

**MR. McLAIN
and
SISTER JENNITH**

—A Life Fulfilled—

Imaginary Story

(CQ)

Chapters:

- 1—Tough Beginnings
- 2—The Workbench and My Visiting Carpenter
- 3—Impossible Yet Possible With God
- 4—Hope and Renewed Inspiration
- 5—One Step at a Time
- 6—When Mother Goes
- 7—My Sister and I—An Unusual Team
- 8—Living His Dreams, and Prospering
- 9—On a New Road of Life
- 10—In Retrospect—Musing on Life’s Event’s and Occurrences
- 11—Praising His Goodness Forever
- 12—The Masterpiece is Returned

Forward:

“Delight thyself also in the Lord: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”

— Psalms 37:4

“I want you to see that as you give up your petty dreams and big wishes at times, the Lord can and will more than compensate. He knows how to bring you through and give you more than you dreamed of.”

—Rodney McLain

1—Tough Beginnings

In the years between 1942-1949 things were pretty tough. Our family was struggling, like most of those in the world were, just to get by.

Sometimes a friendly neighbour or acquaintance would make an appearance and lend us use of some tool, or bring some food they'd grown, or perhaps offer to take us into town to gather needed supplies. Those times of getting special favours from others were rare and unique, but none-the-less a help in our struggle for existence.

The world, and so many places on it, had seen and were enduring so much upheaval. Our troubles might have seemed small to others when compared to what they were enduring. But each one has equal challenges to what they can manage and handle, and what will teach them lessons that they will utilize for a lifetime.

My mother was brought up, as an orphan, by a Presbyterian preacher and his wife. They didn't have children of their own, so they took her in. She was of Swedish descent, the only child of a neighbouring family.

They'd known her since she was young. And though it was certainly hard to lose both her parents, one to chronic illness, and the other due to overseas missions for the government, at least she knew this family well.

She liked helping them care for the goats and hens, and would tend to the garden. She learned to read the Bible at an early age, and learned that God hears and answers prayer. These were treasures she was able to pass on to her own family.

When she was sixteen the family thought it time to find a suitable partner for her. They took her to visit a family whose oldest son had recently returned from studying overseas. When my mother met this young man, she immediately fell in love with him, perhaps because he was kind and gentle, or perhaps she rarely met with young men. Either way, the families agreed to meet again some months later. In the meantime the two young people corresponded with mail, and got to know each other better.

Tragedy struck, and he and his brother were suddenly sent away for overseas missions. He never talked much about it, later on, as it seemed better to forget the heartache and trauma.

When my mother was 19 she at last saw him again. He looked very different, but his heart still loved my mother dearly. She had waited so long for him, that she decided to get married.

The wounds of the past would heal, she thought, and they could build a better life together. Perhaps the joy of having children would help him forget the images and sorrow he felt, as well as the loss of his dear brother, who never made it home.

His mind seemed to be unclear at times, and he wasn't sure what to do with his life. He had made great plans for his future, when he was young and unspoilt by the tragedies of the greed and lust for power in the world by its selfish rulers and their heartless masters.

Finally, a job opening came and he found work. Nothing he had dreamed of but it provided enough to get by. He helped a meat seller in his business.

When dad first held me as a baby, and then later my sister, he would smile and life would seem right. Mother was glad that he had found joy and purpose for living.

"Things are going to be alright now," she said to herself. "Loving the little ones God sends to a family has a way of making things right and brightening up the dark corners of life. Children bring the light of Heaven in their pure, freely given smiles."

My father was a butcher for several years then, but due to an accident, and the business being unable to hire him due to financial pressures, he was no longer able to work.

During his time of healing, and wondering what to do with his life now, he would often sit for many hours by the fire and muse over his past.

He seemed so melancholy at times, and we worried for his wellbeing. At times he would shout at us or at mother; other times he wouldn't speak to anyone for hours. We were all deeply troubled.

A new stranger seemed to enter our household at that time—an unwelcome one: the bottle. I don't know how he acquired the booze he then started to live on, but the new "him" was either drunk and acting strange, or feeling the horrible effects of a hangover. We just wished things would be right and pleasant.

My mother tried her best to encourage him, or try to find work herself,

so he wouldn't worry so much about providing for us. But he got more and more depressed, and drinking only brought him further down.

My sister and I tried to learn from books, or with our mother, or from neighbours, but there were no proper schools near where we lived. And even if there was a place to get formal "education" we couldn't have gotten there easily anyway.

My sister was born with a handicapped leg, and she couldn't walk well. She could hobble around the house for the things she needed. However, a long walk to and from school would have been impossible. Mom needed me to help look after her when she was busy with dad, working in the garden, making clothes, and all the many other things she had to tend to. I was needed for work around the home, too. With dad unable to do much, and only making things harder for us, mother depended on my help more and more.

We started to see Dad less and less, and in some ways that was a help, but it didn't make our family happier. We felt incomplete without him. Sometimes we'd only see him once a month or less, until it was getting to be only every few months. He continued to look worse in health and couldn't think or speak well. We tried to show him love whenever he came by for a visit, but within a day or two, he was gone again, for how long we never knew. A couple years had past and we wondered if he was even still around, quite likely not. Our hearts mourned for him, but we had to keep on living, and trying to survive.

One day I was bringing in the coal to heat our tiny house, and dreaming—that's what I did whenever I felt cold or hungry, or just wished for brighter days—when this thought came to me:

"All it would take is somebody somewhere, who's holding the world's gold and savings, to smile on our family and give us a handful, just a handful or two, poetically speaking. Then we'd be able to do all the things we have been wishing to. We could make things better for ourselves and for those around us."

But of course that wasn't meant to be. Getting handed a lump of money, for no work, was a dream—a day-dream for sure. However, that thought seemed to get stuck in my mind and I just couldn't let it go. I started fixating my plans and dreams on this imaginary lump of cash, as the solution--the only one--that would set us free to live a happier and better life.

Since that never happened, at least not in the way I wished or dreamed it would, I began to be despondent with life. I put my hope for better things all on fading flimsy cash, and when that didn't come, I lost hope, and my outlook on life went down.

I started to drink at an early age. Not much to actually get drunk, but only a quick swig or two when I could grab it. I liked feeling unattached from the normal surroundings.

I thought if things couldn't be made better, the next best choice was to simply not think about them, and to just try to forget the misery and the poverty that so many were suffering through.

My mother saw the hurt I was feeling, and prayed earnestly for me to make wise and good choices. She'd already lost her husband to drink and despondency, or so she thought. She didn't want to lose me down that road. Her prayers were answered one day, just as she knew they would be.

One day I entered the church, a quiet and small building, and I sat in silence. I had reached the point when I was ready for answers, for something new to give me hope and guidance.

"Why can't things be just a bit better...?" I stumbled out half a prayer, half my own thoughts escaping and hoping that the Big Guy would take notice.

"Why can't mom get a job... Why can't little sister's leg work right... Why can't dad take care of us... Why can't I..." I broke into a million tears... "Why can't I love..."

Somehow I knew in this place of worship, that at the heart of the God and King of all was an eternal source of love that radiated out to all His creation.

"I'm so weary with life... so cold in heart... God, if you are there and you care, come into my heart. Fill me with your love..."

That is all I could manage to say, though I hardly knew what or why I was saying it. It just came to me, and at last it was a true prayer, one I felt had been immediately answered.

When I looked at the picture of Jesus on the wall, it seemed to be looking right at me and saying, "I have forgiven you and want to be in your heart and life always. My life was no easier than yours—in fact a good deal harder. But since I made it through, I can now help you do the same. You will live to see God's power change your life in ways that will surpass your imagination."

In awe I sat down again, thinking about what I had just heard transmitted to my mind.

"Okay," I said. "I want to give You a chance."

So that rainy day, on August 4th, 1949, I made a commitment to God and to accept Jesus' help, and received His love in my heart.

I knew things would be better from then on.

When I reached home my mother looked up and saw something different in my face and the way I was.

She looked twice just to see the smile I displayed. It wasn't often that such a feature graced my face.

Mother was just taking out some food from the oven we'd borrow twice a month, for the rare treat of a baked meal. She set it down and came over. She wrapped her arms around me and tears fell to the top of my head. I knew her own hardships were plenty, but this was giving her hope. If her children walked with God, then they would be alright.

2—The Workbench and My Visiting Carpenter

On my fourteenth birthday, an uncle from my father's side visited. He didn't often come, as he lived far away. But there was some business he had to tend to, and decided to include a visit to our family. We talked for some time about dreams and about what could be done to better things in the area we all lived in.

"So what do you want to do?" he said.

I knew he didn't mean just now, but what I wanted to do in life to work and support myself and my family.

"When deciding about what to do with yourself, you look at a couple things. First you see what you have—your assets; and secondly what your heart and mind are tugging on you to do. So, first of all, what do you have?"

I glanced around at the sparsely furnished house and drab clothing.

But he continued, "I don't mean in the way of material possessions. That can come later. But what do you have in the way of talent, skill, ability, and knowledge? What can you use to build a prosperous and beneficial life?"

I wasn't sure at that point in life that I had much of anything.

"Well, let's start with your body—do you have two working hands and legs?"

Thinking of my sister who lacked somewhat in the leg department, at least I had that much, and was thankful.

"Yes," I nodded.

"Good then, let's move on. How about seeing eyes and ears that hear?"

I looked up.

“Well, you are seeing and hearing me speaking now to you, so that proves that one. These are priceless gifts and tools that will benefit you for a long time—and something you can’t buy even if you had a million dollars.”

I was feeling empowered with these words. I did have a lot to be grateful for.

“Now,” he continued, “Do you have a working brain, and the ability to think things through? Can you imagine things, work out problems mentally, think about what you do before you do it, and size up possibilities? Can you sit for an hour or two seemingly doing nothing, but have the ability to use your thoughts for something good during that time, something that will make yours and other’s lives better?”

“Or do you just let your mind behave recklessly? Do you choose to put it to work for you, or do you neglect to use this amazing machine that is meant to serve you?”

I had to pause on that one. He’d asked a string of questions. Just when I was forming an answer for one he’d ask another. But they all led to the same thing: Did I allow my thoughts to run wild, or did I have vision for the future and would I get my mind working for me to bring visions into reality?

“I think a lot,” I said. “Sometimes I make plans. I think of so many things I’d like to do. But none of them seem like they could work out. I think then, what is the use? If I think about other things that are just fanciful, pleasant imaginary thoughts, then it distracts me from the way things are. Sometimes it makes me happier to just let my mind go on vacation, rather than work.”

“Well, every good workman needs vacations every now and then, but you can’t let that be the main occupation of your mind. It’s a workman that you need to keep working for you, or else it will get you into trouble and ring up a debt, with too much time on its hands. I think the first thing we need to establish is: What is one thing you’d like to make a reality, what is one of your ideas that you could work towards?”

“Perhaps things don’t work out because first of all you are just thinking about them, rather than doing something to make them happen.

“And secondly, you need someone to help start you off. Every race needs a starting point, and every goal needs something to set it off. Since it’s your birthday, I will give you a gift of offering to be the starting point for one of your ideas.

“You can then use your hands, legs, mind and all, putting them to work for you in at least one effort. So what will that be? I have made some good

business in town this week, and I will give a portion to helping you out.”

I looked up with surprise, and great gratitude.

“You just need to decide what it will be. Do you have an idea? This is the second part of assessing what to do with your life—after you see what you’ve got to work with, and all pluses and minuses, then you see what is in your heart and mind, what vision you have.”

Scanning through my mind quickly at all the plans I had made, all the wishes I had, I came up with one I thought could work.

“I’d like to build with wood,” I spoke, somewhat unsure of myself.

“Now, that is a marvellous idea! A fabulous plan,” my uncle congratulated me for my wise choice.

I felt a boost of confidence. I was totally unsure I could do something in this sphere, yet I could see how beneficial it would be. But here I was given encouragement. It seemed from the tone of his voice my uncle thought I could do it.

So if he thought I could succeed in this endeavour, there might be a chance I would.

“So what you’ll need is a place to work, a workbench and some tools to get you started. You start looking around for wood that can be used, or folks that want to give you a go at fixing this or that. Find a corner of your property you can work in, and I’ll do my part to get you a workbench set up and some tools to get you started.

“And don’t you let up on this plan until you have succeeded in some way. You hear? If you give up too soon you’ll never be pleased with yourself. It will be hard at first, and you’ll need some guidance, but I know with determination you’ll be glad at the good change it will make in your life.”

When he left I began to get to work—the thinking part that is.

I knew a few good carpenters, and I thought if I would offer my help to them, perhaps to clean things up in their workshop, or help in their garden, if they would be willing to teach me a few things. I couldn’t afford to pay for actual classes, but we could trade—work for teaching.

That night as I lay in bed I spoke with Jesus in prayer.

“Dear Carpenter of Galilee, Son of God, I need you to help me. I don’t know what I’m doing. I have as yet no tools or work even. It’s all just a plan, just an idea. Please give me the talent and ability to do this—for my family, for myself, and for my Uncle. I don’t want his efforts to help me to be in vain. Please, help me...” I said, my voice trailing off as I fell into a

good sleep.

Three weeks later a visitor was at the door. A delivery was being made. It was addressed to me! I was now ready to set up and get to work! The delivery was from my uncle, who had managed, with the help of a few acquaintances and friends, to gather some of the most essential tools I'd need, as well as a wonderful and large workman's bench!

