

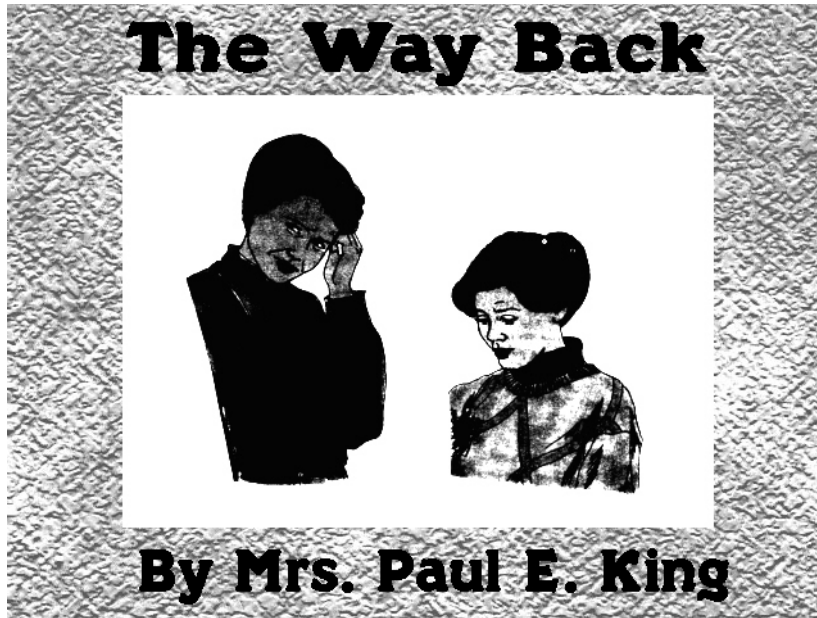
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Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

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The Sunday School Beacon
October 17, 1999



THE WAY BACK
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"Thanks for the advice, Pamela," I told my friend. "But it's not as easy as you think it is."

"But you're making it too hard, Sue," Pamela countered with tears in her eyes.

Shaking my head, I exclaimed sadly, "How I wish I could believe that. I want to. I really do want to. Only. . . ."

"I know. I know," Pamela cried in exasperation. "I've heard what you're going to say over and over again and again. But you've got to let God be truth and stop listening to the voice of the enemy of our souls. He's a liar; the Bible tells us so. The father of lies, to be exact. God's Word says, 'Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts' Malachi 3:7. This means you, my friend. You!"

I looked at Pamela, wanting to believe what she told me, only, well. . . .

Let me tell you my story; then you will see what I mean and understand my predicament better.

I was brought up in the church: a sound Holiness church. Regular and consistent church attendance was as normal as eating and sleeping were to me. It was as natural a thing as getting up in the morning was. I loved going to church and feeling and experiencing the sweet and mighty movings of God upon the services. The saints would shout and rejoice in the Lord and sinners were moved to repentance and believers were sanctified wholly. I've seen some wonderful miracles of God take place in my short lifetime.

Life for me was wonderful: it centered around the Lord, my church and my family. I stayed victorious all through high school and through the first year and a half of college. Then I met Randall Teasdale. He introduced me to his cousin, Tiffany. Tiffany was an outgoing redhead whose brain was as sharp and bright as her beautiful hair was red. She was the kind of girl who gave you a warm feeling from the moment you met her; nothing stuck up nor "offish" or "better-than-thou" about her. She was a down-to-earth girl with irresistible charm. She had a host of friends: I was one of them.

I felt honored to sit in the classroom with Tiffany. Unknowingly, we had chosen many of the same subjects and were, therefore, in the same classes, under the same professors and teachers. Tiff's brain was awesome, as the students phrase anything unusual and magnificent or wonderful. Her answers and replies to some of the questions given to us in class were nothing short of amazing and astounding. She had a brilliant mind.

