BOLD AS A LION

(Part I)

By Mrs. Paul E. King

I looked at the packet of tracts in my hands. I was speechless.

"Distribute these," the minister told me as he thrust them into my hands. "Take them and give them out, please, Paul. I want our entire church to become involved in the ministry of reaching souls."
"But, Brother Iverson, I'm just not outgoing. I'm . . . well, I have no ability whatever when it comes to talking to people and making speeches. You know this is a fact," I countered truthfully, wondering how I was ever going to manage. I was a follower -- a good follower -- but I certainly was not a leader. I knew this, and I felt sure that everybody in our church knew it, too. After all, God needed followers: too many leaders in one church could lead to trouble.

Smiling broadly, Brother Iverson said, "Another Moses, huh? Let me quote God's words: 'Who made man's mouth?'"

"I know" I replied. "But you have no idea how hard it is for me to have to talk to a stranger about anything. I've always had pity and empathy for the man Moses, since I, too, can say that I am not an eloquent man; I too am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. For sure, I'll certainly not cause you any trouble with my tongue. Nor any other way, God helping me."

Brother Iverson smiled. "You have spoken the truth, Paul, and I truly appreciate your meek and quiet spirit. But just as the Lord helped Moses, I want you to give these gospel tracts out. It will not only help you greatly in your spiritual life and in your walk with the Lord, but you will be helping in the ministry of reaching others for the Lord. There's a great ministry in giving out tracts. Please, will you do it? I'll be praying for you. Can I count on you?"

Swallowing, and all but gasping from shock and fear, I replied with a tremble in my voice, "I've always done everything you asked me to do and, God helping me, I'll do this, Brother Iverson. 'If I perish, I perish.'"

Throwing his head back, my pastor broke out in hearty laughter. Then he sobered. Placing his hand on my shoulder, he said, "You won't perish, Paul. Of a truth, I feel greatly constrained to tell you that I believe the Lord is going to bless your efforts and reward you richly for doing this. We become strong by breaking down, or through, the barriers of fear and timidity and venturing out for God and the souls His Son died to save. The Lord will go with you. God bless you."

My pastor's kind words inspired me and added a modicum of courage to my quivering spirit; but to say that I felt like running through a troop, or leaping over a wall, as per stated in II Samuel 22:30, would have been a
falsehood of the strongest nature. I could say truthfully and from my inmost being, however, the three verses that followed the 30th verse:

"As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.

"For who is God, save the Lord? and who is a rock, save our God?

"God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect" (II Samuel 22:31-33).

Fear gripped me for a brief moment and, inwardly, I felt panicky. Our minister's words, however, about becoming strong by breaking through the barrier of fear and timidity, encouraged and inspired me. More than anything, I guess, I desired to be a soul winner for the Lord.

I thanked God for the four young men for whom I had carried a burden and prayed on a regular and consistent basis, until each was converted. I knew I had had a part in their salvation though they had never known that I had a consistent prayer vigil for them.

I had met two of them at one of our district youth gatherings. When I learned that neither one was saved, I covenanted with God that I would pray until they became His blood-washed sons. The other two I saw while waiting for Mother at the grocery store. I was sitting in the car, watching for her grocery cart to come through the door so I could drive up alongside the curb and load the groceries into the trunk of the car. The red-headed fellow caught my attention immediately. Not only was his hair red, it was thick, too, and he stood six feet four, at least. He was the specimen of real masculinity if ever I saw one. His companion, too, was tall and well-built. His hair looked the color of ripened wheat. I judged them to be brothers. A burden settled in on my heart for their salvation as they disappeared around the corner of a nearby drugstore. I had four now for whom I felt accountable to God.

My soul was nearly beside itself with joy when, less than a year later at another youth gathering, all four for whom I had prayed, stood to their feet and, with faces glowing, testified to being saved. The redheaded giant declared it to have been "a miracle indeed," since neither his brother nor he had been church goers. "But God," he said, "seemed to be pulling and drawing us inside, as we started to pass the church on Vine Street, not far
from where we have our apartment. We went in and sat down in the last pew. A power so strong and wonderful as to make us tremble with fear gripped each of our hearts. We literally ran down the aisle and fell over the altar when the minister asked if anybody wanted to give his heart to the Lord. Oh, it's been glorious since Bradley and I got saved. We're praying for our parents now: they need the Lord -- badly."

