire you, the Lord willing. You'd have to be ready to leave soon thereafter, though. He said he needed the help badly."

"Father won't allow me to leave, so I suppose I'll not dare tell him I'm going, if I get the job. Still, I don't feel this is the Christian thing to do. And if I tell dear Mother, Dad will treat her dreadfully mean for allowing me to go and not stopping me.

Oh, Katy, please pray that the Lord will work this out in His way, so there will be the least amount of hurt and pain for Mother, and that Dad will be able to hire a good man to do the farm work. I feel sorry for him, and I don't mean to hurt him, either."

"I'll pray, Jon. And I feel confident that, even now, God is working things around for you. I've just been sitting here marveling at God's perfect timing! Why, until last night, we had no idea Uncle's business had prospered so greatly that he was in need of help. He told us all about this; just as if we lived across from him and could come up immediately with a dependable and upright man for him.

"It's amazing! Positively amazing how God works. I never cease to marvel at His perfect timing and His moving or leading, as the case may be. He is such a wonderful, caring and loving Heavenly Father. And He is watching over you, Jon, and looking out for you, too. Now let's drink our lemonade; it's not going to stay cold very much longer in this warm temperature."

Jon sat down and sipped the deliciously-refreshing beverage thoughtfully. He didn't want to thrust an inconvenience upon his father, not at
all. Nor did he mean to hurt him. Oh, no! He knew the anguish of being hurt. How well he knew!

The thought of the sowing and reaping came quickly to mind. True, and without any doubt, "... whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," was Biblically sound and factual: one did reap what he had sown. But, Jon thought silently, he would not do anything that appeared like he was "getting even" or was being revengeful. No indeed. The Lord stated that vengeance was His. Furthermore, he had always tried to be a peacemaker and to please his father, even though it had seemed to have availed little.

He sighed a deep sigh and prayed a silent prayer, committing the situation into God's hands.

"You all right?" Katy asked, hearing the long, drawn out and deep sigh.

Jon set the glass on the stand and looked at Katy. "I'm fine, thank you," he said. "And Katy, this lemonade is delicious. You make the best, I do believe. You and my mother. I was just thinking. And praying silently."

"I was thinking too, Jon. And I feel as though I should call Uncle Thomas right now. He has a phone in his shop, which is located on a part of ten acres which they own. Their home is built at the front of the acreage and the shop is on a distant corner."

Katy got to her feet. "I'll get him on the line now," she said, going quickly inside.

Jon poured himself another glass of lemonade and stood looking out across the velvety-green lawn, his mind deep in thought.

"Father," he prayed, looking upward, "If this is Thy will, please put all the pieces together and in their proper place. Work out every single detail of it for Thy glory. And if it isn't Thy will don't allow anything to work out. I want Thy will. Only Thy will! I commit it to Thee. I put it, and my future, into Thy hands. Totally and completely so, dear Heavenly Father."

A deep inner peace and calm came into his heart, flooding and filling and overflowing his soul with glory. He wept for joy and walked back and forth across the patio, waving the napkin in the air as he basked and reveled
in the mighty and wonderful presence of God. Why had he not thought of placing his problems relating to college and his dear father and the work situation in God's hands before? he wondered, marveling at the infinite calm in his soul since he gave it over to the Lord completely. How very foolish he had been, carrying and bearing the load which God had wanted to carry all along! The Bible told him to cast his burden on the Lord and the Lord would sustain him.

The word sustain gripped him; he knew it meant to hold up or support; to maintain or keep up; to keep going; to support or keep alive; and, to bear up under.

Jon meditated upon the full meaning of the verse, his heart soaring once again into the heaven lies as he realized that the verse also declared that the Lord will "never suffer the righteous to be moved."

How very foolish he had been to carry his load and to bear his heavy burden when the Lord had been waiting all the time to take it and to relieve him of it. He hoped he had learned a lesson which he would never forget. God delighted in helping His children. It was His will and His design and plan for them to be joyful in Him at all times and under all circumstances, no matter what tests or trials they were subjected to.

Again Jon was amazed how utterly at peace and how calm his soul and his entire being was. Oh what a difference when one turned everything over into God's hands, to work out, solve, and do as His sovereign will saw fit and knew was best.

"And the righteous shall never be moved!" he exclaimed softly aloud, recalling an old song he had heard his mother sing many, many times as she worked in the garden and the kitchen:

I shall not be, I shall not be moved;
I shall not be, I shall not be moved,
Just like a tree that's planted by the water
I shall not be moved.

Jesus is my Savior,
I shall not be moved;
Trusting Him forever,
I shall not be moved:  
Just like a tree that's planted by the water  
I shall not be moved.

Tears shimmered in his eyes as he thought about his mother. She herself had been as stable as a rock in her life in Christ. She never wavered or changed, but stood unmoved upon the Word of God. His mother lived what she professed; she walked carefully and prayerfully; she was a shining example of a child of God. She had her roots -- spiritual roots -- anchored down deep in Christ. She was a beautiful example and description of Jeremiah 17:7-8:

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

"For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."

What a beautiful description of his mother! he thought, feeling suddenly confident that, ultimately, her pure, holy and wonderful Spirit-filled and spiritual life would draw his father -- her husband -- to Christ; draw him away from his passion for money and earthly possessions to the meek and lowly Christ who uttered the words, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

New hope surged up within Jon's heart. He loved his father deeply. And someday his father would love him too. He must not give up hope. Never! Faith was the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen. His was a deferred hope, that was all.

His father would be a tremendous worker for the Lord when and if he ever did business with God and died out to all self and selfish desires. His energy, now expended upon and for things earthly, would then be used in winning men and women to Christ and in building up the kingdom of Heaven.

His father was a handsome man whose carriage and bearing was almost kingly and, always, he was well dressed. His office job demanded
this, the young man knew; but it was no secret that he hated to get his hands dirty. He shrank away from the outside work.

The land had been leased out to a neighboring farmer until he, Jon, was old enough to work it, then it became his sole duty. His father bought the farm machinery and he, Jon, did the work, which was good for him, he knew. Moses needed time in the desert to prepare him for the future which God had planned for him, and Jon knew that the myriad long hours of plowing furrow after furrow, and of sowing and planting and reaping and harvesting, had endowed him with rich spiritual blessings: many of the hours had been spent in prayer and meditation and communion with the Lord.

Time spent thus was never wasted, he knew; but was truly, truly profitable. It was while working the land, as he was praying and meditating, that he had felt God's hand laid upon him for a special calling; a special service. And he had never been able to get away from the call; rather, it had intensified and become even clearer and more real as he had sought he Lord's will for his life on his knees in earnest prayer.

Jon sipped the lemonade, knowing without any doubt that he must prepare himself for the God-given call that lay heavily upon him.

Suddenly he felt a new release take control of him; a release from the farm and all its duties. A voice seemed to be whispering in his soul, saying, "You must work for Me in My vineyard and My harvest fields. Follow Me."

Blinded by happy tears, Jon cried, "Yes, Lord! Yes! Gladly and willingly will I follow Thee. Anywhere. Everywhere. Lead on, Almighty God."

He was blest almost beside himself. He had the answer regarding his feelings of duty to his father -- "It is better to obey God than man."

Katy was calling to him from inside the screen door, motioning for him to come. Her face looked radiant as she handed him the portable telephone.

Chapter 5

Jon's hand trembled with excitement as he took the phone and spoke into the mouthpiece. He need not to have been nervous, however, for Katy's Uncle Thomas Franklin put him instantly at ease.
"You're my man," he said emphatically and sounding like he was crying. "I've been asking the Lord to give me His man; His choice, not mine. I'm human; I'm able to make an error in the choice. God, never! Numerous fine young men have been here, hoping I'd hire them, and, always, without fail, God's Spirit seemed to whisper, 'He's not the man; that's not My choice, Thomas.' So I have waited and continued in prayer. When my niece called and told me about you just now, God's Spirit whispered softly to me that you are the one. Now listen carefully. You will be flying out tomorrow, God willing. So you will be an extremely busy young man, getting things packed and ready to come."

"To . . . tomorrow, Sir? Did you say tomorrow, God willing?"

"That is right, son; tomorrow. I'm sure I can get you a flight then; my oldest son, James, works at the airport. He'll see that you get a flight schedule by then. I'm going to call him now and have him get busy on lining this up for you. I'll call you back immediately after he gives me the schedule. Stay there until you hear from me."

"Oh thank you, Mr. Franklin. Thank you!"

Jon handed the phone to Katy. He was speechless and overwhelmed at the event of things. Tears were shimmering in Katy's eyes.

"I . . . I'm not dreaming this, Katy, am I?" Jon asked seriously.

"No, Jon, this is real. You and I both are wide awake." And Katy ran quickly outside to retrieve the pitcher of lemonade. Jon followed her.

"Kathleen Lenore Berring!" Jon exclaimed as he saw Katy's face. "You . . . you're crying!"

"I . . . I am, Jon. It's just that. . . . Oh, Jonathan, I . . . I'm happy as can be, and I . . . I'm sad, too."

"I know, Katy; I feel the same way. I . . . I guess I've loved you ever since you and I walked together to school and I never realized it until today when I came here and thought how utterly lonely and empty my life would be
without you. Oh, Kathleen, I do love you. Forgive me if I am being presumptuous or... or bold in stating this."

"Jonathan, my dear! I love you, too. I was just thinking how very lonely I will be without you. Washington is a long distance from here. And I'll seldom ever get to see you now."

"I feel like a king, Kathleen: God loves me, you love me, my mother loves me! Oh, I am a rich man; rich in treasures of love. Loved by God my heavenly Father and two of the purest, finest, most noble women on earth! You can't imagine how happy you have made me!"

"And that goes for me, Jonathan, my ever-wonderful prince charming! My noble, wonderful Jon!"

"We will write to each other, Katy, God willing. And as soon as I can afford it, I'll call you. Oh, we have so many things we need to talk over and to decide before we separate. Your uncle is wanting me to fly out tomorrow, Katy!"

"I . . . I know. And I will be leaving within a few weeks for nurse's training. Oh, Jon, do you suppose you will ever come home for Thanksgiving or Christmas? If not, it may be years before we see each other again."

"My dear, dear Katy! Love always makes a way. Always! We will place even this great desire to see each other, when each of us has gone his and her separate way, in God's hands. His Word states that He will not withhold any good thing from them who walk uprightly. He will make a way, in His time and His way. I love you so very much, dear little Katy, and I always will."

"Oh, Jon, I love you so dearly and deeply too. It will be so lonely with you gone so far away. But I am so happy for you."

"Thanks, my dear Katy. I too am happy. Now I will need the strength of your prayers as I break the news to Father and Mother. Mother will rejoice, I'm sure, but my father will not. In fact, I am sure he will give me a rough time. But I must obey God. I must! I must! He has opened the door, and I feel the time has come for me to pass through it and obey Him rather than man."
"Like I told you a short while ago, Jon, I feel God is already working on your behalf. He closed the mouths of lions and He can subdue your father's temper and control his painful, verbal abuse too. We must trust Him."

"You are so right, Katy. Only a short time ago I told the Lord that my father, like my entire future, was totally in His hands, and here I am, concerned again over something which I have no control whatever! When will I ever learn to rest in the Lord and to trust Him with everything that concerns my father?" Looking heavenward, Jon said, "Please Lord, help me to remember that I turned it over to You, entirely. Amen!"

They were silent for a while. Jon studied every feature of Katy's pretty and honest face. He wanted the picture of it etched forever in his mind so that when he was lonely and homesick her dear, sweet face would be there to remind him that, beside his precious mother, Katy loved him.

He took her hand in his. "My dear, dear Kathleen!" he exclaimed. "Why was I so long in recognizing that my feelings toward you were love all along and not a mere kind of brotherly attachment?"

"God must have wanted it this way, Jonathan. After all, each of us has more years of schooling ahead of us, the Lord willing. And more than one couple has forfeited their life's calling for a quick marriage only to regret it later. If each had prepared for his/her calling first and married, how different the outcome would have been! A case in point is Clarice Meyers. She had a definite and clear call to be a missionary to Swaziland when she was in her mid-teen years, my mother told me."

"She did?" Jon asked in amazement. "She looks and seems so sad most of the time, Katy. Often, I have bowed my head and prayed for her when I see her in the church services; prayed for the Lord to bless her and make her joyful and happy in Him. But she is an excellent mother. I've observed her with her large family and they seem to adore her."

"Oh they do, Jon. It's obvious. Frank came along and fell head over heels in love with Clarice, Mother said. He was a kind, patient and good-hearted man who wooed Clarice until she finally consented to marry him. She had hoped that, eventually, Frank too would be called to the mission field and they would then serve God's cause together over there. But Frank never received a call."
"I didn't know this," Jon said thoughtfully. "I suppose this, then, is the reason for her sad looking countenance."

"You're right. Mother said Clarice was always joyful and happy and radiant for Christ before she married Frank Meyers. Not that Frank wasn't a righteous and good man; he was, and he is. It's just that Clarice must have married out of the will of God. She had two years of Bible school training behind her when she met Frank."

"But she loves the Lord, Katy. And so does Frank. I really believe they do. They are such dedicated Christians."

"True, they are. But Clarice's sad countenance comes from having missed the will of God for her life. She told my mother this in my presence one day. She said she goes to sleep seeing the faces of the Swazis and hearing their cries, then she wakes up to the same."

"What torment and torture that must be for her!"

"Indeed it is. She told Mother that she sought and obtained the Lord's forgiveness for thwarting His purpose for her life, but she said the call would be on her to her dying day."

"That is the scripture, Katy. Romans 11:19 tells us, 'For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.' Since God's word admonishes us to 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' I will now know better how to pray for Clarice."

"How very much we need the 'assembling together' at church! Little wonder that we are admonished to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. I need my church family to encourage me and to pray for me. You need them. Clarice needs them. She is so very faithful in her attendance. So is her husband, and their children. She knows she needs her spiritual family to keep her encouraged in the Lord."

"She told Mother she prays daily, in real earnestness and anguish of soul, for the Lord to call her offspring into His white harvest fields, and for them to go, not allowing any distraction whatever to hinder them from going and fulfilling His bidding and His will for their life. Her burden for the Swazis is
heavy and great, she said; so she and Frank fast two days every week and spend much time in prayer for the people to whom she was called but could not go, after her marriage and the arrival of the children. And Jon, I just believe God is going to have some Swazis to greet her when she arrives in Heaven."

"'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' the book of James tells us. And Psalm 126:5-6 states, 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy,' Jon said, adding,

"'He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.' Like you, Katy, I believe Clarice and Frank will see some Swazis who are saved and sanctified wholly and in Heaven because of this, their earnest praying and interceding and fasting."

"I have been reminded of what Jeremiah wrote, so many, many times since hearing Clarice's sad story," Katy said soberly.

"About the potter?" Jon queried, equally sober and thoughtful.

"Yes, that's it. It says, 'And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hands of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it' (Jeremiah 18:4). Clarice is much like the remade piece of pottery, Jon. She is not what God originally had designed for her to be and do, but she is doing her utmost for His highest as she serves the Lord here at home under the, 'so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it' status."

"That's really sad, Katy. But oh, how thankful I am that our God is so patient and long-suffering with us as to 'remake' the marred vessel. And into a thing 'which seemed good' even! When I think how close I have come to thwarting and hindering God's plan and His calling for my life due to feeling duty bound to my father's command and demands it frightens me. But I am liberated from that. Praise the Lord! I now know that God expects and wants us to obey Him rather than man. And by thus obeying what He tells us to do we are not dishonoring our parents."

"Not when we are adults and know what God wants us to do, Jon. It becomes sin not to obey His voice. I have often wondered, had Saul obeyed
God's specific commands as told to him by Samuel, what inspiring and spiritually uplifting chapters may have been written about him. Instead, we hear Samuel's fearless words, 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. . . .'
'Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.' I think Saul's final end is one of the saddest things in the Bible. He had such a humble and meek spirit at the beginning of his reign as king over Israel."

"I agree with you, Katy. And this means that each of us must constantly be on our guard and keep the blessing and the presence of God upon our life lest our final days end up like Saul's. But isn't that the phone I hear, my dear? Your uncle said he would call me back as soon as the flight arrangements were made."

"It's the phone, Jon, and I'm sure it's Uncle Thomas. Better answer it."

"I will, Katy." And Jon hurried into the house.

Chapter 6

Katy remained seated on the patio, trying to think what her life would be like with Jon gone so far away. All her life she had looked to him as her protector and, without any doubt, he was her closest confidante next to her mother.

Jon had always treated her with utmost courtesy and respect. In the truest, deepest sense and meaning of the word, he was a perfect gentleman. A Christian gentleman.

How many things -- and people -- one took for granted until, suddenly, they were taken from them! she thought sadly now. Not that she had ever taken Jon for granted; she hadn't. But she knew without a doubt that things around the Berringer and the Keithly households would never again be quite the same once Jon was gone. He added such depth to the lives of those who loved him and he gave new dimension and meaning to the ordinary, everyday routine of things.

He saw beauty in everything around him: a freshly-turned furrow, the web of a garden spider, a newborn calf, fuzzy-downy ducklings on the pond near the Gardners, a four leaf clover, the first crocus. And she could go on
and on. Jon had helped her to see and notice all these things, she realized. He added sparkle to them all.

Katy felt a tear slide from beneath her eyelashes, she was happy beyond words the way things were working out for him, but sad because of the void that she would feel and experience every time she came home from school. Things would be so very different, she knew.

But this was life, she told herself sternly. It was all a part of growing up; of becoming a young adult. And she had a sudden feeling that it could also very likely be a part of God's Divine plan to get one out of the home nest. For, once one left for college or work, there was never a "coming back" again, in the deeper sense of the expression. True, one's birthplace and homeplace would always remain just that -- the birthplace and homeplace. But now new interests would have been carved out and pursued; new friendships would have been made and established and, in general, one's life would be revolving around a whole new round of duty and obligations and commitments.

The coming home would be only pleasant memories to recall and remember but never to live again, she knew. Childish things would have been put away to be replaced by life's more serious things; its business things.

Another tear slid down her fair cheek as she realized that for the first time ever, Jon and she would be on their own. They had never before done this. They were what their peers called "home bodies." Now that title and name would fit them no more. True, each had been a "home body." But why not? The very nature of Jon's work demanded and dictated that he be a home body: one could not very well work the land and be anything else. Plowing and sowing and reaping took time. Much time. And, aside from his faithfulness to the church and its services, Jon gave the land his very best.

But that was Jon, Katy thought now, always giving only his very best to each and every thing he did or was asked to do. And he constantly did more than he was asked, too. He was not at all like some whom she knew, who did the very least they could do and tried to get by with it. No, Jon was not like that at all. He believed in giving his very best and then going beyond the call of duty.
He had so many wonderful characteristics, she realized. He was kind and gentle beyond words. She recalled an incident from grade school now which, though it had happened when each was smaller and much younger, stood out in bold recollection and remembrance as though it had transpired but yesterday. She had been so proud of him then.

Billy Brown's dog had given birth to a litter of six pups. No classy breed, those pups. So, Mr. and Mrs. Brown had told Billy that since Mrs. Wiggs -- the dog's name -- was his, it was up to him to see that the pups were gotten rid of as soon as they were weaned. Or done away with. No matter how; just, "done away with."

"Wan'na see something?" Billy asked, big as you please one school morning out on the playground. "Sure. Sure!"

The response was almost unanimous. And loud. Billy's folks had money and, having money, it seemed to have "earned" them a rather high position and place on the school board. Billy never failed to let any of the school children know that his dad was rich; his dad was "the biggest" on the school board (Billy's words). Consequently, many of the school students thought Billy was great.

"Come to the river with me as soon as school's out," Billy answered. "Today we're going to have some fun."

"What are you going to do?" Jon asked, stepping up to Billy.

"Come and see," came the instant reply.

Jon had grabbed hold of Billy's arm and, with intense pity wreathing his face, he asked, "You . . . you're not going to drown Mrs. Wiggs' puppies, Billy, 'are you?"

"Well, what else did you think I'd do with them, Jon? I can't keep them. Dad says it's time they must go."

"But Billy, you can't drown them!" Jon pleaded.

"I can't? Come and watch me. I have the bag and a heavy rock and . . . ."
"No, Billy. No! You can't do that!" Jon exclaimed. "That's wicked. It's cruel. Those puppies want to live; I'm sure they do. How would you feel if someone put you in a bag with a heavy stone and dropped you into the river?"

"I'm not a dog, Jon!"

But by now even Billy's bravado seemed to be shriveling and shrinking and falling apart.

"'Course you're not a dog, Billy," Jon continued. "But how would you like to be treated the way you're planning to do those puppies?"

Billy's bravado crumbled to ashes. Great tears tumbled down his cheeks. He slumped down on the cool earth floor and sobbed. The children crowded around.