By that time I had set something up under the awning of our porch for my work, that I was determined to do. My sister was curious and interested in my new endeavour. She'd sometimes prepare a bag of food for me to take when I went to receive training from carpenters, in return for work. Those were long days, as I had to walk most of the way there, stay for as long as I could, and then make my way home.

We had a nice little vegetable garden by then, and my sister tended it well. Fresh foods would be picked for me when I would take these long day-trips.

Sister and I had become better friends, now that I had something positive to think about and work towards. This gave us new things to talk about and discuss. Sometimes we'd make plans together. This helped her feel a part of things, and that even though she also couldn't do all that she wished, due to her physical drawback, at least she could play a part in what I did.

Mother found work helping at the corner store. Sometimes they would sell whatever fresh foods we could spare from our own garden, or things that mother would sew or knit.

Things were looking up and getting better in many ways. I was able to get a good pair of shoes made by the local cobbler, so my feet would be protected when I worked with the wood, and when I took my long walks to receive training from others.

It was a special Christmas that year, when sitting around a humble tree or branch rather, that we'd pulled in to use as our "decoration" for remembering the season of Christmas. Someone suddenly walked in bringing a pot of cooked stew.

"Dad!" we said with surprise.

"I wanted to wish you a merry Christmas," he said.

He couldn't afford an armload of gadgets, but this was the best way he could give something to us. He had not been well; and we didn't even know

if he “was” any more. Overdrinking and the sickness it had caused him, rendered him able to do little.

We found out from him that he had taken up residence at the other side of town. He loved us and didn’t wish to burden us. Being here seemed to painfully remind him of the family he couldn’t help.

For a couple hours we at last felt like we were a family again. That night he was sober, and said he hadn’t had a drink in over six months. His life was changing, and people from the Salvation Army were helping him slowly get his life and health back together again.

When he left that night, after we ate supper together, he said he hoped to see more of us. That was one great Christmas gift. From time to time, he would drop by to say hello, or to bring a gift or food. He seemed to be looking better each time. A change was taking place, and it was encouraging to see.

Some months later I was in my workshop porch area, when I was facing a difficult task. I really didn’t know how to go about fixing something—well that happened often. I was still very much in the learning stage. There wasn’t anyone nearby anywhere in the vicinity that could help me out that day. I was stuck, and it may have been days before I could seek the help needed to finish the project. I stopped to pray.

“Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” The scriptural promise from God’s Word came to me. There WAS someone very close by that I could get help from.

Then like a flash a picture came to my mind, of just what I needed to do. I decided to give it a try. It seemed right and good. With a bit of time and effort, sure enough the idea in picture form that came to me proved to be just the answer needed. By late that afternoon, the work was completed.

When my mother came home in time to prepare the supper, I showed her the work that was done, and told her about my visiting carpenter—Jesus Christ—who could help me when I needed it.

She smiled and was pleased. I knew she was tired and didn’t say much, but by the look on her face I could tell how she felt. She was inspired to do some “asking, seeking, and knocking” for herself. The One who helped me, could most certainly give her aid in whatever was on her own “fix it” piles.

Also, I knew not having a father figure around for me to call on and get advice from was hard on her, too. She wished she could have provided this for me.

But this occurrence that I shared, encouraged her that our Heavenly Father would look out for me and get me through each tough spot.

3—Impossible yet Possible with God

About a year and a half after my mini workshop had been up and running, and I had put in many, many hours of work and training, my uncle came back again for a visit. This time he brought a friend with him.

They wanted to see if their investments in me had been worth the while. I hadn't done much in the way of communicating with them. Life was busy and time sped by fast.

Mother, seeing the men approaching the house, quickly found a couple glasses and filled them with fresh water, changed her apron and tidied her hair. She welcomed them in to the small sitting room, that served many purposes.

As they chatted I overheard them saying, "So, what's he been up to?" and I knew they were speaking of me. I could hear through the window to the porch some things that were said. I wondered what mom's response would be.

"Why don't you go take a look for yourselves," mother said.

I quickly placed on my workbench some of my latest work, and all around were other projects waiting to be done. I put the tools in their place—some of which these men had helped to acquire for me. A quick sweep of the floor and I was ready for show and tell time.

"Hi, sonny, I can see you have been up to some good these days—or months!" my uncle exclaimed when approaching and seeing what was around.

I smiled. Then looked towards his friend, who I wasn't well acquainted with.

"Mr. Sulmester, this is Rodney the Carpenter, my nephew," my uncle introduced us.

"Pleased to meet you, sonny," he said.

"Same to you," I joined with a handshake.

"You're plying your trade faithfully..." he said looking around.

I showed and explained to them some of the things I was currently working on, and those yet to be done.

My uncle and his friend were very impressed at the speed I had

learned the trade, and how useful I was already becoming.

“Got a few new tools boy, I see,” my uncle commented.

“Ah, yes, I found that I needed them, and after my first job’s pay I was able to put something towards expanding my tool supplies,” I explained.

“You are learning a bit of business in the bargain, too! Fine lad. We’re pleased to see the man you are developing into,” my uncle expressed.

“I hope so, sir,” I added. “Something goes to my mom and sister, something goes to me, and something goes to...” I explained briefly how I handled the humble amount of funds I was earning, but hesitated and looked over at Mr. Sulmester.

I didn’t know where his faith stood, and wondered what he’d think. Yet I continued, as I saw them look on with eagerness for me to finish my sentence:

“I give some to the Lord or to those in need. Not much, but I try to do my part.”

I looked down, wondering if they would understand. Those who had found the secret of money increasing when one gave to God would know this was the wisest thing to do; but those who were caught in the trap of money-means-the-world-to-me, would think it was a waste.

Mr. Sulmester walked over to me and put his hand on my shoulder.

“You’re doing a good thing, my boy, a very good thing. I’m proud of you. Just to think that what I was able to help give to you, is now in a small, yet very admirable way, being a help to others. Why this makes it worth it all over again. And God is going to bless you for it, Son. Indeed He will.”

“Thank you, Sir,” I said, very relieved for this positive response. And I determined in my heart that I would always give a portion of my small earnings—or large if ever that occurred—to those in need, as my way to help God show His care.

At times a visiting evangelist or missionary would be in the area, and then I would give some of my earnings to them as my gift to God, too. It wasn’t always easy, as it meant that for the moment I wouldn’t have quite as much; but for some reason good would come of it. Sometimes the good came that day, sometimes weeks or months later. But it seemed that the more I gave, the more I got.

Requests for work were coming in, even more than I felt I had the skill or time for. But this just gave me opportunity to call for the help of my “visiting Carpenter”—Jesus. Sometimes He told me what to do, or he sent along someone else to assist me, or at times I was able to redirect the work to

someone else who I knew could do it, and would be very pleased for the work and the funds. Either way, I got through, and my family was helped.

What had seemed impossible for me had become now a reality—I had something I could do to support my family, I was doing a task I didn't dream was possible for me. I was earning some income, and being able to help others with it. With a good bit of hard work and focus, the Lord had made all this possible.

There were other lingering thoughts, that I knew I shouldn't be thinking about, or it just brought me down. But I did wonder at times if it was an impossible dream, for dad to move back with us again, and be around to help us out.

Two years after I had been working, I felt I knew enough that I could construct a cabin or large room. I needed somewhere bigger to work, somewhere to keep my wood and tools dry. As I was sitting by the willow tree down by the lake, thinking things over, I heard someone approach me.

I looked up, "Dad!?" I could hardly believe what I was seeing. There he was, looking more healthy and smiling. And what was that in his hand? A pair of pliers, a hammer, and a bag of nails. Over his other shoulder he was carrying a plank of wood.

"Well, it's not much to start with... but I was thinking, if we go into this together..." my dad began to hint at his plan.

"You want to help me?" I was overjoyed. Mostly to see him well and sober, and smiling, and now also ready for work.

I hopped up and we began to make plans for the house extension that would serve as my workshop, too. He could help with the jobs he knew how to do, and I could teach him what I had learned.

Though dad had stopped drinking and smoking, still the coughing spells and after--effects of living an unhealthy lifestyle took its toll. It was better he had a room to himself.

He, after living alone for so long, didn't feel ready to move back in to the house, like he had been before. Besides, mother needed good sleep anyway, as she wasn't in the best of health.

Dad chose to build a bed in the workshop we made, and with a woodstove to keep him warm and heat up some beans and soup on, he was content.

Dad and I were a team for about five years. At last I had someone to work with, and who could run errands, or make deliveries, so I could stay

working on the carpentry side of things.

Sometimes we had disagreements on how to go about doing things. Sometimes I wished I was alone again, working with just me and the Lord. But when I'd go down to the river to pray, that voice I learned to love and trust, was always there.

God's voice seemed to say, "You don't have forever, with your dad, at least not here on earth. Try to make the best of it. So what if you can't always do things your way? When you are a grown up and have children of your own to feed, you'll have all the time in the world to figure things out on your own.

"Take him where he is at, and try your best to encourage your father in his efforts. He's trying to do what he missed doing for you and your sister. He wants to support you all, but just doesn't think he can do it alone. But if he helps you, and some income is earned, then it's his way of helping you all out. Thank him for his effort."

The wise counsel of my Carpenter friend, Jesus, was always heart-calming and fortifying.

I'd go back and talk things out patiently with my dad. I knew in his heart he wanted to help us, and I chose to make that wish possible.

One day, when dad had been living with us for over four years, I heard singing coming from inside the house. It sounded like a man and woman singing together. This intrigued me. I went in to see where it was coming from.

There were two bedrooms in the house. The voices were coming from my mother's and sister's room that they shared, since dad stayed in the workshop. I used to sleep on the floor of the sitting room, but now I had the use of the other room to myself.

The door was slightly ajar and I could see my father and mother leaning back on the pillows, singing a hymn together.

"Wow! I guess he learned lots with the Salvation Army folks..." I thought.

I turned to walk away, but they heard my foot steps and sensed my presence.

"Come in dear..." mother said as the song was at a close.

"We're singing of heaven..." my dad said. "I feel I shall be in glory before the year is over. It helps us to not be as sad as we might, like those

with no hope, when we keep in our mind the joys that await us up there.”

“Upstairs,” mother added. “We on earth are living downstairs, in a way. When God in the Heaven’s receives a loved one who passes on, we can think of them as ascending the golden staircase and moving in Upstairs.

“They are still around, it’s just that we can’t see them. I’m sure Jesus has a great place of residence prepared for your father. Did you know that just over this past year he has helped to bring several people to know of our Lord Jesus?”

I hadn’t been aware of his activities for the Christian faith, though I did see a big and positive difference in the way he was now, after his conversion and change.

I came and sat on the bed. It seemed they had more to share with me. But first a coughing spell over took my dad, when he was calm again, he spoke in a soft voice.

“Son, I know, and am ashamed, that I haven’t been there for you like I should have, and perhaps could have been, if I had given up what was stealing me away from you all. I let the past and the problems of life get to me.

“I’m really sorry for what I have done, or rather what I haven’t been able to do. But through it, I see you have appealed to your Heavenly Father to fill in for me, and he has done a grand job of looking out for you. I want you to keep up the good work and take care of your sister and mother, until it’s time she joins me Upstairs too.”

I nodded, and let a tear run down my cheek. I had grown to enjoy and appreciate this man’s companionship. There was much I could learn from him.

His life hadn’t been one of roses without thorns. Most of his young years and early adult life he never spoke of. But I could see there was hidden pain and quite a few sorrows. Perhaps that is what drove him to a life of drink, sleep, illness, and repeating the process.

Perhaps if he had spoken of it sooner, to the right person, he could have found relief, before his body broke down from turning to a substance, rather than to the supernatural and Saviour. But at least he would die right with God, and his heart was new. He was now gentle when he spoke, and kind-hearted, willing to admit mistakes and ready to lend a friendly hand.

And I found out now, that he was ready at all times to put in a word for the good Lord, so that others wouldn’t have to go on so long with unalleviated inner pain and hurts. He wanted to help people find the love and peace he found in Jesus, so they wouldn’t go down the road he had.

4—Hope and Renewed Inspiration

I'll never forget that snowy winter day when my father, called me to his side. He was now set up by the fireplace in the sitting room, the couch had become his bed. We knew his time was drawing to a close, and we wanted to savour the last bit of time he still had left.

Mother was there at his side knitting, and my sister was drawing pictures and writing some letters, beside the window. I had been out in the workshop, but calling me was easy.

Dad and I had wanted an easy way to know when the meals were ready, without making my mother go out in the cold briefly to get us. We found some old piping and hose, and had it rigged to go from the sitting room to inside the workshop. All one had to do was speak into the pipe on one end, and the sound would travel quickly through to the other. It worked both ways.

Dad sat up, and spoke into the pipe, "Son, can you come for a bit?"

I stopped what I was doing, and made my way there. I didn't know how long it would be, so I checked that all was well before closing it up and going into the house.

When I entered there was an air of hush and stillness. The fire being some of the only source of movement and sound. I sat down on a footstool beside the couch and looked at my dad.

"Son..."

"Yes, Dad..."

"I know you don't like to hear this, but soon you are going to be the man of this family. You're going to need to..." the coughing then interrupted what he was about to say. It was sometime before he could continue.

"I want you to make sure, that more than anything, you all look to the Lord to take care of you. Can someone get me my Bible? It's over on that table."

My sister reached for it and handed it over to me. I placed it on his chest.

He began again.

"This book—or rather this collection of books—is like a treasure chest, filled with all the riches you will ever need to truly succeed. Maybe you have dreamed of someday being rich and well-off, and who knows if that..."