I felt humbled now, as I remembered that I had had at least a little part in helping to bring them all to the Lord, via intercessory prayer for their salvation.

Surely, I reasoned now, God would help me as I distributed the tracts which I held in my hand. Maybe I wouldn't need to tell that, either. I could just hand out the tract and let it "talk" for both the Lord and me, I decided, as I started down the street.

Where should I go? I wondered, as I felt the fringes of fear trying to make encroachments into my soul. Raising my voice to the Lord, I implored help and strength from Him. Almost immediately, Mr. Bensor's bearded face came into sharp focus and I felt compelled to go to his place of business.

"Lord," I cried, 'You know he fired me. He said he never wanted to see me again, after I told him I couldn't sell the customer that used part and charge him the price of a new part. Oh, God . . . please!" I cried.

The bearded face remained, however; enlarged now and sharper focused than before.

I knew what I must do. "'If I perish, I perish,'" I quoted, as I made a quick turn and started down South Street to Adams and on to Main Street.

Mr. Bensor saw me before I was inside the door, even. Bellowing like an angry bull, he greeted me with, "I told you I never wanted to see you again, didn't I, Paul? Why are you here?" He opened the door and shoved me out.

"I want to give you something," I said with a tremor in my voice. "Here, Mr. Bensor; please accept this."
"I told you I didn't want to see you!" His voice was sharp, like a razor. Grabbing the tract roughly, he shouted, "Beat it! I said, beat it!"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Bensor. But not until I tell you I'm praying for you, sir. I wish you'd come out to our Wednesday night church service, sir. We have some great Bible studies and times of prayer."

"I said . . . go." Mr. Bensor's mouth was agape. He looked like he was in shock.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Bensor. Good day, my friend."

"Now where, Lord?" I asked, feeling strongly elated and excited over the way God had helped me with my "speech." Never had I been so loquacious before. Best of all, Mr. Bensor had the tract. Sure, he had grabbed it roughly. But he had it! That was of great importance: he hadn't torn it up!

"Thank You, Lord. Thank You!" I exclaimed, feeling something akin to holy boldness taking hold of me and helping me.

Mrs. Withers. Sully Heintzeleman. Stu Ferror. The names paraded before me in rapid but lingering procession.

I gulped. Mrs. Withers had a sharp and cutting tongue. In fact, she had used her tongue so forcefully and to the extent that she was practically, if not altogether, friendless. One never knew what she would say about you, or tell on you. Little matter to her that it wasn't the truth.

Sully Heintzeleman! He was the terror of the neighborhood. A bully of bullies. A gang leader. A tougher-than-tough guy.

"Is this for real, Lord?" I prayed, in the form of a question. "Is Sully on Your list for me, too? You know I'm nothing, dear Lord. Nothing in myself. . . ."

"I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." The Voice was clear and plain; the message from Heaven, strong and uplifting with a strong appeal for marching orders.
"Thank You, Lord," I cried, as I headed quickly for Mrs. Withers' house. It was closest to Mr. Bensor's business. Sully and Stu were farther away. She was working in her flower beds when I opened the gate and called her name. "Your flowers are beautiful," I said, after addressing her.

She straightened up and thanked me, saying, "Most young people never notice things like flowers, Paul. I must say that you are an unusual young man." She exercised her shoulders, as if trying to work the kinks, or aches, out of them.

"Could I do something to help you, maybe?" I asked kindly. "I'm sure you get tired, doing all the weeding and trimming."

Mrs. Withers smiled. She actually and truly smiled. It was a pretty smile, I noticed. "Paul, you are rare indeed!"

It was an exclamation of genuine sincerity, I was sure, as I saw the look on the attractive, middle-aged woman's face. It was a look of glad surprise. She reminded me of a little girl who had made a very pleasant discovery and couldn't possibly conceal it.

"I'd be delighted to help you," I replied quickly.

Tears came to Mrs. Withers' eyes. "Thank you, Paul. I appreciate your kind offer; but working in my flowerbeds among my flowers is therapy for me: it keeps me from dying of loneliness and sorrow. You see, I have no friends, and I am a widow. A very lonely widow. My son, had he lived, would be your age. This is part of the reason for these tears. I wonder if Alan would have been kind and caring like you. Do you have a minute or two to spare, Paul? Would you mind listening to a woman old enough to be your mother? It's been so long since I've had anybody to talk to."