"You love those pups, Billy," Jon said, on his knees now beside the fallen comrade. "I know you love them, 'cause I'm a boy, too, and I love them just by hearing you talk about them and telling us of all the cute things they do."

Billy raised his head and looked yearningly and pleadingly into Jon's face. "I do love them, Jon; more than anyone knows. But Dad says they must go. Oh, what'll I do? I don't want to drown them. I don't! I don't! I'd like to keep every one of them."

By now, the girls were crying with Billy. So were some of the boys.

"We'll help you," Suzy Collandish cried soothingly.

Billy's blue eyes opened big and round. "Oh, Suzy, will you?" he asked, pleading with his eyes.

"Well, I mean, I pity you," Suzy replied, not knowing how to help nor actually what she could do.

"Billy," Jon said softly, "why not give the puppies away?"
"Nobody wants to be bothered with them, Dad says. That's why he said they'd have to be. . . ." Billy shuddered; he wouldn't even say the word drowned now.

Right then and there Jon got to his feet and, facing all the school children, he said, "If each of us who may, would take a puppy, Billy won't have to do this cruel thing. I'll take one; I know my mother won't mind. . . ."

One by one the puppies were rescued and saved. Even Mrs. Wickersham, the teacher, got in on the "rescue" project by taking one for her nephew, who had been looking for a puppy to play with.

Then there was the time when Walter Maddox came to school with more patches on his pants than anything else. His shirt was threadbare and so thin from wear that it looked almost transparent. Walter had become the most laughed-at and made-fun-of boy in school. Behind Mrs. Wickersham's back, of course. It was more than Jon's tender, kind and sensitive nature could take.

"Walter," he said, one day after Walter's spirit was crushed to the ground by the laughing, jeering, unkind, insensitive boys. "Come with me."

Jon and Walter disappeared to a little thicket behind the school house and when they emerged together a short time later Jon was wearing Walter's pants and shirt and Walter was wearing Jon's.

In a kind and soft-spoken voice, Jon said, "Now, make fun of me if you care to, but don't ever do it to Walter again. The Bible tells us to do unto others the way we'd have them do unto us. It's wicked and sinful to make fun of the poor. Somewhere in the Bible it says that, 'Whoso oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker.'"

Katy recalled how the boys had disappeared around the side of the school house, looking smitten and ashamed of themselves. And Walter was never again made fun of. Also, from that time on, Walter had nice clothing. Katy knew they were some Jon's mother had shared with the poor boy. They were Jon's clothes. Katy recognized them immediately. Oh, how proud she had been of Jon!
Another time, Becky Stahl came to school with wet feet and hands as cold as icicles. She had neither boots for her feet nor gloves for her nearly-frozen hands. Mrs. Wickersham made her sit with her feet near the hot water register until her stockings were dry. Becky looked so embarrassed and ashamed, seeing her badly worn, wet shoes drying out on top of the register.

At recess time Jon hurried over to her, Katy. She was rolling a snow ball for a snow man's head, she remembered now. Katrina Unswerth had the body almost as large as she thought it should be. The head was needed and necessary to give their snow man "personality and identity," otherwise he would be "only half a person," Katrina had said, laughing in her pleasant, bubbly way.

"Katy," Jon's face was sober. She thought he was going to cry. "Katy," he said again, "do you think you could find a pair of mittens for Becky? I feel so sorry for her that I could cry."

Katy remembered how smitten she had felt, not thinking of helping Becky out on her own. It took Jon to notice the down-and-out ones; the poor; the despised; the abused. So long as she could remember, Jon was like this.

"Do you think you could, Katy? I know your parents wouldn't mind." Jon's eyes were great pools of sorrow and wells of pity.

"Oh, Jon, of course I will. I will! I'm sorry I didn't think of this. I have three or four pairs of mittens."

"And Katy, Becky shouldn't have wet feet. . . ." Katy recalled how the tears had stung her eyes. "No, Jon. No. She mustn't have wet feet, never again. I'll talk to Mother. Becky shall have a new pair of boots. And Jon, I have an extra coat that's warm and nice. It's too short for me. Mother was saving it until she knew of someone who could wear it. Becky's shorter than I am. . . ."

And that had been how Becky Stahl was clothed and provided for all the years that they went to school together in the little red brick school house near their farms. Jon was behind it all -- Walter and Becky being clothed properly and the puppies being rescued.
Suddenly Katy realized just how very much Jon meant to her. She would be proud and honored to wear his name if he should ever ask her to marry him. Of all the young men she knew, Jon excelled them all. He stood -- towered, really! -- above them all. His foul treatment from his father, and deprivation of love, all of which was acutely painful to him, had driven him into the arms of his Heavenly Father for love and comfort and solace. And instead of being bitter and rebellious and defiant, the fiery trials had served to make him compassionate and caring and kind and meek. He knew how to sympathize with the deprived, the hated, the unwanted: he was one of them!

"Oh, Jon! Jon! I love you so!" Katy cried into her hands. "You have been tried and tested and you have come forth as pure gold."

Whatever his calling, she knew she would be willing to go with him to the ends of the earth if he should ever want her.

Strange, she thought silently, that he had never told her what God wanted him to do. But that was not for her to answer, she reasoned; Jon would answer to God for his calling and she must, meanwhile, prepare herself for what she knew God wanted her to do.

She brushed her tears away and looked up in time to see Jon coming toward her.

Chapter 7

"Katy! Katy!" Jon called, running to where she sat. "I'll be leaving tomorrow afternoon, the Lord willing, at 5:53 on the flight headed for Washington. Your uncle told me to leave my old car here, at home, that he has two extras there, one of them a pick-up truck. I'll be living in an apartment above the shop, he said. Said two of their children had lived in it, after each got married and until they could afford a place of their own. Oh Katy, God is so good to me! So very good. But I'm going to miss you dreadfully. Now let's pray together before I hurry home and begin a whirlwind of packing and of getting things in order for the man who will have to take my place on the farm, whoever that may be. I want to make it as easy as possible for my father and the new man."
"I'll be on my knees a lot this night for you, Jon. I still feel like God is going to work things out for you in a wonderful and marvelous way. By the way, how are you going to get to the airport? I'd love to take you. . . ."

"And I'd love nothing more, my dear, dear Kathleen. In fact, I had planned to ask you. Also, it may be best that you take my car, and let it here afterwards. When Dad gets upset he takes his anger out on people and things, in destructive ways sometimes. I don't plan on telling him that I am going to be working for your uncle. At least not for the present, I won't. I feel it's best that he doesn't know this. He may make life bitter and nasty for both you and your folks. I plan to tell him that God opened a door of work and schooling for me through a friend, and that I am going to pass through the door and begin preparing myself for God's calling for me."

Katy listened in silence, her thoughts lingering on how different life was going to be for her when Jon was gone. "Shall I tell my parents, Jon?" she asked. "I know they're going to miss you. So will everybody at church."

"Tell your parents, Katy, if you want to. But tell them I'd rather it wasn't made known that I was working for your mother's brother -- your uncle -- due to my father's bad attitude and evil temper. As for the dear church people, Mother will tell them. Now, let's pray together, then I must be getting home. There is so much work to do before I leave. . . ."

Long after he left, Katy sat on the patio, thinking and crying. Jon would be leaving the home nest before she did now. She had thought she was the one who would be leaving and that, always, whenever she returned home for a break or a brief visit, Jon would be there to welcome her, still working his father's land. How quickly things could change! she thought.

Pulling herself together, she got to her feet. This should be a time of spiritual jubilee, not one of weeping and pining over loneliness, she told herself resolutely and positively. God was in His heaven. He had "seen the affliction" of His dear child, and in a miraculous way and a perfectly-timed way He had come down to deliver Jon. Rather, He had used her Uncle Thomas to serve as God's deliverer and she, Katy, had been God's messenger in conveying her uncle's request and plea for help.

"O Lord," she cried joyously, "I thank Thee. I praise Thee. Thou art never too early and not one minute too late. But always, always, right on
time. I will praise Thee, for Thou art worthy of praise. Thank You for opening this door for Jon. Now as he enters, bless him -- his work hours and his schooling. Make his life out there to be a life of blessing. . . ."

Katy prayed on. And on. She felt so blest and happy. God's ways were past finding out, she knew. And in her overjoyed heart she knew too, as surely as she knew her name, that God was working all things together for Jon's highest and greatest good. She felt confident that their separation was only a temporary thing; a getting ready for God's service kind of separation. With God's help, she meant to give her best to learning all that she needed to learn and to be a nurse who would glorify God in both her department and her vocation.

Katy went about her duties, feeling uplifted in spirit and thankful that she had learned a long time ago to take everything to Jesus -- her joys, sorrows, heartaches, disappointments, cares and loneliness. Everything. Always, she had come away from the Throne of Grace with joy in her soul, peace in her heart, and a song on her lips. It was wonderful to know, and have the calmly-sweet and blessed assurance, that God was in control of everything.

Jon, meanwhile, hurried back along the lane toward home, trying to decide what he should do first in preparation for his soon departure. He must, first of all, tell his parents the news. His father would still be at the office in town, he knew. But he could tell his mother. Or should he wait until his father returned home from work and tell them together? he wondered. Maybe this would make it easier on his mother, since his father could not accuse her of having known and of not telling him.

He decided upon the latter, not wanting his mother to be hurt by his father's stinging, cutting, slashing verbal abuse. Jon wondered how she stood up under it, physically and emotionally. Yet, for all the abuse, she remained the perfect Biblical wife and mother, staying sweetly patient and kind and loving.

Jon felt a knot constrict his chest and his throat. How he would miss his dear, sweet and wonderful mother! But he knew without any doubt whatever that he would have her fervent and earnest prayers following him day and night. And he believed in those prayers. Trusted in them and relied upon them, too.
He wondered, suddenly, just where he might be had it not been for his God-fearing, Spirit-filled, holy and praying mother. He shuddered with thinking the thought, realizing, again, as he had done so often before, that it was her life -- her prayers and influence -- that had made him yearn after and seek the Lord until he was born again and subsequently sanctified wholly.

He now thought of the boys with whom he had gone through high school and, ultimately, graduated, and his heart felt sick inside as he recalled how they had wasted their lives in what they called fun and "having a blast." It was, instead, wanton living -- drinking, smoking, dancing, using drugs, immorality; the whole gamut of sin and fleshly gratification. How different their lives may have been had they been blest by having a praying, loving father or mother or both, he thought sadly.

He had tried to help them; tried to point them to Jesus; but every time he testified to them (when opportunity presented itself), they had scattered and hurried away telling him they wanted to have fun while they were still young, that they would have time enough for the "religious bit" when they were old and feeble and didn't have anything better to do.

Jon felt burdened with remembering, wondering how many of their entire graduating class of one hundred fifty-nine would live to grow old. So many voices were beckoning his former classmates away from God; away from everything high and lofty and holy. So many worldly "sirens" were calling, bidding them to drink their fill of sinful pleasures. And they were, with no thought whatever of God.

He stifled a sob, wondering if he had done his best for them; wondering what more he could have done to turn them back from the downward road that leads to hell and destruction.

He had wept over them, prayed for them, and with some of them; but the call and lure of the world had charmed them until, by a continuous yielding and participating and partaking of, they had become slavish servants to their gods of pleasure and lust. They were fettered, bound, and chained and, as Jeremiah declared in 4:22, "... they are wise to do evil."

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools . . ." (Rom. 1:22).
Some things had to be turned over to God, he knew, and this was one of them. After one had let his light shine brightly for Jesus, he must trust the results to God. Faithfulness in witnessing and shining was God’s prerequisite for him; he had done his best to fulfill and carry it out: the rest was up to God.

Jon hastened his footsteps, realizing that he had much work ahead of him before his flight to Washington. Everything had happened so fast that it seemed almost unreal to him. However, the inner heart peace and the calm assurance that God had planned it all was verification enough of its reality.

He hurried to the barn and implement shed and checked the doors. He would close everything, he decided, and make sure there was nothing cluttering the floors. He wanted everything in excellent shape and order for his father's new farm hand, whoever that might be.

Satisfied with what he saw, Jon patted the tractor and said, "Good-bye, faithful workhorse, I won't be needing you anymore. I'll be leaving, God willing, to prepare myself to work in harvest fields of a different kind than those in which you and I have worked together.

"I've received many spiritual blessings riding you, and you've 'heard' many a prayer and sob and song as we plowed, disked, planted and sowed. You've never 'heard' anything but spiritual things in all the years I've driven you. I hope it will continue this way. But not all men fear God. So instead of praising and glorifying Him and His holy name, they curse Him and take His name in vain. I trust this will not be the case. . . ."

From the implement shed Jon hurried toward the pasture where the beef cattle grazed in total contentment. He wanted to check the fence, to make sure there were no holes and no broken wires. And, too, he wanted to make sure the gate into the pasture was latched tightly and that the chain was slipped around the metal post and was well secured. It was not uncommon for cattle to open the latch on a gate; but the looped, circled, heavy metal chain, never.

The steers paid him scant attention as he followed the fence row the entire length and width of the pasture land, checking the fencing. The beef herd looked fat and prime. He was thankful for this; the herd seemed to be his father's special pride and joy. They were little or no work, having all they
needed in the lush, green pasture and the grain supplement which was automatically fed into a long trough beneath a shed twice daily. The stream that wound its way through the pasture provided them with an abundant supply of fresh, clear, cool water.

Jon checked the gate carefully then walked toward the house. Instead of feeling sad about leaving the familiar things, his heart felt jubilant and happy. God had given him a total and complete release from the farm and from everything pertaining to it. He had received orders from a Higher Authority -- from a Heavenly voice -- to "Get you out of this land. . . ." Like Abraham of old, who had had a quick obedience, he meant to do likewise.

With a purposed heart, he walked to the kitchen. The hardest task of all lay ahead of him -- telling his parents. But he would do it. Indeed he would. God was for him; he had nothing to fear.

Chapter 8

It was unusually quiet in the kitchen; Jon wondered where his mother was. Perhaps in the garden, he thought. She loved her garden and, like her heart, she kept the garden free of weeds and meticulously clean.

If his mother had ever harbored any "weeds" of ill will or wrong attitudes and bad feelings toward anyone he had never known of it nor been aware of it. No, her heart was like the Biblical "well-watered garden, whose waters fail not." His mother had displayed and exemplified a spirit of perfect love and true holiness and righteousness under even the strongest provocation and the severest testings.

It suddenly dawned upon the young man that his mother's unwavering faith in God -- her wonderful stability in Christ -had served as a foundational basis for his steadfastness and immovability in things spiritual: if God could keep his mother in spite of the hardships through which she must go, God could and would keep him also. After all, He had promised grace sufficient for every test and for each trial.

He hurried to his room and sat down at the desk. The ledgers and record books containing the input and output of the farm's operation, as well as its gains, losses and profits, was all recorded carefully and in a business-like manner between the lids of the books.
He checked them over quickly but expertly, going over column after column of figures, et cetera, and when he had finished them he placed each on top of the desk, one on top of the other where his father could easily and readily find them. He wanted to give no occasion for his father to say he couldn't locate those record books. Better still, he decided, he would give them to his father personally when he broke the news of his leaving to him.

Jon hurried to the attic after the luggage pieces which he had purchased better than a year ago. He smiled now, recalling his mother's question when the set arrived via United Parcel Service.

"Are you leaving us, Jonathan David?" she had asked with a smile on her sweet face.

"Not now, Mother," he replied. "The set was reasonable; and someday, the Lord willing, I may need luggage. It's a handsome and durable set, don't you agree?"

"Very much so, Jonathan. I'm glad you bought the entire set, too. Someday, if I know the voice of God, you will need those pieces of luggage. Why not leave them in the boxes in which they arrived? Then put them in the attic when you are through looking at them. They'll stay nice and new looking and clean in the boxes. And when you need the luggage you will have adequate and handsome pieces to use."

His mother had hugged him then and told him how much she loved him and how very thankful she was for him.

"You are constantly in my prayers, Jonathan," she had added softly. "I am praying for God to use you. And He will, my son, if you will remain pliable in His hands and be obedient to His voice and His leading.

"There are many voices that call out to the young. Be careful to heed only the voice of your Heavenly Master. You will recognize and know His voice, my child," his mother had told him confidently. "His voice is like no other; it is gentle, kind, lowly and loving. He speaks in gentle tones to those He loves. He woos, calls, leads and opens doors. Follow close beside Him: He will lead you in the way He wants you to go."
"Satan, too, will come with his enticements, his 'wares' and his offers of prosperity, wealth and success and popularity. You will recognize his voice and his enticements if you remain close by your Good Shepherd's side and stay filled with His Holy Spirit. He promised to "guide you into all truth." He will do what He has promised, Jonathan David, for "He abideth faithful, He cannot lie." This is God's Word."

"How forcible are right words?" Jonathan exclaimed aloud now, quoting from Job 6:25. Then adding reverently, "Thank You, kind Father for my wonderful mother."

He brought the luggage pieces down from the attic and set them, still in their boxes, inside his bedroom. Then he decided to find his mother and tell her how very much he loved her and appreciated her. He wanted her to know, again, how deeply and greatly her Spirit-filled life had affected and influenced his. There would be no place nor time for him to do this when once he had related the news of his departure to his father. It would then be one verbal accusation and castigation after another. There would be no peacefully-quiet moments in which he could speak thus to his mother, he knew. And he did want her to know, at least one more time, what an inspiration and encouragement and spiritual blessing she was to him.

He let himself out of the house and started down the brick pathway toward the garden. From tree branches and bushes, birds sang, whistled and called as he passed. It was as though they were sending him off with their blessing in song.

There would be birds in Washington, too, he knew. Soon he would be listening to and reveling in their sweet musical notes, God willing. He would enjoy whatever kind and species were out there, for he loved birds and animals. And God had been so kind and considerate and loving as to give each state -- each country and continent, really -- an abundance of His creature creations, each according to its habitat and adaptability to climate, vegetation and such like things. What a great and wonderful God he served! he thought, with a sense of awe and amazement.

He rounded the little bend and stepped out from the shade of the trees into the clearing where his mother's garden sat like a small Eden, completely weed free and richly green except for the splashes of ripening red and yellow tomatoes and lemony-yellow crookneck squash peeking out from beneath
dark green leaf covered vines, and red and orange-yellow bell peppers hanging like huge colored bells from equally healthy, green plants.

He started to call her name, then he realized she wasn't there. Where could she be? he wondered. It was quite unlike her to leave the farm place without letting him know that she had an errand to take care of and that she would soon be back. Sometimes it was to run to the drug store for an ailing, elderly couple to pick up medication for them and a few pantry staples from the grocery store. Or maybe it was to rush a small child to the doctor in the absence of a hard-working father-husband. But always, she had let him know.

He thought of the berry patch then. Perhaps she was there. She enjoyed picking berries. Picking anything, really. But berries especially!

Jon felt like, even now, he could smell the marvelous fragrance -- the ambrosial goodness! -- of the cooking black and red raspberry jams and jelly. The delicious fragrance lingered in the rooms of the house long hours after the cooking and preserving was finished and completed. Same way with the strawberry preserves and the blackberry jelly.

His mother was quite a homebody, Jon thought with a feeling of deepest gratitude and thankfulness. Her home was her castle. Her work was God-ordered and God ordained. She loved her role as homemaker; it showed plainly and visibly in her face. And her garden and berry patch were two of her favorite work places. She had told him so more than once. In the garden, she had confided, she had many a time of blessed fellowship with her God. She had "deposited" more than one burden and care into God's great, super-abundant, burden-bearing sack, she had said one time, right while on her knees weeding the garden or gathering vegetables.

Jon wondered how many plants had received moisture from his mother's tears as she worked in her garden. She had shed many, he was sure.

He came to the berry patch and called her name softly. The only response he received was the noise of crows cawing and fussing in the nearby woods. A careful check of the red raspberry canes revealed that there would be no more fresh berries until later in the fall, when once again the plants would bear their full, plump, sweet, fat berries.
He walked toward the house now with a brisk step, knowing that he hadn't one minute's time to waste. If he could not speak to his mother 'alone before leaving, he would write his feelings down on paper and give it to her, he decided.

He came in through the kitchen doorway and stopped by the sink for a drink of water when he spied the letter on the kitchen table. Sipping the water, he opened the paper and read,

Jonathan, my dear son,

I am sorry I must pen this rather than tell you; but since you were nowhere around when I tried to find you, I shall have to write.

Your father called from the office in town shortly after you had gone outside this morning to work; he insisted that I go with him on a business trip. We will be gone until late tomorrow night, he informed me. He seemed rather disturbed about something; said he had no inkling the Company would be sending him out on this trip. I want you to pray for him, Jonathan. And pray for me also, that I may display only the spirit of true holiness and manifest Jesus Christ in every circumstance.

