Chad fished the notebook out of his desk and began taking notes of everything Mr. Mathers was giving and saying. The test was not going to be an easy one, the teacher had warned, attempting to get his students to study more and come prepared, when the test would become a reality two days later.

"There is no reason why any of you should fail, or make a poor grade," Mr. Mathers declared as he kept a sharp eye on the entire class. "Listen to
what I am saying, please, and do take notes and, last, but far from being least, study. These years are years of learning in your life. Make the most of them. Be diligent Someday you'll be thankful that you were."

"He's preaching again!" Randall Crownly slipped the written note back to Jerry Cox and scooted way down in his seat, scowling at his teacher. If there was anything he hated and disliked it was to be lectured at and to by anybody. His teachers especially After all, whose business was it what he did with his time? And if Mr. Mathers thought he could get him to stop watching television so he could study, he had another thought or two coming. Nobody --- but nobody! -- was going to boss him around and tell him what to do or what not to do. No way! After all, he had a friend or two. . . .

"Study pages 180 through 250," Mr. Mathers stressed "And don't forget to review the last three chapters we just covered and came through. You'll be prepared for this test if you do as I have instructed you," he added positively, before dismissing the class

"Who does he think he is?" Randall exploded as he hurried out of the classroom.

"It's not who he thinks he is, Randall," Connie Brown said with a mischievous twinkle in her pretty blue eyes, "but who he actually is. And, in this case, Mr. Mathers is our teacher! Better pay attention. Unless you don't mind making a failing grade."

"Who says I'll make a failing grade?" Randall retorted quickly "After all, there's more than one way to pass a test. . .." His sentence trailed meaningfully.

"One of these days you'll get caught," Connie declared. "Then you'll wish you had studied and not taken what you think is the easy way out."

"Oh, spare me the lecture! Spare me!" Randall cried. "Isn't the great Mather lecture enough for one day?" he asked. Turning quickly, he said, "Hey, I thought you were my friend!"

"I am," Connie affirmed soberly. "Maybe that's why I said what I did to you. Maybe it's because I don't want to hear that you got caught and. . . ."
"Who'll squeal?" Randall asked nonchalantly. "Who would dare to squeal? After all, I'm not the only one who's doing it, you know."

"But what if you get caught, Randall?"

"So . . .? I'm not the first, and I'm pretty sure I won't be the last one. Hey, where's Jerry? He and I had plans for this evening."

"He's talking to Chad over by the water fountain. I'll walk with you, Randall. I'm thirsty."

"No Jerry, it isn't honest." Chad's voice was filled with emotion but it was strongly positive and firm. "I won't go along with that. I'll take a failing grade before I'll cheat. And since it would be all wrong for me to take written answers from your test papers, it would be every bit as wrong for me to pass mine on to you or let you see them, even. That's cheating. You'll pass if you apply, and do, what Mr. Mathers instructed you to do."

"But Chad, I don't have time to study. And truthfully, I hate studying. I'm not cut out for books. Just this once, please, pass me the answers when you're finished with the test. You could do it when Mr. Mathers has his back turned: it would be easy since you're right across from me. Please, Chad!"

"I can't do it, Jerry. I can't. I'm a born again Christian and I'd sin by cheating. Jesus can't abide -- or live in a heart that has sin in it. No, Jerry, I won't do it. When I gave my heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ ten years ago, I purposed in my heart that there were some things that I would not do, and, God helping me, I won't betray that purpose. I have a goal in sight, Jerry -- Heaven! To get there, one must be holy and pure and clean; washed in the Blood of the Lamb of God. You know this; you were one time saved. You used to love the Lord and. . . ."

"Cut it out, Chad!" Randall cut in. "Maybe he doesn't care about that silly, sissy stuff anymore. That's kid stuff. It's not for real men."

Stepping in front of Randall, Chad said kindly, "I choose to differ with you, my friend. God's men are great men! Every one of them. A sissified man would never have stood the test and allowed himself to be thrown into a den of starving, hungry lions like Daniel did. Nor would a silly, sissified man have run, with a slingshot and five smooth stones as his weapon, to meet a nine-
foot tall challenging, threatening giant whose staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. These, Randall, are only two of God's great men, of whom there are hosts more like them.

