

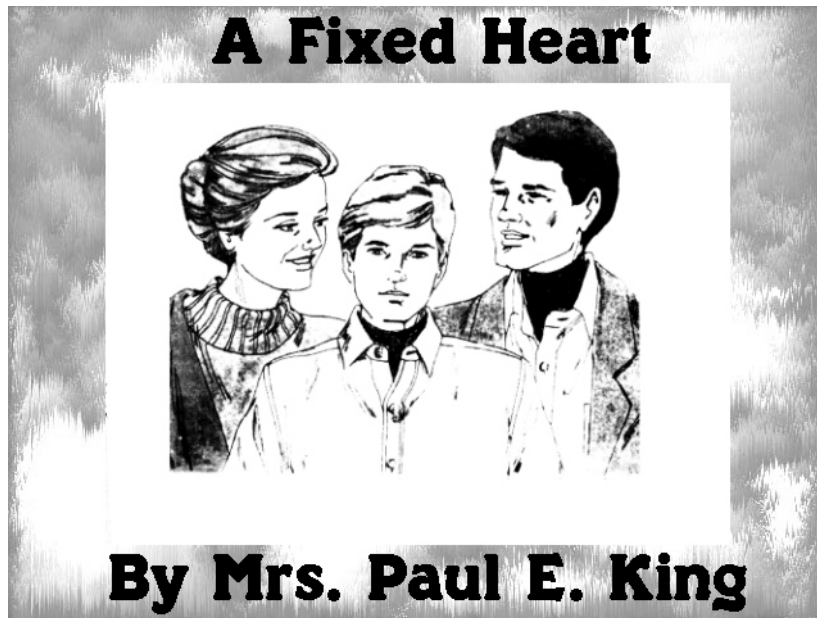
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**A FIXED HEART**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**  
**(Part 1)**

John Mark Saunders could scarcely believe his ears But he knew he had heard his parents right. It didn't seem right to him, but he knew they'd said the shocking things; every single one of them. He stood like one in a trance, or a daze, trying to sort things out in his mind, not wanting to believe

that his father and mother had meant what they had just said but knowing only too well that they did. Still, it seemed unreal.

"Think it over, Mark," his mother cajoled sweetly, somewhere near his ear.

"You know we love you," his father added quickly. "But you're too young to get so . . . so serious over religion."

John Mark stood still. Then he turned slowly and faced his parents. "It isn't religion," he said kindly but firmly. "I got saved. Saved! Jesus lives in me; in my heart. I have peace and joy, Father and Mother. I never had this before. Not with anything I did or tried. Always, no matter how much fun or pleasure I thought I was having running around with the gang and doing the joints and the town, I came home with an empty heart; a void that nothing ever satisfied or filled. That's all gone since I met the Lord Jesus Christ and gave my heart to Him."

Bart Saunders grabbed his son by the shoulders and shook him roughly, saying, "You heard your mother and me, John Mark; you must give up this foolishness. You must!"

John Mark's eyes looked steadily into the cold, gray-blue eyes of his father. "I love you, Dad," he said, "but I love the Lord Jesus more. I can't give Him up. He's my Savior. He died for me. And for you and Mother, too."

"Stop it! Stop it!" Bart's hand came up like he was going to slap his son's face; but he never did. "I told you, we'd rather have you dead than to be so religious."

Tears swam in John Mark's eyes. "I'm sorry to hear you say this. I was hoping I had heard wrongly the first time you said it; but I know now -- for sure -- I didn't. Oh Father, can't you see what the Lord did for me? I no longer curse and swear nor do I lie or drink and carouse around. I'm changed; made new. The Lord came into my heart and washed away each and every sin and wicked thing I ever did, by His precious Blood. My heart is washed in His Blood. I'm forgiven. Forgiven!"

"Don't you ever say this in front of any of our friends!" Muriel Saunders hissed through clenched teeth. "Never, John Mark! Never! You've disgraced

your father and me. Do you hear? You've disgraced us. What will our friends say when they hear what you have done? And they will hear, you may be sure. Their sons and daughters will be spreading the news far and wide. You have shamed us, John Mark. Shamed us!"