Unlike many of our peers, Tiffany had what I thought was a solid and good religious background. She was devoted to her church and to its creeds and dogma, although I never bothered to look into what each believed or stood for in her church. I was completely and fully satisfied with my church and I was persuaded that what I had been taught from my earliest years was from God's inspired Word. Period!

I read my Bible; Tiffany read hers spasmodically. When I expressed my feelings and convictions about a given verse, Tiff merely smiled and generally gave out a meaningless-sounding, "Oh." No question-mark tone of voice and neither that of a shocked exclamation mark, just a simple and softly-quiet, "Oh."

This bothered me at times. I was hoping for a comment: a statement of confirmation that she believed the Bible meant what it stated and what was written on its sacred pages and that she would die for it, if necessary.

"Are you sure you're ready for Heaven?" I asked her one morning, when she failed to read her Bible for the sixth consecutive day. We used to read it at the same time due to our class schedules.

Smiling, like I had asked her did she want an ice cream soda or some such thing, she replied softy, "Of course I am, Susie dear. Some of us just don't believe -- or feel -- we have to do everything you do to get into Heaven. I've been baptized and catechized and I'm as ready for Heaven as I can possibly be."

"Oh, Tiffany," I cried, "that's not the way to Heaven. Jesus said you must be born again. Of God."

Smiling again, she replied, "See what I mean, dear Sue? Your beliefs and mine are different. I've done what I believe I must do to get into Heaven. This is what my church teaches and believes and practices. It's far easier than your way of living and doing. Every day you go through the same thing: read your Bible, pray, and meditate on the scripture. It's a ritual, Sue. I only read the Bible because you did it."

"Oh, no, Tiffany. No! It's not a ritual," I exclaimed tearfully. "God's Word is our 'map' on what to do and how to live. It's. . . ."

"I like my church's way better," Tiffany cut in. "It's far easier and less binding or demanding than the way you believe, Sue. No offense meant; just a candidly-frank statement from me to a very dear friend."

I was too shocked to say more and, too, Tiffany left the room when she finished speaking.

Almost before I realized it, I was rationalizing Tiff's words and, too, her sweet life. She was a gentle, caring and kind young woman who never ran around with the wild crowd. Never. Tiffany chose her friends carefully and wisely, like some others of us did. Was Tiffany's upbringing right or was it mine? Tiffany's? Mine?

Right then and there, I should have pled the blood of my Savior, rebuked the adversary of my soul in Jesus' name and purged the questions from my mind by clinging to the precious Word of God. But I didn't. Instead, I decided that maybe, just maybe, since God was a God of love and mercy, that I was making everything harder on myself than He expected of me. That's when and where the trouble began.

I began letting down a little here, a little there. Nothing too noticeable for others to see, mind you; but all things that affected me: my inner life, I mean -- not as much Bible reading, less time spent alone with God in prayer, and my devotional books neglected entirely. These were the "foxes" that got me into spiritual trouble. Song of Solomon 2:15.

I'll never forget the day Mom called to tell me that my favorite cousin was diagnosed with leukemia. "Not Jill!" I cried into the mouthpiece of the phone, feeling like I was going to pass out from the shock.

"Yes, Sue, Jill. She's dying. According to the doctors, she has less than six weeks to live. She's hoping you'll be able to get home to see her."

"Mom," I cried, sobbing "there must be a mistake. Jill's too young to die. We're almost the same age. She can't die. She can't!"

"Death disregards age, honey. Have you forgotten?" Mother asked, sadly.

"But Mother," I sobbed, "not Jill. I know she's not been feeling well for some time, but . . . well. . . ."

"And this has been the reason for her extreme fatigue and tiredness all along, Sue. The all-important thing is that Jill's victory is as genuine and as bright and fresh and real today as the night she got converted and then, a few days later, was sanctified wholly. She has on the robe of righteousness, Sue: she's ready to meet her God, washed in the blood of Calvary's Lamb and cleansed and made holy through the purging power of the blessed Holy Ghost."