I am sorry I do not have a good supply of precooked food in the refrigerator for you to reheat and enjoy. But the notice came unexpectedly and too quickly and the time to leave was too suddenly and short for me to be able to prepare anything for you. I am sorry -again I state this. For I feel that a good mother will always try to have well-balanced meals for her family, insofar as the budget allows. My garden supplies us with such a bountiful harvest of good things to eat; healthful and nutritious things, they are. All praise and glory must go to Him, the Giver of life as well as of food.

I have some canned vegetable soup down on the shelf in the basement, Jon. I meant to bring a jar of it up, but your father arrived in a state of agitation and, being in a hurry to leave, I had no time to get it for you. There are plenty of frozen peaches in the freezer. (I know how well you like these!) Help yourself to anything you may feel hungry for. Eggs are plentiful. And there's a pound of bacon in the refrigerator -- just in case your taste buds crave a breakfast meal for supper!
Don't work too hard. Enjoy yourself -- I mean your privacy. (What an excellent opportunity for praying and meditating and waiting upon God! No distractions; no demands!)

I plan to use this trip to the best advantage possible, although I am still somewhat baffled as to why your father insisted I go along with him. (This is only the second time ever that I have gone along with him on a business trip. And Jon, your father seems even more confused and baffled as to the reason and necessity of the trip.) I am thankful that, in my heart, I know nothing comes as a surprise to my kind, loving, and understanding Heavenly Father. He knows the reason (or reasons) for this even though we may not. Bless His dear, holy name forever and forever!

I thank God for you, Jonathan David. Stay encouraged in the Lord and don't allow anything to discourage you or get you down spiritually. God's grace and His Almighty power is constantly available to you, affording you the "more than a conqueror" status for your daily walk with the Lord.

God bless you, my beloved, very-precious son, and may He watch over us until we are home safely and back together as a family again.

I love you greatly and deeply!
My love and prayers,
Mother.

Jon folded the letter and clasped it to his bosom. He would carry it with him to Washington, the Lord willing. He would keep it forever. Its value to him was priceless and far above anything that money could buy.

He lifted his hands upward, the letter held with it. They may not have understood the reason for the sudden, perfectly-timed out-of-town trip, but he did. He knew! And suddenly he was having a season of thanksgiving and praise to the God who knew how to fight his every battle.

His continual victory was dependent upon his obedience and total commitment to Christ and His will, he realized afresh and anew, going to the bedroom to begin packing.

Chapter 9
Jon placed the letter on his dresser while he removed clothing from the drawers and began packing the things into the pieces of luggage. He was absolutely amazed at the perfect timing of the Lord. He regretted not being able to tell his parents personally and face to face about leaving, his mother particularly so, but he was also greatly relieved. God's ways were always best. Now there would be no encounter with his father, whose anger could well have reached limits the likes of which neither his mother nor he had ever seen before. And, he felt certain-sure, his father would have done everything within his power to have compelled him to remain home to work the land, even using force if necessary.

Oh, God was so good! To him especially, he felt. He wept humbly and brokenly, rejoicing over the fact that the Lord knew how to deliver the godly out of their trials, testings and temptations. It was a miracle, what was happening to him, and how God's power and might was working for him.

Katy's calm words of sweet assurance echoed back to him now in a positive way: "I feel like God is even now working things together for your good, Jon," she had stated kindly and emphatically.

How very true her words were and how right! he thought as he hastened from the room to call her.

"Katy! My dear, dear Katy!" he exclaimed happily as soon as she had answered the ring.

"Jon! Are you all right? Oh, I'm so happy to hear your voice again!" she cried. "Are you all right? I have been praying and crying and interceding in your behalf.

"Oh Katy, my dear, dear girl! God has wrought a mighty deliverance for me. In a way, I feel somewhat like Peter felt when the angel of the Lord came upon him as he lay in prison sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door keeping the prison.

"The angel smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

"And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And he did so. And the angel said . . . follow me."
"'And he went out, and followed the angel,' Acts 12:6-9 states, and 'wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.'

"'When they were past the first and the second ward,' the Bible says, 'they came to the iron gate leading unto the city; which opened to them of its own accord.' And after he was out and had passed on through one street, the angel left him. Then he came to himself and began his praise testimony, saying, 'Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod. . . .'

"I know without any doubt whatever, Katy, that God has worked an equally marvelous and wonderful miracle for me: not only has He opened a door of employment and Bible schooling for me but He has given me clear passage to my new state, with no hindrance whatever; no hassle."

"What do you mean, Jon?"

"I returned home with full intentions to tell my parents the news around the supper table this evening. But God has saved me all of this. Every verbal bit of it, Katy!"

"How, Jon? What happened?"

"Dad had to go out of town on business for the Company, not knowing the reason or the need for such a trip. Miracle number one. He insisted, Mother's letter on the table to me stated, that she go with him, a thing rare and most unusual. Miracle number two. They will not be returning until late tomorrow night sometime, she said. Miracle number three. Oh, Katy, I feel humbled and blest and happy beyond words."

"Praise the Lord forever and forever, Jon! 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' He is working in your behalf. This really strengthens my faith."

"Like I said, it's a miracle, Katy. All the way through, a mighty miracle. Now I will not have to listen to my dear father's verbal abuse nor his outbursts of anger. I will write each of them a letter; or I may just write it to both of them. I want to do what I feel will make it easiest for my precious mother."
"God is so wonderfully good and kind to us, isn't He, Jon? He pours out so many beautiful surprises upon His children who love and trust and fear Him."

"And to think that I am one of His recipients!" Jon exclaimed meekly and humbly, adding that he must get back to the business of packing and getting ready to leave.

Work went easily for the young man; it was as though God was helping him. He marveled over it.

An hour after supper, he had everything packed and ready to go to the airport. He and Katy would leave shortly after the noon hour, God willing. The almost two-hour drive to the airport would not need to be a hurried thing by leaving early, and he would be able to pick up the ticket at the desk, as per Mr. Franklin's instructions, and check his luggage pieces through at the same time. Then Katy and he would have the remaining time to just be together. He would take her out to a cozy little restaurant not too far from the airport terminal, the Lord willing, and they could enjoy an unhurried meal together.

He had eaten at the restaurant twice; once when he took an evangelist to the airport to save their pastor both the time and expense of going and, again, when he picked up an evangelist who had a meeting in their church. The food was excellent, the prices within reason, and the atmosphere was delightfully-pleasant and lovely. Everything bespoke of cleanliness and tidiness, too.

Jon looked around the very familiar room, now emptied of his personal belongings, and realized that this would be his last night to sleep in the bed and be in the room. For how long? The answer to that was in the hands of God. It may be his last night ever to sleep in it. When one moved out and on to other living quarters it was, frequently, a permanent thing. In his heart, he felt like the days spent in the room which was called his would be few, if any, after this, his last night.

There were things which would always hold fond memories for him, he realized. His mother, bless her, had tried to make up for his father's lack of love and affection in countless and numerous ways. She did myriad thoughtful things for him and showered him with acts of kindness and deeds of love.
His room was a treasure trove of her expressions of love for him -- the quilt on his bed, made completely by her gentle hands, every single stitch of each block of an appliqued duck done in softly-beautiful earth tones and teals and emeralds set against a background of mossy green; the two quilted and framed pictures above his chest of drawers, exact duplicates of the handsome quilt on his bed but made with only one large block each; the trunk at the bottom of his bed, carefully, painstakingly and lovingly restored because he had once voiced his desire to have it brought down from the attic and set in a place more worthy of its antiquity and charm.

Jon walked over to the old trunk and ran his hands across its humped top, recalling how his mother had worked untiringly to bring out its original beauty. Even the metal braces that gave durability and strength to the sturdy old trunk, not to mention beauty, were cleaned and shined and polished until it became a handsome addition to his room.

It had belonged to his great-grandfather, his mother had said. This added to its charm and its rareness and intrigue, Jon felt. It had seemed to be a vital link which connected him to a long-ago past. As a little boy, he had conjured up all kinds of beautiful images and mental pictures of this great-grandfather. And he had pretended that that marvelous old trunk had traveled to sea with his great-grandparent and that inside its "body" had been treasures of every kind. Oh, it had been so much fun to pretend, he remembered now, recoiling his many trips up the attic stairs to pay a visit to the trunk and to pretend and dream.

These would always be fond memories for him, he knew. But he would not be pining over nor longing for the things he was leaving behind. He knew this too. It was as though he had known all along that they were his only for a while; something higher and greater was out there awaiting him. He had felt its pull since that day while plowing in the field. It was a constant thing. And with all of his heart, he kept saying a continual yes. Earth's treasured things became as nothing when one had had a glimpse of the Heavenly, he thought joyously, feeling a total peace with God.

He left the room, taking the farm record books with him out to the dining room table. He placed them at the head of the table, where his father always sat to eat the evening meal. Then he sat down and wrote the letter to his
parents, praying for Divine guidance and wisdom for everything he would be writing.

As he wrote, it was as though Someone higher and greater than he was guiding the pen and directing his thoughts as to what to write and say. It was glorious; the Spirit gave him liberty and freedom and Divine help. There were so many things to say on paper which he would never have been able to think of had he been talking to his father face to face.

The letter was straightforward and to the point. Seasoned with grace and filled with loving kindness and tenderness, Jon prayed for another miracle when his father would read its contents. He prayed for strength for his mother and for healing for her loneliness after he was gone.

He placed the letter in an envelope and, standing it upright against the record books, he went to bed, having the calm assurance that he was following God's will for his life.

Chapter 10

The sun was just beginning to stretch its rosy fingers heavenward when Jon awoke and got out of bed. Ever an early riser, this day was no exception. He loved the early dawn; loved its cool freshness, the song of birds, the quiet and stillness and the sense of the presence of God.

He had made it a daily practice when he first awoke to greet God with a psalm or song of praise and adoration. It seemed to be the key that unlocked his heart for greater, deeper, broader and wider expressions of love and praise and adoration. It was the preparation ground for his private devotions. Always, he entered into His courts with praise. First and last and always, it was praise and singing.

This morning his heart seemed to have an overflowing wellspring of praise: it bubbled up, spilled over and ran out. Everything about the day seemed destined to expressions of praise and adoration. This day would mark and commemorate a day of new beginnings for him; it was the turn on the road of life that would lead him to the fulfillment of a higher commitment; a Divine commitment.
He was so happy that he wept for joy. And when he remembered how God had worked everything out for him -- to the minutest detail -- with precision timing, his cup of joy and blessing overflowed.

He dropped to his knees beside the old trunk at the foot of the bed and poured his inmost feelings of delight and love and adoration out to the Lord. This day -- his last few hours at home -- would be a day of continual praise to God; a time of thanksgiving for answered prayer and for the mighty works of God. He would make no requests known to the Lord; he had done that in days gone by. Today would be set aside and given over to only praise and thanksgiving and adoration to God, he decided. Like the Israelites, he would have his day of jubilee; his day of celebration for total deliverance from things secular to things higher.

He had a camp meeting in his soul. When he arose, he picked up his oft-read, much-used Bible and read chapter after chapter from its pages, a thing he did daily.

The striking clock from the dining room reminded him that time was slipping by rapidly. He closed the Bible reverently and slipped it carefully into the piece of luggage which he would be carrying on the plane with him, then he made sure the room was tidy and in perfect order before he began carrying the pieces of luggage out to his car.

Some time later, going through the house for a final checkup to make sure the windows were all closed and that he hadn't forgotten anything, he slipped a note into his dear mother's Bible, saying things he dared not say in the letter on the table.

He wanted her to know that God had definitely called him to labor for Him -- in answer to her request and her prayers and earnest petitions. And he wanted her to know how very much he loved her and believed in her and her profession of faith, and that he would be counting upon her prayers and her love.

He wrote so many tender and endearing things on the piece of paper which he slipped into her Bible. It would be safe there, he knew; his father didn't read the Bible. He was sad to have to acknowledge and admit this to even his own heart, but it was true, nevertheless.
He locked the door then slid behind the steering wheel of his car and made a quick trip to town to the bank. Mr. Franklin had assured him his air fare would be paid and taken care of. But Jon felt he should reimburse the man. He never was, and he never intended to become, a human leech; a "moocher" -- one who expected and accepted gratis and handouts. No! God had given him a strong physical body and so long as he was able, he intended to work and pay what rightfully he owed. God had no place in His economy for a sluggard and a freeloader. These kind brought a reproach and a blot upon the name of Jesus. And on the church, too.

Katy was waiting for him when he turned into the driveway. Like a small, eager child she ran to him.

"Mother and Father insisted that you take this along," she said with a smile, thrusting a small but neatly wrapped box into his hands. "You are not to open it until you are airborne, Jon. Mother's orders. Oh, by the way, she and Daddy said to be sure to tell you they will be praying every single day for you, and that they love you deeply. And . . . and like a son."

"Did you tell them, Katy?" Jon asked, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Tell them what, Jon; that I love you and you love me? Yes, I did. But it wasn't necessary; they saw and knew it long ago, they said. In fact, Daddy went so far as to say this was an answer to his prayers! Can you imagine that!"

"Well, yes, I can, my dear. Why does it seem so incredulous to you?"

"I guess it's just that, well . . . I never knew my parents gave this any thought. Now if I would have been dating someone I could understand it more readily."

"Katy, I believe that every Christian parent who loves his or her child begins praying for that child's life companion long before they reach a dating age even. I know Mother has frequently told me that she has been praying for God to hold me steady and keep me pure and clean and holy for His choice of my mate. She didn't maybe name names, but, knowing Mother, I wouldn't be too surprised that she didn't whisper your name, linked with mine, to the Lord. She loves you very much, Katy. In Mother's eyes, you are the ideal Christian young woman. And she is right, of course."
"My parents feel that way about you, Jon," Katy replied. "They felt so badly that they couldn't see you before leaving. But Daddy committed himself to go with the preacher today on district business. They left before daybreak. Something to do about a future camp site for our district. The District Superintendent wanted them to go and check it out, since both my father and Brother Kendry are on the district advisory board. They are to bring a full report back regarding the buildings on the grounds--how many dormitories and cottages; how many can be fed in the dining hall, et cetera. Also, they are to see if the buildings are in good shape and if the tabernacle will seat our district crowd. If their report is favorable and good, the District Moderator and as many others of the advisory board who can go, will go to have a look, then they will make the final decision shortly afterwards, by vote, God willing.

"Mother had to leave early also. This is the day she takes Mrs. Hennigen to the clinic in the city for her therapy. But they told me to tell you not to worry about the car; it will be parked in our garage. Daddy said he knew now why he had a three-car garage," and Katy laughed when she said it. "And if you're wondering if I'm ready to go, the answer is yes, Jon."

"Check the doors, Katy; be sure they're locked. And the windows too; are they closed? It can blow pretty hard sometimes when it storms."

"Everything's fine, Jon; I checked before coming out here. You sound so much like Daddy. Wait till I lock this front door, then we'll go."

Jon watched as she hurried up to the door and turned the key in the lock. What a wonderful young woman she was! he thought. So unlike the average women her age.

He walked around to the right side of the car and, opening the door, he helped her inside. Then he started the car and headed out of the driveway.

"This will be our last time to be together for a long time," he said. "I want it to be a time that each of us will cherish and cling to and remember while we are apart. We will be busy, you and I, and there may be times when neither of us will have time to write. We must not doubt or mistrust each other in those times, Katy. If you should, perchance, find someone else, I want you to let me know, my dear. It's easier to face life's difficulties knowing the facts
than it is to wonder and imagine wrong things. As for me, I know my heart; there will never be anyone for me but you."

"Jon! You shock me," Katy remarked. "I love you. Only you. I, too, feel I know my heart, and for me there will never be anyone but you."

"There will be professional men, Katy; I'm sure you will be receiving some invitations to fine restaurants and such like things."

"But they will never be my Jonathan David. And, of course, I wouldn't think of going out with a sinner man, Jon. Not even to a restaurant. I am going away to train, my dear; to prepare myself to serve a suffering, dying humanity, not to dine and have a good time, as many of my peers are doing."

"I believe you, Katy. Oh, I do believe you! I just felt I wanted you to know what I said just in case. . . ."

"Don't say it, Jon!" Katy exclaimed, interrupting his unfinished sentence. "There will be no need for your 'in case.' Christians don't go flirting and carrying on around the opposite sex. Especially not with sinners. You may relax and put your mind at ease. This is a promise. A solemn, from my heart promise."

"Oh, I'm not worried, Katy dear; not in the least. I trust you. It's just that I know, and you know, also, there is the possibility. . . ."

"Possibility, but not probability; my dear, dear Jon. I know the young man whom I love: know how he has always lived; and that he towers above any other whom I know or ever will know, in principle, uprightness and morality. Also in spiritual things."

"You humble me, Kathleen. May I ever be worthy of you and your love. Are you getting anxious to leave?" Jon asked quickly.

"Since you are leaving, yes. I'll miss my folks dreadfully. But I'll be able to drive home to see them once in a while, the Lord willing. This eases the pain of leaving them. But it's different where you are concerned: God alone knows when we'll get to see each other again. This makes me want to cry, I must confess."
Jon reached over and gave Katy's hand a gentle squeeze. "Have you never heard the saying that love always makes a way to see and be with the object of its affection?" he asked gently.

"Yes. But you'll be so very busy, Jon. And Uncle really needs you."

"This is a blessing, my dear; work makes the time pass by more rapidly. The idle man finds time weighing heavily on his hands; not so with one who is busy: time then seems to speed by. See where the two-fold blessing comes in? It's a speeder-up of time and it keeps the one occupied happy, too. The Bible says, 'The sleep of the laboring man is sweet, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.' Work has many benefits and blessings besides the money one receives for his labor."

"I know, Jon. And I keep telling myself that very thing with what I'll be doing, God willing. Do you plan on going to Bible school? Uncle Thomas said you could go to classes in the morning, if you chose to do so, and work for him from around noon till six each evening. He's a great man! So is my Aunt Julia, his wife. They will want you to put God first. This is the reason his business has prospered the way it has, I believe. They have always put God first in their lives and in everything they do. He gave God the first three thousand dollars his business brought in. It was his 'first-fruits' offering, he said, given as a token of love and appreciation to the Lord for helping him to earn it. You'll love them, Jon, I know you will. And they'll love you. This is a promise!"

Jon gave Katy a quick but affectionate glance. "You wouldn't be partial, would you?" he teased.

"Extremely so, my dear Jon. But you'll see that I was telling you the truth."

"Are you getting hungry, Katy? I thought we'd eat in a restaurant near the airport after I pick up my ticket and have my luggage checked through, the Lord willing. We'll have time for a quick sandwich and something to drink now if you are hungry or thirsty."

"Thanks, Jon; I'd rather wait until after your flight reservation is confirmed and you have the ticket and your bags are all checked through that need to go through."
"You're quite a girl, Katy! I was just thinking how quickly things have changed in one single day. I am overwhelmed how God put all the pieces together so quickly and perfectly and wonderfully well. His ways truly are 'past finding out.' And He used you to help. Oh, Katy, I am utterly amazed!"

"God delights in giving us 'good gifts,'" Katy answered, smiling. . . .

Chapter 11

The trip to the airport was both pleasant and sad; pleasant for Jon and Katy in that they were together and sad in knowing that they were parting, one going one direction—west—to work, the other east for her training. They savored every moment, knowing it would be their last time together for many months.

Linking Katy's arm through his as he came from getting the ticket and checking his luggage through to its destination, Jon guided her gently through and away from the busy, milling crowd of people to his car in a nearby parking lot.

"Well, that's done," he remarked with a smile. "We made good time getting her, Katy. Now we'll go to the cozy little restaurant where I ate several times before. And we won't need to hurry. I'm thankful for that."

Katy laughed softly. "So am I, Jon," she said. "The time will go by all too rapidly as it is. But I dare not—must not—dwell upon that part of this beautiful day. Nor upon the loneliness I know I'll feel after you are gone: God very definitely and miraculously opened this door for you. I will rejoice in Him and praise Him for this. And who knows what the outcome will be!"

"It will have to be something good and wonderful, Katy, for God does all things well. I feel like I am just beginning the greatest venture of my life. I don't see, or know, the full extent of it now, but I have the feeling that I am soon going to see and know. At least in part. And wherever He leads, I'll go; whatever He asks, I'll do. I am totally and completely resigned to the whole will of God for my life."

They drove in silence for a while; Jon, intent on his driving, Katy, alone in her thoughts.
Jon took the turn-off to the restaurant and in a short time they were seated in a quiet, secluded area at a table for two. Hanging baskets of blooming fuchsia and a species of vining, ruffled geraniums filled the restaurant with beauty and color and, scattered here and there in tall, ornate planters, were beautiful, tall, well-shaped, dark green weeping figs. "It's beautiful!" Katy exclaimed.