"Not at all," I remarked eagerly, marveling that I hadn't heard a single derogatory statement or remark about anyone. "I'd enjoy it," I added truthfully.

She led me around the side of the house to the shade-dappled lawn near her back porch. There on the patio, sipping delicious ice-cold, freshly-made lemonade and sitting in comfortable lawn chairs, I learned of her once-happy marriage; of Alan's arrival and the joy he brought until spinal
meningitis took him from her husband and her on his twelfth birthday; of her husband's sudden and untimely death at 42, and of her bitterness toward people; happy people especially and particularly.

"I resented them," she said sadly. "I became filled with bitterness. In retaliation over my losses and other people's joys, I used my tongue like a sword. Oh, I was vicious! And so full of malice and hatred, Paul. And here I sit, alone. Friendless, widowed, and childless." Tears streamed down her cheeks.

"You're not actually alone, Mrs. Withers," I said, speaking kindly. "The dear, loving Father in Heaven has been looking down upon you all the time. He loves you. He would be most happy to have you invite His beloved, only begotten Son to come into your heart. If you'd do this, Jesus would come into your heart and you'd never be alone again."

"I treated Him shamefully, Paul. You have no idea how shamefully. It fills my heart with sadness and grief now as I think about it. I feel I have no right to ask Him for anything. Shame fills my heart when I remember how I scorned Him and rejected Him."

She sounded suddenly very old. "It's a dreadful thing not to have anyone who loves you," she added on a sob. "My tongue isolated me from the few friends I once had. They became fearful of me and of what I'd say to them or tell about them. Today, they're gone: all of them. And I don't blame them; I drove them away. The same way with God."

Raising my hand in protest, I countered softly with, "No, Mrs. Withers. No. God loves you. The Bible tells us that, '... God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved' John 3:17. The Lord loves you. So do my parents and I. He wants to become your Savior."

Standing to her feet, Mrs. Withers wrung her small hands nervously. "Oh, I hope so, Paul. I hope so. Thank you, son. Your visit has been like God sent an angel down to bring hope back to my bitter, shriveledup and very dead soul."

"I know God sent me here, Mrs. Withers: He made it very plain that I was to come by your house today. I have a tract here that I want you to read,
please. I'd sure love to have you out to the Wednesday night Bible study and prayer and praise service. Our pastor is taking us through the Book of Romans for the next three months on Wednesday night. God's Word is unfolding wondrously for me through these times of study. I know it would help you too."

"Thanks, Paul. I'll read the tract, for sure. Thanks for coming. It's like a gleam of light has made a glimmer into my dark, dreary and lonely world." (See Part 2)

(Part 2)

After praying with Mrs. Withers and almost, but not altogether, extracting a promise from her to attend our church service, I felt like I was walking on a cloud. In my heart, I felt a calm, sweet assurance for her salvation. It wouldn't be long, I felt, until our entire town would know that the once sharp-tongued, critical and censorious woman was "different," changed, through the transforming power of the blood of Jesus Christ!

My step had a spring to it; my heart bubbled with songs of praise and adoration to the One Altogether lovely and wonderful to my soul as I hurried away toward Sully's house.

At the thought of Sully and who he was and what all he stood for -- in the way of evil -- I stopped dead still in my tracks. I felt chills of terror race madly up and down my spine. Fear's tentacles grabbed at my being like an octopus slithering stealthily out for its prey. Lifting my eyes heavenward, I cried out for help. And for courage. Instantly, through the power in the precious blood and the unfailing promises of God, I felt the vicious tentacles uncoil and release me. Strength for the battle surged through me and filled my entire being with holy boldness. I stood amazed. Tears coursed down my cheeks. In that instant, I realized that God's mighty power was available to those who loved Him whenever they needed it and wherever they were. Oh, glorious victory through Christ!

Quickly, I began walking toward the street on which Sully lived. As I expected, a gang of young people had congregated in the yard. When they saw me, Sully walked toward me, grinning sardonically. "Well, I do declare!" he remarked, as he stood in front of me and took hold of my shirt collar. "Mr. Goodyshoes has paid us a visit, fellows. Can you believe it!"
Loud and raucous laughter ensued.

"You wanting to join our gang?" Sully asked mockingly.

"I came here to give you fellows these," I answered, holding out the tracts, hoping and praying for at least two takes.

