

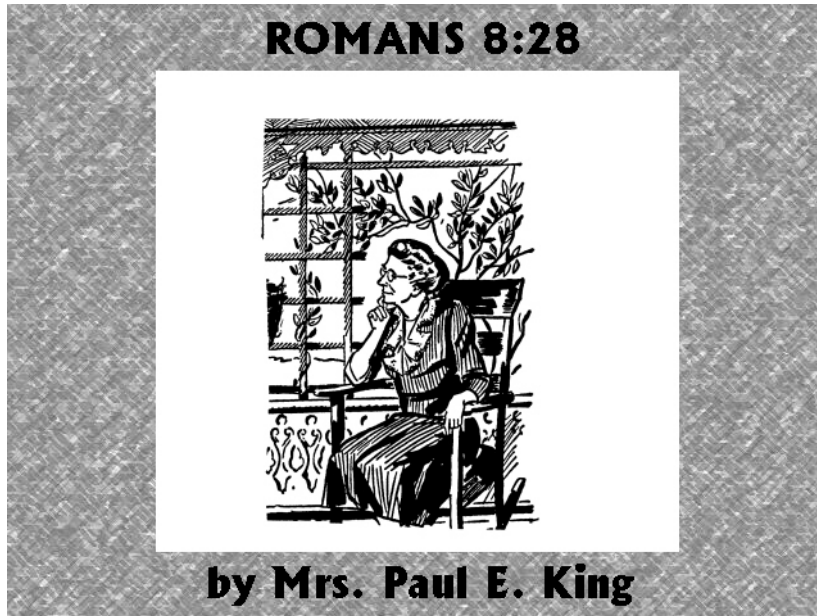
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ROMANS 8:28
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Amanda Strawbridge opened her eyes and listened. Through the partially opened window she heard the song of the robin singing from his perch in the sugar maple not far away. Four-thirty she mused silently as she struggled to get out of bed. Resisting and rebelling with aches in her muscles and pain in her joints, her body seemed to defy her efforts to be natural; to be the once-agile and efficient woman she'd been.

"The joy of the Lord is your strength," she quoted aloud from Nehemiah 8:10 as she sat on the edge of the bed before getting to her feet.

Four-thirty in the morning. Her singer was right on time with his opening choruses of praise, she thought silently as she looked at the large numerals on the nearby clock.

Stiff and aching, she made the bed, then picked up her Bible and sat down in a chair to read. Had Glenn been here, he'd have tried to coax her back to bed, saying she had all day to do what she desired and what pleased her. The children, too, would have chided her gently for her early morning rising, now that she was old and life's once-busy demands were no longer expected of her. But her pattern had long ago been established: her time alone with God was one of the constants of her life.

The children had grown and married and established homes of their own, some far away, others nearby. Glenn, her companion and sweetheart of fifty-six years, had taken his departure to the glory world three summers ago and, amid all the changes and grief God, through her early morning quiet with Him, had sustained her and met her every need and kept her spirit quietly joyful and content. The whippoorwills lulled her to sleep at night, singing lustily and heartily from a nearby forest, and the robins, song sparrows and killdeer roused her from her bed in the morning. She felt she was surrounded by a great choir of some of her Heavenly Father's choicest melody makers.

At thought of the killdeer, Amanda's heart saddened. Only two hours ago, she had been awakened by the intensely pathetic cry of the mother bird. It was a sad cry, a beckoning-home call. It tore at her woman's heart. She understood the longing and the feeling of the killdeer she herself was a mother, wasn't she?

Amanda had watched the "family" from the day the nest was made. Rather, when the lovely bird laid her first egg on the stones near the garage in her driveway. Each day thereafter, another egg appeared until there were six.

It seemed strange to Amanda that the bird should choose stones as her nesting site rather than the softer building materials of grasses, leaves and such. But such was not the case. The Master Creator had built within her the

proper way to have her nest and to hatch her young and, for her, it was stones and earth. True, the rays of the sun kept the eggs warm when and if she left the nest. But what discomfort to the nest sitter! Amanda often thought, feeling sorry for her patient, feathered friend, who seemed not to mind her presence as she worked in the nearby flower beds. It seemed as if the killdeer knew she was harmless and that she enjoyed her company and presence.

