The Invitation

by Mrs. Paul E. King

JerrilLee looked up into Ron's face, feeling a bit grieved and distraught. "You don't understand!" she cried, flinging her arms wide in a gesture of complete exasperation. "But then," she added, "how could you; your father's a Christian."
"But JerriLee," Ron continued, "why don't you ask your father to come with you and your mother to church? It's great that each of you became converted in the last revival we had, but I know the Lord wants your father to be saved also. This great salvation is not an exclusive experience, meaning to say that it's not just for a select few, it's for 'whosoever will': this includes your father."

JerriLee sighed heavily. "It's no use trying to explain to you, Ron Jewell. But I'll say this one thing, and that is that if you had to live around my father you'd understand why I haven't asked him to come to church. Our home's a battleground of controversy anymore, with Mom pulling and contending for spiritual things and Daddy doing just the opposite."

"Don't you and your mother do anything with your father?" Ron probed gently. "I mean, don't you do anything together as a family since you've been to the altar?"

"Like what?" JerriLee questioned, a bit puzzled. "We're Christians now."

"So! It wouldn't be sinful to go fishing with your dad through the week, if he likes to fish."

"Mother hates fishing. And now that she's taken up with the church and its activities she doesn't have time. Oh, Dad wants us to go; but Mom just tells him she's too busy now."

Ron felt a stab of pain go through his being. "Do you think that's a good testimony for your father, JerriLee?" "Well, what else could she do?"

"Fishing's not wrong. Jesus had some really wonderful followers who fished." Ron answered kindly. "If it would help your father toward getting to God I'd say it was time well spent. Why don't you go with him, JerriLee?"

"Ron Jewell! Are you kidding! I'm sticking by my mother; she's a Christian, Daddy very definitely is not!"

"Hear me out, please," Ron begged. "The Bible tells us that he that winneth souls is wise. Right?"

"That's what it says."
"Well, then, don't you think it would be the wise thing, and the only right thing, to go fishing with your father when he asks you, JerriLee? Are you winning him by doing what you're doing now?. I'd say, if anything, you're hurting him and pushing him farther away rather than drawing him toward Christ."

"Well, like I said before, you don't understand our predicament. Daddy's not interested in spiritual things. Take that for what it's worth, Ron, and I mean it kindly."

"Do you mind if I pay him a visit at the store someday and invite him out to church?" he asked.

"Of course not. And I wish you all the success in the world while you're doing it. But don't be shocked or surprised if he cuts you off or gets short spoken with you. I'm warning you, remember this."

Ron laughed softly. "It won't be the first time I've been cut off, JerriLee. I've even been told off a time or two. You get into all kinds of situations when you go knocking on doors trying to win people to Jesus Christ. This doesn't scare me. If anything, it challenges me. Many times the ones who appear the hardest are the most easily won. And I can't help but believe that beneath your father's so-called hard exterior is a heart as soft as melted butter. He just needs someone to show him love -- Christ's love."

"But . . . but Ron, Mom and I try! We don't do any of those wicked old things that we used to do. And you know how faithfully we attend all the church services. Isn't this showing him Christ's love?"

"That's being faithful to Christ. Going fishing with him would be displaying Christ's love in you and through you. I have a feeling that your father feels totally left out of your lives."

JerriLee gasped.

"I really mean it" Ron added. "It's almost like he is no longer important to you or your mother."

"Ron Jewell!" JerriLee was shocked. "Do you mean that?"
"Do me a favor, will you?" Ron asked. "When you are by yourself, and after the initial shock of my words wears off, sit down and quietly and honestly try to put yourself in your father's position. This is all I ask. Now don't forget, JerriLee, to take in account how you and your dear mother keep refusing to comply with his perfectly worthy and fatherly/husband requests. Promise?"

"I . . . I guess I can."

"Will you do it? And will you ask the Lord to help you to see your dad the way He sees him, and to love him like He loves him? Is this asking too much?"

"No."

"Then I'm counting on you. And I believe when I see you again you'll have something wonderful to tell me. Now don't forget what I told you to ask the Lord to do."

"I'll do it, Ron?"

"I'll be praying for you, JerriLee."

Ron hurried home. On the counter top he found a note propped up against the cookie jar, asking him to go to the hardware store for parts for the plumbing job his father was doing at the Lindley home. He felt excitement surge through his entire being. This was God's doing, he knew.

He got the keys off his father's dresser and hurried out to the garage then backed the El Camino out and hurried away, praying as he drove. Lymons Hardware Store was a busy place. This day was no exception, Ron noticed, as he entered the store. He started down the aisle with his father's hand-written list when Mr. Lymon himself approached him with, "May I help you, please?"