Sully grabbed the tracts. "I'll take them," he shouted, as he opened one and began reading randomly. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

He turned red with rage. Holding the tracts in front of him, he bellowed madly, "Here's what I think of these!" Then he tore them to pieces and threw them to the ground. Stomping upon them, he ground them into the dirt, saying coolly-sarcastically, "So-o-o, Mr. Goodyshoes thinks he can convert us, does he? Well, I'll teach you a thing or two. Here, take this. . . ."

His fist came up and out, but before he ever touched me, from out of nowhere, a tall German Shepherd dog had him by the hand and would not let go.

Cursing and swearing, Sully tried to free himself by kicking the dog. The beautiful German Shepherd, however, seemed to be aware of the bully's every move and not once was he touched.

"Get the beast off me! Get him off!" Sully shouted. Then, in a commanding tone of voice, with fire registering in his eyes, he ordered the group to, "Give Goodyshoes the works, fellows! The works! He's responsible for this."

Like deaf mutes, not a man moved.

"I said to give him the works! I demand it!"

Still no action. Each man stood like he was petrified, while Sully wrestled with the powerful dog, whose hold had not lessened in the least. The dog's eyes were fixed upon the captive.

"Help me!" Sully cried in pain. "Help me!"
"Why not ask the Lord to help you?" I said. "He loves you, Sully, and He wants to save you. Just like the tract stated, if you'll call upon the name of the Lord, and repent of your sins, you can be saved."

"Shut up! Shut up! Get out of here! Do you hear me, get out of here! Get off this property!"

"As soon as I give the fellows a tract," I answered, marveling over God's help as I distributed the tracts to the group.

"I'll be praying for you fellows; every one of you," I promised, as I started to leave. "Just remember what Sully read to you: it's true. 'For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

"Get off this property this instant!" Sully demanded. "And take your dog with you. I'll have you arrested. I'll. . . ." He screamed out in pain as the dog tightened his hold.

"Can I help?" I asked, as I hurried to his side. "Leave! Now! Get the dog off me. Get him off!"

"Sully," I said, "I don't have a dog. I don't know whose dog this is. Unless . . . unless . . . yes. Yes! I believe God sent him to protect me from harm. God sent him, Sully. I'm sure of it."

The beautiful creature looked at me and wagged his tail, all the while maintaining the hold he had on Sully. I felt like an angel was hovering somewhere near me as I left. The dog was, indeed, God-sent, I was sure. Sully and his gang were dangerous and exceedingly wicked. But God . . .!

Tears trickled from my eyes as I thought about Daniel's mighty deliverance from the lions' den and the three young Hebrews' deliverance from the burning, fiery furnace. The same God who had come to their rescue and delivered them, had proven Himself All-Powerful and mighty again and had delivered me out of the hands of Sully and his gang. I felt strong and bold; bold as a lion, through Christ. Only Christ!

I prayed as I walked toward Stu's tumble-down, unpainted house and weed-surroundings: prayed for Sully and the members of his gang. And for
Stu Ferror. The man was eccentric and strange. A sort of hermit, or recluse. He had a dozen or more cats, of different colors and sizes, and a dog with three legs. Rumor had it that he was mean and that he had knocked the dog's leg off in one of his mean fits. My folks warned me about paying attention to rumor, however, so I didn't believe the story at all. Especially not after I had seen how attached the dog was to Stu on one of my trips to his house for a couple bales of straw for my mother's strawberry patch, where she spread the straw to keep the berries clean and out of the mud and water when it rained.

The dog, Speck, trailed Stu like a shadow, never venturing far from his side. Stu paused time and time again to rub Speck's head and ears or stroke his back. He was downright affectionate and attached to the gentle-mannered dog, whose speed amazed me in spite of his having only three legs.

I parted the taller weeds now and found the rusty gate. Hanging askew on its equally rusty hinges, I went into what should have been lawn but what was, instead, a wild and tangled mess of weeds, vines and wild flowers. The sidewalk had long since succumbed to the thickly-tangled overgrowth and was gone. Even Stu's earth-packed path was hard to see, but I knew that behind the tall, thick, overgrown bushes and weeds, vines and saplings, lay the house.

I came upon Stu before I reached the house. I heard his voice before I saw him. He was talking to someone. Or something. I listened, thankful that he wasn't aware of my presence.