"I thought you'd like it," Jon replied. "It's relaxing."

"And so clean and neat looking, too!" Katy added. "I like cleanliness."

"Of heart and life. And house," Jon added, knowing Katy's aversion to uncleanliness in any form.

They laughed together over Jon's emphatically stated "and house" remark.

"You really do know me quite well, Jonathan David," she teased.

"And how could I help not to?" Jon quipped with a smile. "I've been looking out for you almost all of our natural lives. I always thought you were too tiny and fragile looking to go to school those first few years. But you survived. Quite well, I must admit."

"Oh, Jon, did you really think that?"

"I certainly did, Katy. This is a fact. Truth is, I used to voice my boyish concern to Mother. She always set my heart and mind at ease by telling me that you had a lot more physical stamina and endurance than met the eye. My eye particularly. But say, hadn't we better be ordering our meal? I see our waitress is coming."

Katy discovered the meal to be everything she had expected, and more. It was simply delicious. The atmosphere surrounding them seemed to give added succulence and a delightful flavor to the food. The stir fry vegetables which she had ordered could not have been better. Crispy-tender and delicately seasoned with a savory herb seasoning, she enjoyed the medley of colorful vegetables immensely. They were a delightful compliment to the broiled chicken breast and the congealed jello-fruit salad.
They ate their meal in a leisurely and unhurried way, thankful for the moments they could be together but aware of the fact that, all too quickly and rapidly, the hands of the clock were signaling their soon separation.

On the way back to the airport, Jon said, "Katy, I have ever so many things I want to say to you. I love you. I'd like to ask you to marry me, for I truly love you enough to marry you now. But I feel it's best for us to wait a while before we become engaged. You have your God-given work which you must learn and be trained for, and I have my Bible schooling ahead of me, God willing. We must not thwart God's plan for our lives by rushing ahead of His schedule and His timing."

"Oh no, Jon. Never. I love you enough to marry you now, too. But I know what God wants of me and I must prepare for this. Mine is as much a calling as I've heard our minister say his was, and is. Until I am through training, Jon, I won't marry. God's will must be carried out first in my life. I don't know what's out there in the future for me for I can't see that far ahead. But I do know that for my life now, I must train for nursing. This is very clear and real to me."

"Your dedication and total obedience to Christ has always been an inspiration to me, Katy. You are a marvelous woman and most unusual. I love and admire you for it. With God's help and by His grace, we will each prepare for what God has called us to.

"Love -- true, real and genuine love -- never becomes impatient nor hasty; it can wait. And wait. And I feel like the account given in Genesis 29:20, where it states, 'And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.' What is three years, or four? Or even more, if God so wills?

"We will be in touch with each other, the Lord willing. And who knows, maybe the Lord will work things around that we can see each other over Christmas I'm not sure that my father will allow me under his roof, however, for he will not take my leaving kindly. I trust and pray that he will not be abusive to Mother because of this. I am hoping and praying that God will change his attitude and his conduct toward my mother and, through my absence and exodus, that he will treat her with the courtesy and kindness and gentleness and love which she so much deserves."
Katy turned and looked at Jon. "You know," she said quickly, "this may get him to thinking. Maybe, with you gone and him not having another male rival, he may change toward your dear mother."

"I certainly never would have thought of myself as being a rival, Katy dear. A father and son were meant to be close, not rivals. And, God being my judge, I never did anything to give him that feeling."

"I know that, Jon. But, innocent though you have been, and are, the fact that you were born a male instead of a female, you became his rival. It's ridiculous, isn't it? An innocent, helpless, dependent baby boy a rival to his father! But I'm afraid that is the situation in your case. Like I said before to you, it honestly and truly boggles my mind. But I suppose, when one has been brought up with massive doses of love and kindness and gentleness all of her life like I have been, that this never will be fully or completely understood and comprehended. For a fact, Jon, I can't understand it. I know it's so about your dad, and that it's every word of it the truth, but that still doesn't help me to understand it. It's a sinful, unregenerate heart, to be sure. But it . . . it's -- dare I say it? -- it's inhuman."

"It's certainly not natural affection, Katy," Jon answered. "And Paul stated that in the last days people would be without natural affection. But I know God can change my father. I love him. How I wish he loved me! And he will when he gets truly born again. The new birth alone can and will change him. I am praying for God to touch his heart, in His way, and give him a complete change and turn-about. But if he never changes, I have set my face like a flint to go through with the Lord. I found the true Source of living when I found Christ in saving grace and sanctifying power. "You mentioned about my life being an inspiration to you, Jon; well, I'm not sure that I can find words to describe what your life has meant to me. You've always been so strong and steady. Spiritually, I mean. And when I learned, inadvertently, that your father didn't want you, and I saw your shining face and your steadfastness in Christ and how very sweet and kind and gentle you were -- in spite of your rejection -- I felt like I was one of the least of God's children.

"It was easy for me to serve Christ, I realized; I had never had any opposition whatever from either of my parents. All I ever knew and heard were words of encouragement from them. You had just the opposite from your father. It made me realize just how wonderful you were; how well
anchored your soul was in Christ. Your spiritual, Spirit-filled life has been like a beacon light to all of us at church. You will be missed greatly, I know."

"I know someone else who will be missed," Jon declared as he pulled into the airport parking lot and helped Katy out of the car in true gentlemanly fashion. They walked arm in arm into the airport. The time of parting was fast drawing nigh. They sensed it, and were silent, content just to be together.

"I wish you didn't have to drive home alone," Jon finally said, breaking the beautiful silence between them. "I really appreciate you coming with me, and then driving the car back."

"Aside from the fact that I will miss your dear presence and your company, Jon, I don't mind. In fact, it's been my sheer delight and pleasure to be with you. I would not have wanted you to leave without me. I treasure these hours spent with you. And in the days and months that lie ahead, I know I'll treasure them even more."

"Christians enjoy such simple things," Jon remarked. "Things like just being together, even if it is in a crowded airport; things like visiting flower gardens, arboretums and planetariums."

"And zoos," Katy added with a smile, recalling the time when their church youth group had visited the zoo in the city.

"We had such a good time," she added. "I felt sorry for you, that you had to stay home and work."

"I'm sure it didn't do me any harm, my dear. The work, I mean. It was a lesson in discipline, I must confess. I wanted to go. But Father's orders were for me to stay home and finish working the 50 acre field. I finished the job that day. In itself, this was extremely rewarding to me. There's just something about doing one's work -- getting it done, I mean -- and doing it well, that is highly and richly rewarding. And although I didn't get to go with the group that day, I felt richly rewarded and repaid in seeing my work finished and completed. Mother has always said that the way one does his everyday work in the field of the secular pretty much determines how he will do God's Kingdom work. I've worked hard at being my best and doing my best in the everyday round of duties, training and disciplining and schooling myself for
God's higher spiritual work, which must never be done in a careless, slipshod, half-hearted way."

"You are too conscientious to do anything slipshod or careless," Katy asserted truthfully.

"The Bible has something to say about doing God's work negligently, Katy. In Jeremiah 48:10, it says, 'Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully. . . .' And in my marginal reference column the word deceitfully is rendered negligently. But say, I must be getting down to my gate or I'll miss my flight. I'll be writing you, dear Kathleen, and calling, as my finances permit, God willing."

They fell in step with the milling, rushing crowd heading down the airport concourse toward the various gates, where planes were either coming in or soon to go out.

Jon was one of the last to enter the plane heading for Washington, wanting to stay with Katy as long as possible.

"I'll love you forever," he promised her before embarking. "And I'll be praying for you. Be careful driving home, my dear. . . ."

"I love you, Jon. I'll be waiting for and counting the days till we can see each other again. At Christmas, I hope. I'm going to be praying for this, if it's in God's will. God bless you, my wonderful Jon. . . ."

Katy stood looking out the window. Tears spilled down her cheeks. Not until the plane was off the runway and had disappeared into the sky did she leave.

"Thank you, kind Father," she said as she hurried out of the parking lot toward home. "Thank You for giving me the love of one so noble and pure and God-like; thank You for Jonathan David Keithley."

Chapter 12

Jon watched until city, trees and land were swallowed up in a sea of billowy-white puffy clouds; then he leaned back against the seat and dosed his eyes, which were swimming with tears. He had braced himself to keep
from crying when he said good-bye to Katy; now, however, he shed the tears which had threatened to flow when he left her, standing alone, just inside the gate.

He brushed the tears away quickly, thankful for the hope of seeing her again someday, with God's help.

How utterly forlorn and desolate must those feel whose loved ones crossed death's river without the Savior's hand to bear them over! Jon thought, making a spiritual analogy. If God so willed, he knew that he would be seeing Katy again. He had a shining, sustaining beacon light of hope. But for those who were doomed and lost, cast into the fire that is unquenchable, there was no hope. None whatever! The separation was a final, permanent and eternal one.

Jonathan thanked the Lord silently that such was not the case with Katy and him. Each loved the Lord and served Him willingly and joyously. They had a hope, and the eager anticipation of seeing each other again, not only in the here and now but in the life after death. For the child of God death was not a separation but a grand Homecoming day and a joyous, glorious reunion. For all eternity.

He prayed silently for Katy and her safety home. Then he prayed for his father and mother; prayed for God to not allow his father to hurt his mother; prayed for his mother, that his sudden and unannounced departure would not be too great a shock on her and cause, or bring about, a physical collapse.

A calmly-sweet and heavenly assurance filled his total being: it was the assurance that he was in the will of God, doing the will of God. He must, now and forever, put all his concerns and his anxieties into the hands of God and trust Him with each and every detail of his life. Only by doing so would he be able to make it through his work days as well as his Bible training, he knew.

Jon was not blind to the enemy's tactics; he knew that a soul who was constantly carrying, instead of casting his burdens and cares and perplexing situations upon the Lord, had little time for anything else. Burdens, and cares of life, had a way of draining and sapping one's spiritual energies, he knew, unless they were literally, and in total abandonment, cast upon the Lord.
He would have many years in which to put this into practice, he thought; but he was determined to carry it through, beginning this very moment. He wanted his heart and his mind to be free of worry and care so he could throw all his spiritual energies and physical stamina into preparing his heart and mind for God's work. Already he had lost a year since he graduated from high school; but his father had insisted -- demanded, really - that he must farm the land and make no other plans or preparations whatever. And in total obedience to the head of the family, he had complied.

Looking back over the years and the circumstances and situations enfolding and surrounding those years, Jon again realized that his leaving was a miracle of miracles. God had to get his father out of town. (His dear mother, too, to save her from his father's brutal accusations.) The "stay at home" law was deeply ingrained inside his male parent's heart. Whether it was a form of brutal punishment because of his birth -- and that, a boy, an unwelcome intruder! -- or whether it was that his father realized and knew he had an excellent farmhand at little expense and output on his personal wallet, Jon didn't know. Maybe it was both reasons. At any rate, he knew his father would never have allowed him to leave had he been home when the job opening from Washington came his way. So God sent him out of town to make the leaving possible and smooth for him, Jon.

Fresh tears found their way out from beneath heavy eyelashes. The miracle of it all would never cease to bless and amaze him. Never! God had used a miracle to get Joseph to the high position in Egypt and Jon felt that his own deliverance and going away was no less a miracle than was that of the stalwart, noble, pure, clean and upright Joseph. In each instance God had worked and brought the miracle about. What a great and wonderful and Almighty God he served! Jon thought, blest beyond words.

His hand, searching for the clean handkerchief inside his suit coat pocket, touched something hard. Then he remembered: the box! Neatly and carefully wrapped, he had slipped it into his pocket and forgotten about it.

He took from its place of hiding and, thankful that he had no seat companion for this part of the trip, he held it before him, gently and lovingly. Whatever its contents were, he knew it spelled out the word LOVE. The Berringers were people whose hearts were filled with love; not only for God but for others as well.
Slowly and carefully, Jon unwrapped the box and lifted the lid. A neatly folded, beautifully written note caught his attention. Unfolding the piece of paper to its full length, he read:

My dearest Jonathan,

I felt I must add at least some small token to this little going-away box from Father and Mother to you. So here I am -- with you, even though you will be riding high in the clouds while I "wing" my way homeward on terra firma, God willing. I am with you, my dearest Jon, in thought and in prayers and, presently, via the pen.

You will be greatly missed, not only by yours truly but by everybody who knows and loves you. There are many of us, believe me!

You have had your trials -- your testing and proving times -- dearest Jonathan, and the God whose image and likeness you have reflected and demonstrated has seen that you are pure gold. As He was with you in the furnace of affliction and testings and trials, and brought you through them, so He will be with you now, and bring you through and out and forth, "more than a conqueror." Bless His dear name forever and ever. Our weapons are not carnal. He goes before us and makes a way where there is no way. He fights our battles and keeps us victorious.

I want you to know (one more time) that I love you and you only. By God's help I mean to "throw" my whole being into my training so I will be prepared and equipped to labor for Jesus wherever He may take me or lead me. Too, this busyness, as you mentioned in one of our conversations together, will keep my mind off my loneliness over missing you.

May God bless you and keep you and, in our temporary separation, may He guard, guide and protect you.

All my love and prayers --
Katy

P.S. My little gift (and it is little) is at the very bottom of this box. My love -- K. B.
Jon read the note over, then he folded it carefully and tucked it inside his shirt pocket until he could get his Bible and place it between its pages.

He found yet another note as he looked inside the box. It was so nice, he mused, feeling rich in the blessings of friendships, to find these "treasures" high above the earth and to enjoy the message of love which each conveyed to him. Oh, he was a greatly blest and highly privileged young man to have friends who were genuine and true and who were spiritual and Spirit-filled. Yes, he was rich indeed: not in wealth and money, that could get away like quicksilver, but in myriad other ways, among which was the wealth of true friendships.

He unfolded the piece of paper and his eyes misted over with tears as he read the very first words:

My dear Jon, my son (You have always seemed like a son to me!) -- I regret that Laura and I have not been able to see you before you left, for you are so very close and near and dear to our hearts. We have loved you like a son! And now you are leaving us. But we rejoice in God’s open door for you, feeling completely assured that it is His will for you.

We will miss you greatly! Your place will be empty not only in the church pew but in our hearts, as well. I want you to know that you have been a real blessing to me, Jonathan David. Your life has been an encouragement to me -- to press for the mark. God has used you to strengthen me in Christ when my own faith seemed to be weakening. God bless you. Laura and I love you greatly. Things won't be quite the same around here with you gone. But we will be praying for you -- daily.

I was not at all surprised to have Kathleen tell her mother and me of your love for her, and hers for you. We rejoice in this. We thank God for it! We could wish and desire for her to love no one greater -- you are at the very top, Jonathan. We know what you are, how you have lived and where your treasures are! She could not have chosen a finer, purer, cleaner, more noble man had she searched the world over. You have our blessings and our approval, my dear boy. God is wonderful, to lead two of the finest young people ever together!

We have felt that we should give you a gift toward your Bible college expenses, Jonathan. It is in this box, sent with love and a prayer that God will
use you greatly and mightily and make all your learning sessions times of
great spiritual encouragement for you.

    Again, let me repeat, we shall miss you greatly. But rest assured that
the Berringers -- all of us -- will be praying for you daily -- our favorite son.

    May God go with you, and may He make you as great a blessing in
Washington as you have been back here to all whose lives you touched.

    You will love Laura's brother, Thomas. And, equally so, you will
love Julia. Don't allow her to pamper you nor get you too "over-fed." She's quite a
wonderful and motherly soul, and a super-great cook! Better than all this, she
and Thomas are deeply spiritual people. You will discover these things
shortly, once you are settled in.

    We rejoice with you over this miracle, Jonathan. When Kathleen told us
how things just fell into place, our hearts spilled over with blessing and joy for
you -for the miraculous way in which God worked things out. To the very last
detail even! What a stimulation this has been to our faith! And to yours also, I
am sure. All I can say is, "The Lord hath done great things for us [you],
whereof we are glad." Truly, He is great, and He deserves our praise.

    God bless you, dear son. You are gone but not forgotten; out of sight
but not out of mind!

We love you --
Mark and Laura Berringer

    Jon wept. Then he reread the letter. Son! Mr. Berringer had called him
"son." It was wonderful. Wonderful! The very title which his own father had
despised and loathed -- because he despised the one to whom the title
belonged -- was now being used lovingly by his neighbor, Katy's father. Oh,
but it made him feel good!

    He looked at the words again. And again. He could feel the genuine
love and affection that emanated and flowed from the pen and through each
and every line. And suddenly, he felt like a king. It was then that the words of
Jesus sang a medley in his heart, "There is no man that hath left house, or
brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my
sakes, and the gospel's,
"But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Matt. 10:29-30).

God had given him riches indeed. Already he had received "an hundredfold" in Mr. Berringer addressing him as son. Already the promise was being graciously fulfilled!

He suddenly recalled Katy's postscript at the bottom of her letter and once again he looked into the box.

He gasped in awe and surprise when he lifted out a partially folded check with the sum of one thousand dollars written neatly on it. Attached by a paper clip to the check, in neat handwriting, were these words: A little something toward your tuition for school, Jon. We love you so much and we believe in you. It's our love appreciation-expression for you. Mark and Laura.

He was overwhelmed and totally overcome with thankfulness and gratitude and glad surprise. Tears swam and danced in his eyes. He reached for his handkerchief. And then he saw Katy's sweet face smiling up at him from the brass oval frame lying neatly on the bottom of the box. Picking it up, he pressed it to his heart. Oh, what precious and priceless treasures were his from the little box! He felt richer than the richest man on earth.

"Katy!" he exclaimed almost reverently. 'My sweet and holy Kathleen Lenore! I love you."

Never in all of his life had he been so happy. Oh, God was so good, so kind to him!

He felt humbled; unworthy and undeserving even. Bowing his head, he poured out praise after praise to the One who had made all the good things that were happening to him possible.

Chapter 13

Sleep was slow in coming to the young man on the plane. His heart and mind was in a state of delightful ecstasy and purest joy. God had done so much for him that his happy heart was just too excited and overjoyed to
sleep. Everything seemed too wonderful to be real. But it was real, he told his blissful soul. Didn't he have the letters and the check and Katy's lovely picture to prove it! And wasn't the trip on the plane proof positive that he wasn't imagining that he had a job! Oh, indeed it was. It was!

Another overhead fight near him was turned off and Jon looked around to see most of his fellow companions in travel either asleep or dozing. It was getting late, he realized, as he reached up and turned his overhead fight off.

He put the seat back as far as it would go and closed his eyes, then silently thanked the Lord for the joyous prospect of beginning to prepare for his higher calling. And then he fell asleep.

Some few hours before sleep came to Jon, Mr. Keithley, still in a state of agitation over having to have made the out-of-town trip, drove into his driveway, grumbling.

"I haven't the faintest or vaguest idea why Ben Gross felt it was so absolutely necessary that I check into that!" he exclaimed to his wife. "It was the most useless trip I've ever made. Positively and absolutely, there was nothing at all to be concerned over or worried about. Things are in excellent shape up there. I feel like I wasted two valuable days, Marie. Days that can never again be recalled. I had three extremely important contracts which I had hoped to wrap up."

"There'll be other days to complete them, Bruce, the Lord willing," Mrs. Keithley replied patiently and kindly.

Mr. Keithley gave her a withering look. "What do you know about business?" he snapped. "And why must you always say 'the Lord willing'? I get tired of hearing that. Now go inside and turn some lights on. I don't know what's wrong with that boy; he knows well enough that I like the pole light on near the garage when I come home late. You did tell him I'd be late, didn't you, Marie?"

"I did, Bruce." And away Mrs. Keithley hurried to unlock the door and turn on the lights.

The house felt stuffy and unusually warm, she thought, hastening to the kitchen window and raising it as far as it would go. Now why would Jonathan
have closed the window? she wondered, remembering that she had it raised open wide before her hasty departure.

She heard her husband's footstep on the porch and quickly put fresh water into the teapot for boiling. Bruce would want his usual, nightly cup of freshly brewed tea before retiring, she knew.

"I wonder where that boy is," Mr. Keithley remarked angrily.

"Jon's no doubt in bed, Bruce. And why not? It's late."

"Then where's his car?"

"Why in the garage, I suppose, like always."

"Well suppose again! It's not in the garage."

"Are you sure? I . . . I mean. . . ."

"Am I sure, the woman asks! Go check for yourself if you doubt my word."

"I don't doubt your word, dear. I just thought you could have been mistaken. I'm sorry."

"Sorry? For what? Now bring me my tea. Did you check his bedroom to see that he's in bed?"

"No. No, I didn't. I just got in a few minutes ago."

"Give me my tea, then go check."

"The water's not ready, Bruce. It hasn't had time enough to boil. Sit down and relax a bit."

