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Parsonage

A novel about life behind the scenes for an evangelical pastor's family: in the church, the parsonage, the community

By G. Edwin Lint, ThB, MA

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The Author of *Parsonage*, G. Edwin Lint,

MA,...has created the book's characters and action from a broad knowledge base. While not autobiographical, PARSON profits from his extensive training and experience, including his formal education: Bachelor of Science in Bible and Bachelor of Theology degrees from United Wesleyan College in Allentown, Pennsylvania; Master of Arts in educational supervision and administration from Glassboro State College in Glassboro, New Jersey.

He has 36 years of professional education experience with state certification as elementary teacher, elementary supervisor, supervisor of curriculum and instruction, elementary principal, special education teacher, and supervisor of special education. Throughout his secular career, he has remained active in Christian service in a variety of capacities: Sunday school teacher, Sunday school superintendent, teacher trainer, director of Christian education; choir member, choir director, orchestra member (playing trumpet), member and manager of a regional Gospel singing group, owner of a Gospel music store; representative for the Pennsylvania Council on Alcohol Problems, interim and supply pastor.

For over 33 years he has worked as a part-time Gospel DJ. He earned an FCC Third Class License with Broadcast Endorsement by passing the written examination. Since 1980, he has produced and hosted two nationally-syndicated Gospel music radio services: [Gospel Caravan](#) and [Something Beautiful](#).

Ed Lint claims that his most important credential is "a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I have accepted Jesus Christ as my sin sacrifice. He is my Lamb of God. The Holy Spirit fills me. He gives me power to live a successful Christian life and protects me from Satan and his demons."

Ed Lint is the owner and primary author of [DiskBooks Electronic Publishing](#).

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Major Characters

James A. (Jim) Hogan -- Pastor of the Ashtabula (Ohio) Community Church for 25 years; candidate for an opening as senior pastor, and eventually becomes senior pastor of the much larger Wesley Evangelical Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania; early fifties.

Debra Hogan -- The pastor's wife; late forties.

Jessica (Jessi) Hogan -- 17-year old daughter of the Hogans.

Reuben (Ben) Hogan -- 6-year-old twin son of the Hogans; known for his riddles; hates to be asked about his ability to play golf.

Rachel (Shelly) Hogan -- Ben's twin.

Dave Court -- Church softball coach, Patricia's husband; defendant in a felony assault case which alleges he sexually-assaulted and seriously injured 2-year-old Tessa Stetson, whom he dearly loves as a daughter; mid twenties.

Patricia Court -- Dave Court's wife; director of Wesley Day Care; the Courts want a child but Patricia is having difficulty becoming pregnant.

Paul Donaldson -- Lawyer friend of Jim and Debra Hogan; counsel for the defense in the assault case against Dave Court. His business card reads CALL PAUL, plus phone and fax numbers, e-mail address, and sky-page number.

Jonathan King -- Jessi's red-haired friend and eventual fiancee.

Carla Stetson -- Tessa's mother; early thirties; begins as a friend of Debra Hogan and Patricia Court..

Sandy Simpson -- Jim Hogan's administrative assistant in the church office.

Tessa Stetson -- 2-year-old victim in the sexual assault case against Dave Court; fond of playing horsey with "Unca Dave" Court.

[G. Edwin Lint](#)

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Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

1. Dedication: As the story opens, Dave and Patricia Court are presenting their new baby, Elizabeth Ann, to the Lord on a Sunday morning in an act of infant dedication. Tessa is thrilled to be named as baby Beth Ann's God-sister, and the official witness of this important event. Carla Stetson appears at the rear of the sanctuary and Jim fears more disruptions. Instead, Carla begins to walk down the aisle towards the altar. As Jim watches and prays, he is aware of a monumental spiritual struggle with the young woman at the epicenter. Little Tessa's eyes are huge with fear but she takes her cue from her Uncle Dave. She joins her small voice with the mighty volume of prayer which is being lifted for Carla's deliverance. "Please Jesus, please help my Mommy." Years later, Beth Ann will ask Mommy and Daddy about all the tear drops on her Certification of Dedication. Dave and Patricia will be too choked with emotion to do a very good job of telling her why.

2. Interstate 80 East: Jim Hogan is driving across Pennsylvania in a driving snow storm to spend the weekend in Mechanicsburg. The church board of Wesley Evangelical Church has nominated Jim as senior pastor. There will be a congregation vote Sunday evening. Back home in Ashtabula, a pensive wife and a somewhat obstinate teenage daughter are not too sure they want to leave Ohio.

3. Mechanicsburg: Jim meets the staff at Wesley and learns about the physical plant.

4. Interview. The church board has arranged for Jim to participate in a large-group Saturday afternoon "interview" with members of the congregation asking questions and Jim giving extemporaneous answers.

5. First Sunday: This is a behind-the-scenes view of the morning service in a large evangelical church as Jim sees his prospective congregation in worship for the first time.

6. Beggars' Bonanza: This chapter is in didactic narrative style as Jim preaches his first sermon in Mechanicsburg -- from 2 Kings 6:24 -- 7:11.) "Why are we sitting here until we die? . . . We have wonderful news to tell and we're keeping our mouths shut!"

7. Moving: Jim doesn't get as strong a congregational vote as he expected, though the altars are lined with seekers in both morning services. For several days, he and Debra wrestle with the decision of what to do about the call. Eventually Debra and Jessi join with Jim in feeling God's clear leading to accept. The move from Ashtabula to Mechanicsburg is major because of having lived in the same old farm house, a.k.a parsonage, for twenty-five years; what a collection of garage-sale fodder.

8. First Day Of School: Jessi starts school in Mechanicsburg as a junior in March. She feels lost the first day, especially when a resource person in health class harasses her regarding her beliefs on sexual morality. But she takes her stand-- vocally and forcefully. Before the day is over, she gets a standing ovation from the class for the manner in which

she has stated her beliefs, makes two new friends, and forms the nucleus of a Mechanicsburg chapter of the Ivory Club. (This is a support group for young people who believe in celibacy until marriage.)

9. Tournament: Jim helps Dave Court coach the church soft ball team in a regional tournament of church teams. This chapter ends with a play-by-play narration of the exciting end of the final game as Wesley wins the two-day tournament on a pinch-hit grand slam home run by the pastor. After the game, Dave's Louisville Slugger is missing.

10. Unca Dave: Dave drops in on Patricia's day care class and has a good time romping with Tessa and the other kids as they use him as their "horsey".

11. Cross: Jim gets a call from Ray Benson, a man he met during his question and answer session the first weekend he spent in Mechanicsburg. Benson has listened to a tape of Jim's "interview" with the congregation and wants him to get involved with CROSS Radio -- Christian Radio Over Satellite Systems. Jim agrees to host a daily call-in talk show to be known as "The Pastor's Study".

12. On The Air: Jim's new telephone call-in program goes on the air live and he is seen fielding a number of questions from listeners.

13. Arrested: Patricia Court has an important appointment with her gynecologist and receives the happy news that she is finally pregnant. But as she prepares a celebratory dinner for two while waiting for Dave to get home from a night class at Shippensburg University, he calls from the county prison to say he has been arrested for felony sexual assault against little Tessa Stetson, of all people. Patricia hangs up after Dave's call, phones the parsonage, and then collapses on the floor.

14. Call Paul: Jim and Debra promise they'll call an old lawyer friend about representing Dave in the assault case. As they are driving back to the parsonage after helping calm Patricia's nerves and congratulating her on the pending birth, Jim realizes he hasn't called the Stetsons about little Tessa's condition. When he calls, Carla is very hostile and refuses to talk with him, claiming he is more interested in the welfare of the defendant than the condition of the victim. Later, Jim visits the hospital, just to be able to pray silently by Tessa's bed. However, he is ordered out of the room because of the wishes of the patient's mother. Paul Donaldson, whose business card reads "Call Paul," agrees to take Dave's case.

15. Prison: The physical evidence is strong against Dave: his hat was found in Tessa's bed and the assault weapon is a shaved-down wooden bat with Dave's initials on it. Paul tries in vain to find an alibi; Dave was traveling between his home and Shippensburg University at the time of the crime and stopped at a rest area on I-81 to study and doze. Patricia is heart-broken because the judge has ordered that Dave be held without bail pending arraignment. She visits him in a communal visiting room where she tells him the

precious news of their new baby over an institutional phone with reinforced glass between them.

16. Arraignment: Several members of Jessi's Ivory Club and Dave's church soft ball team attend the arraignment to establish a prayer vigil on behalf of Dave receiving bail. The judge is quite intrigued when he learns Jessi has made the arrangements.

17. Carla: Carla Stetson, Tessa's mother, makes a surprise appearance at the arraignment and completely loses control. She leaps on the judge's bench, struggles with an armed officer, and, in the scuffle, grabs his gun and hides it on her person. Suddenly Carla is pressing a Smith & Wesson .38 Police Special against Jessi's forehead and promising to kill her and four persons connected with the case. The Hogans, the Courts, Paul, the Ivory Club, and the soft ball team all join in lifting a mighty volume of prayer. Carla puts the gun in Jessi's mouth and threatens to pull the trigger at once unless the praying stops. The prayers become silent but no less intense. Carla pulls the trigger but the first chamber is empty, as she knew it would be. She pulls the trigger again, with intent to kill-- but the gun misfires. She continues pulling the trigger while pointing the gun at her intended victims, and it continues to misfire. Unheard of in a police weapon! Carla is subdued by Dave's flying tackle and Paul begins to sing the Rich Mullins song, "Awesome God" . All the believers join in a victory parade which starts marching around the court room. Judge Amos Schwartz joins the parade and leads it straight out the front doors of the court house and around it several times. The media people go berserk.

18. News Conference: Jessi becomes the focus of the news gatherers' attention and has a beautiful opportunity to give God the glory for the miracle of the police revolver's misfires. She also explains the moral value system behind the Ivory Club to a national TV audience.

19. Trial: Debra remembers the strange man she saw hanging around the team bats at the softball tournament. Paul tries in vain to find this person and link him to the crime. Despite the miracle at the arraignment, the wheels of justice continue to turn and Dave is tried for the assault on Tessa. The prosecutor attempts to enter into evidence some taped comments Jim had made earlier about demon-possessed criminals being able to look a jury straight in the eyes and lie with impunity; damaging evidence.

20. Star Witness: Against the advice of the prosecution, and to Paul's amazement, Carla insists on bringing Tessa into the court room on the final day of testimony, in hopes of influencing the jury in favor of a guilty verdict. Her plan backfires. Gradually it dawns on Tessa that everything that is happening around her is designed to do something bad to her dear friend, Dave Court. She makes the first sound since her attack, and it's a scream, repeated over and over again. "Not Unca Dave! Not Unca Dave! No, no, no! Not Unca Dave!" Paul moves for acquittal and his motion is granted without objection from the prosecution.

21. Holy Land: Jim gets a call comes from a man in Saudi Arabia who wants to contribute huge sums in U.S. funds to a project Jim proposed almost in jest one Sunday a couple weeks back at the close of the CROSS Network's coverage of Wesley's morning worship service. This man with millions to spare was listening to his short wave radio when he heard Jim's sermon about the danger of burying your talents in the ground. The crises may be Parson but the opportunities continue.

22. Holy Land USA: An abstract of Jim's proposal to his benefactor in Saudi Arabia, complete with thumbnails of major attractions.

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Chapter 1: Dedication

The third Sunday in June was a major holiday for several families in the church. Babies would be dedicated today. Of all the professional duties a pastor was called upon to perform, dedicating babies was Jim's favorite. He loved to hold each precious bundle of potentiality and ask God to use this child in His service. Maybe this one would be a missionary or an evangelist. Or maybe this one would be a born-again teacher or typist. No matter. Each bundle was precious to God and to the families entering into the covenant of infant dedication.

The organ was softly playing "Jesus Loves Me" as the baby processional started to move slowly down both central aisles. Jim had asked Sandy to make up the order for the processional in alphabetical order according to the baby's last name. Sometimes a baby would be presented by both parents and both sets of grandparents. Older children were dedicated, also, when parents came to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior after children were already born into the family.

In today's dedication, the Court family led the procession down the left aisle. Patricia and Dave were both from the west coast so the grandparents would not be able to attend. However, the Court entourage did include one other person. Dave carried their new daughter on his left arm, and Patricia walked at his right side. And Jim smiled broadly as he watched the fourth person in the Court party walking sturdily down the aisle and holding Patricia's right hand. Two-year-old Tessa Stetson had been named the baby's God-sister and would be a proud witness of Beth Ann's dedication.

The fact that Tessa was even in the service was something of a minor miracle. Her mother, Carla, had been opposed to the idea of her little girl having anything to do with the dedication of the Court baby. She had refused to discuss it with either Jim or Dave. Ever since the trial, Carla had been very cold to everyone having anything to do with Wesley.

Then Thursday night at eight o'clock, Carla had left a message in the church voice mail. It was very short and simple, and the caller didn't identify herself. But that brief message would bring much joy to Dave and Patricia. The voice was very faint. Friday morning when Sandy took the messages off, she had to listen several times to make sure she understood what was said. When she was satisfied that she had it right, she typed it up and put it on Jim's desk:

"I got Tessa a new dress, and she can do it Sunday morning."

By the time the organ had completed the third verse of "Jesus Loves Me," there were five family groups across the upper platform, facing the congregation. While the procession was moving down the aisles, an usher had placed a small lectern down on the floor and facing the congregation. Jim now took his place at this lectern.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the ceremony of infant dedication is a very important element of worship here at Wesley Church. If this is your first time to attend a dedication, I'd like to outline what is about to happen. There will be two separate parts of the service. First, I will ask the parents to make their vows of dedication as a group. Then, I will pray a prayer of dedication for each child in turn. The processional was in alphabetical order, so the prayers will be in reverse order, with Elizabeth Ann Court being last."

With that, Jim turned and faced the group on the platform. He had a special smile for Tessa, who looked cute in her new long, white dress trimmed in pink.

"Do you covenant before God and in the presence of these witnesses to do everything in your power to raise these babies and young children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? If so, answer 'I will.' And do you covenant to bring them regularly to God's house for instruction and worship? If so, answer 'I will.' And do you covenant to strive to bring them to an early knowledge of Jesus Christ as a personal Savior? If so, answer 'I will.' And do you promise to give your child over to God's service, in whatever area He sees a need? If so, answer 'I will.'

"Now that you have promised in the presence of God and these witnesses to discharge your scriptural responsibilities as parents, I will dedicate each child in turn, beginning with--" and Jim glanced down at his list, "beginning with Aaron Zettlemyer."

Baby dedication was a joyful church ceremony, and at times it was somewhat noisy. Not all babies take kindly to being passed to a stranger in the midst of a Sunday morning nap. But when Jim had worked his way around to Beth Ann, she was lying quietly in the crook of Dave's left arm. The pastor took a moment to congratulate the happy parents and had a special wink for the God-sister. Then he picked the baby up in his arms and turned to face the congregation.

"This is Elizabeth Ann Court, the daughter of David and Patricia Court, born May fifteenth. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of life with which you have blessed the Court family. Surely this is an answer to prayer and we rejoice with Dave and Patricia in the coming of this blessed child. We pray that you will give these parents the wisdom of Solomon, the courage of David, and the strength of Samson, as they contend against the forces of evil which will strive to destroy her never-dying soul. Now, we dedicate Elizabeth Ann Court to You and to Your service, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Jim always watched and prayed, and as he concluded the prayer for Beth Ann, he was aware of a person moving very slowly through the dimmed sanctuary, right down the center aisle toward the altar. It was Carla Stetson, Tessa's mother!

At first, Jim was concerned there may be another eruption similar to the one in the court house the day of Dave's arraignment. But this time, Carla appeared calm. However, Jim sensed a monumental spiritual struggle, with the young woman at the epicenter. In her

face, there was evidence that Satan and all his demons were doing their utmost to keep Carla from moving toward that altar. Dave handed Beth Ann to Patricia, as he and several prayer warriors started to move toward Carla in her support.

But, Jim signaled them to stay back and pray from a distance. This was to be Carla's struggle, and Carla's victory. The spiritual confrontation was great. God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, all the Holy angels-- they were all urging her to move forward toward forgiveness. Toward reconciliation. Toward peace.

However, Satan and all his demons were using their powers to hold her back

Suddenly, the woman fell down flat on her face, and began clawing her way along the carpet, toward the altar. Immediately a mighty volume of oral prayer rolled up from the congregation. Little Tessa's eyes were huge with fear but she took her cue from her Unca Dave. She folded her tiny hands, bowed her head, and joined her small voice with the many prayers which were being lifted for her mother's deliverance.

"Please Jesus, please help my Mommy. Please help my Mommy!"

Carla worked her way beyond the last pew to within five yards of the altar. A lady usher dropped a light blanket over the struggling body as Carla inched along. Her face was covered with tears and perspiration. Her voice was hoarse with the prayers of supplication.

As she came within eighteen inches of the altar, the congregation rose to its feet and the volume of oral prayer became a mighty roar. Inch by precious inch she moved ever closer until she was able to reach out and just touch the base of the altar with the tip of her index finger.

Instantly her faith was rewarded and she was delivered from the demons which had plagued her for so many months. Demons which had caused her to hate her church, hate her pastor, hate her God. Tessa ran across the platform and leapt into her arms. They hugged each other fiercely. Then Carla turned and hugged Dave, hugged Patricia, and then everyone was hugging everyone in a spirit of true revival.

Many years later, Beth Ann would ask Mommy and Daddy about all the tear drops on her Certification of Dedication. Her parents would be too choked with emotion to do a very good job of telling her why.

That night, Jim lay in bed, too emotionally keyed up to sleep. Downstairs the grandfather clock sang it's Westminster song of midnight. Debra couldn't sleep either.

"Jim, ever wish we were still back in Ashtabula? That you never made that trip here to Mechanicsburg in that snow storm?"

"Sometimes yes. Sometimes no. I think this morning's dedication service was definitely one of the no times."

Debra yawned, feeling more sleepy. "I still miss the old parsonage, kind of. Don't you?"

Jim was flat on his back, sound asleep, snoring softly, and dreaming of driving through a Pennsylvania blizzard.

G. Edwin Lint

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Chapter 2: Interstate 80 East

The Jeep Grand Cherokee plodded through fifteen inches of powdery snow, all four wheels pulling steadily like a team of matched draft horses. An I-80 sign was so obscured by the blizzard's flaked fog, Jim couldn't see if it said east or west.

Not that it mattered. He'd been following I-80 East since the junction with I-79, north of Pittsburgh. When Jim left Ashtabula just after noon, the January sun had been warming the Ohio farm country with enough intensity to whisper slyly of Spring. Now, with the dash clock glowing 5:20, Spring seemed months away. While Jim had been on I-79, about half way between Erie and the junction with I-80, the wind began to howl from the northwest off the lake. That howling wind soon began to drive billows of sandy snow pellets at blizzard intensity. At first he had considered the storm to be of the lake-snow variety and had looked forward to driving out of it. But the farther he traveled south along I-79 and then east along I-80, the more fierce the storm became.

Jim had stopped at Clarion for gas and a fast-food meal. Before he pulled out on I-80 again, he had shifted into four-wheel drive. Now The Chief was breaking trail through ever-deepening and unblemished snow. Jim chuckled to himself at the nickname the twins had given the Grand Cherokee. They had trouble pronouncing Grand Cherokee. First it had been GC. Now it was The Chief.

At times, Jim had a hard time telling where the snow in the air ended and the snow on the highway began. Thinking a little music might ease the sharp tension-pain at the base of his skull, he began rummaging in the tape bin for Phil Driscoll. Jim played a little trumpet himself and was partial to a brassy horn. He usually joined the Sunday night volunteer orchestra during the congregational singing and offertory, especially if he felt well prepared for the sermon.

But as the strains of "Sing Hallelujah" were beginning to swell through the Chief's eight speakers, Jim braked swiftly but carefully to a stop. He was off the main highway and about twenty yards up an exit ramp. Apparently he had started to follow a row of reflector-marked stakes up the ramp instead of staying on I-80. Jim knew twenty yards is quite a distance in fifteen inches of snow, especially after dark. His first instinct was to turn around and drive down to the highway, but the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation plow hadn't passed that way since the last storm. Drifts were beginning to form on both sides of the ramp and Jim was afraid that even The Chief might get bogged down during the turn-around maneuver. While he was considering his predicament, the wind shifted suddenly and began coming from the northeast instead of the northwest. This change in wind direction provided a little better rearward visibility and Jim decided to back down the ramp. He put on his driving gloves, flipped up the hood of his parka, and pressed the remote lift-gate button.

Carefully Jim crawled back through the length of the vehicle to the lift gate, avoiding some toys left behind by the twins and his own luggage. He pushed the gate up to its full-open position and reached around to brush snow off each backup light lens. Satisfied that he had achieved maximum visibility and illumination in the circumstances, he began crawling back to the wheel. On his way, he released the catch on the back of the middle seat and folded it down. After reaching the wheel, he chuckled a little when he realized he'd left The Chief in gear with the brake off. The Grand Cherokee hadn't moved an inch, even on the fairly steep grade of the ramp. Jim hoped that wasn't a permanent state of affairs. He deliberately omitted buckling his seat belt to have more freedom of movement but did turn the heater fan on full blast and turned on the hazard flashers. He also released the right bucket seat's recliner latch and pushed the back down as far as it would go. With his right arm braced on the bucket's lowered back, he could turn his body to the right and have a fairly good view of the ramp behind him, up which he had carelessly driven.

Jim had intended to back down in his own tracks but almost fifteen minutes of blowing snow had begun to blur their edges and he really had to concentrate. Every five yards or so, he crawled back to the open hatch and checked his position and direction carefully. He didn't want to wander into a drift or slide into a ditch. As he approached the edge of I-80, he instinctively checked to be sure nothing was coming before backing out onto the highway. The last moving vehicle he had seen was a balloon-tired 4X4 in the west-bound lane. That had been thirty minutes ago and he didn't see anything now. Quickly Jim restored The Chief to forward-motion mode and he was under way again. Although the wind continued to blow out of the northeast, the snow had stopped entirely during the backing maneuver. He rewound the Phil Driscoll tape, which had been playing unheeded, and got The Chief under way again. Still a lot of miles to travel before he reached Mechanicsburg.

Jessi was just finishing her makeup when her mother appeared in the open doorway. She glanced at the clock before making eye contact with her in the dresser mirror.

Debra studied the reflected mother-daughter image and thought how much she looks like me. And yet, how different. Both were about five five in their stocking feet. Jessi had long straight strawberry blonde hair with bangs falling close to her eyebrows. Debra's hair was closer to auburn and was cut short with lots of waves. Both were pretty, in the girl-next-door sense, not the thin-and-flat fashion model sense. Jessi's nose was slightly sloped and ended in what Jim jokingly called a ski jump. Debra's nose was a little straighter and thinner.

Debra accepted Jessi's brief glance in the mirror as permission to speak, knowing as any experienced mother does there are times when an audience with a teenage daughter is something to be sought cautiously and nurtured carefully. "Do you have a minute to talk?"

"Not really. Kevin's picking me up--" again a glance at the clock, "Kevin's picking me up in ten minutes. Can't it wait?"

Debra prayed for calm. "Yes. It can, but not too long. You know your Dad is driving down there right now."

Jessi put down the eyeliner and turned to her mother, sighing. "Yes, I know. Mechanicsburg. It sounds so-- grimy. Nobody at school has even heard of it. Some dump, probably. And the school's probably a dump, too."

Despite the tension, Debra had to fight a smile. "The kids down there have never heard of Ashtabula either," she said lightly. "But you know that a parsonage family has to be ready to go where God calls. Ashtabula, Mechanicsburg, wherever."

"God may be calling Dad to Mechanicsburg, and maybe you and the twins, but He sure isn't calling me. Mom, you know how much the youth group at the church here means to me, and we all go to high school together. I want to graduate with these kids next June, not some bunch of greasy mechanics in Pennsylvania. Why would God want to mess up my life now, when everything is going so--"

"Careful, Jessi," Debra said softly, continuing to pray in her spirit. "God made you and He knows all about you. He doesn't want to mess up your life and never has."

Jessi's eyes fell and Debra could see that her daughter was fighting tears and the resultant destruction of her carefully applied makeup. Her heart ached with love for this beautiful child God had placed in their home seventeen years ago this July twenty-fifth. Sensitive but feisty. As faithful in her personal devotions as she was in her nightly regimen of situps. Equally at home in conversation with peers and adults. (What had her Aunt Jacki called her when she was two: the "thirty-year-old midget"?)

"What's he going down there for anyway," Jessi asked irritably. "I thought you guys did all that before Christmas."

"You're right about our going to Mechanicsburg the weekend of December twelfth. That was to meet with the search committee. And, your Dad and I wanted to look at the church and the parsonage, kind of get a feel for the situation there. Then we drove around the community a little. Even went by the high school."

Jessi ignored the reference to the school. "Well, wasn't that it? Didn't you decide then that we're going to move to Mechanicsburg?"

"We didn't make a final decision, and neither did the church. At that time the search committee was still interviewing candidates. I thought you understood all that."

"Maybe I did. I guess I've been blocking it out because I don't want to think about it. But I still don't understand what this weekend's trip is all about."

"Monday your Dad got a call from the chairman of the search committee, a man by the name of Miles Abbott. He told your Dad he was their number one candidate and he asked permission to present your Dad to the church board for a vote. Wednesday night, the board voted unanimously to give your Dad a call to go to Mechanicsburg. Now they want to have a question and answer session tomorrow afternoon for all the church members. Then he's going to preach in both services Sunday morning and Sunday evening. Then after the evening service there will be a congregational vote. If two-thirds of the voting members say yes, he'll be officially called to pastor the Wesley Evangelical Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania."

"And if he does get that two-thirds vote, it's off to Mechanicsburg we go," Jessi said not at all gaily.

"Not necessarily. Your Dad has to answer that call with a yes or a no of his own. If he answer is yes, then it's off to Mechanicsburg. If the answer is no, we stay right here in Ashtabula."

"Why did he even want to consider moving in the first place, and how in the world did they even hear about him down there in Mechanicsburg?"

"He wants to be in the center of God's will. He wants to spend his life and his talents doing exactly what God wants him to do, when and where God wants him to do it. As far as how they heard about him, a couple people from the search committee down there visited our church here back in September and heard your Dad preach. I guess they liked what they heard so Miles Abbott called your Dad and asked us to go down and visit. And we did."

The door bell chimed two notes.

"That's Kevin, Mom. We're going to meet everybody at the church and then go bowling. See you about ten." Jessi grabbed her jeans jacket, blew Debra a kiss, and hurried down to answer the door.

The storm had passed, for the moment at least.

Debra turned out the light and walked slowly down the steps. She, too, had a storm in her heart, but she didn't have the teenage luxury of instant venting which Jessi enjoyed. After all, who can a pastor's wife confide in, other than her husband, of course, when it comes to changing churches? And she had to be cautious with Jim because he had his own set of doubts about moving to a church with a combined Sunday morning attendance of 3,000 adults. Debra knew he was ready at the personal and professional level. Twenty-five years in the ministry, with that rare combination of skilled Bible student, informative teacher, and powerful preacher. Even with his doubts about whether a move to Mechanicsburg would be in the center of God's will, Debra knew Jim was ready. But was she?

The front door banged open and the twins came charging in, flinging their knapsacks on the hall floor as they raced out to the kitchen like Mosby's rangers on a foraging

expedition. Debra followed in their wake, picking up mittens and caps as she went. "You kids have fun over at the Meyers'? she asked, intercepting the milk carton on its way to Ben's mouth.

"Yeah,' said Ben, "but Donnie Meyers gets to drink out of his milk carton. How come I can't?"

"Because it's really gross!" said Shelly with a major emphasis on the "gross". "Use a glass like sillivized people."

Ben loved that. "'Sillivized people'? Mom, did you hear that? Shelly says we're all supposed to act like sillivized people." With that, he fell to the floor in a paroxysm of exaggerated laughter, rolling from side to side and kicking his heels on the floor.

Debra took down the wooden yard stick from its hook beside the cupboard and whipped it hard and flat on the bare table top. The result was a crack like a pistol shot. Instantly Ben was on his feet, all laughter gone. Debra had to fight laughter herself.

"Ben, you're going to do four things and you're going to do them now. First, you will apologize to your sister for making fun of her." Debra waited while he mumbled a perfunctory "I'm sorry, Shelly". "Second, you will explain to Shelly what the correct word should have been." Ben did that, too. "Third, you'll gather up all your stuff, yours and Shelly's, and put it where it belongs. Here are the caps and mittens. You do the rest." Ben's lower lip was swelling into a full pout of self-pity but Debra was unrelenting. "And fourth, you will get a soap pad and basin and scrub off those black marks you just made on the linoleum with your heels."

"Aw, Mom! That's not fair. I didn't make ALL these black marks," and he pointed with his toe to show the marks which were not his responsibility." Debra paused in the act of hanging up the yard stick, freezing it in mid-air on the way to its hook.

Ben started to say something but changed his mind and went about the business of putting his and Shelly's outer clothes away.

Debra had trouble remembering what caused the ruckus in the first place. Oh, yes. Ben drinking out of the milk carton. She shook her head. Kids!

Debra had written the teacher a note with permission for the twins to go home on the bus with the Meyers kids so they could play a couple hours, with Mrs. Meyers bringing them home in time for dinner. The Meyers kids were twins, too, a boy and a girl. Both sets of twins were in the first grade together at Ashtabula Elementary School and they were close friends. Although the Meyers family attended Synagogue, that hadn't kept the kids apart. In fact, Ben was always begging to go with Donnie and Bonnie Meyers to, as he called it, "Jewish church".

As Debra put a small turkey breast in the oven, she watched lovingly as Ben worked on the black marks and Shelly worked at the table with her crayons. The twins were dark where she and Jessi were fair, taking after Jim. Their heads were covered with black curls just like Jim's. All three had dark brown eyes and long lashes. And all three had dimples. Debra and Jessi often said they wished they could swipe the dimples from Jim and Ben. Only girls needed dimples.

Debra saw that Ben had finished his chores. "How would you kids like to ride over to the church with me for a few minutes?"

"Aw, Mom! I just got done putting all that stuff away. Do we hafta?"

Shelly had a different problem. "Will the car be warm?" She hated to ride in a car in the winter time which hadn't been warmed up first.

In answer to Ben's question, she said, "Yes, you hafta." In answer to Shelly's question, she said, "I'm going out to warm up the Eagle right now. When I toot, you come out. "Oh, and kids, you can both sit in the front with me." The twins liked being belted together into the 89 Eagle's right front bucket seat, even though Shelly squealed when the automatic shoulder harness wrapped around her when the door closed.

Debra pulled on her own jacket and walked out through the breezeway to the garage. She started the Eagle and while it warmed up, she walked down the driveway and then turned and looked back at the parsonage.

She loved this old house. Twenty-five years ago, when they had moved to Ashtabula fresh out of Calvary Theological Seminary in Columbus, this had been the only house the real estate agent had shown them. At the time, the Ashtabula Community Church was less than a year old and meeting in a grange hall. Debra smiled nostalgically as she remembered the bare wooden floors, the out-of-tune rinky-tink piano with the broken ivories, the folding wooden chairs, the permanent smell of kerosene, and of course the drafty yet smelly outhouses. That old building had yielded to the law of eminent domain when Interstate 90 came through. But no power on earth could cancel the spiritual victories which had been claimed there.

When the real estate agent first showed them this old farm house which was thought to be about a hundred years old back then, it was love at first sight for Debra. A large church in Cincinnati was helping to plant the new church in Ashtabula and had agreed to subsidize the new pastor's salary. However, this subsidy did not include rental costs for a parsonage. So Debra decided to use an inheritance from her grandmother which was in the form of a \$10,000 CD. It covered the down payment and then some. So the brand new pastor and his wife began life as the proud owners of a 100-year-old parsonage. When the church was on its feet financially and able to pay a living salary, they began to fix it up with carpeting throughout, modern kitchen and baths, and a study for Jim. Now the house, freshly painted and comfortably renovated, was all theirs, free and clear. Although

they had an instant buyer with the Church Board willing to buy it for a new pastor, it would be heart-rending to leave it.

The Eagle was warmed up and Debra tooted for the twins, who came running out with parkas unzipped. They drove the two miles to the church. She parked at the front walk and then paused to look at the bulletin board. It was headed:

**Ashtabula Community Church
James Alan Hogan, Pastor**

The twins were anxious to get inside and run down to their Sunday school classroom so they could write on the chalk board. Debra wanted to linger a while outside so she gave Ben the key.

"Leave it in the lock, Ben," she instructed. The bulletin board was the only thing left from the original grange hall-turned-church. The two metal pipes had been replaced by a brick escarpment but the bulletin board was the same, including the black-on-white metal letters which hung in slots behind the glass door. She remembered the Mechanicsburg church had a modern sign made of translucent plastic with internal illumination. Wouldn't be the same.

Debra entered the church and stuck her head in the first-grade Sunday school room. Both children were filling the board with games of tic-tac-toe and hangman. Then she walked back to the vestibule and stood in the doorway of the sanctuary. She loved to absorb that special feeling known only in empty churches, that unique silence which spoke soundlessly of God's mighty power on earth through His Holy Spirit. She stepped to the head usher's station and flipped two switches. Now the vestibule lights were off and the only illumination was the backlit stained glass window above and behind the choir loft: Warner Sallman's "Christ in the Garden". Slowly she walked down the center aisle, just as she had envisioned Jessi might do some time in the future. The sanctuary, which had been dedicated twenty years ago, could seat 500 comfortably. Each pew she passed triggered memories of some segment of the congregation. Many victories, a few defeats, all the people precious.

The pastor's wife sank to her knees at the altar and buried her face in her arms, shoulders shaking in silent sobs. After a long while she raised her tear-wet face and looked at the famous artist's depiction of her Savior praying in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He was executed, His face raised to His Heavenly Father. Doctor Luke said He had sweat blood that night, not because He was afraid of the physical pain He was facing, not because He was afraid to die, but because He had an innate dread of bearing the guilt of the believers' sins on the cross at nine o'clock the next morning.

