Barry read again the assignment for the history test for the third time. He felt as though he knew little or nothing more than before all his reading.

"You going over that again?" Zachary asked, incredulously. "What's wrong with you, Barry? You haven't been acting like yourself for the past three days. Snap out of it"
Barry lifted his eyes from the book long enough to give Zachary a long, searching look.

"What's eating you?" Zachary asked in a whisper.

"My conscience," Barry replied truthfully in a half whispered reply.

"Conscience? Man, who bothers about one's conscience these days?" Zachary answered, far more loudly than he intended to do.

"Quiet!" Miss Rubens ordered from where she sat behind her desk grading papers of a previous class. "This is study time," she reminded sternly, looking toward Barry and Zachary near the back of the room.

Zachary studied his friend for a long while before settling down to serious studying of his own. He was baffled over Barry's changed behavior and his sudden seriousness and soberness. Ordinarily, his friend was outgoing, witty and jovial, and fun to be with. The last three days, however, he was anything but that; if anything he was like a dark cloud over the sun. His fun loving ways seemed to have flown out the window or washed down the drain. Enigmatically, he glanced over at the desk next to his and saw a worried look on Barry's ruggedly handsome face. Something was wrong, he surmised. Something was bothering Barry. He meant to find out what it was as soon as school was out for the day.

Barry, meanwhile, tried with all his might and brains to concentrate on his reading, knowing that Mr. Twittler's history tests could be anything but easy. But try as he may, the print before him seemed to run together in one word after the other and all came out spelling watermelons! It was frightening. Scary, really. He knew he could never get away with it. Oh, he did! He had had proper upbringing: he knew it was wrong to steal watermelons. To steal anything, really. But he hadn't wanted to be called a sissy, nor even to be thought of as such, so he had "gone along" with the fellows' suggestion that they raid the Choice Fruit Farm's watermelon fields and dispose of a few of their very choicest and juicy-best ripe melons via their stomachs.

Barry felt hot just thinking about it now. It made him feel weak and cowardly, remembering what he had done and knowing that he was as guilty
as the other six were. His father and mother would be shattered if they knew what he had done: they had trusted him.

He felt like closing the book, knowing there was no way he could study when everything seemed to be screaming watermelons to him from the pages. Oh, but he was cowardly! He saw it as real as life now. A man of strength and character and good morals would have said one big no to the others' suggestion and he would have stood firmly upon that no. But not him; he had no backbone, it seemed. And this in spite of knowing that one could not sin and get by with it. He knew this. How well he knew it! Hadn't he tried, as a very small boy, to conceal the chicken he'd killed with a wild pitch of a rock? (After having been told by his father and mother not to throw rocks, that it was too dangerous; that he could kill someone, or injure them for life).

Perspiration broke out on Barry's face as he recalled the scripture, "... and be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). God had used his very own canine friend, Spot, to "uncover" his sin, literally and actually. He had quite an "uncomfortable" session with his father, once the evidence of his sin was "unearthed" by his very own dog and the truth of what had happened to one of his mother's twelve laying hens was out. God's methods and means of uncovering sin, though not always the same, were, nonetheless, always foolproof and sure. Sin (always) would be found out -- uncovered -- no matter how well concealed it may have seemed to have been.

He saw this as plainly as daylight now and he realized, again, that nothing was ever concealed or hidden from the All-seeing eye of God. Nothing! Just as surely as "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him," just so surely, Barry knew, those same All-Observing eyes had seen each and every watermelon that had been stolen and eaten. And somewhere up in God's Great Heaven, recorded with unfailing and righteous accuracy, were the name of the thieves; the date and the time stolen, and the amount of melons taken.

Barry could scarcely wait until school was over for the day. As soon as the last buzzer sounded for dismissal, he all but ran from the room, ignoring completely Zachary's call for him to wait. He was determined that nothing, or no one, would stop him from doing what he knew he must do. There was too much at stake for him, not the least of which was his never-dying soul. One
couldn't trifle with spiritual things and get away with it, he knew. Never! Always, there was the reckoning day with God!

He put his books on the desk in his room then hurried into the kitchen to his mother. "May I please have the keys to the pickup truck?" he asked.

His mother spun around from her work at the sink and looked Barry full in the face. "Whatever for?" she asked sweetly. "And why the big hurry?"