Ron smiled. "Dad needs quite a few things, Sir," he said. "Thank you. I'll appreciate your help. Here's the list," he added, handing him the paper. "And when you have everything together, Dad said for you to charge it to his account."
Working expertly and knowing where everything was located, Mr. Lymon asked, "Who is your father?"

"I'm Wayne Jewell's son, Ron. JerriLee and I will graduate together this year, God willing. You are Mr. Lymon, aren't you?"

"That's right. And I'm happy to know you, Ron. I think most highly of your father. He's an honest man. And he's one of my best customers. Yes sir, you have a wonderful father. He's so very kind."

"He's like this all the time, Mr. Lymon. But then, Dad's a Christian."

"I know," he replied. "He radiates Christ. I enjoy being around your dad. You say you'll graduate with JerriLee?"

"God willing, yes. She's quite a girl, Mr. Lymon. And she has brains to spare, if such a thing is possible."

"I think she's rather special, Ron. She was always close to me. Lately though she's not quite like she used to be. I feel . . . well . . . excluded in her and her mother's life anymore. And I tell you, this hurts."

"Mr. Lymon, I was wondering if you'd do me a big favor. I'd love to have you come to church with me. And I know Dad would be every bit as happy as I?"

"I told your father I'd come sometime, Ron, and I sincerely meant it when I said it. But I was waiting for an invitation from my wife and JerriLee, and neither one has ever asked me. It's almost as if they don't want me with them; almost like they don't care about me. I've been so lonely since they started going to church and have excluded me from being with them. I've made life miserable a few times for my wife, I know. But I'm almost beside myself. And I long to know what to do; how to get back into their lives again. Everything I suggest doing together as a family is received with an, 'I'm too busy: answer. I thought Christ united not divided families.'"

Ron felt crushed as he looked into the face of the man who searched his face for answers to his questions.
"Christ does unite, Mr. Lymon," he replied. "And I'm sure that both your wife and daughter love you as much as ever. In fact, mom. They have some learning to do and some lessons to learn; but I'm sure that God's going to help them. Wait and see. Meanwhile, why don't you come to church on Sunday, if God spares you? I know you'll not be sorry that you did. And I know that a certain young lady would be overjoyed to sit beside her father in church."

"Do you think so, Ron? Do you really think so?" He searched Ron's face earnestly and seriously and eagerly.

"I don't think so; I know so, Mr. Lymon!"

Taking Ron's hand and shaking it vigorously, Mr. Lymon exclaimed, "Then I'll be there! it will be a new experience for me," he added, "but I'm looking forward to it."

"You won't be disappointed," Ron said.

All the way over to the Lindleys' house, Ron prayed for Mr. Lymon. He was sure the man wasn't far from becoming converted. His father rejoiced when he told him the glad news, saying he would spend more time in prayer for his friend's soul.

Ron's heart sang all the way home. God was working, of this he was sure.

JerriLee called him after supper; she was crying, "I don't know where to begin," she stated. "First, though, I want to thank you for everything you said to me. But after sincere, heart-searching praying by both Mother and me, we saw, or realized, that everything you said was true."

Ron gave out a softly-toned, "Praise the Lord!"

"I realized that neither of us was demonstrating Christ's love to our father in the way we should have been. Both Mother and I told the Lord how sorry we were for our neglect and for our exclusiveness, and asked His forgiveness. And Ron, since asking the Lord to let me see Daddy through His eyes, and to love him through His love, something's happened to me: I've
always loved my father, only I've never loved him like I do since praying that prayer -- from my heart. Oh, it's wonderful!"

"Thank the Lord for this, JerriLee."

"Oh, I do. I do! And I have. Something happened to Mother, too. She cried and cried when she realized how neglectful she's been to Daddy. So she told me that this night we were going to begin showing our Christian love to Father by making his favorite things for supper. Talk about a feast! And you talk about a surprised man! Our home is happy again. And Ron, I asked Daddy to come to church with us on Sunday, the Lord willing, and he promised Mother and me that he'll come! Oh, I'm so happy I can't stop crying.

"Mother's carrying on like a young bride again; Daddy hardly knows what to make of it all. Mom asked him to forgive her for being so busy all the time that she neglected him. She told him she wanted to go on a fishing trip with him as soon as he can go. Imagine this! Isn't the Lord good to us! We have so many things to learn yet, Ron; please help us wherever you think we need help."

"I'm praying for each of you to get sanctified wholly; to be filled with the Holy Spirit, JerriLee. Jesus said, 'And when He -- the Spirit, that is -- is come, He shall guide you into all truth."

"I'm not giving up until I know the Holy Spirit abides and resides in my heart, Ron. Keep praying for me."

"You can count on me" he answered as he brushed tears from his eyes.