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REJOICE ALWAYS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Sally brushed the tears from her cheeks and made a hasty exit from the church, leaving Sandi, Kandra and Terry trailing behind her to the parking lot and the car.

If only it were as easy as her pastor made it sound in his preaching, she thought as she recalled the message on praising. True, there had been a

time when it was easy: most of her life, in fact, praising seemed to be second nature to Dick and her. But now, with Dick lying in a hospital bed in a cast and the house payment due within six days and no weekly paycheck coming in, things looked bleak indeed.

Her praises seemed to have taken wings since she received the call to come to the hospital that Wednesday morning more than two weeks ago, shortly after Dick had left for work. The children had departed for school less than an hour before the frightening call came. Without thinking to call the school and notify them of the call and of her departure, she hurried to the hospital, her body tense and her heart fearful, not knowing what to expect when she arrived.

"Hey Mom, wait up." It was Terry. "You're going like a steam roller," the fourteen-year-old added as he fell in step beside her.

Smiling faintly, Sally slowed her pace and glanced behind her to make sure that Sandi and Kandra were following. "I'm sorry, children," she said quietly. "It's just that . . . well. . . ."

"I know, Mom," Terry said consolingly. "It's hard on you, having Dad in the hospital. But it's hard on us, too. The girls and I feel like we hardly know you anymore."

Sally gasped and stood dead still. "Oh, Terry," she cried, "I'm sorry."

"So are we," Terry said. "We . . . well, we . . . we never saw you like this before and, Mom, it scares us."

Again Sally gasped.

"You've always told us to trust God," Kandra said as she and Sandi joined their brother.

"What happened to you, Mother? God hasn't changed, has He? Why are you so withdrawn and scared? We always felt we had a rock in you and Dad."

Sally felt like she was suffocating, like she couldn't get her breath.

"We know this is hard on you, Mother," Kandra continued. "But it's in the dark times when our faith and trust in God shines through the brightest. That's what Daddy and you always told us. Remember? I believe this, Mother, with all my heart. This morning, in my Bible reading and private prayer time, I felt the reassuring hand of God and the whisper of the Holy Spirit that He has everything under control."

"I got a promise to that effect too," Terry added reassuringly. "Dad's going to be all right, Mom. It's going to take time, but he's going to be all right."

Getting into the car, Sally sobbed over the steering wheel. "I'm sorry, children," she said again, as soon as she could speak without crying. "You're right: God hasn't changed, and faith does shine brightest in the dark times, in the valleys of our life. Forgive me for being a gloom bringer instead of a praiser. And thanks much for shaking me awake by what you said."

"We love you, Mother," Sandi said, as she wiggled her ten-year-old body over closer to her mother's side and gave her a hug.

Drying her tears, Sally said, "What a blessing the three of you are! Thanks for the verbal shake-up: I needed it. I've been worrying instead of trusting; doubting, I guess, instead of believing and praising.

I'm sorry. Well, let's get home and take care of that chicken that's waiting in the oven for us. Maybe your father would enjoy a chicken sandwich when we visit him in the hospital this afternoon, Lord willing."

"May I make it for him, Mother? Please?" Sandi asked. "He told me he can hardly wait until he's home again and can eat your good cooking. I know what he likes on his sandwiches."

"Indeed you may," Sally replied, as she drove out of the parking lot. With God's help, she would obey the beautiful scriptural injunction to, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

Tying an apron around her waist, she removed the fragrant-smelling stuffed chicken from the oven soon after arriving home.

The girls tossed the salad and set the table. Terry filled the glasses with ice water. And the tempter . . .? Sally knew where he was and what he was doing! Ah, yes, she did: he was very near, trying to fill her heart and mind with doubts and gloom.

Immediately, she began to praise the Lord.

She had so many things for which to be thankful: the Lord had spared Dick's life when the pickup truck slammed into his car on the icy road that morning; and the prognosis was good and wonderful, really, for her husband's full and complete recovery. It would take time, to be sure, but her beloved was still among the living even though the car was beyond repairing and fixing.

"I'm starved," Terry remarked, as he hovered over the tempting chicken which his mother was now cutting and removing the stuffing from.

"I'm thankful," Sally replied, smiling.

"Thankful that I'm starved!" Terry teased.

"Yes, I am, Son. I just realized what a blessing it is to have hungry children. Take Byron, for instance.

"He's abnormal, Mom," Terry stated quickly.

"That's because he's in poor health," Sally countered softly. "This is why I said I'm thankful that you are hungry; that you're 'starved,' as you phrased it.

You're hungry because you're healthy and are growing and you're normal. Your body needs are 'expanding' as you grow and mature: this is normal, Terry. So I'm praising and thanking the Lord for this."