"Perhaps we're not facing dens of lions nor threatening, challenging, nine-feet-tall actual, literal, physical giants today. But in another very-real sense, God's great men and women and students are still shining and standing tall in the arena of life! The big test, just two days away, will reveal just who the great ones are. The really great ones are not afraid to accept life's challenges and meet them head on. The great ones will study and prepare. They will do their best to make a good grade. But, should their expectations not be as great as they had hoped after all their many hours of study and preparedness, these great fellows and girls will find tremendous satisfaction and perfect peace of heart and mind in knowing that they earned their grade honestly! They didn't, and wouldn't, stoop to cheating. These are the truly great ones, Randall. There isn't a sissified bone in their entire vertebrae."

"Quite a sermon there, Chad," Randall said with sarcasm. "And why I stood here listening through it all I can't quite figure out. Just the same, and this is for you, Jerry, if you need, and want, an assist with this upcoming test, meet me at Ryan's house tomorrow night. He and Thad Mathers are real buddies. Ryan knows where the 'good stuff' -- like answers to questions -- are kept. Get it? You'll pass, it's a promise. And no one's going to be the wiser that it wasn't because of your own smarts that you made such an excellent grade. They'll brand you brainy, Jerry. Kinda' nice huh?" And Randall walked away, laughing like an hyena.

"Look Jerry," Chad said kindly, "I'll help you out by pointing out all the important things in our review chapters as well as the new reading, studying assignment Mr. Mathers just gave us. Come over tonight, God willing, and we'll go over everything together. I'll go home now and read through the new assignment and make notes of everything I feel is important, then when you come we'll. . . ."

"I can't, Chad. I promised Randall I'd. . . ." He stopped just as quickly as when he had broken into Chad's unfinished sentence. He realized he had revealed something he hadn't meant to reveal. He turned and started to leave.
"Jerry," Chad said as he placed a hand on his friend's shoulder, "I'm praying for you. I wish you'd come back to the Good Shepherd's fold. Don't allow Randall to influence you anymore. Somewhere down the line his sins will find him out. I'd hate to see you were in the same boat. If you change your mind about tonight, I'll be happy to help you. You may even use my notes -- write them down and all, I mean -- as study guides. Things seem to sink in much better for me if I write them down on paper then look at them, in review."

"Thanks, Chad." Jerry hurried away and was soon lost from sight among the many students rushing for the doors.

The day of the big test arrived. Chad bowed his head and asked the Lord to bring to remembrance the things he had studied. Mr. Mathers' voice sliced into his silent prayer:

"Class," the teacher said, "I hope you have done your homework well. The questions I had previously planned for this test have been changed. The questions disappeared for a while yesterday; along with the answers, I may add. I thought Mrs. Mathers may have been in my study/library doing some cleaning and that she may have moved them to another area. Such was not the case, however: she hadn't so much as been in the room even. Thad assured me vehemently that neither had he entered the room. So, in all fairness, and for whatever the reason of the vanished-for-a-while questions and answers, I have made up an entirely new and different set of questions I want your papers back before the end of class," he said, as he passed out the pages of questions His eyes studied Ryan's face.

Chad looked up just as Randall ran his hand across his forehead. He was perspiring. His face looked white; drained of color. Jerry sucked a huge breath of air into his lungs and squirmed uneasily in his seat. Several others looked askance at Randall as they twirled their pencils nervously between their fingers and waited with blank stares, for the newly drawn-up test papers to be placed on their desk tops. Ryan's face was white.

The students who had studied and prepared, set about answering the questions as quickly as they received their papers and, to Chad's great surprise, he discovered the test wasn't nearly as difficult and hard as he had supposed it would be. But then, he had prayed earnestly last night that the
Lord would illuminate his mind as he studied and reviewed everything Mr. Mathers had asked them to do.

Preparedness paid off handsomely, he discovered, when his papers came back marked with an A+ and the word Excellent was printed out boldly and beautifully beneath the grade.

A few days later Mr. Mathers said, "I want to see each of you whose name I call, immediately following class. All others may be excused and go home. I have a business matter that needs to be settled once and for all. I demand honesty and integrity in my classes!" His voice was strong. Firm. Forceful. Fearful.


