Reverend Carling sighed tiredly and wearily as he reached for the jangling telephone on the desk in his study. It had rung steadily from the moment he had secluded himself inside the quiet room, where he hoped he could pray and meditate and wait upon God prior to preparing the messages for the upcoming Sabbath.
"Good morning," he said, speaking cheerily into the phone. "Brother Carling speaking."

"O Brother Carling, the copier is acting up again," Jenny Wadsworth lamented. Jenny was the church secretary. "I'll never be able to get those announcements ready for Sunday."

"I'll call up town and see how soon the repair man can come by and fix it for you, Jenny. Any other problems?" he asked. "Well, I hope this won't create any great problem in the church; but the Smithsons called. . . ." Jenny's trailing sentence spoke much.

Brother Carling sighed again. Only too well he knew the Smithsons. First, it was Howard Smithson who had cornered him shortly after he had preached his first message in the new (to him) church where he had come to pastor.

"We're not too great on this holiness bit," Mr. Smithson had said in no uncertain tone of voice. "It will be to your benefit if you won't preach too many sermons like the one you just delivered," he added warningly. "The wife and I give quite a bit of money to this church. Take that for what it's worth, Pastor."

His next encounter with the Smithsons, in a very personal way, that is, came a few weeks later from the "lady" of the house.

"I . . . I hardly know how to . . . to say this," she declared. "But it's all too obvious that . . . that someone needs to tell you." Then, in a loud, very definitely angry tone of voice, she exclaimed, "No minister of the gospel should ever use such obnoxious and dreadful sounding terms as the old man!"

"But Sister Smithson," he had countered softly and kindly, "the Apostle Paul called this vile, inherent sin nature the old man. You will find it in Romans 6:6 -- 'our old man is crucified'; in Ephesians 4:22 -- '. . . put off the old man, which is corrupt . . .'; and again in Colossians 3:9 -- '. . . ye have put off the old man with his deeds.' This is a Biblical term. . . ."

"Bible term or not," she had cried, pointing her index finger at his nose, "you are not to preach about this . . . this old man any more! This is an ultimatum! Do you understand?"
Facing her with tears in his eyes, he had stated simply, "I take my orders from the Lord, dear lady. I will continue preaching His Word. All the counsel of the Book God's Holy Word."

Trembling with anger, she had cried out, "You'll be sorry! You'll be sorry! Money talks!"

Again, very kindly and sweetly, he replied, "And I'm not for sale. I have a Higher Instructor; an Holy One. I will be faithful to Him no matter what the cost."

Jenny's voice broke through his recollections and his thoughts, "Did you hear me?" she asked. "I said the Smithsons called. Both of them were on the line."

"Did they say what they want?" the pastor asked.

"They want their membership dropped from the church. She said they found a church more to their liking. He added that they were not appreciated any longer in our church. She said this new pastor never uses obnoxious terms, and he added that the people and pastor all made them feel so welcome over there. They both declared they felt most comfortable now and 'at home' in this new church."

"Thanks for telling me, Jenny. I'll pay them a visit then I'll take it up with the church board. We'll take care of the matter, God willing."

"One more thing, Brother Carling; Maggie's mother is failing fast. And the little Crooks baby was rushed to the hospital where Maggie's mother is a patient: Maybe you can see both of them. . . ."

"Will do, Jenny. I'll leave immediately. Again, thanks,"

He was on his feet before he finished speaking with Jenny, and before he received any more phone calls he had locked his study and left for the hospital, a forty-five minute drive across town.

He prayed as he drove. He was burdened for the Smithsons, who had repeatedly and continually rejected and spurned heart holiness. He was
surprised and amazed that they hadn't left the church long ago, since they had openly and blatantly castigated both him and his messages on holiness. God had been so faithful to them, he realized.

He felt sad. They had lived up to their name and reputation -- holiness fighters -- in true form and fashion. (His District Superintendent had told him, after his second year of pastoring them, that they had always been that way).

Tears fell from the minister's eyes. He had tried so hard to become their friend. Tried hard, too, to help them in every way he could. His preaching had not been to them, intentionally, nor did he ever single them out: He had preached only what he felt God had given him, after much praying and waiting upon God and diligent seeking on his part for the will of God. Then and only then did he deliver his messages.

