"Aw, c'mon, Bill," I urged. "You'll have fun. There'll be cookouts, boating, fishing and kind'a just roughing it. And for a whole week, too! How about it?" I asked.

Bill studied me for a long while. "It sounds great, Todd," he replied. "But I know what else you and your folks'll be doing. . . ."
His sentence, inference laden, lingered somewhere above me in the shimmering shafts warmly down through the leafy branches of the trees on our front lawn.

"You know what I plan to do as soon as I'm old enough," he said, wrapping an arm around his bended knee as we sat on the top porch step with the leaves quivering above us and around us. "I'd be there now if Dad would have signed the papers."

As if I needed reminding! I thought, wondering why Bill though there was nothing so important as joining the Air Force. I suppose the thought of him doing that would not have haunted me so much if he had been converted. But knowing that my best friend was not converted gave me an uneasy feeling every time I thought about him going into the Air Force.

"You have a wonderful father and mother, Bill," I said, looking straight ahead. "They care about you. Deeply and greatly."

"But Todd," he cried, "there's nothing wrong with enlisting in the Air Force. And by the tone of the world news, we may be drafted one of these days. I'd rather enlist," he stated.

"If you were saved. . . ."

Bill gave an exasperated "tsk, tsk" sound, then he said, "You and my parents! What difference does it make? I'm going to go someday. If Dad won't sign for me now, I'll soon be old enough to do things for myself."

"Only if God spares you, Bill."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" he asked quickly, looking me squarely in the eyes, not too happily, I must confess.

"Only that James tells us in his epistle we should never say we will do thus and so without saying 'If the Lord wills,' that's what. But the little phrase is loaded with meaning. I'll let you figure that out for yourself. Only don't be too sure of what you will or will not do, Bill. God sometimes changes these things for us. I've had my plans changed more than one time by God."
"How do you know it was God?" he asked with a hint of irritation in his voice.

"I just knew, that's how. Especially if and when I was determined that a certain thing dare not change. God changed it in such a radical way that there was never a doubt in my mind that He had done it. And every single time, the changed plan or the changed circumstance was for my good. For my very best, really. That's how I knew -- and know -- it was God. But say, why don't you think about what I just asked you, then let me know before Tuesday. The Lord willing, Dad plans to leave early."

"Like when? I mean, what is early with your dad? My folks consider seven o'clock early."

I laughed, and leaned my head against the porch post. "Dad's an early, early man; four o'clock, Bill."

He whistled. Then he exclaimed, "Whew, that is early! Hardly pay for a fellow to go to bed, even."

"The van's comfortable," I countered, smiling. "We can stretch out on the floor and sleep. The carpet's soft down there. Bring a pillow and a blanket. It'll be great, I know. My folks are wonderful to be with."

"I know that," Bill added. "And it sounds great. Well, since there's nothing better for me to do, I guess I may as well go with you."

I jumped to my feet. Slapping Bill on the shoulder, I said, "It's settled then. I'll tell Dad and Mom they'll have two boys instead of one for that week, God willing. And wait till you see the view from the peak of that mountain! The Little cabin nestles against the mountain's base. We'll have to climb to get to the peak, Bill, but its worth every single hour of tough, hard, muscle stretching effort. Why, the air's so fresh and cold and thin that..."

"I never climbed anything higher than the cherry trees in grandfather's orchard," Bill remarked, interrupting my unfinished sentence. "And that sounds like a challenge. A real challenge, Todd."

He looked excited and eager to start.
"Why couldn't we camp there one night? I'd like sleeping out under the stars. It'd be a brand new experience for me. And you know how well I enjoy something new and different so long as it's legitimate and not demoralizing, Todd."

"Well, that wouldn't be demoralizing, and I know it would be a never-forgotten thing; only there are bears in that mountain. I'm not sure it would be safe for us to sleep out under the stars like that. I'll ask Dad, the Lord willing, and see what he thinks. He may even want to go with us if he thinks it's safe for us. And I know he'll suggest that we talk to the Park Ranger, once we're settled in the Park. Those rangers are great, Bill."