Mr. Mathers stood at the door until the last free-to-go-home student was in the hallway then he closed the door and stood facing the group, his back straight as an arrow, his shoulders squared. He was fearless. No sissy, this teacher.

"I'm sure you all know my reason for detaining you this afternoon. . . ." His eyes never once wavered; his voice never faltered as he stared at the faces before him. "Ryan confessed to having taken the questions and answers of my originally planned test papers and making a copy of them -- after I questioned him, since he was the only other person in our house that evening besides my family.

"He also confessed to making many copies, after leaving our house, and selling them to each of you. . . ." Mr. Mathers paused for a long time as he faced the group.

"As punishment for your dishonesty and cheating, and since not a single one of you made more than an F on your test, I am making up a new test, different from each of the others I had prepared. In addition to my previous assignment for this last test which I gave, you will be required to
review not only the last three chapters that we covered in class some time ago, but you will have to review the last six chapters! The last six chapters; plus the new study pages, 180 through 250. I will give you exactly one week to prepare for this new test. And if you cheat one more time, you will be sorry for it. This is a promise! And oh, by the way, and for whomever may be interested in knowing it, from here on out all test papers -- and answers -- will be locked securely away and only I will hold and keep the key. Thank you. You are dismissed"

Walking briskly to the door, he opened it wide, standing straight as an arrow and fearless as a lion as the students left the classroom.

(Part 2)

Charity stood inside the door in the school's wash room, feeling almost soiled. Dirty. Whatever had come over Glenn? she wondered, breathing heavily like she always did when when she was scared and frightened. She leaned her head against the wall and prayed for the Lord to strengthen and steady her. Her legs felt rubbery; like they were going to buckle under her. She used to never be afraid of Glenn. Never. In fact, they were friends. Only friends; nothing more.

Feeling the weight of the books in her arms, she walked over to one of the wash bowls and set them on the edge of the bowl, rubbing her arms to bring circulation back into the part that felt numb. And then she shivered. She hadn't known Glenn was anywhere nearby when she tripped so blithely and happily down the stairs on her way to the library. He grabbed her beneath the stair well to the far corner, then began to paw all over her. If she hadn't screamed she might still be trapped there in that far corner.

She felt faint and weak. What should she do? Dare she leave the restroom? Where was he? What if he was waiting for her somewhere else along the way to the library?

"Lord," she cried, "I need help. Please send someone. Please help me. . . ." She was crying now.

"Charity! There you are. I've been looking all over for you. What's wrong?" It was Danita. God had sent her best friend to her rescue!
"Oh Danita, God sent you here. He did! He did!"

"Whatever are you doing here, Charity? I thought you had gone to the library. And by the way, Mrs. Fromme sent me after you. She said you are to bring this book up to her classroom whenever you are finished getting the reference books you need for your own assignment." And Danita gave the piece of paper with the title and author of the book to her friend. "Now tell me what's wrong, please."

"It's Glenn. Oh Danita, I feel dirty. I don't mean good earth-dirty; I mean. . . Well, dirty."

"But why should you? You didn't do anything to make you feel this way, I'm sure, Charity. I know you too well to believe you did anything vile or evil."

"I didn't, Danita; Glenn did. He grabbed me before I was off the last step and pushed me beneath the stair well, to the farthest corner, and then he pawed all over me. He had wicked intentions. I know he did, Danita, and I'm scared. So scared."

"Where is he now? I mean, how did you get away from him?"

"I screamed. Then I ran. Did you see him, Danita? Oh, I hope I don't see him again. I believe I'll faint if I do. I'm scared of him. And I feel defiled. So defiled and dirty; like I'm soiled."

"But you're not, Charity. Really and truly, you aren't," Danita said kindly and understandingly. "Just because he wasn't a gentleman doesn't make you less of a pure young woman."

"But to think of the liberty he took! Oh Danita, it was dreadful. He had vile intentions; I know he did. He looked and acted like a wild man. He honestly did. Why would he do this to me? Why? I've never been careless around him; nor flirty and 'free.' I don't understand it."