Again Debra buried her head in her arms and prayed specifically for Jim. Heavenly Father, please help Jim this weekend. Help him say the right things in the right way tomorrow afternoon at the meeting. Fill him with the power of the Holy Spirit Sunday in the services. And when the people vote, may your will be done. And if Jim is still on the

road right now, cause your Holy Angels to surround The Chief and keep them both safe. I claim your promise that Holy Angels will watch over us as we travel, so we don't stub our toes. Protect him from his own mistakes and from the mistakes of others on the highway with him. And keep The Chief mechanically sound.

"Thank you, Father, for your great Plan of Salvation which took your Son, Jesus Christ, to the cross so He could pay the ultimate, once-and-for-all sin sacrifice for our sins. And thank you for the Holy Spirit who is in the world today to guide us, and direct us, and protect us from unseen evil. May the Holy Spirit begin to work in the hearts and minds of each of those three thousand people who will hear Jim preach this Sunday. Prepare them for what Jim will say to them in his sermons. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray. Amen."

Phil Driscoll cycled and again Jim enjoyed "Sing Hallelujah", singing along in his imitation of Phil's Joe Cocker-style voice which always made the twins laugh and Jessi wince. The wind was gone, the snow had stopped, and the cruise control was set at forty as The Chief hummed along on packed snow. Several miles back as Jim had crossed the Centre County line, he was surprised by two plowed lanes. Later he had passed a brace of Walter Snowfighters dressing the berm. "Thank you, Jesus" he said not at all casually. Then just as he leaned down to shift The Chief back into two-wheel drive, a heavy sound stepped all over Phil and harsh illumination filled every cubic inch of the wagon's interior. The sound was a little like E. Power Biggs pressing a ten-note chord on his concert pipe organ with all the stops open. Jim resisted a strong impulse to hit the brakes, even though he was totally confused and more than slightly frightened. He did throttle back, though, and the horn blasted again, this time accompanied by the staccato roar of the twin straight pipes of a powerful V-8 engine. A third horn blast caused Jim to glance left and there sat a Dodge Ram 4X4 pickup with tires taller than The Chief's hood. The truck's body was sitting on a twenty-inch lift kit. Looking up, he understood the horn blasts and the intense light. The Ram's roof was adorned with air horns and a row of KC floodlights.

When Jim looked left again, the Ram's passenger window was down and a red-and-black plaid arm was scribing a circular invitation to drag. Jim slowed more and still the arm circled "let's drag". Again Jim slowed until he could read the white letters on the balloon tires beside him. And then the Ram began crowding right, inch by inch. Jim kept yielding right until The Chief's right tires were clipping the base of the five-foot wall of snow left behind by the Walter Snowfighters.

Jim hated to come to a complete stop in this desolate area, already knowing the type of people with whom he was dealing. Suddenly he heard the sound no driver ever wants to hear behind him. Again he heard it, and then a third time. All around him, the snow was turning pink as a red light flashed in his mirror. This time the siren whoops were music in Jim's ears.

An amplified voice drawled "Yield, Ram, and pull over." The Ram's driver responded by flooring the accelerator and flipping on the roof-mounted KCs. With a thunderous roar of

exhaust the Ram tore out, its huge tires churning up billows of fine snow. The police car fishtailed wildly but stayed right on the Ram's tail. The last Jim saw of either of them was a winking red light on the distant horizon.

Thank you, Father, for your Holy Angels--and thank you for the Pennsylvania State Police, Jim prayed aloud. Then he pressed RWD to hear "Sing Hallelujah" all over again.

Debra collected the twins, turned out the church lights, got back in the Eagle, and drove slowly home to the parsonage.

G. Edwin Lint

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Chapter 3: Mechanicsburg

The rhythmic beep-beep, beep-beep of his wrist alarm woke Jim at six A.M. He found the stop button, padded over to the window, and parted the draperies to peek out and see what kind of day it was going to be. The orange and green neon of the Holiday Inn sign still glowed brightly in the dawn's early dark. Not enough light to predict the day's weather on the basis of the sky.

After a brisk shower slightly on the cold side, Jim got his New International Version out of his briefcase and settled at a round table under a hanging lamp for his morning routine of Bible reading and prayer. Later, he took a legal pad and outlined the weekend's activities. At ten, Miles Abbott, chair of the search committee, and Grace Carson, chair of the church board, would be picking him up for the at Shoney's all-you-can eat breakfast bar down Route 11 about a mile. At that time, the salary and benefits package which the board was willing to offer would be discussed. At 11:30, Jim would be introduced to the church's professional and support staff with an opportunity for questions and answers on both sides. This would be a critical meeting. If Jim was called to this pastorate and decided to accept the call, one of his first official duties would be to review all job descriptions and make decisions on the division of work.

The big meeting of the day would be held at one-thirty in Fellowship Hall and this was being billed as "The Interview". According to the plans of the search committee, The Interview would provide each person who attended the church an opportunity to meet the pastoral candidate informally during a buffet lunch. As he jotted notes on the yellow pad, Jim smiled at the pattern of eating and working and fellowshiping which had been planned. The early Christian church as described in Acts made a practice of combining food and worship. Mechanicsburg was surely in step with the Bible on that point.

The primary element of The Interview would be an open question-and-answer session following the buffet. Jim had been told that everyone attending The Interview would be given an opportunity to ask questions from the floor, and that he would be expected to answer on the spot--and off the cuff. Jim winced a little as he thought about the Pandora's box of controversial issues a session like that could open.

James Alan Hogan was a competent and experienced pastor who was at home in the pulpit, in business meetings, in the living rooms of his parishioners, and in the counseling chamber. But he was not at home with this business of being a candidate for the job of pastoring a new church. He had gone straight to the Ashtabula Community Church fresh out of seminary and had not had so much as a letter of inquiry from another church until he had been contacted by the Mechanicsburg search committee back in September. He was definitely navigating uncharted waters and he and Debra had talked about this very thing yesterday morning before starting his trip.

"Maybe this was how the slaves felt when they were put up on the auction block," quipped Jim. "I hate this business of being put on display so people can poke me and prod me and check my teeth."

"Just be yourself, Jim," Debra had said simply. "I know that sounds trite but if you present yourself as something you're not, you may get a job you'll always regret."

"I especially dislike this interview thing. They expect me to stand up in front of everyone and let them take potshots at me for over an hour!"

"Come on, Jim," Debra said with a sly smile. "There isn't a theological or social issue on which you don't have a carefully-thought-out position right this minute. Believe me, after twenty-six years of marriage, I should know. If somebody pushes your abortion, or alcohol, or tobacco, or illicit sex, or homosexuality button, just let 'em have it right between the eyes."

Jim had decided right then that he would do exactly that, and let the votes fall where they may. Now he knelt at his chair and spent over an hour in prayer with a heavy concentration on how he would handle the interview questions that afternoon.

At nine forty-five the phone rang. "Jim Hogan."

"Good morning, Pastor," Miles Abbott boomed over the house phone out in the lobby. "Ready to see if Shoney's will be able to give three hungry people all they can eat for breakfast?"

Jim took his London Fog off the hanger, picked up his brief case, and walked down the hall to begin what might turn out to be his first day on the job at the Wesley Evangelical Church.

The prospective pastor had gotten to know Miles Abbott during his first visit to Mechanicsburg, and through many phone conversations since September. He was meeting Grace Carson for the first time.

"Morning again, Pastor," Miles boomed almost as loudly as he had on the phone a moment ago. Like you to meet the chairperson of our church board, Dr. Grace Carson. Grace, here's the man you've heard me talk about many times since I first heard him preach last September in Ashtabula."

Jim knew instantly that neither he nor any other pastor would be pushing this lady around. He judged her to be sixty-five and she was at least six feet tall. She had steel gray hair pulled back in a rather severe bun and she was wearing a matching steel gray business suit, softened a little by a light blue blouse with lace at the throat and cuffs. He felt a little like he had just been called into the principal's office.

He extended his hand and said in his best pastoral voice, "Happy to meet you, Dr. Carson."

"Just Grace, thank you," she said with a smile. "I left that doctor business behind when I retired from teaching last June."

Miles chuckled. "The Mechanicsburg Area Senior High won't be the same without her. She was principal there for, what was it Grace, twenty years?"

"Miles, you make me sound positively ancient. Stop it this instant!" She stood with her left fist on her hip and pointed a long finger directly at the man's nose, holding that pose for at least five seconds. Miles froze and his face got very red-- and then they both doubled over laughing.

"I get him every time," Grace chortled, her clear blue eyes dancing merrily.

Abbott mopped his brow in almost-real relief. "You sure do, but I never thought you'd pull that in front of our brand new preacher."

"You see, Jim, Miles and I spent a lot of time together in high school. In my office, that is. Every once in a while, just for old times' sake, I pull my angry principal act and he still jerks his knee without fail."

"We can all ride in The Chief," Jim offered as they stepped outside.

"The Chief?" Grace said with raised eyebrows.

"My car," Jim explained quickly. "Jeep Grand Cherokee. Debra and I have twins but they couldn't quite manage Grand Cherokee so we called the car The chief."

"I'd like to meet The Chief some time but why don't we give the old boy a rest and let Mr. President take a turn today? Here, Miles, you drive," and she flipped a set of car keys to Abbott who turned and walked across the parking lot to a brand new Lincoln Town Car, shining like a new penny in the bright January sun.

Jim soon decided that Miles and Grace had been appointed a committee of two to put Shoney's out of business. Miles borrowed a line from Arby's and really piled it on. Grace had a special liking for biscuits smothered with gravy and lots of those mini sausage links on the side. Jim understood why the Shoney's Breakfast Bar had been the restaurant of choice.

Jim ate lightly but slowly, having a couple bran muffins with fruit and decaffeinated coffee.

After the final round of dirty plates had been cleared away, Grace laid out the basic salary and benefits package the Board was offering. The salary was very generous, equal to what Grace had been making her final year as principal, "And that was with a doctorate and--" she looked pointedly at Miles "twenty years' experience." Besides the salary, there was a full parsonage benefit which included a modern twelve-room home with all utilities. The health coverage applied to all family members living in the parsonage who were less than 19 years of age: HMO, major medical, dental, vision, and prescriptions.

"If the church votes to call me to this church and I don't come, it sure won't be because of salary and benefits," Jim said sincerely.

"Good," Grace nodded briskly, "and there's one more thing. Each year you'll get a five percent cost-of-living salary increase. If things are going well in the church at the end of each year, the

board can vote to add a five percent merit raise to the cost-of-living raise. Anything else?" she asked looking at both men.

"One more thing," Jim said. "Could we talk a little about this interview which is coming up this afternoon. Is there a hidden agenda I need to know about before everybody starts firing questions at me?"

Grace and Miles looked at one another, each waiting for the other to speak. Finally Grace said, "There is a skeleton in our closet, Jim. I'm not sure how many of the people who will be attending the interview this afternoon actually know this first hand but we did have a bad experience with our pastor ten years ago."

Here it comes, Jim thought. I knew this whole thing was too good to be true. "Define 'bad experience'."

"Bad as it gets as far as preachers are concerned. He had an affair with a high school senior, from my school no less, and they ran away together. Heard they're married now and living in Mesa, Arizona. Very sad for everyone concerned. Pastor Carr had four children and a lovely wife. Two of the kids went to high school with the girl involved. One was a sophomore and, get this, the boy was a senior who had been going steady with this girl before she ran away with his Dad!"

"And here's the worst part of all," Miles said, totally serious for a change. "The media people had a field day with this thing. If you think the televangelists had it hot in the late eighties, this was worse. And I mean TV, radio, papers, everybody. Got so bad the girl's mother cracked and killed herself. The autopsy said over 50 Digoxin tablets stopped her heart cold."

"Then the media got really serious and it was networks and press people from throughout the mid-Atlantic states. Very sad, indeed," Grace said softly.

"I remember reading about the mother's suicide but hadn't made the connection with this church until right now. Any idea on how this might effect the kinds of questions people will be asking this afternoon?"

Grace answered. "My guess is you'll be getting some pretty close questions about your private life, including your personal relationship with your wife."

"I have absolutely nothing to hide and I'll answer every question I'm asked," Jim said calmly.

"Good!" Grace said briskly. "Power breakfast adjourned." She strode to the cashier and had two twenties on the counter before Jim could get his wallet out of his pocket.

Miles winked and said briefly, "On us."

They drove North on U.S. 11 to the Camp Hill junction and then South on U.S. 15 to the Wesley Drive exit, a ride of about twenty minutes. The Wesley Evangelical Church complex of

sanctuary, gym, softball field, parking lots, and parsonage spread across fifteen acres of good land East of Route 15 and close to the Wesley Drive exit.

"Was the church named after the Drive or was the Drive named after the church."

"Neither," Grace smiled. "Before we even knew this land was for sale, the church was incorporated as Wesley Evangelical Church. Wesley Drive was here before we were. Actually, the church is named after John Wesley, who happens to be my favorite hero in church history."

The Wesley Evangelical Church complex faced Route 15 but since the highway was limited access, the facility was reached by taking the Wesley Drive exit and then using an access road which entered the property from the northwest corner.

The church itself was built of colonial brick with a columned portico and large wings spreading out on both sides. The North wing housed administrative offices and classrooms for younger children, including the nursery. The second and ground floors supplied classroom space for older children and adults. The ground floor under the sanctuary housed Fellowship Hall with banquet seating for one thousand and a fully-equipped restaurant kitchen. The South wing contained the gym and some classroom space for teens and young adults.

Since the land sloped down from the front of the church, all the ground-floor rooms had some natural light and those toward the back of the building had full-size windows. The gym was on the first floor of its wing but there was no second floor in order to provide the head room needed for basketball and volley ball.

Although the main church building was rectangular in shape, the platform area of the sanctuary was along a long wall, the North, wall, with the choir loft on the left of the pulpit and the orchestra pit on the right. The piano and organ were on a dais directly behind the pulpit and faced each other at a forty-five degree angle. In front of the piano and organ were a semicircle of short pews to accommodate the pastoral staff and others who would be participating in a service.

"How's that for a whirlwind tour?" Grace's long strides had just circumnavigated the major areas of the church and she was barely out of breath. Whirlwind was the right word, Jim mused, who seemed to have less breath left than did his guide.

"Check out that pulpit for size," Miles suggested.

The pulpit was done in natural walnut enameled ivory insets, as was the case for all platform furniture and the pews as well. Jim assumed the classic pastoral stance with arms spread to grasp the outside corners of the pulpit. Speaking in his best platform baritone, he said, "The ushers will now come forward to receive the Lord's tithes and your offerings."

"Hired on the spot," Miles chortled and snapped his fingers. "You're our kind of man."

All laughed and Grace said with her blue-eyed twinkle, "Careful, boys. Some guy from the "Patriot-News" might be hiding up there in the balcony and writing all this down.

Jim turned to face the pews again and his mood turned quickly serious. The platform spots were on but the rest of the sanctuary was in semidarkness. The empty pews stretched in a semicircular panorama before him on the floor and above him in the balcony which swept around three sides of the sanctuary. How many souls were represented by these pews? Which ones already knew Jesus Christ as a personal Savior and were filled with the Holy Spirit? Where would the Sunday Christians be sitting who lived the other six days of the week as though the Bible didn't exist. Which specific spots would be occupied by those prayer warriors so essential to the success of any church program.

In answer to Jim's unasked question, Grace spoke softly. "An average of 3500 people every Sunday morning counting both the 8:30 and the 11:00 services, plus the kids in the nursery and junior churches. Twenty-five hundred every Sunday night. At least 1500 Wednesday nights for Bible study, Christian service training, membership classes, and various activities for kids and teens. And every one of them with a never-dying soul. Pretty awesome responsibility, isn't it."

Jim nodded in silent agreement while lifting an unvoiced prayer in the words of Bill Gaither's song, "Come, Holy Spirit, I need you."

Suddenly Miles looked at his watch. "Hey, it's almost 11:30. Time to meet the staff." With that, he led the way off the platform through a door located between the choir loft and the organ. Fishing a single key out of his wallet, he walked across a broad corridor which ran behind the platform area of the sanctuary and stopped at an unmarked door directly across from the hall from the choir loft.

"Pretty neat, huh?" he asked Jim with a grin.

"Miles, this is more than neat, this is down-right convenient. The pastor can walk right out of his private office, cross one hall, and be on the platform in less than ten seconds. This your idea?"

"This whole complex is his idea, including the parsonage," Grace stated flatly. He's just too shy to admit it so he drags me along to toot his horn for him."

"You're an architect?" Jim asked.

"Sure is," the former principal answered. "Tell him, Miles, and stop confusing your shyness with humility."

Despite the good-natured banter, Miles did look a little embarrassed. As they were hanging up their coats, he explained that his role in designing the church had begun while he was a freshman in high school. He had enrolled in Mechanicsburg High School's four-year art program with a heavy emphasis on commercial art and drafting. The church complex was an on-going project all through high school and on into his baccalaureate program at Penn State.

By the time he graduated summa cum laude, all of the views and elevations were complete. The church board had been keeping tabs on Miles' project for the past eight years and they adopted it without hesitation. The general contractor liked the work so much, he paid Miles a fee which wiped out his college indebtedness in one stroke.

"Enough about me," Miles said as he swung open the door on the other side of the room from which they had entered. "Let's meet the staff, and here's the keystone which holds this whole operation together. Say 'hello' to Sandy Simpson, administrative assistant."

"Hello, Sandy Simpson, administrative assistant," Jim said with a twinkle.

"Good morning, Rev. Hogan," she said as they shook hands.

Each person took rapid inventory of the other. Jim saw an attractive young woman in her early thirties with a riot of red curls reminiscent of Annie. She was slim, about five-five, wearing a little softer version of Grace's gray business suit, only in light brown. A quick sweep of her work alcove located right outside the pastor's door told him she was neat and organized.

Sandy liked Jim instantly. His handshake was firm but not lingering, and he didn't cover her right hand with his left as Dr. Clark had done. His gaze was direct and never left her face to travel down the rest of her body.. Although she sensed he was checking her out just as she was checking him, the interpersonal dynamics were totally professional.

At that moment, Miles leaned between Jim and Sandy to kiss her firmly on the mouth.

"Miles, honestly!" Grace groused without venom. "When are you going to grow up?"

"I have a license for it," Miles pouted with mock offense.

"What Miles is trying to say in his own unique way is that he and Sandy are married," explained Grace with a smile.

"Yep, five years this June," Miles boasted with his thumbs pushing out red suspenders from under his suit jacket. "And there's only one thing that mars my happiness. My thoroughly modern Sandy insists on continuing to use her maiden name!"

"If you don't pipe down, your thoroughly modern Sandy is going to mar your head with a tape dispenser," Sandy said lightly as she pinned a name badge to her husband's lapel. "Now put this on Rev. Hogan and I'll take care of Grace. Got to get everyone in uniform," she said pertly.

Jim glanced down at what Miles was ready to pin on his lapel.

Rev. James A. Hogan
Pastoral Candidate

The card inserted in the plastic pin-on badge was beautifully done on what Jim guessed was a printing press. The type was bold sans serif with black ink on light blue card stock. A photo-

reduced version of the church logo appeared in the lower left corner. Unfortunately, it wasn't quite right.

"Sandy, I hate to make waves about something minor but would you mind making up another name card for me? I know it's time to meet the rest of the staff but maybe you can just turn this card over and write this, and he leaned over her desk and wrote on a scratch pad:

Pastor Jim Hogan
Ashtabula, Ohio

"Didn't I get your name right?" Sandy asked with concern as Jim was scribbling on the pad.

"What you did was completely accurate," Jim said with a smile, "but this is correct," and he handed her the sheet from the scratch pad. "My name is Jim Hogan, my signature is James A. Hogan, and I never use reverend. If a title is needed, 'pastor' is fine."

Sandy looked at Jim scribbling on her scratch pad and smiled broadly. "Finally! A preacher who knows what he wants and knows how to ask for it. But I won't turn this card over and write on the back, I'll make a new one. Just take a sec. Want to watch?" The office in the Ashtabula church still used IBM Selectric typewriters equipped with a correcting tape feature. He sure did want to watch.

Without waiting for an answer, Sandy zipped around her desk and sat down at what Jim discovered was a Power Macintosh computer with a screen the size of an aircraft carrier's flight deck.

"Couple clicks of the mouse here and there and bam! you'll have a correct name card." In less than a minute, Sandy's flying fingers and nimble mouse had the corrected card on the screen. Holding down the OPEN-APPLE command key, she pressed the letter P and the laser printer behind Jim came to life and began to hum softly. He turned and watched a sheet of blue card stock roll out with his correct name card in the upper left corner of an eight-card grid.

Sandy disappeared in a utility alcove where Jim could hear quick rasps of a paper cutter. In a maximum of two minutes from the point of his original request, he was wearing a name card identical in style to the others which read:

Pastor Jim Hogan
Ashtabula, Ohio

"I'm impressed," Jim said sincerely as he looked down at his new badge.

"You better be," Miles said with a grin. "That was fifteen thousand dollars worth of the Lord's money you just saw at work.

"And worth every penny of it," Grace said matter of factly, as she led the way out of the reception area and into the main conference room.

Chapter 4: Interview

Jim counted about ten people seated in the conference room, chatting with their neighbors on one side or the other. As soon as they realized the prospective pastor had been escorted into the room, they rose as a body and faced him. It was almost as though an ensign had barked, "Admiral on deck!" Jim was tempted to say "At ease."

Grace said simply, "Be seated, folks. I'd like you to meet Jim Hogan from Ashtabula, Ohio. We're running a little tight on time so let's get started. You all know that Jim has been given a unanimous vote by the board to come as our next pastor. Jim, I'm going to turn things over to you. I think we should plan to break up here about one so we can get ready for the open interview session in Fellowship Hall, and that begins at one thirty."

Jim took his seat and glanced around the table. Sandy had been at work with her Macintosh and mouse in here, too. Everyone was wearing the same type of name badge he wore. In addition, a crisp place card which showed name and title was at each person's chair. At that moment Sandy appeared at his side and, with a quick wink, deftly replaced a "Rev. James A. Hogan" card with the "Jim Hogan" version. Jim promised himself he would learn more about this Macintosh and LaserWriter business whether he pastored this church or not.

Now he scanned the names and titles on the place cards which Sandy had prepared: Jason Masters, Assistant Pastor; Jill Dawson, Associate Pastor for Young Adults; Bob Baker, Associate Pastor for Teens; Emily Marlow, Associate Pastor for Education; Cliff Graham, Associate Pastor for Music; Patricia Court, Director of Wesley Day Care. Besides the professional staff, there were three secretaries present: Betty Hummel, Lois Boop, and Rebekah Ottinger. Grace Carson, Miles Abbott, and Sandy Simpson had place cards, also.

Grace continued. "We would like this to be a smaller and more informal version of the open interview this afternoon. This will give us some time to get to know each other a little. And please feel free to ask questions. It's all yours, Jim."

"Good morning, everyone," and there were friendly smiles and nods all around with a chorus of good mornings in return. "Maybe I should have said good noon." Appreciative laughter from the group.

"According to my watch, we have about 70 minutes to get acquainted. I have copies of your job descriptions which Sandy has kindly prepared, and I see each of you has a copy of my resume abstract. But I'd like to have us exchange some information, somewhat off the cuff. Agreed?" More nods and smiles.

"Can you provide resume abstracts to go with these job descriptions?" he asked Sandy.

"Jim, they're attached to the back of the job descriptions."

"Great. Then I guess I have everything I'll need if I need to do some pondering when I get back home."

Jim caught some raised eyebrows at Sandy's casual use of his first name.

"First I'd like to share some information about myself which doesn't appear on that resume. Most important, I know Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. I have accepted Him as my Lamb of God. I believe God sent Him into the world to die as the ultimate, supreme, once-and-for all sin sacrifice so I, and anyone else who accepts Him as their sacrifice, won't have to bear the penalty for sin which is eternal death. I also have the presence of the Holy Spirit and He provides me with three types of power. This power to the third power includes power to comprehend the eternal truths of the Bible and to share those truths with others, power to be preserved from sin as long I maintain my guard so Satan and his demons can't destroy me, and third, power to do things which far exceed my own human abilities."

Jim was pleased to note that his testimony was punctuated at various points by amens, with the most frequent and fervent coming from Jason Masters.

"A minute ago, I thought I saw a little reaction when Sandy called me Jim. Sandy, why don't you comment on that yourself?"

Briefly she summarized the incident about the name tag which had taken place in the reception area.

"Back home, the people on staff are free to call me Jim when we're working together in the offices, like we are right now. We have a youth pastor, Gary Marker, and all the kids call him Pastor Gary-- when they're not calling him "Magic Marker" or "Little Miss Marker. He has a very open relationship with all the kids and they love him all the more for it. That's the way we like to operate in Ashtabula."

Jim could detect an easing of tension which seemed to circle the table. Jason took off his jacket and hung it over the back of his chair. Bob loosened his tie and unbuttoned his collar. Miles pushed back his chair and propped his feet on the table, getting a stern visual rebuke from Sandy.

Jim played along. "Glad to see you're getting comfortable. But if you sleep, don't snore."

More appreciative laughter as everyone got psychologically comfortable at least.

"Now it's your turn to talk. Jason, let's start with you."

"Thank you, Jim, for letting me call you 'Jim'". More appreciative laughter.

Jim wasn't sure what was so funny but decided to let Jason continue and see what developed.

"I moved to Messiah Village to retire after thirty-five years in the ministry. But Grace, here, Shanghaied me back into active duty. My job as Assistant Pastor has involved visiting new contacts and those who are ill, running our ministry for senior citizens, and carrying a fairly heavy load in the area of spiritual counseling. And, when the Senior Pastor is away or ill, I fill the pulpit."

"And does it very well, I might add," said Grace. "Jim, before you continue your meeting, I think I should say what everyone else is thinking. Your personal style is so different from Dr. Clark's that the staff is close to shock. That's why everyone has the giggles and Miles has been misbehaving. We're just expressing a feeling of release. Now don't get me wrong. Dr. Jeremiah Clark is a saint of God whom we all respect highly. It's just that his wife, who always calls him 'Dr. Clark' when anyone is around, well-- Mable just puts a little too much starch in his shirts. That's all." Close to uncontrolled laughter. "But now Dr. Clark has retired to Florida and it looks like we may be entering a new era. Does that help?"

"Sure does. But for now, let's leave Jerry to his fishing pole or golf clubs or whatever it is that retired people do down in Florida. "Jill, tell me about your work with the young adults."

Jill Dawson was somewhat rounded but smiled readily and had deep dimples. She talked rapidly, saying much of it with her hands. Jim's Dad would say this woman could talk a leg off an iron pot.

"My ministry includes programs for folks from the day they graduate from high school up through their late twenties, early thirties. Activities, outings, Bible studies, personal witnessing and visitation, maybe a little informal career and marriage counseling thrown in. You name it, we do it," Jill finished with a flourish of her hands.

"Sounds like a full-time job. Bob, how about you?"

"A lot of the same programs as Jill has but mine run from the seventh through the twelfth grades. I spend a lot of time in the high schools, especially during lunch periods. Just talking with kids, not only our church kids but anyone who wants to talk. I'm the chaplain of four different varsity football teams; pray with the guys in the locker rooms before the game, kind of hang out on the bench. The last weekend of the football season, I attended parts of six games. Two Friday night, two Saturday afternoon, and two Saturday night. It's a very exciting and a very rewarding ministry."

Jim nodded approvingly. It was easy to see that this man would be equally at home in a locker room or a Bible study. Jim guessed Bob Baker stood at least six-six. His afro was well-trimmed and his dress was stylishly casual but impeccable. His voice was well-modulated and his speech was both crisp and articulate. Jim had a hunch he knew a little more about playing football than praying before the game.

"Emily, let's hear about the Christian education you're giving these kids."

Emily Marlow wore her medium brown hair straight and parted in the middle. Debra would call her attractive which meant no major structural flaws but not pretty, either. Behind her round oversized wire rims her eyes flashed with a dry wit and an articulate summary of her ministry told Jim she might be plain but she surely wasn't dull. He learned her responsibilities extended beyond the traditional morning Sunday school hour to include nursery and junior church programs from infancy through sixth grade. She also ran church-related scouting programs for boys and girls. During her spare time, she taught classes to train teachers and aids in doctrine as well as the principles of education. Busy lady.

Miles spoke up, a wide grin on his face. "Jim, I claim the honor of introducing our Associate Pastor for Music. Meet Cliff Barrows Graham!"

Cliff joined in the laughter with Miles laughing loudest.

"With a name like that, you don't need a title," Jim joked amid the laughter.

"My parents were saved at a Billy Graham crusade while my mother was carrying me, and that's how I got the name. The music comes from the fact that they are both card-carrying professional musicians to this day."

Cliff went on to say that he directed the choir and orchestra, led the singing, and coordinated special music for all services. In addition, he taught classes in sight reading music and coached the people who supplied the special music in performance techniques.

"Music is an important part of worship," said Jim seriously. "I'm looking forward to hearing the choir and orchestra tomorrow morning."

"Now let's talk about the wee ones. Ready Patricia?"

Briskly the director of the Wesley Day Care outlined her program, explaining that she used the nursery and classroom facilities of Wesley Evangelical Church to provide a quality Christ-centered day care program for families of all religious persuasions.

Next Jim asked the three secretaries to talk a little about their work. He noted that all three spoke with some degree of the Pennsylvania Dutch accent common to the central part of the state. Rebekah Ottinger was the most dutchified of all and wore the small white cap of the Mennonites.

Jim was extremely impressed with the staff. They were all very well spoken and gave evidence of a sincere concern for the souls of their parishioners. Checking the resume abstracts as each person spoke, he had noted that everyone had a Master's degree. Jason, Bob, and Jill had received theirs at various evangelical seminaries. Emily, Cliff, and Patricia had their degrees in their respective fields.

"I believe that about wraps things up as far as I'm concerned, except for one thing. I already know Miles and Sandy are married. How about the rest of you?"

There were nods around the table. "She isn't married," said Miles looking straight at Grace, who responded with a warning wag of her finger.

"I may be out of line in this, and if I am, Grace can cut me off. But I'd like to include the spouses in the staff banquet you've planned for this evening. This afternoon's interview sounds like it may get hectic and tomorrow I'll be meeting hundreds of new people. I'd like to have a relatively quiet time with all of us at this table plus your spouses. Of course if your spouse has another commitment, no problem. I know this is spur of the moment.

"And Grace, I'll make a deal with you. If you can talk the board into supporting this extra expense, I'll be your escort for the evening!"

Everyone laughed approvingly and Miles clapped loudly.

"That's an offer no one of my age or marital status should reject," said Grace with a broad smile. "It's a deal!"

The meeting broke up on that note and Sandy hurried to her phone to instruct the restaurant to plan for an extra nine places at dinner that evening. Miles and Grace stayed behind to confer with Jim.

Grace looked at her watch. "The buffet over in Fellowship Hall should be ready to serve now. Shall I ask Sandy and the girls to bring over trays? We could eat right here so you wouldn't have to stand in line."

"I wouldn't mind standing in line if I were going to eat," Jim said quietly. Actually I was hoping to slip into the sanctuary and spend some time at the altar between now and when the interview is to start. I'm not worried about knowing the answers to the questions, but I am concerned that I phrase those answers in a way which will be informative without being abrasive."

Grace and Miles nodded, silently pleased at the emphasis Jim placed on prayer in his own life.

"Fine, Jim. Sandy, Miles, and I will get our lunch and I'll plan to meet you back here, shall we say, around two? My guess is we won't be ready to introduce you until about that time.

Jim nodded and as he was rising to leave for the sanctuary, Sandy tapped on the open door.

"Excuse me, Jim, but I forgot to ask you about editing the tape."

"What tape is that, Sandy?"

"I'm sorry, Jim," Grace said. "I'm the one who forgot. We're planning to tape the interview this afternoon. You'll be speaking from a mike, of course, and we're asking each person with a question to come to a mike, also, when they speak. After the interview, our sound man, Dick Allen, will duplicate the interview tape and copies will be available in the morning services for anyone who didn't get to this afternoon's session. Go ahead with your question, Sandy."

"Dick needs to know if you want to review the tape or have edits made before he makes the copies."

Jim hid his surprise at the plans for taping and duplicating. By noon tomorrow, the church's entire constituency would have access to every word he said this afternoon. He was doubly glad that he would be able to spend an hour or so at the altar before running the gauntlet. "As far as I know now, nothing will need to be done to the tape before it's duplicated. Barring some type of tasteless outburst from a questioner, that is. Tell Dick to go ahead with the duplicating unless he hears from me otherwise."

Sandy, Miles, and Grace all liked Jim's answer and Sandy hurried out to return Dick's call.

At the very instant Jim was dropping to his knees at the church altar, Debra was kneeling in prayer in the study at the Ashtabula parsonage. It wasn't until six months later that they learned of what was far more than a coincidence.

At five minutes after two, Grace came hurrying into the conference room, somewhat out of breath.

"I think we're about ready for you in Fellowship Hall, Jim. Everyone who bought a buffet ticket has now gone through the line and if you don't mind talking while people finish eating, I think we can begin."

"Let's do it," Jim said.

He estimated that three hundred people were seated at tables in Fellowship Hall and at least that many were seated in rows of folding chairs along the walls and across the back. Those in the rows of chairs had either finished eating or had elected to skip the buffet and just come for the interview. Jim sat in an empty chair near the entrance as Grace moved to the podium.

"Speaking for the church board and the search committee, I'd like to thank all of you for coming out this afternoon to meet Jim Hogan who is a candidate for senior pastor. Jim, why don't you stand so everyone can see who you are." The candidate for pastor rose briefly and was greeted with vigorous applause.

"In case we haven't met, my name is Grace Carson and I chair the church board. On my right is Miles Abbott who heads the search committee, and he's seated with his lovely wife, Sandy, who serves as administrative assistant to the senior pastor.

"Some of you may not know the history of what brings Jim Hogan to Mechanicsburg today so let me fill you in. Back in September, shortly after Dr. Clark retired, Miles and Sandy and a couple people from the search committee went to hear Jim preach in his current church at Ashtabula, Ohio. He had no idea who they were then but they came back with a very glowing report of Jim's preaching and how he conducted the morning worship service. On the basis of that visit, the board invited Jim and his wife, Debra, to come and talk to us about moving to Mechanicsburg. He didn't preach for us at that time but the board was so impressed, we gave Jim a unanimous call to become our next pastor.

