Prudence Swift checked the clock on the mantel again, watching the time carefully. She didn't want to be late getting to the airport. She could just imagine how crowded it would be. It frightened her, in a way. But there was no way her husband could get off work early and go after her father, whose plane was due in within the next two hours.
She did more odd jobs around the house now, wanting to use profitably the time she had left before going after her parent. And, too, she wanted her mind to stay occupied. She tried not to dwell too long on her father these days. He seemed more like a stranger to her than a father since her mother had passed away. He had been extremely unkind to their children, also. And, sad as it was to admit it, their two sons weren't excited one bit about his visit. She knew it was because of the painful and bad memories the boys had had of him and his churlish ways and behavior toward them on his last visit.

"Please, dear Lord," she prayed, "don't allow him to be unkind and hateful this time. Change him, dear Father. Change him!"

Thinking back across the years, Prudence recalled her childhood days. Her father and mother had always been kind and good to her. She had had a happy childhood, really. And she had always had all her needs met, too. Her father had seen to this. He was an excellent provider. He was not a lazy man. Never. But he was irreligious, and stubborn and determined as well. No amount of pleading and coaxing on her part, to go to church, could move him. He was adamant. Firm. Church was a place for weak minded people to go, not for strong, disciplined, and self-reliant people, he declared.

"But Daddy," she had remonstrated once, when the little church on the corner was having a Vacation Bible school, "Melissa's going. She's learning all kinds of wonderful things and she's even making something special and beautiful for her mother. Please, may I go? Please?"

She recalled his angry and terse but final reply and knew she dare not plead any more.

Tears filled her eyes as she remembered how, day after day, as quickly as the day's classes were over and when her little friend came skipping home, she made her way over to Melissa's front porch and there Melissa would rehearse and repeat what she had learned and been taught that day.

Melissa became her teacher. She learned the scripture lessons and memorized the scripture verses with her little teacher.

When she didn't understand the meaning of a verse, she asked Melissa who asked her Bible school teacher. And as God's wonderful and Holy Word...
unfolded itself it soon became a very precious and very real thing to her and her heart. She became converted that summer under Melissa's tutelage and teaching. And she had never been the same since.

For a while her father, after learning of her change of heart, forbade her to play with Melissa. Oh, how she had missed her little friend's love and kind words and her knowledge of Bible things, as she was taught them Sunday after Sunday by her Sunday school teacher at the church so near to their own home.

Then one day her mother informed her that she could play with Melissa again, stating that she had spoken to her father about her need of a little friend and that he had consented for her to resume her friendship with the little girl next door. How could she ever forget that wonderful day! She had rushed over and Melissa had squealed with joy and delight, declaring that her parents and she had prayed every single day for her father to change, and to make it possible for her -- Prudence -- to come over. That simple incident and answer to prayer had convinced her forever of the power in prayer and the value of prayer.

It wasn't long after that incident that her mother had begun going to the little church on the corner, taking Prudence with her, and was gloriously converted and made new in Christ. Prudence recalled how her father had fumed and fussed and threatened, but her mother remained undaunted and was faithful to her Lord.

Prudence sighed now, wishing her mother were, coming with her father. But that would never become reality again, she realized brokenly: her mother was in the presence of Jesus and the shining angels. She had died rejoicing and praising the Lord.

She brushed tears away. She missed her mother's sweet face and her ready smile as well as her words of encouragement. And suddenly Prudence felt sorry for her father. His great loss had changed him radically and drastically, she realized. His "listening post" and "leaning post" was taken away from him and he had loved her deeply and greatly. He felt totally bereft and completely alone, she was sure. He didn't know how to handle either his grief or his loss. It had overwhelmed him to the point where he could not endure it so he had run away. Yes, that's what the move had amounted to, she was sure.
Again she sighed. Poor, lonely Daddy! she thought. Oh, if only she could speak to him about Jesus and His power to save from sin and to fill with the Holy Spirit and to heal broken hearts and bind up wounds and hurts. He had no one to help him. But each time she mentioned anything to him about the Lord he either walked away or told her to be quiet and to say no more. She felt so helpless at times.

A quick glance at the mantel clock told her she must leave immediately if she would be there to meet his plane.

She prayed all the way to the airport, wanting to see her father saved more than anything else in all the world. What a memorable Christmas it would be if he would give his heart to the Lord, she thought.

She saw him as he came down the ramp and through the doors and rushing to him, she was soon clasped tightly in his strong arms.