"Remember when I broke off with Pete, Charity?" Charity nodded, brushing tears from her face. "I was scared too. He wanted to park. We were out in the country. I told him no; I was against parking like that. I said it could lead to nothing pure and good and wholesome but only to sin and vileness and wickedness. He drove a little farther until he came to a little grove of
trees. As soon as he stopped the car I bolted out the door like a stalked animal and ran for all I could run toward a farmhouse I had seen not far away. My heart felt like it was going to jump out of my throat."

"Oh Danita, you poor, dear girl. You never told me this before. Why?" Charity asked quickly.

"Because it brought everything back in frightful and frightening recall, and then I had nightmares at night and couldn't sleep because of fear of him. I told Mother and Father all about it, of course, since I had to call my parents to come and get me."

"You did? Did Pete not know where you went?"

"Oh, no! I prayed all the way across those fields to where the light was shining through the kitchen window in the farmhouse. And after I knocked on the door, I collapsed. The sweetest little old lady ever was standing over me and washing my face with a cold, wet washcloth when I regained consciousness. I began sobbing uncontrollably. She knelt down beside me on the porch and wrapped her arms around me and cried too. I'm sure she pretty much suspected what had happened and why I was there.

"I asked her to please call my parents and tell them to come and get me. She helped me to my feet and supported me with her arms all the way to the big rocking chair in the dining room, and after she had put the call through and given Dad instructions how to get to their farm, I told her what had happened.

She wept. Then she told me she was proud of me and only wished she knew someone who was worthy of a girl like this.

"I told her I was a Christian, and that I had purposed within my heart to keep myself pure and clean for the man whom I would someday marry; the man who would then be my husband. 'God has kept me clean to this good hour,' I told her, 'and by His grace I mean to stay this way -- for my wedding night.'

"She cried again, then she patted my arm and told me she would pray for the Lord to help me to maintain and keep this beautiful and sacred virtue
of chastity until I could present it as a 'far above rubies' gift to my husband on our wedding night.

"Her husband had had to go to a farm meeting, she said, as she explained why she was alone. Their sons, two of them, lived on the farm with their families -- in separate houses of their own, of course -- and did most of the farming.

"Ever since that night, the Seebolds and we have been really close friends. My parents just love them. And so do I, of course."

"Seebolds? Oh Danita, now I understand," Charity remarked in awe. "It is because of you and your folks that they began attending our church! How wonderful! They are wonderful people."

"God let me see that light, Charity, just before Pete got to the grove of trees. And He helped me to remember that I had seen it, even through my almost overwhelming fear. Then, best of all, He helped me to reach that safe haven and not be chased down by Pete. Oh, He is so wonderful, Charity!"

"What about Pete? Aren't you afraid of him anymore?"

"I was, for a long time. But not anymore: God took away all the fear. Pete called me a couple of days after that scary ordeal and apologized. Then he nearly begged me to take him back. I told him it was over; every bit of it.

"He said he was sorry. He even tried to explain his actions by saying that he didn't see anything wrong with parking and petting when you loved someone the way he loved me."

"I thought Pete said he loved the Lord, Danita. Surely, the Holy Spirit dwelling in one's heart would have let him know that it was all wrong; especially since the Word of God speaks out clearly and plainly against all sexual sins and fleshly lusts."

"I told him almost the same words you just said to me, Charity. He said he was sorry -- again. Then he asked me again, to please take him back and give him another chance. I told him he had had his chance and that he had failed miserably and that, once and forever, my answer was a very positive no. The chapter was closed, I said, to never again be repeated, since I had
lost all respect for him and would never be able to trust him and his motives again."

"I'm proud of you, Danita. Now please pray with me and ask the Lord to take away my fear of Glenn. And ask Him, please, to never again allow Glenn to touch me. I know the Lord answers prayer and that He can do this. Like you, I purposed in my heart to remain sexually and morally pure and clean for my wedding night. I mean to keep this vow, and this 'purposed heart' goal, just like I am praying and watching and waiting and keeping my heart pure and holy and clean for the arrival of my Heavenly Bridegroom. Pray for me, Danita, please, then I'll have to get to the library."

"Gladly, Charity. And just to keep you company, I'm going with you to the library."

Joining hands and bowing their heads, they prayed.