"Very few of you know that our bylaws require that a pastoral call by the board must be ratified by a two-thirds vote of members who are of voting age and present at a meeting called at least three weeks in advance. That ratification vote will be taken tomorrow evening after the service. Before you vote, however, we wanted you to have an opportunity to present questions to our candidate on any Biblical, or moral, or social issues-- as long as those questions are in good taste. Jim readily consented to subject himself to what we have come to refer to among ourselves as 'the interview'. He's also agreed to not use an open Bible or any notes in responding to your questions. He has no idea what your questions will be. In fact, none of us do. This will be entirely extemporaneous.

"Now, some guidelines for you. You may ask one primary question and one follow-up question. You may not ask a third question or engage in any type of dialog with Jim. If you do, I think Dick Allen over here on the PA system will shut your water off." Everyone laughed and Grace continued. Now, let's give a warm Mechanicsburg welcome to Jim Hogan of Ashtabula, Ohio!"

Everyone rose and the applause was hearty and prolonged. When the hall was quiet and the people had resumed their seats, Jim began. "Thank you for that 'warm' welcome. While driving through a blizzard on I-80 yesterday afternoon, there was a time when I thought I might never get out of Clearfield County. So anything warm is really welcome." More laughter. I'm not going to spend any time talking about myself or my family. Sandy tells me you have a copy of my resume and personal testimony. Let me assure you that every word of that testimony about my relationship with God, His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit is absolutely true. I'm not quite as sure about the resume." Again laughter.

"There sure are a lot of people here this afternoon and if you each ask just one question, we'll be here till the snow melts. So here's what I'd like to do. Sandy has some three-by-five index cards numbered one through ten." Sandy fanned her cards and held them high for every one to see. "If you want to ask a question, get Sandy's attention and she'll give you a numbered card. Please don't write your question on the card. It's just to show you

when it's your turn to come to the mike and ask your question. After the first ten questions have been asked, we'll recycle the cards and start all over--until all questions have been asked or until we run out of time. When you get up here to the mike, please begin with your name and your relationship to this church or another organization you may be representing.

"Any questions about asking questions? Yes, right here in front."

"No question, Pastor", said a very large lady with a very small hat perched on top of her head. "I just want to get a card so I can have a number."

"Good! Sandy, give this lady a card and, Ma'am, please step to the mike and tell us your name."

"My name is Betty Lydecker and I'm a charter member of this church. What I want to know is, which do you think is the real Bible? I keep hearing about these new-fangled translations and I don't know which one to read any more."

"The King James Version was good enough for Peter and Paul so it's good enough for me." General laughter. "Seriously, Betty, . . ." and the questions and questioners came in a steady stream.

After several rounds of questions and answers, Jim was beginning to feel pretty good about this question and answer business in front of such a large audience. His pleasure was short-lived. The woman stepping to the mike was dressed very sharp, in the casual, loose-fitting style favored by Yuppies. If Jessi was here, she would know instantly what clothing label was being displayed. Was it Ann Taylor, Liz Claiborne, Perry Ellis? Whatever the label, the woman's set jaw and piercing eyes told Jim that his answer would not be welcomed.

Sandy broke into Jim's reverie by saying hesitantly, "Pastor Jim, this is Penny Starr. She's an investigative reporter for 'The Guide'." Jim could hear the tension in Sandy's voice and wasn't sure what to expect.

"I'd like to ask a question as a private citizen instead of a reporter," Ms. Starr said in a cultured, low-pitched voice which hinted at on-air experience. "Are you pro-choice or are you pro-life?"

Jim and Debra had talked about how to handle an abortion question if one was asked, so he knew exactly what he was going to say. Knowing what to say didn't make him feel any better about saying it because he could tell he was in a lose-lose situation.

"In a forced choice such as you've given me, I must say that I'm pro-life," and he continued smoothly when she tried to cut in, "but let me put that position in context. Abortion is one of the most painful and divisive topics on the contemporary social, legal, and religious scene. I surely can't hope to provide a solution during this interview.

However, I think I can provide some food for thought by drawing your attention to another controversial topic which has also been much discussed in social, legal, religious, and political circles, and that is capital punishment. If you're saying, 'Hey, Pastor, there's no relationship between abortion and capital punishment, give me the next three minutes and at least listen.

"Here are the points of comparison between abortion and capital punishment. First, both involve life. Second, both involve ending life for what are thought to be good reasons. And third, both have strong adherents and opponents. Now let's look at these one by one, and I'm taking the life issue first. If you believe the Bible, you have to accept the fact that life begins at conception. The prophet Jeremiah talks about God calling to him while he was still in his mother's womb. If you're talking about breath, that does begin at birth, If you're talking about life, that begins at conception. Of course there is no question that a convicted criminal is alive.

"Second, let's talk about the 'thought-to-be' good reasons for ending life. In the case of the unborn fetus, these reasons generally relate to the personal preferences of the woman, with the dominant preference having a lot to do with convenience. A career woman finds it inconvenient to interrupt her climb up the corporate ladder to have a baby. The working woman finds it inconvenient to lose the second income and incur the financial burden of raising a child. The unmarried woman simply finds it inconvenient. In other words, the decision to kill the baby is made on the basis of what the woman wants to do, not on the basis of what the baby has done.

"Now let's talk about the "thought-to-be" good reasons for ending life in the case of the person convicted of a terrible crime such as a murder and kidnapping. First, the Bible clearly supports the concept of capital punishment. God Himself practiced it regularly and He commanded that it be used by humans in cases of horrible crimes. In fact, every civilization since the dawn of time has applied the principles of capital punishment-- until the last 50 years or so. In other words, the decision to kill the person who commits a horrible crime is based on what that person has done.

"Now the ultimate point of the comparison. The average liberal supports abortion and opposes capital punishment while the average conservative opposes abortion and supports capital punishment. I may not have the research to support this theory but you can do your own research right now. Think of your liberal and conservative acquaintances. Where do they stand on these issues?

"And that, said Jim hoping to defuse a potentially tense situation, is a K-Mart Blue Light Special-- two for the price of one."

Jim was positive there would be a follow-up question but the reporter just stared straight into his eyes before reaching up to adjust her floppy-brim hat. That movement was a signal because at that instant, about fifteen young adults seated across the back of the hall leaped to their feet and began marching up the center aisle. As they marched, they

pumped convention-style signs up and down on which had been screen-printed the slogan "It's Our Body" in huge block letters. As the demonstrators marched, they chanted "It's our body, we decide!" over and over again. As the marchers neared the front row of seats, the leader handed an extra sign to Penny Starr who then headed the column, strutting and shouting at the top of her lungs, "It's our body, we decide! It's our body, we decide!"

Suddenly the front of Fellowship Hall was bathed by harsh TV lights. A Channel 27 Action News minicam had just swung into action. But before the camera man could pan down the line of marchers, a painful whistle blast stopped everything cold. Dick Allen, the sound man, jerked off his earphones and yelped in pain.

Grace Carson was standing at the mike, calmly twirling the lanyard of an Acme Thunderer referee's whistle clockwise and counterclockwise around her index finger, very much like a bored lifeguard on a stand at Virginia Beach. There was complete silence for about ten seconds.

Then Penny again lifted her sign and opened her mouth to continue the chant. Before she could utter a single syllable, Grace popped the Acme back in her mouth, leaned close to the mike, and shrilled three short, sharp blasts.

"Penny Starr, sit down!" she ordered in her clarion principal's voice. "You are on private property in a private building by invitation of the official board of this church. Our right to assemble and our right of free speech supersede anything you plan to say or do! And the rest of you can take your seats, also. I've had all of you in school at one time or another and you know I won't stand for this kind of nonsense."

Jim was totally amazed at what happened next. Later, as he and Debra discussed the demonstration back in Ashtabula, he still couldn't believe it. Penny Starr lowered her gaze, her sign, and her feathers, and returned to her seat. The rest of the demonstrators did the same! Jim was stunned!. Having a retired high school principal as chair of the church board wasn't all bad.

The TV reporter was still hovering along the side wall so Jim decided to outflank him. "Why don't we take a short break so we can all have a chance to stretch a little. I'll be ready for the next question at exactly two-forty-five," he said as he set his wrist alarm.

During the break, Jim made a quick stop in the men's room and then walked down to the sanctuary altar for ten minutes of intense prayer. "Lord, help me say the right thing in the right way. May your Holy Spirit touch my mind, touch my lips, keep my spirit sweet and Christ-like . . ."

In a small vestibule off the rear entrance to Fellowship Hall, an impromptu board meeting was being held during the break. "Well, what do you think?" Grace asked casually.

"I'm impressed," Miles offered promptly. "The guy's dynamite! Glad we're getting this on tape." Several members nodded agreement but Karl Zimmerman was giving his close-cropped and grizzled head a knuckle massage.

"Now I'm not so sure," he said in the Snyder County whine of the Pennsylvania Dutchman. "Some things he's talking about are controversial. And he seems so sure. Everything is black or white. There's nowhere to think for yourself, seems to me."

"That's exactly what I like about him," Miles retorted. "Stands on his own two feet and speaks his mind. If we're going to pay a man a generous salary plus housing and fringes, I expect to get my money's worth."

"I'll tell you one thing," spoke up an elderly lady with a cane hanging from her arm, "every word he's said so far is straight from the Bible. And he's speaking without notes and hasn't even opened the Good Book once."

"I agree with Sister Briscow," spoke up Sandy, "and a lot of the people out there in the Hall do, too. I don't want a pastor who's so wishy-washy you can't tell if he's fer it or agin it."

"Pipe down, little lady," said Miles. "You don't have a vote on the board."

"I may not have a vote but I'll always have an opinion," Sandy flashed back.

"You got that right," Miles muttered good-naturedly and the ad hoc board meeting broke up as the participants drifted back to their seats in the Hall.

Jim resumed his place at the mike, ready for the questions to continue. Sandy, who has the next question?"

The questioning continued for another forty-five minutes or so and might have gone on into the night but Grace intervened. "Pastor Jim Hogan, I am positively amazed at your depth of knowledge on each topic on which you have been questioned. And I have been moved by the Christian spirit in which you have handled some of the most controversial issues in our society today. But most important, and I must give credit to Pastor Jason Mattern for pointing this out to me just a little while ago, you have been in a spirit of prayer much of the afternoon. In fact, Pastor Jason told me that he has felt strongly impressed to pray for you as you presented your answers. And that makes sense, because no mere mortal would be gifted with your depth of wisdom unless the Holy Spirit was upon him.

"Before we close, I want to remind you that Pastor Jim will be preaching in both worship services tomorrow morning as well as tomorrow night. And remember that this session was taped this afternoon and if you ordered a tape ahead of time, you can pick up that tape after the services tomorrow morning at the information desk in the lobby.

"And one last announcement. Tomorrow evening at the close of the worship service, the church will vote on whether to call James Hogan to be our next pastor. All church members fifteen years of age and older will be eligible to vote. Anyone have anything else before we close?" and Grace visually checked with Sandy, Miles, and key board members. "All right, Pastor Jim, I'll call upon you for closing remarks-- as long as you promise not to answer any more questions!" The crowd laughed.

Jim said, "Let us stand for prayer. . ."

After the brief prayer, a man approached Jim with a smile and hand extended. "My name is Ray Benson and I was wondering if you've ever thought of doing any TV?"

"Not really. Some ministers may feel called to the electronic pulpit but I have never felt drawn in that direction.

"How about Christian radio?"

"I have thought about that, especially a music format. We evangelicals tell our kids not to listen to secular rock music because of its emphasis on sex and drugs and violence, and even the occult. But what do we offer in its place? I feel the church should put its money where its convictions-- and restriction-- are. We should financially support Christian music on the radio. And not only in contemporary formats for the kids, but in easy-listening and southern formats for the rest of us, too."

"What about a Christian talk show with live phone calls? You sure know how to handle tough questions."

"Never gave it a thought," Jim said honestly. "Maybe some day." Benson handed Jim his card and then turned to go.

[G. Edwin Lint](#)

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Chapter 5: First Sunday

Even with twenty-five years in the ministry, Jim could count on one hand the times he had preached in a double-header service which began at eight-thirty Sunday morning. Remembering how he used to feel in his early-morning college classes, he wasn't sure how this was going to work out. He arrived at the Wesley Evangelical Church complex shortly after seven thirty and parked in a rear lot close to the entrance to the pastor's office. He was pleasantly surprised to find the main lots were beginning to fill, even at this early hour.

He went straight to the conference room and found Sandy, the pastoral staff, Grace Carson, and Miles Abbott, just as they had promised. In addition, there were five people Jim hadn't met. Although the hour was relatively early, everyone seemed alert. Cliff Graham, Associate Pastor for Music, introduced the people Jim didn't know as the special music for the morning services. Candace English would be singing a solo in each service. Two husband-and-wife teams, the Bakers and the Watsons, were a mixed quartet who would be singing in both services, also.

After shaking hands with the singers, Jim took a seat at the head of the table. "I asked you to come forty-five minutes early this morning so we could discuss the services and still have time for prayer around the altar. Sandy had distributed bulletins and Jim glanced over the order of service before continuing.

"We'll begin by my introducing you to the congregation," said Jason Mattern, Assistant Pastor. "Then you can make a few remarks, and if you will, I'd like you to offer the invocation." Jim liked this arrangement. So often he had sat in the congregation waiting through a full third of the service before he heard a guest speaker so much as open his mouth.

"Then after your invocation, Cliff Graham will start the song service," continued Jason. "And I guess you can see the rest of the lineup in the bulletin."

Jim noted that Jill Dawson, Associate Pastor for Young Adults would be receiving the offering, Bob Baker, Associate Pastor for Teens would be greeting visitors, and Emily Marlow, Associate Pastor for Education would be making announcements.

The bulletin showed that Jim would be leading in prayer. "Jason, tell me a little about your prayer time."

"We usually have an open altar with anyone who needs a spiritual or a physical touch coming forward to pray. The Assistant Pastors and myself will have oil for any who wish to be anointed for healing."

"Do you have a list of prayer requests I should mention or should I make a public announcement about requests?"

"The size of our congregations just about mandates that we have prayer requests in advance," responded Jason. "As people come in, they give any written prayer requests to the ushers. Then Sandy takes these and gets them typed up in a list which will be on the pulpit by prayer time."

"Sandy, I've been here less than two days and you've already become indispensable to me." The Administrative Assistant smiled with appreciation.

"We need to continue to remember Patricia Court's unspoken request," said Emily Marlow. "You may remember her as the director of Wesley Day Care. She has really been under quite a burden for several weeks."

Jim thanked Emily for her request on behalf of Patricia. "Anything special I need to know?" he asked, glancing down at his watch and noting it was close to eight. No one spoke. "All right, first I'd like to read my scripture lesson so you'll be able to pray in specifics and then I'd like us all to go into the sanctuary for about fifteen minutes of prayer around the altar. Jason, I'd like you to lead in prayer and then each of you can follow with just a few sentences. I'll close.

"My scripture will be found in the second book of Kings, chapter six, beginning with verse 24 and concluding with the first part of verse 9 in chapter seven. 'And it came to pass after that, Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria . . . '."

By eight fifteen when Jim finished leading in prayer at the altar, the sanctuary was more than three-quarters filled, including the balcony. Upon seeing the group in prayer down at the altar, many incoming worshipers had gone to the altar, also. Jim didn't realize it then but he had just set a precedent for pre-service prayer at the altar which would last at Wesley Evangelical Church.

Jim joined Cliff Graham and the choir in their practice room where he was introduced and led in a brief prayer. He was already getting a strong sense of fellowship with people of the church. He liked the spirit of friendliness and openness which seemed to be the pattern with all the people he met. Of course, the acid test of a congregation was the degree of spiritual freedom he would feel in the pulpit. He was convinced that freedom in the pulpit was an absolute indicator of the amount of prayer support he was receiving from the pews. It wouldn't be long until he knew.

At eight-fifteen, the pianist and organist began a prelude which was nothing less than outstanding. Not outstanding in the sense of a Bach classic, but outstanding in the variety of hymns and worship choruses and the manner in which they were played. Jim knew there is nothing quite like evangelical piano and organ playing and he had never heard

better. All effective evangelical musicians know the arrangements in the hymnal are very dull and unimaginative. They consist of solid, four-note chords with few frills because they were written to be sung in four-part harmony. However, evangelical singing has given rise to a style of piano and organ playing which expands the basic melody and harmony into a lively and vibrant accompaniment. As Jim waited in the hall outside the entrance to the platform, he knew that these musicians would greatly enhance the congregational singing and special music. Later, he learned that Arnold and Betty Barnes were self-taught as far as their improvisations were concerned. They could play any song in any key by ear, and read music, too! Jim was sure that anyone who was used to hearing hymns played straight from the hymnal would be thrilled by this great evangelical accompaniment. Some might call this kind of playing a skill. Others might say it was a talent. Jim was convinced it was a gift straight from the Lord.

The choir entered the loft at eight-twenty and began to sing along softly with the prelude. Many in the gathering congregation participated, also. Meanwhile, the line of worshipers kneeling at the altar had increased until it stretched the full length of the padded rail. Their praying voices mingled beautifully with the piano and organ, the softly-singing choir, and the singing from the congregation until a powerful montage of praise was being lifted to the Lord.

By eight twenty-eight, all participants in the service had gathered with Jim in the conference room, across the hall from the platform entrance to the sanctuary. The processional was nothing fancy. Jason Mattern led the way, followed by the Assistant Pastors, the singers, and Jim. An usher was there to close the hall door as Jim went up two steps to the platform.

When the pastors and singers were standing in front of their platform chairs, Cliff Graham stepped to the pulpit. He lifted a silver trumpet to his lips and played a cappella the last phrase of the chorus of "How Great Thou Art". Each note of that simple phrase was liquid brass. Clear, flawless, powerful. Jim felt the short hairs at the base of his skull prickle and he knew his forearms were covered with goose bumps. A physical response to the moving of the Holy Spirit.

Then, with an upward sweep of the bell of his horn, Cliff began the chorus from the beginning. The piano, organ, and choir were right on cue. The entire congregation was instantly on its feet, many with hands raised to Heaven: "Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee, how great Thou art, how great Thou art. . . ." Jim lifted his face and arms to the Lord and just listened. Normally he thoroughly enjoyed singing along with the congregation, especially on those rare occasions when Debra was by his side to join in the harmony. But this morning, he just worshipped. Tears flowed freely down his face and he said over and over again, "Come Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit."

At that moment, Jim was convinced that Cliff Graham was the best trumpet player in the evangelical movement. The first time through the chorus, Cliff had given heavy emphasis

to the melody. But as the singing progressed to the second and third and fourth times through, Cliff added overlays of variations and embellishments. And Jim could sense that it was completely in the Spirit, not a demonstration of prowess with a trumpet. Just as Jim was convinced that Cliff could not add another variation to the grand old chorus, he led the singing through the fifth and final chorus by triple-tonguing an eighth-note running counter-melody.

As the song ended, the volume of praise and prayer which was being lifted to Almighty God was nothing less than a roar. Behind him in the choir loft, Jim could hear people crying, laughing, and praying all at the same time. To his right, Jason Mattern had his arms up and his head thrown back, saying over and over again, "Thank you, Jesus; thank you, Jesus; thank you, Jesus!" To his left one of the couples which made up the mixed quartet was standing with arms about each other's waists, free arms lifted toward Heaven.

Cliff Graham was more than a talented trumpet player. He was an expert worship leader as well. At the height of the volume of praise following "How Great Thou Art", he had signaled the pianist and organist to begin playing "Come, Holy Spirit", that powerful song of invocation by Bill and Gloria Gaither. When he began leading the choir in singing along with the instruments, the congregation quickly joined in. About half way through the second chorus, Cliff moved back to stand in front of his chair and Jason Mattern took his place at the pulpit. Jason made no attempt to lead but just waited for the chorus to end and then signaled for the congregation to be seated.

"That's the most excitement I've had at eight-thirty in the morning since last Sunday this time." Everyone laughed and many clapped. Jason went on to introduce Jim and to explain the significance of his being at Wesley Evangelical Church on this particular day. And then it was Jim's turn to step to the pulpit.

"In your bulletin, you'll notice that I'm supposed to offer the invocation. The word 'invocation' comes from two Latin words which mean to 'call in' or literally, to 'voice in'. This makes the invocation the act of calling in the presence of the Holy Spirit to the worship service. Well, I really don't need to do that because the Holy Spirit is already here in His fullness. And in addition, you have already sung the invocation with that beautiful song by Bill and Gloria Gaither. One of my all-time favorites, 'Come Holy Spirit'. But I will lead you in a brief prayer of thanksgiving.

"Heavenly Father, we praise you as the Great God of all the universe. You made this universe, and everything in it, including us. We thank you for loving the human race, even after we sinned. And we thank you for providing your great plan of salvation which took Jesus Christ to the cross to pay the death penalty for sin so that we won't have to die an eternal death for those sins. We thank you for the Holy Spirit, whose presence we are feeling in such great power this morning. And we thank for the Holy Angels whom you have dispatched to watch over us. We thank you for our material blessings, including the mental and physical ability to work. We thank you for this beautiful sanctuary and we

thank you for the political and legal freedom to worship here in the beauty of Your holiness.

"May the Holy Spirit open our minds and hearts to receive your instructions, and may the Holy Spirit open my mind as I share your Word. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen." (Of course, he gave it the evangelical pronunciation of "a-men", rather than the more formal "ah-men".)

As Jim was saying "amen", Cliff was at his shoulder, ready to step to the pulpit for the first congregational song. "Turn to page one in your hymnal as we continue to worship the Lord in song. 'All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name'. I like to refer to this as the 'National Anthem of the Christian Church'. Let's stand together.

Jim watched Cliff carefully as he led the singing. The first word of the first verse was "All", and since this was a pickup note, Cliff signaled it with an upward sweep of his right hand. The second note was "Hail", the first beat of the first measure, and he signaled this with a straight-down stroke. The song was in 4/4 time so the second beat was signified by a curving movement which was up and to the left. The third beat sent his hand parallel right and on the fourth beat, his hand swept up to the point where the first beat had begun. After less than two measures, Jim knew that Cliff Graham was a true song leader and not just a page caller and an arm waver. Out of the corner of his eye, Jim could see that the pianist and organist were paying very close attention to Cliff's arm signals. Apparently all three of them realized that a song leader really leads the piano and organ only, and maybe the choir. The instruments, in turn, lead the congregation.

From time to time throughout the song service, Cliff would lift that silver trumpet and add its clarion call to the worship in music. Jim was already looking forward to the evening service when the orchestra would participate in the song service. His own trumpet case was in The Chief and it wouldn't take much persuasion for him to sit in.

After two songs, Cliff made a smooth transition to a worship chorus and Jim was pleased to see that twin slide projectors were displaying the words of the chorus on large screens mounted well up the wall on both sides of the platform. Later he would learn that the projected slide images were legible from any seat in the sanctuary. The crisp, clear characters on a contrasting background were far superior to the traditional overhead projectors with words written or typed on acetate transparencies. The slide projectors were mounted in recesses behind the wall and projected their images on the screens from the rear. They were synchronized by a single control in the audio booth. Jim wasn't at all surprised to learn that Sandy could create the two-by-two slides on her Macintosh computer in just a few seconds. At the bottom of each slide, Sandy had typed the copyright notice and the words "used with permission".

Then Jason Mattern was at the pulpit, opening the altar and inviting those who wished prayer for spiritual or physical or material needs to come forward. Within a few seconds, the altar was lined with supplicants while others stood three-deep behind them. As Jim

took his place at the pulpit, his pastor's heart broke at the sight of so many needy people. Glancing down at the typed list of requests, he began to pray from his heart. Soon tears were flowing down his cheeks and his arms were raised heavenward as he poured out his spirit before God on behalf of the many needs represented in the altar area and throughout the sanctuary.

After prayer and when the people had returned to their seats, there was a time of fellowship when everyone was encouraged to shake hands and make a special point of getting to know visitors. While this was happening, Cliff led everyone in singing a chorus Jim had first heard on an Evie album many years ago: "I Love This Family of God, so closely knitted into one. You've taken me into your heart, and I'm so glad to be a part, of this great family."

The mixed quartet sang next and it was exceptionally good. The song was more on the southern Gospel side of the Christian music coin, but very well done. The accompaniment was live and consisted of the piano with amplification, an electric bass played by the tall man singing bass, and a skillfully-played trap set. Soon many in the congregation were clapping in time with the music and quite a few were singing along as well. Jim was pleased to note that Cliff did not restrict music with a beat to the evening service. Jim's foot began responding to the music and then he released all pastoral restraint and sang and clapped, also.

While Arnold and Betty Barnes played a lively offertory on the piano and organ, Jim took the opportunity to make a quick inventory of the sanctuary as it appeared when filled. Miles had told him yesterday that the sanctuary seated a maximum of twelve hundred on the floor with an additional three hundred in the balcony. Jim estimated that the congregation in the eight-thirty service was pushing twelve hundred, and that would not be counting the many children, teachers, and aides who were in the nursery and who were worshipping in cherub church and the junior church in other parts of the complex. As he contemplated the massive spiritual and administrative responsibilities represented by a church of this size and complexity, he was reminded of what Mordecai had said to Queen Esther when the king was planning to have all the Jewish people executed: "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Could he say no because he was comfortable with his smallish church in Ashtabula? Could he say no because Debra was in love with the parsonage there in Ohio? Could he say no because he hated to disrupt Jessi's high school education?

Then Candace English rose to sing and Jim knew his message was next. Better get back in the spirit of the service and wait until the vote this evening before deciding whether to say yes or no. Might not need to say no.

The young lady took a hand-held wireless mike with a yellow wind-screen from a stand behind a potted fern and moved to a position to the left of the pulpit and close to the edge of the platform. She nodded slightly to Dick Allen in the floor-level sound room at the rear

of the sanctuary and a prerecorded sound track began to play. Jim had never been especially fond of sound tracks in worship, feeling that the Holy Spirit couldn't very well move the singer to repeat a chorus or a verse unless the sound man was a genius at live cueing.

By the end of the first verse, Candace had turned Jim completely around on the sound track issue. The song was contemporary and one which Jessi might recognize but which Jim had never heard. No matter, though. Candace sang with the energy of Margaret Becker, the worship fervor of Twila Paris, and the commercial vocal qualities of Amy Grant. In addition to her musical skills, her mike technique was flawless. Jim suspected Cliff's coaching was in evidence here. There was never a hint of an acoustic pop, that unpleasant sound caused by pronouncing "P" and "B" sounds directly into a mike which is being held too close and directly in the air stream of the singer or speaker. And there was no distortion either, as she moved the mike closer to her mouth for soft, dramatic effects and farther away when high pitch and greater volume were indicated. In addition, Candace never held the mike in a way which would give the congregation the illusion that she was eating a lemon sherbet cone. Her mike was always below her chin level and never distorted her appearance in the eyes of the congregation.

Candace surely needed a mike which did not have a wire jacked into the floor somewhere. She took full advantage of her electronic freedom and worked the platform from one end to the other. But there was never a hint of excessive theatrics which would have been out of harmony with the way the Holy Spirit was working in the service. At the end, the congregation reacted with a full swell of applause, and Jim contributed whole-heartedly.

Now Jason Mattern, Assistant Pastor, strode to the pulpit and before he knew it, the introduction was over and it was time for Jim to rise and approach the pulpit for the morning message. While Jason was speaking, Jim had reached to his side inside his suit jacket where the wireless microphone transmitter was fastened to his belt. He moved the tiny toggle switch to the on position and glanced down to make sure he could see the red wink of the LED tally light. In the few seconds that remained, he prayed fervently God's will would be done during the next forty minutes or so, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Jim rose to welcoming applause and took his place at the pulpit. He placed his large, black Nelson King James on top of the pulpit and assumed the classic pastoral position with both arms spread wide and grasping the corners of the sacred desk.

"Thank you Pastor Jason for that fine introduction. For a moment there I thought I might have gotten into the wrong church and was starting to look around for the fellow about whom you were speaking." Appreciative laughter. "Now It's my turn to say nice things and I can't say enough about everything which has happened in this service to this point. I know this will sound trite but for me, it is no polite exaggeration when I say I've never been in a service where I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in a more profound way. And

the music! The music has been literally out of this world; it has been heavenly! Cliff, Arnold and Betty on the piano and organ, Candace, the Bakers and the Watsons-- thank you for allowing your musical gifts to be used by the Holy Spirit in such a powerful way."

Since Jim had already had an opportunity to speak in the service, and since he had spent quite a bit of time yesterday afternoon answering questions from some of these same people, he decided to skip any further pleasantries and move directly to his scripture lesson.

"Please turn in your Bibles to the second book of Kings, chapter six. This is one of the most exciting Old Testament Bible stories you'll ever read. And with the excitement, I'm going to show those who can testify to being born-again Christians a lesson you need to learn. And, I'm going to share some important information for any of you who might be chained by the shackles of sinful habits and practices. The title for my sermon is 'Beggars' Bonanza'."

Jim was very gratified by the rustling music of India paper as over a thousand Bibles were turned to second Kings six. "Let's begin the reading with verse twenty-four of chapter six.

G. Edwin Lint

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Chapter 6: Beggars' Bonanza

As Jim began reading at verse twenty-four of second Kings six, he instantly felt the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. His earlier question about prayer support from the pews was already being answered.

"There are three scenes on which I would like us to focus. The first is the starving people of Israel inside the besieged walls of Samaria. This scene is described in verses twenty-four through twenty-nine of chapter six. In the second scene, we see four beggars with leprosy sitting outside the walls at their favorite begging spot by the city gate. This scene is described in chapter seven, verses three and four. And then the final scene is what I have chosen to call the 'Beggars' Bonanza' and this is described in verses eight through eleven.

"Now let's look at each of these scenes individually and there will be something to learn from each. In scene one, we see a normal situation for a time of siege. Walling in a city was a common means of defense until gunpowder and modern warfare made walls obsolete. And an equally common military strategy for attacking a walled city was the siege, especially if the aggressor had plenty of time. A siege was very simple. The opposing army merely closed off all gates to the city so no one could get in or out. If the opposition could maintain the siege long enough, the walled city would have to surrender to starvation as much as to the enemy general. This is pretty much the situation in which Samaria found itself as today's story opens. Look at verse twenty-five of chapter six and you'll see that a donkey's head was selling for the equivalent of about eighty shekels of silver. There are two things wrong here. First, a donkey was unclean according to the laws of Moses because it doesn't have a split hoof. And second, even if a donkey was considered edible, it's head would be the last thing to be sold at the local meat market. And in verse twenty-five we read that a half pint of pigeon droppings was going for five shekels. To be honest, I have to point out that the NIV at this point does say that this may have been "seed pods" instead of actual pigeon droppings. Either way, the point of high prices and low quality is well taken.

"But things get much, much worse. Look at verse twenty-eight. Here we see that two mothers have entered into contractual cannibalism. The first day they would cook and eat the first mother's son. Later, the same thing would be done to the second mother's son. But, the second mother defaulted on the contract and hid her son so he couldn't be eaten.

"Now let me make the application. Benhadad and the Syrian army clearly represent Satan and his demons. They are the forces of evil. The poor starving Samaritans inside their walled city represent people in today's society who are besieged by the forces of evil and starving for the Bread of Life and the Living Water. And the beggars on the steps, who are they? They are us, the evangelical Christian church."

Jim noticed that many people in the congregation were jotting down notes as he spoke. Some had regular note books, others were writing on the back of their bulletin, which had a lined area just for note taking. Still others were making marginal notes in their Bibles. Rather gratifying. The Ashtabula people were not great note-takers.

"Now I'd like to spend some time talking about the starving people in our society who are besieged by sin. Weren't you a little put off by the idea of the Samaritans eating pigeon droppings, no matter how hungry they were? But look at people in our society today. Some are drinking poison. Some are inhaling poison. Some are sniffing it up the nose or shooting it in an arm. Beverage alcohol, nicotine, and every illegal drug you can name are all deadly poisons. These substances were never meant for human consumption, with the possible exception of certain drugs which may be used in medicinal quantities and by a doctor's prescription only.

"Tell me. Don't each of you know at least one person who has died in the last year because of lung cancer, or cirrhosis of the liver, or a drug overdose, or AIDS which was sexually acquired. Our society is indeed eating pigeon droppings and donkey's head, and it's killing us!

"Now stay with, me people. There's more to come and it gets worse, much worse. Let's talk a little about the mothers who made a contract with each other to eat their baby boys. There isn't a person in this building or who will eventually listen to the tape of this service who is not totally repulsed by the idea of eating baby boys or baby girls. Am I right? You can't even stand the thought of it! It's that repulsive. But it's happening all around us in Mechanicsburg, right this very minute. 'No way,' you say. And I say 'yes, it is!' Oh, maybe babies are not being consumed with a knife and fork. But they're being consumed, never the less. The classic example, of course, is the practice of abortion. And by the way, please don't defend abortions by talking to me about rape and incest. Of the thousands of babies who are legally aborted every year, how many of those children would you suppose were conceived through rape or incest? I submit that the percentage of such conceptions is very, very low. So what's the real reason which causes mothers to kill their own babies. The real reason is convenience! Yesterday during my interview over in the Fellowship Hall, we talked about this a little. I'm going to repeat myself for about the next sixty seconds, so those of you who were in Fellowship Hall yesterday afternoon may take a short nap." There was light laughter across the congregation. "But the rest of you better pay close attention because I means business on this point.

"What are the reasons a mother uses when she makes the decision to kill her baby? Well, I'm telling you these reasons have a lot to do with convenience. A career woman finds it inconvenient to interrupt her climb up the corporate ladder to have a baby. The working woman finds it inconvenient to lose the second income and incur the financial burden of raising a child. The unmarried woman finds it inconvenient period. You know, I was just thinking . . . Being very hungry is inconvenient, too, isn't it?

"Let's move on. How else does our sin-besieged society destroy our children. How about mothers who continue to drink beverage alcohol while pregnant? We now are seeing a generation of fetal alcohol syndrome children coming up through our school systems, permanently impaired by the uncontrolled appetites of their mothers during pregnancy. The same thing is true of crack babies, and babies born with AIDS! And why are these terrible things happening to our children? Because our society is besieged by the forces of Satan and his demons, that's why!" Strong and sustained applause flowed across the congregation.