Bill got to his feet and stretched his long arms expansively then he said, "Just think of it, Todd, once I'm in the Air Force I'll look down from above and wave at the mountain peak as I fly over it in a flash. I tell you, I want to fly so badly that I can almost taste it. Dad thinks I should study agriculture, but my whole being tells me that's not for me. I feel I must learn to fly."

I studied my best friend for a long time. Then I said, "Know what, Bill?"

"What?" he asked quickly.

"God may want you to fly. If only you'd get saved and turn your Life over to the Lord!"

Bill was silent; deathly silent. He wrapped those long arms of his around the porch post nearest him and looked out across the lawn like he hadn't heard me. Then in a tone of voice that was packed and filled with emotion -- a tone of voice like I'd never heard from him before -- he said quiveringly, "What . . . you just . . . said, Todd. . . ."

"What did I just say?" I countered softly, wanting to know which statement/sentence he had reference to. "A . . . about . . . God . . . wanting me to . . . to fly."

I looked up quickly, and was sure I saw tears shimmering in his deep blue eyes.

"What about it?" I probed gently.
"I . . . I know I'm not a Christian," he declared. "And this is what seems so strange; because.., well, I know this is what I'm to do. If only my father could understand!" A long, drawn-out sigh, sounding more like a groan than a sigh, came from deep inside him.

I felt tears sting my eyes. "Bill," I said, moved strangely, "I'm going to pray for God to get you where He wants you. But first and foremost, I'm going to keep praying for your salvation."

I saw him swallow -- hard. "Thanks Todd," he said. "I can use your prayers. Well, I'll see you later," he added Lightly, sprinting down the steps and driving away in the old Chevy truck he had bought for almost nothing.

The drive to the park was exciting and beautiful and Bill enjoyed it as much as I did. It was a first for him; a third time for my folks and me. I was all that remained home of the five of us; the others had married well and left the nest; the last one, three years older than I, a sister, had married in December -- a Christmas bride -- and she and her husband had gone to Peru as missionaries. When I stated that my brothers and sisters married well, I didn't mean financial wealth; I meant that each had married a God-fearing, Spirit-filled mate. This, to me, is marrying well!

Bill stayed with us two mornings for family devotions but the third morning he managed to slip away as soon as he had eaten breakfast. Dad and Mother and I went ahead as usual, and after I had finished what few chores Dad had assigned to me I sauntered outside for a walk. My steps took me down to the boat dock where the boat was moored which dad had rented for us for the week. Bill saw me before I saw him. "I got it fixed," he called jubilantly.

"The boat?" I asked, as I hurried down to the dock. "You mean you've got it running, Bill?" I asked quickly. "Mr. Keefing was supposed to have brought us another boat yesterday," I told him.

"Well, since he's either too busy or he just plain forgot," Bill said with a broad smile, "I decided to try my little bit of mechanical skill on it and, Todd, I got it running. Listen to that motor purr!" he exclaimed, starting the motor in an instant. "Let's go for a ride," he ventured. "I've been itching to get into the deep part of this sparkling-clear lake."
"But we don't have our fishing gear," I protested, "and the weatherman gave a small-craft warning, Bill. See those clouds?" I pointed to the mountain peaks off in the distance where dark, ominous clouds brooded forebodingly and menacingly above them.

"We can get out and back before the storm hits here," Bill said cheerfully. "Let's go. We don't have to go too far out, and it will be fun to take a spin in this thing."

I climbed in, and soon Bill and I were gliding smoothly and quickly across the blue-green water. It was wonderful, feeling the cool air and the spraying water on our face. I forgot completely about the weatherman's warning and so did Bill. The boat was cutting across that enormous lake like a dream and Bill was as excited as a little boy in knowing that he had fixed what was wrong with the motor and was now behind the wheel of the small craft.