(Part 3)

Arthur Furrow sat looking out the window pouring over a math question. He loved math; made good grades in it too. In fact, he made excellent grades in math. He guessed if he had a favorite subject it would have to be math. But history and chemistry were pretty close toss ups with math, too. He was a real history buff too and. . . .

Wham! Crash! Clatter! Whew, that rock almost hit his head! Who . . .? What . . .? His concentration was interrupted rudely. Eric! Eric Grove had actually and willfully and deliberately pitched that rock through the window! He saw it with his own eyes! Then he had run and hidden among a grouping of tall yews!

Mr. Taft was on his feet. With two long strides, he stood before the smashed window. Then he looked over at Arthur, where the stone had fallen on his desk and was still lying there.

"You all right?" he asked Arthur, furrowing his brow.

"Fine, Sir. Thank you. It missed my head by a small fraction. But it missed; that's all that matters."
"I'd like to get my hands on the fellow who did this!" Mr. Taft exclaimed angrily. "Adults; that's what I'm supposed to be teaching, as well as the other faculty members. Young adults. And just look at this mess! Now, if we had a bunch of first graders around . . . well. . . . But we don't. This is high school."

He looked through the broken window, surveying the surrounding area with his sharp eyes. Then he wheeled around on his heels and said, "Fellows, I'll need your help. Be careful where you walk. Girls, maybe you can help get the shattered pieces of glass off the desks. Don't use your bare hands! This is an order. Mr. Prill has brushes in the janitorial supply room. Carla and Bea, run down to the room and borrow a few brushes from him, please. Come right back. The glass must be brushed into wastebaskets, not onto the floor. No need making double work."

The room bustled with activity after the orders were given and nobody seemed to notice when Eric Grove sauntered carelessly and nonchalantly into the room and slid into his seat. Nor did they notice the tear over the right knee of his trousers. But Arthur saw it.

Eric was a real bully. He delighted in being the center of attraction; delighted, too, in scaring the girls silly with his pranks and his tricks. He had a penchant for stirring up trouble and creating problems then disappearing like a sleuth when the showdown came. He was a smooth talker and a slick operator and he had quite a following of young fellows like himself, who were bullies but with less daring than he. Eric was the "chief": he was the leader, the others were followers.

Some of the girls were daffy over him, labeling him the "coolest guy in Bradford High," all of which only served to feed Eric's already over-inflated ego. His dad was on City Council, on Bradford High's school board and something or other at City Hospital as well as being a State Representative for their area. He had a lot of "say" on the way the city hospital and school and State should be run. Realizing this, Eric seemed to feel that anything he did would be overlooked and would be considered as only a daring teenage prank.

"When did you come in?" Mr. Taft asked, seeing Eric seated in his seat. "A while ago."
"Well, get busy, Eric. This room's a mess, and it's almost time for classes to begin. We can't do anything until the glass is swept up from the floor and cleaned off the desk tops. It's amazing that no one was hurt or injured. I'm going to the principal's office to report what happened; but I'll be right back. Now get busy and help the fellows. There's work to do . . . ."

Mr. Taft was no sooner out of the room than Donald Cyris and Luke Mellow duetted loudly, "You did it, Eric. We saw you."

"So did I." It was Patrick Shannon. "And I think we should make him clean the room himself. It isn't fair that we should have to clean up the mess he made."

"Try it, fellows," Eric said coolly. "Go ahead and try it. This fist has lots of good punch in it." He held up his fisted right hand and remained seated.

"Get up here and help," Donald said angrily.

"After all, we didn't make this mess."

"So-o?"

Carla and Bea rushed into the room, breathless from hurrying. Tossing brushes to a few of the girls and passing out dustpans to catch the glass as it was brushed from the desks, Bea said, "I think who did this, if it's ever found out, should have to clean this entire room by himself. He should be made to scrub the floor on his hands and knees then clean every single window in this room and dust and polish each and every desk until it shines and. . . ."

"And scrub the walls and the blackboards two times," Carla added, breaking into Bea's unfinished sentence. "And think he should have to pay for the cost of the window, no matter how much it cost. It might teach him a lesson or two."

"Hear that, Eric?" Patrick asked. "A pretty good 'sentence,' I think. Only I'd make it twice for scrubbing the floor on your knees."