"It's important, Mother, believe me. I must make a restitution to Mr. Tillis at the Choice Fruit Farm."

His mother's face paled. "You . . . you didn't . . . take anything that . . . didn't belong to you?" she asked haltingly.

Barry's head dropped. Tears stole from his eyes and trickled down his face. "Yes, I did," he admitted with open candor and honesty. "Oh, I am so ashamed of what I did!" he cried. "I was afraid of being called a sissy, so I went into Mr. Tillis' watermelon patch and ate as many melons as the others did. I'm sorry I did it, Mother; sorry, too, for disappointing you. I want to make things right with Mr. Tillis. May I use the pickup, please?"

"Oh, yes. By all means, Barry, get things fixed up with Mr. Tillis."

"Thanks, Mother. Thanks much. It shouldn't take me long."

Barry's heart felt faint as he rounded the bend and the rolling hills of the Tillis farm came into view. His legs felt weak and rubbery as he headed down the long lane toward the attractively decorated and well-kept fruit stand. How would he begin? he wondered. What should he say?

Beads of perspiration broke out upon him. There was no need for pondering the questions; he had committed the sin, and the only way to rectify what he had done was to confess it to Mr. Tillis and offer to pay for the melons. Yes, that was the only way. Didn't the scripture say, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9?) Indeed it did.

He pulled up in one of the parking spaces in front of the fruit stand and got out of the truck. With trembling knees but a determined heart, he looked
around for Mr. Tillis. Not seeing him, he asked one of the helpers where he might find him.

"Oh, hi, Barry." It was Becky Tillis; she was just coming into the market place to help with the sales. "If you're hunting for Dad" she said with a smile, "you'll find him down in the apple barn. The place smells delicious down there" she added brightly, feigning a swoon by the delicious fragrance.

Barry smiled. "Thanks a lot, Becky" he said. "I need to talk to him. See you later, God willing."

He hurried down a flower-bordered flagstone path to the big apple barn. Mr. Tillis was just coming through the doorway.

"Hello there, Barry," he called cheerfully. "What brings you here?"

"Business, Mr. Tillis. Important business. For eternity business, I guess I might say. I want to make a confession to you and make restitution for the same by paying for what I took." Facing Mr. Tillis, and looking him in the eyes, he said humbly, "I stole some watermelons from your patch a few nights ago. I'm sorry, Mr. Tillis. Please forgive me. It was the first and only time I've ever done anything like this. I'm miserable. I want your forgiveness, and God's."

Mr. Tillis looked Barry full in the face. "How many melons did you steal?" he asked. "Were you alone?"

"I really don't know how many I took, Mr. Tillis. And, no, I was not alone. But I'm sure I ate no less than two or three of those round, dark green sweet gems. I'm willing to pay for whatever amount you charge me, though."

"Barry, may I tell you something?" And Mr. Tillis' eyes brimmed over with tears. "I saw you when you and the other boys were here. I know exactly how many melons were eaten. And now, young man, I want you to know that I freely forgive you. Get things straightened out between God and yourself, however. When a man's heart is washed in the Blood of the Lamb, he doesn't do such things like stealing melons, or anything else. And now, son, because you have come here and confessed this great evil to me, I'd like you to work with Becky in the fruit stand after school and on Saturdays. I'm sure you could use the money."
Barry's head dropped. Tears flowed freely from his eyes. "Oh, Mr. Tillis!" he cried happily. "How can I ever thank you!"

"By staying away from the boys who lured you here," came the immediate and quick reply. "'Evil communications corrupt good manners,' so says the scripture. Stay away from any and all who would influence you down the path of evil and wrong-doing. Go home now, Barry, and get things settled between yourself and God. Make a clean breast of things -- clean the slate. Then, God willing, be here after school tomorrow. Becky needs a good helper. Someone dependable and honest and strong. And one more thing; don't worry about your parents: I talked to them about hiring you and they are in full agreement. You see, Barry, I knew you'd be here to make restitution."

"You . . . you did!"

"Sure did, my boy. Did a lot of talking to God about you and for you. Now run along, your debt's paid. In full."

"Th . . . thanks, Mr. Tillis. Thanks!" And Barry threw his arms around the surprised man's neck and wept like a baby. "I'll never steal again. Never!" he exclaimed. "From here on out, it's going to be Christ in me, the strength of my life."

"Amen." came Mr. Tillis' soft reply.