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**THE SPECIAL THANKSGIVING**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

The noise of the telephone's loud ringing awakened me. I sat up, wondering where I was. Then it dawned on me: I had gone to sleep on my knees beside the sofa, praying. Quickly I got to my feet and hurried over to where the phone was. "Hello," I said. "Pat Oakes speaking."

"Pat, this is Chris. Are you all right? I mean, I let the phone ring and ring and ring. Everything all right, my dear?"

"I'm fine, Chris. Thanks. I just now heard the phone. I was praying; I fell asleep at the job, on my knees. Some intercessor I've become."

"Oh, Pat, don't let this bother you. God knows your heart. He knows what pressure you've been under and how little sleep you've been getting. You're going to be rewarded for praying even though you may have fallen asleep. He loves you, Pat; so do we. Now, how about Thanksgiving?"

Do you have plans?"

"Nothing unusual, Chris. It seems I can't get excited over holidays anymore. Everything seems so . . . well . . . something happened when Fred deserted the children and me."

"Look Pat, I know you're hurting. Badly. But if you will, Jack and I want you and the children over here for Thanksgiving Day, Lord willing. We always help out at a mission downtown, though, so this means we'll not be having our dinner till three or three-thirty. Maybe you'd like to help at the mission too. It's a wonderful experience; one you'll never forget. And it would be great for Jill and Bradley, I'm sure. Our Briana and Cliff think it's the highlight of their year. They wouldn't miss it for anything."

I felt tears trickle from my eyes. "You're like an angel from God," I told Chris. "Thanks for being so kind and good to us. I'd love to help out at that mission," I said, adding, "I can use a bit of different 'scenery' just now. And as for Bradley and Jill, I know they'll be overjoyed when I tell them about it. And now, what may I bring for our Thanksgiving dinner, the Lord willing?"

Chris laughed in her usual bright and bubbly way. Then she said, "Well, you know how I love that pineapple casserole you make. I need no other sweet when I have that. Oh Pat, it's so delicious."

"Thanks, Chris. What else? I insist on bringing more," I said softly.

"Jack loves that layered lettuce salad you make and your pickled mushrooms and pickled eggs and beets."

"Got it. What else?"

"Nothing, Pat. Absolutely, not a thing more. We'll have more food than we know what to do with. God is so good to us, isn't He?" Chris exclaimed before hanging up.

After placing the receiver in the cradle, I settled down with my Bible, hoping, this time, to finish reading my usual seven to ten chapters without falling asleep like I had done on my knees and, also, before Jill and Bradley returned home from practicing for the Thanksgiving play which their Christian school was having the night before dismissing for the big day itself. A nearby, kind Christian lady drove them back and forth with her own children for nothing more than the few dollars I insisted upon her taking.

It was so wonderful to be a part of God's family, I mused in praiseful silence as I recounted all the many, many blessings God had sent my way since the shock and trauma of Fred's desertion, which left me feeling completely and totally bereft and rejected. I knew I had the Lord; knew this from deep inside and with all that was within me. But the shock of learning and knowing of his betrayal of me and his unfaithfulness to me left me feeling numb and zombie-like. Especially since I had trusted him and never so much as given a thought that he would ever leave the children and me. We had had a beautiful and a wonderful marriage, I had thought. I knew my heart was faithful and true to him and I knew, too, that I loved him deeply and dearly.

We weren't prepared for what happened, neither the children nor I. And now, with God's help and His wonderful love sustaining us, the three of us were working our way back to a normal state of living again -- without husband and father. It would never be the same, we knew; but we had taken God as our Heavenly Father and my Heavenly Husband. Isaiah 54:4-5 became my anchor: "Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

"For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called."

The Bible reading was especially precious to me now as I read, pausing every now and then to meditate upon a particular verse. I was finishing a bit of mending and darning when Bradley and Jill burst into the house, their cheeks rosy-red from the cold night air and their faces aglow with joy over what they considered "the most fabulous Thanksgiving play ever!" (Their words).

"I'm beginning to see just how good the Lord has been to me," thirteen year-old Bradley declared after hugging me. "Why Mom," he went on, "I have the Lord as my wonderful Heavenly Father, and I have you and Jill. I couldn't ask for a more wonderful and more godly mother than you. And where, may I ask, could a brother find a sweeter sister than Jill? I miss Dad, it's true. I'll always miss him, I guess. But tonight, while Mrs. Brooks prayed for us and with us before play practice, I got this wonderful feeling that you and Jill and I are going to make it. We really are, Mom. God is watching over us all the time."

Hugging my son to me, I let my tears wet his hair. Then I said, "You're so right, Bradley dear; we are going to make it: we have the promises of God to sustain and encourage us that we are. And now, I have a wonderful surprise for Jill and you."

"What is it Mother?" ten-year old Jill cried joyously, throwing her arms around my waist and hugging me soundly. "I just love surprises when they're wonderful and good."

"Chris and Jack want us over for Thanksgiving Day, the Lord willing."

"Oh, goody! Goody!" Jill squealed. "Briana and I have ever so much fun playing together."

"Wait a minute; there's more. The Lord willing, we're going to be helping Chris and Jack and the children at the mission downtown. Chris told me that each year they help to serve the street people and the poor, or whoever comes for a meal. The mission serves a bowl of hot soup and bread daily, of course, to the poor and the needy. But their annual Thanksgiving Day dinner brings in hundreds of hungry people. This is where we come in, in serving, cleaning tables, and whatever else needs done. It will be a busy and a full day, but I am looking forward to it. Our Thanksgiving Day dinner will be served between three and three-thirty, Chris told me, God willing."