"And you mean that you were not 'shamed' when I had to be carried into the house so under the influence of alcohol that I couldn't help myself nor know where I was nor what I was doing?"

"All our friend's children were doing the same," came the testy rejoinder.

"It was disgusting and disgraceful and taking me ever farther down the broad road to hell and eternal damnation and I was ashamed of myself when I was told how I behaved and acted and how I had to be carried home. That's all in the past; I'm on a new road -- the road to Heaven -- and I have purposed within my heart that I'm going to travel this joy-filled Highway until I'm inside the gates of Heaven and see the One who did for me what no one, and nothing else, could do for me."

Bart's jaws squared; color drained from his face. In a vise-like grip, he clutched his son's shoulders. "You will leave this house, then. You have disgraced us. Now leave. Leave, I say!"

"I will leave, Father. I love you and Mother and I will be praying daily for you. May I pack a few clothes, please?"

"Do as you wish; only be out of this house before seven tonight. We are hosting a dinner party for the Company and I don't want anybody seeing you," and with that Bart Saunders turned and hurried away with his wife following.

John Mark walked across the enormous living room with its exquisite, elaborate and costly furnishings and made his way up the beautiful winding stairway and down the wide hallway to his bedroom, feeling sad for his parents but strangely calm and joyously happy in his soul. Never, not in all of his eighteen plus years, had he experienced anything so wonderful before. It was as though he was living in a brand new world. Everything around him seemed beautiful and new.

He took clothes from his dresser drawers and off hangers and packed them in two expensive flight bags which had been given to him one year for Christmas. He had no idea where he would go, but his simple childlike faith in his Heavenly Father kept the peace within his heart enclosed around a song which his new friend, David Haddon, sang when he prayed through in David's house.

He tried to sing it now but was not familiar enough with it to do so. It was something about, "Peace, peace, wonderful peace -- Coming down from the Father above. . . ." The rest was forgotten, however. Little matter: God had put the peace in his heart and this was all that mattered. David would teach the song to him soon, he was sure.

In less than an hour, John Mark's packing was finished. His parents were nowhere to be found as he sought them to tell them goodbye. Should he take his car, he wondered, or should he leave it behind? It too was a gift -- from his parents upon his graduation from high school.

Deciding to leave it in the garage lest he anger his father more by taking it, he called for a taxi and walked out the door and down the long, winding driveway to the heavy iron gates and waited for the cab driver, praying silently for God's leadership and direction as to where to go. He had enough money on him to get a small efficiency apartment, he knew, but he hadn't had time to search for any.

He was so deeply absorbed in silent prayer and with his thoughts that he didn't notice the car stopping in front of him.

"Hey, where are you going?"

The voice broke the spell. Looking up, John Mark saw his friend. "David!" he exclaimed. "David, God sent you! Talk about perfect timing!"

"Where are you going?"

"I'm not sure. I don't know. I need a small efficiency apartment, only I haven't had time to look for any."

"What do you mean, John? Are you saying . . . well, I mean, is it what I think it is? You were put out, huh?"

"That's it, my friend. I've disgraced my affluent and socially prominent parents. I was told to leave. I called for a cab. . . ."

"That won't be necessary," David said quickly. "I'm taking you home with me. Dad and Mother will have a room for you. Truth of the matter is, they're missing my brother and sister fiercely since they married and left the home nest."

John Mark felt tears come to his eyes. "I . . . I can hardly believe this is . . . real. But I did ask the Lord to show me where to go and what to do, and He answered quickly. Oh, He is wonderful, David. My soul is so at peace. Well, here comes the taxi driver. . . ."

"Pay him the fare," David said kindly. "You're coming home with me. I know now why the Lord prodded me to come and see you. Yes, I know now."

John Mark explained David's arrival to the taxi driver then paid him for the trip out and back, and soon he and David were on their way to the Haddon house.

"I'm sorry about this," David remarked when John Mark told him what happened. "I had no idea your folks would do this to you. They must be very angry to do such a dastardly thing."