"Are you going to take all night to make me a cup of tea?" he stormed angrily. "All I ask is a cup of tea? Now bring it!"

"I'm sorry, dear. As quickly as the water boils, you shall have your tea."
"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry," Mr. Keithley parroted in an angry, sing-song fashion, mocking the meek little woman before him and walking away.

Mrs. Keithley dropped a tea bag into the waiting cup and stood watching for the first signs denoting that the water was about to boil.

"Well, he isn't in bed," Mr. Keithley announced angrily, startling his wife with his loud voice. "Sneaking around while I was gone! I'll take care of him. I never could stand a sneaking kid."

"Jonathan has never 'sneaked' around, Bruce. You know he hasn't. He's a good son. A noble son. He's not 'sneaking around.'"

"Son? I despise the word. Why, I'd . . . I'd rather have a . . . a . . . ."

"Don't say it. Please don't!" Mrs. Keithley exclaimed softly. "Jonathan's been a blessing. And a joy. He's been an obedient son."

Mr. Keithley stormed over to his wife. He dug his fingers roughly and deeply into her slender shoulders. Then he shouted angrily, "Don't call him son! Do you hear?"

Very quietly, Mrs. Keithley said, "But he is our son, Bruce, and I am proud to address him as such. Now if you will please release me I will pour the water for your tea. If Jonathan's gone, he has a good reason for going. He lives righteously and uprightly. We have nothing to worry or fear."

"He'd better have a good reason for being out this late," came the quick retort.

"Jonathan's a young man now. It is grossly unfair to treat him as a child."

Mr. Keithley angrily mumbled something under his breath; then he released the painful hold on his wife's shoulders and sat down to drink the tea. The week hadn't been going well for him at all. No, not at all. He never did enjoy interruptions, and that senseless, futile and useless out-of-town trip had been one of the worst interruptions of all.
He sipped the scalding tea, his mind deep in thought. What was wrong with Ben Gross? he wondered. Was he losing his mind? What had he heard that made him send him, Bruce Keithley, flying as it were, on that senseless and hurried trip?

He couldn't figure it out. No matter which way he looked at it or analyzed it, it didn't make sense. And the worst part of all was when the big boss at the out-of-town plant had asked him, "What brings you here, Bruce Keithley?"

Sipping the hot tea now, Mr. Keithley felt absolutely humiliated. Especially so after he had checked into every department that Ben had told him to check into and found out that everything was in tip-top shape and super-good condition: the plant was in the best shape he had ever seen it.

Too agitated and overwrought over his utter embarrassment and deep humiliation to finish the tea, Mr. Keithley got up from the kitchen table and headed down the hallway for a shower and then to bed.

He would talk to Ben in the morning, he decided, and find out just what was happening and why he had to go on that senseless time consuming and costly trip. It had done nothing whatever besides making him lose two originally planned and heavily scheduled days in which he knew he would have finished those extremely important contracts. In business, each day counted. Sometimes, even, the hours! Yes, he could remember and recall several instances in which things had to be "wrapped up," figuratively speaking, and ready for their client within hours, not days.

The more he thought about the trip and the unfinished contracts lying on his office desk, the more angry he became.

"Come to bed, Marie," he bellowed, "so I can get some sleep. You know I can't tolerate being disturbed when I am trying to go to sleep. You can unpack our few things in the morning. I'm weary. I want to leave early in the morning. I mean to see Ben and have a long talk with him about that ridiculously senseless trip. I mean to know the reason why for that."

Marie Keithley turned the kitchen light off, then hurried down the hallway to the bedroom, leaving the piece of unopened luggage by the dining room archway, her thoughts upon Jonathan and his absence.
Whatever his reason or purpose was in leaving, she knew it was not without merit and good reason; their son lived his life in a careful, Christ-centered and Christ honoring way and manner. Never would he do anything to mar the name of Christ or bring a reproach upon that sinless, spotless name. Jonathan's first and last allegiance was only always to Christ. The thought of him "sneaking" around, as her husband had falsely accused him of, sent a dagger of pain into her mother-heart.

Tears smarted her gentle brown eyes as she prepared for bed. That her husband despised this child for whom she had so earnestly prayed, was no secret. This she knew; had known from the moment of his birth. But why? Why?

If Marie Keithley had asked herself that question once, she supposed she had asked it hundreds of times since God had so marvelously answered her prayers and sent Jonathan David to her. How welcome he was to her mother arms and to her heart! She felt like the Lord had sent her an angel in the embodiment of a tiny, helpless, loving, dependent, baby boy, whose name she had carefully and prayerfully chosen from the many wonderful Bible characters after her husband's firm and very definite refusal to "not have any part whatever in that boy!" His precise and exact words.

She recalled, now, how crushed and grieved she had been; how intensely painful and cutting his words had been to her heart. But the baby boy had lifted her up and above the churlish man's evil and unnatural spirit. Each day, their son had wound the love cord more tightly around her heart. And while not neglecting her husband nor her wifely duties and obligations to him, she purposed within her heart that Jonathan David's life would be saturated and filled with love -- Christ's and hers.

She started out early to teach and train him in the things of Christ and the love of Christ, beginning from the day of his birth. Despised and rejected though he may be by his father, she would see to it that his heart and soul and mind were filled, literally, with the Word of God. The words and teachings of Jesus, especially. When she nursed him, she sang to him about Jesus and His love. When she rocked him, she sang about Jesus and His love. As he lay in his crib or on the floor on a quilt, she read to him of Jesus and His love for the little children, reading, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14).
She read, too, "... Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

"And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:3-6).

Jonathan was ever an obedient child. Compliant and sweet by nature, he came early in childhood under his mother's firm but gentle do's and don'ts, as per God's Book of instruction and rules on how and what children were or were not to do; how they should live or should not live; where they should go or should not go; and whom they were to follow or not to follow. Early in life he was soundly and genuinely converted; not in a camp meeting, nor during a revival meeting at the church. No! It had happened and taken place one morning while she had been praying with him, Mrs. Keithley remembered. His sweet voice and pleading words lingered with her still.

"Mama," he had said, raising his dark, honest eyes to meet hers, "I feel like my heart is dirty. I want Jesus to wash all the dirt of sin away. I want to be saved...."

Marie recalled that prayer meeting -- just the two of them. And God! In his childlike manner, Jonathan prayed. Nothing profound. It was extremely simple and open. But oh, the results! In a moment of time Jonathan's entire being was changed. He was converted. He looked like an angel from heaven, so shiny and radiantly bright was his countenance.

She had shouted, laughed, praised and cried with him, she now recalled. They had hugged, laughed, praised and cried some more, the praise session lasting for quite a while. Her whole being was blest out of herself -- she had seen that accomplished for which she had ceaselessly and earnestly prayed since Jonathan's birth. Yea, even before his birth.
It was not long afterwards when, upon learning from God's Word that, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification . . ." Jonathan was truly and entirely sanctified. All the self life was purged out and cleansed and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. From that day to this, the mother recalled, there was not even the slightest sign of carnality manifested or displayed. The thought now filled her heart with joy. "Get to bed, Marie! I'm tired."

The angry, commanding, demanding voice of her husband brought the humble little woman abruptly out of her pleasant memories of the past into the immediate now; the present.

"In just a little while, husband," she answered sweetly.

Chapter 14

Marie Keithley lay in the darkness, listening to the steady, even breathing of her husband. She wondered how one who had so neglected and ill treated his own offspring could sleep. But the Bible had stated something about those whose consciences were "seared with a hot iron" (I Tim. 4:2). She hoped sincerely that her husband didn't come under that heading nor fall into that category. But he was, very definitely, callused and harsh and hard. And, also, unnaturally unfatherly and unloving to the son whom God had sent to them.

Tears sprang to her eyes. She reached for a tissue and wiped them away. How she wished that God, in His great mercy and compassion and pity and love, would deliver Jonathan from the hands of this ruthless man who was his father. Oh, that the Almighty would hasten that day! She had prayed so long and so earnestly and pleadingly for the Lord to do this. She must not lose faith, she told her heart; she must pray on. And on. God would answer!

She would miss Jonathan, she knew, if ever he was able to get away from home. How she would miss him! But there was no future for him so long as he remained at home. Her husband -- Jonathan's father, of all people! -- would compel him to serve him like a slave, making Jonathan do the work which he himself would not touch with so much as one of his fingers. And Jonathan, out of respect toward the Biblical injunction for children to obey their parents, and to honor them, as well, would continue working, like a servant or slave, with little money and a mere pittance for wages.
Marie Keithley prayed for the Lord to remove the thoughts from her mind. She didn't wish to dwell upon them any longer. She remembered how very close to bitterness and hatred she had come shortly after her marriage to Bruce. It was like he was a man with a dual personality: one for courtship - loving, courteous, jovial, kind, congenial, caring, affectionate, and even gentle; the other for marriage -- the head of the house! -- demanding, petulant, ruthless, unloving, uncaring, sarcastic, cutting and unkind.

They had professed to be Christians, both Bruce and she. And they had attended a formal church, too. She supposed, now, that the reason she had thought then that she was a Christian was due to the fact that she had been a good and faithful church member.

At any rate, within a short time after her marriage to Bruce -- when his true nature was exposed and had come to the fore -- she realized she needed someone to talk to and with. But she knew of no one whom she would dare to so much as mention, even, that her marriage to the dashing and handsome charmer was all a grave and serious mistake; that this man, who appeared so utterly and completely refined and gentle and caring in the eyes of the public, was a brute at home; driving and demanding and commanding, minus any love and affection whatever, until her physical and emotional stability felt like it was crashing around her, almost smothering her.

Brokenly and weeping bitterly one morning after she had seen him off to work, she dropped into a living room chair and sobbed like she had never sobbed before. Reaching for the box of tissues nearby, she saw the Bible. It had been a wedding gift. She thought every home should have at least one Bible on display somewhere in the house. Especially so when one was a member of a church.

With eyes that were blurred by tears, she picked the Book up and held it in her hands. She hadn't read but very little from a Bible in all the years of being a good church member. It was the minister's duty, her parents had told their family, to give them the Word of Life. And she had believed that and held to it, too.

Now, however, driven by disappointment, lack of love and kindness, and a growing bitterness and hatred for her husband of less than a year, she pulled the Book close to her bosom. In a voice full of emotion and a cry for help, she pleaded pitifully, "O God! Do You care? If You do, please, please
help me! I can't stand this any longer. I'm growing an abundant crop of bitterness and hatred in my heart toward my husband. And God, I don't want it. I don't! I don't! O forgive me. Please! Please! I must be a sinner, Lord, else I wouldn't have these frightening and frightful things in my heart. Please God, forgive me. Forgive my bitter feelings toward Bruce. Forgive me. . . .

Marie recalled now, how, that morning, for the first time ever in her life, she found peace. Soul peace! God, for Christ's sake, had heard her unpolished, straight-from-the-heart prayer and forgave her. She was so happy that she laughed and cried for joy. She knew she was made new in Christ. Her Bible, hitherto unopened and unread, now became her constant source of strength and help. And the God under whose wings she had come to trust became her Confidante, her Burden Bearer and the Listener to each and every thing that seemed too hard for her to bear and too heavy to carry.

From that day, she became a student of God's Word, reading, then praying over passages which she hadn't been able to fully comprehend or understand. In a short period of time she had read the Bible through. What a source of strength and comfort it was to her!

Bruce had laughed at her when she told him that the Lord had saved her. Mocked her, even; declaring that "that stuff" (his words) was "only for sissies," and that "strong people didn't need this sort of thing."

Marie recalled now, that, from then on, Bruce had become increasingly mean and hateful and also more selfish with her and unkind to her. It was as though the enemy were driving him at a fearful rate and pace to make life as miserable and as unbearable for her as possible. She had told no one of the problem but the Lord.

And then she had changed churches. Bruce was furious with her, almost dragging her -- literally and physically -- to church with him, if and when he went.

He was embarrassed, she knew, and his pride was wounded. The neat little holiness church to which she was going and in which she had been wholly and entirely sanctified, wasn't fashionable enough for her promising young business husband. He wanted his wife going to a church "with class and prestige" (again, his words).
And then, in answer to her fervent prayers, the Lord had given them Jonathan David. How her heart had rejoiced at his arrival. Here now was the son whom she had asked of the Lord, that she, like Hannah, might give him back to God in full-time service for Him and His kingdom work.

Tears of thankfulness and love flowed freely down the mother's cheek now as she thought of the years in which she and Jonathan had shared and enjoyed together of the good things of God. They had had so many spiritual feasts together. The times around the family altar -- just the two of them; Bruce would not participate -- were times of refreshing from God.

She prayed for Jonathan now. Lying in the darkness, in the still of the night, she prayed for guidance for her son, and for the fulfillment of her early prayer before he was born. God would answer, she knew. She had His promises to rest upon and lean on.

And then, still praying, like a softly-cool refreshing breeze, she felt His presence. She received the assurance that He was answering her prayers. And like a babe in the arms of its mother, she fell asleep to the sound of His voice.

She awakened to the song of birds and the gruff voice of her husband.

"Are you going to sleep all day?" Bruce demanded gruffly. "I told you I wanted to leave early this morning. I mean to have it out with Ben for sending me out of town unnecessarily and causing a delay on those contracts. The very idea!"

"Bruce," Marie said kindly, "please don't allow this to upset you so. Stresses such as these bring on heart attacks and strokes. I'm sure that Ben had a reason for sending you all the way up there. And truthfully, I enjoyed the scenery and the time with you. Please try to relax. I'll have breakfast ready in a little while, God willing."

"God willing, again!" Bruce taunted. "Why wouldn't it be God's will to get a man his breakfast? answer me if you can."

Bruce's voice was filled with sarcasm and mockery. "Oh, I'm sure God wants me to get your breakfast, Bruce," she answered sweetly, "for the Bible
gives guidelines for each member of the household, and part of mine deals with guiding the house and being a good wife and mother."

"That still doesn't answer my question," Bruce declared loudly.

"Well, honey, in the book of James it says, 'Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

"'Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.'"

"Hey, I didn't ask for a sermon!" came the loud outcry.

"You asked for an answer, Bruce. I had to give you those two verses so you will understand the scriptural answer. It follows the verses which I just quoted. Here it is, your answer to the why of the God willing phrase: 'For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that' (James 4:13-15)."

"Get my breakfast and cut out the Bible quotes."

"Two eggs, dear? And what about some fried potatoes and onions along with the eggs and bacon?"

"Two eggs, nothing else. I'm in a hurry. Ben's got some answering to do to me. I mean to corner him before he gets too busy. Now hurry."

Marie donned a housecoat and hurried to the kitchen, wanting to please her husband and to avoid further rankling from him. How very different he would be if he would get converted, she mused silently.

She had just put the two eggs onto her husband's plate and poured his coffee when he hurried into the kitchen, demanding, "And what are these doing, sitting on the dining room table at my place?"

He slammed the books down on the kitchen table with a thud.
Marie put the eggs on the table in front of her husband. "Those look like some books I've seen Jonathan use at times," she said.

"Where is that boy?" Bruce demanded roughly. "and what is the meaning of these?" he asked, giving the record books a shove across the table and landing them on the floor.

Marie picked them up and gently put them on the table. Opening one, she saw the carefully and neatly kept records. "Oh," she remarked, "these are records which Jonathan has kept.

What an orderly book!" she added, smiling.

"Records for what? And why did he put them at my place for our evening meal?"

"I don't know, Bruce. They look like farm records."

"Where is he? I want to know where he was last night."

"I don't know where he is," Marie answered. "But you know he's an early riser. He's no doubt somewhere outside."

"Doing what?" Bruce asked loudly and angrily.

"Having his private devotions, perhaps."

"Then go out and tell him to come in. I mean to have a talk with him and find out what he was up to so late last night."

"Twelve o'clock isn't really that late when one drives a distance to a church service, dear."

"So-o! You knew all along where he was!"

"I didn't, Bruce. And I don't. I only inferred that he could have gone to a service and that, if he did, and if it was some distance away, it would make him late at getting home."

"Did you hear him when he came in, Marie?" Bruce asked probingly.
"No, I didn't. Jonathan's a man, dear; he doesn't need to be watched nor treated like a child."

"I said, 'Go and bring him in.'"

Marie stood motionless. "I'll never disturb him if he's praying," she answered softly. "No, Bruce, I won't go. One's private devotions are too holy and sacred to be broken up by man."

Bruce Keithley got to his feet. With anger flashing in his eyes, he shouted, "You defy me? Me? Well, I'll see about that!" And he came rushing toward his wife.

Marie backed into the dining room. Standing behind her husband's chair at the head of the table, she said kindly, "I wouldn't think to defy you, Bruce; I'd be going against God's Word. But neither can I break up a young man's time alone with God, if that is where our son is. Now don't touch me to harm me. I have a great Protector in my Heavenly Father."

Mr. Keithley's face turned white. He stopped in his tracks. Turning quickly, he walked back into the kitchen.

Breathing a prayer of thanks to God for His protection, she started for the kitchen. On the floor, she saw an envelope. Immediately she recognized the handwriting. Stooping down, she picked it up and read, "To Dad and Mother." Tears stung her eyes. Brushing them away, she hurried into the kitchen.

"This may explain our son's lateness last night," she said, handing the letter to her husband.

(Chapter 15)

Bruce Keithley looked at the envelope which his wife placed in front of him, reading Jonathan's words, "To Dad and Mother."

Like something tainted or poisonous, he took his knife and knocked it off the table, declaring flatly, "I'll not read it. Now, where is he?"
"I feel the letter may explain this," Marie said kindly.

"Why would there be a need for a letter? He lives here, doesn't he? If one is too cowardly and meek to say what he wants to say face to face, man to man, then I don't have time to read his letters."

"Then I shall read it, Bruce. Without a doubt, Jonathan wants us to know something." And Marie opened the envelope, took out the letter, and read,

My dear Father and Mother,

God has done wonderful things for me, for which my happy heart cannot find adequate expressions of praise. He has miraculously and wondrously opened up an excellent job for me as well as an opportunity to go to Bible School for training. I have never told you this but feel that the time to do so has come: God has called me into the ministry. One day while driving the tractor, plowing, His voice came as distinctly-clear to me as the pealing of a bell in my ears, telling me that He needed me -- wanted me! -- to work for Him in His vineyard.

I gladly answered His call, willingly and joyously so, telling Him that I would go anywhere for Him and do anything, so long as He would go with me and would lead and guide me. That was four years ago. I have waited patiently upon Him, trusting my life and its future to His care and direction. Today He threw the door open wide for me. I am entering this opening, feeling completely and wonderfully in the center of God's will.

I had planned to break the news to you at the supper table. However, God changed my plans; you dear ones had left town. (I found your letter on the table, Mother.) So this is my reason for writing. Everything has happened so suddenly!

Father dear, I shall be praying for God to make it easy for you to find someone to take over the work of the farm. Things are in good shape, thanks be to God! I am giving you my record books, for I have kept a yearly record of yields and losses, costs and profits, et cetera, et cetera. Everything that you will need to know you will find recorded in order in these books. Take care of them and preserve them; someday you may need to show them to an IRS
investigator. You will have nothing to worry over nor fear if you will keep these records.

I want you to know that I love you, Dad, very deeply. I have only one regret, and that is that you would never allow me to find a place in your heart. I have tried, Dad. Oh, how I have tried! With all my heart, I have longed for this, a closely-knit father-son relationship. I found it in Jesus Christ, my wonderful Lord and Savior. Time and again He has come so near until it felt like He, my kind Heavenly Father, wrapped His tender and loving arms around me and whispered, "When thy father . . . forsakes thee, then the Lord shall take thee up."

I have nothing in my heart but love for you, Dad. I want you to know this. And I have honestly and truly given the very best of my physical strength toward working the farm and making it a thing of profit for you. I have worked and labored conscientiously, lovingly and willingly for you. Now, however, this must cease: God has led, and opened this new door for me, and I am following His leadership. He is my Master. Oh, how delightful and joyous it is to know this!

Mother dear, I pray this will not come as too great a shock to you, for I love you deeply and greatly. I know you have prayed much for me -- how could I ever forget hearing you call my name in prayer, both in private, when you didn't know I was within listening distance, and around our blessed family altar! Thank you, Mother, for those many, many prayers. God heard them! Too, He "bottled up" your tears for my salvation. And then one day, as a little boy, those tears were spilled out as a sweet perfume to God, for I repented and confessed my sins and God for Christ's sake forgave me of every sin and made me a new creature in Him.