Coughing interrupted; each time it seemed to take him longer to feel comfortable again.

“Who knows if you will one day be rich and famous. But is that really the goal? Will that stop you from losing your mind, your health, and your loved ones? In some cases it might even add to your troubles. But this...”

Coughing and wheezing struck again.

“This book, God’s Word, is what will bring you love, life, and goodness in all the best ways. Read it. Believe it. And most of all obey what He shows you to do from the Words written therein.

“This is my last will and testament—the Old and the New Testaments, given to you. To you all I bequeath this book, after I am gone. Don’t let a day go by that you haven’t taken some time with the Master, the Lord Jesus, and time spent reading from this book. Will you all promise me that?”

“Yes, we will,” we all said, and meant it.

“Darling, my dear little girl,” now dad spoke to my sister. “I don’t want you to worry about a thing. I know your brother will take good care of you. God has you on his list of Special people. And I believe, because I heard Him tell me it this morning, that one day you will walk as you have always dreamed. Perhaps He means just in the next life—Upstairs—or perhaps it’s for a sooner time. But never give up hope, and keep praying. He heals just as good nowadays as He did when this book was written.”

Sister nodded, and resolved that she would keep hope and trust, and not let herself get worried.

And I promised then and there to always be a support to her, for as long as she needed and wanted me to.

“Do you have a favourite passage, darling, that you could share with us now?” mother asked.

Father shared the scripture, “I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” He didn’t need to read it, he could quote it from memory.

“Young or old, if God is your keeper, and you are close to Him, eager to be kept by Him, then He’s going to provide all you need. As a good caretaker He won’t indulge you with silly or harmful things that you might feel you need or want, but what is truly good for you.

“Pray for each other. The scriptures tell us to do so. Prayer will make this family carry on, even when others are facing fierce troubles. Prayer can do the impossible, for it activates God. ‘For with God nothing shall be impossible.’”

Everyone sat quietly and listened, and mother took a few notes of the words he said. These were his parting words and will.

“Darling, can you sing that song again for me, I need something to remind me of where I am going...” Dad asked my mother.

My mother’s voice had a hard time singing, as she was holding back some tears, and struggling to be brave. But she did the best she could, and we joined in with the parts we remembered.

Dad soon fell asleep, and we all quietly left to go about our work. Mother went about cooking the supper, and Sister sat down at the table to help her to cut up the vegetables. I left to finish things up in the workshop, but I was having a hard time thinking clearly. I needed some fresh air.

“I think I need to take a walk,” I told my mother. She nodded. She knew I had much to process mentally and emotionally.

I put on my jacket, my walking shoes, and took a drink of water. I wasn’t sure just how long or short this walk would be. I said goodbye to my sister—who probably wished she could go out nature walking with me as well. I thanked her for her help in the kitchen, and headed out the door.

The sun was getting lower in the sky and a bit of a wind had started to pick up. I wrapped my jacket around me more tightly and crossed my arms for warmth as I faced into the chilly wind.

Meanwhile, back at home I knew mother was praying for us—for us all. She was good at pray-cooking, or pray-cleaning, or pray-knitting, or whatever she did. She didn’t have to only stop to pray, but did it as part of just about anything.

I knew she was praying because as I walked, it was almost as if I could feel her prayers surrounding me and in some way warming me on the inside.

I felt a loving warmth around me and within me, that seemed to make the cold less noticeable. And so I kept on, walking here and there, and pausing every now and then to sit and think or pray. I had to come to grips with the fact that things were to change shortly. It seemed it would be easier for my sister in some ways, as she had mother to learn from, but I as a young man, felt the need for a father to help counsel me and assist me in the manly challenges I faced.

“Lord, be my guide, my companion, my...Father,” my heart cried out.

Just then I saw a picture in my mind of Jesus while on Earth, His own earthly father passed away, and he was left to do the carpentry work alone and support his family. Perhaps his brothers helped him with the

work, I don't know. Maybe they did take over the business when Jesus was called to leave and start His short but powerful ministry.

His mother was a widow for some time, while on Earth, but God saw to it that she was provided for. Scripture talks of His "mother and brethren" so they were looking after her. He worked hard for many years, though, as a carpenter, and who knows how many of them were without Joseph there with them.

Then I remembered the words of the prayer He taught His disciples to pray, it started with "Our Father".

Having a Heavenly Father to look to, speak with, and go to for help, is what I needed. People come and go but, "I will never leave thee" the Bible says of God. He would be with me forever.

I knelt down on the grass and prayed, from memory, the "Lord's Prayer", this time with more meaning than ever before. I was calling on a Father to help me through all I now would face. I needed strength, and I knew, "My help cometh from the Lord," as King David said.

When night had just about covered the land, I knew I better make my way home. I didn't have a light, and wasn't even clear which way I had come. In actuality, I had done nearly a circle, and wasn't that far from home, but I didn't know that just yet.

I stopped to pray for guidance.

Just then I heard my name being called. It seemed rather distant, but clearly it was the voice of my mother, calling me home.

This timely call gave me the guidance to go in a certain direction, and before too long I found the way to our house. Mother was there to greet me, and held me tightly.

"We need to get you in where it's warm," she said. "Some hot stew is ready, too."

"I'm sure ready for it, too. Thanks mom, thanks sister. Thanks for letting me go for a bit while you took care of the home needs." I said.

I knew how much we all needed each other, and was determined to never take a day for granted. This time would end one day for each of us. I should show as much love and kindness to each one while we still had one another.

When dad stirred awake, sometime later, mom was there to offer a bowl of stew. That was to be his last meal.

For the next day he slipped away, and walked those golden stairs.

Six months had passed since Dad had moved up to be with our Heavenly Father, and was at last truly happy and free of the illness that racked his body.

I tried to do my best and keep at my work. But something was missing. I felt I lacked much in the way of inspiration or joy. It wasn't just because dad was no longer there, for I was working happily before he joined us.

I had a new need. I had a need to love and be loved by someone special. Would anyone notice me and care to join their life with me?

Sometimes, rather than working in the workshop, I'd just sit by the fire staring into it. I needed something to once more stir me onward.

Sister noticed my change in mood, and tried her best to encourage me. Sometimes she'd come to sit with me, and read a book out loud, or she'd suggest we play a game.

I appreciated her efforts, but I didn't really know how to pull out of this slump and get on with life with renewed vigour. I know I was doing a poor job of being the man of the family. Dad would be ashamed, I thought. Mother tried to find work for me from neighbours, since I wasn't up to going out much and seeking jobs.

All of a sudden my mind flashed back to what my dad was like before he turned to the bottle and drinking, and moved away and got sick. He too would just sit and stare into the fire, without keeping his mind positively occupied at the same time.

It can be a good place for thinking and praying and relaxing, but one has to keep their mind thinking things that are beneficial.

I realised I didn't want to go down the path he took—the wrong turn that is. I would instead need to remember his last will and testament, and do what he'd asked us to do.

“Sister, let's read the Bible together, shall we?” I suggested.

Her eyes lit up. She knew there was something good stirring in me, at last.

She came to sit with me and we opened it up to find the verse, right in front of our eyes,

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”

—Psalms 103:13-14

We nearly jumped! It felt as God was right here with us and spoke right to us. He cared about us, right now, and always. He was our Father.

We then read selected chapters from different books here and there, especially those that had many markings in them, that showed they were some of Dad's favourite passages. It was fun trying to decipher Dad's writing and notes on one of the pages.

A little piece of paper slipped out when we were flipping through it, and with curiosity we looked it over. It was the names of people our dad had brought to know Jesus. He'd prayed for them, spoke with them, and led them in prayer to receive salvation. He kept their names listed in his Bible so he could continue to pray for them. They were like his children too, born again of God by the Spirit.

We knew then that Dad had likewise prayed often and fervently for us.

It felt as if we were sitting with dad and having Bible stories together. Sometimes I thought I could almost hear his voice in my mind explaining something that we were reading. Maybe it was just my own thoughts, or maybe it was God. But whatever the case, we seemed to sense our dad's presence and it was comforting.

Before putting the Bible away, I happened to flip to the back to see if there were any more notes. I found there something that changed the way I looked at the situation, with dad being gone.

There seemed to be a prayer or question from him, perhaps one of the last things he wrote.

"Why do I have to go, now Lord?" then the verse, which must have been the Lord's response to him, was written then:

"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, you may be also." (John 14:3)

I showed my sister, and we knew that dad was sent to prepare things for us. Jesus would let him get things set up in the ways that my mother would love, when it was her time to go; and for us to join them when eternity beckoned us to be gathered again to our Heavenly Father's place.

We smiled and felt our hearts warmed and at peace. A feeling only God could give.

We chose to meet then, everyday for Bible reading. Sometimes Mother would join us, and would listen while she knitted or did mending. And it was through these daily times of Bible reading and discussion, that always ended in prayer, that we began to build our family up again.

We started to feel more inspiration in living, more ideas of ways to help others started to come to us. And yes, even more financial and practical supply started to come in as well.

New work opportunities came and I felt the confidence to take them on, and with the Lord's help and guidance, I could do most things I put my mind to do.

When Sister's birthday came along, I was very pleased to hand her a package of a new dress! She hadn't had one like this in many years. I was glad for the support that God had brought us, so that something as special as a needed gift on a birthday was possible.

Sister put on the dress and we sat down to a delicious dinner Mother had cooked, of Sister's favourite things.

We sang a hymn, quoted a scripture passage, prayed for the food and for Sister's new year, and enjoyed a very happy time together. Our Father in Heaven was looking after us.

5—One Step at a Time

How many times have you requested in prayer for something you really wanted, only to be told "wait" or "later"? Or perhaps you thought God was saying, "No", because nothing much seemed to come of your prayers.

Did it make you want to stop asking and choose to stop wishing for it? Perhaps that was right and good; for when you have committed a heart's wish to the One who loves and deeply cares about you, you can safely leave it with Him. Later, it might be the time for you to once again bring your petition to God's loving hands, and see if the time just might be right.

My sister and I had a custom, that the night of each of our birthdays, we would make a special request to the Lord. It was a secret prayer or wish, that only we personally knew. If or when it happened, we would then tell the rest of our family.

Some requests were answered soon after, but others took years until the time was right.

We knew that the only prayers that would be answered with a "yes" were the ones that were good for us, and that were in accordance with God's will. So we tried to make sure to pray and wish for things we knew He would be glad to grant us.

One of my secret prayers had been for dad to come home again. When that happened, I knew God had answered and granted my request. It was like God's special birthday gift to me.

My sister said one of her wishes had been to learn to read, at a young age. She was able to pick it up easily, and we never lacked in the way of educational training, though it happened from home, for the most part.

This last birthday I wondered what my sister would ask for. I knew, as usual, I would have to wait and find out. But for some reason I felt the urge to request a gift from our Heavenly Father on her behalf as well.

While she prayed near the fire, the night of her birthday, I was praying in my room.

“Pray for her healing, that she will be able to walk normally,” a thought pressed on me.

It seemed a very unlikely request to be granted. Why should I waste time asking for something that it seemed was not God’s will? Or was it? Father did say to pray for her. So I should at least try one more time.

I reasoned these things in my mind.

When I was younger, my sister and I would pray for her healing. We would also act out the story of the lame man whose legs received strength and healing and he could ‘walk and leap and praise’ God.

Sister would play the part of the lame man, and I would be Peter or John coming to the temple. I would then say what they had said and hope my sister could leap up then and there, and we could go run and play outside.

But though we had fun acting out Bible stories, we didn’t get the fulfilment of healing then and there. Instead my sister was given good health in other ways, and joy in spite of her handicap. She felt the grace to surrender to this difficulty, without complaint, until the time was right for her to walk again—whether in this life or the next.

After awhile, as years past, I eventually stopped asking God to heal her leg. I thought I’d asked plenty of times and God was well aware of what we wished for. We knew her handicap must be for a purpose, and later we’d find out why. We chose to make the best of things the way they were, and not worry about what we couldn’t fix.

However, on this birthday of hers I felt this irrepressible urge to pray and ask once again.

Little did I know, that Sister was doing just that as well. She had been wondering just what to ask her Heavenly Father for. She wanted to ask for a gift that only He could give her. Then she got a strong nudge in her mind to ask for the miracle of healing; for the ability to walk normally.

Mother was in her room, resting. She’d been particularly tired these

days. We tried to let her quietly rest without disturbance. But while she dosed, as she told us later, a vision came to her, and a voice spoke clearly to her mind.

“Your daughter will walk with you. I have heard and answered.”

Mother woke suddenly, and wondered what that meant, though it was a pleasant thought. She smiled and fell back to sleep.

Meanwhile, while Sister was praying, she felt this unusual and Heavenly warmth surge all down her leg—the one she couldn’t use well.

“What is this?” she wonders.

“Get up,” she heard the words in her mind, strong and commanding.

When she is manoeuvring into position to attempt to get up, the words came,

“Rise up and walk!”

She remembers the many times she and her brother have done the skit and used these words. All of a sudden she is aware that Jesus knew each of those times, each of those requests for help from Heaven. Not one of these prayers for help had gone unnoticed. And she knew just what it meant now.

“Get up and walk?” she thinks. “Okay, I’ll give it a go...like I have so many times before....”

At first she felt it a great struggle to do so, as something is weighing on her. Something was holding her back. Maybe her fears of it failing, maybe her feeling of weakness, or maybe something from the hindering side of the spirit.