Bradley's eyes were shining. "That's great, Mom. Just great!" he exclaimed. "All my life I've wanted to do something like this. It's what Jesus did, and what He'd still do if He were here now."

Thanksgiving Day dawned bitter cold and cloudy, with not even the hint of sunshine in the overcast sky. We went to the mission early, knowing there would be plenty of work for each of us. And we were not wrong in our assumption: I was put to work immediately peeling potatoes. Yes, peeling potatoes, all of which were donated by caring grocer friends of the mission. Bradley was put to cutting up lettuce and cabbage and Jill began what she told me later she thought was "an endless job" of spooning mixed fruit into small individual dishes, all of them disposable.

Never before had we seen such a crowd of people at a Thanksgiving gathering and never, not ever, had we seen so many pale looking faces and undernourished looking people. More than once, I wiped tears from my eyes. I was proud of Bradley and Jill, who worked like pros with Briana and Cliff, at hugging shy looking, undernourished, thinly-clad children and carrying their loaded trays to tables, making sure they had hot chocolate to drink with marshmallows swimming on top.

Watching the four children, Chris' and Jack's and mine, I was sure the mission never had a better "staff" of children's helpers. If any child went away hungry it was no fault of our four: Over and over, these four "missionaries" kept adding food to plates that were soon emptied -- with permission from the Mission Manager, of course -- and I knew that, for once, many a little tummy went away stuffed.

Chris and I picked meat off turkey backs, necks, wing tips, and wherever carving was impossible, making sure that all bones were kept and tossed into tin enormous cooking pot for "boiling down" for turkey stock which, with our "pickin'-off" meat would provide delicious makings for the turkey soup for the hungry the following day.

Oh, it was a wonderful day. My burdens and cares faded somewhere into a back cavern and never emerged one time to nag me and press me down or make me weep. By helping those who were far less fortunate and blest than I, I was helped. God let me see that He would always have a place where I was needed and where I could be a blessing and that, as I reached

out in love and pity and kindness and compassion to others, He would heal me: my broken, hurting and pain-filled heart. It was the greatest therapy I could have asked or wished for, and it didn't cost me a single penny. As some new converts (from the mission) sang while the meal was being served, God came along beside me and whispered so comfortingly to my soul, "Lo, I am with you always. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The loneliness in my heart ebbed away; I was at peace.

After helping until the last table was cleaned and the mission kitchen was in neat and tidy order, we made our way across the city to Chris and Jack's house. By now, snow had begun to fall, and Bradley and Cliff, who were riding with me, became really excited. It was our first snowfall of the season and, always, there was something unusually exciting and awesome about a first snowfall for both Bradley and Jill. Even I got caught up in the wonder and the excitement of it all, stopping, many times, whatever I was doing to accept with eager delight the children's invitation to, "Come, Mom; let's take our first sled ride down the hill together," or, "Hey, Mom, let's go for a hike in the woods and see how many little animal footprints we can identify in the snow."

My ears suddenly tuned in to the conversation that was going on in the seat behind me. Tears filled my eyes as I heard Bradley say, "You know, Cliff, this has been the best Thanksgiving Day of my life. But now I'm worried. . . ."

"Worried? How come, Bradley?"

"Those people, Cliff, and all those dear little children: I . . . I'm afraid they'll be cold. Did you see the rags some of them had on for clothes? I can't get away from it: their faces bother me. I have more pants and shirts than I can wear, almost. Mom, is it all right if I share some of my clothes with the mission?"

"By all means, do!" I remarked. "And so will I, God willing."

"I see just how many things I have to be thankful for," my son said, sounding ever so mature and grownup. "I know it's hard on you, Mom, working at the school cafeteria to keep the bills paid and all that sort of thing, now that you don't have Dad's paycheck coming in to care for us. But I know that the Lord loves a cheerful giver, and I just read in Proverbs that, 'He that

giveth unto the poor shall not lack: . . .' Today I think I learned what that really means. Oh, Mother, thank you for going to the mission and for taking us. I want to help out down there as often as I can. I felt like I was working for Jesus. I mean, I felt as if Jesus was right there telling me what He wanted me to do today. It was so wonderful!"

"Well, He really was there," Clifford stated. "I know you remember that scripture verse about, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' Mrs. Tabbey really drilled us on this verse, remember, Bradley?"

"I don't suppose any of us will ever forget Mrs. Tabbey, Cliff. She was the best Sunday school teacher a fellow could ever have. I wonder if she's teaching something up in Heaven. . . ."

A warm feeling of motherly love rushed over me as I listened to the interesting conversation going on behind me. Then, suddenly, I felt a great swell of praise surge through me -- praise and thanksgiving to God for making this Thanksgiving Day the most wonderful of all Thanksgivings for my family and me. I knew that we would never again be the same. Never. There would be a reaching out -- a stretching out -- to others, and we, in turn, would be helped and healed.

Brushing tears from my eyes, I began to sing. Bradley leaned over the seat and wrapped his arms around my neck, saying in a benedictory manner, "It's so good to hear you sing again, Mother!"

There were tears on his cheek as he kissed me.