The kind, faithful shepherd didn't enjoy losing anyone from his congregation, and knowing that, now, the Smithsons had actually and finally decided to do so, he asked God to help them and to be merciful to their soul. They had been greatly upset when Mr. Smithson wasn't reelected to the church board two years ago, he knew. God had been blessing the church greatly with new people finding God in saving grace and sanctifying power. And, in spite of the fact that the Smithson's money was being withheld, the financial state of the church was never better, a thing that agitated the "money couple" greatly. God had proven that His resources were limitless and were not confined to a select few: His cause would go on . . . and on . . . and on in spite of any and all who opposed and withheld their financial aid and assistance.

The minister pulled into the hospital's parking lot and parked in the section assigned for Clergy then he hurried inside to the elevators, visiting tiny Angela Crooks and praying with both the infant and her anxious parents.

"I spoke with the baby's doctor in the hallway," Brother Carling told the young parents who were new converts, "and he says Angela's going to be fine. They'll keep her here for several days then you'll be able to take her home again, the Lord willing. She's quite a fighter, that little daughter of yours. And this in spite of coming way ahead of schedule, too!"

He saw the look of relief on their faces and after visiting with them a while longer he took the elevator down to Mrs. Spencer's floor.
What a contrast! he thought, as he hurried down the long, shiny-clean hospital corridor to Room 656 where family members and loved ones and friends had gathered to be with and see the beloved and saintly woman in her last hours on earth. Upstairs, only a floor away, was a new life just beginning its maiden voyage on the sea called Life, and here, one floor below, was a flickering candle, a fading flower, a vapor fast disappearing. Life; death; he thought soberly. Beginning. Ending. How important that one should be ready for the latter -- the end of life.

He was thankful that he had stayed late into the night by Mrs. Spencer's side. She knew him then, and gave a glowing testimony to her Savior's wonderful presence in her room. Now, however, there was no response when he spoke to her or called her name. That the end was near, was obvious. He would stay until the final breath left the dear woman's body, he decided, forgetting that he had nothing to eat for lunch and only a piece of toast and a cup of hot tea for breakfast.

He prayed with Maggie and the other family members in the room as they crowded around the bed, loathe to get too far away lest the one who had given them birth slip over the line of worlds without their knowledge.

In the hallway outside the door, Brother Carling prayed with and comforted the many who stood in little groups, waiting, watching and weeping. Mrs. Spencer was a woman beloved, he realized. Her many kindnesses and deeds of mercy would never be forgotten. She had lived unselfishly, giving of herself and her time whenever and wherever needed. She had been a deaconess in the church and she had been a minister's friend. Faithful, dependable and godly, that was Mrs. Andrew Spencer, widow, mother, grandmother, and friend to all.

Hearing running footsteps coming down the corridor toward room 656, Brother Carling turned and saw a fine looking couple rushing toward the door, exclaiming between sobs, "We came as quickly as possible, as soon as we heard she was ill. Oh, tell us, please, will she live? Oh she must! She must! She meant more to us than anyone else on earth."

The minister stepped up to the two. "She's beyond responding," he said, speaking quietly low. "Go in and see her. She's not far from the crossing. What a happy, blessed time that will be for her!"
"Thank you, Brother Carling," the young man answered. "She meant everything to Marla and me. If it hadn't been for her, we'd still, be without God. She loved us to God!" And they walked quietly over to the bed and kissed the stony-white looking brow and wept.

The influence of a single life! the tired minister thought silently, recalling Mrs. Spencer's interest in the newly married, fussing, fighting, quarreling, drug taking, alcohol drinking couple. She had heard about them from a friend. She had begun praying for them, adding them to her already long prayer list of people. Then she felt strongly compelled and urged to call on them, and that's when the door opened wide for her to tell tiny cute, but high-strung Marla that there was a better life and a better way for her than the life she was living.

Maria had an open heart, also an open mind. It wasn't long before she was gloriously converted. So radically and wonderful was the change that her husband, Kent, decided it would be doubly wonderful if he, too.

Maria had gotten in touch immediately with Mrs. Spencer who dropping everything else, hurried over to the apartment and prayed with the weeping husband who was gloriously saved. Converted.

