

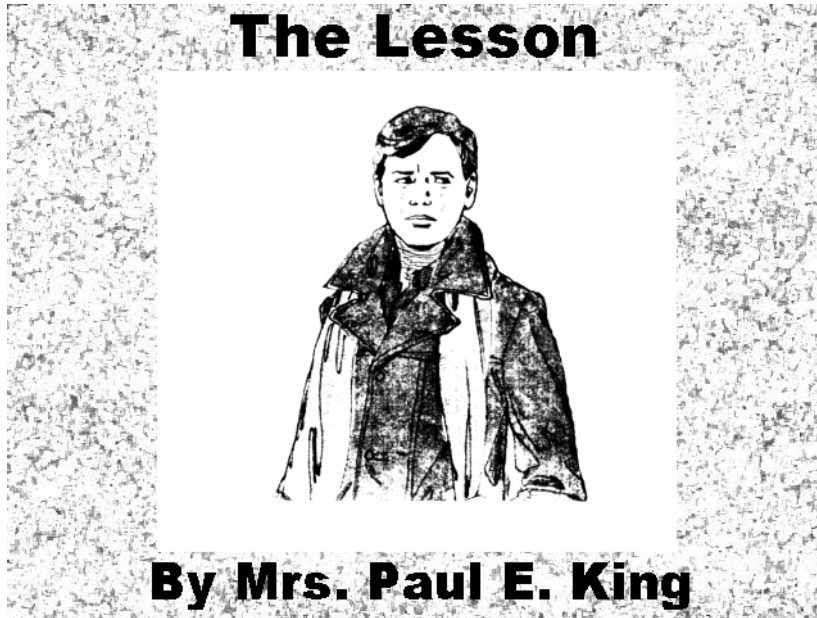
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THE LESSON
By Mrs. Paul E. King

I grabbed my coat and hat from the peg inside the closet off the kitchen and tried, unsuccessfully, to escape to the yard before being seen.

"Please!" Russ' voice pleaded behind me. "Take me with you, Johnathan."

Turning, I replied in what was little more than a strained, hoarse whisper, "Not this time, Russ. I . . . I want to . . . be alone."

"May I go? Please?" It was ten-year-old Mary Lou.

"Not today, Sis," I answered with a tremor in my voice as I slipped quickly and quietly outside.

The day was cold. A broody, overcast, gray sky added only more grief and sorrow to my aching breaking heart as I cut across the meadow and hurried to the back forty where the edge of the field joined and hugged the mountain, into which I escaped.

I walked briskly my mind plaguing me with questions for which I seemed to have no answers. My heart felt like a shattered, broken thing that was crushing the very life out of me. My body was numb with shock and my once-bright and secure world seemed suddenly to have been turned into an abyss of sorrow and intense heartache.

The mountain was ablaze with beauty. God had splashed His flamboyant colors everywhere. It was as though He was giving an added bonus of loving kindness and goodness before the icy-cold advent of winter. Ordinarily, I would have paused and lingered awhile as I drank in the glory and beauty of the brilliant colors above me and at my feet. Today, however pausing was painful and lingering would have been even more so.

I pushed ahead, feeling broken and crushed, wanting to cry but unable to do so. I needed the tears; they could have, and would have released at least to some degree, the hurting pain and deep sorrow of my heart.

"Please," I cried heavenward, "help me, dear God. I don't see how I can live without Grandpa."

My chest felt tight, constricted with grief. It couldn't be. It couldn't! Grandpa was alive -- so very much alive! -- less than three hours ago. And now. . . . Oh, it couldn't be!

"Grandpa!" I cried aloud. "O Grandpa!"

Crows, hearing my cry of distress and desperation, suddenly ceased their loud, raucous cawing from their tree perches high above me.

"Grandpa. O Grandpa!" I cried aloud again, as I continued moving upward, deeper into the beautiful mountain.