“Jesus Christ makes me whole! I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me!” she whispers with determination, and takes the plunge to get up on her feet. And does so!

“Oh, God, you are real! You are here! And You can heal! Every prayer you have heard. Thank you for granting me this marvellous gift for my birthday!” her heart rang out in praises.

She must have thought she was being quiet, or trying to be, but within seconds, I, her brother, came into the room to see what was going on.

“Oh, Sister! I was just praying for your healing! This is wonderful!” I said as she took a step or two in my direction, looking as good and healthy as ever.

We embrace and cry a few tears of joy.

Mother, hearing the excitement in our voices woke up and joined us. We praise God for doing the miraculous and for doing it at the time He knew was best. It was like a surprise He kept for us for later, when He knew we'd most need the encouragement, and would really appreciate it.

She would have to take it easy, and gain muscle strength in that leg, but the more she used it, the stronger she would get. That birthday evening we watched her, for the first time, walk to the kitchen and back, while we stood by her sides, rejoicing.

It was the best birthday gift ever!

After a week of practice and strengthening, while walking around the house and garden, she was ready for a proper "walk". Mother and I let her choose the first place she wanted to go, and we'd all go together. Mother remembers the message that came to her in her dream, that she would be able to walk with her daughter. Now it was happening! A dream come true.

"I'd like to tell someone that I am healed. I think that is what Jesus did it for. Sometimes it's good that it takes a long time for healing to come, so that when it does, others are amazed and think more about God and His power," my sister said.

"We could walk to the neighbours over that way," mother suggested. "Their children might enjoy seeing the miracle. They are the ones that visit us, and that you read stories to. They know that you couldn't get out and around."

And so we went. As we knocked on the door, we wondered what reaction we would get.

A welcoming voice greeted us, and a surprised look came over the lady's face as her eyes scanned my sister up and down. It had been a year or more since she had seen my sister, and in that time she had grown a fair bit taller.

The children had been to the house, however during that time, but the mother was usually working in the house and garden. My sister was a fun and good teacher for them. Besides reading books to them, she gave them tips for drawing pictures.

Sister had plenty of time to practice her artistic skills, and it was nice to have children eager to learn from her. It made her feel like there was plenty she could do, in spite of her disability.

However, this lady, the children's mother, remembered my sister as shorter and unable to walk. When she saw this radiant, taller, walking

young lady she said,

“I didn’t know you had another daughter! I don’t believe we have met yet.”

“This is my only sister,” I said. “God has done a miracle and healed her. Look! Now she can walk!”

My sister added, “I wanted to visit you and the children, to show and tell them about what has happened. I thought they would be so glad.

“Now when they visit we can also play games outside and run around. I won’t only sit with them. We all can have so much more fun. Perhaps I can help you care for them even more.”

“Well, well. Come on in,” the wide-eyed woman said.

“Children!” she called. “There’s someone here to speak with you.”

The pitter-patter of feet came running to the sitting room, from all corners. At least half a dozen came in to meet with us. We were seated by that time.

“Did you know it was my birthday last week? I’m now 17 years old.”

“Happy birthday!” the children said, and came over to give her hugs and greetings. They were surprised that she had made it to their house for the first time, but when looking over at her tall and strongly-built brother, they imagined he could have carried her, or perhaps she was pulled in a wagon. They didn’t have time to ask, as my sister began her story.

“Well,” my sister said, in a tone that captured their attention. “On my birthday I got a very special gift, and it’s something I can share with you, too! That is why I came. I wanted to show it to you and tell you about it!”

A gift. Fun! But they could see nothing in my sister’s hands. They were most curious to find out about it.

“Can you guess what it is?” Sister asked.

“A horse? So you can get around, and we can have rides on?” one boy made the elaborate guess.

My sister chuckled a bit. “Now that would be fun, and maybe one day that will happen. But it’s something else...”

A girl chimed in, “A set of knitting needles, so we can learn to knit when we come to your house?”

“What a great idea! I think we should start to do some knitting when you come next time. But I’ll give you a clue. The gift I got for my birthday is something that could only come from Heaven; something only God could

give me.”

The children were wide eyed, thinking they were about to see something that had come from Heaven.

Sister stood up and began to walk, and skip and dance, march and spin around.

The children laughed and began to romp around with her.

“I can walk and use both legs now! It’s a miracle! God healed me at last! We prayed and He did the impossible. Isn’t that wonderful? Now just think, when you come for a visit, we can also go out into the garden and play hide and seek, and do all sorts of things!”

The children laughed and squealed with delight. Then they joined hands and formed a circle around my sister, and began walking and dancing in a circle, with her in the centre. They were singing a cheery song and celebrating! They closed in on her at the end of the song and gave her one big group hug.

“Can we come and see you tomorrow?” they were asking.

“Work it out with your mother and father,” my sister said. “But I’m happy to see you then, or the next day. I hope it will be soon.”

The mother of the family was talking with my mother and congratulating her, and some tears of joy were falling. They both knew what this meant. There was then the chance that my sister could get married, and have children, and would be able to care well for them.

Grandchildren were something every mother with grown children looked forward to.

“I am so delighted! And it gives me courage too, that healing might come as well to my nephew, he also suffers from some infirmity, unable to enjoy the outdoor play with his siblings. We’ll keep hoping for the best,” the lady said.

“And praying,” my mother added. “Then, in God’s good time it will happen.”

“God bless you all; God bless you for your faith,” the lady said as she bid us good-bye.

It was worth waiting for, if the healing could help encourage others, and thus grow the faith of the believers, and increase our own joy many times over.

6—When Mother Goes

One day when I was in the workshop, I heard a cry. Mother had yelled

out in pain. I quickly ran to see what had happened. Oddly enough, my sister was faster to her side than I. How wonderful is that?

Something had given way under her feet or her knees buckled, or perhaps she blacked out for a moment as well, and she and the basket of fresh veggies had fallen.

“Are you alright, mother?” we asked, as we tried to help her up.

She wasn’t ready to stand yet. There was something more to it than we knew. At that time she was also suffering from terrible headaches, and needed plenty of time to rest.

“Should we try to get a doctor to come and look at her?” my sister and I whispered. We wondered if that would be of any help at all.

“I’ll go to Mrs. Kindersol, they have a phone, and with all the children she has, perhaps she knows of a doctor that we could call on,” my sister suggested.

I nodded for her to go ahead, while I did my best to help my mother up and get her to bed.

I placed the pillows all around her, and tucked her in with the warmest blankets we had. She seemed to be shivering inside, but her temperature was rising. I could tell a high fever was taking hold of her.

“What else can I do for you, mother?” I asked.

“Would you read to me from the Bible, please darling. I feel that is just the medicine I need,” she faintly whispered.

Quickly I grabbed it from its place in the sitting room, and sat beside her.

I didn’t know what to read exactly, but I thought to start with a few Psalms. Mother smiled as she listened, and closed her eyes. Every now and then I offered her water to sip on. She didn’t feel the need for anything else. She was content to be in the presence of the Lord, hearing His Word read.

She would dose for a while, but then wake up again, but she never wanted me to stop reading it. She said she could still hear what was being read, even when it seemed she was asleep.

“I don’t know if you are going to believe this,” she suddenly spoke up, while I was thumbing through trying to find another appropriate passage to read.

I looked up.

“I have had the most amazing dream. I can hardly describe it. It was

just so beautiful,” mother started.

Just then my sister had returned. The look on her face said that she'd asked all the people she could, trying to find someone who knew or could contact a doctor willing to come out here.

She whispered to me: “The earliest a doctor or nurse that could come would be later on that night, that is if they didn't have any new emergencies to tend to.”

I nodded. We were just going to have to get through this together, until more help could arrive.

My sister sat beside Mother and I, just in time to hear what Mother was about to say.

“Tell us your dream, mother,” I prompted her.

“Oh, good, you are both here now,” she said, opening her eyes briefly to see my sister there as well.

“I don't rightly know if it was just a dream. It seemed so real. In this experience or dream-like state, I was walking down the most beautiful pathway. The flowers were more gorgeous than you or I have ever seen. The air was so fresh, so pure, and seemed filled with light. It was as if light was all around, yet without the sun shining down hot on me.

“As I walked along I started to see people, lovely, beautiful people. Their faces were radiant with joy. As they approached me I began to realise that these were people I knew; yet people that have passed on from their earthly life. I felt like I was their family.

“Then the crowd parted and I saw your dad. He looked more healthy and happy and radiant than I've ever seen him before. He said he was so glad to see me, and we hugged and held each other for a long time.

“He said to me, ‘I'll be seeing you soon.’ Then in an instant the dream ended, and I was awake here again, hearing the Bible being read.”

We were glad that in her difficult time she had something lovely to think about. But the full meaning of it we weren't sure. Was it a premonition that she was soon to pass on to the land of golden streets and unearthly light, to be surrounded by love and joy?

We decided to let her rest some more, after praying together for her full recovery. Perhaps she would have another encouraging dream, that would spare her the discomfort she was experiencing.

In the kitchen my sister and I talked in hushed tones. “Should we bring her something to eat; some broth or something?” “Or is it better to leave

her resting without disturbance?”

We discussed each decision together. We checked on her every now and then, and if she was very peaceful looking, then we left her to rest. But if she was stirring, then we asked her if there was anything she needed, or offered her something to sip on.

One time it was my sister’s turn to check on her. I was out in the workshop, pray-working. My sister spoke through the piping and called me to come right away, there was something she wanted me to see.

I put down quickly what I was doing and entered the house.

“Look, just look at mother’s face!” Sister said.

I didn’t know what was so interesting, or what to expect.

I walked in very silently and looked at my mother’s face and saw the most beautiful smile. Yet she was, to our eyes, just asleep.

“Must be another of those dreams,” I said, when we went into the sitting room.

When night fell, a visitor arrived. It was a kind older gentleman, who had known my mother as a girl, before she became an orphan. He had tended her mother in her sickness before passing away. He remembered this girl and always wondered what had become of her.

When the request for doctor’s assistance came to his work place, he made inquiries on just who was needing help. The name was familiar, and when he placed it and realised just who it was, he determined to come bring aid as soon as possible, being that he was a doctor.

“I’m sorry I took so long to come. I did my best to get here, but delays happen,” he apologised.

I thanked Dr. Alburne and shook his hand, then led him to the room where mother lay quietly resting.

“Has she had anything to eat or drink in awhile?” he began to ask questions, trying to figure out just what would be needed and what her condition was.

Dr. Alburne took a few notes, and then stepped out of the bedroom to the sitting room, where we could talk more freely without disturbing mother.

We told him how her health had been waning over the past year and a half, and now with her headaches, and the more recent falling accidents, this being the third in the past month, we were concerned.

“Hmm, I see...” and more notes were taken.

“I think the best thing for her is just what you have done—rest and liquids when she can be given them. The fever will pass naturally. But the cause isn’t quite known yet. I’ll need some time to think and look in my books, and of course ask the good Lord about the situation.

“God only knows what to do, in each individual case. I’ll stay at the town inn tonight, and come see you tomorrow afternoon. Perhaps one of you should rest in there with her, should she need anything. Good night then, until tomorrow,” Dr. Alburne said, and was off again quick.

“I’ll keep watch for mother for the first half of the night,” I offered. My sister needed some rest herself, I could tell. “And if you wake in the early hours of the morning, we can switch, so I can get some rest.”

Sister agreed, and soon settled in her bed for the night, but not before we read something from the Bible together and committed our mother’s health to the Lord.

After we prayed a thought came to me.

“Sister you are good at writing—something I seldom have time for—why don’t you write down the dream she told us today. It was so lovely. Who knows if she’ll have more to share when she wakes. That smile on her face seemed to be a peek into what she might be experiencing.”

So Sister took a pencil and notebook to bed and wrote all she could remember.

It was about 3:00 in the morning when something seemed to wake Sister from sleep. Thankfully I had been able to sleep quite a bit, as mother was resting so peacefully. When Sister came to check on things it was the perfect timing. Mother also stirred and then whispered for us. We both went to her side, ready to aid her in any way needed.

I propped her up and put a glass of water to her lips. She took three sips and then lay back relaxed.

“What have you been dreaming of, mother?” Sister asked.

I wasn’t too sure we should be making her talk, but mother didn’t seem to mind.

“Come closer darlings, I can’t speak too loudly, as it tires me. I have dreamt several times, and each lovely dream seems to carry on from the one before; each one builds on or adds to the former one.”

Sister rushed out to get her pencil and notebook and returned so fast that she was ready to take notes before mother had caught her next

breath. The lamp beside the bed was turned on, and we were ready to listen and record.

“Together your father and I walked, along with so many others. His dear brother was there beside him, and an old pastor I knew as a child was there too. He was like another father to me.

“The more we walked the brighter things became. It seemed we were nearing the source of the light. Though I could remember my life here on earth, I wasn’t thinking about it at all. This place of beauty and Godly purity inspired all my senses, filled them and awakened them. There aren’t words for me to say all that I felt and saw.”

Wanting to hear more, my sister urged, “Then what happened next? Or is that all?”

“My dear children, there is more. But I don’t wish for you to be sad,” she answered.

“Go ahead, mother,” I added, “This is cheering us up. What happened next?”

A tear or two slid down mother’s cheeks, as she attempted to find the words to say. She wiped them away saying, “I’m not crying because I’m sad, but it was deeply moving to me what happened next.”

Eagerly we listened, with Sister poised and ready to write.