I suppose it was the darkening of the world that brought both Bill and me out of our ecstasy and made us look upward. I gasped. The sun seemed to have dropped out of the sky. Clouds rolled and turned and churned above us. Bill paled.

"Head back, Bill," I shouted, trying to be heard above the noise of the rolling thunder.

"Maybe I'd better steer toward that shore over there," Bill shouted in answer as he pointed toward a distant but definitely nearer than our shore.

He nosed the small craft toward the shore and just as he did so there was a loud sputter and the engine died. No amount of coaxing could restart it.

We sat in mute silence, hearing the deafening roar of the thunder and watching the tongue of forked lightning darting across the sky in awful awesomeness. The little craft tossed crazily, nearly dumping us into the churning, turbulent water.

I bowed my head in prayer, asking God for Christ's sake to care for us and, most of all, to save Bill's soul. "Todd. Todd!"
Bill's voice managed to slice through the noise to my ears.

"Yes?" I shouted back, raising my head.

He moved back to where I sat on the little seat. Falling to his knees, he said, "Pray for me, Todd. I want to get saved. God sent this storm for me. I won't tell you to throw me overboard, like Jonah did, because I'm not ready to die. But I want to get ready. Now! I wanted to do this yesterday in your family devotions. But I didn't have the courage to tell you. Please, Todd!"

If you never heard of anyone praying through in a little boat before, you're hearing it now. I prayed, of course; but Bill really wouldn't have needed me there: He stormed the heavens. And I mean stormed! I never heard anything in my life equal to his praying, and I've heard some powerful praying in my young life.

He got through. Clear through. Such shouting and rejoicing I have never seen nor heard in a boat. Bill's face was clothed in a shine. I mean, his face shone. You talk about a changed man, that was my friend Bill.

It took him sometime to realize that he was still on planet earth; but when he remembered that we were stranded, not on an island but out in the middle of the lake, he said with a joyous smile and a quiet confidence in his God, "We'll get back to the dock safely now, Todd. I feel God's hand upon me in a calmly-sweet assuring way."

He tried the motor and, on the first turn, it started.

"Talk about God being in control!" I exclaimed reverently. "And not one drop of rain on us yet!"

I heard a joyous "Hallelujah" from Bill as he steered the boat toward the far-distant shore where our dock was.

We had just gone inside the little cottage-home when the storm broke in its fury. We were safe!

The day we climbed to the very peak of our mountain marked yet another epoch for Bill. Standing on the summit looking down into the deep
canyons and across to the plateaus and valleys, Bill said to both Father and me (Mother remained down in the cottage), "I want to be sanctified wholly. Let's pray now."

And pray we did. Oh, it was glorious. Glorious! Dad and I both prayed until we touched God. And so did Bill! Up on that mountain's summit, Bill had a death -- to self!

Long after Dad was sleeping peacefully beside me in his sleeping bag, Bill and I lay wide awake talking. (The Park Ranger had said it was all right for us to sleep out up on the summit.)

Once, when I was almost asleep, Bill broke the drowsy spell by saying, "Todd, as surely as I'm talking to you, God wants me in the Air Force."

I sat up quickly. "Are . . . you . . . sure?" I asked. "As sure as I can be. I'm going to be a missionary pilot. I've felt God's gentle nudging that way ever since I prayed through out in the boat. . . ."

Well, it's amazing how God works and leads. Bill's almost through with his schooling and training in the Air Force now and he's "chomping at the bit" -- his words -- to begin work as a missionary pilot. And, oh, yes, one thing more; he'll be flying supplies in to where I'll be stationed soon, God willing. It's a jungle. And Bill's plane will be the only way my wife, Esther, and I will have to get supplies in and to transport the critically ill out, if Esther, R.N., thinks they need to be hospitalized.

I'll never forget that vacation when Bill went with us. Neither will he. He says it was the most profitable vacation he ever had. And I agree.