Thank you, dearest Mother, for your consistent life and your great spiritual help to me. I shall be forever indebted to you. I love you. I will need your continued prayers, for I'm not sure, yet, where the Lord is leading me to. I only know He very definitely called me into the ministry, and that I have a great desire and urge to study linguistics. This (to me) would seem strange except for the fact that God gave me this great urge and desire the day He called me to labor for Him. I mean to be obedient and include this in with my other studies, the Lord willing.
By the time you read this I will be well on my way to my new job, God willing. I am truly overjoyed and excited beyond words. Again and again my overflowing heart cries out rapturously, "What God hath wrought!"

Someday I hope I shall be able to tell you how the Lord worked one miracle after another for me regarding the job, my Bible training, my getting there, plus many other things. It is one great and mighty miracle from start to finish! Oh, my faith has soared to heights never before explored! It has mounted high on eagle wings of Divine Love. I will never be the same; faith has reached a new plane. All glory to my God!

Again, let me say that I love you both, deeply and greatly. I will be praying for you. God bless you, and may He watch over us in our absence one from the other.

Your loving son -- Jonathan David

Marie folded the letter and put it back inside the envelope. Tears filled her eyes.

"You will need to hire a farm worker," she said to her husband.

Bruce looked up from his plate. Anger showed in his eyes. "What do you mean, hire a farm worker? If that worthless boy thinks he can dictate to me and tell me what to do and what not to do he's in for an eye opener. Just wait until he comes in here; I'll bring him around. Yes, indeed, I'll show him who's boss."

"He won't be coming in, Bruce. You won't need to worry about showing him who's boss: Jonathan's gone."

"He's . . . he's what? Gone, did you say? Well! Well! I suppose he's got the big idea that he can go and come as he pleases. Just wait till I see him; I'll settle with him!

"That won't be necessary," Marie stated quickly. "Jonathan's gone. He has a job, and he'll be going to Bible School, too, the Lord willing."

"A job, you say!" Bruce shouted angrily, thumping his fist on the table. "As if he didn't have work enough!" he declared. "Where is he? If he thinks he
can leave me whenever he wants to and go work for another he's mistaken. Is he in the city?"

"He didn't say," came the calm reply.

"That's where he went, I'm sure," Bruce cried. "Where else would he find work? I'll find him, see if I don't. He can't leave me this way. The corn and the beans will soon need harvesting. I won't lose those crops. I will not! I'll find that worthless boy and compel him to come back. I told him he must remain home and farm."

"One higher than you is giving him orders, Bruce. Finally, he is being led forth. And out. You will have to find you another farmer."

"Don't give me orders!" Bruce exclaimed loudly. "I am the head of this home. I will find that boy and bring him back by force. He can't do this to me. Where did he say this job is?" he asked, getting to his feet and pacing the floor in anger.

"He didn't say where. Read the letter, please, then you will know some things for yourself."

"I will not read the letter, Marie. And I don't want you to read it to me. But I promise you, when I find him he'll wish he had never left here. The very idea, leaving! And when the two big crops need harvesting, too!"

"It's extremely dangerous to try to harm one of God's children, Bruce. And unless you really don't want to lose your corn and beans, you'd better be looking for a new farmer. Jonathan will not be coming back."

"Why are you so sure of that? You knew he was planning this all along, didn't you? Yes, you did. That's why you can be so calm about it." Bruce's eyes blazed.

"I knew nothing at all," Marie answered quietly. "This letter has come as a total and complete surprise, rather, I should say shock, to me. Our son has a call into the ministry. For this my heart rejoices."

"Our son! How often must I tell you not to address the boy as my son, Marie! And he . . . he what?"
"But he is your son, Bruce. A wonderful son, indeed. And, yes, he is called of God to preach. This fills my heart with great joy."

"Called to preach! Fills your heart with great joy! Oh! Oh! I am humiliated. Humiliated! Do you hear? Oh why, why, did Ben Gross ever send me out of town on that needless trip? This never would have happened. The boy wouldn't have left, for I would not have allowed him to do so."

Without another word Bruce Keithley stormed out the door and sped away in his car.

Marie steeped herself a cup of spearmint tea and made two pieces of toast in the toaster. Then, thankful for the peace and quiet -- like the calm after a violent storm -- she gave thanks for the food and pulled the letter from the envelope and read Jonathan's letter over a second time.

An inner joy surged over her, washing its blissful waves gently and reassuringly into every part of her being. God had answered her prayer for deliverance for her beloved son. Yes, He had! And He had answered her other great heart-cry, in that He had called Jonathan into the ministry.

She raised her tear-filled eyes heavenward and allowed her spirit and lips to give vent to the praises that rose and swelled inside her. She was happy. She was blest. She was overjoyed. Her cup of blessing was full and running over. God, in His time and His way, had worked all things together for Jonathan's good.

A thought raced quickly through her mind. It filled her with a new surge of blessing. God had planned the hasty out of town business trip, she was sure. Ben Gross had been the "tool," or the medium, to set God's plan into action and motion by ordering her husband to go, and that quickly.

It was as if a veil had been removed from her eyes and now she saw clearly the why of that "useless, senseless, needless" (Bruce's words) business trip. God had to get her husband away from home -- out of town! -- so Jonathan could enter the Lord's open door without being harmed, and in peace and quietness. It was not a senseless trip; no indeed! For Jonathan, it was profitable indeed!
Suddenly Marie Keithley was laughing -- for pure joy and happiness. Everything the Lord did was done perfectly, and perfectly right!

Praising the Lord for victories won, she got up from the table and hurried down the hallway to Jonathan's room, wanting to pray in her son's room. It seemed only fitting and proper that she do so since God had so wondrously and miraculously sent him such a great and mighty deliverance.

She dropped on her knees beside the trunk at the foot of the bed and all she could do was offer praise after praise to their Almighty Deliverer.

Chapter 16

Jon watched as the plane circled and got closer and closer to the airport and the landing strip. The countryside looked magnificent and beautiful with towering evergreen trees. He felt like he had come home, so sure was he that he was in the will of God.

"Sweet will of God!" he cried happily from the deep of his soul. "Oh, sweet will of God, ever fold me closer to Thee!

Never in all of his life was he more happy. God's will, and knowing that one was in His will, were the ingredients for real joy and satisfaction, he realized as he prepared to leave the plane with the single small piece of luggage which he had carried on with him.

The airport terminal was alive with a milling, motley crowd of rushing, running people trying to find which concourse to take to make the schedule for their departing planes. Jonathan stood away from the gate through which he had just come and looked around him, realizing that he and Katy's Uncle Thomas wouldn't know each other if they were looking directly at each other, for neither had ever seen the other.

It struck Jonathan as a bit humorous. But he hadn't the least fear or worry: God had gotten him here and He would lead Mr. Franklin to him, or him to Mr. Franklin.

He decided the best thing for him to do was to remain stationary. For the present, at least; until all the passengers on his flight had deplaned.
He was watching the greeting and the meeting of an elderly man, just off the plane, and a handsome young couple with a smiling little boy whose joyous shouts of, "Grandpa! Grandpa! My Grandpa!" reached his ears and touched his heart, when he felt a gentle tap upon his shoulder. Turning, he looked into a pair of laughing, dancing eyes and the friendliest face he had ever seen.

"Jonathan David Keithley! Welcome, welcome, my son!"

"Mr. Franklin!" Jonathan exclaimed joyously. "Oh, but I am glad to see you! And thank you, thank you, for meeting me and for giving me a job sight unseen, resume nil. You are a man of great faith. By God's grace, I shall not disappoint you."

Mr. Franklin slapped Jonathan on his broad shoulders, stating kindly, "I have a kind Heavenly Father who runs my business. I take everything to Him and I get my orders from Him. My instructions, too. Two days before your Kathleen called me, or I suppose I should say before I called them, I had the calm assurance from the Lord that He had my man ready for me.

"I didn't know where he was, at that time. But then, who needs to know, so long as God knows and lets you know that He has hand-picked the man for you! I tell you, Jonathan, I feel like shouting every time I think about it: God hand-picked you for me! Well, I say glory!

"I had the strangest, strongest urge that I should call my sister that night. Your Kathleen's mother. Laura and my dear Julia correspond by letter on a rather consistent basis; but it's rare for us to call each other by phone.

"I put it off, thinking I was just imagining that I should call. But when the urge to call persisted and dogged my every step, I fell to my knees and said, 'Now Father, You know You and I have had a very close Father-son relationship. I can't understand this strange, persistent, relentless urge that I should call my sister and brother-in-law. Are they ill, Father? Why should I call?'

"Well, Jonathan, I stayed upon my knees, waiting upon God; listening for His voice. When the urge to call couldn't be prayed away, I looked up to Him and, like a son asking an earthly father, I said simply, 'Is this of Thee,
dear Father? Do You want me to make that call or am I just thinking I should make it?

"And Jonathan, the answer-reply came clear as a bell to me, 'Make the call.' Oh, I get blest just thinking about it. The ways of God are past finding out!

"Well, I called, and Laura and Mark were as surprised to hear my voice as I was to be calling. We talked about many and various things for a while. Julia was on another phone in the house, and my dear sister and she really had a lot of 'catching up' to do. We talked and talked, all four of us, sometimes five, when Katy called something in from the background. And then, as clearly as though someone had spoken it to me, I felt that I must share my burden for God's man to help me, with them. I asked them to join me in prayer regarding this. And as soon as I had told them, I felt my burden lift.

"I knew, from that night, that the answer to my prayer was only days away. If that. Then when Katy called me about you, the sweet Spirit of God whispered, 'That's your man, Thomas: He's the one I want you to have. I've been keeping him and preserving him for this hour and this time.'

"Well, Jonathan, I was blest almost beside myself with joy. God hand-picked you for me! I just can't say this enough. I almost took on two other fine young men from our community. But each time I started to contact either of them God's hand seemed to have been laid upon my shoulder and His voice whispered, 'He's not My man, Thomas.'

"That was all I needed. I proceeded no further with my hiring plans but turned it over completely to God, placing my need for help in His hands and His trust and care. And that's when I was prodded ever so gently but persistently to call my dear sister. Oh the ways of God are past finding out! But say, I didn't mean to 'drown' you with my many words. But I can't stop praising Him for this miraculous answer to prayer, my dear boy."

Jonathan was wiping tears all the while his kindly employer spoke. Oh, the ways of God were, indeed, past finding out! he thought, too choked up to reply for the moment. Not only had God very capably, efficiently, smoothly, and marvelously fit all the pieces of his complicated home life together in a
miraculous way, but He had worked simultaneously in the far North Pacific region as well on Thomas Franklin.

"Miracles! Miracles!" Jon finally exclaimed in a reverent tone of voice. "My departure from home is nothing short of a genuine miracle, Mr. Franklin. Oh, God is so good and so kind to His children."

"That He is, my son. Now we'll collect your luggage, then head for home. Are you hungry, Jonathan?"

"Not really, Mr. Franklin. Thank you. I'm too excited and overjoyed over everything to be either hungry or tired."

"It'll come back. The appetite, I mean," the friendly man remarked, laughing pleasantly. "I think we'll stop at a good Chinese restaurant on the way home. I'm sure you'll enjoy the food. And you may just discover that you are actually hungry, once you smell the food. I told my dear Julia that I'd bring her something good and tasty, so she wouldn't need to cook. She enjoys Chinese food immensely. And now tell me how the trip out here went for you. Did you enjoy it?"

"I really did, Mr. Franklin. It was most kind and generous of you to make all the arrangements and to buy the ticket for me. I want to reimburse you for it. I have the money with me. Perhaps you'd rather wait until we reach home; or in the restaurant even."

Thomas Franklin placed his hand gently upon Jonathan's shoulder and said, "Hold on to your money, my boy. And don't mention the fare again. That was all a part of my hiring you. I wanted to do it, out of love and thankfulness to my wonderful Lord for hand-picking my man. Thank you just the same. The fare's been paid. No money out of your pocket. Okay?"

"Thank you, most kindly," Jonathan replied. "May God repay you a hundredfold."

They picked up the luggage pieces and were soon on their way to the restaurant. Jonathan, in spite of not feeling very hungry earlier, ate the deliciously prepared food with delight and relish.
"That was delicious," he told his employer as they drove down the busy freeway. "Thank you most kindly."

"Julia and I think it's the best," Mr. Franklin replied, taking an exit off the crowded highway onto another not so busy. "Kathleen mentioned the excellent and unusual way in which you brought your father's farm crops up to peak yields. Do you think you will miss the farm, dear boy?"

Jonathan turned and looked his employer full in the face, saying, "I feel it was my preparation ground; giving me time to get to know myself better and affording me long hours of prayer and holy meditation as I worked the land -- hours in which the Lord and I had glorious times together. No, Mr. Franklin, I will not miss the farm. I think farming's an excellent vocation if one has not heard God's call to work in His vineyard. But I heard His call. As clearly as a bell ringing in my ears, God called me to be one of His humble servants to labor in His whitened harvest field. From that day on, I could scarcely wait for Him to open the door so I could leave the farm and begin preparation for God's kingdom work.

"And now that I am about to begin I am nearly beside myself with joy and excitement and anticipation. How I prayed, as I worked the land! I'm afraid there may have been times when I grew a bit impatient, and I wondered when God would make it possible for me to leave. Then, while in prayer and communion with Him, He seemed always to reassure me with Psalm 37:3-7:

"'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

"'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

"'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

"'And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. '"'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: . . .'
"And another verse which He assured me with, again and again, was, 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way' (Psalm 37:23).
"I suppose these are some of my very favorite promises. For my situation particularly. The Lord deepened and strengthened my trust in Him. And as I learned to trust, I developed a blessedly wonderful spirit of ever-broadening and widening delight in my Lord. The act of trusting and delighting just naturally and wondrously yielded and produced the blessed fruit of commitment; of keeping my future, His call upon my heart and life, and everything pertaining to my call, in His hands. And quite naturally, when one has totally committed all to his God, it brings a quiet rest into the soul, which, in turn, makes the waiting easier and truly blessed.

"And now that I am actually here, after having been an eye witness to and the recipient of, miracle after miracle, I am blest out of myself, as it were. I certainly would have messed up all of this that God had laid up for me had I moved ahead and not waited upon Him. As it is, my soul has grown fat and strong in the Lord. And I know, without any doubt or misgiving whatever, that I am in God's will here with you this very moment. I shall give you my very best, Mr. Franklin. I feel like I am home. It's amazing, since I never knew you until a few hours ago."

"God does the bonding, son. Those who know and love the Lord are one in Him. Julia and I have been excited about your coming as a couple can be. And Jonathan, I checked about your schooling. As soon as you are settled into the apartment and have rested from your flight, you may go over and enroll. It's a sound little Holiness Bible School."

"I feel like I'm dreaming; this is all so wonderful and miraculous," Jonathan said, wiping tears from his eyes.

"We're almost home now," Mr. Franklin remarked as he turned onto a road leading into the country.

"This is beautiful country, Mr. Franklin. I am convinced that God has lavished His beauty in every state and continent. He didn't spare with His beauty out here."

"It is beautiful," Mr. Franklin agreed. "Julia and I have lived here all our lives. Laura was born out here too. So were all our other brothers and sisters. But when Mark saw Laura he felt he couldn't live without her, nor she without him, so he married her and carried her away with him." And Thomas Franklin
laughed as he said it, ending with, "But that's the way with love. It does strange things for one. Laura was quite a homebody. A real homebody in fact. Until she met Mark and fell head over heels in love with him. Then the beautiful scripture found over in the Book of Ruth became a reality for my sister, who told Mark, 'Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

"Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me' (Ruth 1:16-17).

"Mark and Laura are a wonderful couple, as you already know, my boy."

"Do they ever get out to see you?" Jonathan asked quickly.

"Occasionally. But farming can be quite demanding. Especially when one has animals to look after and care for. I guess my brother-in-law is doing quite well on that lovely farm of his."

"He's an excellent farmer, Mr. Franklin; a God-fearing, righteous and upright man, and wonderful neighbor. As were, and are, your sister and her daughter. Mother and I always felt we were blest to have them for our closest and nearest neighbors."

"Well, we're home now, Jonathan," Mr. Franklin announced as he pulled up in front of a lovely house. "And, as usual, Julia's waiting for us."

"Honey," he said, getting out of the car and drawing Julia's arm through his, "this is Jonathan David, our boy."

"Oh, Jonathan, we are simply delighted to have you," Mrs. Franklin declared emphatically, beaming radiantly. "Now I'll have someone to cook for again besides dear Thomas and myself."

"And I was warned about your cooking," Jonathan teased. "I hear you're quite a cook."

Julia laughed pleasantly. "Well, all I can say is that the Lord has filled my cup full and run it over by sending you to Thomas and me. Oh, Jonathan," she cried happily, "you are God's gift to us."
Too overjoyed to comment, Jonathan wept. God's gift to them! He felt like he was in another world.

Chapter 17

Jonathan was taken to his apartment after visiting for some time in the home of the Franklins. The feeling of belonging and of love was an overwhelming and all pervasive one. Time and again he felt like he had to do something like pinch himself or jump up and down to convince himself of the blissful and miraculous reality of his new surroundings and the God-like couple who were God's instruments in making the change possible.

The apartment above the shop was ideal. When the Franklins had finally departed and left him to his unpacking, he walked from one room to another and, with upraised hands, he wept for joy and praised with gratitude. Who would have thought that just yesterday he had said good-bye to Katy, and that he had left a life of servitude to a ruthless man--his father--and now he was here, among two people who loved him and whose kindnesses were manifested everywhere he turned, it seemed.

He was overwhelmed with a sense of awe for the Franklins. The apartment was furnished with furniture that exuded warmth and hominess; nothing elaborate nor elegant, perhaps, but warm and appealing and inviting. There was a small but extremely efficient kitchen-dining area, a good size living room with a lovely old desk of solid walnut near a cheerful, curtained window, a pretty bathroom, and a nice-size bedroom with tiny, floral patterned wallpaper on the walls and ruffled curtains at the windows.

Jonathan stood in awe in the living room. What had he ever done to deserve such generosity and blessings from the Lord? he wondered, feeling deeply and greatly humbled and unworthy of God's goodness and kindness to him.

"Thank You, dearest Father!" he exclaimed heavenward. "I love Thee so deeply."

He stepped into the kitchen and smiled with pleasure. How very bright and cheerful everything was! And spotlessly clean too, thanks to Mrs. Franklin.
Jonathan opened the refrigerator and gasped in surprise. Inside were covered dishes with delicious looking foods and fruits and lettuce, carrots and celery, cheese and lunch meats. In a conspicuous place near the front, he found Mrs. Franklin's neatly written note, saying, "In case you get hungry between meals, our dear boy. Love, the Franklins."

Tears surfaced and danced down the cheeks. How very much like his precious mother! he thought. And oh, how generous.

As he unpacked the luggage pieces and put his belongings neatly in the dresser drawers and inside the clothes closet, Jonathan wondered how his father was reacting to the discovery of his departure. Oh that God would hinder and stop him from abusing his dear mother! he thought.

His heart was too full of joy over all the good things the Lord had done for him to dwell long upon thinking of his father and his evil traits and characteristics. He would continue his earnest praying for him and, always, he would love him. But God had now opened a new kind of life for him and he meant to dwell more on the praise side. He had turned his father over to the Judge of all the earth; he must keep him there. Worry never did get anyone anywhere, he knew, except into a state of frustration and unbelief and depression. Faith was the opposite of worry: it mounted up on eagles' wings and transported the believer into heights of purest bliss and eager delight and expectancy and joy. Faith laughed at the impossible; it shouted triumphantly at the insurmountable. Faith triumphed. Always. Always!

Jonathan put the luggage pieces inside a small storage area off the bedroom. Then he sat down at the sturdy desk in the living room and wrote Katy a letter, telling her of his trip out and of her uncle's miraculous and wonderful answer to prayer regarding his need of a man to help him.

"Your uncle told me several times that God 'handpicked' me, my dearest Katy. He was so blest when he told me. And I was blest in my soul, I must confess," he wrote, adding,

"O Katy, I have never been more happy in all my life. I am in the will of God! I have you and, soon, God willing, I shall be enrolled and starting with my schooling. I am overjoyed; I am blest; God is so good to me!
"I miss you much, my dear. So very much. And I wish you were near. But the years will go by quickly for us as we bend ourselves to learning and preparing for His work. Oh, this is such a beautiful thought to me, Kathleen: to work together for Him someday, be it His holy will!

"I plan to go to the post office as quickly as possible and have things set up so my mail can come to a box. I'd rather it didn't come here, due to Dad's ill temper and evil nature. If he found out that I am working for your uncle -- your mother's brother -- he may make life miserable for your dear parents! And I certainly don't want this to happen. If I have a post office number, even though he would see this on my return address to their letters, he would not know where I am staying nor working.