"You may not like my next point quite as much," smiled Jim. "But I must talk about another type of child destruction which is also a product of the wish of parents to have convenience. And that is divorce! Now let me say at the beginning of this discussion that I am not talking to those of you who have already experienced divorce yourselves. A divorce is the direct product of sin in the life of one or both of the marriage partners. But if you are born again, and your sins are under the blood, then the sins which caused your divorce are under the blood of Jesus Christ, also. If there were children in your previous marriage, you need to pray for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit so you can continue to relate to those children at the highest level practical.

"Now I'm talking to those of you who are still single and you married people whose marriages are still strong. If you are a born-again Christian, the word divorce is not in your vocabulary as long as you remain true to the Lord. Why? Because divorce itself is against God's law and the forces within a marriage which threaten to tear that marriage apart are spawned by Satan's demons themselves. And selfishness is Satan's favorite weapon for destroying your marriage. If you think your marriage may be threatened right now, you need to pray together for the power of the Holy Spirit to repel those demons which are assaulting you. And if you can't work things out by yourself, get to a Christian marriage counselor now!"

Jim paused and reached for a cup of water which was sitting on a shelf under the pulpit. "I started on this divorce topic because I wanted to talk to you about damaging children. A marriage which ends in divorce where no children are involved is a tragedy. But a marriage with children which ends in divorce is a crime! It should be, at least. Human beings are highest in the order of creatures which God has created. And as members of the highest order, our young require the longest time to grow and mature to the point where they can function independently. That's why God has such rigid rules about human sexual behavior and about marriage and divorce, also. God knows that the family is the primary building block of any successful society and that's why it must be protected. And by family, I mean an intact family with children growing to maturity under the protective guidance of both a mother and a father.

"Satan knows this too. Satan knows that our Christian culture will fall if the family fails. So, he has launched a massive assault on family values. Christian family members are being bombarded on all sides by forces which have the potential to tear the family apart.

We've already talked about divorce. Add to that homosexual liaisons under the label of marriage, free sex, single women seeking sex in order to give birth to a child, singles seeking to adopt a child, and this includes homosexuals-- all these negative and destructive forces represent Satan and his demons' best effort to destroy the traditional family unit. Friends, the siege Satan and his demons have laid around the walls of our society are truly causing us to destroy our marriages and our own children.

Again there was an approving ripple of applause, and Jim took another sip of water. "Now let's move outside the besieged walls of Samaria and take a look at four beggars sitting on the city steps. These four leprous, homeless beggars had a meeting. They considered their options and death seemed certain, no matter what they did. There was nothing for them inside the city. The people in there were already starving to death. If they stayed where they were, they would starve to death with no one to beg from and no garbage to pick through. Now look at verse three of chapter seven of second Kings. 'They said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?' The Bible doesn't use the word 'beggar' but it does say these men had leprosy, or some other infectious skin disease, which rendered them unclean under the laws of Moses. Therefore, the only way they could sustain themselves would be by begging. Now in normal times, they probably eked out a meager living by sitting by the gate and receiving coins dropped into their beggars' bowls. And I suppose after dark, they went out to the landfill and rooted around for scraps of food. But these days, there was no traffic in or out of the city gate so they couldn't beg. And the people inside the city were eating every scrap of garbage they produced so nothing edible had been found on the dump for weeks.

"The leprous beggars did have one other option. The camp of the Syrians. Look at verse four. 'Now let us fall on the host of the Syrians'. Maybe the soldiers would have mercy on them and let them have the scraps from one of their famous evening meals. Armies in the days of Benhadad didn't travel on field packs and K-rations. They lived pretty high on the hog, especially when in a long-term siege situation. They came with their tents, and provisions, and cooks, and slaves. The Syrian siege camp was a self-contained city. Why sit we here till we die? We won't! We'll go down to the Syrian city-camp and try to beg from them.

"So off they went, four leprous beggars stumbling along in the twilight, their bodies badly ravaged by their disease." Up to this point in his sermon, Jim had stayed pretty close to the pulpit, although he was completely wired for sound with a transmitter on his belt which broadcast everything he said to a matching receiver back on Dick Allen's console in the sound room. Now, as he talked about the leprous beggars, Jim began to enjoy his freedom and used the full width of the platform.

"I see one beggar swinging along on a pair of crutches made out of two forked branches," and Jim mimed this man's gait for a few feet. "And then I see another beggar using a cane made out of a crooked stick," and again he demonstrated the gait of this beggar. "And then I see two beggars badly bent over, with their arms around each other's shoulders,

helping to hold each other up as they stumble along." At this point, Jim grabbed Jason Mattern by the hand, pulled him to his feet, and together they showed what the last two beggars might have looked like as they crossed to the far end of the platform." When the laughter died down, Jim continued to preach from there.

"And then a miracle happened. God took the sounds of the staggering, stumbling steps of the four beggars as they scraped and thumped along and ran it through Heaven's master sound system. He called in some of the Angels who were into high-tech sound and said, 'Juice it up a little, boys'. And they did. They jacked up the highs and boosted the bass until the sounds of those beggars really had pop!. And they went to their sound effects library and mixed in some recordings of a massive army on the move. The thunder from the hooves of ten thousand mighty draft horses pounding the ground. The rumble of hundreds of chariot wheels. The shouts of the men, the jingle of the harnesses, the clarion calls of the trumpets, urging the soldiers to charge. And all recorded on location, of course. Next they went down to Circuit City and cleaned them out of the biggest boom boxes they had in stock. And they planted those huge boom boxes throughout the Syrian camp and set them to full volume. And finally, the angels ran their enhanced signal through a fifty thousand watt clear-channel radio station with a transmitter tower on a hill right behind the camp. Now, when Michael began broadcasting at full power, what do you suppose came out of the speakers of all those boom boxes? You can read it for yourself. Look at verse 6: 'For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host.' Isn't that marvelous? And when they heard the sounds of a mighty army rushing down upon them, they took off! They thought that the King of Israel had hired a bunch of mercenaries from the armies of the Hittites and the Egyptians and they weren't about to hang around long enough to eat their evening meal and pack their duffel bags. In the language of the King James, they left their camp 'as it was and fled for their life'.

"Let me ask you a question, those of you who are born again through the power of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Do you still remember how it was right after you got saved? The peace. The release. The sense of purpose in your life for which you had sought in vain for years. Well, that's about how the leprous beggars felt when they stumbled into the hastily-vacated Syrian camp. They were completely stunned. They couldn't believe their eyes. It was truly a 'Beggars' Bonanza!' Verse eight shows they acted in a rather predictable fashion for a while. The tables in the first tent were set with roast beef, mashed potatoes, brown gravy, corn on the cob . . . It had been years since they had even smelled food like this so they did the natural thing. They pigged out. Then they went to another tent and there was a seafood buffet. King crab legs, baked oysters, broiled swordfish steaks, shrimp, scallops, clams. You name it, it was there. So again, the beggars ate beyond the point of pain.

And then the beggars came to their senses. Look now at verse nine. 'We do not well. This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace.' Can you see what's happening here?

Can you tell what's beginning to stir in their hearts? I can. They're starting to feel a sense of evangelism. They're starting to think 'revival in the land'. They're beginning to remember the starving people back in the walled city of Samaria who are still eating pigeon droppings, and donkey's head, and even their own children. And they're saying to each other, 'Hey, man, we have good news to tell, and we better get on with it.' And they do.

"Now some of you have difficulty witnessing about the glorious freedom you have in your life through the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. But look at the job of witnessing these four leprous beggars have to pull off. First, they're on the lowest level of the socio-economic scale; they're beggars. Second, they're under permanent quarantine because of their leprosy. And third, and most important, they have an utterly preposterous story of good news to tell. The Syrians are gone. The siege is over. The famine is over. Prices will return to normal. Let me show you what it could have been like. On our way back from the Syrian camp, my three beggar buddies have elected me as the spokesman for our group. By now, it is completely dark and we get up close to the city wall, right below where the night watchman has his station."

Here, Jim stepped down from the platform onto a lower level behind the altar rail. And then to the amazement and amusement of the congregation, he tore off his suit jacket and tie, loosened the top two buttons of his shirt, unbuttoned both cuffs, and pulled out half his shirt tail. Next, he jerked off both shoes and socks and rolled one pant leg half way to the knee. Finally, he spread the fingers of both hands in his carefully combed hair and pulled straight down and out. There was general laughter throughout the congregation and a few flashes were seen as the merciless got a picture of this for the grandchildren. When he was finally in costume for his beggar role, he dropped to his knees, cupped both hands, leaned back, and called in the direction of the top of the pulpit above him.

"Hey, man! Man! I have good news for you." Then he leaped up behind the pulpit, leaning on one elbow and looking down to the level below.

"Who's there? I say, who's there? Oh, it's you, you crazy old beggar. Go away. Get out of here before I get what you've got.

Back on the floor below, kneeling and looking up. "No, man! Wait! I really do have good news for you and everybody in this whole city!"

"I thought I told you to scam out of here. Keep it up and I'm going to pour hot oil on your head."

"Please, man. Listen to me. I really do have good news. The Syrians all ran away and their camp is empty. Open the gates. The siege is over. The famine is over, too. Me and my buddies just had roast beef and a seafood buffet. All you can eat, too. And clean plates every time you go back for more." The entire congregation was in full laughter now but Dick Allen compensated by jacking up Jim's audio level as the laughter got louder and

louder. Many were crying as well as laughing as the Holy Spirit spoke to their hearts through Jim's antic role-playing.

The porter on the city wall remained stubborn. "You're crazy, man. Eating too much garbage. And if you and your buddies don't get out of here and let me have some sleep, you guys are going to be the blue-light special at Mertz's Meat Market by noon tomorrow!"

Jim retrieved his jacket and tie, turned and spoke briefly to Cliff Graham, and exited the platform through the door into the hallway. Cliff rose, said "Key of F" to the pianist and organist, and began leading the chorus in Bill and Gloria Gaither's "Get all excited, go tell everybody, that Jesus Christ is King!"

Jim stepped across the hall into his office and quickly restored his appearance to normal. As he strode back to the pulpit, Cliff and the congregation were just finishing the second chorus. "...Jesus Christ is still the King of Kings.

As Jim returned to the pulpit and Cliff took his seat, the entire congregation rose in a sustained standing ovation. Jim let it go for a few seconds before spreading his arms to restore quiet. "I'm going to remember that very positive response if I become your pastor and start a door-to-door witnessing program. More laughter, but scattered this time.

"You can read the rest of this fascinating story before you take your afternoon nap. The watchman finally passed along the beggars' report to his supervisor and eventually it made its way up the chain of command to the king. The king thought it was an ambush at first so he only sent out a scouting party to check the Syrian camp. Later everyone went out and enjoyed the Beggars' Bonanza. This story has a rather interesting twist which I haven't had time to discuss this morning. So when you read this after dinner, be sure to watch for a character who appears in two verses. First, verse one of chapter seven, and then again in verse seventeen.

"I'd like to close this message by making the application right where you live. Who are you? Are you one of the beggars as they're down in the Syrian camp, pigging out on the seafood buffet. You go to church on Sunday morning and Sunday night. You go to Christian concerts and church social activities. But you never get too far from the banqueting tables of God's great blessings.

"Who are you? Are you one of the beggars as they're standing at the foot of the wall and trying to convince the watchman that the siege is over and there's food for everyone.

"Who are you? Are you living in the city besieged by Satan and his demons, feasting on pigeon dropping and donkey head. Consuming your own children in your search for satisfaction and meaning in life.

"Who are you? Maybe you're the watchman on the wall who is looking down into the face of a person whom you feel is well below your station in life but who has a preposterous message of freedom and plenty.

Jim knew it was close to nine forty five and he had to move quickly to minimize interference with the Sunday school hour which was scheduled to begin at ten. Of course, when the Holy Spirit began to work in the lives of people, schedules should take second place.

Jim had already told the pianist, organist, and Cliff that if he wanted to use an invitation song, it would be 'Just As I Am'. Now he made a small rotating signal with his index finger down at his side. Instantly the organ began to play softly 'Just as I am, without one plea...' The piano joined in but Dick Allen kept it well below the organ, the way it should be during an altar invitation. Jim moved down to the lower level, standing between the communion table and the altar.

"If you're living inside a walled society which is besieged by the forces of Satan and his demons, I have good news for you. Right down here at this altar is freedom from addiction to alcohol and drugs and tobacco. Right down here is the strengthening of our family relationships. Right here at this altar is the expulsion of the demons which are forcing you to practice a homosexual lifestyle, or to engage in sexual sin, or maybe even to molest little children, even your very own. Right here is the ability to stop physically or psychologically abusing your wife or your children."

As Jim spoke, the aisles were filling with people moving toward the altar. And as each seeker arrived, a praying Christian was there to greet that person and they knelt together in prayer. After the pastors were all engaged in praying with seekers, the choir members began to serve as prayer warriors and fill in the ranks.

Jim shifted his invitation somewhat. "Perhaps you're not living in the walled city of sin this morning. Perhaps you're down in the abandoned Syrian camp, enjoying all the good things the Lord is supplying. Perhaps you haven't gotten to the point in your spiritual growth where you can say as the beggars said in today's story, 'We do not well. Today is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace.' If you have been holding your peace, and if you have not been sharing the good news of freedom and plenty with the starving people in the walled city besieged by Satan and his demons, you may want to come down and pray, too." This revised invitation brought another wave of seekers, many weeping, husbands and wives walking with arms around each other, whole families walking down together as they clutched each other or held hands. Jim's pastor's heart was broken again and again as he viewed the needy people, kneeling to pray and crying out to God for the forgiveness provided through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Or, praying for the spiritual power to be able to tell a sin-shackled world that there's a full-course roast beef dinner and a seafood buffet just waiting for them if they'll only voluntarily leave their walled city of sin.

"In just a moment, I'm going to pray, and I'd like to include you in that prayer. Perhaps you felt the Holy Spirit moving in your heart this morning but did not choose to come down to this altar for prayer. I'd like to pray for you, right where you are. If you would like to be included in this final prayer, please raise your hand. Everyone's eyes are closed and all heads are bowed. May I see your hand, which is your request for prayer?" Raised hands were seen throughout the congregation, including the balcony. "Thank you. You may put them down. "Heavenly Father, we thank you for who you are, a God great enough to create the entire universe and yet small enough to know our names and know where we live. Pour out the mighty power of your Holy Spirit on these seekers right now. Some are seeking for salvation, for freedom from the walled city of sin. Some are seeking for more power to be better witnesses of the fact that freedom and plenty are available for all who are willing to accept your Son, Jesus Christ, as a personal savior. And we pray also for the many people who raised their hands for prayer. Lord, you know each need represented by the forest of hands I saw a moment ago. And if some of those hands belong to people who have not yet experienced the new birth, may the Holy Spirit continue to convict them until they, too, kneel, and confess, and accept the blood of Jesus as their personal sin sacrifice. Bless the remainder of this day and all its activities and we'll give you all the praise and glory for whatever is accomplished. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen."

G. Edwin Lint

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Chapter 7: Moving

By the time Jim finished praying at the close of the eight-thirty service, people were kneeling three-deep the full width of the altar and in the first two rows of pews across the front of the sanctuary. A chorus of oral prayer began to build as dozens of prayers were lifted by seekers and counselors alike. Little by little, counselors began to lead weeping seekers to more private places in other parts of the church complex. Many seekers who remained in the altar area began raising their hands as shining smiles of victory covered their faces.

Many people in the sanctuary who were not directly involved in seeking or counseling left to attend the Sunday school classes, which began at ten. Still others stayed near the front of the church as vicarious participants in the spiritual victories which were being won around the altar. Throughout the prayer time, Arnold and Betty Barnes maintained a flowing piano and organ medley of praise and worship choruses. As the praying began to diminish because of victories being won, many in the mini-congregation began to sing along with the choruses.

Jim had stayed behind the altar rail throughout the prayer and praise time. Occasionally he would lay a hand on a seeker's head and pray for the spiritual victory that person was seeking. From time to time, he would kneel down and ask if a seeker would like to have prayer for a specific problem or need. Then, as people began to move away from the altar and take seats in the front rows of pews, Jim felt led to speak.

"Some of you have experienced some real spiritual victories around the altar here this morning. I know, because I can see it on your faces, and I can feel it in my heart. Seems to me like you're already out of the walled city of sin and are beginning to get a whiff of that roast beef dinner and seafood buffet. Now I've already told you in the message that after salvation, you must learn to share your new joy and freedom with others. And there isn't a better place to practice doing that than around the very same altar where you just found spiritual victory. Don't worry about the evangelical buzz words you may have heard people use. Just talk to us in your own words and tell us what happened to you. Pretend you were shopping at K-Mart yesterday and you took advantage of a fantastic blue-light special. All right, who would like to be first?

The first to stand was an attractive couple with their arms around each other's waists. Jim judged them to be in their late twenties or early thirties. The man spoke first. "Pastor Jim must have been listening through our keyhole last night because his sermon this morning hit us square in the bull's eye." Everyone laughed. "We have three small children out in classes right now, so that makes us doubly ashamed by what I am about to--"

Jim interrupted softly but firmly. "Before you say anything else, my friends, I must tell you that you are under no obligation to confess any sins in public. In fact, I prefer that you

not do that. What I meant a while ago when I talked about sharing your victory did not include confessing your sins in public. You confess your sins to God and God alone. Then you can testify to the fact that those sins are under the blood of Jesus Christ, but in a generic instead of a specific way. Does that help?" he asked, looking directly at the young couple standing near the altar.

"It sure does," smiled the man, taking a deep breath. "Just let me say we've been having some very serious troubles in our marriage and I've been at fault. Then, last night we got into a major argument and at the end of it, we both agreed we would see our lawyers and start divorce proceedings. And then when we came down to pray at the altar--" At that point, the man's voice broke and he covered his face with his handkerchief, his shoulders shaking with sobs.

His wife spoke. "Bob doesn't need to take all the blame because I've been at fault, too. I've been cold towards him, and selfish. But when I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior just a few moments ago, it was like I felt all brand new inside. For the first time in my life, I understand what people mean when they say 'born again'. That's exactly how I feel. Born again! And as far as a divorce is concerned, the things we were fighting about last night just aren't important any more," and suddenly she needed her handkerchief, also.

Meanwhile, Bob had regained some of his composure. "I've been going to church for over twenty years and this is the first time I ever found out what it's all about." He then turned, took his wife in a full embrace, and they both cried their hearts out while everyone clapped for joy.

The testimonies continued on for some time but Jim asked Jason to take charge so he could return to his office and prepare for the eleven o'clock service.

Later, as he lay stretched out on his bed in the Holiday Inn for his traditional Sunday afternoon nap, Jim marveled that the two morning services could be so different in tone but so similar in outcome. In the eleven o'clock service, Cliff Graham didn't touch his trumpet. The singers used different songs. The spirit of the service was soft and mellow, but definitely sweet. And then during the open-altar prayer time, the Holy Spirit broke in upon them in a mighty way. Several began to seek in earnest for spiritual help and the pastors and counselors were kept busy moving from seeker to seeker, praying with each one. No sooner would one person get up from prayer when two or three more would come running down the aisle and fall on their knees at the altar.

Thinking about it later as he began to doze off for his nap, Jim was convinced that God was teaching him a lesson with the two completely different services that morning. God had used two different styles of services to achieve a comparable outcome. Dozens of people sought and found God in both services! Jim had eventually preached his "Beggars' Bonanza" sermon in the second service, also. But it was after the altar call instead of before. God works in mysterious ways . .

His wrist Seiko beeped him awake at four thirty and he rose fully refreshed after two hours of solid sleep. On a whim, he packed his suitcases and got them ready to take down to the car. He decided that if he got a positive vote in the evening service, he would drive straight home to Ashtabula instead of staying overnight and leaving in the morning. With his good nap and the adrenaline of a pending move pumping in his veins, he wouldn't be able to sleep a wink anyway if he did stay over night in the Holiday Inn.

When he left for the church shortly after five, he took the room key with him. If he did decide to leave for home tonight, he'd leave the key with Miles and he could check him out in the morning. The church had an open account with the hotel and would be direct billed for Jim's charges anyway.

He got to the church around five fifteen and went immediately down to the altar for personal prayer. He knew the orchestra would be tuning up in about thirty minutes and he wanted to have some prayer time before then.

At quarter of six, he got his trumpet from his office and met Cliff Graham in a Sunday school room which doubled as the orchestra warm-up room Sunday evenings. About a dozen volunteer musicians were already there, tootling and strumming a variety of instruments. Quickly Cliff got them settled and introduced Jim to those who didn't already know him. Then he blew a solid B flat on his trumpet as a basis for tuning up. At ten of six, the musicians took their places on the platform. Jim made the third trumpet player, sitting between Cliff and an elderly man with a dull and battered cornet. For the first song of the prelude, Cliff whispered a number which turned out to be "Such Love". Most of the players just glanced at the book to check the song title and key and then closed the book. Arnold and Betty Barnes played a full verse and chorus on the piano and organ while the musicians got situated and blew the last globules of moisture out of their spit valves. Jim noted that aside from the three pieces in the trumpet section, there were two trombones, one E-flat alto horn, a baritone, three saxes, three clarinets, a couple flutes an electric bass, an electric lead guitar, and the drummer who had played traps for the mixed quartet in the morning services. Jim didn't know what type of sound to expect from this group, especially with so few people paying any attention to written music.

Cliff was sitting in first chair, front row. At the end of the piano and organ introduction, he signaled the pickup note and the entire orchestra was right with him. Except Jim. He had decided to sit out a few measures in the beginning and try to get a feel for what was happening. And the pastor was surprised and pleased by the solid harmony which surrounded him. Lively beat, too. On his left, Cliff's silver trumpet was leading the way. To his right, the battered cornet was playing a lively and mellow second part to Cliff's strong melody. That left the way clear for Jim to play the third part in the middle register, his favorite part in any instrumental ensemble. "Such Love" was an ideal selection for a volunteer orchestra in several ways, especially with so many playing by ear. The song was in 4/4 time, it was written in 4 flats (2 flats when transposed up to the piano key for B flat instruments), and it had no more than four chords.

Jim was swept back to his teen years in Ohio on the platform of the Circleville Camp tabernacle where just such a volunteer orchestra had belted out the old camp meeting and revival favorites night after night during the song services and offertories. There always seemed to be plenty of trumpets playing melody and alto so Jim had learned to play a third part which did not include the notes which either of the other trumpet parts were playing. And not only had Jim learned to play third part accurately, he had learned to play third with a running counter-melody and lots of variations.

With the enthusiasm of a teenager, Jim jumped in on the second line and played a strong running third part which blended perfectly with Cliff's melody and the cornet's alto. At the end of the first verse and chorus, Cliff tapped Jim's knee. Then Jim realized that all the horns were resting and the second verse was being played by reeds and strings only. Then on the chorus, the brass came back in and everyone played the chorus twice. On the final chorus, Cliff led them through the triple "wonderful" which Jim had been itching to put in all along. "...How wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful is love like this!"

The congregation, which had been rapidly filling the lower level of the sanctuary, clapped their appreciation. The next song in the prelude was "Glory to His Name", also 4 flats, 4/4 time, and no more than four chords. Cliff Graham sure knew his stuff.

The remainder of the service moved rapidly, it seemed to Jim, and in no time, Jason was calling him to the pulpit for the evening message. Jim chose as his scripture lesson Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, chapter six, verses fourteen through eighteen. The text for the message was verse seventeen: "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you."

The thrust of the message was based on the concept there is a vast difference between being average and being normal. Being average is doing what most of the people do most of the time. Being normal is living according to the moral absolutes which God has spelled out in scripture and which never change, down through the centuries. Although the spiritual tide was not as high as it had been in the morning services, Jim still felt complete freedom in the Holy Spirit and the people in the congregation followed him just as closely as they had in the morning, with nearly everyone using the Bible and many taking notes. Jim closed with a simple prayer of benediction.

And then it was time for the pastoral vote. Jim slipped away to the office and waited for the result.

Grace Carson stepped forward to conduct the proceedings in her capacity as chair of the church board. The voting bar was established as the first thirty pews in the three center sections. Members in good standing fifteen years of age and older were asked to move into these seats. Non-voting constituents and visitors were free to leave or watch the balloting from outside the designated voting bar.

Grace called the church meeting to order and Jason led in prayer. After prayer, she asked for the pleasure of the group regarding tellers. A motion was immediately made and seconded that the evening's ushers serve as tellers. Grace appointed Miles Abbott, the chair of the search committee, as head teller. She then instructed the tellers to distribute one ballot to each person inside the voting bar. The ballots were slips of blank paper, salmon in color.

Grace stood on the sanctuary floor between the first pew and the altar. "For many of you, this will be the first pastoral balloting in which you have participated. Can you all hear me?" There were several calls of "no" from the pews farthest back in the voting bar and Jason quickly handed her a wireless hand-held mike. "There, is that better? Good. Now, as I was saying, this is the first pastoral election for many of you. So I'll take a minute to explain. As you can see, your ballots are blank. To vote, you write just one word on your ballot. Vote 'Yes' if you want Jim Hogan to be our pastor. Vote 'No' if you do not want Jim to be our pastor. Then, if two-thirds or more of the ballots say 'Yes', we will have called a new pastor. If one third or more say 'No', the search committee will continue looking for candidates. Any questions? All tellers, distribute the ballots. Immediately after you get a ballot, mark it yes or no--do not fold it, please, and be ready to put it in the offering bag as it is passed down your pew.

"Pastor Cliff, can we have a couple choruses while the balloting is taking place?"

The Chief hummed along through Clearfield County over bare pavement where Friday evening, there had been fifteen inches of unplowed snow. The dash clock glowed 11:30 with another five hours or so of travel until Jim was back home in Ashtabula. Not home for long, though. Although the highway was bare, Jim still was on a constant lookout for ice patches where during the day melting snow from the plowed ridges along the berm had caused water to flow across the highway. Jim knew that with nightfall and lowering temperatures, such wet spots could freeze and become a serious hazard.

As The Chief rolled smoothly westward across I-80, Jim thought about the vote which had been taken earlier that evening. It had been a lot closer than he would have predicted. Closer than he liked, actually. When Miles had knocked on the office door and told him the results of the balloting, he wasn't even sure he wanted to go back out and talk to the people. Too close.

At the close of the service, Jim had said nothing about the closeness of the vote. He just thanked the folks for the call to be their pastor, thanked everyone again for a very pleasant weekend in Mechanicsburg, and said he would be getting in touch with Grace regarding his final decision. Jason offered the benediction and it was over. Jim said a few brief good-byes, hopped in the Grand Cherokee, and was on his way home to his family in Ashtabula.

Debra couldn't get to sleep. She hadn't slept well Friday or Saturday night, either. She and Jim were contact sleepers, weather permitting. Throughout the night, they were

touching or snuggling in one way or another. When Jim was away over night, she never did sleep soundly. With the added tension of the purpose of this current trip, she probably wouldn't sleep a solid minute all night long. With a bored instead of a sleepy yawn, she reached for the remote control and turned on the bedside thirteen-inch Sony. Nothing looked good as she flipped through all available channel at least three times. Finally she decided on a black-and-white movie on the PBS channel. Before getting settled, she pressed the remote control's sleep button. This would turn off the TV automatically in the unlikely event she dropped off to sleep before the movie was over.

Suddenly Debra felt warm lips pressing on hers. She jerked and twisted violently only to hear a familiar voice chuckling in the dark. Then she opened her arms and the Hogans completed the interrupted kiss.

"So I see you welcome strange men who kiss you in the dark," Jim murmured in her ear.

"You're strange, all right," she said, biting him lightly on the right ear lobe. Then she turned and looked at the clock. Four fifty? "I thought you were going to stay overnight. What happened?"

"Missed you and came home early," and he kissed her again, this time a little longer.

"Didn't you even stay for the vote? Come on, Jim. What happened?"

"I'm in the mood for love and all you want to do is talk church politics," Jim said with another chuckle. He rose from the bed, turned on a dim light, and started to get undressed for bed. "Here it is, plain and simple. Fourteen hundred and forty members voted. Nine hundred and ninety-five said 'Yes'. So that means they called me to be their pastor."

Debra did some mental arithmetic. "What was two-thirds? Nine fifty something?"

"Nine sixty, to be exact. I got thirty-five over the minimum."

Debra didn't know whether to be glad or sad. On the purely human and selfish side, she had been wishing that he wouldn't get enough votes to be called to Mechanicsburg. But now that the vote was so close, she felt like her husband had been sullied somehow. "Why do you think it was so close? How were the services?"

"To answer your second question, I've never found it easier to preach. The power of the Holy Spirit broke in upon us in a very unusual way in both morning services. The evening service was about what you would expect, with an important church meeting coming up afterward. Had fun playing in the orchestra, though. Reminded me of Circleville Camp."

"What about my first question," Debra persisted. "Why do you think it was so close?"

"Not sure," said Jim from the bathroom, through a mouthful of tooth paste foam. He finished brushing his teeth and then slipped into bed beside her. "I have a theory, though."

"What's that?"

"Well, I told you they were going to set up this interview thing Saturday afternoon, remember?" Debra nodded. "They did that and they came up with some pretty tough questions. Not that I didn't know all the answers."

"Questions about what?" asked Debra with a perplexed frown on her brow.

"Abortion and homosexuality, to name just two. Some lady from a newspaper asked the abortion question and that triggered a mini demonstration, complete with marchers and TV coverage. And then," Jim continued in a tone tinged with exasperation, "I get this homosexual couple asking what I think about homosexuals being ordained into the ministry."

Debra snuggled closer to her husband and put her arm around his neck. "Honey, you know the Biblical answers to both of those questions backward and forward. What was the problem?"

"I'm not sure, but I think it had something to do with the controversial nature of those questions. Some others, too, like what version of the Bible you should read, and is the entire Bible inspired of God?"

"Yes, but aren't those kinds of questions pretty standard for any group of evangelical Christians?"

"They are. But I think the thing that made the difference was the tape. They taped this whole thing Saturday afternoon and then passed out copies in the worship services Sunday morning. My guess is, never in the history of the evangelical movement has a congregation known as much about what a minister thinks until they've heard him preach for a year or so. Maybe I'm just looking for an ego shield but I think the interview and the tapes on top of that have a lot to do with all the no votes."

"I know one thing for sure," said Debra softly. "Those no votes weren't because you aren't handsome, intelligent, a powerful preacher, and a great husband!"

"Not entirely relevant, but I love to hear it anyway. Hey Debbie, I've been away since noon Friday. Too sleepy to really welcome me home?"

"Bright as a new penny and worth twice as much," she said gaily, giving his ear lobe another light nip.

Jim slept in Monday morning and missed seeing the kids before they left for school. But when he got home from the office at five thirty, all three pounced on him. The twins moved in first with a chorus of redundant questions.

"Are we moving, Dad? Are we? Are we? Why do we have to move? We like it here? We don't want to move!" Ben tried a different tack. "If we move, I'm running away from home," to which Jim gave his standard answer, "Save your money."

Jessi stayed in the background and said nothing. However, the stoney look on her face told Jim she was guessing a move was imminent. Jim glanced at Debra, standing in the arch to the kitchen. Her sly smile said, I saved it all for you, Honey.

Jim sat in his favorite chair and took Ben on one knee and Shelly on the other. He motioned for Jessi to sit on the couch across from him. "Kids, you know I love you all very, very much. And it makes me very unhappy when what I do makes you unhappy. But in the type of work a preacher does, the Big Boss is God. And when God tells me to do something, I have to do it. The people at the church in Pennsylvania have said they want me to move there and be their pastor. I'm not sure yet what God wants me to do. Maybe he wants me to stay here in Ohio, and maybe he wants me to move to Pennsylvania. As soon as I know what he wants me to do, I'll tell you."

"Yeah, but why would God want to ask you to do something that makes us so sad?" asked Shelly plaintively. Jessi smiled slightly and inclined her head to say, you took the words right out of my mouth, Shelly.

Ben had an idea. "Hey, Dad. Would it be okay if we prayed and asked God to tell you to stay right here in our old church?"

Interesting theological quandary, thought Jim. "You can always ask God for anything you want and he will always answer you. Just remember. Sometimes he answers 'yes'. And, sometimes, he answers 'no'."

"Bet He answers 'no' on this one," Shelly sulked.

"How was your trip, Dad?" Jessi asked sincerely. Jim told her about the snow on I-80 Friday evening and his run-in with the Ram Charger truck.

Debra, who had been listening out in the kitchen, called in to Jim, "What time did that happen?" The whole family got a blessing when it was learned the incident with the truck happened at exactly the same time as when Debra was on her knees in prayer at the church altar.

"Do you like cops now?" Ben wanted to know.

"I like that one a lot."

Jim remained in limbo regarding the Mechanicsburg situation for over two weeks. He prayed about it daily but couldn't seem to get a clear indication of what God wanted him to do. Debra never spoke with him about it and tried to deflect the kids' constant "are we going to move" questions.

The answer came on Wednesday January 31st. After prayer service he got to visiting with some people in the church vestibule and absent-mindedly left his Bible on the pulpit. The church was locked and dark and he was ready to pull out of the parking lot when he asked the kids if his Bible was in the back seat. When he learned that it wasn't, Jim put the car in park and opened the door.

"Jim, can't you get it in the morning. You'll be right back here at eight o'clock."

He knew Debra was logically correct but still he felt a strong need to go back in the church and get his Bible. When he re-entered the church, he flipped on the light for the stained-glass picture only. As he approached the platform and started to step up to the pulpit, he stopped and looked at the image of Christ praying in the garden of Gethsemane, as he had done so often before. And in that moment of quiet meditation, the answer came. And it was yes. It wasn't a voice. It wasn't a vision, either. He neither heard nor saw anything unusual. But the answer was still a definite yes.

He dropped to his knees at the altar, thanking God for giving him the answer, and asking for the Divine help he would need in fulfilling the mammoth responsibilities which that yes represented. After about five minutes, Debra came looking for him. Instantly she sensed what was happening and silently knelt beside him, putting her arm around his waist. In another couple minutes, the kids became restless in the cold car and all three trooped into the church, looking for their parents.

Jessi, too, sensed in her spirit that this was a special moment for her family. She took the twins by the hand and led them to the altar to kneel on the other side of their Dad. Ben and Shelly never remained still for more than three minutes at a time, even while sleeping. But for the next fifteen minutes, the entire family bowed silently and humbly before their God in prayer.

Then Jim rose and the others rose with him. All five embraced in a tight circle of unity and love. As they were walking down the aisle to leave the church, Ben paused and tugged at his father's hand.