What a change in those two! The minister thought, watching them as they spoke softly near the ear of the one who had had them to Jesus Christ, the Savior of their soul and, shortly afterwards, into the glorious experience of entire sanctification, in which their heart was cleansed from the old sin nature and the carnal man was crucified and they were filled with the inexpressible joy.

The end came shortly after Kent and Maria's arrival. The minister was glad they were there. Opening her eyes in wide-eyed wonder and amazement and laughing joyously, Mrs. Spencer waved her hands in rapture, exclaiming loudly and in a voice as clear as a bell, "They're coming for me! I'm going Home now. Oh, how beautiful Heaven is! And there's Jesus! Can you see Him? He's taking my hand! I'm starting across . . . Oh, what glory! What glory! Good-bye, my dear ones; meet me in Heaven. . . ."

Her hands fell silent on her chest, the voice ceased, and with a tiny, final "pouff" of exhalation, the woman's spirit took flight to its Eternal Home.
It was late afternoon when the good pastor, after having remained long with the family and loved ones and friends at the hospital, and after having helped them to make necessary funeral arrangements, drove once more up to his study door at the church. He unlocked the door and walked inside to the desk, feeling the weariness of his body as he sat down in the chair behind the desk.

He reached for the phone and called his wife, telling her of Mrs. Spencer's triumphant Homegoing and informing her that he would be home at his normal time, God willing, saying, "Oh, Evelyn, it's always my most-looked-forward to things at the end of my busy day; coming home to you and our two children. I love you so!"

"And I love you too, Matthew. With all my heart. But you sound tired. Are you? And didn't you eat the salad I sent along with you this morning?" she asked.

"I didn't have time, honey. I'm sorry."

"It was packed with all the love and care your wife could put in it was also full of nutritional goodness," Evelyn Carling teased. "Well, I'll see you soon, God willing. And, again, I love you, Matthew Carling."

"Aren't you sorry you married a minister?" Matthew asked, teasing.

"Never! I'd marry mine all over again!"

He felt refreshed after hearing his wife's voice and with renewed vigor he got to his feet and began pacing back and forth across the room, praying and walking, asking God to burn His messages for the upcoming Sabbath upon his pleading, waiting soul.

He fell to his knees and prayed fervently for help from Above, waiting upon God, and listening now for His instructions. After a long while, he went back to his desk, sat down and, with Bible open, he began writing down the skeletal points of the Sunday morning's message as they came to him, fresh as morning dew from Heavenly Courts. He would add the "meat" later, after the basic points were recorded.
He looked to the window, still deep in his meditation, when the smile of a little pixie-faced, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed girl caught his attention. She waved her tiny little hand at him and blew him a kiss then giggled secretly and mischievously.

"Sunshine!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet and rushing to the outside study door through which he had entered.

He threw the door open wide. wondering how his little daughter had gotten there and wanting to pick her up in his arms and crush her to his bosom, when the joyous shout of three voices, sounding for the world like angels, welcomed him with, "I love you! I love you! I love you!"

With tears trickling warmly down his cheeks, his weariness vanished like a vapor. Then, rushing to them, he gathered the three most priceless of all earth's treasures into his strong, young arms and crushed them to his heart.

"We wanted to surprise you, Daddy. Did I really surprise you?" asked Sunshine, who was nicknamed thus because of her sunny disposition and ever-ready smile but whose real name was April Naomi.

"You certainly did!" came the instant reply. "And what a surprise! Why, I don't feel nearly so tired and weary now. And guess what. . . ."

"What?" chorused three-year old Sunshine and one year old Matthew II simultaneously.

"Daddy's going to lock the study door and come home with you and Mother. We need time together too. I mustn't neglect the members of my own little castle," he said, pulling the door shut and hurrying away with his "treasures."

"Do we live in a castle, Daddy!" Sunshine asked, wide-eyed.

"Not a big, mammoth, turreted castle, honey. Ours has only three bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, bath and a-half, a big, roomy living room and a double garage and fenced in yard for a very sweet little girl and boy to play in. That's our castle, sweetheart. And I wouldn't trade places with the
richest man on earth. I'm most happy in our little castle, because I love the people who live there; they make life happy for me."

"Why, that sounds like our home, Daddy!" Sunshine remarked, smiling broadly. "And I love our castle."

"Me too!" Matthew II cried happily.