"To my knowledge, he has never known nor even so much as heard of your Uncle Thomas Franklin. And truthfully, Katy, I am thankful for this. Without meaning to be, or even sounding, disrespectful, I'll have to admit that my dear father has a violent temper. When things don't go his way, he sometimes becomes violent. I've seen it on frightening demonstrations a few times. Oh, I pray he will soon turn to God. Please continue praying with me to this end. 'If two of you agree on earth. . . .' Remember the faith-inspiring promise? We must claim this, my dear. Daddy has a precious, never dying soul.

"I'll not be lengthy with my letter this time as I want to write my dear parents yet, also yours. I was overwhelmed with the monetary gift! And your picture is a cherished treasure. I love you!"

Jonathan arose with the dawn the following morning, feeling physically rejuvenated by his night of good sleep and rest. He looked out of the sparkling-clean windows to the Franklins' ten acres of land. Everything was truly beautiful to look upon. It was as though he were dreaming, he thought, as he saw the neatly-kept, well-cared-for ten acres and remembered that he was now a part of things here. Oh, how wonderfully kind and good the Lord was to him! he thought again, as he had done repeatedly since God worked in such a miraculous way for him and had gotten him to where he was now.

He made the bed and saw that things in the room were all neatly arranged and put in their proper places before showering, shaving and getting dressed for the day. Mr. Franklin wanted him down in the shop by eight this morning. This would be his first day to work at his new job. Mostly,
his kind employer had told him, it would be a time of orientation; of getting to
know the shop and its machines and layout and what he would be doing. The
afternoon would see a longtime desire of his heart fulfilled and his prayers
answered: Mr. Franklin was taking him to the Bible school so he could enroll
for the very first semester.

Jonathan felt like he was in another world, so full of joy and happiness
was he.

He ate little breakfast; his heart was filled to overflowing with love and
adoration and praise to God for the manifold and rich blessings which he was
receiving until his appetite for the temporal and physical need seemed small
indeed.

He spent a long time in the Word and on his knees in prayer, thanking,
praising and magnifying the Lord, before pleading in agonizing intercession
for his father's conversion and salvation and his mother's protection and
safety. Then he went forward to meet the day victoriously, with a song on his
lips and a heavenly joy in his heart.

It was late that evening when Bruce Keithley stomped into the house,
slamming the screen door after him. His wife, knowing that he was in an
unusually bad and ill-tempered mood, spoke very softly to him. She placed
the supper which she had kept waiting for him on the table, then called him.

"I'll come when I choose," was his curt, terse and brusque reply.

Marie Keithley, knowing her husband well enough to know that he
meant just what he had said, sat down at the dining room table and ate
alone, in silence, wondering how long until God would answer prayer and
would save her husband.

His mercy was far beyond human comprehension, she knew, and it
was not His will that even one soul should perish and be damned, but that all
should come to know Christ and be saved. Still, the years of having patiently
and lovingly endured and borne her husband's ruthless treatment and his
callous ingratitude and selfishness were all wearing on her physical and
emotional being. She could feel them taking their toll upon her strength. And
there were times when she wondered just how much more she could tolerate
before the physical broke. Had it not been for the Lord's help, she would long
ago have collapsed, she knew.

Tears filled the tender, lonely eyes, the eyes which at one time -- during
the courtship period -- Bruce had declared were the most beautiful blue eyes
he had ever seen. How he had complimented her then! And how happy she
had thought they would be, together, when they were married.

She had been disillusioned, she realized again, as she had realized so
very many times since she became Mrs. Bruce Keithley. If only her husband
would get saved! She knew that God could change the vilest sinner and set
him free. Bruce was no exception with God. He was an extremely proud and
arrogant man who wanted, and generally got, his own way. This had been
ingrained deeply in him from and by his parents, Marie was sad and sorry to
admit. They had pampered him and given in to his every whim and desire
until he was accustomed to having and getting his own way at any cost,
regardless of the pain and hurt he caused or inflicted upon others.

She knew that Jonathan's sudden departure, totally unexpected and
anticipated by her husband, had angered and upset him greatly. He was left
in a bind; a bind that would not be necessary if Bruce was willing to pay a
decent and fair wage for a farm hand or hired man. This added expense was
cutting deep into his niggardly spirit, she knew. Too, he was aware of the fact
that nowhere would he find another to whom he could pay such scant and
meager wages as he paid Jonathan, if indeed one dare so much as call
Jonathan's sparse earnings wages.

It was sad indeed, Marie Keithley thought; Jonathan had served his
father like a common slave. And he had been treated with the same
bitterness and aloofness and harshness, too, she realized.

She felt sad and lonely, missing the son for whom she had prayed.
Then the sadness turned into joy as she recalled the words of a note she had
found inside her Bible.

My dearest Mother, it said,

This is meant for you alone! Please don't worry about me: God has
done great and wonderful things for me -- in answer to our prayers! I want
you to rejoice and praise the Lord; I am. He (God) ordered that hasty
business trip for Father so I could leave peaceably -- without Dad fighting and possibly injuring both you and me. You know how violent he can sometimes become, dear Mother!

I will be working for a wonderful Christian man! And, nearby where I am employed is a Holiness Bible school! What a miracle-working God we serve, Mother dear! You helped to pray this to pass. In fact, I am sure this modern day miracle is due largely to your many years of earnest and fervent and unselfish prayers.

Oh, my precious Mother, someday, the Lord willing, I hope to be able to tell you in detail the sequences of the miracles God performed and wrought for me! You will weep and laugh and shout. And every bit of this had its fulfillment on the day of Dad's hasty out-of-town business trip!

I have many things I'd like to tell you -- where I'll be working and with whom, et cetera. But I want you shielded and protected from any extreme probing and questioning. I mean, if you don't know where I am nor for whom I am going to be working, you will be able to say truthfully, "I don't know." I have only your interest at heart by doing this, my precious and beloved mother. I know you will understand. You are the most wonderful mother in all the world!

You have been my earthly guiding light. It is because of you that I am a devout follower of Jesus Christ. Your beautiful and holy life convinced me that Jesus was real and that He could keep one in every circumstance and situation of life. I followed you as you followed Christ; I saw Christ living in you and shining through you. Not just one day, but day after day after day; year in and year out. Today, I am journeying this Heaven-bound, holy highway with you: you showed me the way. My soul is saved and wholly sanctified, free from envy, hatred, bitterness and strife, anger and malice. I saw this glorious freedom from sin demonstrated in your life. Oh, Mother, I love you so very deeply. Thank you for giving me such a beautiful Christian heritage. All that I am or ever hope to be I owe to Christ and to you.

The Lord willing, I will try to write to Daddy and you regularly.

Continue praying for me, that God may give me His wisdom and understanding as I study and prepare for the ministry, and as I work for this wonderful Christian man.
Again, I want to let you know how much I love you! Jonathan

"Marie, where is that boy working?"

Bruce's harsh voice, so demanding and cruel sounding, cut like a sharp knife into Marie Keithley's tender and loving thoughts.

"I don't know, dear."

"You do! You're keeping it from me. I'll bring him back if it's the last thing I do," he vowed angrily and maliciously. "I demand to know where he is. Do you hear?"

"I tell you the truth, Bruce, I don't know. Now please sit down and eat. Your supper's getting cold. I wish you'd read Jonathan's letter; you'd then know what I have been telling you."

"I told you I'll eat when I decide!" And with that Mr. Keithley hurried away, slamming a door after him.

Chapter 18

Jonathan proved himself an able learner and scholar, both in Thomas Franklin's shop and at the Bible School. It was a delight to be employed by and working side by side with the godly, Spirit-filled Mr. Franklin. Day after wonderful day and week after wonderful week, he counted his many blessings and offered up constant and continual praise to God for affording and allowing him the privilege of being a helper to the man who was by now a true father image to his once-starved and hurting heart.

His morning classes at the Bible School were times of pure joy and holy delight. He absorbed his lessons like a thirsty sponge, taking them deep into his happy heart and allowing them to speak to his soul. They became a part of him. His evenings of study time were feasts to his soul, and his job in the afternoons in the shop was like working in the vestibule of heaven, so full of spiritual times was it. Not infrequently, Mr. Franklin, while working and talking about the good things of God, would rejoice and shout, and get happy in his soul.
A strong bond developed between the two of them; a father-son bond. It was nothing like Jonathan had ever experienced before. Whereas he was treated with disdain and hatred and bitterness by his biological father, Mr. Franklin lavished massive doses of love and kind words and praise upon him, moving him, many times, to tears. Oh, how he loved Mr. Franklin! And his equally wonderful wife also.

The letters from Katy and his mother were treasured and reread many times. Katy was doing well in her classes and her training, she had written him. She really liked what she was doing and felt so wondrously happy knowing she was in the will of God.

His mother had written, in one of her letters to him, that his father had looked at the postmark on his letter and said he (Jon) was having someone forward them from there, to make him (his father) think that he had gone out of state.

Jonathan was especially thankful, after reading that, that he hadn't told his dear mother where he was. Let the little postmark tell its own story, whether his dear father believed it or not. His mother had said, in a earlier letter, that his father was trying to locate him at the factories and plants and shops in the city closest to them.

"He is so sure," she wrote, "that you are working there. And he declares that he'll bring you back home when he finds you, Jonathan. But you are no longer a boy; you are now almost twenty: he could not, by law, compel you to return against your wishes.

"I am so happy -- and I rejoice with you -- that God has opened this door for you. I am praying for you daily -- many times a day, my dearest son. My cup of joy is full, even to overflowing, in knowing that God has answered my prayers and is, even now, granting you the privilege of preparing for His work.

"Serving Him, and laboring for Him, is a privilege, dear Jonathan. Keep that thought always in mind and no task that He may call you to do will ever seem commonplace or dull. Even in the smallest place, with the most unlikely-seeming circumstances, if serving Him and working for Him is counted as the greatest privilege and the highest calling, your work will be a thing of glory and a time of purest joy and delight."
"Consider no place too mean to serve; no man too far down to be reached, and no calling or vocation higher than that to which God has called you.

"Never allow any man to 'buy' you off, son, no matter how dire your circumstances nor how large the sum of the 'sale' money. The servant of God must remain, always and forever, not for sale. Many a man of God has gotten into bondage and has been unable to proclaim the whole counsel of God without fear or favor because he was 'for sale.' The man who 'bought' him off became master over the man of God.

"I rejoiced greatly when I read the paragraph telling of preaching your first sermon and how God helped you there on the street corner to tell those who were listening about Christ's power to save from sin. How I wish I could have listened also!

"Preach the Word, Jonathan my son! Not what you think, but the Word. Jesus said, 'And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.'"

Thinking now of his dear mother and her written words, Jonathan thanked God for such a dear parent, whose chief concern for him was that he do God's will, first and last and always. Oh, he was truly honored and privileged in having her for his mother. How different his life may have been had he been born to a woman other than his mother; a woman who had no concern whatever about his spiritual needs; a woman whose time was spent mainly on the vain, earthly things of life, which would, in time, all pass away and be burned up as chaff.

Jonathan recalled a paragraph of the letter which told of his father's promotion in the company where he worked and how elated he was over the promotion. The crops had all been gathered in and were harvested, she had said, but almost at the "eleventh hour." His father had kept waiting, she had written, in hopes of locating him -- Jonathan -- and forcing him to do the work. When he realized that the crops would be a total loss unless he hired the harvesting done, he (grudgingly) paid the full price to a harvester, and the corn and beans were gathered safely in.

His poor, dear, lost father was a classic example of one whose sole interests were wrapped around and dependent upon the material things of
life, he thought sadly; as long as his "barns were full" and the money was coming in in great abundance, his father was content and satisfied.

Greed was a dreadful thing, Jonathan realized. It was both blinding and, to a degree, deadly. It had driven his father relentlessly (for so long as he could remember, with its slavish, binding, constricting tentacles tightening more tautly yearly around him) until his life seemed to revolve completely and entirely around getting more and more. And more. And God alone -- and only He! -- could cut the binding chains of this earthly, materialistic god and release his dear parent from its vicious and deadly hold.

It would be a real miracle indeed, Jonathan knew, if his father was ever set free from the god of greed. So often, it dragged its victim down into the "lake of fire, where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not." Jesus had said, "... how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24).

There was always a price tag to this business of getting more and wanting more, the young man knew. Its victims were driven mercilessly and relentlessly with the lash of desire and greed until their nerves became frayed and their health broke and, in some cases, reason departed from them. Yes, there was a price. Always. And what a price!

The beautiful scripture verses came suddenly to mind now, as he thought of his precious father. How wonderful if he could only have fit into the lovely verse that said, "But godliness with contentment is great gain," or, "And be content with such things as ye have."

His prayers ascended daily upward for his parents; for his father's salvation especially. Oh, he must not be lost. He dare not be! Prayer was the power that moved God, he knew.

One year passed by; a year of blessing and deep spiritual growth and health. Jonathan had never before enjoyed or known a year so full of spiritual blessings and so rich in heavenly treasures for his soul. He threw all his energies into both his schooling and his work at the shop, spending the early morning hours on his knees in prayer and Bible reading. Time spent alone with God was of the greatest value, he knew. His day's heavy schedules, devoid of the precious hours of communion and fellowship with God, would
have been catastrophic indeed, and meaningless and empty and void. Christ was all in all to him.

Katy and he had had a wonderful and lengthy conversational "feast" via telephone communication at Christmas time. He had "splurged" for once, deciding he had to hear her sweet voice. Neither one had anything to spare monetarily. The letters, however, flew back and forth weekly at the average of four each week.

He had called his parents after he and Katy finished talking. His mother was ecstatic with joy and delight over hearing his voice, saying the phone call was by far a greater and more wonderful Christmas gift than all the lovely gifts he had sent her, not at Christmas only but at regular intervals since he had left home and had begun to work.

His father, his mother had told him, refused to open any of the beautifully wrapped gifts which he had sent to him. They were stacked, she said, inside the closet in his (Jon's) bedroom.

Jonathan knew by that very thing that his father's attitude toward him had not changed one bit. He was still the callous, uncaring, unloving parent, full of hatred and bitterness toward him. He wondered if his attitude and his disposition had changed any toward his mother or if he had become even more hard-hearted and harsh and brutal and unkind and selfish with her.

The only thing he could do was to continue being faithful in prayer for the man who was his father, he knew. He left the house, his mother had told him, when he called home at Christmas time and asked to speak with his father. In response to his question as to whether or not his father had gotten someone to farm the land for him, his mother replied that she knew nothing of what was going on; he never discussed anything with her.

Jonathan realized now how very distant his father was to and with his mother. It was certainly not a marriage-building trait or characteristic, he knew. And in almost 100% of all marriages, the relationship would long ago have ended had the woman married to his father been anyone other than his dear mother. Not so with his mother; she had been taught from childhood that marriage was a for-life thing; a "till death do thee part" relationship. She believed this with all of her heart. She was a living testimony to what the
The Bible had taught. And she had schooled her only son well in the scriptural admonition and injunction.

The young man's thoughts turned suddenly and quite naturally to Kathleen. Oh, how deeply he did love her! He longed for the day when their lives would become one; when she would be by his side instead of thousands of miles away. He would treat her with every courtesy and kindness that a Christian husband could bestow upon his wife. Love would make doing these things pure joy and delight. He would have a tremendous duty to perform and obligation to fulfill, he realized as he recalled how Ephesians 5:25-29 laid down so plainly and explicitly what the husband was to do:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word,

"That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

"For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."

His mother had told him that a man who loved his wife, and who was kind and gentle and loving to her, made it easy for her to be a submissive wife. She had said that the submitting came as naturally and as easily as breathing when and if the husband loved his wife as himself.

Jonathan smiled as he recalled his mother's words when he told her (on the phone) that Katy and he loved each other and that someday, God willing, he planned to marry her.

"Another one of my prayers will be answered," she had replied. "I have prayed for years for this, my dear son. If it was in accordance with His will. You could not have chosen a finer or more lovely young woman, Jonathan."
She has all the qualities of making a wonderful Christian wife." And then she had told him about the loving and the submitting part.

How she must have longed for a loving husband! he thought now, knowing that his mother was a person who not only showered love but absorbed the love which he -- Jonathan -- had bestowed upon her like a sponge. Yet she had been deprived of the very quality which was a solid foundation stone upon which a marriage was built and in which the marriage grew and prospered and flourished and thrived.

She deserved so much but got so little. Of everything, where his father was concerned, the young man knew.

He bowed his head and wept.

(Chapter 19)

It was during the Christmas season in Jonathan's second year of Bible schooling that he and Katy became engaged. She and her parents flew out to be with the Franklins, Mrs. Berringer's brother and his wife and family. When Katy told them they were coming, Jonathan had counted the days until they arrived. How he had wished his dear mother could have come! But knowing his father as he did, he knew this would not happen. His father would not have given her money to make the trip. Especially not since it would have been to see him -- Jonathan.

Katy looked a bit thinner, he thought, and there were dark circles beneath her eyes from long hours of study and hard work. But she was still the same sweet, loving, spiritual, unspoiled and lovely person that she had always been. It was her parents who told him how well liked and much respected she was at the hospital, with doctors, nurses and patients alike. He was not surprised to hear it; he had expected this. And knowing Katy, he was sure her light was shining brightly for Jesus on every floor and in every wing of the hospital.

They had visited ever so many places of interest while she was there; places about which his college friends had talked and told him but which he had had neither the time nor, in several
cases, the money, to see. But with Katy's coming, he had managed to save enough money so they could enjoy some of the interesting and lovely places in the city.

They had ridden a city bus, just for the pleasure and fun of riding instead of driving, to a rose garden, and then on to the planetarium and the zoo. It was a full but wonderfully grand day. Their supper, eaten in The Chinese Garden, was a delightful ending to a memorable and never-to-be-forgotten day. They were tired but happy when they pulled into the Franklins' driveway that night, where lights still burned brightly from inside and laughter floated out to them as they entered the door.

Katy and her parents and the Franklins all went with him to the mission that he pastored in the slums of the city, holding services every Sunday afternoon on a regular basis. When he had first begun holding services there he had all children, mainly small children. But one by one, after he had begun making weekly calls in the homes of the children, the parents began attending the services and some had been gloriously converted.

Katy was overjoyed with the work. She helped him like it had been a regular, everyday occurrence for her instead of it being a brand new experience. They sang together, and Katy held the congregation spellbound with her vivid presentation of the true account of one of her little patients who gave his heart to Jesus just a few days before he died, telling how his testimony and his witness caused several nurses and a few patients to turn to Jesus.

Never before had he seen how extremely capable and efficient and wonderful Katy was with children. Her Christ-centered love flowed abundantly and freely out to them and they responded in many ways to her proffered, unselfish love. He had known all his life that she loved children, this was true; but her God-given talent and ability to so easily influence them for Jesus amazed Jonathan.

She would be a perfect helpmeet for him. In fact, he saw firsthand and for himself how well the two of them could work together as a team; as husband and wife. He saw, too, that she, with her womanly/motherly instinct and touch, had a way with his small charges that he didn't have, love him though they did. It made him love her all the more.
It was Mrs. Berringer who had brought him the wonderful news about his mother. He had wept for joy as he listened.

"I have never seen your mother so happy, Jonathan," she had said. "She's nearly beside herself with joy knowing you are preparing for full time service for the Lord. She said the very thought of what you are doing makes her few burdens and trials seem as nothing. In spite of her heartaches at home, your leaving for Bible School has given her a whole new outlook on life. She seems younger and more dynamically alive than I have ever seen her. Her entire being seems to have been refreshed and rejuvenated. Her faith has reached a higher plane, she told me, and what you are doing is, in her words, only the beginning of the greater things God has for you. Her faith for your father's conversion is stronger than ever."

Oh, the preciousness of those words! They were a stimulus to his own faith, buoying up the hope that throbbed inside his breast.

But all too soon the departure of those whom he loved so dearly drew nigh. The days had sped by in a whirlwind of delicious joyousness and happiness and Jonathan, watching as the plane carried Kathleen and her parents away, wiped the tears from his eyes, then hurried away from the airport. They were gone, but the fragrance of memories made would linger with him forever, to be recalled and remembered and cherished when days grew long and tiresome and hard. Always, the stored-away memories would refresh him and bring joy and gladness to his heart. He had so many things for which to be thankful.

He settled down to his regular routine of study and work and found boundless joy and satisfaction in what he did. Mr. Franklin's shop was a haven to work in. The two of them discussed many Bible truths together, each adding a new dimension to the other's spiritual depth. Thomas seemed to be as eager a student of the Word as he, Jonathan, was.

In the young man's eyes and mind, Thomas Franklin was everything and more than he had ever imagined a father could or would be. He was indeed like a father to him. Oh, how he loved the kind, gentle man! And his equally wonderful wife, too. They were spiritual giants. Prayer warriors. The daily times of Bible reading and prayer and of singing a hymn or two around the family altar were times of spiritual refreshings and outpourings of glory and blessing. Not a day went by but what Jonathan left the family altar feeling
revived in his soul, refreshed in his spirit, and determined in his heart to make new advancements for God and His cause.