Amanda was ecstatic when the eggs hatched. From the day the first egg hatched and baby killdeer discovered the big, wide wonderful world that was its own, the yard became Amanda's theater. What a runner Baby was! God had created it thus at birth. And what a voracious appetite too! Baby found all that was needed, foodwise, in the yard on Amanda's many plants and bushes. What an insect eater the little runner was, and what a busy pair were the parent birds when six pairs of legs ran in all directions for food!

Day after day Amanda watched as mother and father took the hungry brood to a nearby soybean field and gave them free run of the lush green "pasture" of bugs and insets and night after night, sitting on her porch, Amanda saw the family return, not to what had been their nest of stones but to the far corner of her lawn where, in a softly plaintive way the "children" were called in by the parents' insistent "Killdeer, killdeer" call and bedded down for the night.

After days of watching six pairs of legs speed away in the easy morning, dew-laden hours and the trying-out of wings to expedite matters to the soybean field and beyond, it wasn't long until four pairs of legs, only, returned to the far corner of the lawn, causing consternation and anxiety for the mother bird, whose calls, though pleading and imploring were totally unheeded and ignored. Thus it had gone, until there were only two "chicks" left to call home, and last night's sad, plaintive, pleading call was the final of the brood, Amanda knew.

Tears filled the woman's eyes now, as hearing the call from the far corner of the yard, and out in the soybean field, Amanda knew that each lovely bird was now grown and capable of managing on its own. But oh, the grief and pain she felt and sensed as she recalled the early morning call and cry of the mother bird for her youngest and last remaining one to "Come home to the nest."

Amanda knew the feeling. She empathized with her feathered friend. The "empty nest" could be so painful; the unanswered suppertime, bedtime call extremely sad and tearful, though the growing-up years were as natural and as normal as was eating and breathing.

At thought of the killdeers unanswered call, Amanda's thoughts went to Hollie Adamson, whose once steadfast faith and instant obedience to the Spirit's slightest whisper, seemed to have died a slow death since her mother's passing less than four months ago.

"Hollie! Oh, Hollie!" Amanda exclaimed aloud as tears flowed from her eyes and ran down her cheeks, settling, finally, on the pages of her opened Bible.

"Guide her, Holy Spirit. Please, guide her," Amanda implored. "May she once again find her solace and her source of strength and consolation in Thee. Heal her, until she shall once again give instant obedience to Thy voice and Thy entreaties to, 'come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give thee rest.'"

Hollie was like a shining star in the church. Her influence upon the young people was powerful and mighty. Before her mother's untimely death, she was a great soul winner. Things changed, however, when her mother died. She had prayed so earnestly for her mother's healing and had expected a miracle that never happened. When the cancer won the battle in her beloved parent's body, Hollie was left in a state of shock. She seemed to have locked herself up in a world of sadness and sorrow and grief saying little and mingling less and less with those who loved her and wanted to help her. Even the God-anointed preaching and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church services, seemed not to reach through to her inner being.

Amanda felt tears slide down her cheeks. Her heart went out in love and pity for Hollie, who seemed to have forgotten the beautiful and comforting Scripture, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Never had she seen Hollie in such a state before.

A heavy burden sealed down upon Amanda for Hollie. Remembering that the girl no longer had a mother's daily, freshly-anointed prayers going up to God's throne for her, Amanda felt it was her responsibility to carry on in behalf of the saintly, now deceased Mrs. Adamson. True, the woman's

prayers of the past were, all of them, still doing their powerful and mighty ongoing work; but what better work could she, Amanda Strawbridge, be doing than to take on yet another one of God's needy ones and, on her knees, intercede, implore and plead until the answer came?