“When we got closer to this light, this brilliant light, I started to make out the figure of someone. I knew instantly just who it was. Someone I know, and Someone I hope you will get to know very well.”

More tears fell, and she was too choked up to speak. We waited in silence, patting her, or giving her hand a squeeze.

“Jesus Christ, the Son of God stood radiantly before me. He reached out His arms and drew me close to Him.

“The love I felt was overwhelming. The feeling I had was of being truly home at last. Home with the One I belonged to.”

Mother was unsure if she wanted to go and speak more. But we knew there was more. There was nothing in what she said so far that would make us sad. Quietly we waited.

“From what He told me, and I will reserve His words to me exactly, but I believe it won’t be long until I will join that Heavenly family—Upstairs,” mother whispered.

It was big news for us to hear this, and we were taken back. But with such a lovely reception and great place to go, in the land beyond tears, we

could see how she would be well cared for and happy there.

Perhaps the Lord would make it not seem so long to her and dad, until us grown children would join them Up there. We'd get by.

We had thus far, and our Father in Heaven would continue to care for us—maybe even in new and special ways.

The passing of our dad brought the encouragement of Sister's healing to us from God's loving hands; we knew God had good things in store for those who continue to love and trust Him.

Mother needed to rest more, but we weren't ready to sleep at all. So much was going through our minds. I stoked up the fire in the sitting room, turned on the lamp and read the Bible. Sister was nearby writing out more fully all that mother had said about her experiences or dreams.

At 9:00 in the morning, Dr. Alburne showed up. We hadn't expected him so early. But he had taken a good deal of time thinking, researching and praying during the night. The Lord then also woke him early and told him that there wasn't much time left, and he needed to make his way back to our house as soon as possible.

Sister had just made some breakfast and we invited him to join us, while we told him about the night and how mother was.

He'd brought with him some little books of prayers and gave one to each of us. "This might be the best you can do for now, both for yourselves and for your mother. I've found these prayers written in this book, comforting and reassuring."

We thanked him, and then made our way to mother's room.

There it was again, that radiant smile—yet it seemed she was fast asleep. There was one thing different, however, her hand seemed to be reaching out, as if it was holding the hand of someone sleeping right beside her.

Suddenly she stirred, and was most disturbed and disoriented. She opened her eyes and seemed very surprised to be where she was. "Where am I... oh...I've come back..." she said, finally realising what had happened.

I offered her another drink and placed the cover snugly over her. Soon she was peacefully asleep again.

But as we turned to leave her in peace we heard a little gasp, then all was silent again.

In about an hour, after spending time in prayer around the fire, the doctor went to check on her.

When Dr. Alburne felt her brow, no longer was the fever there, but her heat was fading fast. He checked her heart beat, and pulse, but found that vital signs had stopped. It was clear that she, the real mother, was no longer there.

“I think she’s in paradise, dear ones.”

Sister started to sob, and I began to leave the room, a lump forming in my throat.

I hadn’t taken many steps when I heard the sweetest music I ever heard. Sister looked up too. “Where is that coming from?”

Then in a moment, mother suddenly opened her eyes and called out, “Darlings, I’ll be seeing you later. I’ve got some things to prepare for you. I love you!”

We froze, utterly shocked, and ran back to the room.

“Mother, mother, we thought you were...”

“Yes, I know darlings, and well, we say things differently Up There. I was embracing eternal life. I will never die, and neither will you... Jesus let me come back briefly to say farewell, until later, wasn’t that tender? Take care of each other now...your Heavenly Father is with you always..” she said, then like a light turning off again, she had sped away.

Dr. Alburne didn’t know what to make of it. He went through the motions of checking her heart and pulse and breath, and feeling her forehead. It was the same as it was before.

All he could do was shake his head.

“Well, I think I’ll stay around for a few more hours to monitor the situation. Who knows what will happen next?” It certainly wasn’t something he faced each day.

“You two, don’t worry about a thing,” the doctor said to try to console us. “I’ll take care of all that needs to be done now. Once we are sure there aren’t going to be any more surprise visits, then she can rest in peace.”

While he waited there with us, we talked a bit with him, relating to him about her dreams, and her faith.

“I believe it!” Dr. Alburne said. “After what I saw today, she has certainly stepped into the realm of glory and was permitted to give you a glimpse. Say, there are lots of folks who need something to give them a ray of hope when facing the passing of loved ones. I’d love to have published what you are writing up, then I could give it out to patients and the grieving. Would you do that for me? I’m sure you can’t put a picture on it,

but at least the words will be a great, marvellous help.”

“Actually,” I said, “Sister is not only a great writer, but pretty good at art too...I’m sure she could draw something up. It would be wonderful to have, in mother’s honour, something printed that brought others to know of Jesus, and just what is awaiting those that believe on Him.”

Sister promised to get to work on it right away, and to have it ready as soon as possible.

“Good then,” said the doctor. “I’ll be eagerly waiting for a copy. I’ve had good business this year, and as the tithe of my income and a way to serve the good Lord, I’d like to invest in this.”

Dr. Alburne kept his word, and so did we. Sister worked on a lovely article that told of our mother and her moments in paradise before joining the angels at last. We also included some scriptures and explained the way for others to know they would be going to Heaven, when their life was over. The prayer included said:

“Dear Lord Jesus, I know You are God’s Son, and that You lived, and died, and are alive now forever. My sins are forgiven due to your sacrifice for us all. I accept that as my payment for all I have done wrong. Please come into my heart and make me a new person, a child of God, one of Your Heavenly family, so when I die, I will in fact become more alive than ever, because of Your gift of eternal life. Amen.”

Sister drew up some pretty pictures to add to it. Together it formed a nice booklet. Dr. Alburne gave us many copies, and he kept many too. The word would get out, and mother’s passing would now cause many more to be allowed into Heaven’s Gates, through what this little booklet shared.

7—My Sister and I—An Unusual Team

It was sometime before my sister and I felt we could put our life back together. When a formerly-thought essential element is removed, a few things seem to collapse. All that a person was holding together and helping support—maybe many things you didn’t even realise—suddenly are found to be lacking and faltering.

We didn’t really know what we were to do, where we were to go from then on. But we didn’t need to worry about much, because apparently it

had all been worked out in advance. We just didn't know about it yet.

It started with an increased amount of visitors to our humble place, people who knew of us, or who our parents had helped. They brought food and gifts, and offered to run errands for us. It was their way of showing moral support.

I'm sure we would have managed just fine without all this extra care and kindness lathered on us graciously, from people far and near. But emotionally it did help us piece together the broken or changed parts of our heart and life.

One day our Uncle came by for a visit. He was the one that had helped to get me started with my carpentry work, which now supported us. I wondered what he would say or do this time.

"I'm deeply sorry about your mother," he said like he really felt it and meant it.

He gave each of us a warm hug and then gestured that we go on inside.

"Come, I've got something to discuss with you."

We went to the sitting room, and Sister brought out a jug of water and part of a loaf of bread that was baked the day before. We offered him of our humble supplies.

Politely he took some, smiled, and said, "Are you ready? I've got something I think you'll be pleased with."

Sister and I looked at each other. What was up now?

"I've arranged a place for you to stay, near my house, just for a bit. You've lived here long, and perhaps you are ready for a change. There are many others starting to set up houses and properties in my area.

"Used to be rather remote, but land has been selling and there's lots of building work going on. Which means..."

My Uncle paused to see if I could fill in the rest of what he was to say.

I made a guess at it, "Which means there is a need for a carpenter and plenty of work for me to do?"

"Righto!"

"When would we go there... and what would happen to this place?" Sister, ever the practical thinker began the queries.

"Well, you could leave as soon as you wanted to—and the sooner the better. The more work you get, the better off you'll be—or at least it's a

help to you both. It's my way of helping you out. You'll be able to stay free of rent for the next six months, and then after that you can decide what to do.

"This house here belongs to our family, so that is why you have been able to stay free of rent. But since it is ours, I do have the authority to rent it out for the time being; and I'm happy to let you both keep the money from it. You'll be able to earn a bit from the rent of this place, enough to cover some basic expenses.

"Then while you work on carpentry you can save up all you can to use for whatever future plans you wish to make. I'm sure you both are bursting with ideas!"

Well, bursting wasn't really the way I felt. More like swimming and trying to keep afloat, but I appreciated his enthusiasm.

"Thank you Sir," I said. "Thank you very much for your thoughtful and kind offer. My sister and I will have a good chat about it and let you know what we plan to do."

"Very well then, I'll be back in a month. If you are ready to move, I'll take you. If you choose to stay here and carry on as you have been—I see you do have a well established garden, and that's good; and if you are not ready to leave it, then I'll just come to have a chat and bid you farewell."

We planned to meet then one month from that day, when he promised to return.

"Oh, before I go, I do have a gift for you," he said. Always the one to spring surprises.

He took us out to the shed—the place he knew I wasn't at the time of his visit—and there was a nanny goat!

"Here, something for milk and cheese—that is if you know how to milk one," Uncle added with a grin.

Well, we did have some experience, though not much.

"I guess we'll be learning in a hurry then, I suppose," I added.

"Warm milk and bread, with fresh herbs for supper," Sister said with a smile.

We gave him hugs and thanked him heartily.

That evening we sat by the fire, sipping our fresh goat milk that had

been heated with herbs, and dipped in our crusty bread that softened nicely.

“I guess you have a new job!” I said to Sister.

“You too,” she added with a laugh.

“Okay, we’ll take turns goat watching—so she doesn’t eat our veggies. We can take her out where there is grass in the day, and at night the shed could be the place for her sleep, for now at least.”

We agreed that was a good plan.

That wasn’t all. There was more in store. There were so many people adding this or that to our life, that a new shape started to take form. We were wondering just what was in store for us, but so far it seemed hopeful it would be good, better than expected.

Two days later, a lady came to call. She was from a neighbouring town. She brought with her a cage containing two hens.

“Here darlings,” she said. “These are two of my best laying hens, and they will provide you some good egg suppers.”

“Why, thank you.. Mrs...?” I asked, not knowing her name, but wishing to thank her properly.

“Oh, just call me Annie. I like to keep things casual and friendly. I was wondering who to give them too, as I need to travel for the next while. Then I heard of you both, here and forlorn. It’s not much, but it’s what I can do. You can have them for free and keep them for as long as you wish,” she kindly added.

Sister asked, “Can we invite you in, or something?”

“Well, I do think I must be going. Lots of preparations to do. But I thank you for your kindness. Oh, and I almost forgot, here is a bag of feed,” Annie said, pointing to a large bag of milo she’d set on the porch.

“It ain’t too bad eating it yourself either, if you get hard up. Cooks like a type of porridge. The chickens can forage quite a bit on their own in the garden, so they won’t miss a cup or two if you need to snitch a bit.”

Then with a smile, she was off.

“Well, farmer, Sister,” I said.

“And you too, Mister,” she added.

I helped to carry the large wire cage with the poultry to the back of the house, while Sister dragged the bag of feed to the workshop.

I figured we could let the hens out for a bit. They'd probably been cooped up for too long already. The back was fenced in, and they couldn't easily escape. We'd rig something up for them for the night. Goatie wouldn't be lonely that night, I imagined—two new animal guests to keep her company.

A month passed quickly, and we'd been busy keeping up with the new animals, learning how to care for them, providing sleeping places for them, as well as making plans for the future.

We knew it would only be a short time when my uncle would show up again, for our answer. We needed to make our final decision.

We listed all the pros and cons of moving or staying. Neither of us felt comfortable moving or staying. Each one had its ups and downs and mostly unknowns.

We decided to take the matter to our Heavenly Father. Guidance was what we needed. Jesus knew the past, the present and the future. He could help us make the right choice.

We read portions of the Bible and prayed for God to show us something while we rested and slept that night. Perhaps even in our dreams, He could tell us what we were to do.

That night I woke with a dream, a startling one indeed. In the dream Sister and I were neither here at this house, nor living in the other promised house, but somewhere I didn't know where.

In the dream, we were happy, and had what we needed. But the building we stayed in wasn't a house to ourselves. In fact we stayed in many places.

One of the places was a room in a Church that seemed to have taken us in for awhile, as they wished to hear what we could share with them and help teach the children. At other times we were camping out in a tent. Another time we were in a large mansion type of house, with many children around us. Other times we were staying in a back yard shed, where I did work during the day.

In the dream we had a wagon load of supplies—building supplies and carpentry tools, teaching aids for children's classes, musical instruments, cooking pots and a stove, blankets and a lantern, cots and fold out chairs, and of course a few chickens and a goat.

Whatever could this mean? I couldn't wait to talk with my sister about it.

But I must wait. She might be dreaming just then, and I didn't wish to wake her up prematurely.

“Does this mean that we are to move around... help many people... not settle down just yet? Not find those we are to marry, just yet?” With these questions on my mind I put on my coat and left the house as quietly as I could. I wanted to sit under the stars and commune with our Father in Heaven.

It was then that a plan unfolded to me, one part at a time:

—When our uncle came to see us, we would load up our supplies in the wagon he promised to bring, but just what we needed in order to get by. We didn't need to take all the furniture and so on. If we left this behind it would ensure a higher rent anyway, providing a furnished house for a family.

—The rent from this house was to provide for us as we set off to explore new areas. We'd seen so little of the country we lived in. It was time to travel and learn new things, and get to know new people. Through this we could have a way to support ourselves yet further.

—I would help with carpentry while passing through, in return for food and lodgings, and Sister could help mothers with their young ones, and teach classes, or perhaps help with the cooking and cleaning.