I found the tree quickly and easily: the one where I experienced my first-ever legal hunt. Grandpa helped me to build the stand up in its boughs. How proudly I wore the hunting coat displaying my first ever hunting license that rode between my shoulder blades. It was a thrill beyond any describing, made even more so because Grandpa had said I was "ready for the license; not only because you are twelve, Johnathan, but because you have passed the test." Grandpa's test, that is.

I didn't receive a diploma of parchment, nor any such thing, by "passing the test," but my entire being soared with wings of triumph and achievement and accomplishment at hearing Grandpa's words. In my heart, I knew I was ready: my wonderful teacher had said so. He was a man of truth and integrity: a God-fearing man who believed in and practiced and lived the life of Holiness and righteous living and carried this over in his hunting habits and principals by obeying the laws and abiding by the rules.

I sat down by the trunk of the tree and closed my eyes, trying desperately to "will" Grandpa to be sitting beside me, like always. But try as I may, all I could see was Doctor Mays standing over him, shaking his head sadly and saying, "He's gone. His heart just gave out on him." Dr. Mays lost his closest friend. Tears swam in his eyes.

I opened my eyes now and blinked several times, trying to erase the scene from my mind. It didn't work: the undertaker's visit to our house was even more real than Doctor Mays' words were. I longed to ride inside the vehicle with Grandpa, to hold his hand, to make him breathe again, knowing the utter futility and impossibility of the latter.

Grandpa and Grandma had come to live with us when Grandma's health problems accelerated to the point where help was needed. She died less than two years after becoming a daily part of our family. Grandpa allayed his loneliness and grief over her absence by staying busy around our house and Dad's work shop. Most of all, though, he became a personal tutor to Russ and me. Mary Lou, too; only Mary Lou didn't do "man things." He read

to her and helped her with arithmetic and such like things. But he instructed and taught my brother and me ever so many important and invaluable lessons, both spiritual and moral. Also manual.

I drew my knees up beneath my chin now, my thoughts going back to those first hunting lessons by my kind but no-nonsense instructor. What a teacher he was! What a living example! He was a demanding but loving taskmaster quick to point out deficiencies but equally quick to praise when a thing was done right and done well. Always first on his teaching schedule in hunting, safety was top priority. Many times Russ and I fell short of his requirements and demands. Little wonder then at my elation, joy and jubilation when he patted me on the shoulder and said that I had "passed the test."

Grandpa's first hunting lessons for Russ and me were with "pretend" guns -- sticks that simulated the real weapons. With these, we "hunted" for rabbits, squirrels and ring-neck pheasants in briar thickets, fields, woods and scrub patches, demonstrating and practicing Grandpa's teaching lessons on safety as carefully and dutifully as if we were using one of his for-real guns. An infraction of the law of safety meant the confiscation of our "weapon," a sad frown from Grandpa and a strongly reinforced verbal teaching-lecturing lesson from the lips of the man we respected and loved deeply and dearly, plus the embarrassment of walking with no stick while the other "hunted" and flaunted his.

It was a good lesson to learn early: it helped me wondrously in my spiritual life, as well, teaching me the "salty" lessons of God's "Thou shalt" and His "Thou shalt nots." Oh, Grandpa was a wise man. So very wise and knowledgeable in ever so many ways.

I sat in numbed silence, leaning my back against the tree and brooding over my great loss, remembering how I had learned the lesson of patience from my grandfather by his stalking techniques. This he carried over into the spiritual life, stating and demonstrating that it is "they that wait upon the Lord" who have their strength renewed. Also, "The race is not to the swift. . . ."

"Some things take time, Johnathan," he would say. "Lots of time. 'Let patience have her perfect work.' And always, in everything, be thankful."

I groaned inwardly wondering who would ever be able to help me like Grandpa had; who would be able to take his place. And suddenly I realized there would be no one. Absolutely no one.