"Dad," he whispered, "He just said 'yes', didn't He?" Jim nodded, too choked to speak. "And you know what, I'm not running away from home, neither?"

They all felt a subdued sense of peace as Jim relocked the front door and they drove home to the parsonage.

Jim's Bible stayed on the pulpit all night long.

Chapter 8: First Day Of School

Debra blinked back tears as she watched Jessi trudge up the road toward Wesley Drive and the bus stop. I know it would sound corny if I said it out loud, but this hurts me more than it does you. She and Jim had both offered to take her in to the high school but Jessi could be very strong minded at times and this was one of those times. She declared she wasn't a baby any more and didn't need Mommy and Daddy looking after her every minute. And that was that.

The twins had long ago forgotten their misgivings about moving and were actually looking forward to going to a new school and meeting new kids. In fact, they had made some new friends yesterday in Sunday school who went to the same elementary school they would be attending. Right now both were in the powder room off the kitchen, jostling for position at the sink as they brushed their teeth.

Ben had inherited his Dad's ability to brush his teeth and talk at the same time. "Mom, when Shelly spits, it goes all over the place, even on the mirror."

"I can spit as good as you can."

"Can not!"

"Can too!" And then a new song was heard. "Mom, make Ben leave. I need my privacy."

"I was here first. You can get your privacy up stairs."

Debra was tempted to remind them they had taken communal baths until they were too old to fit into the tub together. Then she had a better idea. "Ben, did you know there's a lavatory down stairs, off the family room? Have you tried that one yet?"

That idea appealed to Ben and he thundered down the stairs to check out the new facility.

Finally the twins were ready to leave for their first day of school at the Shepherdstown Elementary School. Breakfast was done, faces were washed, teeth were brushed, and each had visited the necessary room. And, Ben insisted that the hugging and kissing take place in the privacy of his own kitchen. "I don't want no kids at school seeing me getting kissed in broad daylight"

"Mommy, what's broad daylight?" Shelly wanted to know.

"Outside where other people can look at you," explained Debra. Shelly looked like she was about to pursue the issue with a question about "broad nightlight" since she rarely asked just one question on a given topic. Debra forestalled that. "Okay, everybody ready for the new school?"

"Yep," said the twin in unison, smiling and nodding. Debra glanced at the stove controls to make sure the burners were off and then ushered them through the connecting door to the garage and into the Eagle. As she pulled out onto Wesley Drive, she noticed there were no high school kids at the bus stop.

"Hey, kids. Let's pray, shall we? Our prayer topics this morning can be Dad in his new office, and Jessi at her new school, and you at your new school, too." And me with all those boxes! On such a gray, misty day. "Who wants to pray first?"

Debra watched the road while the twins prayed in turn. Both had been praying since they learned to talk. Jessi, the little rascal, had even taught them a night-time parody which Ben had been fond of quoting in front of church members. How did that go?. Now I lay me down to sleep, with my Ford parked in the street. If I die before I wake, I pray the Lord will set the brake. Where do kids come up with this stuff?

Quickly Debra refocused on the twins' prayers, and joined with them in spirit as God's blessings, the direction of the Holy Spirit, and the protection of the Holy Angels were invoked on everyone's behalf during the day's activities.

All three Hogans were a little startled to find that the new teacher was a man. Somehow, Debra had always associated first grade with a woman. But, Mr. Hutton was neat, personable, and very professional. Both Ben and Shelly seemed instantly impressed.

On the way back to the parsonage, the mist became a cold drizzle. Debra was thankful it wasn't cold enough to freeze on the roads. She decided to leave the Eagle in the driveway so she would have better access to the boxes which were stacked up on both sides of where the car had been parked. In fact, the garage was so filled with boxes, The Chief had to spend the night outside. Probably would for the next several nights, too, until things got organized.

Since the Hogans had lived in the same house in Ashtabula for twenty five years, they had accumulated an enormous amount of flotsam and jetsam. A sizable contribution to the local land fill and a three-week garage sale had gotten rid of quite a bit but much still needed to be moved.

The garage sale had been kind of fun. Jim had given the garage a good sweeping and then set up the Ping Pong table and several card tables to hold a wide range of household items, toys, tools, and books. Small adhesive labels with prices were put on each item and the labels were color coded. White meant the item was not the personal property of one of the kids. Jessi's things had pink labels, Ben's had blue, and Shelly's had yellow.

They had run an ad in the "Valley Shopper" and put posters on the bulletin boards of several area super markets. In addition, Jim had lettered a four-foot square of plywood on both sides with "Garage Sale" and an arrow pointing to the garage. The sign was placed at the edge of the lawn where it could be seen by people driving by.

Jim had also rigged an automatic signal for the breezeway door which buzzed in the downstairs hall when a customer entered. The kids were the sales force. If someone sold a white-tag item, that person could keep the money. Of course, the money from colored items went to the original owner. Fortunately it had been a very mild February. By keeping the overhead door closed and the quartz heater on, the garage hadn't been too cold for the kids to handle money. Since all the prices were in multiples of twenty-five cents, the twins were able to catch on to making change, with a little coaching from Jessi. By the time they closed down the garage sale, Debra estimated they had cleared almost four hundred dollars.

But what hadn't been sold or given away or taken to the land fill had to be put in boxes. One of the members worked for IBM and his family had moved around quite a bit. He and his wife had shared several moving tips with the Hogans.

The first tip had been to use only boxes which have been used to ship paper, the kind with the fitted lids which slip down over the top. Another member of the church had owned a print shop and he provided all the paper boxes they needed and then some. The second tip had been to allow no one outside the immediate family to help with packing boxes. The next tip was to carefully mark the unlabeled end of the box with its exact contents. Break these two rules, the IBM man had warned, and you won't see some of your most cherished possessions until the rapture.

Jim had contributed a couple of his own ideas to the moving effort. He sketched plans of all three floors of the tri-level and then marked each room with a simple designation, such as kitchen, living room, dining room, and family room. Then each box lid was marked with its destination in the new parsonage in Mechanicsburg. However, as they got down toward the end of the packing, more and more boxes had been destined for the garage.

Now Debra stared at all the boxes which had ended up in the garage and she was more than a little depressed. Suddenly she realized that the movers had made a mistake and left one of Jessi's boxes in the garage. It seemed light, probably one of several which contained stuffed animals. She decided to carry it up Jessi's bedroom. Had to start somewhere.

Jessi's room was the only normal place in the whole house, even though the moving van had pulled away less than thirty-six hours earlier. The first thing she had done was hook up her stereo and unpack her CDs. Then she had worked like a beaver throughout Saturday afternoon and early evening, while enjoying the sounds of Mylon, and DeGarmo & Key, and Petra, and White Heart. Jessi sure did love her music.

Jessi couldn't remember having been more miserable. At the bus stop, no one had said a word to her. All the other kids stood in clumps and talked to each other but she could have been a telephone pole. A misty rain had started to fall before the bus came and her spiral perm was kinking up. When she got on the bus and started to walk to the back, which is the universally-accepted province of juniors and seniors, she found to her embarrassment there wasn't a single seat available back there. She ended up in a front

seat next to a pimple-faced seventh-grade boy who had repaired his horn-rim glasses with a bent pin. Of course he wouldn't slide over and she had to clamber across his gangly legs. And then he kept leaning against her, even when centrifugal force didn't justify it.

The day didn't get any better when the bus arrived at the Mechanicsburg Area High School. Both Jim and Debra had offered to drive her to school and make sure she got registered all right but Jessi hadn't been feeling real close to either parent since the final decision to leave Ashtabula. So she had insisted that she was perfectly capable of catching the bus with everyone else and registering herself when she got there.

When she finally found the office and presented her Ashtabula transcript at the counter, no one was available with the necessary authority to take care of the paper work. Her first thirty minutes at her new high school consisted of serving as department store mannequin on a bench in the office. Or maybe a statue. Teachers and students came and went but no one so much as glanced in her direction. She wished the place had pigeons. At least they paid attention to statues.

At eight-thirty, an assistant principal sauntered in, declared he didn't handle new students either, but did invite her into his office to get better acquainted until the guidance counselor came. No sooner did she get settled in the assistant principal's office when his phone rang. For the next twenty minutes by the clock, he went round and round with a parent about a bus stop while Jessi sat miserably in his small cubicle of an office.

Finally Mr. Book, the guidance counselor arrived and led the way down a short hall within the office complex to an even smaller cubicle of an office. Mr. Book was kindly, balding, and wore half spectacles through which he seldom if ever looked. But his corny humor did make Jessi feel a little better. The counselor was visibly impressed with the grades on the transcript and with the extent of her extracurricular activities. She assured him she would like to continue to be in band and chorus. However, there was no computer club and that was disappointing.

At long last her schedule card was completed and she was a full-fledged student in the Mechanicsburg Area School District. By now, though, first period was over and the clock was well into second period. Mr. Book hastily scribbled a hall pass for second period, which was English 3, and gave her a locker assignment card along with padlock and key. Mr. Book would have escorted her to both the locker and the second period class but two other students were already waiting in the hall to talk to him so she said she could find her way okay.

"Don't worry about anything in that locker. The kid who had it moved to California last week," advised Mr. Book. "Just chuck it all."

The locker was a disaster. The things in it which were recognizable included three foul gym socks, one equally-foul sneaker, a stained athletic supporter, and an unsharpened pencil. Somehow, the unused pencil fit in with the rest of the locker contents and she

almost smiled. She put her coat back on to have a place to hang it, slung her purse over her shoulder, put her notebook under one arm, and then used the pencil to fish out the soiled clothing and deposited each item one by one in a nearby trash can. Oh how she longed for Ashtabula Junior-Senior High School and the neat-as-a-pin locker which had been hers since seventh grade. Carefully she hung her suede leather jacket on a bent hook, hoping it wouldn't fall to the bottom of the filthy locker. There was a Slurpy cup down there complete with some sort of sticky substance which was have been its contents. With a sigh, she closed the locker door, snapped the padlock, and trudged down the hall to English 3, which would dismiss in less than fifteen minutes.

The English teacher never missed a beat in his monologue about dangling participles. He just strolled back to the rear seat Jessi had taken, tucked her hall pass in his shirt pocket, and kept right on talking.

By the end of fifth period, with two more periods to go, the only person who had spoken to Jessi as a real person, instead of just another student, was Mr. Book, the guidance counselor who had registered her.

Her non-person status ended with her sixth period class, health. The teacher appeared to be a yuppie in her late twenties who wrote her name on the board at the beginning of the period as Ms. Carter-Clarke. Later she learned that all the kids called her CeeCee. Right away Jessi learned the class was part way through a unit on sex education. The text was titled "Experiencing Sex and Life".

The feature of the day was a look-alike acquaintance of Ms. Carter-Clarke's named Ms. Hockinger. Ms. Hockinger represented the local Planned Parenthood chapter and was speaking to each period on the topic of modern birth control. After a few words of introduction, Ms. Carter-Clarke sat in the back of the room grading papers while Ms. Hockinger held forth on the virtues of safe sex and related matters.

Jessi had known the facts of reproduction and birth control from the day she asked her first probing question at the ripe age of two. Her mother had answered that question in simple but biologically-accurate terms. The same had been true of each succeeding question, whether asked of her mother or her father. And with each answer about sex had come a value system based on the Biblical absolute that sex is reserved for a man and woman within the bounds and bonds of a legal marriage. And within marriage, totally fulfilling sex is completely natural and blessed by God.

Ms. Hockinger was coming from the opposite end of the spectrum. "The old, Victorian taboos about sex are gone forever," she intoned. "A modern teen has to worry about two things and no more. Number one, prevent pregnancy; number two, prevent disease. Beyond that, you should feel perfectly free to express yourself sexually." Jessi's stomach churned with anger and she bit her lip to keep from blurting out a bold denunciation of this kind of values-free tripe. "Sex is a perfectly natural bodily function, just like eating food or eliminating wastes. When you're hungry, you eat. When you feel a need to urinate

or defecate, you excuse yourself and use the rest room." There were several snickers, mostly from the boys. "And, if you feel physically attracted to another person, you express that attraction with a level of intimacy with which you both feel comfortable. No big deal, just like going to the restaurant or the rest room as the case may be." The woman surveyed the class with a supercilious smugness. "Any questions or comments?"

Jessi had been waiting, had been hoping, had been praying for just such an invitation. Why not? No one in this whole school even knew she existed so why not speak her mind as well as her conscience? Jessi didn't just raise her hand or ask for permission to speak, she stood erect and stepped into the aisle.

"Ms. Hockinger, I'd like to say something."

"Yes?"

"I agree that sex is a natural part of life but I don't agree it is as casual as going to the rest room. God tells us in the Bible that sex must be restricted to heterosexual marriage."

"Well, Virgin-ia, do you believe in Santa Claus, too?" Hockinger asked sarcastically with a rude emphasis on "virgin".

"The name is Jessica Hogan and no, I don't believe in Santa Claus."

"Hogan, Hogan... Didn't I read in the paper some church over on Wesley Drive got a new pastor by the name of Hogan?"

"Pastor James Alan Hogan is my father," Jessi flashed proudly.

"Well, Miss Preacher's Kid, I suppose your daddy has told you not to have sex until you're married," Hockinger said mockingly.

Jessi prayed for both the wisdom and the protection of the Holy Spirit. It was one thing to be lonely in a crowd. It was quite another to be standing up in front of twenty-five high school kids with the scorn of an adult focused squarely on her. "I don't 'want' to have sex before I'm married, and it's how I think, not just what my dad says."

"That kind of thinking was last heard from right about the time your dad graduated from high school. We've had a sexual revolution, or haven't you heard? We've made a lot of progress since then!"

"Progress? Do you call AIDS, claymidia, herpes, teenage abortions, and an increasing number of children having children-- do you call that progress? I call it regress, right back toward the decadence of a falling Roman empire!"

Hockinger smiled with false sweetness. "You're entitled to your opinion and to your right to express it. Just know one thing. Even though you are admittedly articulate on teenage sexual mores, you are definitely in the minority. I'm sure that all the boys in this class will

agree with me on that point." She smirked around the room but strangely, no one was willing to make eye contact.

That did it! Jessi had never been considered a sex symbol but she was pretty in a wholesome way and she was above all else fashionably correct, from her Esprit sweat shirt to her Treetorn sneakers. She jammed her fists in the pocket of her jeans and looked Hockinger straight in the eyes. "As far as boys are concerned, I've always had as many dates as I cared to have, even with my antiquated ideas about sex. And for your information, a lot of other kids feel just like I do.

"Back in Ashtabula, Ohio, where I used to live, we had a group in our school called 'Ivory' and we had one thing in common. We were dedicated to the concept that sex must be limited to heterosexual marriage. The kids in that group came different churches and different races but without exception, we all agreed on total sexual abstinence before marriage."

Now Jessi turned and faced the whole class. "This is my first day at Mechanicsburg High School and none of you know me. This may be a little sudden, but I want you to know that I'm starting an Ivory Club in this school, right here and now. All of you can join or none of you can join but the Ivory Club exists in this high school starting--" and she smacked a clenched right fist into her left palm, "starting right now!" Then the little crusader sat down fast and covered her face with her hands, tears starting to flow.

Never in the history of Pennsylvania public education had so many high school kids made so little noise for such a long period of time. Finally a tall kid with red hair, freckles, and a varsity sweater who had been sitting in the right front corner of the room stood and began to clap, slowly and rhythmically. A cute girl sitting across from Jessi stood and joined in the clapping. Then someone in the back of the room, and over in the left rear corner. One by one kids were standing and clapping until the whole class was on its feet and smiling Jessi's way. Ms. Carter-Clarke discarded her papers and walked over behind Jessi, grasping each shoulder in friendly pressure.

At the height of the standing ovation, Ms. Hockinger stuffed her handouts into her briefcase, snapped it shut, and stalked out the door.

The teacher left Jessi and walked to the front of the class. After the kids had stopped clapping and resumed their seats, she said, "Jessica, Dr. Grace Carson is a dear and personal friend of mine. Tonight, I'm going to call her and say that if Wesley's new pastor is half as good a preacher as his daughter, the church board just got a good bargain. And I think I'll see you in church Sunday, too." Jessi was speechless. She had read her new health teacher all wrong.

Ms. Carter-Clarke continued. "Class, I've been hearing about virginity support groups springing up in high schools all over the country, so the concept behind Ivory isn't something Jessica just cooked up in a remote corner of Ohio. You heard what some people

would call the liberal viewpoint from Ms. Hockinger. And your new classmate just expressed the conservative viewpoint very beautifully, as well as forcefully." Ms. Carter-Clarke sent a special smile Jessi's way. Again considerable applause from the class. "And since you have information from both sides of the issue, you are now better qualified to make your own value judgments about what you will do about sex in your own lives.

"Here's what I'm going to do regarding Jessica's Ivory idea. Unfortunately I don't have the authority to endorse the creation of a school club. And, I don't have the authority to control what you do in your free time, either. So, if you're interested in what Jessica-- or is it Jessi?" Jessi was too full to speak but she mouthed "Jessi". "All right, Jessi-- if you're interested in what Jessi has to say about Ivory, meet with her outside of class time. And Jessi, you can talk to me any time about your project. I'm really interested in seeing how this all turns out."

The bell rang and most of the kids in the health class scattered to their next period classes. But about ten boys and girls clustered around Jessi's desk, eager to learn more about Ivory. The red-haired boy who had started the clapping reached her first, sticking out a bony hand.

"Jonathan King," he said, pumping her arm excitedly. "Everyone calls me Jon. I've been itching to say what you said today since I first got into this class. I've never seen this Hockinger person before but old CeeCee can get pretty liberal herself, sometimes. Congratulations for standing on your own two feet!"

"Thanks, Jon," Jessi said earnestly. "What you did today really means a lot to me. That took courage. Being the first to stand and to start clapping. I'll never forget that." And then on sudden impulse, she stood on her highest tiptoes and kissed him lightly on the cheek. He blushed beet red, making him look very endearing and vulnerable at the same time.

The cute girl who had sat near by grabbed her hand next, saying with admiration. "Oh, Jessi, I'm so glad you said what you said. I've always felt like you do but I guess I was too scared to say anything myself. Oh, I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Cindy Parsons," and she gave Jessi a quick and impulsive hug.

Most of the kids gathered around Jessi's desk had study hall next period so they quickly agreed to regroup there and try to talk some more about Ivory. For some strange reason, Mr. Book was monitoring the study hall and Jessi felt comfortable in asking him for permission to work with her group at a table in the back of the cafeteria.

As soon as they were situated, a short boy with long hair and glasses slid a nine-by-twelve sheet of drawing paper across the table to Jessi. She gasped with delight.

"Did you do this? It's really neat!" Everyone gathered to look at a professional-looking logo and quickly agreed that it was indeed neat. The word "ivory" was outlined in large

block letters. Below the large letters was a line of smaller script which read "100% Pure". In the background was an olive branch.

"This is really good! What's your name?"

Alan Cotton was a four-year art major at Mechanicsburg who didn't have a lot of classes with the rest of the kids around the table and no one really knew him. Besides, he was very shy, especially around girls. But he quickly thawed in the warmth of the group's praise of his work

"My name is Al Cotton and if you want, I'll be Ivory's resident artist." Everyone expressed approval and Al continued, "I'll use a Macintosh computer in the graphics arts room to make this logo into a camera-ready original and then you can go anywhere you want with it from there."

"How about T-shirts or sweat shirts?" Jessi asked.

"Yeah," said Cindy, "I'm working at that Big-T place at the mall. I can get the shirts wholesale and get a forty-percent discount on the imprints, too."

The group got so engrossed in their plans that everyone was surprised by the bell signaling time to pass to last period classes. After making quick plans to meet again on the bus ramp after school, Ivory dispersed to assigned classes. Jessi was especially pleased that both Cindy and Jonathan would be in last period with her.

The back door banged and Debra looked up from shaping a meat loaf as Jessi burst into the kitchen. "Hey, Mom! Guess what! We're going to have Ivory in Mechanicsburg! Isn't that wild? Oh, and Mom, meet my best friend, Cindy Parsons. Cindy, this is my Mom."

Debra was astounded. "Jessi, slow down and let me get my breath." Quickly she washed the meat loaf off her hands and opened her arms to Jessi for a big hug. Then she extended the hug to include Cindy, also. "Did you say Ivory and a best friend, all in the same day?"

Jessi nodded. "Isn't that great? I think I'm going to like it here!" she sang in a passable imitation of Annie, while waltzing around the cooking island in time to her music.

"Tell me all about it," invited Debra as she led the way to the breakfast nook. Quickly Jessi recounted the happenings in the health class, in study hall, and on the bus ramp, with numerous excited assists from Cindy.

"Yeah, and Jessi made another new friend today," said Cindy importantly. "Tell her, Jessi."

"Well--" started Jessi with a blush, "there was this cute guy in health class and when I got done making my big speech, he kind of got everybody clapping."

"Yeah, and we all ended up giving Jessi a standing ovation!" bubbled Cindy.

"A standing ovation," marveled Debra in a whisper. "Well, young lady, you have had yourself one mighty fine day. By the way, What time did you have health?" Debra asked soberly, close to tears.

Jessi looked at Cindy for help. "About one-thirty, Mrs. Hogan."

"I thought so," said Debra softly.

Suddenly it dawned on Jessi. "Oh, I get it. You and Dad were praying for me about that time, weren't you?" She too spoke softly and was equally close to tears. Cindy sat very still with a puzzled look on her face.

Debra nodded in answer to Jessi's question. "Your Dad was pretty late getting home for lunch, and then when he got here, he said he wasn't hungry and just wanted to pray for you. So we did, right where we're sitting now. We prayed together for at least a half hour."

Cindy's eyes were as big as moons and she wasn't entirely sure she wanted to stay any longer. But Jessi jumped up, leaned over the table to kiss her mother on the cheek, said "Thanks, Mom. Love you both!" and then grabbed Cindy's hand.

"Come on, Cindy. Let's go up to my room. You can tell me all about Mechanicsburg and I'll play you some great music." She flashed Debra a wink as she headed for the stairs.

Debra never liked to call Jim at the office but this couldn't wait. "Sandy, I hate to be a bother on Jim's first day on the job but is he available? I need to talk to him if possible."

"No problem," said Sandy with a laugh. "He's already told us that your calls have the same priority as Grace Carson's and God's. Please hold."

"Hi, Debbie. What's up?"

"Jim, I know you're busy but this'll just take a sec. Guess what happened to Jessi at school today."

After Debra hung up, it was Jim's turn to marvel. A virginity speech, a best friend, a standing ovation, a cute boy, another Ivory. All on the first day of school? To God be the glory for the great things He has done!

Chapter 9: Tournament

A major event in the life of the Wesley Evangelical Church was the Spring Softball Tournament. Teams from the ten evangelical churches which participated in the West Shore Church League all trooped down to the York Sports Complex on the Friday afternoon of Memorial Day weekend and played each other until every team but one had lost two games. The first game was Friday evening under the lights and play continued all day Saturday until all teams had been eliminated by winning twice, except the tournament champion.

Wesley Evangelical Church maintained three church-league teams and an ASA team in a recreational league. Players from the church-league teams all voted for an all-star team to compete in the tournament. Jim had been surprised to learn that with that much talent to draw from, Wesley Evangelical Church had never won the championship. Jim was no stranger to slow-pitch softball, but he hadn't been on a ball field since last summer when he coached the Ashtabula church team through a championship season. Although he was approaching fifty, he had followed the example of Paul by keeping his body under control. But in recent years, his shorter wind and cramping legs told him he better limit his active playing to hitting fungos and serving as an occasional pinch hitter.

However, no one had said anything to Jim about getting into the softball program and he had been too busy this last three months to give softball more than a passing thought. He was more than a little interested in the insert in last Sunday's bulletin which provided all the details of the tournament and invited everyone to make the trip to York and support the team. Jim felt he needed to get better acquainted with younger men in the congregation and a softball tournament would be an excellent way to do it.

Sandy buzzed. "Dave Court is here to see you. Got a minute before you leave for the hospital?"

Jim wanted to run over to Hershey Medical Center before going home for dinner but he remembered that Dave Court had been named as the all-star coach on the softball tournament flyer. "I'll be right out, Sandy."

Dave sure looked like a ball player. He was dressed in sweats with a pair of cleats hanging over his shoulder and a pair of batting gloves tucked in the waistband of his sweat pants. A red handkerchief was tied around his head as a sweat band. Dave was about twenty-five Jim guessed, without very many extra ounces anywhere on his body. That's me twenty-five years ago, Jim mused without envy.

"Hi, Pastor," Dave said as he offered a handshake which was firm without being painful.

"Good to meet you, Dave. Getting in a little practice, I see. Gonna take it all, Saturday?"

"Sure plan to," Dave chuckled. "Guess you heard by now it'll be the first time, if we do go all the way."

"Double elimination, is it?"

"Yep, and we sure do plan to stay out of that loser's bracket. Last year, we lost the first game Friday night and then it was play, play, play all day Saturday. Ended up losing the last game, too. Bottom of the seventh, by one run. But we all had fun. Good fellowship, too."

"Hope things will turn out better this year. I'll be there, rooting you on."

"You know Jessi's been keeping the book for my team this season and she'll be doing it for the all-star team in the tournament." Jim was ashamed to admit that he hadn't known Jessi was keeping the score book for Dave's team; busy busy, busy. "Well, Pastor, I gotta hand it to you. That little lady sure knows her baseball and says she learned it all from you. And, she's been telling me that you do a little playing yourself. Something about scaring all those Ohio pitchers to death with your line drives up the middle."

Jim laughed. "Never could teach that kid to keep her mouth shut around the parishioners. But I'm afraid my playing days are about over. Said hello to the big five-oh in March. Did a little coaching in Ashtabula, though."

"Hey, I could use some help in the tournament. How about directing traffic down at third. Gonna be a lot of it, you know. And maybe we can put you in a time or two to teach those pitchers how to field their positions. Can I put you down? Gotta have the roster in by ten tonight."

This was just the opening Jim had been hoping for, fellowship with some more of the young couples of the church and a little fun for himself beside. "Well, I haven't swung a bat since last summer but I still remember how to wave 'em on in."

Great! I'm going down early Friday for a coaches' meeting at three. Why don't you try to get off early and we'll go down together," Dave said with a twinkle.

Jim smiled, too, and glanced briefly at the ceiling. "Boss says it's all right. Let's do it!" Both men laughed and the meeting ended with a resounding high five.

It was raining hard Friday morning when the alarm clock went off and Jim felt like a kid again, wishing it would stop raining so he could play ball. But by the time he adjourned the weekly staff meeting at noon, the sun was shining and the sidewalks were drying. Since it hadn't rained in over a week, Jim was sure the outfield would be dry enough for safe play by game time at six o'clock. The early afternoon passed swiftly as Jim reviewed Sunday's sermon notes and then walked out into the sanctuary and down to the altar for a time of prayer. He had his personal devotions in his study in the parsonage and prayed

regularly in his church office while preparing sermons and between counseling sessions. But he still liked to make a daily practice of praying at the sanctuary altar.

The sanctuary at Wesley Evangelical Church was open all day every day for meditation and prayer. This afternoon, at least a dozen people were scattered in the front pews and another dozen or so were kneeling at various points across the long, curving altar. He could hear voices in prayer, muted by the emptiness of the vast sanctuary and the soft organ music playing over the sound system.

A tiny beep from his watch reminded Jim it was two o'clock and time to meet Dave Court in his office for the trip to the York Sports Complex. Before rising, he prayed specifically for the physical safety of all the players and then walked up the aisle to the foyer and back to his office.

Dave was resplendent in a Yankees-style pinstripe uniform, complete with pulled-up stirrups. "Hey, Joe DiMaggio! Can I have your autograph?"

Dave grinned good-naturedly and held out a folded uniform for Jim. "Time to get suited up, Pastor. You ought to feel right at home in our uniform. Jessi tells me everyone in your family is a Yankee fan."

"Sure are. In fact, Debra's dad is a first cousin of a fellow who used to play outfield for the Yankees back in the fifties. Fellow by the name of Gene Woodling. Ever hear of him?"

"I must admit he was a little before my time, but I sure have read about him. Well, how about it. Gonna put on the pin stripes?"

Jim took the hat and shirt but handed the rest of the outfit back to Dave. "Think I'll skip the pants and the stirrups, Dave. Afraid my legs will look like Babe Ruth's spindle shanks if I get all gussied up in stirrups."

Dave grinned again. "Suit yourself, Pastor. Ready to ride?"

Jim folded himself into the right bucket of Dave's Mazda Miata and they were soon droning down I-83 toward York.

Wesley's first game Friday night was against a sharp-looking team from Calvary Evangelical in Gettysburg. The team from Gettysburg was being coached by their pastor, Tim Grover. When all the players from both teams gathered around home plate for a moment of prayer, Tim asked Jim to lead. "Heavenly Father, we ask you to keep your hand of protection on us this evening as we compete on this softball field. May we play safely, may we play well, and may we play in the spirit of Christ, in Whose name we pray. Amen."

Gettysburg looked pretty tough at first, turning a double play in the first inning to kill a budding rally, and then holding things to a 5-5 tie through four and a half innings of play.

But Wesley stayed out of the loser's bracket, for Friday night at least, by breaking things open with a six-run rally in the bottom of the fifth. The game wasn't a blowout, but it was a decisive victory. Great way to start a tournament.

Jim had a lot of fun directing traffic at third. The players soon realized that he knew exactly what he was doing when he signaled them to hold at second, take third going down in a slide, or wheeled them on home to score. His coaching position with men in scoring position was part way down the third base line so a player approaching third could pick him up easily and know whether to hold the bag, or score without breaking stride. Jessi did a great job keeping the book and consistently made wise choices regarding whether a batter had hit safely or reached on an error. She also barked out Wesley's next three batters and kept Dave posted on where in the lineup an opposing batter was hitting. And she teased her Dad about being really pumped up by the easy victory. Jim had to admit he was having a barrel of fun and was looking forward to a full day of competition on Saturday.

The next day started for Wesley with an eight o'clock game against a large church from Pottstown. Wesley got three quick runs in the first and then played tough D to win 3-2. This win was followed by four more during the day, two by virtue of the 10-run rule which ended the game if one team was ahead by ten runs or more by the end of the fifth inning. Jim noted that Dave hadn't put himself in the lineup all day, even though the way he handled infield drill showed he was as comfortable with a bat and glove as he was with the lineup card and score book. A couple times Dave asked Jim if wanted to pinch hit or catch a little but each time Jim declined, having too much fun coaching third, and wanting the regular players to have more chances to play.

By late Saturday afternoon, all the teams had been eliminated by losing twice except Wesley and Gettysburg Calvary. Wesley was undefeated and Gettysburg had lost once, the opener to Wesley Friday night. The championship game between Wesley and Gettysburg would be played at 7:30 on the main field under the lights.

Debra and the twins arrived around noon in time to join the team and the Wesley spectators in an impromptu picnic. Several people had brought their charcoal grills and there was an assortment of hot dogs, hamburgers, and hot sausage sizzling on all the grills. A couple of the grills also had casseroles of baked beans and one even had a small crock of sauerkraut to spice up the hot dogs. One of the ladies asked Debra to offer prayer and then the whole Wesley entourage kind of milled around until all persons had filled their plates. Debra had been planning to run out to McDonald's for lunch but her biggest problem soon became limiting the abundance of food being pressed upon her without offending anyone's feelings.

The twins insisted on eating with Uncle Dave and Aunt Patty, but Debra hesitated, not wanting them to be a bother. Dave had a better idea. "Why don't we all sit together? That way, Pastor Jim and I can make war plans, you and Patty, can get better acquainted, and

I can still be close to my two good buddies." He gave Ben and Shelly, who were clinging to either side of him, a quick squeeze. Everybody seemed to love Dave Court.

After they ate, Debra and Patricia visited while the men took the twins across the way to an assortment of playground equipment. Jessi came by with Jon King and chatted a while. She and Jon had become quite an item since the day of the standing ovation in health class. She and Jim had discussed this unfolding relationship with some concern. But, how could you tell your daughter she shouldn't be dating a clean-cut born-again Christian who was vice president of the local celibacy support group.

"Guess what, Mom," said Jessi excitedly. "Jon's batting 850 for the tournament so far. Isn't that great! And you should see him at first base. What a stretch!"

"Your daughter's quite a little cheerleader, too, Mrs. Hogan. No matter where I am on the field, I can always hear her big--"

"Careful, young man," warned Jessi with mock importance. "I keep the book and I get to decide who gets a hit and who reaches on an error. You might want to show a little respect."

"Respect? Is that what you want, respect? Well, here's a little respect," and he pulled a water pistol out of his pocket.

Jessi ran squealing across the picnic area with Jon in half-speed pursuit.

Debra shook her head and smiled. Oh to be young again.

The Sunday night after the Mechanicsburg edition of Ivory was born, Jon had visited the evening service with Jessi. They sat two rows in front of Debra with the rest of the youth group and she kind of kept her eye on Jon especially during the service. She could sense he was under strong conviction of the Holy Spirit during the altar call but he didn't go forward. After the service dismissed, Jessi and several of her friends stayed with him in the pew, talking seriously. Debra thought about asking if she could help. But then a parishioner stopped to chat and when she looked back, Jon was down at the altar praying with all the kids from the youth group gathered around him.

She had sat down and prayed silently while watching still another miracle unfold at the altar. Soon Jon's arms were thrust heavenward and his face was shining with tears of joy. From that day to this, Jessi and Jon had been like the two peas in a pod. In perfect union spiritually, psychologically, but never sexually.

Shortly after Jessi and Jon left, Debra noticed a strange man over by the backstop of the field where Wesley had played their last morning game. Months later she would be asked to describe in great detail the appearance of the man and the word which always came to her mind first was strange. Strange in the sense that she'd never seen him before. And strange in the sense that he appeared to be somewhat odd. He was shorter than average

and had an oversized ball cap pulled low over his face. And, even though it was warm enough for the twins to be running around in T-shirts and shorts, this man was wearing a buttoned-up trench coat which was at least three sizes too large. The coat's belt was not buckled and one side of the belt was dragging on the ground. The strange man seemed to be rooting around in the cluster of bats which were leaning against the backstop and Debra shaded her eyes to get a better look at what he was up to.