—We would get a tent and camping supplies, either from friends and relations or with the first bit of funds we could gather, so when there was no place to stay, we were set.

—We'd need something to transport us and the wagon, but that could be worked out, somehow.

—We could use the printed tract that Dr. Alburne had made, and give it to those needing encouragement.

—Perhaps Sister could write more, a book or something, and that, along with her lovely pictures, could be sold to interested folks.

There were endless ideas, and by the time the sun started to rise and lighten the sky, I actually did feel I was bursting with ideas, just like my uncle thought I would be. It was all a wild idea, so everything needed miracles. It wasn't the time now to ask “how and why” but just to get the right plan for the next step into the future.

I went into the house and heard some clattering in the kitchen. Sister and I looked at each other with odd smiles, as if each one held a secret to share, but wanted the other one to start off first expressing theirs.

“Milo cereal with fresh milk and eggs?” Sister suggested a breakfast menu.

As the milo cooked, we fetched eggs and milked Goatie.

When there was little to do but wait for the pot to finish its boil, we started to share our “dreams” or thoughts from the night.

I let my sister go first. More like I begged her to. My dream had seemed too crazy. I was sure she wouldn’t like that idea in the least.

“Well, I slept really well. I can’t remember a dream, really...” she shared.

“But did you have any ideas or thoughts whatsoever?” I questioned desperately. Time was running out for us to make up our mind.

“I don’t know what it meant, but when I woke I heard these words coming to my mind, and so I quickly wrote them down on a piece of paper,” Sister said.

“Well... what does it say?” I continued to prod her.

She got her paper and read:

“Go out, not knowing where you are to go. Like so many travellers did in Bible times, who were giving God’s message to others. You can live a joyful life unrestricted by the walls you now have. When the time is right, and you are ready, a house and home and families of your own will come. Just not yet. Do this one thing first. One step at a time the way will clear.”

Expecting a puzzled look on her brother’s face, she looked up to see, surprisingly, a smile greeting her.

Now she was completely intrigued.

I then told of my dream in the night, and the thoughts that seemed to nearly cascade into my mind.

We were fully engaged in our conversation, for a long while, even after we were done eating. We nearly forgot to let the animals out.

I took them out for their grass time, while Sister cleaned up and began to make lists of what we would need to do and pack, give away, clean up, purchase and loan out to others. Today and the next few days we would work on our preparations.

We decided to take up our uncle’s offer, and we would stay in the accommodation he had provided, at first. The funds we hoped to raise while there would help us to invest in getting what we needed for the challenging journey we planned to take; and perhaps others would be willing to help us to acquire the essentials.

In two days time we were ready to greet our uncle as he showed up, and were ready to make our move.

It was exciting, and a bit scary at the same time. But before we stepped out of the house and into our uncle's car we prayed and read a Bible passage. It gave us the courage to take the next new step of our life. There was so much we could offer others, and we were ready and willing to do it.

8—Living His Dreams, and Prospering

I remember the first night that my sister and I spent at the borrowed location—the house near our uncle's place, after leaving the homed we'd known for so long.

The weather was getting cold by that time, and we didn't have much to keep us warm. We could only manage to heat one room. We didn't want to use up precious saved funds on too much fuel for the fire. Our Aunty, my Uncle's wife, came out to see us, carrying some warm supper she'd cooked just for us. It was very thoughtful of her.

As we sat there, huddled under blankets near the heating stove, eating our meal, I think we were both thinking "What are we doing? Have we made the right choice?"

I'm sure my sister was thinking about our house back at "home". This was quite a change and we felt like fish that had just jumped out of the water.

"Are you thinking what I am thinking?" she finally said.

"Probably," I responded.

"Let's read a psalm or two after this," Sister suggested. "I'm sure we'll feel better then. Not everyone has the opportunity to move and get around and do new things. Just think I can walk now. I should be so very glad, rather than thinking of all it's costing me, and what we've given up."

I replied, "Well, I think we are a bit tired and cold, and the change is making us have some feelings of adjustments. But I think you have a good idea. If we read the thing that has not and will not change—God's Word—perhaps we'll feel more at home and be ready to get a good night's sleep."

A knock then sounded at the door. I went to see who it was.

"I thought you could use these, darlings. It seems a cold has suddenly set. It was milder last week. Perhaps things will warm up again. Who knows?"

It was a neighbour who had come to bring a few more blankets and hot water bottles as well—already filled and warm and ready for use.

We thanked her heartily, and put them to use right away. Ah, the warmth made us feel the Lord's love. After Bible reading and prayer, we soon were sleeping.

The next day I went out around the neighbourhood, letting people know that I had moved in, and was ready and willing to help with carpentry work that might be needed. I let them know I was just here for a short time, so whatever work they'd like, would need to be sooner, rather than later.

People thanked me and said they'd let me know later on if my help was needed.

Meanwhile at the small house, Sister took care of the animals, and did her best to set things up in a workable way. She then walked out to find out from people where they got their food, and where the nearest market or shops were.

By the end of the first week, things were up and running. We knew time was short, and besides keeping ourselves going for the time being, we had a future to prepare for. Each day had to also include steps forward towards our goal.

It was decided that I would work hard and well on the carpentry requests that were coming in, as well as milk Goatie. Sister would take care of the house and meals, animal care, and would focus on preparations. There were letters to be written, inquiries to be made, maps to be studied, and so forth.

Every two weeks we talked about the progress and needs, and had special prayer for what still needed to be done.

By the time there was only one month left on our agreed upon time here in this borrowed house, we knew we needed to get down to some serious prayer. There seemed to be so much more to do, more than we could manage in such a short time.

But after spending all day praying, Bible reading, and trying to hear God speaking to us, that is when things started to really move.

People we had written to and made requests of, had answered us. Their letters came in and pleased us with their responses. An ad we had put in the local paper had a good effect and people started showing up at our door with supplies we'd need for our journeys.

On the final day, after we had packed up what we had into the wagon, and cooked our last evening meal, came the biggest miracle of all. A new neighbour had just moved in to his now built house, and came knocking at

the door.

“I hear you wanted to travel west, along the lake to the camping spot over there. But without animals to pull the wagon, nor any sort of automotive powered vehicle, you didn’t know how you were going to get from here to there.

“I was thinking, *That’s along the way I am to travel in two days...* Perhaps I could hook up your wagon load of supplies and take you both along with me and let you off where you are trying to go; that is if you wish to.”

We both looked at each other. The miracle of transportation had happened. In a new way that we hadn’t yet thought of. We would be able then to be on our way. God was leading and providing for us.

“That is a very kind and generous—and I might add timely--offer. Thank you Sir. But we needed to be out of this place by tomorrow, as there are new renters moving in,” I responded.

After thinking a moment he said, “Well, I’ve got a big yard, what do you say you move on over to my place for a couple days, starting tomorrow. Might help you test out your camping supplies and figure things out first, and see if anything is missing, while still close by for friendly help if something is amiss. Then, when I take the trip you can pack up and we can be going.”

Another gift of God’s providence. We must have smiled big enough he took it as an agreeable option to us.

He continued, “I’ll come over here first thing in the morning and tug your rig over to my place. You two can walk over, when you are ready, with that goat of yours, and meet me there. You know where I am,” he offered.

“I hardly know what to say,” I began. “This is wonderful. Thank you so much, and may God mightily bless you.”

The kind man added, “You are doing a good thing, and doing your best to brighten other’s corners, it’s the least I can do. No trouble really. Just lending a helping hand, like any good neighbour should.”

And so went the pattern of what turned out to be five and a half years. It’s hard to believe so much time passed. We were kept so busy, people requesting our help here and there, that time seemed to speed on. The hardest part was moving on from the kind folks we’d met, and who took us in, gave us food and lodgings, or perhaps some spare clothes they no longer needed. We made so many friends, more than we’d had in our whole life time up until that point. For many years afterwards we kept up

writing some of them. They became lifelong friends.

I know it was hard for Sister to say good-bye to some of the children she helped to teach, but there was a time to stay and a time to move. If we had stayed only in one place, then the friends we ended up meeting and the children we helped at the next town, would never have been met.

We had to learn to let go of one thing in order to reach out for and receive something new. Eventually we got used to it, a bit at least.

Sister wrote a book of our journeys and kept a record of miraculous and special events. Several years later it was at last complete, with artwork and all. We wrote to each of our friends, and the grown children she used to help care for and teach, telling them about the book.

They were so interested in it and many pitched in together with whatever they could, to help pay for it to get printed—and so a copy was sent to each of them as well.

We must have stayed in about 100 different places—from cabins, to tents, to lofts, to fancy hotel rooms, to sheds, to barns, to sitting rooms of small houses, and so many other places. The more we shared with others about what is awaiting those who know and love Jesus, the more people we were able to bring to know the Saviour.

I think perhaps that was the best part of the journey, those we knew we'd played a part in bringing to Jesus. This made the cold, the discomfort, the forsaking, and the waiting for our life-partners, worth it all.

Many of these people were young ones, who accepted Jesus as their Lord and King, Friend and Saviour. Sister, when she had time, would write out for these children a story or two about Jesus' life on Earth, and draw a picture to go along with it.

She would give it to them as a gift, to remind them that they belonged to Him and He loved them. It would give them a desire to one day find out more about what was written in the Bible.

Some of these people we met, a couple of very special people, it was hard to move on from them, because there was a new feeling of love being created in our hearts.

I think we had been travelling for about four and a half years, when all of a sudden, we both found ourselves deeply in love with someone. I, with a lady I had met and, and my sister with a respectable gentleman.

For the next year or so that we travelled and kept up with our ministry, we wrote to these ones we loved. If they wanted to write us back, they sent

it to our uncle's place, and he held all mail for us, during that time.

Every couple months we'd swing by our uncle's home to say hello, swap stories, and pick up our mail. They we're always happy times. Except for the time when we had been detained there for six weeks due to illness.

At that time we wondered if we would ever get back on the road. But I think we just needed the time to rest and recoup and have a "certain dwelling place" for a bit. We wondered if perhaps we had done enough and it was time to occupy a house of our own.

However, the Lord showed us clearly that more was yet to be done. It was then, soon after we got back on the road again, that we both at last met the ones we ended up marrying. God blessed our giving, and gave back to us in special ways.

9—On a New Road of Life

During one of these times of briefly saying at our uncle's place, I saw my sister sitting under a tree reading a letter to her. From the look on her face I could tell it had something to do with Earnest, the man who was interested in her, and whom she loved dearly as well.

"A letter just came in, Rodney," I heard my uncle say, and with curiosity opened it.

"Dear Rodney,

Thank you for your letter. It is always with pleasure that I read what you write. You must have quite an interesting life. I don't know if I could do what you are doing, but I'm glad you find joy in it.

If you ever feel the need to settle down, you are more than welcome to come and stay in our house. We've got a large property, with a cottage that is unused, much of the time. It would be perfect for guests, like yourselves. Please accept this invitation, when you wish.

With sincerity, Lara"

I must say, my heart either stoped for a second or jumped, but whatever the case, I was affected. Lara, dear beautiful Lara. To be around her, even if we only stayed there for a brief time, would be heaven... But I'd need to talk with Sister, of course.

When I found her later in the garden, she was very pensive.

"Rodney, I need to speak with you about something..."

“Some thing... or some ONE?” I said with a hint of a smile.

“Oh, Rod, do you have to guess all my secrets? Well, I suppose it’s not really a secret, at least won’t be now,” she said.

“Tell me,” I looked at her, poised to listen well.

“He wants to marry me—this spring... how good is that? But, it then totally disrupts what we have going. Our ministry together would come to a close, and it would be a whole new chapter. Oh, I’m torn back and forth, not knowing what is right to do and what should wait until later; or what I should just say no to. Oh, can you help me out?” she said with emotion.

“Hmm, we’re used to changes—so it isn’t uncommon for us to change yet again. Perhaps we need to meet and discuss this and pray about how much longer we are to carry on our travelling life. Maybe it is time to do something new. I actually got a letter from Lara...” I said.

“Oh, what did she say? I hope it was good. I do want you to be happy,” Sister said, caringly.

“Yes, it was quite an attractive offer, but like I said, and like you feel, I think we need to pray. If now is not the time to move on yet, and get settled down to the tune of wedding bells, then we’ll need to pray for the strength and joy to keep going.”

“Yes,” Sister said. “Let’s do it soon. I want to write him back while we are still here in this house, and get an answer back, hopefully soon, too.”

“Yes, me, too! Let’s meet tomorrow,” I suggested.

And so it was that the Lord made it clear—both in the night to us as we slept, and in speaking to us the next day as we prayed. We felt the same as we did when someone before had offered us the opportunity to stay in their house or backyard, in return for our help; at those times we knew it was God leading us to the next place. And so we felt now, with these invitations from those we loved deeply, it was the next place to go to, and to keep doing our best, wherever we were to go.

“Listen to this!” my sister said one hot summer day. The return mail came at last, after her letter to Earnest, accepting his offer for marriage. She was sharing with me some of what he said.

“He says, *‘I’ve got a cabin you both could use, just a mile and a half up the road. It belongs to my cousin. He is travelling for three of the coldest*

months this coming winter—he wants to go where it’s warm. So it’s free for your use—you and your brother, if you wish to have a place to take a break and keep warm.”

“Wow!” I said. “Sounds like our winter accommodations are worked out then. Great!”

The wedding was to be in the spring following that winter, if all worked out. The plan could tentatively be, that during the coming winter we could stay at that cabin there and get to know Earnest and his family more. Perhaps I could take trips to see Lara, every few weeks, and build on our friendship.