"I'm beginning, now, to realize how Jesus must have felt over the way I treated Him," came John's soft reply. "Why David, the first time you talked to me about the Lord and asked me if I knew I'd go to Heaven when and if I died, I was so angry with you that I was ready to fight you. I felt like pounding you to powder -- if such were possible -- then trampling that mass of powder into the dirt; grinding it in with the heels of my shoes. You have no idea how utterly humiliated and embarrassed I was that you seemed to have singled me out in the midst of all my friends. I know now that your questions were directed to each of us in the group that day, but I felt within my heart that they were directed to me. Without a doubt, God directed them to me, for I could never get away from them. They followed me in the daytime and haunted me in the night."

"It was God's Holy Spirit, my friend, who was speaking to you -- wooing you -- trying to get your attention," David said as they made their way down

the street to where the Haddon house stood among other houses made of the same design and the same color brick.

"You're home," David announced cheerily as he pulled the car into the driveway and stopped alongside the two steps that led into the sunny kitchen. Mrs. Haddon met them at the door with a smile.

"Surprise!" David called as he opened the door and hugged his mother. "You and Dad have a son again."

"We do?" Mrs. Haddon asked teasingly, going along with her son's light-hearted mood. "I didn't know you had left us," she added, laughing.

"Oh, I didn't. I haven't. It's John Mark. His folks made him leave since he got converted."

"Really! Oh you poor boy! Come in, come in. David's father and I have been so lonely since our Philip married and moved until we can scarcely stand it. You see, Miriam married the day after Christmas and it left a vacancy beyond describing. And now, eight months later, Philip married. Oh, we're as happy as we can be for them; but those empty rooms upstairs seem to shout their emptiness to both my husband and me. David, please show him to Philip's room. And John Mark, please make yourself at home. You are one of us now. The Lord brought you here. Yes, the Lord brought you here!"

John Mark was too overcome to speak. He stood and wept. Then, going to Mrs. Haddon, he said hoarsely, "Thank you, Mrs. Haddon. Thank you much. God not only forgave me of my sins and wrote my name down somewhere in Heaven's record books, but He has placed me in a home where my newfound faith and experience in Christ will be fed and nurtured and strengthened. What a God! What a Savior!"

(Part 2)

Lights glowed warmly in the Haddon house. An air of love, contentment and peace and harmony pervaded the atmosphere in the room where Byron Haddon sat reading the Bible and Mrs. Haddon was knitting. Baby things, they were, she had said, for Miriam's and Ted's firstborn, due sometime in early spring, God willing.

John Mark sat in awe of the family with whom he was now living and under whose roof the Lord God Almighty had so lovingly provided both shelter and food for him. That he was treated like a son filled him with overwhelming awe and amazement. David was like a brother to him, taking him with him to all the church meetings and youth gatherings he himself attended and went to.

Life was certainly not dull in his new home, John Mark thought. Never had he realized the many and varied opportunities there were for serving the Lord. He had always thought one's Christian life and faith was demonstrated and put into action and full swing in the churches he'd seen all over the city. What a surprise he'd had when David and he went down to the city jail to witness to the prisoners and read scripture to them and pray with them. He knew without a doubt that David was no mere novice at what he was doing. His Christian love and compassion radiated through him, and he conducted the short jail service like he'd been inside the church he attended all of his life. "And now John Mark Saunders will pray for you," David announced after reading the scripture. Just like that -- "John Mark Saunders will pray for you."

John Mark smiled now, recalling the queasy, shaky, butterfly-ish feeling he'd felt churning deep in the pit of his stomach upon hearing the softly-spoken announcement. He felt panic churn and boil up from somewhere inside his being. Then, just as quickly, he remembered the pit from which the Lord had lifted him and realized that on more than one occasion he'd have been in one of the ill-smelling cells himself had it not been that his father was Bart Saunders, wealthy businessman, who knew "how to handle the police."

God prayed through him as he opened his mouth and uttered the first words, "Oh righteous and holy Father, thank You for sending Jesus to suffer and bleed and die for my sins, and for the sins of the world. Thank You for saving my soul; for forgiving my sins and for changing my life and giving me a clean slate and a brand new start. . . ."

The Lord's presence settled down in the jail, John Mark remembered, and when he had finished praying and opened his eyes, many of the men were in tears.

"I remember you," one of the young men said then. "You were at the Breckenridge party three months ago. What a party! Sally's folks weren't home -- remember?"