Getting a pen, and the ledger in which all of her prayer list was written, Amanda wrote Hollie's name at the very top, making a notation of the month, date and year. Hollie's name was in the ledger, to be sure; but this day Hollie would take top priority: God had a very specific and definite reason for placing the burden so heavily upon her heart, Amanda knew. Yes, there was a reason, and nothing in the world was more wonderfully rewarding than to pray and pray and wait upon God until one had prayed through and touched Heaven and had the blessed assurance that the answer was on the way.

It came as no surprise to Amanda, two days later, to find Hollie at her door.

"Come in, dear child, come in," Amanda cried as, opening the door, she swept Hollie into her arms. "I've been expecting you," she added, holding the girl at arms' length and looking full into her face. "God has answered my prayers."

"Indeed He has!" Hollie exclaimed with a radiant smile upon her face.

"Sit down," Amanda said, leading the way into the kitchen, where she poured milk into two glasses and pushed a plate of still-warm cinnamon rolls before Hollie, saying, "I was sure you'd come. These are your favorites, as I recall."

"Oh, Mrs. Strawbridge," Hollie cried, "how kind and sweet of you! Yes, they are my very favorite thing. Thank you. Now, I must tell you what happened to me. . . ."

"Shall we offer grace first?" Amanda said. "I can scarcely wait to hear what you have to tell me."

"Oh, yes, by all means," came the quick reply. Biting into the cinnamon roll shortly afterwards, Hollie said, "God is so wonderful, Mrs. Strawbridge, and He uses the simplest kind of things sometimes to speak to our heart. Early this morning -- very early, in fact -- I was awakened by the sad cry of a

mother bird: it was the killdeer that hatched out a clutch of eggs in the corner of the field next to our backyard. She had six beautiful babies. We all watched them as they were growing up. One by one, they fended for themselves and took off on their own until the mother bird had only one remaining with her. For several nights I noticed it took her longer and longer to call the once little bird back to the resting place with her. Last night it must have taken off for good.

"I was awakened this morning by the mother's sad call and I realized what had happened and taken place. I began to cry, out of pity and sadness for the lonely parent, and in that very moment, I felt the presence of the Lord. He came so near, Mrs. Strawbridge; I felt I could touch Him."

Tears were running down Hollie's cheeks. Amanda was silently praising the Lord.

Brokenly, Hollie continued. "The Lord let me know, as I listened to that lonely killdeer that just as she was calling her now-grown-up baby so He had been trying to get through to my heart, calling me to come to Him for comfort in my great sorrow and deep grief wanting to 'bed' my soul down in His green pasture of peace and solace and to give me the joy oil of His healing. I came, Mrs. Strawbridge. Dropping on my knees in front of the open window, I cast all my care and my sorrow upon Jesus. Oh, how glorious it's been since three o'clock this morning! I'll never understand the reason for Mother's death, perhaps, but I know that He can and does comfort the broken-hearted and that He knows the reason for allowing her to die so young. My soul is comforted. Oh, it's wonderful! Wonderful! I feel like I've come out of a long, dark tunnel. His presence is so real. He was with me all the time."

Amanda, thanking God silently for the killdeer's call, reached across the table and took both of Hollie's hands in hers, saying softly, "Nothing but sin in the heart and life can separate us from the love of God, dear child. Never forget this.

"The Apostle Paul stated it so beautifully in Romans 8:38-39 when he wrote,

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

"Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shaft be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Smiling through her joyful tears, Hollie remarked, "It's true, Mrs. Strawbridge, and the light at the end of my sorrowful and dark tunnel is now wondrously bright with His presence. I feel stronger, too: in my soul."

Amanda said a softly heartfelt, "Praise the Lord," knowing it was the storms that planted the roots of the trees more firmly and fixedly into the deeps of the earth and gave them depth. Hollie's roots were going deeper -- in faith and the love of God. Today, she could write, "Prayer answered," beside Hollie's name in her ledger. How blessed it was to have a part in God's kingdom work, she thought, as she refilled Hollie's glass with more milk.

THE END