"It's good to see you, Pru," he remarked, holding her at arm's length and looking at her. "I believe you look more like you mother than ever!" he declared, stifling a sob. "O but I miss her!"

"Are you happy running the motel you bought?" Prudence asked, wanting to divert his thoughts. "Is the tourist business as heavy as you thought it would be?"

"Far more," he replied quickly. "And the air in that Big Sky Country is wonderfully fresh and clean I love Montana. But I'm so far away from you and Bill and the boys. By the way, where are the boys? I thought they'd be here to meet my plane."

"Their Sunday school class is practicing for the program they're having in church tomorrow, the Lord willing. And after practice Mrs. Turner wants the class over to her house for refreshments and a taffy pull and a popcorn ball making time. They were quite excited, as you can imagine. I remember when a certain little girl was once just as excited, Daddy."

Her father made no comment but Prudence knew he remembered.
They hurried along with the milling crowd and, after getting his luggage, she drove them home. He looked older, she thought. Or was it that he looked extremely unhappy?, she wondered, feeling a rush of pity and compassion wash over her.

How desolate he must feel, she thought, without Christ to help him and lean upon. She wondered if he still felt as he had about church and the Lord. She was thankful that, yes, she had felt her own weakness and her utter helplessness years ago and that she had fled to Christ for her salvation and, ultimately, her sanctification and that He had become her Strength. Her everything really.

"Do you have enough good, dependable help, Daddy?" she asked, hoping he was not overworking himself in the new venture of business. She and Bill had tried to discourage him about leaving his good paying job and going into the motel business. They had even told him they'd be happy for him to move in with them, since he could not bear the thought of being in his home without his wife. But he insisted that there was nothing else for him to do but to move away. There were too many vivid memories, he had said sadly.

"I have good help," he answered, adding, "fortunately. Some haven't been so fortunate as I."

"Maybe they're not paying their help as well as what I'm sure you do, Daddy. You always did believe in paying a good wage for a job well done. Bryan declared you paid him more than anybody ever paid him for mowing the lawn. He asks about you every time he sees me. He said he misses you and Mother."

"How is he doing, Prudence? I mean, does it look like he'll be going to college when he graduates in the spring?"

"He's hoping he can. But he feels obligated to his mother, too. So I know it will be a toss-up between his own personal desire and his concern for his mother."

Prudence felt happy, showing her father to the guest room which Bill and she had remodeled and redecorated in September. It was cheerful and
bright and extremely attractive and comfortable. Her father smiled when he saw it, commenting that he may not want to leave.

She rushed over to him and threw her arms around his neck, exclaiming happily, "O Daddy, that would be wonderful! You are so far away and we see you such a very little bit. I love you."

He pulled her to him in a tight hug. His lips trembled and there were tears in his eyes. He was such a lonely man! she sensed. And he didn't seem churlish anymore Sorrow had a way of softening and making tender, too, she thought, taking a finger and wiping a tear off his cheek. The gesture seemed to open the wound. Tears gushed from his eyes. "I'm sorry, Pru;" he stammered, "your mother used to do that very thing. It . . . it felt like . . . her finger. Same barest amount of pressure and all. Forgive me," he said. "I didn't mean to cry."

"Daddy dear, you cry anytime you feel like crying around me. It's good for you. You've been bottling your feelings up too tightly and too long for your own health's good, not to mention your emotional good. The doctor told me once that if more men would cry, like we women do, his men patients would have less ulcers, he was sure."

"I'm sorry. I'll be all right now, honey."

She kissed him then and told him to make himself at home and to come downstairs when he had finished unpacking.

Supper went smoothly, and Bill and her father and she spent a delightful uninterrupted evening together.

Prudence was amazed, when the boys came home later in the evening via Mrs. Turner's van, to see how eagerly and almost hungrily, her father welcomed them. Before they went to bed, he took them up to his room, saying he had a surprise for each.

Gregg was the first to come whooping down the stairs followed closely by his younger brother Chris.
"Mom, Dad," he cried joyously, "look what Gramps gave us, made out of petrified wood. Isn't it neat!" And he held up a carved eagle. His eyes seemed to be shining stars.

"Look at mine!" Chris exclaimed. "Isn't the bear real looking? Will that ever look beautiful on my dresser! And Grandpa wants Gregg and me to come out and spend the summer with him! Imagine! He said he'll take us to see lots of things. . . ."

Prudence felt tears sting her eyes. God was working. Yes, behind the scenes and behind the facade of chauvinism, God was working.

