

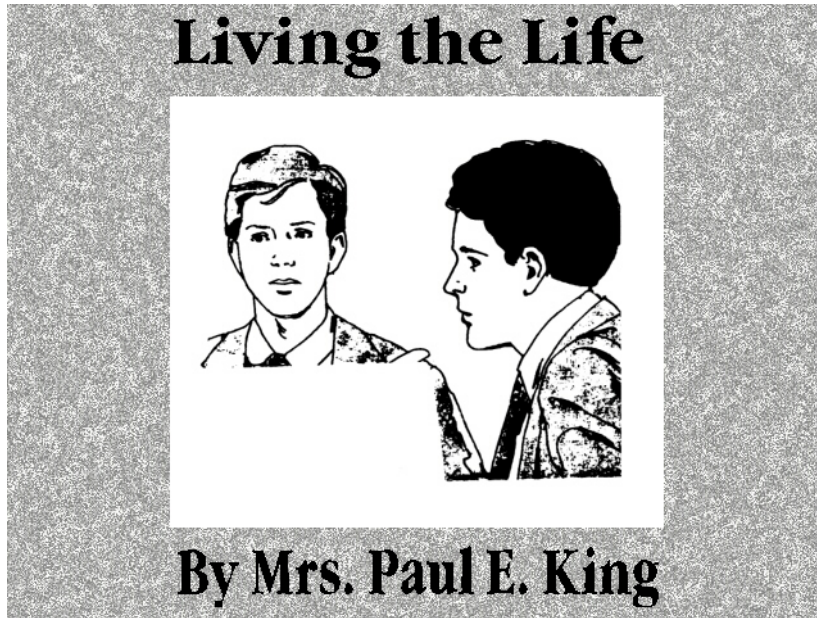
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LIVING THE LIFE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Dwight left the church in a thoughtfully silent mood, trying to "digest" and spiritually assimilate all that the minister had said in his sermon that evening. More than anything else, he wanted to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior. To make sure that nothing would distract him or take his mind off the fact that he was in church to worship the Lord, he had moved up to a pew in the first row.

With a silent prayer to be more and more like Jesus, he headed for the car in the parking lot now. "Hey, Dwight, wait up."

The voice broke in upon his meditation. Turning, he saw Gary Ellers running towards him.

"Why the big hurry?" Gary asked. "You're not going anywhere till your folks come out."

"I was thinking over and meditating upon what I just heard preached, Gary. I didn't want anything to disturb my quiet and meditative time until the message was 'absorbed' and 'digested' in my heart."

"That's pretty heavy stuff for a teen to 'digest,' Dwight. Do you feel it's necessary?"

"I'll let you answer your question with a question of my own. Was the message Brother Foss preached from the Bible? I mean, was it Bible preaching or just something he made up?"

"Well . . . he gave scripture for everything he preached. But let's forget about that now; I wanted to know if you could come over to my house tomorrow night for a little while. A sort of get together for Burt Spangler."

"He got that job at the bank, didn't he?" Dwight asked.

"He surely did. We'll have a sort of surprise congratulatory get-together thing for him."

"Wait till I ask my folks, Gary."

"Aw, c'mon, Dwight, you're not a little kid anymore. Your folks won't mind, I'm sure."

"But they're still my parents and I'm still at home, and God's Word instructs me to honor my father and mother."

"But you'll be graduating this year," Gary injected quickly. "Surely you're old enough to decide some things for yourself."

"That's true, and I do. But first, I will get my parents' answer; their yes or no. Dad may need me to help him with something around the house."

Gary gave a sound of disgust then shrugged his shoulders and walked away, saying, "Let me know what your answer is. You can call me."

Dwight watched Gary saunter back to the church. He wished he knew more about him. He knew that the Ellers family hadn't been much inclined toward spiritual things. In fact, both Mr. and Mrs. Ellers had "told him off" when he had visited them shortly after they moved in, less than a year ago, and invited them out to church. He had kept going back, however, and each time it was the same as the first time. Then Gary had started coming, and Dwight felt it was worth everything he had heard and endured from the Ellers themselves.

Sitting in the car now, Dwight wondered about the get together. Would Gary's parents help him or would it all fall on Gary's shoulders? Perhaps Melanie would be helping him. They were together a lot lately and Melanie was a good worker. A fast worker, too.

Dwight talked Gary's get together over with his parents on the drive home and was told that he could go. His father gave a word of cautious concern, however, when he said, "We trust you, Dwight, and know you won't do anything that would grieve the Holy Spirit or bring a reproach upon the worthy name of the Lord. Gary's lifestyle and yours sometimes run crosscurrent to each other. We must continue praying for the dear boy until his life is what the Savior wants it to be."

"Thanks, Dad, for your confidence and trust in me. By God's grace, I will do my best to keep it this way. I feel if Gary had parents like you and Mother he'd be different. Spiritually different. He gets no spiritual help at home. None whatever. I'm encouraged over something he told me recently though: he said he's not being nagged anymore for coming to church. I believe God's working in the heart of each of his parents."

"That is encouraging," Dwight's father replied, adding, "prayer and kindness and love have changed many a heart and life. The Ellers, too, can be changed. And if we remain faithful in praying for them and demonstrating a genuine Christian love for them, I believe they will get saved."

"They're a bit more civil to me lately," Dwight said, "and they even seemed glad to see me last week when I stopped by to see Gary. I was surprised; but it was a glad surprise. I think that's kinda' like Rhoda felt when she saw Peter standing outside, knocking on the door, as recorded in Acts 12:13."

