I shifted the weight of my body uneasily from one foot to the other and tapped the end of the pen nervously against the cold hard steel of the telephone, trying to muster up courage to call home. Would I dare call? I wondered silently, my mind in a state of confusion. Had I any right to call . . . after everything?
I remembered another time I had called only that time my call was different:

"I have a collect call for anyone at this number," the operator had told Mom after she had heard Mom's pleasant "hello."

"The call's from Ron Jenkins," she explained in detail. "Will you accept the call?"

"We'll accept the call, Operator," Mom said softly into the mouthpiece. "Ron's our son." Her voice sounded proud to make the declaration to the unknown. "He's away at Bible college. Put him on, Operator," and her voice laughed musically, sweetly into the receiver and floated like a melody out over the lines and across the many miles that separated us.

"Your party's on the line," the operator informed me. "Go ahead."

"Ronnie!" Mom's voice exclaimed in eager excitement. "How are you?"

Though I was twenty then and always called "Ron" by everyone at college, it was indeed pleasant and deliciously sweet and wonderful to hear Mom's "Ronnie." I've decided since, that to a mother and father the man never really becomes fully man but always maintains his identity as "their boy" -- in thought and memory, at least. At any rate, I was still Ronnie to Mom and Dad and I liked it. It gave me a feeling of security and special love even though I was twenty.

"What's on your mind, Son?" Mom pried gently.

"Well, I . . . that is . . ." I stuttered knowing full well my mother knew something was troubling me. (And it did trouble me . . . even though I tried to push it aside.)

Always, so long as I could remember, Mom and Dad knew whenever anything was bothering me and when anything was on my mind or had gone awry. "What is it, Ronnie?" she asked gently.

"Roxene and I are getting married," I blurted out. "I asked her after prayer meeting Wednesday night and she accepted."
There was a long pause on the other end of the line and I thought I heard a faint sob.

"Well," I ventured, "aren't you happy?"

After a still longer pause Mom said brokenly, wounded-like, "I guess there's nothing to say, Ronnie."

"Aw, Mom, don't feel that way," I had defended. "Roxene's a pretty girl and she's sweet."

"But God told you she's not the one for you, Ronnie, and God never changes. That's one of His Divine attributes."

"But we love each other, Mom."

"I wouldn't want to be in your shoes, Son -- when it comes to answering to an all-wise God for overriding and overstepping what He has told you is wrong for your life. Oh, Ronnie!" she had broken down now and was crying, "don't do it . . . for God's sake and your own soul's sake. There's awful danger ahead; both for your home and your soul."

I had hung the receiver back on the hook then, feeling like tons of weights were fastened about my heart. What Mom said was true . . . all of it . . . and I knew it. God had told me so: but my love for Roxene was strong (at least I thought so at that time). I remembered how I had struggled at an altar of prayer over her. I knew she wasn't God's choice for me but my foolish, deceived head told me I could change her moody, stubborn ways and Mom had warned me of the utter impossibility to do such a thing but I thought they were mistaken.

Just four months and twenty-two days after that telephone call, Roxene and I were married. Up to the night of our wedding I felt warned of God. In desperation I tried to break up with her, as I had done on numerous, different occasions during our courtship, but she always won me back with her aggressive actions and attitude and her expressions of deepest devotion and love, telling me she couldn't possibly live without me and that she could scarcely wait till the day when she could cook and keep house for me. What a fool I was to disobey God and believe her!
I knew she wasn't at all like Mom; for I was sure, from all Dad had told me, that my mother never was the aggressor in their courtship. Nor was she "pushy" and "forward" like Roxene. I guess I never could have respected Mom like I did if she had ever been like that. Some of the things Roxene had said to me on various occasions made me suddenly shudder. I knew neither Mom nor Dad would have approved of them (had they known about it), for they bordered on the suggestive, the sensual. Here, too, God had warned me and given me a full look at the real girl and I knew she couldn't possibly be classed as the "ideal of womanhood." Again my dizzy head reasoned that she was different (note, I said head, not heart) and that she would turn out all right after we were married. What a fool's paradise I forced myself to live in! It's dreadful -- to force one's self like King Saul in the Bible -- to do what God has forbidden you to do! I have regretted it every hour of every day since. But let me get back to Roxene.

The first few months of our married life weren't bad at all. In fact, Roxene was sweet like I had told Mom she was that night over the phone. Oh, she had her moody spells and was extremely determined and stubborn about having her own way; but my love for her surmounted these things and I felt sure I could revolutionize her with time and patience. But such was not the case. She became more and more demanding of me and was extremely possessive. I received as many as six to eight calls every day at the store in which I was a salesman. Naturally, the boss resented this and I was fired and replaced by a man whose wife kept her place and was a "keeper at home."

The real crisis came a couple of years later when Krista was nearly ten months old. I felt as if my little world had suddenly decayed, crumbled, and fallen to pieces -- pieces so much like sand and dust until they couldn't possibly be put together again. For months Roxene had been complaining because we couldn't afford furniture as nice as the Carruthers' (they were our close friends and lived just three doors west of us).

I came home from work (I had to change eight times in those two years we were married due to her constant calling for me at the store) and was extremely tired. When I entered the cozy little house I had bought for her I sensed something. "Roxy," I called. "Krista. Krista darling, Daddy's home." I hurried to the bedroom where Krista was playing and cooing contentedly with her little pink toes. I stooped down to pick her up in my arms when I saw the note fastened onto her crib. "Sorry, Ron," it read.
"I never have loved you . . . just thought I did. I'm leaving Krista in your care. I know how very much you love her and I know you'll take good care of her and train her up the way she should go. I always have hated cooking and taking care of the house . . . although I told you differently when we were going together. I've found someone new, Ron. Sorry. Roxene."

I gathered Krista in my arms and wept like a baby when it's hurt real bad; then I fell on my knees and prayed like I hadn't prayed in years. I told the Lord what a fool I had been and just how "all-wise" I suddenly realized He was and how right all along. I thanked Him for Krista and for the privilege of having her to raise and to keep and, as I prayed, He became so very, very real and precious to me . . . just like He had been before I disobeyed Him.

I tapped the cold hard steel of the phone with my pen. Slowly I dialed. "What would I tell Dad and Mom when they answered?" Just what I'll tell you -- that I have been a misfit for marrying out of the will of the Lord and that I'm going to serve God regardless of the cost and rear Krista the way I was reared and taught. You see, I learned a big lesson (one that will cost me dearly the rest of my life) -- I married the wrong girl! "Till death do thee part" is a long time.

"Hello. Hello." That's Mom's welcome voice. Since I've told you my story (which could be repeated times without number) I'll talk to Dad and Mom. I'll need a lot of pointers on raising a child alone.

See next week's "Learned Too Late."