Bea and Carla paused, holding their brushes in mid-air, their mouth open wide. "Did you do it, Eric?" they asked simultaneously.
"Now why would you blame a good fellow such as I for this mess?" he asked teasingly.

"Cut it out, Eric, and get to work," Luke said bitterly. "You're responsible for all this mess."

Still in shock, Bea exclaimed, "Is he?" Then looking at Eric, she asked, "Did you do it?"

Smiling smugly, he said, "Now tell me, do you really think I'm capable of doing something so dastardly?"

With her hands on her hips, Bea replied, "Did you do it, Eric? For if you did, you're going to clean off these desks; not us girls."

"Make me do it, Bea. Try it. I wouldn't dare fist you since you're a girl, but I'd think of something to get even with you."

"Get even with me! How ridiculous; when you... you made the mess! Now get busy!" Bea was furious.

"What's going on?" Mr. Taft asked, stepping back into the room and noticing all the angry stares. Silence. Complete silence.

"I thought I told you all to clean up the mess. Why have my orders not been obeyed?" He glanced from one to the other around the room. Seeing Bea's hands on her hips and the anger on her face, he asked, "What's wrong? I want an answer: Now! Bea . . .?"

"I don't think it's fair that we should have to clean up this mess that someone else made," Bea replied quickly.

"Do you know who made the mess, Bea?" Silence.

"Answer me, please." Mr. Taft's eyes darted from one student to another. "Well . . .?"Total silence.

Stepping carefully, he came closer to the desks. "All right," he said, "since you refuse to answer, I'll be asking each of you personally, do you know who did this. Alan Crabb, do you know?"
"I can't say, for I didn't see anybody doing it, sir."


Arthur felt he had to answer and, that, truthfully. Patrick and Luke and Donald had remained silent when the question was presented to them even though they confessed to having seen the culprit commit the act. Silence was almost, if not altogether, like lying when one knew a thing to be a fact. And he would not lie. The Lord had changed him wonderfully and radically that night at the altar when he was born again and he had purposed in his heart that, no matter what, he was going to go to Heaven.

He promised the Lord that he would follow Him always and anywhere and everywhere, and that he would obey God's "thou shalt's" and His "thou shalt nots" in the Bible and, since the Word said that liars would have their place in the lake of fire, "where the fire is not quenched and their worm dieth not" (St. Mark 9:43-44), he, being faced with the direct question, must answer accordingly.

"Arthur, do you know? Did you see . . .?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

The eyes of all in the room were upon him.

"Who was it?" Mr. Taft's eyes probed his face like a detective, he felt.

"It was Eric, sir. I saw him run and hide in among that grouping of yews immediately after he threw the rock. I'm certainly not meaning to sound like a tattler, but I must be truthful: I'll be facing a just God someday: He knows all! He sees all!"

Eric's face turned white with rage. "I . . . I . . . he's lying!" he exclaimed testily. Angrily.
"He is not!" It was Patrick. "I saw you too, Eric."
"Then why didn't you tell me so when I asked you?" Mr. Taft questioned with flashing eyes.

"Because, sir, I lacked the courage to do what Art did. But it's a fact, I saw him with my own two eyes."

"So did Luke and I," Donald admitted, seeing the teacher's eyes searching his face and knowing that he, no doubt, would be questioned again the second time, since he, too, had remained silent when asked outright by the teacher.

Too intent with the mounting tension and the fear of what Eric would do to get even with those who had revealed the facts, the students didn't see Mr. Miller, the principal, standing in the doorway until he spoke.

"Mr. Taft," he said, "take your class to the auditorium: there are chairs on the stage. Eric, you will remain here. Also you, Arthur, and Patrick and Donald and Luke. I want all the details from you fellows. Facts; only facts. Truthful facts. You will be free to go to class after I have questioned you further and have all the evidence. Then I will take care of things. . . ."

And take care of them he did. After speaking to Mr. Grove (Eric's father), the "sentence" was decreed by the Senior Grove himself: The window was to be replaced at Eric's expense; the mess of shattered glass was to be cleaned off the desks and up from the floor by Eric himself, and he would be grounded for three full weeks -- at home.

"Art, I . . . I'm proud of you," Patrick declared after school that day. "How'd you do it? Admitting it so bravely, that you saw Eric? I admire you. I was a coward; afraid of what Eric may do. . . ."