One day, shortly before we were to leave our uncle’s place, another letter arrived for me. I had written Lara thanking her for inviting us to stay at her place, and suggested we could stay in the later month of autumn. It was now well into summer, and we had a few more places we still wished to travel to.

She wrote back saying everything was worked out, and if we wanted to come earlier we could. There was accommodation available for two months at her place. We would be given food and all that we needed. It was this family’s way of helping to support God’s work—by giving to those trying their best to tell others about Him.

So the plan seemed to come together rather well—and Sister and I both knew that the One who had called us to this ministry, was working out wonderful things for us. Perhaps our travelling days were coming to a close, but there was no end of challenges and change, and new things to learn and do.

Now that we had all the communications and accommodations and invitations worked out, we packed up and headed out again. I look back and remember those last three months of travel and ministry that my sister and I had together that year, as some of the happiest.

We both didn’t know how the road of life would wend, and wondered what was actually around the corner. But for the time being we would just put our heart and mind into doing the best we could.

When summer days turned to autumn, and the autumn of our ministry was drawing to a close, we felt ready for it. The Lord had done so much for us thus far, and we knew He would keep us in the next trek.

With autumn half over we made our way to Lara's place. We found people going in that direction, and as we prayed we were able to get rides, until we made it at last. Things happened as planned, and we stayed at the lovely accommodation provided by Lara's family for a couple months. During that time she and I became fast friends. We were sure that living together, as man and wife, was what we wanted to do.

When winter set in, we then moved to the cabin near Earnest's place, and started the next stage of seeing how or if the friendship would work out between my sister and Earnest.

Though he was a quiet sort of young man, I could tell that he really cared deeply for my sister. He was well-off too, and from what I noticed he wasn't mercenary in anyway, but kind and courteous, and keen to use his regular, substantial income for things that he was sure would benefit those who needed it the most. I felt she would be in good hands.

Although it would be very different for us both to be with others, I was certain the time was right and we had learned what we were meant to learn during our years of travel. Time for a change and a new set of lessons would help us both grow in character in new ways, thus making us a better help to others.

New experiences would increase our understanding of others. It would be a good change; though of course it would take some serious adjusting.

In early spring, Sister and I went away for a week of camping, to have our last time of it just being us two together, and to make sure that we both were doing what we felt was right.

We prayed,

"Lord, we've given you our time and strength and our all. It seems You are giving back to each of us someone that loves us and wants to spend the rest of their lives with us. It's kind of amazing, but we think it's something You have worked out.

"We need You, our Lord and Guide, to make it sure and secure in our hearts, that this is for sure what we are each to do. And if one of us is to marry, and the other isn't, please show us that too. Amen."

Then we waited quietly and listened. There wasn't a booming voice telling us to do this or that, but we could almost feel the warmth from the smile of Jesus looking down on us. We knew we were on the right path.

A verse popped into my head,

"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

(Matthew 19:6)

I took this as Him saying He was putting us together with our new partners.

“I also had the idea,” my sister said, “That in the future, like during the summers, we could still go for a bit of travelling, and visit the friends we met on our trips. I could continue to teach the children I met, about the Lord.

“Perhaps getting married doesn’t have to mean we’ll never take trips again. I think there is much good that is needed to be done around the country, and God needs those that aren’t too occupied with house and home, to give Him a bit of their time to get the truth of God’s Word out to others. I feel like there is still so much that needs to be done.”

And so it was agreed, that marriage didn’t mean the end of all future ministry, but was to be as a home base and a way to fill in the other needed parts of our life and hearts—and a way to assist the families we were marrying into. But every now and then, when the time worked out, we’d set off again, as brother and sister, to help others come to know about Jesus’ love.

Once we were certain of God’s plan for us, we could begin to get enthusiastic in planning things. We moved back with our uncle, for these weeks of preparation and completion of our fulltime travels. The house we had first stayed in was free for use for six weeks, so we moved in for that time. We then communicated with each family—Lara’s and Earnest’s, and worked out to have a double wedding.

Our uncle and aunty got so excited and helped out in all the ways needed. He seemed to pull friends out of all corners of the country. People who heard about us were bringing not only wedding gifts in advance, but food and clothes, and even items and clothing for the future children they thought we each were soon to have with our partners.

I was fitted out with a fine new suit for the wedding, and Sister had an array of dresses for her to choose from. Cards with gifts of money were coming in from those we had met on our travels and had written to about this new change of our life. They wished us well.

It seemed for those final whirlwind weeks before each of our weddings, that every bit of love was coming back to us again. We were in awe. Great is God’s faithfulness. He plentifully rewards!

About two weeks before the wedding was the last time that either of us had seen our fiancés. We hoped they were well. But we imagined that they were having just as much fun, or excitement and a bit of nervousness too,

about the upcoming wedding.

When the awaited day came at last, I saw my beloved Lara, so lovely. Like a radiant flower in a meadow of green, singular in beauty, in all ways. I felt I was in Heaven. When my sister said, “I do”, I could tell that Earnest felt he was the happiest man alive.

We had a double wedding that spring, and eighteen months after each of us were married, we made our first trip, as brother and sister. We explored a new part of the country we hadn't been to yet. We found it indeed hungry for what we could share about God's love and about the Heaven that awaited.

It was a bit difficult for us to get away for this trip, and sickness tried to stop us, and many other pulls of home living. But once we got away and began ministry to others, we felt a wave of God's blessing in our hearts. There was a time for everything. Moving with God—stopping when He said it was time, and moving when it was best, was the way to live a fulfilling and joyful life.

10—In Retrospect: Musing on Life's Event's and Occurrences

Now I sit, 12 years later, having lived a good life with my new little family, musing on all that has transpired since I took this new road to join my life with another. So much has happened. I can say that there has never been a dull moment.

My hands have never stopped making something or another, although carpentry isn't all I do now. There are children to take on hikes, a wife to listen to and help, farm animals to tend to, and a flourishing garden to work in.

Since my uncle passed away a few years ago, God bless his soul, he bequeathed to me a hearty portion of his wealth. I gave some of it to my sister for her book work and publishing. The rest I kept and had our own little house built, out here in the country.

Lara and I take turns tending to the small farm that provides for us in many ways, and we take turns teaching and caring for the children. I've learned so much since being a father. It's like starting a whole new set of life lessons.

You have to keep a watchful eye on their wellbeing, more than thinking

about whatever you are planning on doing or are in the middle of doing. You have to have a ready and Godly answer to so many questions and situations the children bring up.

I'm glad for the times we spent reading the Bible, as now I have a basic knowledge of what God said, and it helps us to direct our family's ways.

Being a father means choosing to do what is best for your young ones, not always what you would prefer to do. It involves a lot of giving, and giving up what you had imagined. There's change every day—change in the way the children are as they grow older and bigger, and change in plans according to what happens that day.

The biggest thing I learned is the importance of praying for the children. The days I pray plenty for the children to learn and grow well, and to have an enjoyable life, the better things go.

If I just rush into the day, and keep at a busy pace, not stopping to ask the good Lord to take care of our special needs, then new problems arise—more problems than solutions, and we feel overwhelmed. That's when we have to stop, as a family, and get quiet before the Lord and ask for His blessings and healing and supernatural help and care.

Lara and I have learned lots too. At first I tended to want to tell her what to do, more than I would listen to her ideas or heart's wishes. This made her cry and wish I wouldn't be that way. I knew I needed to change, but it was hard to do it when I felt strongly about what I thought we should or shouldn't do, or what projects to take on, or how to raise the children.

Now I've learned better that to make a fulfilling life and a happy family, we need both the oars of the boat rowing working together, figuratively speaking. It's like I'm only using one oar on one side of the boat of our family, trying to move us along. Lara's ideas and what she can do and thinks is best is like using the other oar. I learned we both were needed. I needed to relax and let her and the children too, have a say in what we did or didn't do. Unless it was clearly a wrong choice, or something the Lord showed me should not happen, if it instead was fine and actually made good things happen, then I would let them do what they wished.

For some years, every few months we went to the distant church to meet with believers and their children. There was a big lunch we'd all pitch in to provide for. It was an all day event—since many of us travelled from far away. We'd chat with friends and fellow believers, eat heartily, and end the day singing around a campfire.

The day also included children's Bible lessons and activities, which my

children helped with, along with Lara. It was a social event, yet provided good Christian fellowship. We could chat and swap stories of how things were going, and pray for one another. We stayed at rented accommodations and travelled back in the morning.

One of our children was born with one blind eye. And although it wasn't completely hindering, it did affect his seeing things in proper perspective, and at times caused him to stumble or have accidents.

However, this was only the case until he was six years old. By that time we decided to take him to a distant preacher who often prayed for the sick or handicapped. Miracles of healing were being reported all the time.

It was a few days journey, but we chose to go. So we all packed up and went on what ended up being a week-long trip. Before we got there, to the prayer and healing meeting, something very special occurred.

We were stopped to picnic under a tree when I heard the voice of the Lord saying to me, *"Pray for him now. He needs to know I am real and can do this thing for him."*

So I acted on this instruction, and gathered the family to George's side, and prayed. "Lord, You are everywhere, and can do anything, anytime—because you are the God of all.

"I pray for the healing of George's eye, that there will now be no further sign of vision impairment. That from this moment on his eyes will work right, just as you did for the blind man in the Bible, and so many others since then, who suffered with all sorts of seeing problems.

"Nothing is beyond your power to intervene and give instantaneous healing. In Your Name, Jesus, we ask for this gift of full sight for George."

I felt confident that our humble, desperate prayer was heard and would be answered when the moment was right. One of the children, Milly, called for me to take them over to see a certain berry bush, and while I was gone my wife finished up the picnic with the rest of the children.

However, I didn't get too far in walking over to the berry bush, as the noise of excitement drew my attention back. I rushed back to see what they were all saying—or playing. George's older sister had put a scarf or cloth over the seeing eye of George, but George now could see from both eyes, and well, too!

They were having a game to find out if he could see this or that item that they showed him, only letting him look at things with his formerly blind eye. The children were laughing and enjoying the new change and miracle.

Praising the Lord, Milly and I then went back to the berry bush to pick

some and celebrate the miracle that just took place. We sang songs of praise and ate the berries that it seemed the Lord supplied just for this moment. We decided to go ahead and make our way to the meeting, even though the healing had already taken place. We could testify of it and increase the faith of others—that our God is a God of the miraculous, and a prayer answering God, who cares.

Another memorable event happened when we had been married for four years, and our second child was soon to be born. This was at a time when I hadn't been able to get much work for a while, so our supplies were running low, and we didn't know how we were going to carry on for too much longer without something changing for the better.

I had just put out our goats to graze and was coming back to the house when something stopped me. I looked down and saw a coin... and then another and another. It seemed as if someone had dumped out their purse on the dirt.

Of course no one did, as this was private property, and to our knowledge no one had been at this place. I picked up all the coins I could find, and jubilantly brought them to Lara.

"I was just praying!" she said. "Praying for something good to happen to get us through this time! How much is it?"

I counted the handful, and found it was more than I thought. It was more than enough to get what we needed for the next few months—why? Because when I went back to the spot I found the coins I saw there were a few I had missed. "What, a gold and a silver coin?" And they were. These proved to be just what we needed, and all was well. God was looking out for our needs—and the needs of our coming baby.

It was these special events that cemented or built strongly our faith that God would never stop being the amazing One that He is. No matter what is needed, when those who love and trust Him are in His will doing His work, there is no limit to what He can and will do.

There of course were many, many answers to prayer in our life, as having children provided plenty of opportunity for prayer and seeing the answers to it.

11—Praising His Goodness Forever

When Lara was a few months away from having our fourth child, she urged me to go ahead and take a mission trip with my sister. We had been on several so far, over the years of being married and each part of a new and forming family.

My sister and her husband Earnest, and their 11 children—some of

them having been twins—were planning to go out as missionaries. Pretty wild and adventurous. But they were going to try it at least for a year, to give the children a chance to learn and grow in a new environment.

Sister had been reading the scripture about “beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel”. It made her thankful, all over again, for the supernatural healing she received, and enjoyed every day. She would never be able to do what she was then able to do—having a large family, and do so much travelling—if that healing hadn’t come.

That day, when reading the Bible she heard the call in her heart to suggest their family take the Gospel, and the books of faith she had written, to those who needed it.

So it was during this time, before leaving, that Lara suggested that my sister and I go for one more trip together.

We decided to go—but the team would be somewhat larger than in years before. I’d take my oldest child, and she her two youngest, and two oldest. Sister’s oldest child carried the very youngest in a back carrier, and I did the same with her other young one.

Sister’s second oldest child teamed up with my child, as partners to look out for each other. We had a town in mind, that wasn’t too far away, and we’d camp there for a week. Our partners back at home, with some help at times too, would care for the rest of our families.

I remember that first night, with little ones curled up on our laps, we sat by the tents and looked up at the vast amounts of stars that were visible that clear night. We praised God for all He had done in our lives; for the children He had given us, and for the miraculous healings, and the supply and everything that had kept us going and serving Him all these years, to the best of our ability. We prayed for guidance on this mission trip, for it to help better the hearts and lives of others in this area, in some way.

Then we snuggled into bed in each of our tents—we had three tents to accommodate us all, for that special trip.

When sounds of peaceful sleep and gentle snoring were heard, then I, the main man of the team, crept outside again, to look at the gorgeous sky once again. I felt the Lord’s presence so real and near, like I have seldom felt it before. It seemed He was almost tangible or visible.

