I took one look at the report card then let out a loud groan. I couldn't believe what my eyes had just revealed to me. But neither could I deny the card's validity; there they were, in clear and distinct proof -- my grade marks. I was horrified. I took one more quick look then, feeling rubbery and definitely not manly strong in my knees and legs, I shoved the report card between the
pages of my math book and fell in step with the noisy crowd of students hurrying down the hall and spilling from their rooms toward the main doors of Merrybell High.

I felt numb, and this was a fact. I knew I'd been busy at the fruit market after school, and Dad said he felt Nyree and I were spending too much time together after my work hours, adding that my grades would be suffering, without a doubt. But I was sure I could handle both my after-school work and the hour or two Nyree and I had together three nights weekly after work and still keep up my good grades.

I felt my mouth go dry. This would really pull my good averages down. Radically so. And the thought of facing Dad and Mom and seeing the disappointment and the shock on their eyes was almost more than I could stand. You see, my parents have always been so fair with me and lovingly-loyal, too. Dad had never once "pushed" me to be the greatest, neither the smartest, in my class. Never. All he has ever told me was, "Chip, your mother and I dedicated you to the Lord long before you were born; you belong to God. You are on loan to us from God, to teach you His Word and His ways, and to help to prepare you for whatever He has planned and designed for you. Do your best, for God. This is my one request. I know you will."

I tried to swallow; my mouth felt every bit as dry as when the dentist put the wads of cotton around the area of the tooth ready for filling, absorbing every bit of moisture.

"Hey Chip, you on the honor roll again? But, of course, that's a silly question to ask," Aaron Clark added, answering his own question and falling in step with me "You're always on the honor roll." Seeing the look on my face, and the shock, as well, Aaron asked, "Hey Pal, you all right? You sick or something? You're white."

"I'm sick, Aaron; on the inside. Look at this," I said, pulling the report card out of the math book and shoving it toward my friend.

Aaron let out a loud whistle "Whew? This isn't your card, is it?"

"See my name -- right at the top."
"But Chip, you never make C's. And a D! I . . . I can't believe this. What's wrong?"

"I'm one sick-feeling young man, believe me," I answered sadly. "I don't know how I'll ever face Dad and Mother with . . . with . . . this. They've told me to do my best, and up until I began to work and started dating Nyree, I really did that. I knew my after-school work hours would cut into the time I could study but I never dreamed it would come to this."

Aaron slapped me gently on the shoulder and walked beside me in silence, knowing, no doubt, that at the precise moment silence was truly golden for me. And, true friend that he was, I knew he was praying for me.

Aaron was a genuine Christian whose compassion and concern for others extended far beyond the perimeters of our church and its needs: He had what Dad called "far sighted" vision, seeing needs where few of us young folks ever even noticed, and then doing something about what he saw. None of us who knew him had any doubt that God had a special work and a special calling for Aaron. I felt honored to have him as my close friend. He was a bulwark of spiritual strength for me.

I owed this careful choosing of friends to my wonderful parents, I realized suddenly as a stab of pain shot through me over my grade card. I had the world's most wonderful parents, I was sure; never pushy nor harshly demanding but always leading and demonstrating by daily holy living and loving and caring. Suddenly, I wanted to cry, young man or not.

"God will help you to make a comeback, Chip. I'm as sure of it as I am that we're walking here side by side on our way home. You may have some adjustments to make, but He's going to help you."

I gave Aaron a wan smile, adding, "Thanks. Thanks much. I'll need all the encouragement I can get. And all the prayers, too."

Little more was said until we came to the street where Aaron lived. As he turned to go down it toward his house, he stated emphatically that he would be praying earnestly for me.

I thanked him then continued going down my street, knowing that all the prayers in the universe would avail this young man -- me -- but little
unless I cooperated with God and did something about my dilemma. I was responsible for those grades on my card, was I not? I was fully aware of the fact that, in order to make good grades, I must prepare and study. It was that simple.

My feet dragged as I stepped on the porch. I hoped that, for only this once, Mother would be busy outside, or somewhere, so I could sneak in undetected. But such was not the case. My ever-loving, ever-loyal parent was in the kitchen as usual, waiting for me.

"Hi Chip," she called sweetly and melodiously - Mom's voice always sounded melodious, I thought; it was sweet and soft. "Have a good day?" she asked, standing beside me and giving my cheek a quick kiss. "Guess you're hungry," she stated. "I have some freshly baked peanut butter chocolate chip cookies waiting for you. Milk, too," she added quickly.

"Thanks, Mom," I managed to say over the lump inside my throat.

"Hey, what's wrong?" she asked as she followed me down the hallway to my room.

If ever I was faced with a strong temptation it was at the precise moment my mother's question hung suspended over my head. The adversary of my soul suggested that I make up excuses, all kinds of excuses, adding, "You don't need to show the report card to your parents, you know. Get someone else to sign it for you -- a lot of the kids are doing this."

"Chip, something's bothering you; what is it?" Mom's voice rang with deep concern and care.

Pleading the blood of Jesus for deliverance from the tempter and his vile and evil suggestions, I faced my mother like a man. In doing so, I felt spiritual strength surge through me.

"I've never been so embarrassed," I cried, as I handed the report card over to my mother. Stammering, I said, "I'm really sorry, Mom. I'll bring them back up to normal with God's help."
Mother handed the report card back to me and, in her usual bright manner, she said, "I believe you will, Chip. I'm sure you will. Now, do you feel hungry enough to enjoy several still warm cookies and a glass of cold milk, do you suppose?"

"Truthfully, I'm not hungry; the shock of seeing my poor grades removed the desires for food completely and entirely. But since you were so kind as to make them, I'll eat one or two, hungry or not," I declared as I followed Mother back into the kitchen.

Dad was scarcely inside the door until he saw the card and heard from my very own lips about my poor grades. I was determined that the enemy of my soul would not make another single suggestion, be it an excuse, a way out of my predicament, or anything else.

Dad scanned the report card carefully. "Quite a drop in grades, Son," he said, looking me full in the face.

I saw the disappointment in his blue-gray eyes; eyes that lit up like candles when he was happy. Kind looking eyes.

"I'm sorry, Dad," I said sadly, feeling like I had hurt him more deeply than ever before in my life. And suddenly I wanted to hug him like I used to do when I was a little boy.

He looked me steadily in the eyes then he took a step toward me and before I realized it we were hugging each other. And believe me, this seventeen-almost-eighteen-year-old was sobbing on his shoulder. Childish? Soft-ee? Call it what you may, I felt closer than ever to my father.

Punishment? The look in my father's eyes was all the punishment I needed.

"You'll bring those grades back up, Son," he said as he held me at arm's length. "Remember, you belong to God. Give Him your best. Your very best."

He smiled at me then patted me on the shoulder and said, "Smells like your mother has supper ready; let's go and eat."
Talk about a load being lifted off my shoulders and a crushing burden from my heart! I felt hungry. Actually and really hungry.

I learned some never to be forgotten lessons that day. In fact, I had proven James 5:7 to be true; "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Not that I had ever doubted its truth; never! Only, this time I had used it as a weapon upon the devil and he had had to flee.

My grades have come back to normal again. All praise to God and to a loving, earthly parent-team. Dad was right; I told Nyree that I would see her only on Saturday evenings and in church on Sunday. She was most agreeable, stating that her grades, too, had suffered. Nyree runs a cash register in Wynns Drug Store after school.

All in all, it's been a time for me to remember that I belong to God by a spiritual re-birth, born again, and sanctified wholly experience, and that whatever I do I must do it heartily as unto the Lord. What a difference this has made in my grades specifically and in me especially!