And then Jessi returned with Jon launched one of her "Guess what, Mom" narratives. Debra didn't see or think about the strange little man again.

During the day, the tournament crowd dwindled as team after team was eliminated and supporters departed with the players. But when seven-thirty came and it was time for the final confrontation between Wesley and Gettysburg Calvary, the bleachers were full and numerous lawn chairs and blankets stretched down both sidelines. The fact that Mechanicsburg and Gettysburg were within easy driving distance of York contributed to the size of the cheering sections.

Wesley lost the first game by a heart-breaking score of 13-12 in the bottom of the tenth. Although the game was exciting and the score was as close as a score can be, the partisan crowd focused its energy on cheering for the home team without making jeering remarks about the opposition.

Now both Wesley and Gettysburg had each lost one game and the next game would decide the championship. During the break between games, Dave called the team together down in the right field corner. When everyone was seated cross-legged on the outfield grass, Dave asked Jim if he would like to say a few words.

Without standing up, Jim began to speak quietly and intensely to the players. "Whether its win or lose in this next game, you guys can be proud of your team and what you've done here in this tournament. I've been involved with church softball for over twenty years and I've never seen a team play harder and cleaner than you've done here these last two days. We're going to have a word of prayer but I'm not going to ask God to help us win. After all, those guys over there in the left field corner want to win, too. What I think God wants for all of us is to play our best, to play clean, to stay cool if we lose, and to be humble if we win."

Jim stood, taking off his hat, and the rest of team did too. After the prayer, Dave read the lineup. Jim was a little surprised that the coach had himself leading off and pitching. But no one on the team seemed surprised. To a man, they were grinning from ear to ear, kind of like the infantry hearing the cavalry's call to charge, off in the distance.

In this final game, Wesley was designated home team and batted last. When Dave took the mound, Jim understood a little more of why the team was so happy when the coach put himself in the game. He was the best control pitcher Jim had ever seen play slow-pitch softball. He could drop the ball on a dime anywhere in the strike zone, including all four

corners. And after each pitch, he took a couple of strides straight back and was in place to field his position by the time the batter swung. If the ball was hit safely to the outfield, Dave took up a position half way between the mound and second and the outfielders threw straight in to him when there was no good chance of getting a runner going in to a bag. On three occasions, Dave was able to throw behind a runner taking a wide turn at first and either pick him off or get him in a pickle. Pretty smooth, Jim smiled to himself.

In the bottom of the first, Dave sliced the first pitch with a vicious inside out swing which sent the ball toward the right fielder, but on an arc curving toward the foul line. Unfortunately, the fielder had started to break to his right with the crack of the bat. Too late he, realized his mistake. Although he ran hard toward the right field foul line and dove for the ball in desperation, it fell under his glove in foul territory and rolled across the track. Since it had started fair, it was ruled a fair ball.

Before the ball stopped rolling, Dave had rounded third and was high-fiving Jim on his way to a leadoff home run and enthusiastic applause by Wesley rooters of all ages. It was more than their appreciation for the psychological advantage of a leadoff home run. Everyone loved Dave Court.

The score see-sawed back and forth with the lead changing hands every inning or so. Gettysburg had a big seventh and Wesley came to bat for the last time in regulation play behind 10-7. Jessi checked the score book and called out the names of the first three batters in the inning, "Court, Dawson, King!"

Dave called for a quick huddle. "Sounds like runs, guys. I know you've been playing good ball all day but we need four to win and we need 'em right now! Can do?"

Everyone stuck his arm into the pinwheel. "Let's go!" they chorused. Jim trotted down to the third base coaching box and Dave began taking his practice swings, timing each swing with the pitcher's warmup tosses.

"Play ball," barked the ASA umpire and Dave began digging in, deep in the batter's box. After two called strikes he repeated his first-inning slashing line drive down the right field line but this time the right fielder was more prepared, short-hopping the ball a yard in foul territory and throwing a perfect strike to short, holding Dave to a long single. Everyone in the crowd was standing and cheering lustily for either more offense or more defense.

Jack Dawson dug in the batter's box even deeper than Dave had done and received a gift. He topped the ball, sending a weak one-hop comebacker to the pitcher, but the ump bawled "Catcher interference!" Jack's bat had tipped the catcher's glove on the swing. Now there were men on first and second.

Jim moved part way down the base line toward home, in position to wheel Dave on in to score if the ball was hit to the outfield. With Dave's speed, he was sure of scoring from

second on a single. No chance, though. Jon King walked on four straight pitches and the bases were loaded. His batting average for the day was around 800 and they wouldn't give him a pitch he could drive somewhere

The next man up hit the ball hard, but straight at the third baseman. Dave retreated quickly to the bag. With the count three and two, Mason Dunkle hit a towering drive deep in the left field corner but the wily left fielder let it fall foul for a strikeout. ASA rules specify that a two-strike foul ball is considered the third strike. Had the fielder caught the ball for the second out, all three runners would have advanced, with Dave scoring.

"Tough luck, Dunk," Dave called and signaled the third base ump for time out. He walked over to Jim in the coaching box.

"Think it's about time we unleash our secret weapon. How about one of those line drives up the middle Jessi's been telling me about?"

"I already told you Jessi talks too much," Jim said with a little grin. "Why don't you let Carl bat? I'd hate to butt in and take his licks away from him."

"He's wearing the collar. Hate to see him make it 0 for 5 with the bases loaded and two out in the bottom of the seventh. Sure you don't want to give it a try? I think you can do it, big guy!"

Jim responded by giving him a high five and walking behind the backstop to select a bat from the clump standing there. He took a bat which hadn't been used yet in the entire tournament, a piece of ash with a thick barrel. Never could stand an aluminum bat with its silly-sounding ping.

"Hogan batting for Carter," Jim said to the ump as he took his place at the plate. The ump turned to his right and relayed that information to the Gettysburg bench. Jessi trotted over to the Gettysburg bench to make sure both score books coincided.

The Gettysburg outfielders had been a little perplexed when Jim stepped to the plate. "Who is this guy?" the two center fielders asked each other. Can he hit? How do we play him?" They finally decided to err on the side of caution and started out fairly deep.

The first pitch was in Jim's wheelhouse and he swung hard but missed the ball entirely.

"You can do it, Pastor!" Dave called from third. "Just take your time and keep your eye on that ball."

Jim stepped out of the box and took a couple more practice swings, concentrating on keeping the bat level and wishing mightily that he had taken some batting practice during the last thirty-six hours.

As he stepped back up to the plate, Jim noted that both center fielders had moved in several steps and he could understand why.

Jim took the next two pitches for balls and then saw one he liked. Swinging hard, he sent the ball screaming down the third base line but just wide of the bag. The ump signaled two balls and two strikes. Even though that last pitch had been well hit, the center fielders still moved in a few more steps. Keep coming boys, Jim thought grimly. I may have something for you.

Jim was tempted by the next pitch but he judged it to be deep and it was. The ump raised two closed fists to signal full count, three balls and two strikes.

"Lord, please help me hit this pitch," Jim prayed silently and shamelessly. I can't strike out with the bases loaded and down three runs in the bottom of the seventh. Jim remembered his concern for the young men and women of the congregation and his desire to get to know them better, to relate with them on a personal level. He glanced down at Dave who was clapping and calling encouragement. He looked around the bases at the other two runners, hoping desperately for something they could run on.

Behind him, the crowd was raising a mighty ruckus. From the bench, Jessi called, "Come on, Dad. You can do it! Level swing, Dad. Level swing. Rip it up the middle. Knock that pitcher down!" Nice talk for a preacher's kid, Jim thought wryly.

From the second the next pitch left the pitcher's hand Jim knew it would be a strike. High arc, just a slight topspin, dropping down over the outside corner.

Jim swung level and hard, hearing the solid smack that signaled line drive. The ball left the bat like a rocket and screamed just out of reach of the leaping second baseman's glove. The right center fielder misjudged the initial trajectory and started to break in, hoping to make a sliding shoestring catch at ground level. Too late he realized his mistake as the ball soared over his head out of reach.

The left center fielder played the ball well. Although he couldn't catch it in the air, he cut to his left and behind the right fielder, getting to the ball just as it stopped rolling. He threw low and hard to the relay man who had come part way out to meet him. The relay man whirled and threw a perfect strike to the plate.

Jim's legs felt like silly putty by the time he rounded second. By the time he turned third and headed for home, they felt more like water. Straight ahead, Dave was frantically signaling him to go down in a slide. He went in hard and low, hooking the plate with his left leg and making firm contact with the catcher at the same time. The catcher went down on top of him and a dust cloud obscured the play for a moment. The most exciting moment in base ball: a close play at the plate!

Desperately Jim craned his neck around the hefty catcher's torso to see how the ump would call it. He never did see the ump drop to one knee and spread his arms wide, palms down. The roar of the crowd with Jessi hitting high C told him all he needed to know.

Grand slam!

Jim had turned fifty in March but he'd never experienced a ride on the shoulders of a bunch of exuberant ball players. Dave Court's left shoulder supported his right thigh, with Jon King on his left. The rest of the team crowded in as close as they could get, each man trying to support some part of Jim's anatomy. He couldn't believe such an ungainly conveyance could retrace his grand-slam trip around the bases of just a few minutes ago, but somehow they managed it, chugging in to home plate to the accompaniment of the happy cheers of the crowd.

The team deposited Jim right in front of the tournament president who was cradling the three-foot-high first-place trophy in his arms.

"Rev. Hogan, as president of the American Softball Association Central Pennsylvania Church Tournament, it gives me great pleasure to present this first-place trophy to the Wesley Evangelical Church of Mechanicsburg. And if I do say so myself, you made more than a small contribution to winning this fellow," and he poked a stubby finger into the metallic midriff of the player with bat cocked who topped the trophy.

"I may have iced the cake but Dave and the entire Wesley team baked it." Holding the trophy under his left arm, he turned and walked among the players, high-fiving every one of them. And then the red-shirted Gettysburg players were in the group and he high-fived every one of them, too. When he got to the Gettysburg right-center fielder who got burned by Jim's line drive, he sat the trophy on the ground and the two players hugged each other in a spirit of Christian brotherhood.

Suddenly Jim felt small arms wrapping around both legs. He looked down and then burst out laughing as Ben and Shelly struggled mightily to perform their own version of the hero-on-the-shoulders trip around the bases.

"Hey, guys, take it easy. You're going to bust a gusset if you keep that up."

"What's a gusset, Daddy?" Shelly asked with shining eyes.

"Go ask Jessi," Jim said with a grin, and they tore off in search of their big sister.

Debra drove Jim back to Mechanicsburg in the Eagle with the twins and Jessi asleep in the back seat. Although Jim had stripped to a T-shirt and a pair of gym shorts, the air was pungent with the odor of dust and dried sweat. Stink or no stink, Jim really felt good.

"Know what, Debbie?"

"You love being a hero," she teased.

"Besides that. I have a confession to make."

"Oh?"

"I cheated a little on that home run. When the count was three and two, I asked God to help me hit the ball. Do you think that was fair?"

"Oh course, silly."

"How come?"

"The pitcher was praying that you wouldn't and that right center fielder was praying that he'd catch it if you did. Perfectly fair."

"Know what else?"

"No, what."

"I just played in a two-day softball tournament without hearing one beer can pop, without hearing one curse word on the field, and without seeing one guy get thrown out for arguing with the umpire. It sure is great being a Christian, isn't it."

Debra nodded silently.

"Who got thrown out?" Jessi mumbled sleepily.

"Hey, Jessi, got a riddle for you."

Jessi groaned and Jim accepted that as permission to continue. "Where is baseball first mentioned in the Bible?"

"I have no idea but I'm sure you're going to tell me."

"In the big inning, Eve stole first, Adam stole second, and God threw them both out."

Jessi groaned again and promptly returned to sleep in self defense.

[G. Edwin Lint](#)

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Chapter 10: Unca Dave

"Unca Dave!" screamed Tessa joyfully as she popped off her nap cot and raced across the multipurpose room to meet the young man just striding in the door from the rainwet parking lot. "Hi, Unca Dave!. Let's play horsey. Please, Unca Dave," she pleaded, eyes sparkling and beribboned pigtails flying as she hopped up and down in two-year-old excitement. "Can we please play horsey? Please? Please? Please?"

Dave Court stooped to her level and looked her straight in the eyes. "Let me see what you did this morning."

The little girl whirled and zipped to a nearby bulletin board, pointing a stubby finger proudly at a finger-paint masterpiece of undetermined configuration which had been posted at her eye level. "There, Unca Dave," she piped with resumed hopping, "There it is. That's mine! Like it?"

"Tell me about it," Dave prompted.

"That's Jesus, feeding the five sands," she said with head cocked to one side, as though any adult surely should know that.

"Jesus feeding the five sands?" Dave asked in true puzzlement.

"You know, when Jesus took five biscuits from 'Tuckey Chicken and two pieces of Silver fish and gave everybody supper. Don't you read your Bible, Unca Dave?"

"Every day. Ah! Now I get it. That sure is Jesus feeding the five thousand. Can you tell me one thing about this story?"

"Well . . .," Tessa mused with thumb in her mouth to aid in concentration, "after supper when the 'ciples took out the trash, it filled up twelve garbage bags!"

"Sure did," Dave agreed as he gave the little girl a quick hug.

Tessa raced back to the middle of the room. "Come on, Unca Dave. Time to play horsey!"

"Not so fast, young lady. Did you wipe off your table when you were done painting?"

"Yep!" she said with more hopping.

"Eat all your lunch?"

"Yep!"

"Finish your nap?" said another voice from behind her.

Tessa whirled and the pigtails flew again. "Aw, Miss Patty. I slept all I could. Honest I did. 'Sides, Unca Dave woked me up" she ended coyly and all three knew that wasn't quite the truth.

"Unca Dave better not have woked you up," said Patricia and she and Dave kissed lightly above the little girl's head. "If he did, he won't get any Silver fish or 'Tuckey biscuits for his supper."

"Tell you what, Tessa," Dave said as he stooped down to her level again. "All your squealing and hopping has gotten everybody awake, so you may as well saddle up. But before we all play horsey, you have to ask Miss Patty if it's all right. She's the boss, you know."

"Please, Miss Patty," said Tessa holding up all ten fingers. "Just five minutes playing horsey? Can we, huh? Please?"

Patricia Court looked down at the precious little girl. Not yet three and bright as this year's penny. Strawberry hair, a light brush of freckles over her ski-jump nose, and bright blue eyes which sparkled with both intellect and mischievousness. Why can't Dave and I have a little girl like this. Or maybe a little boy, or maybe one of each-- like Pastor Jim and Debra. Although her heart ached with the need to hold a baby of their own in her arms, the smile never left her face.

"It's all right with me if it's all right with the horse," Patricia answered, looking down at Dave who had already assumed the position.

By now the horse was surrounded by prospective riders. His equine attributes were well known to every two-year-old in the Wesley Day Care. Dave and Patricia loved Tessa as their own but they never showed any favoritism in front of the other children.

"Tell you what. Let's all play rodeo. Want to?"

"What's a rodeo?" Mikey Calvin asked.

"A rodeo is when a bunch of cowboys and cowgirls take turns seeing who can ride a jumpy-horse the longest."

"Are you a jumpy-horse?" asked Tessa.

Dave responded with a couple of loud whinneys and several four-legged leaps about the room. All the kids squealed with glee.

"Tessa goes first 'cause she asked first, but everybody plays and everybody gets a turn. Here's how we do it. Can you all count to ten?" All the kids shouted their assurance.

"Good! Let's practice, and we're going to count real slowly. Now, count with me. One... Two... Three... " and Dave led them in a slow count to ten. Now, while Tessa is riding, you

kids count to ten nice and slow, like we just practiced. Got it. Okay, Tessa hop on-- oops. Need a little nose job, first," Dave cracked as he noticed the evidence of Tessa's mild upper respiratory infection descending from each nostril. "Sally, run over to Miss Patty's desk and get that box of tissues, will you?"

After nose jobs had been performed on several prospective riders, Dave again assumed the position.

"Okay, Tessa, hop on. Good. Now, lean over and hang onto my hair." Tessa happily buried both chubby fists in Dave's curly perm. "Now kids," he called to the others, "start counting," and he reached back with one arm to keep Tessa safely aboard her bucking bronco.

At the count of one, the bronco began an exciting display of three-legged cavorting worthy of the Calgary Stampede. And as the horse jumped and leaped about the room, sometimes rearing back on his hind legs, the crowd faithfully chanted their slow count to ten. At the final count, Dave reached up to grasp Tessa under the arms and popped her over his head and landed her softly on her bottom.

"Do it agin! Unca Dave," Tessa squealed with more hopping. "Do it agin!"

"We're taking turns, Tessa," Dave reminded kindly. "To the end of the line you go."

Two counts into Tessa's ride, the kids had instinctively formed a line. The little girl now ran to back of the line, ready for a second turn.

Jim walked in during the rodeo and paused to chat with Patricia as he watched the fun. "Dave sure is good with kids. Have you two ever considered his working here full time?"

"We both hoped that he could when I took this job but Pastor Clark wouldn't allow two close relatives to work together."

"Was this his policy or the board's policy," Jim asked.

"His, as far as I know."

"Why don't you suggest that Dave apply to be your assistant? This church is under new mismanagement, you know," and he winked conspiratorially

This was the opportunity Dave and Patricia had hoped for when the new pastor came. Dave had quit his elementary education program at Shippensburg University in his junior year because he wasn't sure he really wanted to be a teacher. His experience with Patricia's day care kids had changed all that. Although he was working as a landscape gardener at Rose Hill Nursery, he was taking all the evening and weekend early childhood education courses he could find in order to get his degree. The afternoon rodeo was a blessing for the kids caused by an all-day rain which made outdoor work impractical.

"Can I tell him or do you want to," Patricia asked, her voice suddenly husky.

"I'll get an application from Sandy and you put it by his plate at the dinner table tonight. Think you can keep it a secret until then?"

Patricia nodded, blinking rapidly. "And by the way, Pastor, thanks for inviting Tessa's parents to the parsonage tonight, too. Dave and I know why you did that and we both appreciate it."

Jim turned to walk back to his office and then stopped. "By the way, Patricia, when Dave starts to work here full time, you better limit his rodeo activity or he'll be put out to pasture before you two have a buckaroo of your own." Both laughed.

After each child had two full ten-count rides, Dave lay flat on his back to catch his breath. A couple of the boys considered jumping on his stomach but a warning index finger stopped them instantly. Dave loved the day care kids but he never let them get out of line. They all loved him right back, and respected him as well.

Jessi had eaten early and gone to her part-time job in the Beneton at the Mall but the parsonage dining room was still well-filled that evening. Jim and Debra sat at opposite ends. Dave and Patricia sat on one side with Tessa between them. (Tessa had insisted on being close to Unca Dave and Miss Patty). Roy and Carla Stetson, Tessa's parents, sat on the other side bracketed by Ben and Shelly. After all diners were waiting behind their chairs, Pastor Jim Hogan spoke.

"We have a tradition in our home that the youngest person at the table thanks the Lord for our food. Tessa," the pastor said with a smile, "You're the youngest so that makes you the designated pray-er."

"Quiet on the set! This is a prayer!" barked Ben through cupped hands. A crossfire of cautionary parental glances forestalled any further directing from Ben's corner of the table.

"Ready, Tessa?" asked Debra with a smile of encouragement.

"Bless this bunch, as we munch, on this lunch, Amen." piped Tessa without hesitation.

Ben and Shelly high-fived each other behind the Stetsons' chairs with many poorly-suppressed giggles. Debra was sure she knew where Tessa's prayer had originated. Dave Court knew, too, and said with mock severity. "Okay, you two. Thirty-nine lashes with a wet noodle for contributing to the delinquency of a minor!"

"Honestly," said Patricia to Debra, "I don't know which of these children is the most disruptive. Yours or mine!" Everyone laughed as the men helped the ladies and children to be seated. Except Ben. He was a man of six and didn't need any help from anyone.

The dinner hour passed pleasantly with everyone contributing to the various conversations, including two-year-old Tessa and the twins. Carla Stetson made a special point of commenting on Wesley Day Care.

"We want you all to know how pleased we are with your day care program. When Roy was transferred here from Pittsburgh, we were so worried about Tessa. She was in a couple different day cares out there and she didn't seem to like either of them. And then when we started coming here to church in January, it just seemed natural to put Tessa in your day care. And she loves it! Mr. Court, she must have talked about your rodeo for thirty minutes non-stop when she got home this afternoon."

Dave grinned with satisfaction. "First, 'Mr. Court' is my dad. My name is Dave. And second, we'll gladly take all three of these kids off your hands when you get tired of them. Right, Patty?"

Patricia's eyes were bright with unshed tears but she smilingly nodded her agreement. Later in the kitchen, Debra told Carla that Patricia and Dave had been trying to have a baby for over a year without success.

Back in the dining room, Ben suddenly announced, "Got a riddle everybody!" Ben was famous for his riddles and parsonage life always stopped until his latest one was solved. "Who's the smallest man in the Bible?"

"Zaccheus," called out Tessa, surprising both her parents more than a little.

"Nope." Although she was wrong by Ben's standards, everyone commented on what a good answer it was.

Several other names were guessed but non satisfied Ben.

"I know," said Jim. "Bildad, the Shuhite!"

"Bill-who the what?"

"Bildad, the Shuhite," repeated Jim. Bildad is one of the men who tried to make old Job feel better when he was having all his troubles. Since he came from a land called Shuha, he's known as 'Bildad, the Shuhite'."

"Not him," and Ben shook his head emphatically.

"Who is it, Ben?" asked Shelly a little petulantly. She was just a little tense about all the attention her brother was getting. "We give up."

"The smallest man in the Bible," announced Ben importantly, "Is the Roman guard who went to sleep on his watch. Fooled ya! Fooled ya!" and he hopped off his chair in preparation for a victory lap around the dining room table.

"All persons in their seats get a piece of cherry-cheese pie," called Debra from the kitchen door." So much for victory laps.

After the meal was finished and the dishes rinsed and racked in the washer, Jim called everyone into the living room for family worship.

"I understand the ladies have challenged the men to a game of Pictionary, and I think the kids are anxious to go out into the family room and mess around. But before we do all that, I want us to have a time of Bible reading and prayer together. I think I'll read the story of another little man in the Bible, besides that Roman guard who went to sleep on his watch. This is the story of the little man who climbed a tree so he could see Jesus. Who was that little man?"

"Zaccheus!" all three kids chorused.

"Right! And by the way, parents, I'm reading from the Living Bible for the benefit of our young listeners." After the Bible reading, Jim asked for volunteers to offer sentence prayers. Everyone prayed with the exception of Roy Stetson, who had been rather quiet all evening. Tessa astounded everyone with her prayer.

"Dear God, please help Unca Dave and Miss Patty get a little girl just like me. Amen!"

"Out of the mouths of babes," murmured Debra to Patricia who was again close to tears.

The men lost the game of Pictionary by at least eight spaces.

"All right, Pastor," said Dave, "get out the Rook cards. The ladies may have won the game of chance but we're going to win the game of skill."

The men lost the game of skill by over one hundred points.

That night, in their somewhat-cramped town house bedroom, Patricia indicated to Dave her trip to the gynecologist had been a source of good news and that things were finally okay again. It had been such a long time. Swiftly their love smoldered into desire and then flamed into the white heat of passion. Later, as they relaxed in each other's arms, they talked about Pastor Jim's sermon the previous Sunday night. "I like what Jim said about how the only sin two people who are married can commit in the privacy of their own bedroom is the sin of selfishness. Oh, Dave, I love you so much. And thanks for being so patient with me all these months. I thank God a thousand times a day for giving me a husband like you."

"Mega-dittos," said Dave as they brushed noses. "And incidentally, there was no sin on your side of the bed tonight."

"None on your side, either," Patricia said as she nestled in the curve of Dave's body and went promptly to sleep.

Not too far away, Carla finished tucking Tessa into bed and stooped to kiss her good-night. "Is Jesus going to give Unca Dave and Miss Patty a little girl, like I prayed tonight?"

"We all hope so, Sweetie." Patricia had confided in her that night that her doctor had proclaimed the end of a year-long insidious vaginal infection. "Ready to pray?"

Tessa promptly folded her hands and prayed extemporaneously for her Daddy and Mommy, for Ben and Shelly with whom she had great fun that evening, and, of course, for Unca Dave and Miss Patty with another plea for a new baby in the Court household.

"Can I have a story, Mommy?"

"Move over so I can lie beside you," agreed Carla. "How about the walls of Jericho?" Tessa nodded, but she only lasted for two and one half circumnavigations of the mighty walls before her sleep-laden eyelids came tumbling down for the night.

Carla switched on the night light, turned off the bedside lamp, and walked down the short hallway to the other bedroom. Roy was spread-eagled on the bed, sawing redwoods.

The young wife bit her lip in disappointment, turned off the light, and silently got dressed for bed. Roy never missed a stroke.

In the parsonage, the grandfather's clock in the living room chimed through its Westminster top-of-the-hour melody. On his way to the master bedroom, Jim looked in on Jessi, who's door was half open. She was reading with *Jars of Clay's* latest CD playing softly. "Night, Babe, I love you," he said softly as he blew a kiss across the room.

"Love you, too, Dad," she smiled and air-mailed a kiss right back.

"Missed you at dinner tonight. Did you nuke the leftovers when you got home from the mall?"

"You bet, and I also got an instant replay of Ben's latest riddle."

Jim groaned. "Have a good sleep," he said as he continued on to the twins' room.

For some strange reason, Shelly was sleeping on the top bunk and Ben was on the bottom. Probably some kind of scam Ben had worked on his twin sister. She could use the extra ladder work, though. As is often the case with young children, the girl was a little taller and heavier than the boy, though they were both exactly six years and seven months old. Both were sound asleep but each got a kiss on the cheek and a whispered I love you.

In the master bedroom, Debra was reading as the bed-side Sony softly spoke of today's news and tomorrow's weather.

"What would you say if I told you I was feeling very unselfish tonight," Debra whispered with a slight lowering of her lashes.

"I was wondering when you were going to bring that up," Jim said with a grin. "A pastor always likes to know that his sheep are walking in the light." Jim locked the hall door, got undressed, and walked into the bath to vigorously brush his teeth.

In a few moments, the pastor's wife was nowhere to be found. Gone was the mother of three. Gone was the caterer who could prepare and serve a full-course dinner for the Board and still smile sweetly at her guests from the opposite end of the dining table. Gone was the intelligent and communicative Bible teacher who could rightly divide the word of truth to a group of gum-chewing junior high kids.

In their place was a sleek, softly-purring tiger.

Later, as they half-listened to Jay Leno turn page one of the "New York Times" into a rather funny monologue, Jim hoped that he had helped his Sunday night congregation become somewhat more aware that human sex can be totally fulfilling as well as totally sanctified.

"You know, Debbie, one of Satan's foulest weapons against born-again Christians is the notion there may be something slightly slimy connected with good sex in a male and female marriage relationship. And I think the demons throw an illicit lust grenade into the bedroom of every up-tight, shriveled-up, taboo-bound Christian couple they can find. Including parsonages. Remember that evangelist we had at Ashtabula who said Satan had assigned a lust demon to every evangelist and pastor in the evangelical movement? I think that's true. And only by the blood of Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the guardianship of the Holy Angels will any of us survive.

"Good night, tiger." Debra snuggled closer and purred deep in her throat.

The last thing Jim remembered before sleep was a soft growl and a gentle nip on the lobe of his left ear.

[G. Edwin Lint](#)

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Chapter 11: Cross

It was a gorgeous early August afternoon, warm and sunny but without the humidity and haze usually associated with dog days. After checking his watch for the umpteenth time, Jim finally succumbed to temptation and shoved back his chair.

"Think I'll go out and give Charlie Butcher a break," he mumbled to Sandy on his way out the door. "If you need me, come out front and give a wave. I'll stay where you can see me."

Sandy smiled in response to Jim's announcement and then turned to Rebekah Ottinger who was running Sunday's bulletins through the folding machine. "You know the only difference between men and boys? The size and price of their toys."

"Yeah," Becky grinned back, "and Charlie wants to play just as much as Pastor Jim does. Of course, he's an old marine so he knows rank has its privilege. So, he'll be in here bugging us any minute."

Both ladies giggled conspiratorially as Sandy reached for the ringing phone.

Jim found the August afternoon to be even more gorgeous than it had appeared through his office window. Charlie had squared off a major section of the front lawn and was just finishing his second cycle when Jim flagged him down near the main side walk.

"You look like you could use a break. Why don't you go inside and put your feet up for a minute or two. I think Becky just made some fresh lemonade."

Charlie grinned good-naturedly as he throttled back the brand new John Deere estate tractor and pressed the hydraulic control that lifted the 42-inch cutting deck. "Saw you at the window a minute ago and figured you'd be out to give me a hand. Not that I blame you. She drives like Ruth Carson's Town Car." Charlie hopped down and Jim took his place in the well-padded saddle. "Everything's marked really good. Can't go wrong." He headed for the lemonade.

Jim had never driven Ruth's Town Car but the big John Deere sure was smooth and quiet. But after only one trip around the plot of lawn Charlie had started cutting, he saw Sandy waving from the sidewalk. Reluctantly he pulled up beside her and cut the engine back.

"Some guy by the name of Ray Benson is on the phone. Says he's a TV producer from Minneapolis."

"Do I know him?"

Sandy shrugged. "Says he knows you. Met you back in January during that question and answer thing you did right before you came here."

"Think I remember him," said Jim as he swung down from the John Deere. "Didn't he say something about doing a Christian radio talk show with live phone calls?"

Again, Sandy shrugged. "I honestly don't remember. Of course we had so many questions that day there's no way I'd remember everybody."

"Want to give it a couple spins?" asked Jim, pointing to the tractor's comfy seat.

"No way! I'm sticking to my Macintosh."

Jim laughed. "I won't complain about that, the way you handle that mouse."

As they got to the door to the office wing, Charlie was just coming out with a large sipper filled with crushed ice and lemonade. "That sure didn't last long."

"You know how it is," cracked Jim. "These ladies can't handle the office very long without me."

"Yeah, yeah." smiled Sandy as Charlie hurried back to his beloved tractor."

Inside, Jim picked up the phone. "This is Pastor Hogan."

"Ray Benson, here. 'Christian Radio Over Satellite Systems' in New York. Met you back in January the day you did that question thing."

"Yes, Mr. Benson. I remember you vaguely. Weren't you doing TV then?"

"Yes, but I just took a new job. Executive vice president for an evangelical communications conglomerate. I'm in charge of a service known as 'Christian Radio Over Satellite Systems'. We call it 'CROSS Radio'. Right now we're syndicating three music formats to radio stations throughout the country. One format does contemporary, the second does southern Gospel, and the third does easy listening. We multiplex all three formats on the same signal. That way, a station has a choice of music with just one down link. We have several AM-FM stations which run, say southern Gospel on the AM side while they do easy listening or contemporary on the FM side. Or whatever they choose."

"Sounds fantastic! Great name, too. CROSS Radio. Like the sound of that."

"Most folks do. Say, Jim-- Okay if I call you 'Jim'?"

"Certainly."

"Let me get to the point of my call. When I was there in January, I asked your sound man to send me a copy of the questions and answers you were doing that day. Kind of filed it away in case I might want to get in touch with you some time. Well, when I got this new

job, one of the first things I did was get out that tape. Stuck it in my car's tape deck and listened to it off and on for two, three days. I had a very strong positive impression of your content and delivery when I heard you live, and listening to that tape has absolutely confirmed that first impression. Man, you belong on the radio."

"Thank you very much for your kind words. I really haven't been thinking about doing any radio, though. I don't have any DJ experience, you know. Can you be a little more explicit when you say I belong on the radio."

"We have DJs hanging all over the place. What I'm talking about is something I already know you're very good at. Answering questions, and preaching?"

"Preaching?"

"Yeah, I guess I have a confession to make. When I asked your sound man for the question and answer tape, I also asked him to send me a tape of your morning service that very next Sunday morning. The service starts with some guy playing a great horn, 'How Great Thou Art'. And then you preach on the four beggars with leprosy. I didn't listen to that tape until last weekend and that beggars sermon sure put me on my knees!"

"To God be the glory." Charlie's John Deere was droning away in the background but Jim didn't so much as glance out the window.

"How long does your morning service usually last?"

"Well, the eight thirty service lasts about seventy-five minutes. At eleven, I'd say an average of ninety."

There was a pause in the conversation as Ray Benson did some thinking. "Try this on for size. Let's say we broadcast your eleven o'clock service every Sunday for ninety minutes. And then, during the week, we do a live call-in talk show for an hour every afternoon, maybe three to four Eastern. What do you think of that?"

"Sounds mighty expensive, in my time and the church's money. And, I'm not sure I want to be bound by the constraints of a radio program during our main worship service of the week."

"Those are valid concerns. Let's look at them one at a time. As far as your time goes, you'll have to commit an hour every afternoon, that's true. But there is no preparation involved since you'll be responding to listeners' questions. As far as you being limited during the worship service, that just won't happen. We want you and the Holy Spirit to have full control of that service. The radio part will just work in around you."

Jim was very pleased by Ray's comment about the Holy Spirit being given full control of the service but he still had concerns about cost. "It still sounds expensive in terms of dollars, at least as far as the church is concerned."

"It won't cost, it will pay. First, we'll put in all the hardware, on a long-term loan basis. That'll include a dish, a small one that won't be any more obtrusive than an air conditioning unit. Then you'll get the up link and down link black boxes. And we'll put in an 800 number with rollover capabilities and auto-hold. We'll add more rollover lines as more people start to call. Oh yes, and we'll put in a console for the call screener with a monitor for you to pick the caller and topic you want to answer next

"Second, we'll pay you and a call screener a talent fee which can be kept or signed over to the church. If I've read you right so far, you'll give yours to the church."

"Absolutely. That is, if I do it at all."

"You will need to hire a combination call screener and on-site engineer for the talk show, about two hours a day. My guess is, your sound man can handle the Sunday morning broadcast without any problem. Incidentally, our people will come in the first week or so and provide demonstrations and on-the-job training for everybody concerned. Getting interested?"

"Can't deny it, I am. But I think I need a little time to think about it, discuss it with my wife, maybe take it before the board as a trial balloon."