My heart took time for praise, and recalled all the events that had occurred, on these many trips taken, since each of us had become married. I thought of the years before, and how each time of difficulty seemed to only lead to something bigger and better afterwards, as I kept following God, reading the Bible, and believing that the impossible was possible with

God.

At last I went to sleep and slept peacefully until the morning.

The birds' cheery songs woke us up to a bright and delightfully sunny, and partly cloudy day. It was just the right combination for having a lovely day.

"What are we going to do today, Uncle," my sister's oldest children asked, young adults now themselves.

"We're going to ask God what He wants done and how He wants us to do it!" I replied.

So around the morning campfire, while we were eating some fruit and cakes we'd brought with us, we first discussed different ideas, and then paused for prayer.

Our children had been learning about prayer and obeying God's voice, but doing it in this setting, when we didn't have anyone or anything else to depend on, or to be telling us to do this or that, made it all the more exciting.

When we, my sister and I, and some of the children too, had shared what they believed the Lord to be telling us, we made our plans for the day.

We would split up into four teams and pass out some invitations we had printed and brought with us. Then we'd meet again at the tents for lunch and rest, and for some play in the field. Dinner would be cooked then, and an early night could be enjoyed.

There were plenty of other campers around, and walking trails, as well as a main road not too far away. The invitation was to a concert of beautiful, classical music, at a church a few hours away. There was to be refreshments served as well, to all who came.

The invitation also had on it a message from God to them, telling them that He loved them. Then those that attended the concert at the Church, would also hear a travelling evangelist speaking. It was a lovely way to bring more beauty and the message of God's love into people's lives.

That night as we sat around the campfire, eating fire-roasted veggies off of sticks, we talked about the future hopes and dreams that the older children had. It was interesting how each one shared a slightly different, yet united vision.

After their time away on their coming mission for a year as missionaries, they were planning to set up schools or learning centres, or game places, or recreational halls, all for the purpose of having enjoyable

places for young people to come, and both relax and learn and also get to know more about the Lord.

Each of these young ones had the vision to teach others, and especially other young people and children, the loving ways of the King of all.

There was so much in store. And so many more to now help spread the Gospel around. If Sister and I hadn't been willing to leave our former home of many years, to travel around, we might not have met the wonderful ones we were now married to.

If we hadn't chosen to keep making the mission of reaching other's with God's love and truth a part of our adult lives, then the children might not have grown up with this theme as part of their lives as well.

And because we had been willing to join our lives with someone and get married, and have and care for all the children God blessed us with, then our team was expanded. There were now many times more people who were willing to help change things for the better.

We were blessed in so many ways.

The next day, as the camp was beginning to stir, a man on horseback came by. He'd asked around until he found out where the people were staying or where they went—the ones who had given him the invitation: to the concert, and to a new Eternal life with a loving Saviour.

He began a conversation with Gerald, my sister's eldest. Later on, Gerald related to us what this man had said to him. But afterwards, he said to all: "You are doing a great work! I guess I'll be seeing more of you, in time, God willing."

He waved good-bye to those of us that were out of our tents, and off he rode.

"He is a travelling preacher of sorts. He said he'll come to the concert and bring along anyone else he can. I asked him what got him started on doing what he does. I think you will like this, mom. 'There was a young lady,' he said, 'that was travelling around one summer with her brother. She taught me and my, brothers about the Bible.'

"This man went on to explain how he made up his mind, after she left, that he wanted to be like that. 'I wonder if she is still around? Heard of her? I think her name was Jennith McLain.'

"When the man said this, I smiled. And said, 'I think she'll be there at the concert, and will be very happy to meet you.'

“I knew you, Mom, were busy with the little ones, and he said he didn’t have much time to chat, so I didn’t call for you to come see him then. Besides, he’ll be all the more eager to come to the concert, and you’ll probably have more time to chat then.”

My sister smiled. A ray of light was in her eyes. It’s always a joy to find that the good you do helped others, and lives on, through their actions and choices.

Some of the days we stayed closer to the camp, and talked with those we found. It was great to find that several were eager to know more about what the Bible teaches, and know that God loves them very much.

Other days we travelled out a bit further, getting food supplies along the way as well. We continued to pass out invitations to the concert, as well as speak with and lead interested people to the Lord.

On the final night my sister planned to give a talk about heaven, and our mother’s dreams. We invited people we met or those staying at the campsite to come over and listen. About 10 people showed up.

My sister passed around some copies of a few of the pictures she had drawn, based on what mother had told us she had seen, as well as passages written in the Bible.

In the end, after sharing what she wanted to, we led each one of them in a prayer, and they accepted Jesus into their life as their Saviour. It was a wonderful way to end our mission week away.

When a month had passed, and plenty of mission trip preparation had been done by my sister and Earnest and their family, it was time to stop for a break and attend the concert and Christian gathering.

There was a team of great musicians who performed many famous, and a few not as well known, hymns and pieces of music composed for the Glory of God.

Several tables were filled with all kinds of food treats to be enjoyed by all who attended. The weather was perfect, and the threatening rain never came. The clouds broke and parted and a great day was had.

When it was nearly time for us to leave, a certain young gentleman—one that Gerald recognized—was asking if anyone knew of a certain woman by the name of “Jennith McLain”. He was then introduced to my sister.

Though a few decades older, she still had that radiant smile, and remembered this man as well—Ted Harnes, though he looked a great deal different than he did in his childhood. They chatted about what had happened in each of their lives over the past many years, and planned to keep in touch.

Before they left, Ted had promised that he would do what he could to send supplies to my sister's family, while they were gone on their missionary trip for the next year. "I'll send a package with some goods and aids to you, every month that I can!" Ted said as he left.

We all waved goodbye again. It was a special moment. We praised God again and again—and knew that living our lives in His service would give us so many things to be glad for, we'd be praising Him forever.

And God's blessings and help never ended. A year and a half later, when my sister and her family at last returned, there was a whole new set of things to praise God for. —Enough, of course, to write yet another book. Or so my sister planned to do.

She exclaimed, "It would be a great story to be passed on down to the grandchildren, one day!" And who knows but it might inspire many others to trust God and serve Him to their best ability.

12—The Masterpiece is Returned

I close this brief look into my life, and the life of my close relations with a parable.

There once was a fine and just King, who owned a vast and unending kingdom. He hired an artist to depict something on a very large and costly canvas.

The blank canvas was placed into his hands, a location for where the work on it was to take place was arranged, and instructions were given.

The picture needed to be bright enough to be seen, but with tones and colours that blended well and didn't clash. The picture needed to make sense and be clearly understood by the casual observer, yet have mystery to it, or more than met the eye, for those who wished to gain insight and wisdom on deeper matters.

It would need to be displayed in a location that many who passed by could see it, yet in a way that it was preserve from too many harsh elements of nature that would cause it to fade or be washed out—from too much rain or sun.

It would need to be illumined so that it wasn't in darkness, but easy to be seen by those without a light to shine on it. It needed to be attractive to look at, though not hiding the reality and truths it needed to show.

"Hmm, this is a task for sure..." the painter thought. Then he got to work. Time for this painting to be completed to the best of his ability, was not limitless. Time would run out eventually. The painter was being supported to do this work, and would have to give an account of what he did with his time.

The painter chose this colour and that; drew this line and that, and did the best he could. At first he felt he didn't really have the skill needed, but as time went by he gained experience that helped him make good choices of shapes and strokes, and what things to depict.

Every now and then the painter would glance down at the instructions from the King, that he had carefully written out.

He couldn't go too fast, or important details would be missed. But he would need to work steadily enough so that progress was made on a daily basis. He pondered and planned each and every stroke, and at times took bold moves just to see how it would look. He learned this way, too. Sometimes he had to paint over and start some parts again. Mistakes seemed a waste of time to him at first, but then he realised that he had gained valuable experience that guided him as he planned other parts of the painting on the canvas.

During the beginning of his work, to an onlooker it might appear that it wasn't a painting of much beauty or value, that was because it wasn't finished yet. There was much more planned and more would be added as time went on.

The King would send messages of approval or advice, and these were always well appreciated by the painter. If he took action on the counsel, it saved him time, and more beauty and life were seen in the painting.

When it was part way finished on, the King surprised the painter. "I want the rest of the painting to be finished out in the countryside, in fact in several places. It will inspire you, and give you fresh ideas on new elements to add. It will ring with life in full colour then. It will have depth and take on character. New shades and hues will be thought of. It will look more as I am imagining it to be. I will send instructions where to go, at each part of your journey and task."

The painter knew it would still be a long time before this large and difficult work of art would be complete. But he was commissioned by the King and wished to do his best. With the aid of many helpers, the painter

was sent with all that was needed for the completion of this masterpiece.

The King said, “Anytime you run out of supplies, just send a messenger to tell me, and I’ll have sent to you all that is needed.”

The painter was very careful to watch over this priceless piece of art, this masterpiece that was being created for the King. He didn’t want anything to go wrong with it. But sometimes the unimaginable would happen. An unexpected rain would fall and splash on a portion of the picture, causing some of the colours to blend together before it had a chance to dry.

The painter looked at it, wondering if he was failing in his mission to make a good and worthy masterpiece. But later on, as he kept painting, he found out that those mishaps actually helped to improve the painting.

Sometimes he was startled by an animal or low-flying bird. This caused him to suddenly jerk, and mark up the painting in a way he didn’t plan.

“Oh no! Why did that happen? Now there are markings that don’t seem right. How can I fix that?” he fretted. He sent a message to the King, telling of mistakes—thinking for sure the King would realise he wasn’t the right painter for the job.

However, the reply from the King was, “I knew that would happen. That is one of the reasons you are there. For the unexpected marks add new elements. One day you’ll see it will fill out the picture and bring more life to it, more depth—and perhaps more caution in the painter, too. You’ll see. It will turn out for good.”

And it did. Not that moment, just yet, but later on it seemed the mistaken lines and smudges were just what were needed to fill out new parts of the painting—things he didn’t know were going to be added later.

Time passed, and the painter worked faithfully. He wanted to be ready when the King said it was now time to place it in His gallery.

One day, when the painter thought there was still more to do, new things that should be added, and was wondering if other places on the masterpiece were a waste of time—as he didn’t think they looked as good as he wished—the message came:

“The masterpiece is to be returned to the King. He said it is good enough for now; more touch-ups can happen later. But it has been long enough in the making and is ready to beautify His estate. He wishes to see it and enjoy what it adds to his palace.”

As the painter saw the masterpiece being carefully carried by the

King's helpers, he noticed that some of the things he thought were irreparable mistakes, blended well with the rest of the painting. It was just that he was looking at it so closely, while painting it, that he didn't notice. But as he got to look at it from a distance, it looked better than he thought.

Well, just the fact that the King said enough work was done on it—and would reward him, the painter, plentifully for it—proved he needn't be dismayed or think poorly of his efforts. He truly had done all that he could and did the best he could.

Perhaps if he had idled away his time, and rather than painting the masterpiece, merely stared at the grass in the field, the King might have not rewarded him quite as well. The painting surely would have been lacking. One way or the other, the time he had to work on it was going to run out, and the masterpiece would be returned to the King.

A strong team of helpers came then to carry the painter in a plush seat and transport him back to the King's estate. He was given riches and gardens, and a lovely dwelling place near to the King and near those he loved and who loved him.

Sometimes he wanders through the gallery to see the many different masterpieces that are on display. Each one is unique in some way—according to the instructions given and the talent and style the painter had. When he looks at the painting he worked on, sometimes it surprises him that he notices a few new elements added to it. A little lightening of colour here, a flower there, a bright splash here, and a few details here and there.

“Yes, the King can add to this painting whatever He likes. He's the master painter, and will keep beautifying it, as He pleases.”

This story is like the life we each are given. We are like painters with the new blank canvas to create something worthwhile, and of beauty. What we each do with our lives will be clearly seen by the King of the Universe.

If we have followed the King's instructions and painted as He guided us, then when the works of our life and what we have created with our time on Earth is displayed, the King will be pleased to show it to all who live with Him in the Heavenly Realm.

Yes, time is running out, and we must carefully, yet faithfully and fervently keep making of our life—the picture that we are to those that see us in the world—that which the King, our Father in Heaven, the God of all, is pleased with.

We only have one canvas, one life, to live. Let us make of it the best we can, by letting the King lead us and support us, provide for us, and

encourage us along the way.

One day you'll see what picture my life displayed, in all its colour and radiance, and I hope to see what you have created with your God-given canvas.

If you have lived a life fully for Jesus, then every corner of your painting will be used to the full, and will have much for the Heavenly Gallery visitors to see. The delighted looks on their faces will make it all worth it—all your labour to paint God's picture into your life.

However, those that have whittled away their time, and didn't think it mattered, or just did random acts of foolish splashes here and there, won't have nearly as an attractive work of art—not quite a "masterpiece" to be viewed.

What will the image of your life look like in the end, as you stand back and get a good look at it?

Jesus Christ is a very skilled craftsman at making the most messy looking canvas, turn into something of dazzling beauty. If you feel you need to start again—or just start at all, to create the painting you wish to have completed before the King calls for it, ask Jesus to help you.

He can come along and spread white washing paint of his "start again" strokes on your canvas, and you can then do your best with the time you have left; redeeming what time and work was lost.

Working with Him you can create something the King will certainly be please to display for the cheers and admiration of those in His vast Heavenly Estate.