"When you have no one to turn to, Johnathan," Grandpa's voice reached back to me, "go to your knees. You have a sure refuge there. You will always find the Lord waiting for you. Go to your knees, Johnathan. Your knees. There you can unleash what's bothering you. He doesn't expect you to carry burdens alone, my boy. He's waiting to help you. To your knees, dear boy. To your knees. And never forget to be thankful. Look for the many overlooked blessings. They're there. But you must look for them sometimes. It's so easy to bypass them. Find them, Johnathan, and then thank God for them. In all things -- every test and trial, every heartache and sorrow -- be thankful, and praise the Lord simply because He has promised to bring you out more than a conqueror."

"Oh Grandpa!" I cried now, "I can't find it in me to praise God for taking you away. I can't. I hurt so."

"To your knees, Johnathan." His voice seemed to call back to me, as he so often instructed Russ and me when we were going through a hard place.

Quickly I changed my position and was on my knees. Kneeling thus, the fountain of the deep pent-up emotional well broke and tears ran down my cheeks like streams. I sobbed and cried until my tears seemed spent. Still kneeling I got silent before the Lord.

"Lean on Me, dear child."

I lifted my head and looked upward. The Voice was unmistakable. I recognized it immediately. It was soft and gentle and comfortingly sweet.

"I will be your Teacher, Instructor and Guide if you will allow Me to do so. But you must trust Me to do it in a way that is best for you. You will not always understand the why of My lessons, child; but rest assured that everything I do will be only for your best: your good."

"Oh, Lord," I cried, feeling so humbled, "I want You to help me. Please! Yes. Yes, I want You to teach me and guide and instruct me. Grandpas gone. . . ."

"I know, Johnathan. Sometimes one can cling too hard and depend too strongly on mortal man."

I suddenly realized the significance and the meaning of the words. Again, tears flowed freely and copiously. It was time for me to let go of my dependence upon the arm of flesh and by faith and complete trust, to look and lean upon the One who was the Alpha and the Omega; the All-wise, Almighty God.

Raising my arms heavenward, I cried aloud, "Here I am, dear Lord. From this moment on, Thou are my Teacher and my Guide -- my Everything."

Something happened inside my heart as I said it. It was as though the Lord poured a healing ointment or oil into every hurting part of me and my body. My heart was quieted and comforted. I was happy for Grandpa, knowing that his Homegoing was a time of rejoicing for him.

Praises to God poured from my lips as I visualized my beloved grandparent shouting and rejoicing safe inside the Holy City, reunited with his companion of many years.

Remembering his admonition to ever be thankful, I began thanking the Lord for blessing me with this wonderful man who had taught me by word and example that always, and under any and all circumstances, it paid to follow the Lord and His leadings.

And then, as clearly as daylight, one of Grandpa's mentioned "overlooked" blessings came before me. Strange that I hadn't seen it as such until this very moment, but I hadn't. Maybe it was because of my deep grief or maybe it was that I had been over looking the One and only One who knew how to mend broken hearts and put shattered pieces together again. At any rate, I lifted my eyes upward and thanked God for the privilege and honor of knowing that I would always have Him as my Heavenly Guide and Divine Instructor.

Earth's human prop and strength had to be removed so that I might grow and mature the better in spiritual things. It was time for me to learn this lesson, sad though it was. The time had arrived, and come, for me to launch out by faith in a total reliance upon and utter trust in the One who is "mighty to save and strong to deliver."

With inexpressible peace in my heart, I thanked God for His All-wise way of doing things and for the lesson I had learned. My heart leaped for joy knowing that my Heavenly Instructor would be mine forever and that nothing could separate us. No, not even death.

Opening my eyes, I saw the panorama of beauty all around; smelled, too, the fresh-clean fragrance of the woods and, suddenly my heart soared as on ease wings, knowing that my faith was now fast-anchored in God and Him alone.

Getting to my feet, I started for home. Russ needed me. I could scarcely wait to tell him about the lesson I had learned on my knees from my Heavenly Teacher.

THE END