John Mark hung his head in shame. Then he raised it and looked squarely at the young man and his fellow prisoners and said tenderly and gently, "That was the old sinful John Mark Saunders. He is no more: I'm new, fellows. I'm born again -- born from above. David Haddon proved to me, by his daily and sweetly-consistent walk with God, that there was a better way in life than the way I was going. It's a high road, fellows; it's called the way of forgiveness and salvation."

Many took the proffered Bibles and gospel tracts when he'd finished testifying.

Not only was he involved in the weekly jail services with David and others from the young people's group, but there were nursing home services, as well, in which he soon found himself deeply involved. Nor was it a mere human-physical involvement; no indeed: God gave him a heavy burden for the patients in the Home who were hurting and/or didn't know the Lord as their personal Savior. It was for these that he spent much time in earnest prayer, pleading to God for their salvation. And, already, he was being rewarded -- Mr. Tarkington, better known as The Grouch by his roommates, opened his heart like an innocent child to Jesus and became radically transformed and changed. Then there was Mrs. Ironsides and her visiting sister -- yes, there was work to do in many areas outside the church, and he felt blest and joyful in knowing that he, yes, he, John Mark Saunders, was accounted worthy for the Lord to have a part in rescuing the perishing and caring for the dying.

Noticing the serene look on Mr. Haddon's face, the young man couldn't help but wonder what his own father's countenance would look like were he saved and sanctified wholly, like the godly man sitting across the room from him.

John Mark's heart felt a stab of pain as he pondered the comparison between his money-hungry father and the soft, kind features of Mr. Haddon's face. He had been at the Haddons for nearly five months already and each new day and week and month convinced him more firmly and surely that his kind benefactors and their son must be the most wonderful people on earth. Their home was a home of love and orderliness and peace. There was no quarreling or bickering or fighting; nothing but love -- Divine Love -- was

manifested. It was the nearest thing to Heaven he was sure he'd experience until he entered The City itself. How he longed to see his parents changed!

He looked down at the open Bible on his knees, thinking back to the many times he had tried to get in touch with his parents only to have the receiver slammed down in place when they recognized that he was on the other end of the line. He had tried calling his father at his office, even, but Sue, the receptionist, informed him that his parent wanted no contact whatever with him. Never!

John Mark straightened himself up in the chair. Sitting straight and tall now, he purposed again that he was going to Heaven no matter what the cost might be. He found the Source of peace and joy and rest and contentment and he meant to cling to the Christ who had so marvelously changed him and transformed him.

"About that young people's meeting on Sunday night, God willing, John Mark," David said, coming into the quiet room just then with a marking pencil and his Bible. "I was wondering what you think about using this for a text, 'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life' Jude 1:20-21."

"Keep it simple, David; I'm so very new in the faith."

"New, but growing by leaps and bounds. Already you are farther up the road than many who have been professing for years. I'm sorry to say that, John Mark, but it's true. And since we're into the subject of faith in our young people's group, I thought you could give us something fresh from God -- by staying on your knees -- along the line of 'building up yourselves on your most holy faith. . . .'"

"I'll certainly do my best, David -- with God's help. It sounds like a rather expansive subject. But every single time that I've attempted something for the Lord I've grown spiritually and been helped wonderfully in my own soul."

"Praise the Lord!" David exclaimed. "The pastor said he felt you should enroll in the correspondence course of study for ministers until you can see your way clear to go to Bible school."

"I've been praying about knowing what to do," John Mark confessed with tears shining in his eyes, "And don't you know, my answer's right here! I'm saving all I can from the job your father helped me to get, and this course of study will act as a preparatory class. Just think of it, David, I'm a child of the King! I've gone from being a spoiled brat and a grasping, selfish son to a perfectly satisfied, content and obedient child of God. It seems unreal sometimes; but I know it's very, very real. I am fully satisfied in Jesus. My heart is fixed, O God; my heart is fixed!"

"Amen," came the reverent chorus from around the room.

Mr. Haddon hurried over to John Mark and hugged him warmly, saying, "You are a blessing in our home. This is your home for as long as you want. God sent you to us. We will do all we can to help you."

John Mark was on his feet now, weeping for joy and praising the Lord.