"Now Chazzy," I heard him say, "you were where you shouldn't have been again, or you wouldn't be hurt. I told you the man and his sons are mean. Why'd you go over there? They hate cats. You know this; else, why'd Mrs. Feezer bring you here when you lived there? Now, be still, Chazzy. I'll soon have your paw wrapped. You'll live. This time, Chazzy. This time. One of these days they'll finish you off for sure, unless you learn to stay where you're safe. I feed you well. And plenty. So why can't you be content like all the others that have come here, from wherever, and quit your roaming? There you are, big fellow!" Stu exclaimed with a note of triumph in his voice. "Walking's going to be a bit awkward for a spell; but your paw's going to heal. Now hop along to the milk pan and the food, Chazzy. . . ."
I cleared my throat then called his name, announcing my approach, saying, "I've come to see you, Stu. You all right?"

"I'm fitter 'n a fiddle," he replied, as I pushed my way around an oversized prickly evergreen bush and came face to face with the man, whose hands smelled strongly and heavily of something akin to carbolic acid. I decided it was one of his homemade ointment concoctions and that the cat, Chazzy, reeked with the same odoriferous "dressing."

Stu spat a mouthful of tobacco juice on the ground, then he asked, "What brings you here, Paul? Your ma needing more straw or something? Your dad OK?"

"First off the list of questions, Stu, I came here to see you. And the next question is, no, Mother's not needing more straw; and Dad's fine. Fitter 'n a fiddle, as you just said you were."

"Well, you sure honor me; payin' me a visit, Paul. Nobody visits here. Guess maybe it's partly my fault: the weeds and bushes hide the house pretty well, now don't they, Paul?"

Smiling, I agreed, adding, "It's like they're keeping the house a secret from prying eyes, Stu."

Chuckling, and spitting tobacco juice again, he said, "Well now, since you came to pay Stu Ferror a visit, the polite thing to do is to invite you to sit a spell. C'mon, Paul, the porch is as good a place as any to visit, and with two sittin' chairs, well, it's a perfect day for sittin'. I could use a bit of sittin'; what with caring for a cat that wanders out of its safety zone onto enemy territory and comes back maimed and injured and sometimes 'most nigh dead. That Chazzy! He's sure enough going to get it one of these days."

"Several of those boys over at Feezer's farm are terrors, Paul. They belong to some gang. They're dangerous. Chazzy forgets and, in his search for mice, he goes all the way over there. 'Course, he came from there. Mrs. Feezer dropped him off some years ago. He was more dead than alive that day. She has a speck of compassion, at least. Maybe more. Who knows? She didn't know that I saw her when she dropped him off. So, I gathered his mangled body up in my arms as soon as she was out of sight and the car was gone, and I took him to the house and nursed him back to health. Guess
I'd better wash my hands; that ointment I used on Chazzy's paw and leg is a bit strong smelling. Here, sit, while I wash up. . . ."

"Thanks, Stu, I will," I said, as I sat down in one of the solidly-constructed old, much-used but still sturdy rocking chairs. Almost instantly, I was transported into another world, it seemed; a world where Sully and his cohorts were forgotten and banished; a world so set apart from the outside world by all its disarray and overgrowth and tangled vines and tall weeds and blooming wild flowers until I was wrapped in a feeling of security. Directly in front of the porch was a clearing of not more than fifteen feet. Here the sunlight lay on the low growing grasses in warmth and brilliance. Directly beyond the clearing, however, everything was again a hodgepodge of overgrowth and tangles and blooms.

The unpainted, weather-beaten and weary-looking house seemed to fit right into its surroundings, I noticed for the first time ever. Bird songs filled the silence with music. Never had I heard so many different notes or songs. The place was filled with birds of all colors and species, while butterflies of every description and hue flitted from flower to flower in the jungle of wilderness and overgrowth.

I sat spellbound and mesmerized. From somewhere nearby, I heard the whistle of quails, followed by the crowing of a pheasant. My whole being was wrapped in blissful serenity and cloaked with complete calmness. It seemed unreal, the glorious music and beauty that came from the nondescript "arrangement" that surrounded the old house. But it was real: my eyes and ears bore testimony to its reality.

I leaned my head back against the rocker and closed my eyes, thanking God for the peaceful haven. Then I heard Stu coming through the house toward the porch. (See Part 3)

(Part 3)

"It took a bit of washin'," Stu said, as he neared the screen door from inside, "but I believe I got it all off. Lemon juice and onion, rubbed over one's hands that have been washed good in hot soapy water, sure can make a difference."
I sat forward in the chair as Stu emerged through the doorway, exclaiming, "Onion, Stu! Onions! They're smelly too."