"I know this, Mother. But Jill's too young to die. I love her," I replied, still sobbing.

"God's ways are not our ways, Sue. He knows what He's doing and why He's permitted this. Nothing comes as a surprise to our All-wise God. Nothing. When do you think you can come home, Lord willing? She really wants to see you."

With my brain reeling and my body trembling I said, "I'll be home next week, God willing. Tell Jill I'll be there."

And thus began a week I'll never forget. I packed all my belongings. Everything. I told my teachers and my friends, as well as the president of the college, that I was leaving and wouldn't be returning. They pled with me to "think things over and not do anything so drastic," stating that I could have a leave of absence for a few weeks to be with Jill, et cetera, et cetera.

My mind was made up, however. I could finish my education in a college near home: a college to which I could drive and live at home and attend the church in which I had gotten saved and been sanctified.

My folks were surprised but overjoyed when I arrived home, bag, baggage and all, and informed them of my decision. Before unpacking even, I drove over to see Jill. I was shocked when I saw her; horrified when I realized how weak she was and how frail and fragile looking.

We hugged. I cried. Jill brushed my tears away with her hand, saying consolingly, "Oh Sue, don't cry over my condition. This isn't the end of all things for me. Truth of the matter is, it's soon going to be the very beginning! Don't you remember how often you and I used to talk about Heaven and wonder what it was really going to be like? Well, my dear sweet cousin, I'll

soon know. I only wish, after I arrive and have seen it with my very own eyes and have seen Jesus, that I could somehow let you know what I'm seeing and doing and just how beautiful it really is. But this won't be possible, so you'll just have to wait until Jesus calls you Home and then you'll see for yourself. Oh Sue," Jill cried, "I'm ever so thankful that I know my sins are all covered by Jesus' precious blood and that my heart has been cleansed from all inbred sin and that I'm ready for Heaven. Isn't this wonderful! Death will soon be swallowed up in victory for me, through Christ."

Jill's face was radiant with Heavens light and glory. I felt like she might step over the slender thread of life any moment and enter into the Heavenly City. Making no reply, I hugged her tightly then ran from the room, my shoulders heaving with great sobs.

Pamela met me at the door when I knocked, after leaving Jill. "Sue!" she exclaimed upon seeing me. "When did you get home? I didn't know you were coming" She grabbed me and hugged me, saying, "It's so good to see you. How long will you be home this time, Lord willing?"

"I'm back to stay, Pam. Jill's dying and I . . . I need help."

I unloaded on Pamela then. Everything. I told her about the "little foxes," which are not in any way little but "spoil" and destroy the "spiritual" vines. That's when my friend reminded me of Malachi's promise in 3:7, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts."

Looking at her now, the marvelous truth of the scriptural passage suddenly sank into my heart, way down to its inmost and deepest depth. "Pam," I cried. "I see it! I see it! It's true: every word of it is true. Oh, Pamela, there's hope for me. Yes, for even me!"

Dropping to my knees beside my friend, I lifted my hands heavenward, crying out, "I return. I return, Lord Jesus. Forgive me and take me back into Thy fold. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." With a broken heart, I repented thoroughly.

In an instant's time the work was done: I was born again. Like a refreshing, gentle rain, God's forgiveness washed over, in and through my soul. My heart was at peace with my God and my soul found its rest. Oh, what joy!

Thanking the Lord for what He had done, I immediately began praying for God to purge and cleanse my heart of the carnal nature, knowing how subtle, shrewd and cunning was the old man of sin. Nor was I denied, for God who saw and knew my heart and its desire and longing to be filled completely, wholly and entirely, with His Holy Spirit, sent the fire of Pentecost and purged out the awful nature of sin. Wave after wave of glory and Divine Love flooded my soul. My entire being was aloft on the sea of glory and of blessing.

Pamela was shouting; I was crying for holy joy. Through obedience and faith in God's Word, I found my way back and, like Jill, I was now ready for Heaven.

THE END