"The district is to have a conference on missions," Mr. Franklin announced as Jonathan came to work one day in early spring. "I thought it would be good for all three of us to attend, my dear boy, if God spares us till then. Would you like to go?"

Jonathan felt his heartbeat quicken. "That would be wonderful!" he exclaimed joyously. "But can you spare the time away from the shop? It seems as though you're getting more orders than ever, and I came here to work for you and go to Bible school."

Mr. Franklin placed his hand gently on Jonathan's shoulder. "Time taken out for God and for His cause is never time lost, Son. I don't believe in shirking duty nor delaying obligations, and I always fill my orders on time, as you know, but I feel that since we are a bit ahead of schedule for the McElNay order it would be greatly beneficial for us to attend that conference."

"Oh, Mr. Franklin, I would love to go. I just didn't want to shirk my duty to you and to the work. You have been so kind and generous to me. You will never know this side of eternity what you mean to me, nor how you have helped me to grow spiritually. Heaven's records will someday reveal what a great blessing you have been to me. You have been God's earthly ministering angel to me. I love you like a father."

"And I love you like my very own son, Jonathan," Mr. Franklin declared, wiping tears from his eyes. "You are God's gift to me. Truly, you are. I don't know how I'd have gotten along without you and your wonderful help here in the shop. You do superb work, my boy. I feel, if necessary, that I could leave the entire business of my shop in your hands and it would be done exactly the way I am doing it, so well and expertly have you learned everything. But back to this missions conference: Julia and I wanted to go as missionaries."

"You did? Where to?" Jonathan asked quickly, never ceasing to be amazed at the dear man. "Just anywhere. We were willing to go wherever there was a need. And we went forward to the altar every time a missionary spoke and asked who would be willing to go if God should call them. But we were never called to go."
Jonathan saw the sadness in his kind employer's eyes. But only for a moment did it last.

"One night, while down at the altar again presenting ourselves as candidates to go, the Lord whispered sweetly to my soul, 'Thomas, I need supporters for My missionaries. I want you and your wife to remain at home and to support those whom I call to go to heathen lands.'

"I was overjoyed, Jonathan: to think that my God could use one so insignificant and unknown. I received my commission that night from God; the commission to support. And I have never again gone forward to present myself for missionary service. I am doing what the Lord saw I was best fitted to do and I couldn't be happier.

"Doing the will of God is a joy and a delightful thing. When each one fulfills his God-appointed job and obligation the work of the Lord progresses and moves forward wondrously well. It's like a piece of machinery with every part functioning smoothly and working harmoniously together to keep the machine running. I am only a small part of God's great work force; but if I fail in my part of the labor His kingdom work will suffer and take a setback. And I will be held accountable for what I could have done and should have done.

"Each and every day that I work," Mr. Franklin continued, "I am reminded that I am commissioned by God to be a supporter of missionaries. My work is a delight to do in view of Whom I am doing it for -- God and His missionaries; His laborers on foreign soil. I tell you, Jonathan, I can hardly wait to get to this convention: Julia and I have supported one of the men who is to be there. He and his wife have six lovely children."

"I'm excited too, and so anxious to hear the speakers," Jonathan said. "This will be the first such conference I have ever attended. You have made it all sound extremely wonderful, Mr. Franklin."

"Oh, it is wonderful!" came the quick reply. "I can scarcely wait. We'll leave as soon as possible tomorrow afternoon, God willing. You'll not be disappointed, son."

And Jonathan realized how very true the man's statement was as he sat listening the following day. He was stirred in a way which he could not remember of having been stirred before. He wept through the service and, in
the evening service, at the close of a moving, stirring, God-anointed sermon by a veteran missionary, he got to his feet and hurried down to the altar, acknowledging his willingness to go anywhere.

The call came to him as clearly as did his call to preach. The Spirit's voice was unmistakable and gentle.

With hands raised heavenward, and while tears trickled down his cheeks and dropped onto the altar, he whispered a sentence of total resignation and gladness, "Anywhere, blessed Jesus; anywhere."

When he got to his feet, Thomas Franklin was by his side. He was weeping. His tears were tears of joy.

"My boy is going in my place," the kind employer said hoarsely to Jonathan. "How did you know?" Jonathan asked brokenly. "The Spirit of God witnessed to my heart when I heard you say, 'Anywhere, blessed Jesus; anywhere.' Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan, my heart is too full for speaking. The Lord be praised! The Lord be praised!"

It was late when the Franklins and Jonathan arrived home that night, tired and weary but full of praise to God for the outpouring of His Spirit and for Jonathan's call to serve as a missionary on foreign soil.

As he lay in the darkness of the bedroom that night, his soul aflame with God's glory and joyful beyond any describing to be chosen by God for missionary service, Jonathan suddenly thought about Katy and her commitment to nursing. She had told him once that her calling into the nursing profession was every bit as clear and as real as their minister at home had said his call to preach was.

The thought jolted Jonathan. He sat upright in bed. Cold sweat broke out upon his body. He knew what he must do, and he would do it like one of the brave men before him: he must write Katy and tell her of the mission call. He would release her of her engagement to become his wife, painful though this was to him. God must be first in his life -- always. Katy's call was to nursing; his was to be a missionary. He must write her.

With tears blurring his vision, Jonathan turned the desk light on and began to write.
My Dearest Katy,

   It is late, late as I write you, and I do so with a heavy heart and with tears in my eyes; but I must, Katy. . . .

(Chapter 20)

   Katy stepped off the elevator and hurried down the hallway to the room she called home since coming for her training. She was tired to the bone, it seemed. The day had been an unusually busy and strenuous one. Coupled with that fact was the thought that this day should, by regular mail delivery standards, be the day when Jonathan should have received her letter to him.

   It hurt her deeply to write it. She had wept much. But she had to do it; God's way and His call was the ultimate thing in her life. More than anything else, she desired to please and obey the Lord. Jonathan would understand, she was sure. Like her, he would weep and be brokenhearted. But he would understand. And God would heal, she knew. Yes, in time they would both be healed of the pain. God was the Master Healer. Not of broken bodies only but of hurting, broken hearts too.

   She opened the door and stepped inside. Almost immediately she saw the letter on her bed. JerriAnn had gotten the mail out of the box downstairs and brought it up for her, she was sure. Jerri was a sweet girl.

   Katy was glad and thankful that the Lord had given her JerriAnn as her roommate in the large nurses' building. JerriAnn was sensible and studious and shy. She was not one for night life or careless living. She was a young woman who possessed a set of wonderful morals and high standards. It had been pure joy to lead JerriAnn to Christ. Each of them was sure the Lord had directed them together as roommates while they were in training and since Jerri's conversion, each was strengthened and encouraged by the other's testimony.

   Katy picked Jonathan's letter up from the bed, took off her shoes, then opened the letter and began to read.

My dearest Katy, she read.
It is late, late as I write you, and I do so with a heavy heart and with tears in my eyes; but I must, Katy. . . .

Your Uncle Thomas and Aunt Julia took me with them to a missionary conference. And what a conference it was! I'll never, never be the same again, Katy. My heart was stirred and moved upon mightily by the Holy Ghost. And Katy, tonight God laid His hand upon me for service on foreign soil. He called me to be a missionary. Imagine it; me! The call was definite and clear. Willingly, I yielded and said a forever -- yes.

This is why I am writing, my dear. I want you to know that, though I love you with all the love that a man can have for a woman, I must go.

It isn't right for me to expect you to go abroad with me, since your clear and definite calling is in the nursing profession and I will be going out as a missionary, God willing, upon my completion of Bible schooling and the linguistic course. (Now I know why the Spirit of God impressed me so strongly to make this one of my courses! Truly, His ways are past finding out!)

Katy dearest, it is with a heavy and a broken heart that I release you from your engagement now, as of this night and this hour of two minutes before midnight. God, Who doeth all things well and maketh no mistakes, will give us strength to bear up under this crushing burden. I know you love me, and I love you far more deeply than words can ever express. But God has first place in my life and, therefore, I willingly and joyously follow His leadership.

I had so eagerly looked forward to the day and the time when we would be married and could work together as a team for the Lord. But, clear though I had felt about this beautiful and much-awaited for occasion, the Lord must have other plans and arrangements for each of us. My only consolation is in the blessed knowledge that He knows what is best and, too, that He knows what He's doing and why.

Oh, Katy, dearest, dearest Katy, please don't feel badly toward me! This is the hardest and most painful thing I have ever done; but I do it willingly for Jesus' sake. Perhaps I have loved you too deeply. But my Heavenly Father knows that while I have loved you thus He has had first place in my heart and life. Always!
I feel that, in some degree, I know how Abraham felt when he offered up Isaac; maybe not literally was he offered, but figuratively, he was. And God blessed him wondrously and marvelously for his instant obedience. May He grant both you and me the strength and the courage we will need during this painful time. He did it for Abraham; He will do it for us, Katy. His grace is sufficient. And it's always available.

I will carry with me to my grave the memory of your smile and your deep consecration and dedication to the Lord. Always, you will be in my thoughts; this will help me much in my labors abroad. Not infrequently has the memory of some great, good, and noble, God fearing woman helped a weary laborer in God's vineyard on to doing exploits for God. In this way, you will be helping me.

May God go with you, Katy; may He use your hands to soothe painful bodies, your smile to warm their hearts and your love to bring them to Christ. I will be forever grateful to Christ for having had the privilege to love you and in turn, for having had your love.

God bless you, my dear. I'm sure you will understand.
My Love,
Jonathan

Katy read the letter. Then she read it over again. And again. With tears filling her eyes and rolling down her cheeks, she dropped by the bed on her knees. The Lord was good. He was wonderful!

She raised her hands heavenward and praised the Lord. Too amazed and awed for loud words, she continued her whispered praising as tears spilled on the floor.

She was still on her knees when the phone near her bedside rang.

Grabbing tissues from the box, she picked up the receiver. "Hello, Kathleen Berringer speaking," she said brokenly.

"Katy! Katy!"

"Jonathan! You got my letter. . . ."
"Oh Katy! My dearest Katy! I am overwhelmed. What can I say, other than, Praise the Lord! I feel like Abraham must have felt when the Lord showed him the ram caught by the horns in the thicket and Isaac was given back to him. God gave you back to me! Oh, Katy, this is a miracle. Another real miracle! Checking with the time when God called you to be a missionary was the same time I was kneeling at the altar and answering God's call to me! Oh, Katy, we are meant to be together. Blessed be God forever and ever! I'm so happy and blest that I want to shout and cry and laugh at the same time."

"My call is as clear as my nursing call was, Jonathan. I was praying when the Holy Spirit's voice spoke to me. I must go, dearest Jon. Like you, I must. This is why I wrote you that I must break my engagement: I felt your call was to preach in America. Oh, God is so good. So wonderful! He tested our consecration and dedication to Him and when He saw that we kept Him in His rightful first place in our lives, He gave us back to each other. This is wonderful. My heart is deeply moved upon and greatly humbled. I love you more than ever, Jon."

"And that is how I feel toward you, Kathleen. This losing you, in a figurative sense, has deepened my already great love for you and made me realize more than ever how very much you mean to me. And how very much you are a part of my life already, even though we are not married as yet.

"When I told your dear, kind uncle what I had done, he merely said, 'The Lord always tests the gold, to make sure it is real and genuine and pure.'"

"He didn't seem greatly concerned that I had written you, releasing you from your engagement promise to be my wife. He was ecstatic with holy joy over my special call to be a missionary abroad. I believe he knew all along that you would be going with me when I leave, God willing.

"Your uncle is a wise man, Katy: he never interferes with my life in any way when he feels God is trying to teach me a lesson or test my devotion and consecration to Him. He prays a lot, this I know. But always, he advises me to seek only the perfect will of God for each and every situation and then to leave the outcome in His hands and to His All-wise discretion. He has been a bulwark of strength for me."
"I'm sure He has, Jonathan. So long as I have known my dear uncle and aunt, they have been deeply spiritual and totally surrendered to God. Their lives have influenced mine greatly."

"The way my mother has influenced mine," Jonathan added. "How I wish I could say the same for my father."

"Mother wrote me recently," Katy said, "that your father is not looking well at all. He's high on the ladder of success and business prestige, but I'm afraid he's a slave to the things for which he has worked so hard."

"Many a man is a slave, Kathleen, to his drives, his urges, and his ambitions. And the sad thing is that this type of individual is not aware of his enslavement. Money, prestige, and material things are his god. But I'm trusting the Lord to give a great and mighty deliverance to my dad. Keep praying with me for his salvation. And before I tell you goodnight, let us praise the Lord for the wonderful miracle that just took place for us again. I'll never, never cease to praise Him for calling each of us separately, and with no conversation between us regarding the call. Oh, my dearest Katy, God's approval and His smile are resting upon us. It won't be too much longer, the Lord winning, until we will be serving Him together as husband and wife. My heart is nearly bursting for joy and thankfulness. I must hang up now and get busy with studying. I love you and I thank God for you and your Spirit-filled life. Goodnight, my dear."

"Goodnight, Jonathan. I love you." I never return and would never again have an opportunity to make things right between God and his soul. Oh, he must not die until he was forgiven for all his many sins! He must not!

He prayed and wept as he packed a piece of luggage for the flight home. James Franklin had scheduled him to leave within a few hours, and his father, bless him! had told him he'd take him to the airport.

Both Thomas and Julia Franklin accompanied him to the airport, going with him to the gate from which he would be boarding the plane.

The parting was tearful and sad, not only for the Franklins but for Jonathan also. The Franklins had woven chords of love around his heart in a wonderfully secure and joyous way and the thought of being separated from them brought tears to his eyes.
He sensed his loneliness especially much when he was airborne and realized that each hour in flight was taking him farther and farther away from the two who had given his life new meaning and a new dimension.

The thought of seeing his mother, however, sent a thrill of joy and excitement surging through his being. He loved her so deeply and he had missed not seeing her. But she had written him repeatedly that his father's anger and rage and hatred had not abated and that he must not come home; that she had no idea what he may do to him -- Jonathan -- if he ever saw him.

And now he was returning home; he would have an encounter with the man whose he was and to whom he belonged -- the man who hated him with a passion because he was born a boy and not a girl.

The thought of it seemed incredulous, ridiculous, and completely preposterous. It was a most unnatural thing, Jonathan realized as he looked down upon the fleecy-white clouds beneath the plane's flying altitude. His poor father was a living example of one who was, as Romans 1:31 states, "... Without natural affection."

He slept little in the plane; his mind was much upon his critically-ill parent and his lost condition. He prayed much. He knew the fervent prayers of the Franklins were following him and were ascending heavenward in behalf of his father's salvation. This was a great comfort to Jonathan in the many hours it took him to arrive at the city airport.

He took a cab to the hospital as soon as he had collected his piece of luggage, hoping and praying that his father's life had not ebbed away while he was en route home.

He found his mother in the intensive care waiting room, sitting in an overstuffed chair, her eyes closed but her lips moving. She was praying, he knew. How sweet and angelic she looked! he thought

He stood, watching her and hating to interrupt her praying. Then he stepped closer to her and gently placed his hand upon her slender shoulder. In an instant, they were in each other's arms, weeping, laughing and embracing.
"Oh Jonathan David! Jonathan, my son!" she cried happily and joyously. "Oh, I am so happy to see you once again. I love you so!"

"And I love you, Mother! Oh, I am happy to see you! It's been such a long, long time. How's Father?"

"Very low. He's critically ill."

"Does he know you?"

"Yes, at times He keeps calling for you. His eyes become big and round and wild looking as he searches the room for you with his gaze."

"Do you think I should go in to see him, Mother? Or will my presence excite or incite him too much that he'll become mean and nasty with the nurses? You know how angry he can get."

"You must go in to see him, Jonathan. He's calling for you. The nurses said to send you in as soon as you arrived. We'll take your luggage out to the car, though, and put it inside the trunk, then we'll go to see your father, together."

"Give me the car keys, Mother, and I'll take care of this luggage. Please There's no need for you to make that long walk out to the parking lot and back."

"Thanks, Jonathan. I'd really like going with you; but I suppose I should remain here in case I'm needed. I'm parked near to where the emergency entrance sign is, second row, close to the hospital building itself."

"Thanks, dearest Mother, I'll hurry." And with a tight little hug and a kiss on his mother's face, Jonathan hurried out of the room, returning a short while later.

Tears swam in Jonathan's eyes as he stood beside his mother, looking down upon the face of his father, whose eyes were shut.

He listened to the sounds of the various life supports and realized again just how fragile a thing life was. Every now and then he noticed his father's
face contorted as if in fear. Dare he touch this man who so hated him? he wondered, as a deep longing to put his arms around his father rose up within him.

Stepping closer to the bed, he gently stroked his father's forehead, whispering as he did so, "I love you, Father. Very much."

The head on the pillow moved restlessly, as though trying to come out of a fog and into the clarity of reality.

"I love you, Father And God loves you, too." And Jonathan's tears wet the face on the pillow

The eyes, full of pain and misery, fluttered then opened. "Jon . . . a . . . than! Son! . . . Son! I . . . I'm . . . sorry."

The eyes closed again. Breathing was labored. Hard. A nurse hurried to the bed. Jonathan clung to the hand. He was weeping. "Father! Father!" he exclaimed.

Tears stole from beneath the closed eyelids of the head on the pillow.

"He's excited," the nurse remarked. "He hasn't seen you for some time, I gather"

"That is correct," Jonathan replied. "I'm going to Bible School and working out near the Pacific Coast."

"Perhaps it would be best for him if you leave the room a while, so he can calm down."

"No! No!" came the hoarse cry from the mouth of the man. "Don't go, Jonathan! Please. . . ."

"He'll be back, Mr. Keithley," the nurse said by way of explanation.

"No! He . . . must . . . not . . . go. I . . . must talk . . . to . . . him."

"But you need your rest, Mr. Keithley. Talking will wear you out."
"I . . . must . . . talk . . . to . . . my . . . son." The words came out with a great effort.

"Jonathan . . . where . . . are . . . you? It's growing . . . dark. So . . . dark. Give . . . me . . . your . . . hand . . . Son."

Shaking her head, the nurse stepped away. "He's serious," she said. "Let him talk. Something's bothering him. If you need me, I'll be over by the monitor." Squeezing his father's hand gently, Jonathan said softly, "Jesus loves you, Father, and so do Mother and I. Jesus wants to save you and get you ready for Heaven. Please ask Him to come into your heart."

The eyes fluttered again. Mustering every ounce of strength possible, Jonathan's father said, "I'm dying . . . and I'm not . . . ready to . . . die. Oh, Jonathan, forgive me. Forgive . . . me! Please! I . . . I love you. I've been such a . . . wicked, selfish man. . . .

"Oh, Father, I forgive you. Freely and fully so. I love you. Love you!"

"You have . . . been a . . . wonderful son. Always I'm sorry . . . for everything I . . . did . . . to you. Oh . . . if only I could live my life over again!"

"Jesus can make you new, dear Father. Please ask Him to come into your heart and to save your soul. He's waiting for you."

"I've been . . . so . . . wicked. Would He . . . have a . . . wretch such as I? Oh, Jonathan, pray for me! It's so dark. I'm afraid to . . . die."


"Please, God," Mr. Keithley begged, "forgive me. I'm . . . not worthy. . . . But for Christ's sake, forgive . . . me. Come into . . . my . . . heart."

The eyes opened wide. A light brightened his face. There was a smile on his lips. "It's . . . all right. All right!" he exclaimed, drawing a deep breath into his lungs as his eyes closed.

Jonathan kept his father's hand clutched in his own, hoping and praying that the love which he felt for his parent would somehow flow through to his father and give strength for healing.
"Please, Lord," he prayed, "don't take him from me, now that he has just begun to love me. Nevertheless, Thy will, not mine."

He thought of Proverbs 13:12. Tears trickled down his cheeks. He looked upward and whispered the words, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life."

"You're tired, Mother dear," he remarked, seeing the shadows beneath her eyes. "Please go into the waiting room and try to nap. I'll stay with Father."

"That won't be necessary," the nurse stated, nodding toward the bed. "Mr. Keithley just expired. I'm sorry."

Jonathan stood as one glued to the floor. Then, shaking himself, he put an arm around his mother and said simply, "God makes no mistakes. He doeth all things well. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Come, Mother, you need some rest."

"Let me kiss him goodnight, Jonathan," the little mother said tearfully, "then I shall leave."

"Thank you, Mother, I too shall kiss him goodnight. My desire has come; it has been fulfilled; it is a tree of life. We shall meet him in the morning. And what a meeting that will be! Blessed be the Lord forever!"

Quietly they left the room and walked down the hallway toward the elevator, wiping tears from their eyes.

The End