"Why don't you do that and then call me back, say in a week or so. Here's the number: 800-555-2211. Will a week give you enough time to see if you have green lights at your end? And then if you do, I'll run up there for a couple hours and we'll put together a written proposal which you can place before your board."

"Oh, Jim, there is one possible expense I forgot to mention. The room where the call screener answers the calls and the room where you talk to the callers on the air need to be adjacent, with a window between them. Might require cutting a hole in a wall, something like that. If the rooms can't be adjacent, we could rig up closed circuit TV but I think you'll be happier with adjacent rooms and a window."

"If I can get everything else past the board, I don't think cutting a hole in a wall will be a problem."

"Gotta run but let me do just a little selling before I go. You are one man who has something to say to the world and you have a very effective way of saying it. So in addition to the Sunday morning broadcast being an outreach for your church, the daily talk show will be an outreach, too. Maybe even more powerful than the Sunday thing in terms of the kinds of people you'll reach. Pray about it."

"You can count on that. And thanks for calling, Ray. I really appreciate your kind words however how this whole thing turns out. I'll be back in touch within a week."

Both men said good-bye and Sandy stuck her head in the door. "We're closing up out here, Jim. Need anything before we leave?"

Jim knew it was a little after five. "No, you go ahead and I'll be right behind you. Anyone else in the building?"

"Pastor Jason has a client in for counseling. I'll leave him a note that he'll be last person out and that he should set the alarm system."

Jim nodded, strongly tempted to ask Sandy how she'd like to work in radio for an hour or so every day. He had already decided that she would be his first choice for call screener. She was terrific on the phone. And anyone who could wrap a Macintosh around her finger like she did would have no trouble with the equipment. But he wanted to savor the whole idea of doing radio and share it first with Debra, so he said nothing to Sandy for the time being.

Monday evening was family night in the Hogan household and Debra usually planned something which was not directly related to church business. Tonight, she had invited Tim and Sally Grover for dinner and table games afterward. Tim pastored the Gettysburg Community Church. The Hogans and Grovers had gotten to know each other at the softball tournament in May and they had become close friends. Debra always felt she could relax just a little more with a family outside the church, especially when Ben or Shelly started to say something. No telling what was coming out next.

When Jim got to the parsonage, he was all set to talk radio but Debra aimed him at the patio and the gas grill. "Honey, can you keep an eye on that chicken on the rotisserie? It's been going for about an hour and I'd like you to start basting it every five minutes or so with barbecue sauce. You did remember we're having company tonight, didn't you? Tim and Sally are coming over."

"Great! While the chicken is rotissing, maybe Tim and I can throw the ball around a little."

"Don't let that chicken get dry or it'll take more than a grand-slam home run to get you out of the dog house."

Ben raced into the kitchen with his glove and cap on. "Can I play, too, Dad? My arm's a lot gooder than it was last year."

"Your arm is 'better', Ben," said Debra lightly.

"That's what I said. Come on, Dad. Let's you and me play till Pastor Tim gets here. I'll warm you up."

"Okay. Just let me wet down this chicken first. Want to use the rubber ball?"

"Nope," Ben shook his head firmly. "That's for babies. I'm ready for a Blue Dot!"

"Suit yourself, but keep your eye on the ball and watch out for your nose."

Shelly wandered into the kitchen with a carefully bundled Cabbage Patch doll in her arms. Debra could see she was pouting.

"Why don't you get your glove and play ball with Ben and your Dad. They're out back."

"Nope. Ben says I throw like a sissy. And then if he misses it, he makes me chase it. Besides, Molly is cutting a tooth and she needs me."

"Oh, I see you've named your new dolly after Molly Wynn at church."

"Yep, and if I get a boy, I'm gonna call him Dave. They're the bestest grown-up friends I got."

"They sure are nice, aren't they. Tell you what. Why don't you go wash your hands and then you can toss the salad."

"Bare handed?" Shelly asked hopefully.

"If you wash your hands very carefully and let me check your nails, too."

"You bet!" and she raced into the living room to put Molly to sleep on the couch so she could work on dinner. Debra couldn't help but laugh. Shelly had a thing about working in the kitchen bare-handed, as she called it. Tossing salad, making hamburger patties, even stuffing a chicken--Shelly loved getting her hands into the food. In a jiffy, Shelly was presenting her hands and nails for inspection.

Debra's inspections before Shelly bare handed food were not routine. "Isn't that finger paint I see between these two fingers?"

"Aw, Mom. You know paint don't come off."

"Finger paint does. Now you get back in there and this time, use soap and a wash cloth," and she shooed the little girl back into the powder room which was just off the kitchen.

Just then the door bell chimed and Debra went to meet her guests. Tim had his glove under his arm and went straight through to the back yard and jumped into the game of catch with Jim and Ben. Debra stuck her head out the door to remind Jim to keep basting the chicken. Then she and Sally enjoyed chit chat as the indoors part of the meal was finished.

Soon the two families, including Ben, Shelly, and Jessi, were sitting down to a fine meal of barbecued chicken, which Jim hadn't neglected in spite of the game of catch.

"I got a riddle, everybody," Ben announced immediately after Pastor Tim had thanked the Lord for their food. Jim and Debra both winced, Shelly pouted at the attention she knew Ben would be getting, and Jessi groaned aloud. Jim and Debra were feeling mild pain because they never knew what Ben might be coming out with next, especially when he indulged his addiction for riddles.

"Okay," Ben continued importantly, "see if you can guess. Who is the first person in the world to deliver mail?"

"Benjamin Franklin," Tim said after a fairly long period of silence.

"Wrong!" said Ben with pleasure. "Anybody else?"

"The Pony Express riders," offered Debra in the interest of keeping the game going for the sake of Ben.

"Wrong again!" chimed Ben with relish. "Any more guesses?" There was another period of silence. "Okay, I'll tell ya. The first person to deliver mail was Eve, in the Garden of Eden! Get it?"

Jessi groaned even louder than before. Shelly's pout changed to a look of confusion. Jim and Debra relaxed; it could have been much worse. Tim and Sally laughed and clapped.

"That's a good riddle!" praised Sally, still laughing. Maybe your Dad can use it in a sermon sometime."

"Don't encourage him," warned Jessi, "or you'll have more riddles than you care to hear by the time the night's over."

Shelly made a mental note to ask Ben what in the world Adam and Eve had to do with delivering mail.

Jim enjoyed the fellowship with the Grovers but all evening he kept thinking about Ray Benson's proposal and was just aching to discuss it with Debra. When their guests left around eleven, Jim told Debra about the radio proposal Benson had made on the phone late that afternoon. Debra was a very positive person in terms of general outlook on life but Jim always tried out new ideas on her because she could take an opposing view and ask some very penetrating questions.

"Do you think you can afford to take an hour out of your schedule every day? You always tell me how hectic your days are with phone calls from church people, and hospital visits, and counseling, things like that."

"It's only fifty-four minutes a day, actually. The network carries five minutes of news at the top of the hour and then there's a sixty second cutaway for a local commercial spot or a weather forecast. Then the talk show starts at seven after the hour."

"Sixty minutes, fifty-four minutes, it's still a major interruption in the middle of your afternoon. And suppose you're called away on an emergency just as your phones start ringing. Then what?"

"My backup will take over."

"And who will that be?"

"You!"

"Like fun it will. I'll say what Jessi would say at a time like this. The Lord may have called you to answer phone calls over the radio but he sure didn't call me."

Both had to laugh at that, in spite of themselves; it was so like Jessi. "Seriously, Debbie, what do you think."

"I've been telling you what I think. It's a major responsibility which will cut into your pastoral time. What will the board say?"

"We're having a meeting tomorrow evening. I'm going to run the basics by them then. But how about you? Don't you see any merit in the idea at all?"

"Sure I do. Talk radio is very big on secular stations, and I think born-again Christians have just as much right to talk about their values and beliefs as anyone else. But does it have to be you? Why not let someone else with a smaller church carry the ball on this one?"

"Maybe God has singled me out for this because He believes I'm the man for the job."

Debra's eyes softened and she went to sit on Jim's lap, putting her arms around his neck. "That, my dear," she said, kissing him full on the mouth, "is strictly between you and God." And then she jabbed him in the brisket, causing him to howl in ticklish agony. "Quiet! You'll wake the twins."

"Be your fault if I do," and he smacked her lightly on the back side. "Come on now, be serious. I'm trying to talk sense here."

"I already talked all the sense I have to give, except for this one thing. Why don't you put out a fleece, like Gideon did in Judges chapter six. Tell your friend Benson that you'll agree to it on two counts. First, the time has to be from five to six Eastern. And second, the original agreement will be for thirteen weeks only. If you do it at five, your main work day will be over but you'll still be in a good time slot in all four time zones. Oh, and one more thing. Let's both really do much praying on this thing."

"Agreed on all counts," said Jim readily. "I really like the idea of doing it from five to six. I was somewhat worried that something in the middle of the afternoon would be disruptive. The next thing is to see how the board feels about this thing."

"What are you going to call your new show?"

"Hadn't really thought about it."

"Well, since you'd be taking calls in your office, why don't you call it 'The Pastor's Study'?"

"Hey, I like that." He picked up the living room phone. "Hello, Donald in Little Rock. You're in The Pastor's Study. . . No, it is not all right to smoke and drink and go to Saturday night dances." Both laughed.

"Oh, by the way, Deb, I forgot to mention one thing. If I do the talk show, the network will carry our eleven o'clock worship service every Sunday morning for ninety minutes. What do you think of that?"

"Sounding better all the time. My husband the talk show host and radio preacher! You'll have to go out and buy a whole new wardrobe of hats."

This time it was Jim's turn to point an index finger at Debra's ribs, who was just as ticklish as he was. Knowing what was coming, she ran squealing for the stairway, Jim right on her heels. Jessi and the twins slept through it all. It wasn't the first time.

The Tuesday night board meeting had a light agenda and quite a bit of time was spent on the non-agenda radio item. When all issues had been considered, including cutting a hole in the wall between Jim's office and the clerical area, the pastor called for a secret ballot. The board voted seven-zero to pursue the offer made by Ray Benson and CROSS radio.

Jim couldn't wait to call Ray Wednesday morning and tell him that all the lights were green as long as he could accept the five to six time slot and the thirteen-week trial run. However, he deliberately got to work an hour early and spent that time down at the sanctuary altar. Oh Lord, if this thing isn't of You, if this is just my ego talking, please show me your will right now.

When Jim did call, Ray was nothing less than bombastic in his enthusiasm. "Jim, that's fantastic! When can we get together to work out the details?"

When Jim told Ray about wanting to start at five and just sign on for an initial thirteen weeks, the producer laughed aloud. "That proves the Lord is in this thing. I've been thinking about five o'clock as a start time all along. Just forgot to mention it the other day when I called. And as far as a thirteen week agreement goes, that's fine, too. Say, good buddy, you didn't happen to have a fleece out, did you?"

Jim felt a little sheepish but acknowledged that's what he had done. "Which was it?" laughed Ray. "Was the fleece wet and the ground dry, or was the fleece dry and the ground wet?"

"Take your pick," said Jim and they began working on their calendars to set a date for Ray's trip to Mechanicsburg.

After hanging up with Ray, Jim spent a couple hours on his Power Mac, developing an outline of all aspects of the radio proposal which he and Ray had discussed, both today and Monday. When he was finished, he did a save to 3.5-inch disk in the external drive, and slipped it into his shirt pocket.

Later, he casually wandered out into the clerical area and sat down beside Sandy's desk. "How would you like to work in radio," he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"You're not getting me in front of a microphone," she said quickly but not sharply.

"Why not? You talk on the phone all the time and that's a mike, kind of."

"You're up to something, aren't you?" Sandy responded with a twinkle of her own.

"You've been acting funny all week."

"Didn't Miles tell you about the board meeting last night?"

"We rarely discuss church business at home," she said with a little laugh. "Sometimes we go for weeks without even mentioning something that both of us have known about all along."

"That's commendable on both your parts," Jim said approvingly. "Everyone involved in church work should take a lesson from you two. Anyway, now I'm going to tell you something which Miles already knows about and so you'll have a dinner topic for this evening. The church is thinking about going on the radio."

"Really? What type of radio?" she asked with interest.

"Two levels actually. Monday through Friday it'll be a talk show from five to six. And then on Sunday mornings from eleven to twelve thirty, we'll broadcast the worship service live. I have all the details right here," Jim said holding up the disk which he had just taken out of his shirt pocket. "While you're spell-checking and fine-tuning this outline, you can read it, too." Sandy nodded and started to reach for the disk. "But one thing first. I really do want to get you involved in our radio ministry." Before she could protest again, Jim added, "As a call screener."

"A call screener? What would I do?" she asked with more than a hint of interest.

"First, you'd have to be willing to work an hour of overtime every evening."

"That's no problem. The way Miles works, we don't eat till seven thirty most evenings anyway. But I still don't know what I'm going to be doing while I'm working this hour of overtime. Not talking on the radio, is it?"

"Nope," Jim said with a grin. "Talking on the phone."

"Really? Well I should be able to do that by now."

Jim went on to explain the process of screening calls and deciding which ones should be put up on the monitor screen which he would be seeing.

"We'll work out some guidelines ahead of time so you'll have an idea of whom to accept and whom to reject."

"What if some guy decides to cuss you out on the air while you're talking to him?" she asked seriously.

"You know," Jim said after a little thought, "I'm not sure of the answer to that question but I'm surely going to find out. They must have some gimmick to keep foul language from getting on the air. Some of these shock jocks might not care but I certainly will. I'll ask Ray Benson when he comes up Friday to put together a final proposal."

G. Edwin Lint

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Chapter 12: On The Air

The "Pastor's Study" was ready to go on the air for the first time Monday, September tenth. The church board had endorsed the final plan developed by Jim and Ray Benson. The equipment had been delivered and installed. The window had been cut in the wall between Jim's office and the clerical area so he and Sandy could sit at tables facing each other while on the air. An 800 number with three rollover lines and auto-hold had been installed. And a seven-second delay tape loop was available to prevent offensive language from going out over the air.

Jim sat at his station in his office facing the window to Sandy's station. He was encouraged by the sight of Mark Mason, a sharp young radio engineer provided by CROSS to help Jim and Sandy get started. Mark would stay with them through Sunday and make sure that Dick Allen knew how to handle the live broadcast of the church service.

Jim stared hard at his equipment, trying to remember the tips Mark had given him. Then he glanced up at the instructions Sandy had typed up on her Macintosh and posted on the wall beside the window. She had used 48 point type and he would have no trouble reading what was there. But could he understand it, especially with a squadron of butterflies doing power dives in his stomach? Ray had been able to find Macintosh software which was designed to manage a call-in talk show. It was named MacCall, of course, and enabled Sandy to type in the name, location, and proposed topic of up to four calls as they were received. This information then appeared on Jim's Mac screen by means of a cable plugged into the modem port of each Mac. A unit consisting of four buttons was clamped to the left edge of Jim's monitor with the buttons lined up with the cells in which the information about calls would be displayed. Seemed simple enough. Jim just hoped it would work as well on the air as it had when Mark had been doing demonstrations earlier in the day.

Ray had told Jim they would be starting with fifty stations carrying the program out of the two hundred stations which subscribed to one or more of the CROSS Network's music services. Ray seemed sure this number would grow steadily as the program increased in popularity. Jim was especially pleased to learn that a local station from the neighboring community of Camp Hill would be carrying the program. He had confided in Debra that this fact made him feel a little better about committing some of his time and the church's resources to a project like this. This was especially true for the Sunday morning worship broadcasts which would be starting this coming Sunday, September sixteenth.

Jim's greatest fear in setting this whole thing up had been that when they finally did go on the air live, no one would call.

"It may be a little slow in the beginning," agreed Ray, "But it'll pick up momentum as you go along. One person calls and says something. And then a second person wants to

comment on what the first person said. And then you say a few things about both of the previous calls. Before you know it, you'll have more calls than your little four-horse system can handle."

"But just suppose that I can't even get that first call," said Jim, still not convinced. "I'm going to be stuck here with an open mike and nothing to put in it."

"Not for long," insisted Ray.

"But how can you be so sure?"

"Because I got two or three shills spotted around the country. If things get really dry, one of them will call in and prime the pump a little bit."

Jim prayed that the calls would come in spontaneously. He didn't like the idea of having any of Ray's skills, as he called them, get involved. It didn't seem completely honest.

At four thirty, Jim suggested that everyone in the office complex go down to the sanctuary altar for prayer. As they all bowed at the altar, Jim led. "Heavenly Father, we know there are many ways we can communicate the gospel and that radio is just one of those ways. Bless us as we begin this new venture and may everything we do and say be in the center of your will. May the Holy Spirit open my mind and give me clarity of thought and expression . . . "

The two-sided digital clock on the window ledge between Jim and Sandy had been calibrated with the CROSS Network time. As the two digits which displayed seconds crawled toward five o'clock, Jim took his seat and prepared for his first call. He wore a head set with a small boom mike positioned in front of his mouth. The mike would transmit his side of the conversation up to the satellite and from there down to master control in Washington. The mike also allowed him to talk directly to a person on the phone. The left ear phone of the head set carried the phone conversation. The right ear phone monitored the broadcast signal from the local CROSS affiliate, WMOR in Camp Hill. In addition, the right phone allowed him to receive off-the-air instructions from Sandy and from master control, with the later taking priority in case both tried to talk to him at once. Each ear phone had a volume control in case he needed more or less of one of the two auditory signals he was receiving. On the desk in front of him was a cough switch which he could depress to temporarily kill the broadcast mike in case he needed to cough or sneeze.

The digital clock now showed 5:04:30 and he turned up the volume on the right ear phone. WMOR in Camp Hill was carrying APRadio news off the CROSS network. ". . . This has been Arnold MacArthur with APRadio news."

"Here's the weather forecast for the lower Susquehanna Valley. It will be clear and warm this evening with . . . "

Now the digits displaying seconds were moving steadily toward 5:06:00.

"This is WMOR in Camp Hill. It's six minutes after five.

Then someone in master control hit the start button on a tape cartridge machine and the theme which Jim and Ray had agreed upon was in Jim's right ear. The theme went under for Ray's rich baritone. "Welcome to our premier broadcast of 'The Pastor's Study with Jim Hogan, coming to you live from the Wesley Evangelical Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. Here's your toll-free nationwide number if you'd like to talk with Pastor Jim. It's 800-555-3737. Perhaps you have a question about the Bible, or moral values, or social issues. Or, maybe you have an opinion you'd like to express. Either way, the number to call is 800-555-3737."

Jim pulled his chair a little closer to the desk, adjusted his head set, cleared his throat a couple times, and took a small sip of water from the mug beside him.

" . . . And now, here's Jim Hogan in the Pastor' Study." On the word "study" the red light came on above the digital clock and Jim knew he was on the air. He took a good-sized breath.

"All of you know how telephone talk shows work so I won't spend a lot of time with explanations. If you'd like to visit with me in the Pastor's Study . . ." Suddenly words started to appear on his Macintosh screen: Alice -- Millville, New Jersey -- Sex education. Jim wasn't sure that sex education would have been his choice of a first topic, but with an unvoiced prayer he pressed the button beside Alice's name.

"Hello, Alice, in Millville, New Jersey. You're in 'The Pastor's Study'. . . .

The phone lines lit up, Sandy put the call info on his screen, Jim answered the questions conversationally and to the point. And the time flew. Hey! This is kind of fun, and Jim was ready to punch up the next call. But then he realized the cutaway theme was playing in his right ear, from master control by way of WMOR in Camp Hill. So, instead he said, "This is Jim Hogan in the Pastor's Study. I'll be back for more of your calls right after these messages." The red light above the clock went out and Jim yawned and stretched.

Suddenly the radio personality saw through the window that he had a live audience. In addition to Sandy and Mark who were grinning broadly and flashing thumbs-up signals, he could see Debra, Jessi, the twins, and at least half the church board. Grace Carson and Miles Abbott joined hands and raised them high in a victory salute. All at once Jim realized that all the tenseness was gone and he felt like a veteran radio broadcaster. Of ten minutes, no less. Then Sandy's voice was in his right ear reminding him he had five seconds to air. At the same time, he heard the theme music from master control which signaled the end of the cutaway.

The red light was back on. He selected a caller named Norman from Fort Mill, South Carolina. "You're in 'The Pastor's Study'."

"Do you ever take a social drink?"

And again the questions rolled in and Jim answered them smoothly and crisply. As he was finishing with his last answer, he heard the closing theme come up in his right phone and the digital clock in front of him was showing 5:59:10. He knew he had to be clear by ten seconds before the hour so he closed briskly. It didn't seem possible his first show was almost over.

"My Name is Jim Hogan and it's been a real pleasure to have you visit with me right here in the Pastor's Study. Jot my number down so you'll have it handy tomorrow at this same time. That number is: 800-555-3737. See you tomorrow!" The theme went up, the red light went, out, and Jim completely relaxed for the first time in the past fifty five minutes.

The office door popped open and in came Debra with Ben and Shelly close behind. His wife gave him a big hug and then kissed him warmly. "Congratulations, Honey. That was great," she breathed in his ear.

"Mushy-mush!" scolded the twins in unison, wagging their index fingers reproachfully.

"We have a license for it," said Debra, smiling down at them.

"Excuse me for interrupting," said Sandy from the doorway, but Ray Benson is on line one. Can you talk to him?"

"Sure," said Jim, punching the winking button on his regular desk phone. "Hello, Ray, in Washington, DC. You're in 'The Pastor's Study'." Both men laughed.

"Jim, you were a natural! Everyone down here in master control is talking about what a great job you did. Not only in delivery, but in content. I know you preacher types don't think in terms of profit margins but this thing is going to sell. I guarantee it!"

"I'm glad it sounded okay on the air. And if it did, to God be the glory," said Jim sincerely.

"Well, keep up the good work, my friend, and we'll be praying for you and pulling for you at this end. See you tomorrow afternoon at five?"

"I'll be right here," Jim promised, feeling pretty good about the whole thing.

When Jim had realized that the tone of the conversation was going to be positive, he switched on the phone speaker so Debra and the twins could listen. As soon as he hung up, he got another wifely hug, augmented by a fierce hug around each leg from Ben and Shelly. Everyone quickly agreed that dinner at the Outback Steak House was definitely called for.

Chapter 13: Arrested

The Mazda Miata hummed a quiet oriental tune as Dave Court guided it expertly along the winding two-lane black-top of Pennsylvania route 114. The posted limit was forty but the road was dry, the hour late, the traffic light to nonexistent, and the car was responding crisply. So his cruising speed was closer to fifty-five than forty. At the slightest hint of torque agony, he down-shifted to fourth or even third with no more than a glance at the tach to confirm what his keen ear had already told him.

Dave was on his way home from an evening course at Shippensburg University which had dismissed at nine-fifteen, even with the professor letting the class out fifteen minutes early in compensation for their having voluntarily foregone a mid-session break. One on the reasons for Dave pushing the Miata just a little extra was Patricia's late-afternoon appointment with the gynecologist. She'd missed two periods and they were fervently hoping and praying that a baby might be about to take up permanent residence in the Court household. After months and months of false hopes, careful attention to the calendar and body temperature, and delays caused by persistent infections, it seemed just too good to be true that Patricia finally just might be pregnant.

He'd thought about slipping out of class to call her but dismissed that idea when he realized that a positive report would have wasted him for the rest of the evening. Matter of fact, the same would have been true of a negative report. Anyway, he had exercised self control and was looking forward to the moment when Patricia would be in his arms, positive or negative. Give me grace to accept a negative report, he prayed while downshifting to third for a left hair-pin curve. We want your will for our lives, Lord, but you know how much we want a baby. Our own baby. Born of our love for each other, and to be raised in a Christian home in the spirit of holiness.

It caused literal physical pain in the pit of his stomach to think of all the babies aborted every day for the callous convenience of the mother. And all those crack babies being born to girls who were scarcely more than babies themselves. All those tiny, innocent babies who were born impaired by drugs, with absolutely no say in the kind of circumstances into which they were about to be projected. Dear God, can't you forestall just one of those unwanted crack pregnancies and give Patricia and me a chance? We promise that nothing will be left undone which would prevent our baby from being brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

For several moments, he heaved dry sobs as the Miata drove itself. The road straightened for about a half mile after a twisting mountain climb. Without thinking, Dave let the speed creep above sixty.

He saw it too late to do anything about it. A township police car had been parked about twenty yards back a diagonal side road, lights out, of course. Dave down-shifted

immediately to fourth and let his speed drop to less than forty before touching the accelerator again. Too late. Even a township cop could tell the difference between forty and sixty, and he remembered what the salesman had told him about cops and red sports cars.

The red-and-blue strobes came on behind him. Without waiting for the electronic whoop of the siren, he pulled into a deserted, decrepit gas station with an oval Esso sign telling of bygone years of happy motoring.

The police car parked about ten yards behind the Miata with headlights on high beam and a spotlight focused on the Miata's interior. Dave rolled down his window but the officer stayed in his car and nothing happened for a least two minutes. "Remain where you are, Mazda," said an amplified and metallic voice with official-sounding inflection. "Turn off the engine and toss your keys out the window."

This guy has a massive case of brass-button fever, muttered Dave as he cranked down the driver's-side window and dropped his keys onto the grass-invaded black-top of the old gas station. And there they both sat. The speeder, who was getting more confused by the moment, and the police officer with the strangest method of making a speeding arrest Dave had ever heard of. It wasn't until another set of red-and-blue strobes appeared on the far horizon that Dave realized the officer behind him must be waiting for backup. For a speeding ticket? The cruiser coming toward Dave was giving full voice with assorted electronic whoops and warbles. Coming at a high rate of speed, too. Practice what you preach, buddy, Dave muttered.

Now the Miata was in the brilliant cross fire of the combined halogens of two sets of high beams with two spotlights trained at Dave from front and rear. The next voice he heard was from the car in front of him which had just arrived.

"Unlatch your door and open it with your foot," intoned a woman's voice over the PA with the same police-officer inflection which had come from the cruiser in the rear. "Keep both hands where we can see them and step out of the car." Dave obeyed quickly, although thoroughly confused and more than a little angry. "Hands on top of your head."

Both officers exited their cars. As the woman officer moved closer, Dave was astounded to see she had a .38 Smith & Wesson police special trained at his belt line.

"Assume the position beside the left front fender of your car, about one yard from the tire." Dave did as he was instructed, leaning forward and placing his palms on the Miata's scarlet skin. While in the classic search position, the man patted him down, swiftly, deftly, and thoroughly.

After Dave straightened, the woman asked, "Do you have any ID on you?" Dave nodded. "Use one hand to toss your wallet toward the back of the car." Dave complied, still completely dumfounded.

The officer in the rear picked up Dave's wallet. "Are you David E. Court of 1425 East Cedar Street in Mechanicsburg?" he asked.

When Dave agreed that he was, a firm male hand grasped his right wrist from behind and moved it down to his belt line. A metallic click and the feel of cold metal. A second click and Dave was cuffed for the first time in his life.

The man now stepped into Dave's line of vision and his gun was drawn, also. "Isn't this a little heavy for twenty miles over the limit on a dry road?" Dave asked with more bravery than he felt.

The officers ignored his question and the woman spoke. "My name is Sgt. Salter of the Upper Allen Township Police Department and this is Officer Hall. We have a warrant for your arrest in a case of felonious sexual assault of a minor. Officer Hall, will you please lay the Miranda card on the hood of the car where Mr. Court can follow along as I read." Hall put the card on the top of the Miata's left front fender. Dave had heard the warning often on TV and decided he wouldn't follow on the card. But then, this time the warning was not being heard from the comfort and safety of his living room couch. Now the famous Miranda warning was being read by a real, live officer, and to him. It was being read to David E. Court of 1425 East Cedar Street in Mechanicsburg, not some no-name actor playing a walk-on part.

Sgt. Salter began to read as Dave leaned over to follow. "You are under arrest. Before we ask you any questions, you must understand what your rights are. One, you have a right to remain silent and refuse to answer any questions. Two, anything you do or say may be used against you in a court of law. Three, as we discuss this matter, you have the right to stop answering my questions at any time that you desire."

"Discuss this matter!" interrupted Dave. "I only wish I could discuss this matter. The worst thing I've done, that I know about at least, is to go about fifteen-twenty miles over the limit. What I want to discuss is this 'felonious sexual assault' charge. Just what am I supposed to have done, and to whom have I done it? I'm innocent, I tell you!" Dave was really steamed but the officers waited placidly until Dave finished venting and then Sgt. Salter continued reading.

"Four, you have the right to a lawyer before speaking to me, to remain silent until you can talk to him, and to have him present during the time you are being questioned. Five, if you desire a lawyer but cannot afford one, a Public Defender will be provided to you without cost." That's me. I surely can't afford a lawyer to get me out of this mess.

"Six, do you understand each of these rights as I have explained them to you?" Dave answered in the affirmative. "Now that I have advised you of your rights, are you willing to answer my questions without an attorney?"

"No ma'am," answered Dave a little irritably. "If I'm being charged with, what was it, felonious sexual assault, that's too deep for me. I've already told you as much as I'm going to: my name and address."

"In that case, I'll ask you to sign the Miranda card as indication you have been made fully aware of your constitutional rights. Are you right or left handed?"

"Right."

"Officer Hall, cuff him in front and then step back." Hall did so and Salter handed Dave a ball point pen. He scrawled his name on the bottom of the card, retracted the point, and handed it back clip first.

When his hands were cuffed behind him again, Dave realized they were already beginning to chaff his wrists. They spoke coldly but eloquently of the reality of his predicament. And the charge! Felonious sexual assault of a minor? That's ridiculous! He'd never assaulted a person in his life, minor or major, sexually or otherwise, except maybe when taking out the short stop to break up a double play. What in the world is going on? This is weird beyond belief!

After Dave signed the card, the officers ignored him entirely and spoke to each other only. Sgt. Salter would be following Officer Hall who would be transporting the suspect and leading the way. Both officers assisted Dave in getting into the back seat of Hall's Chevy Caprice. Now Dave knew for real why officers always pressed down on a prisoner's head while he was getting into the back seat of a police car. If Salter hadn't been pressing firmly on the top of his head, he would have whacked it soundly on the top of the door frame as he struggled to enter the car with his hands cuffed behind him. Hall was pretty long in the leg and the front bench seat must have been back as far as it would go.

After Salter had closed the back door and Hall was getting into the driver's seat, Dave noted that he was in a mobile jail cell. The rear door panels had no window cranks, no door handles, and no door locks. And there was a sturdy diamond-mesh grill separating the front seat from the jail-cell rear seat.

The cuffs were cutting sharply into his wrists. Dave considered asking Hall to pull his seat up a little but decided to seek relief by sitting sideways and stretching his legs out on the seat. In the lights of Hall's cruiser, he could see Salter carefully locking the Miata and pocketing the keys. Then they were underway with flashing strobes but silent sirens.

"Salter to dispatch," said the woman's voice from Hall's radio speaker. "The suspect is in custody and we are moving east on 114 to the Township Building. Tell the county sheriff we'll keep him in a holding cell until a deputy can transport him down to Carlisle. Oh, and tell the sheriff we read him the Miranda and he signed the card."

Dave never made it to the holding cell. When the two-car caravan arrived at the township building, a Ford with Cumberland County Sheriff markings and two deputies in the front seat was waiting to take him to the county jail in Carlisle.

Briskly the four officers switched Dave from the Chevy cell to the Ford cell and once again he was riding under flashing strobes and silent siren. The deputy riding shotgun made a terse radio report to the county dispatcher that they would be arriving at the jail in twenty minutes. After that, the radio and both officers were quiet for the rest of the trip. Dave spent the time praying fervently.

At the prison, Dave was helped from the car and taken to the prison's induction area. There he was booked, fingerprinted, photographed, and strip-searched. After the search, he was asked to sign a receipt for his personal belongings and given an outfit of prison clothes. Then he was escorted to cell with two sets of bunk beds and three inmate occupants. There was a loud clang as we was locked in for the night.

As the correction officer walked away down the cell block, Dave suddenly remembered something. "Officer!

The man stopped, turned slowly, and strolled back to the cell. "Now what?"

"I'd like to made a phone call."

"You already got your phone call. Now go to sleep."

"No, sir, I did not," Dave countered earnestly.

The correction officer grunted noncommittally but produced a set of cuffs. "Step up to the bars." Dave was cuffed through the bars and then the cell door was unlocked. You get two calls if you want them."

"One will be fine," answered Dave.

"What's the number," asked the man as they walked toward the far end of the cell block.

Patricia collected her medical insurance card from the receptionist and left the gynecologist's office walking on at least two inches of air. After all the waiting, after all the hoping, after all the praying, the time had finally come. She was pregnant! She and Dave were going to have a baby! Their own little Tessa. Or maybe their own little Ben. Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, thank you, Jesus! she prayed over and over again. As soon as she got in the Beretta, she switched the ignition to ACC and inserted the tape. Then she reclined the seat about half way back as Sandi Patti's full, rich voice sang, "You are a masterpiece..." How many times had she and Dave prayed their way through this song as the popular singer sang of how God in his marvelous power and wisdom could cause a human masterpiece to form oh so delicately while "secluded in God's safe and hidden place". Right now Patricia's hands spread reverently, lovingly, protectively over that safe

and hidden place where, with each blip of the digital clock's flashing colon, a cell was dividing, and subdividing, over and over again as that tiny mote of life grew second by second into what she and Dave would some seven months later hold in their arms as their very own baby.

The song ended and Patricia immediately pressed rewind and listened. Four minutes and one second later Patricia pressed rewind again to hear "Masterpiece" for the third time. Throughout the twelve minutes and three seconds it took to hear the song three times, she never moved her warm and loving hands from that area of her body where, "secluded in God's safe and hidden place," their baby was continuing to grow.

Finally it was time to back out of the parking place and drive home to the celebration dinner she had been planning for months. She glanced at the clock again. Dave should be home from Shippensburg University about ten-fifteen. That would give her at least three hours to fix the best meal of which her hands and brain and purse and kitchen were capable.

A light turned yellow with time enough to scoot through showing red but she braked quickly but firmly to a full stop short of the cross walk. No rent-a-cop trying to make his quota before the shift ended was going to spoil this night. This night was special. This night was a time for joy, a time for feasting, a time for embracing and weeping, and loving. No lousy traffic ticket was going to spoil this night!