Laughing his soft, musical sounding laughter, Terry declared stoutly, "If hunger is the measuring stick for normalcy, I'm extremely and disgustingly normal, Mom. Especially right now."

Terry's statement unleashed pent-up emotions in Kandra and Sandi, who laughed until tears stood in their eyes.

"You're hilarious!" Kandra exclaimed to her brother as he picked up a piece of celery and began chewing on it.

"Think so?" Terry quipped, adding, "That's a pretty nice compliment, Sis. Thanks. I guess the past few weeks have affected us all. We need to have more laughter. Before this happened to Dad, we used to laugh a lot. I loved our meal times, when we all shared a part of our day and ourselves with each other. I miss this."

"I've been neglecting a lot of things, my dears," Sally admitted sadly; "but we can always pick up what we neglected to do and begin over again, which is what I'm going to do. After all, worry doesn't change a thing. It fosters doubt and darkness and gloomy thoughts, with a dismal outlook on everything."

"And that makes everybody unhappy," Sandi stated. "I don't like to be around a gloomy person, Mother. It's almost as if he feels God has forgotten that He made us."

"He wants His children to be joyful," Sally said, as they all sat down to eat.

In the days that followed, Sally was amazed at how unruffled and untroubled her spirit was as she praised the Lord and thanked Him for each and every thing that happened and came into her life. Whenever worry tried to sneak back into a corner of her being, she chased it away with a verse of praise and thanksgiving from the Bible. What a blessed deterrent was God's Word for worry and doubt! she thought, with a smile on her face.

Her visits to her husband became spiritual uplifts to each of them.

"You're a marvelous wife," Dick complimented as she smoothed his bed sheet one day. "I'm thankful you're not a complainer, Sally. I never could stand a complaining, whining woman. I know you're concerned about the house payment. . . ."

"I put it all in God's hands, my dear. Everything is placed there -- in His hands. By His help and grace, I mean to never take back anything that I put into the safekeeping of those precious Hands, Dick. The money will be here

for the payment, even though I don't know where it's coming from. But I believe God."

Taking his wife's hand, Dick said, "I know where it's going to come from, my dear."

Sally's eyes were bright with expectation and anticipation. "Where?" she cried, squeezing her husband's hands and searching his face with her uplifted eyes.

Dick smiled and returned the pressure on her small hands. "I've been doing a lot of praying, Sally, and thinking, too. Lying on one's back like I am, one has a lot of time to think and to pray. I'm doing a lot of each. Last night I was awakened out of sleep and the Lord brought to my mind the money I had put into a savings account before I got out of the Marines. I had forgotten about this. It wasn't a great amount, but with what interest it has accrued it should help us now, in our time of need."

"Dick, how wonderful! You never mentioned this to me before."

"That's because I had forgotten about it. Completely. And too, that was before I ever knew you, Sally. Dad and Mom took care of making the deposits.

I mailed home to them for putting into my account."

"Oh, honey, that's wonderful. Our children had to jolt me out of my worrying and back to the fact that God hadn't forgotten nor forsaken us in this time of crisis."

"So you were worried, too."

"You can't imagine how worried. And, Dick, I wept when the children reminded me how we had taught them to trust God in even the bad times. Yes, especially in the dark times. I was brought up short when Terry said it scared him to see the way I was grieving and worrying. He said they never saw me like this before; that always, we had trusted completely in God, no matter what the circumstance.

"I asked the Lord's forgiveness, then began to quote scripture verses and praise Him each time. Satan presented his worry packet to me. Honey,

it's changed everything for me, since I switched from worry to praise and thanksgiving. My faith in God has soared since then. This remarkable answer to prayer doesn't surprise me; I've been expecting it.

"Our friends have been wonderful too. God has used them to keep me encouraged in His daily care for us. In yesterday's mail, I found two envelopes with only my name and full address on each; no return name or address on either, and nothing inside except the fifty dollar bill in one and two twenties in the other, with a brief note saying, 'In Jesus' name, with Christian love.'

"After prayer meeting last night, as the children and I were getting into the car, we found four bags full of groceries. God has, indeed, supplied our each and every need, Dick. Praise changes things. The promises of our Lord never fail. They are reliable."

"And sure," Dick added, with happy tears in his eyes.

"Aside from your pain and the cumbersomeness of that cast, I praise the Lord for this; my faith in God has been strengthened immeasurably. I mean to praise Him from here on out instead of worrying and doubting. Without any doubt, the Lord cares for His own. I rejoice in Him."

Between tears and a choking voice, Dick quoted, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

"Amen," came Sally's positive affirmation.

THE END