Smiling, Stu countered with, "Yes, onion. I used it first, after washing and soaping. It's better than the smell of the other. Then I washed some more. Next I got the lemon juice: it helps to 'submerge' the onion odor. Not that I mind the smell of onions; I don't. It's just that I figured my guest may not enjoy onions the way I do."

Stu handed me a tall glass of icy-looking goodness, explaining simply, "Meadow tea. I hope you like it. It grows wild all over the place. I make the tea year round: hot for winter months; iced for spring and summer."

"Thanks," I said, sipping from the glass. "It's delicious, Stu."

"Glad you like it, Paul," he replied, as he sat in the empty rocker near me and looked out beyond the clearing to where the quail were whistling and calling. "Some of my friends," he stated, pointing in the direction from where the calls were coming.

"Choice friends, I would say, Stu. At least they don't give you any trouble. Happy little creatures, they are, with lilting songs and cheerful music. You have a paradise here, for birds and butterflies and bees. And many other wild things too, I'm sure."

"Deer and rabbits and squirrels galore. It never was overgrown like this when Tabitha lived," he said half-apologetically. "Not at all. We kept the place neat as a pin, Tabitha and I. Loved every minute of the work, too. Then she died. Seemed like I died, too; only, I was still moving and breathing. Something happened to me the day she died: I lost interest in living and in everything else. I let the weeds and thorns and thistles, and whatever else came up, take the land over, as you can see for yourself. I couldn't stand to paint the house; it reminded me too painfully of her. For twenty-seven years, it has gone unpainted."

"Was your wife a Christian, Stu?" I asked quickly.

Cupping the tall glass between his hands, he answered without hesitation, "Truest Christian the world ever had."
"Then she's in Heaven, dear friend," I declared. "And that's why I came here to see you today. The Lord gave me orders to visit you."

Stu looked beyond the clearing again. I noticed the absence of his tobacco. He took a swallow of the refreshing tea. Then he looked at me. "Thanks for coming, Paul," he said hoarsely. "You can't imagine what your visit means to me. No one ever comes here. It gets more than lonely; sometimes it's almost intolerable. If it wasn't for Speck and the cats, I don't know if I could stand it."

"Where is Speck?" I asked quickly.

"Smart dog, Speck is. He's hiding. Hates the smell of that ointment. I don't know if a mower got his leg, or what. But, years ago, he was dropped off in the weeds for dead, or just left to die. I heard a whimper and followed the sound to where he lay. I brought him inside, gave him warm milk and bread, cleaned the blood and dirt from the stump of his missing leg then covered it generously with my homemade ointment and bandaged it carefully. I repeated the process daily until he was well and the stump was healed. He's never forgotten that smell though, and whenever I open the can to use it on whatever animal needs it, Speck disappears. He'll come around once the odor's gone." Stu laughed a deep, pleasant laugh.

I looked at this man who was deemed an eccentric and, suddenly, I realized that he was not at all like people thought him to be. Nor were the tales that were told about him true. He was a kind and gentle-mannered being: a human being just like I was; only, life had dealt him a severely hard blow and he hadn't known how to handle it, nor what to do with that which remained in life for him. He had, therefore, isolated himself from the public, and hidden and secluded himself and that which he possessed in the jungle of weeds and bushes and berry vines and tangled overgrowth. It had become his island; his haven of refuge from probing questions and prying busybodies.

"Stu," I asked, feeling I had to know, "were you a Christian -- ever? Were you born again, like your wife was?"

He studied me for a long while. Then he looked away. Sadly, he shook his head negatively.
"Well, I have good news for you," I said joyously. "The Lord sent me here. You can become a Christian now: right here on your front porch. I'm sure your wife prayed a lot for you and your salvation. You can answer those prayers by surrendering your heart and life to the Lord, Stu. Have you ever thought about it?"

Without a moment's hesitation he replied, "Many times, Paul. Many times. Only, I can't seem to forgive myself for not going down to the altar the night Tabitha went and gave her heart to the Lord. She wanted me to go with her, and I wanted to go. But I've always been shy and timid; it was this that kept me standing while she went -- alone. I've had nothing but regrets for not going. I wanted to be saved that night."