"I have Someone living within me, Patrick: He gave me power to do what needed to be done. I know you fellows don't care to hear anything much about God and His mighty power; but He is the answer to your question. He came into my heart some years ago and made me a new creature in Him. He changed my desires and habits and the way I lived. It's called being born again.

"Then I heard a sermon preached telling me that God could take out the 'bent to sinning' through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. And when I was
sanctified wholly, God gave me power to witness for Him and to stand up for Him and what His Word declares. It's the Lord's power, Patrick: only the Lord's! I wish you'd open your heart to Him, Pat. He gives meaning to life and a purpose for living."

"Thanks Art, I'll think about it. I know one thing, and that is, I sure do admire you. So do a lot of others around here."

"I'll be praying for you," Arthur said as Patrick hurried away to get on the school bus.
A purposed heart! Arthur thanked God for it.

(Part 4)

Melinda Stowe put the telephone back in place and stood staring out the window, wearing a puzzled frown instead of her ordinary and almost-all-the-time smile. What was happening to Candace? she wondered, feeling the anxiety mount over her long-time acquaintance and best friend.

Her mind did a quick replay of the telephone conversation and again the unexplainable fear surged through her with the suddenness of a rushing and fearful on-coming wave, about to inundate her.

"Lord," she cried out loud, "I don't understand fully what this is all about; but please, please help Candace. Don't let her take a wrong 'turn' in her life. Something's not all right, Lord. Help my friend. Keep her on the strait and the narrow. . . ."

"I won't be over tonight as planned," Candace told her on the phone after her quick, "Hi, Mel."

"Oh? Why not Candy? Is you grandfather worse?"

"Oh, no; nothing like that. In fact, Grandpa's much improved."

"That's great, Candace. Great! He had us all scared for a while; thought it was his heart acting up again. So, from my heart, I say, 'Thank God, he's improving.'"
"We're all thankful about his turn for the better, Mel. And, oh, by the way, tomorrow night's out too. I won't be going to that youth meeting, after all."

"Oh Candace, you can't mean it! Our trio... What will Sue and I do without you?"

"You duet beautifully together, Melinda."

"But what will I tell our youth leader? I mean, Bradley's going to want to know why this sudden change after weeks of planning and practicing, what's wrong, Candace?"

"Nothing's wrong, Mel. It's just that my plans have been changed."

"But why?"

"I'm going to be out of town..."

"Are your folks going too?" Melinda asked, knowing that Candace's folks weren't at all religious and took frequent trips out of town.

Candace gave a nervous little laugh. "Are you kidding?" she quipped. "Who wants parents along on a date, dear friend?" Again she laughed nervously.

"A date; oh."

"Of course, Mel. I'm old enough to date. So are you. But you're too choosy. And now, I must be going. I'll see you..." With that she hung up.

Melinda walked to the big window in the living room and stared across the lawn to the grove of trees beyond, wondering with whom her best friend was going out. It wouldn't be any of the young people who were active in the church, she knew, for they were dedicated to the cause of God and to spiritual things and wouldn't miss any of the youth meetings unless there was illness or a death or some such thing.

Then, like an arrow piercing her heart, something she had overheard while working her part-time job in Mrs. Mullanney's little Craft and Candle...
Shoppe came to mind. The mere thought of what she had heard made her feel sick to her stomach now.

"You remember Kenneth Dryden?" the young woman had asked her friend, as both were looking for a certain kind of candle.

"Oh, yes, his wife left him with their little two-year old son about four months ago. What about him?"

"Well, he has an attractive baby sitter -- Candace somebody. And, by the way, they now have things about worked out for the little boy -- Vonnie has the boy every week and Ken gets to have him every other weekend. So, with him working all day Friday and Saturday, he has to have a baby sitter until he gets off work. He heard of this Candace and hired her to care for the boy while he's working. He started dating the baby sitter on the weekends that he doesn't have the little boy. . . ."