Throughout the program the following morning in church he seemed to enjoy everything. But when the minister spoke on the reason why Christ Jesus came in to the world -- to save sinners -- Prudence glancing surreptitiously out of the corner of her eye at her father, saw him folding and unfolding his spotlessly clean white handkerchief nervously. She prayed silently for his salvation. She was amazed how readily he assented to going with them to church, when Bill said, "Dad, you're coming with us, aren't you? Our family won't be quite complete without you and the boys will be greatly disappointed if their grandfather isn't there."

"I'm coming, of course. Bill. It'll be new for me, but I'm having to get accustomed to many new changes since Norma passed away," he had replied in a hoarsely-soft voice.

And he had gone back with them that night. Sitting between Gregg and Chris, he had looked pleased, Prudence noticed, almost happy, even, she thought.

The evening before Christmas day, as he piled his carefully wrapped gifts among the others beneath the tree in the living room, Prudence noticed him wiping tears frequently. He didn't know she had seen him. Her heart was wrenched inside her as she saw him standing, holding a beautifully-wrapped package close to his heart. Then, almost reverently, he placed it beneath the tree and walked quietly away, a look of intense thoughtfulness on his face.

Gregg and Chris awakened early the following morning and rushed into their grandfather's room and up into the bed with him, laughing and talking in whispered tones. He drew the boys into his arms, one in each arm,
exclaiming happily, "You boys make me feel young and happy again. I've missed you dreadfully. Yes, dreadfully."

"Know something, Grandpa?" Chris asked. "I love you, that's what. And I'm sure glad you came."

"So am I, Gramps!" Gregg exclaimed, snuggling closer in the strong arm that held him. Then, excitedly, "Say, let's sneak down stairs. Okay?. I can't wait one minute longer. No telling when Dad and Mom'll get up."

"Let's go!" Grandpa cried, throwing the bed covers back and jumping out of bed.

"Hey! You're fun to be with," Chris remarked. "You're not like you used to be, and I'm glad. I like you this way."

"Like him," Gregg ejaculated, louder than he had meant to, "I love him. I'm glad he's our grandfather."

"So am I!" piped Chris.

"Now, on tiptoe, let's go down the stairs. I'll make my bed later. We're going to have a real surprise for your mother and father. . . ."

"What is it? What is it?" the boys asked quickly. "No opening presents," Grandpa said, "until your parents are downstairs, okay?"

"Not even the ones you gave us, Grandpa?" they chorused together.

"No, not even mine And now, let's hurry. We're going to have breakfast all ready for your folks when they get up. How about blueberry pancakes with warm syrup and ham and eggs?"

"Delicious!" the boys exclaimed, rushing out of the room after their robes.

It was long after the gifts had all been opened and as the grandsons played happily nearby, that the lonely man said softly, "I . . . I scarcely know how to say this. . . ." Tears overflowed his eyes. "But . . . well . . . thanks for not trying to push anything religious on me. I doubt that it would have been
profitable. However, after living with your mother, Prudence -- my wife -- and seeing the wonderful change in her life, it got me to thinking. And now, feeling, sensing and seeing the same wonderful atmosphere here in your home -- in your lives -- I am fully convinced that Christ is the answer to my heart's condition. Last night, while listening to the minister tell of Christ's humble birth and then His death -- for me and for my sins -- I couldn't throw the sermon off. It preached and reproached its message of love to my heart. And so, on my knees in the bedroom, I confessed my sins and asked Jesus to come into my heart. And He did. You have a new father, Prudence; a new father-in-law, Bill; and the boys have a joyfully changed grandfather. Today, this beautiful time of the year when we remember His birth, I have Him within me; the most wonderful gift of all. And now, in loving memory of the only woman I ever loved, I want you to open that last remaining box beneath the tree, Pru honey."

"I'm almost too happy to see straight," she said, wiping the stream of tears off her cheeks and from her eyes. "I don't think Bill and the boys and I could be happier. We've prayed so earnestly for this."

"And God answered all those prayers, dear," he said, watching as she carefully removed the ribbon and the wrapping paper. Seeing the beautiful new communion set, with a sizable check attached to the top, she rushed over and threw her arms around his neck, crying happily, "You never did forget, did you? I remember hearing Mother say in your hearing one day how badly we needed a communion set at church. Oh, Father, I'm so happy. So will our pastor and the church people be."

With a choking voice, he said, "Call the pastor, honey, and tell him that I'd like to be one of the first to take communion out of this gift to the church. It will be in remembrance of Him!"

"Oh, Daddy! Daddy!" And father and daughter were suddenly in each other's arms, crying and laughing joyously.