"He's still waiting for you, Stu," I said. "All these long years, the Lord's been waiting for you. Will you come to Him now? It's just the two of us, and there's no long aisle down which you must walk to the altar: that chair's a perfect altar if you really want to be saved. I know about being shy and timid, myself. But here it's just us. Do you want to be saved?"

"I do, Paul. I really do. The emptiness inside nearly kills me. Tabitha often told me that she was never alone, nor empty feeling on the inside, after Jesus came into her heart in saving grace and sanctifying power. Pray for me, Paul. . . ."

It was one of those wonderful times when praying was easy and when, in obedience to God, the heart of the hungry was speedily and gloriously satisfied. Never had I seen mortal man more blissfully happy. Stu's face looked shiny and radiant. The transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ radiated all over and through him. As I headed for home an hour later, I felt more like I was floating on a cloud than walking. It had been a busy day, full of surprises and trials and triumphs, but through it all, the Lord had helped me and strengthened me. I felt strong inside and bold as a lion through Christ.

I passed by an apartment complex and, having a few remaining tracts, I distributed them to whomever accepted and wanted one. By the time I gave the last one away, I felt light and wonderful, like the Lord was smiling upon me and that He was going to use the little silent messengers to bring honor and glory to His name. My minister was right: never had I experienced anything so richly rewarding nor soul strengthening. He was a wise minister,
indeed, I thought, knowing my need to enlarge my coast and to stretch the border of my "tent" to reach those without Christ. It was what I needed.

I prayed a lot between the day of the tract distribution and the Wednesday night church service. I had a great, deep longing to see Mrs. Withers saved. Sully and his gang members, too. And Mr. Bensor. Nothing was impossible with God nor too hard for Him, I knew. Nothing! I had planted the seed of the Gospel by taking it to where I felt the Lord had led and directed me; the rest was up to Him -- as I watered the planted seed with tears and prayers.

Our pastor's Bible study time was rich indeed. Never had the Book of Romans been so "unfolded" nor rightly divided as in and during these Wednesday night half-hour Bible study sessions. I felt I could scarcely wait from one week to the next to learn more.

It was during the testimony time that I heard a familiar voice proclaim victory and glory to Christ for so great salvation. I knew Stu was there! My heart jumped for joy. And when I recognized Mrs. Withers' request for deliverance from sin, I thought I wasn't going to be able to sit still. My heart was doing crazy little flip-flops of indescribable joy.

I guess the greatest surprise of all was when one of Sully's gang members came up to me a month later, after the Wednesday night service, and told me how the scripture which Sully had read from the tract before tearing it to pieces, had convicted him and gave him assurance that his grandmother's way of holy living was the right way to live. The only way.

"I'm thankful beyond any describing," he told me, "that you came. I'm even more grateful that you didn't cower in fear and run away when Sully tried to bully you and manhandle you. I watched you like a hawk; I wanted to see if you were for real, or if Sully's wickedness and his evil power was stronger and mightier than the God you told us about.

"Sully would have knocked you out cold," he continued. "He has power in his fist. Steel power, as it were. When I saw you stand, unflinchingly, with your face shining like you had a thousand watt light bulb inside, I was paralyzed with fear. Then when that dog took charge of Sully, I knew Grandma's God was there: I knew that He was real and that I must do something about my soul's destiny. I broke with Sully and the gang that day."
"What happened to the dog?" I asked, standing in awe of what I had just heard.

"It was the strangest thing I ever saw," the young man, Milt, declared. "As soon as you were out of sight, the dog disappeared. We didn't see him leave; he just seemed to vanish. But then, neither did any of us see him approaching when he made his sudden and right-on-time appearance. He seemed to have dropped down from . . . well, who knows where? I know one thing, Sully's hand and wrist will never again be the same. The wrist has permanent damage and the fingers won't close. That dog tamed Sully's wild nature and crumbled his pride. I expected beatings, and even worse, when I told him I was getting off his wagon. He shrugged his shoulders and said the choice was mine. It seemed unreal. But I knew, again, that Grandma's God was real and that He was at work in both my life and in Sully's. And here I am, a sinner saved by grace. Thanks for coming into that den of wickedness and thanks for standing," Milt said.

Tears rolled down my cheeks. Eloquent of speech? No. No! Slow of tongue? Maybe. " . . . But the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). God's power was boundless and unlimited. I knew: I had experienced it.