Melinda felt like she was going to collapse now as she recalled that conversation of little less than a month ago. At the time, she hadn't paid any attention to what she couldn't help but hear while she worked nearby. Even the name Candace hadn't triggered off any alarm bells inside her being, since she knew three different girls whose first names were Candace. But now the pieces started falling in place and coming together as she recalled Candace mentioning about a cute little two-year-old boy for whom she baby-sat every other weekend, this in addition to the three little girls for whom she baby-sat every Wednesday and Thursday night to accommodate the strange working hours of two single parenting women, one who had two daughters and worked till midnight every Wednesday night; the other with one daughter, working her shift till eleven o'clock each Thursday night.

Sudden tears sprang to Melinda's eyes. "Please, Lord, help!" she cried out in agony of soul. "Head Candace off, please." Four years ago she had led her neighbor girl to the Lord. She loved her. Pitied her, too. Candace received no spiritual help whatever at home.

With urgency, Melinda rushed back to the telephone and dialed her friend's number, weeping as she waited for an answer.

"Hello," came the pleasant sounding voice over the line. "This is the Hollis residence; Candace speaking."
"Candy!" Melinda cried eagerly. "Oh, Candace, please don't do what you're planning to do. I mean, don't go out on that date. Please don't!"

"Oh but I am, Melinda. And I will. I mean, well . . . I'm not a child, my dear."

"I know you aren't, Candace. I know this. But he . . . he's a married man! You can't do it. It's sinful! God's smile will no longer be upon you. It's sinful, Candace. Sinful!"

There was a long period of total silence; so long, in fact, that for a while Melinda wondered if her friend had hung up on her, silently and quietly.

Then, finally, a small-sounding, shocked voice asked, "Who . . . who told you, Mel? How did you find out?"

"I overheard two women talking about this man in the shop where I work after school hours and on Saturdays. Oh Candy, please don't do it. He's a married man. You have no right to him: none whatever. He belongs to his wife; Vonnie, they called her. She's the mother of his little boy. Don't bring God's disfavor nor His wrath down upon your head, Candy. You can't do wrong and get by. Never! God keeps accurate and righteous records. We can't conceal anything from Him. He sees all and He knows all."

"But his wife's a goose, Mel. And she's a slob. She never kept a clean house and never had his meals ready for him, nor. . . ."

"So he says!" Melinda exclaimed quickly. "Please listen to me, Candace; it's sinful and wicked and evil for you to take up with a married man."

"Well, I guess I'm old enough to take care of my own affairs, Mel. He's good to me. Kind too."

Melinda's voice broke. Suddenly she was sobbing. Great, long, heavy, hard, heaving sobs tore her slender figure. "I thought you loved the Lord," she said brokenly. "Oh, Candy! Candy!"
"Don't do that," Candace cried "I didn't mean to make you cry, Mel. I really didn't. I'm sorry. It's just that, since I met Kenneth, I haven't taken things as seriously as you do. Spiritual things, I mean. You're ever so serious about these things. Too serious, really, I sometimes feel, and believe."

"Is it possible to become too serious about that which will determine where we'll spend eternity -- either Heaven or hell, Candace? Oh, my dear, dear friend, how I have prayed and wept and interceded for you, asking God to help you to get a purposed heart; a fixed heart: a heart that will have one goal and one determination in mind -- to please God and do His will and to go to Heaven"

"You've done your duty by me, Mel; weep no more. I'm out now to carve a niche out for my life."

"But your soul, Candace! Ask the Lord to forgive you for this, then allow Him to guide and lead you to a fine single young man. He will help you if you ask Him. I know He will."

"Thanks for caring, Melinda, but my mind's made up. Goodbye."

For a long while after the conversation had ended, Melinda wept. It seemed unreal that Candace could take the wrong road with such ease and apparent unconcern and not stop long enough to count the cost and consider the outcome at the end of life's road. Nor, even, what heartaches and tears and griefs may be just ahead, around the corner, because of her willful transgression and violation of God's holy and eternal Word.

Falling to her knees, she prayed. Then she praised. It took determination and purpose to serve the Lord and to follow Him with not so much even as a backward look or glance. Even the Apostle Paul, in Acts 11:23, "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."

Raising her head and her hands heavenward, Melinda renewed the sacred and binding vows which she had made to God the night she surrendered everything to Him in total and complete commitment to His will and His way. What joy, and what pure delight to cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart.
(The End)