He called Gary as soon as he was home and inside the house. "What shall I bring?" he asked. "And you'll need some help, so what time shall I be there?"

"Just bring yourself," Gary said, laughing. "And with Melanie around, I won't need any other help. Did you ever see anybody do as much work in as little time and still do it right?" he asked. "Sometimes I feel almost dizzy just watching that remarkable girl," he added.

"She's that, all right," Dwight agreed. "But what about the food? I'll bring what you tell me to, Gary

"Melanie and I want to do this for everybody. You bring nothing but yourself."

"But you're not rich, Pal," Dwight remarked. "And we don't want to do anything to make your folks angry or upset."

"True, I'm not rich. But I know how to save, Dwight, and I've been saving X amount of dollars weekly out of my after-school job's paycheck. And with Melanie's expertise and know-how, well, you're in for a treat. Thanks much for your thoughtfulness and kindness though. You're always trying to help me. You do so many nice things for me."

"You're my friend, Gary; that's what friends are for. I'm just as happy as I can be that you're coming to church like you do."

"I wouldn't miss that for anything, Dwight. I'm in with a group of the nicest young people I've ever met or known. And say, forgive me for what I said when you told me you'd ask your parents about the get together tomorrow night. I wasn't very nice; not at all: In fact, I was kind of nasty to the best friend I have. You see, I haven't had the upbringing you've had. I wish I had. I see more and more how this has helped in your life."

"I guess I never thought of them like that; but next to the Lord, you're right about that, Gary. Well, I'll be seeing you tomorrow night then, God willing. And in the interim, if you need me for anything, or in any way, give me a call."

"Will do," Gary promised before telling Dwight good-bye.

It was obvious to Dwight the following evening, upon arriving at Gary's house, that neither Mr. or Mrs. Ellers were home. He wasn't too surprised, however, for it was a common thing for them to be gone whenever Gary had anyone over from the church. Dwight was thankful that they didn't ban or forbid the young people from coming to see their son. This, he felt, was a favorable and good sign. And the very fact that their son was among young people of high ideals and good morals, with Christian reputations and characters to go along with all the rest, should have made them happy indeed.

He walked alongside the house to the fenced-in back lawn and was surprised when he saw how beautifully and attractively Melanie and Gary had decorated everything. The tables were arranged in a semi-circle and were covered with pale blue table covers. From the center of each table was a cluster of helium filled balloons of a deeper, brighter blue, swaying and dancing merrily in the breeze that tugged playfully at their fastened-down strings. And in a circle surrounding the balloon strings were napkins of yet a deeper blue, folded like flower petals and holding, in their center, a delicate blue nut cup, filled to capacity. How beautiful! he thought, musing silently.

"Like it?" Gary asked, sauntering across the lawn to greet the guests.

"Like it! Gary, it's beautiful. You and Melanie must have spent hours on this. Without a doubt, you and Mel have a talent for decorating. I'm going to tell Brother Foss about this when I see him. It would sure make a difference in that drab old hall where we serve the Thanksgiving dinner for the poor people."

"We'd love doing something nice for those people," Gary answered enthusiastically. "That would be great. And as for seeing our pastor, I invited him and his wife here tonight. He has a critically ill patient who might need

him worse than we need him here, however. He said he'd try hard to make it."

"That'll be great, if he can come," Dwight said. "Now, how about letting me help with something."

"Everything's ready. Miss Precision has everything down to a T. And speaking of Melanie, here she comes. Look at this, would you!"

Dwight was aghast. Coming down the sidewalk from the kitchen, was Melanie, with a huge tray loaded with delicious sandwiches and salads and goodies of all kinds. In moments, it seemed, she had placed equal amounts of each tempting looking thing on the tables, arranging each plate and dish in such a way as to give eye appeal to the onlooker and balance to the table. A second and third trip from the kitchen to the tables completed the array of delicious looking food.

Burt Spangler was overwhelmed when he learned the reason of the get together, saying simply, "Thanks, Gary and Melanie. Thanks much. And thanks to all of you for coming. As you know, we're quite new to the community here and . . . well . . . what do you say to a group of young people who take you in, so speaking, and make you feel like you've been one of them all the time? I'm speechless, almost. Overwhelmed. Awed. Thanks much. It's great to know you're loved this much," he said, with a wave of his hand across the heavily laden tables.

"Since Brother Foss isn't here," Gary said, stepping up near one of the tables, "I'd like my dear friend, Dwight, to ask the blessing on this food." He nodded toward Dwight.

The evening passed by pleasantly, and suddenly Dwight remembered that curfew at his folks' house was eleven o'clock. Consulting his watch, he saw that he would have to leave immediately to get home on time. He hurried over to his friend.

"Hey, Gary, thanks much for a wonderful evening. I've got to go. The law at our house is that each of us children must be home by eleven. I forgot all about time until right now," he said, trying to rush away unnoticed, not wanting to break into the Bible quiz that was at its peak, it seemed.

Gary started to say something about a senior having to obey a curfew, then his head dropped and a tear rushed to his eye. "Forgive me, Dwight," he said quickly. "I was about to say something nasty about you having to obey a curfew. But I'd give anything if my parents cared enough about me to lay down some laws and some rules. You're a lucky fellow. And Dwight, thanks for being genuine and real: you do more than profess to love Jesus; you live the life. I'm ready to get serious with the Lord. I'm tired of floundering around like a nominal Christian, if there is such a thing. With God's help, I mean to change. Really change. I'm going to get converted. Before this week is out, too. Pray for me, Dwight. I want what God gave you."

"You can count on me to pray, Gary," Dwight promised as he hurried away, feeling like he was floating on a cloud.