Carefully she tucked the Beretta away for the night in the town house's car port, leaving Dave plenty of room for the Miata. Inside, she quickly placed a lace tablecloth on the dining room table and then placed two sterling silver candle sticks on the cloth. Last night, she and Dave had talked about the news which the next day's all-important trip to the doctor might produce.

"Tie a yellow ribbon on the lamp post if the answer is 'yes'," he suggested.

"No," she said, brushing his lips lightly with hers. "I don't want a yellow ribbon to tell you, silly. I want to tell you myself. How about this. You ring the doorbell, and then don't come in until I answer the door. And when I come to the door, I'll say 'yes' or 'no'. And either way, you'll get a good, big hug and a kiss. If it's a 'yes' and the doctor says he sees no complications so far, there will be candles burning in the silver candle sticks on the dining room table. How's that?"

"Sounds like runs," and he pulled her down in his lap on the couch and blew a raucous, sloppy wet BRRRRAAPP!! at the base of her throat.

"Dave, you hog!" she squealed and then grabbed his curly perm with both hands and kissed him full on the mouth, turning the porcine epithet into a term of endearment.

How about London broil and twice-baked potatoes to go with the candle light?" Dave asked boyishly. "Maybe pinkish red in the middle and light tan along the edges?"

"Will that be medium rare or medium well?" my good sir.

His answer was to open her blouse one more button and make another diving attempt at a BRRRRAAPP!! on her chest. Patricia ducked away and rolled him off the couch and onto the carpeted floor.

Patricia fell on top of him and they both laughed until they were breathless. "Dave, if you don't stop doing that, I'm going to put salt in your shorts when I fold them."

"Promises, promises." Then he helped her to her feet and they climbed the stairs, arms around each other's waists.

Just thinking about Dave's BRRRRAAPPs made her check to make sure her top button was fastened. Silly boy-man!

After work that day, Patricia had just about driven the Giant Market's meat manager crazy trying to find the perfect London broil. Not too thick or it might not get done. Not too thin or it might be too dry, especially if he was a little late. And then those Idahos! She'd never seen such a collection of misshapen, scrawny, lumpy baking potatoes in her life. She finally had to buy two five-pound bags in order to get at least three (two for Dave, one for her) which were appropriate for the ritual of twice baking. Baked once, sliced in half the long way, scooped out with the still-warm potato mixed with cheddar cheese, repacked into the scooped-out shells, and then warmed in the oven until the cheese melted.

After checking for the third time to make sure that everything was on hand, including a chilled six-pack of caffeine-free Diet Coke, she collapsed in the living room in front of the TV and kicked off her shoes. Thirty minutes later she turned off the TV, not remembering one thing about the sitcom she had just watched. She picked up her Bible and turned to the first book of first Samuel. Hannah had wanted a baby, too. Wanted one so badly that she promised him to God's service. She had already discussed with Dave her desire to have a baby dedicated as soon as it was a month old. She could picture Dave holding their baby in a white gown, with her at his side, and Pastor Jim asking them in front of the entire eleven o'clock congregation if they would raise this child in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Oh yes! Pastor Jim. We will! We will! We will teach this precious child whom God has given to love the Lord, to accept the blood of Jesus Christ as a supreme sin sacrifice, to seek the power of the Holy Spirit, to pray for the protection of the Holy Angels. We will, Pastor Jim. In the presence of God and this company, we promise that we will!

Patricia dozed for a while and then woke with a start to realize that it was time to plug in the electric grill and get the London broil started. The Idahos were already making amends for lack of shapeliness by filling the kitchen with the warm, homey aroma of baked potatoes. Earlier she had unwrapped the meat, washed it thoroughly, and then rubbed it on both sides with Dave's favorite steak seasoning salt. Now she positioned it

carefully on the grill. Soon the London broil was sizzling quietly and vying with the potatoes for the best smell in the house.

Just as Patricia was thinking it was time to turn the London broil over, the phone rang.

"Hell-o!" she said merrily. "Dave? Dave-- Dave, where are you?" She switched hands and pressed the ear piece firmly against her ear in a desperate effort to hear more clearly. "You what? But-- But, Dave--" She listened silently for several minutes, her face white as chalk. "I will, Dave. I promise. As soon as I hang up. And Dave-- I love you, too, Dave. And I'll be praying for you."

Numbly she depressed the hook switch to get a dial tone and punched in seven digits. Then she unplugged the broiler while the phone rang three times.

"Wesley Parsonage," said Pastor Jim's warm and familiar voice.

Then the tears came. Scalding, profuse, salty, extended. She released her hold on the receiver and slumped to the floor, continuing to cry hideously. She was totally oblivious to the tiny voices coming from the phone handset lying on the carpet.

Over and over Jim called her name. "Patricia. Patricia? Patricia! Are you all right." In the background, he could hear crying but he couldn't get her to speak into the phone. Dumbly he handed the phone to Debra.

"Patricia, this is Debra. Can you hear me? What's wrong?" Nothing on the other end but continued crying.

"Jim, I think we better get over there fast. Jessi's in her bedroom so the twins will be okay."

The pastor responded by pulling on a pair of jeans and a sweat shirt. "Let's go!"

No one answered the door bell at 1425 East Cedar Street but when Debra walked around the corner of the house and looked in a side window, she could see Patricia lying on the carpet in the arch between the kitchen and living room. "Try the door," she said rushing back to the front of the house. "I think she may be sick."

Jim and Debra knelt by Patricia's side where a sizable dampness could be felt on the carpet from her crying. Jim felt for her pulse while Debra took out a clean tissue and mopped her face a little. Finally the younger woman stirred, moaned softly, and slowly opened her eyes.

"Patricia, are you all right?" asked Jim, leaning over to put his face squarely in her line of vision.

When she nodded her head, Debra helped her into a sitting position on the carpet.

"What happened," Jim asked. "Did you fall? Are you sick?"

"I -- I -- I'm all right. It's Dave. He just called."

"What about Dave? Was he in an accident?"

"He called from Carlisle, the county prison."

"The prison?" prompted Debra.

"He was arrested on the way home from his class at Shippensburg," Patricia managed to choke out amidst renewed sobbing.

"I told him that red sports--" Jim started to crack.

"He said they charged him with sexually assaulting a minor! Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous?" More sobbing, mostly dry by now.

"Do you know who he is supposed to have assaulted?" asked Jim gently.

The sobbing resumed and the Hogans had to wait a few minutes until Patricia got control again. "He didn't even know himself. Said he wouldn't talk to anyone without a lawyer. But then some policeman came on the line and I asked him who the girl was supposed to be. And he said, 'T - T - Tessa Stetson'," she stammered. "Can you believe that? Dave loves that little girl like his own daughter. The worst thing he's guilty of is spoiling her rotten," and she half smiled in spite of the circumstances.

"We'll take you down there right away," said Jim as Debra rose and hurried over to turn off the oven. The burning potatoes had made the kitchen fairly smokey.

"No, we can't. Dave said no one but a lawyer can see him until tomorrow. I'm supposed to call somebody right away. Do you know . . .?"

Jim and Debra's eyes met above Patricia's bowed head.

"Call Paul!" they said in unison, with a touch of gaiety in spite of the grave circumstances. When Patricia looked up with a puzzled expression, Debra explained. "Paul Donaldson has got to be the most effective defender of Christian causes in the country. He used to attend our church in Ashtabula shortly after he got out of law school. Worked out of a store front back then but moved down to Washington to be closer to the First Amendment action. I think the ACLU has him on their list of the ten most hated lawyers."

"Yes, and his business card is the most unusual one I've ever seen. It has a phone number plus two words-- and nothing else. Those words are 'Call Paul' and that's exactly what I'm going to do right now."

Patricia gave Debra a hug and beamed a teary smile of thanks at Jim. You know Dave and I can't pay for a big-time lawyer," Patricia said hesitantly. We're just barely making it now with Dave taking classes and with the ba--"

"Hey, tonight was your appointment!" Debra exclaimed. "What's the news?"

"Well, I had promised Dave he'd be the first to know, either way. But when he called from the prison, I completely forgot about my appointment until he'd hung up. We really didn't have very long to talk. But I'm just bursting to tell somebody and I can't think of anyone I'd rather tell first than you two." Now Patricia truly smiled for the first time since Jim and Debra had arrived. "I'm pregnant and everything's fine!"

Debra hugged her and Jim shook her hand in true pastoral fashion. "There are two things which are true signs of a growing church. Young couples and new babies."

"Right now, though, we need to concentrate on getting Dave a good lawyer. You two pray Donaldson will have some free time while I-- 'call Paul!'" and the last two words were chanted in unison by all three.

G. Edwin Lint

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Chapter 14: Call Paul

On the way back to the parsonage from Patricia's house, Jim suddenly slammed the heel of his hand down on the steering wheel. "What'd you forget now?" Debra asked with a quizzical smile.

Jim wasn't close to smiling. "I've forgotten all about Tessa and the Stetsons. That's what! I got so involved with Patricia and Dave and getting Dave a good lawyer that I've completely ignored the victim and the family. Dave certainly didn't do it but somebody did, and that little girl may be hurting bad. I'm going to call right now," and he opened their cell phone which was jacked into the cigarette lighter.

"It's rather late, don't you think?" The Eagle Summit's dash clock showed ten minutes to midnight.

"And it won't get any earlier," said Jim in a funk of self-denunciation. "Do you know their number?" Debra had an uncanny ability to remember phone numbers of persons she called on even an infrequent basis. She rattled off seven digits and Jim keyed them into the phone and pressed SEND.

He remembered reading something years ago about the phone company suggesting that you should never hang up until the called number had rung at least ten times. Roy Stetson answered in the midst of the tenth ring with a terse "Hello."

"Hello, Pastor Jim here. I know it's very late but I wanted to call and see how things are going with Tessa."

Silence on the line. Jim wondered if he had been accidentally disconnected but the silence wasn't total. He thought he could detect the sounds of movement and even low voices in the background.

"Rev. Hogan, this is Mrs. Stetson," said Carla in a voice stripped of all inflection.

"Carla, we're so worried about Tessa and so sorry to hear about what happened. Is there anything Debra and I can do?"

"Yeah, there is something you can do. Leave us alone, that's what! Not that you haven't been doing a pretty good job of that already," continued Carla with tears and anger mingled in her voice. "This thing happened at four this afternoon and you're just now getting around to calling?"

"Carla, I am so sorry I haven't been available for your family in this terrible time for you. Things have been so hectic since we found out what happened less than an hour ago."

"Hectic! Oh, I know how hectic!" Carla screeched in uncontrolled anger. "We saw your car parked at the Court house just a little while ago when we were driving home from the hospital. Before that, you were probably down at the prison, kissing up to the kinky-headed freak who did this awful thing!"

"Carla, I know you're upset--"

"Upset? 'Upset' doesn't begin to express how I feel right now. My baby was raped in her own bed by this-- this kink-head, this weirdo of an adult, and then he left her to bleed to death. If Roy hadn't found her in time, we'd be talking about the electric chair for your kinko. And she was all torn up down there, inside too. The ambulance had to rush her to Harrisburg Hospital and give her blood on the way. And then it took sixty-five stitches to put her back together again. Can you imagine that! Sixty-five stitches. Probably never be normal down there!

"And where is my pastor who's supposed to lead my family through the valley of the shadow of death while all this is going on? Playing kissy-face with the creep who did it to her in the first place, that's where!"

"Carla, may Debra and I come over? We'd like to pray with you, pray for Tessa, too, that God will heal her of her injuries. I know it's very late but I feel we can be more helpful face to face rather than over the phone."

"Come if you want to but you'll spend the night on the stoop," Carla responded in something close to a snarl. "I hope to never see your face again, or your goody-goody wife, as long as I live. And that goes double for that snooty church of yours and everybody in it. And that goes triple for your God, a God who would stand by and let a sex maniac tie my baby's wrists and ankles to the bed posts with bare copper wire, and then let this full-grown adult tear her poor, little body all up like he did."

"I can understand your not wanting us to come over tonight. But I would like to pray with you over the phone. Let's ask God together to heal Tessa's body and mind, and to soothe your minds during this terrible time. Do you mind if I do that?"

Jim accepted Carla's silence as permission and started to pray. A dial tone interrupted him before the end of the first sentence.

Back in the Eagle, Jim folded his arms on the steering wheel and bowed his head to weep quietly. Debra prayed in her spirit as Jim's tears flowed for Tessa, and for Dave, and for Patricia, and for Roy and Carla. So many hurting people, physically as well as spiritually and psychologically.

Finally he lifted his head and Debra handed him several clean tissues. "I know two things for certain in this whole mess. First, Dave is innocent and second, this is all the direct and carefully focused work of Satan and his demons," the sorrowful pastor said. "Things have just been going along too smoothly. The church is growing with new people accepting

Jesus as their Savior every Sunday. The people seem to have accepted their new parsonage family. Jessi and her Ivory Club seem to be doing great in school. Satan can't stand such progress in God's work. He has to figure out how to throw a monkey wrench in the works. Carla is very bitter towards everyone connected with what happened to Tessa, and my guess is others will be feeling the same way, more or less. She's especially angry at me for having spent time with Patricia-- and she thinks Dave, too-- before I called her."

"Did you tell her you didn't know a thing about any of this until Patricia called you?" Jim shook his head like a wounded bear, saying nothing.

"Debra, I'm going to run you home and then I'm going up to Harrisburg Hospital."

"Don't you think you're overcompensating? I know you have guilt feelings about not having called the Stetsons sooner or gone to the hospital. But you can't change anything by racing up there at this hour."

"You're right when you say *I* can't change anything. But God can. I'm going to get as close to that little torn body as I can get and then I'm going to pray like I've never prayed before. Since Satan caused this mess, it's going to take the power of the Holy Spirit to clean it up."

Debra started to remind her husband that God could hear prayers originating from the parsonage as well as the hospital, but she changed her mind and asked instead, "What about Paul? Want me to call him?"

"Would you? That would be a big load off my mind and you know him as well as I do anyway."

Jim entered the hospital at a trot and flashed his clergyman's ID to the receptionist. Then he went straight up to pediatrics and showed his ID again, this time at the nurse's station. A large black woman with an LPN badge was apparently in charge.

"I'd like to pray for Tessa Stetson," he said breathlessly. "Can you tell me where she is and how she's doing?"

"She's right next door. She's on our critical list but her vital signs are within normal limits. She's heavily sedated but I'd like you to be very quiet for the sake of the other children. Isn't this an unusual time for a pastoral call?" Then she answered her own question by softly singing "He never sleeps, He never slumbers. . ."

Next door, Tessa was the sole occupant of a semi-private room. A blue night light bathed the bed in a near-eerie glow. Tessa looked so tiny in the full-sized bed with its sides up. At first Jim thought she was in traction but then he realized that her legs were elevated with bolsters and somewhat spread. Probably because of all the repair work which had been done. He also saw she was restrained at the waist and the wrists. In IV bottle was dripping

into her left wrist and there was another tube from her lower abdomen which terminated in a catheter bag hanging on the side of her bed.

I know we're not supposed to ask You why but I have to ask You anyway. Why? Why? Why? Why did this sweet little girl who loved nothing more in all the world than to play horsey with her Unca Dave have to be subjected to this hideous abuse?

Then a murky thought entered his mind. Could Dave be guilty after all? Had his attraction for this cute little girl really been sexual instead of fatherly? Could he have raped her in a demonic surge of lust?

But then the Holy Spirit broke through with a renewed conviction that Dave was completely innocent. No matter what the evidence said, and even if a jury found him guilty as charged, Dave was innocent. The condition of poor little Tessa was the direct work of Satan and his demons, even if the complete truth in the matter was never known in this life.

"You Rev. Hogan?" asked the nurse from the doorway.

Jim looked up and nodded.

"Just got a call from the mother to check on the little girl. She got very upset when I told her a preacher was visiting. Said that if your name was Hogan, you was to get away from her baby and stay away."

Jim sighed and turned from the bed to leave the room, deeply grieved at what this tragedy was doing to Carla. He walked down the hall to a waiting room and dropped on his knees at a plastic-upholstered chair.

For a solid hour, Jim stayed on his knees in the darkened waiting room. Praying for Tessa. *Father, heal her mind as well as her body.* Praying for Carla and Roy. *Help them to yield to You in this time of trouble instead of being hard and rebellious.* Praying for Dave and for Patricia. *Oh God, encourage them both right now!* Praying for Debra and her call to Paul Donaldson. *God, I know he's busy but we need him here and now. Please make a way.*

Finally Jim rose, wiped his face with his handkerchief, and wiped up the sizable wet spot his tears had made on the cushion. Warily he went down to his car and drove home.

Paul Donaldson was sitting in his home office reading a brief when the phone rang. Without glancing at his watch, he picked up the receiver. Lawyers in his kind of work were accustomed to their home phones ringing at all hours of the day and part way into the night.

"Y'all called Paul," he drawled in an unvarnished North Carolina accent.

"Paul, you old hillbilly how're you doing? This is Debbie Hogan calling."

"Not so well as I was before the phone rang," chuckled the lawyer. "Yourself?"

"Jim and the family are fine, but a man in our church has been arrested and is being charged with sexually assaulting a minor. We need your help. Got any time?"

"Any chance he's guilty?"

"None whatsoever. His wife directs our day care program and he serves part time as her assistant."

"Day care program? Y'all still at Ashtabula?"

"No, we took a church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. Started there March eighteenth."

"How'd the kids feel about moving to Pennsylvania?" pronouncing it "keeds".

"Just fine. I hate to press but do you think you can squeeze another case into your busy schedule?"

"Well, I'm not doing too much with criminal cases these days. Mostly First Amendment stuff, you know. This boy a born-again Christian is he?"

"Absolutely! Solid as a rock. Just loves kids, and they love him, too."

"How old's the victim?"

Debra hesitated, hating to answer this question. "Going on three."

Paul grunted. "Penetration part of the charge?"

"I believe so. His wife just talked to him a minute or two after he was taken to the prison so we don't know all the allegations yet. We won't be able to see him until the morning."

There was silence on the line for a while and Debra knew from experience what was going on. Paul was weighing the pros and cons of taking a case like this, and was taking his time doing it. "How far are you folks from Philly?"

"Little over an hour and a half."

"Going to be honest with you, Debbie. Judges and juries have been mighty hard on defendants in cases like this lately, especially when the DA's pumped up with physical evidence of some kind. No chance of demonic involvement on the part of the suspect, is there?"

Debra hesitated for just a millisecond. "I'm sure there's no chance of that."

"If there was, Jim would be the best guy to spot it. How about harassment by some special-interest group because of his religion?"

"That's doubtful, too. The child's mother is a member of the church and the father comes quite a bit, too."

"Tell you what, Debbie, your friend has two things going for him. One, case I've been working on here in DC just got a change of venue with a continuance of forty-five days. And two, boy I went to law school with is working out of Valley Forge and got himself tangled up with the Philly school board in a separation case. Been bugging me to come up and work with him some on it. Will I be getting some of your great cooking?"

"You'll be staying at the parsonage any time you're in town, so you'll be getting as much as you can hold." Debra said emphatically.

"I'll do it," Paul said with finality. "Forty-five days ought to give us a good start. On days when your trial is in recess, I'll just zip down the turnpike and bang some heads in Philly. Tell me where and when."

"Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock, Cumberland County Court House in Carlisle." Debra gave him directions to the court house.

The brilliant October sun was brighter than the Hogans' spirits when they stopped to pick up Patricia for the trip to the prison in Carlisle. The events of the preceding evening seemed unreal and far away. Jim remembered from a pastoral counseling seminar that the human organism is equipped with an emotional circuit breaker. When physical or mental trauma becomes too great, that circuit breaker provides a sense of numb calmness until the mind and body have had a chance to regroup. Jim felt that the circuit breaker had been tripped for all three of them.

During the thirty-minute drive to Carlisle, each took a turn at praying for Dave and for the legal aspects of what this day would hold. They pulled into a parking space at eight-forty-five and a spotless 1972 Matador station wagon pulled up right beside them.

"There's Paul, johnny on the spot!" said Jim. Everyone got out of the cars and there was a round of hand-shaking and introductions.

Patricia was impressed with Dave's lawyer, even though Paul was not impressive on the surface. He was at least six-six but thin as a post. A thatch of unruly red hair was now blowing in the wind and his suit was rumpled from travel. But his eyes were clear, his gaze level, and his grip firm. She had a strange sense of inner peace, feeling deep in her heart that Dave would be in good hands with this drawling man from North Carolina.

"Let's get to work," said Paul as he yanked a battered briefcase off the back seat of the Matador. "First thing we need to do is get our boy out on bail."

They met the case's first road block in the person of a burly desk sergeant. "No bail for Court," he said briefly. "Says here on the arrest warrant that bail may not be discussed until the arraignment."

"I'm representing Mr. Court," said Paul. "May I see the warrant?"

Paul read it silently and then shared the comment about bail. "Due to the seriousness of this charge and apparent physical and circumstantial evidence, bail shall not be considered until the arraignment."

"When will that be?" asked Patricia dolefully.

"Have to check with the DA's office. Probably tomorrow or the next day."

"Not until then!" exclaimed Patricia tearfully. "Can I see him now?"

"Visiting hours are two till four," replied the sergeant briefly.

"I'd like to see Mr. Court right now," said Paul, "and his pastor, Jim Hogan, will be going in with me."

"You can. He can't." They were up against a strong-willed person with the authority to say no but not to say yes.

Paul turned to Patricia. "How far are you from home?"

"Less than half an hour," Jim answered for her.

Paul moved a little farther from the sergeant's station. "I don't think we'll be able to do anything about the visiting hours thing. Why don't y'all just go back home for now. I want to check out the charges a little more and then I'll go in and talk to Dave. And I want to talk to the DA, too. Then, if I have time, I'll meet you all for lunch. Any place good between here and the church?"

Jim suggested the Holiday Inn, just north of Carlisle on Route 11.

"If I'm not there by noon, go ahead and order without me. Oh, by the way. do you have a fax at the church?" Jim nodded and Paul jotted the number in his pocket notebook.

The county sheriff's office, the court house, and the prison were all within easy walking distance of each other. Typical small town convenience. First, Paul went to the sheriff's office and read the arrest and preliminary investigation reports. A medical report was not available so he called Harrisburg Hospital. Pediatrics would release no information so he asked for the administrator. When Paul met resistance in an organization, he rarely struggled up through layers of bureaucracy. Instead he vaulted to the top and then worked down. In a few moments, an intern was on the line who had been working the ER last night when Tessa was brought in. Paul didn't shock easily but his face was white when he hung up the phone.

Next, he walked over to the court house and asked for the DA. He was out but a receptionist informed him that an assistant would be taking the Court case. When Paul

asked for his name, he learned it was Priscilla Lane. However, Ms. Lane was in court so he'd have to check back later.

The Cumberland County Prison was dreary and depressing as most prisons are. Even though Paul had been in and out of many of them, he never really got used to the clanging and reverberating. And of course there was the pine-oil antiseptic odor tinged with urine which seemed to prevail, no matter which prison he was visiting. The desk sergeant remained true to form when he realized Dave had not called for him specifically.

"Since we have no record that you're representing the suspect, and since you're not a court-appointed attorney, I'm going to need something in writing."

"Give me something to write on." Paul scrawled a brief note to Dave on the back of a county requisition form which introduced himself as a lawyer Jim Hogan had called last night at the request of his wife, Patricia. At the bottom, he printed: "I hereby authorize Paul Donaldson to represent me in matters pertaining to my recent arrest."

"Take me to his cell and let him read this. If he signs it, I'm his attorney." The sergeant nodded and the clanging began which would lead to Dave Court.

The correction officer passed Paul's note through the bars, along with the stub of a pencil. After reading the note, Dave signed it readily. Then the lawyer was escorted to a single cell at the end of the block where they could have some privacy. Dave and Paul entered and the door clanged shut behind them. Paul introduced himself and the men shook hands. Dave sat on the cot and Paul sat on a folding wooden chair facing him. Paul was favorably impressed with his new client. Articulate, intelligent, a strong stereotype of the all-American boy, and very, very convincing in proclaiming his innocence.

"Mr. Donaldson, as God is my witness, I did not hurt that child. I love her as a daughter. If we-- if Patty and I have a little girl, I want her to be exactly like Tessa Stetson. Patty feels the same way." Dave leaned forward, elbows on his knees, and his intense blue eyes bored into Paul's serious brown ones. The lawyer was the first to look away, and he heard a very faint but very distinct warning bell chime just once, far back in the recesses of his memory. Have to think about that more later. "You have to believe me. I am totally innocent of this charge. Totally!"

"I do believe you, Dave. If I didn't I wouldn't take your case. I'm far too busy to work with a client who can't convince me of innocence. By the way, call me Paul. Mr. Donaldson is my father."

Dave nodded with a smile. "How soon will I be out on bail?"

Paul winced. "I hate to have to say this but it's better that you know the facts up front. I wouldn't count on bail at all."

Dave exploded off his cot. "What! Do you mean I have to stay here? For a false arrest?" Dave's fists were clenched at his sides and his face was red with anger.

"I understand exactly how you feel and I came here this morning prepared to arrange bail. Trouble is, when the judge issued the warrant for your arrest yesterday evening, he put in a stipulation that no bail could be granted until after the arraignment."

"This stinks! Drug dealers are arrested and out within the hour, and they're guilty as sin. How could the judge do that when he hasn't even heard the facts."

"The facts as he understands them at this point are exactly why he said no bail. The medical report is pretty rough and some potentially damaging physical evidence was discovered during the preliminary investigation. Apparently the DA claimed you could be a clear and present danger to the community and the judge wasn't willing to take any chances. I told Debbie on the phone last night, in child molestation cases like this where there is pretty strong physical evidence, judges and juries are really coming down hard on defendants."

"Yeah, but what about me being innocent until proven guilty?"

"Presumption of innocence is a Constitutional guarantee. But in the criminal justice system overall, that concept tends to be limited to what happens while you're in the courtroom. Like in your case, you haven't been proven guilty yet, but the DA is convinced you are and the judge is playing it safe, in case you are. In the meantime, you'll be treated in here just like you are guilty."

"Tell me about it. Just what is an arraignment, anyway, and when's it going to be?"

"It's scheduled for tomorrow morning at ten, over in the court house. At that time, the judge will explain the charges against you, tell you about your rights under the constitution, and ask for your plea. Your choices are guilty, not guilty, or not guilty by reason of insanity."

"Some choices," grunted Dave. "Of course I'm going to plead not guilty. Can we ask about bail then?"

"I'm going to press for that, of course. But between you, me, and the proverbial gate post, that's going to be a lost cause, like I told you before."

"Then what?"

"You'll appear at a preliminary hearing, again over in the court house, probably in another day or two. At that time, the prosecution will show that a crime was committed and that there is reasonable and probably cause to keep you in jail, or on bail, as the one who did it."

"Who's the prosecutor going to be. The DA?"

"One of his assistants, a woman by the name of Priscilla Lane."

"Does the fact she's a woman help or hurt."

Paul stroked his jaw. "Probably doesn't make a difference. The word around the court house is that she's very sharp, so don't be misled by the fact she's a woman. The judge is a man, though, and that's a definite plus. Judge Amos Schwartz. What a name."

"When do I get tried?"

"That date will be set after you go before the Grand Jury?"

Dave was clearly exasperated. "And what, may I ask, do they do?"

"The Grand Jury is a group of citizens from your community, probably fifteen or so, who look at all felony cases up front and make sure tax money isn't being wasted by taking someone to trial without cause."

Dave leaned forward on his elbows, head bowed. "How's Patty doing? he asked, looking up at Paul.

"Met her briefly this morning. She was really upset when they told her she wouldn't be able to see you until two this afternoon. Other than that, she seems to be holding up fairly well." Paul mentioned the lunch plans with Patricia and the Hogans and the fact that all three would be down to see Dave during the two-to-four visiting hours.

"Did Patty say anything about her doctor's appointment last night?" Paul looked blank. "Never mind, I'll wait and talk to her at two.

"Paul, you've been referring to some pretty heavy information about me which you know so far. Would I be out of line in asking just what that is?"

"Not at all. You have every right to know the kind of thing you're up against. The state is going to try to prove that you took Tessa home from school yesterday, went inside with her, and, while her father was asleep on the living room couch, took her into the back bedroom and raped her with the shaved-down handle of a wooden baseball bat."

Dave had been pacing the length of his cell but when he heard about the baseball bat, he sat down hard on the cot. His eyes were glazed with stress and pain.

"They think it's my bat?"

"Your name's burned on the tip of the barrel end with a hot tool of some kind."

"You know, I lost that bat at our softball tournament down in York. That was back on Memorial Day weekend. I use an aluminum bat at the plate. But for years, I've been carrying on old Hillerich & Bradsby-- an old Louisville Slugger to ball games, kind of like a souvenir."

"The one the police found was modified. The handle end was turned on a lathe and then sanded down so it came to a fairly sharp tip."

Dave felt bile rise in his throat. "Paul, I don't own a lathe and if I did, I wouldn't know how to use it. The last time I saw that bat, it was standing against a back stop down at the York Sports Complex. And it was normal size and weight."

"Your ball cap was found in her bed, too."

"I can probably explain that. She wanted to wear it home from school yesterday. She does that every once in a while, especially if I have a new cap. Brings it back to school the next day and gives it to Patty. What I can't understand is where Roy, her dad, where Roy Stetson was while all this was going on. What's his story?"

"He says he slept through the whole thing and didn't wake up until his wife started screaming for him to call 911. Did you see Mr. Stetson when you dropped Tessa off?"

"Well, I didn't exactly see him but his car was parked out front and I did ask Tessa to check and make sure her daddy was home before I drove away. She yelled out the door that he was there and so I took off."

"Can you tell me where you went and what you did after you dropped Tessa off?"

"I headed down towards Shippensburg because I had a class last night at the University. There was some reading I needed to do for the class so I stopped at that rest area along I-81 and read till it got dark. Then I drove on down to Shippensburg."

"Did you talk to anyone at that rest area, or did anyone see you while you were there?"

"I didn't talk to a soul. Used the rest room once but it was empty at the time."

"What were you driving?"

"New Mazda Miata. Red."

"Red Miata," mused Paul as he stroked his jaw. "That particular car might catch someone's attention but finding such a person would be pretty tough, especially if they're from out of state."

"What you're really saying is that I don't have anything even close to an alibi. Right?"

Paul nodded and then rose to stand beside the cot and rest his hand on Dave's shoulder. "Dave, I'd like to pray with you before we talk about the extent of Tessa's injuries. I'm afraid this next part is going to be pretty rough on you." The lawyer used conversational inflection and phrases to ask God to sustain Dave during this bad time and to heal little Tessa. Then he said amen.

"How-- how-- how bad is she?" Dave choked out through a throat constricted with emotion.

"Some of this comes from the police report, some from the 911 operator, and the rest from the hospital. When Mrs. Stetson got home, Tessa had lost consciousness from loss of blood. She used warm compresses to control the bleeding until the ambulance got there. Fortunately Carla knew Tessa's blood type so the EMTs were able to start whole blood while they were still in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. The intern I talked to thinks that may have saved her life. Both the vagina and the rectum have been seriously damaged. She was in the operating room three hours. They repaired the vagina and rectum. But they had to install a temporary urethra and they performed a temporary colostomy, also.

Dave rushed to the commode and vomited violently until nothing was left but dry heaves.

G. Edwin Lint

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Chapter 15: Prison

The luncheon at the Carlisle Holiday Inn was very quiet. Debra just picked at a salad, Jim ate very lightly, and Patricia didn't eat at all. Only Paul ate a balanced meal. He did most of the talking, also.

"Patricia, I think y'all need to be realistic about Dave's situation. He's charged with a very serious crime, the DA has some pretty solid evidence, and he has next to no alibi at all. And, on top of all that, it still doesn't look good for bail, now or in the immediate future."

Patricia nodded silently, tears starting to spill down her cheeks. After blowing her nose and wiping her face, she looked at Paul with both pain and fear in her eyes. "Will you tell me what you were able to find out about the charges?"

Paul briefly reviewed Tessa's injuries and the physical evidence. When the bat was mentioned, Jim spoke up.

"I remember that Louisville Slugger of Dave's, and the whole team knows he lost it down at York during the tournament. Do you think the person who assaulted Tessa stole it that day?"

"It's possible."

"Maybe the criminal took it then just to frame Dave with," volunteered Debra.

Paul looked doubtful. "If he did, that would be real tough to prove. Especially since that bat disappeared almost four months ago. That would mean the perpetrator had a high level of animosity against Dave and planned this thing over a long period of time. Possible but not probable. Besides, sex crimes are rarely planned in advance. They tend to be more spontaneous in nature."

"I know you're the legal expert," said Debra seriously "but this may not be what you might refer to as a 'normal' sex crime, if there is such a thing. The extent of injuries Tessa suffered would seem to indicate sadistic involvement. And with Tessa being so young, I'd say we should be including a pedophile in our list of possibilities."

"And you know how Debra and I feel about the connection between demon possession and sex crimes. When you factor in demonic involvement, anything is possible."

"Possible, but not provable in a court of law," said Paul quietly.

Jim glanced at his watch. "It's getting late. What's the situation at the prison as far as visitation is concerned? Find anything out about that?"

"Visiting hours are from two till four, as we already know, and only one person per prisoner can be in the visiting room at one time. I'm not sure about anything beyond that."

Quietly they paid the check, went out to the cars, and drove down to the prison. The desk sergeant's mood hadn't improved since earlier in the day.

"Sign the register, go in one at a time, and when you go in, leave all your belongings behind," he said curtly. "If you have something for a prisoner, leave it here with me and we'll check it before the prisoner gets it."

"I'm Mr. Court's pastor," said Jim. Does the one at a time rule apply to me, too?"

"Yep."

"Patricia, why don't you go in first," said Debra softly. "Then we'll take turns."

The younger woman nodded and took out her compact to check her makeup. In about five minutes, a uniformed matron informed the Court visitors that the first one could enter. Patricia followed the matron's broad back down a corridor to a door marked 'registered visitors only'. The matron unlocked the door and then locked it behind her.

The visiting room was divided by a partition which separated the prisoners from their visitors. A counter ran the length of the partition on both sides, with a glass window above it. Along the length of both counters, black dial-less phones were positioned every five feet. A folding chair was at each phone but there was nothing to separate one visitor station from the next. On the prisoners' side of the glass window, thin steel bars reinforced the separation of prisoners and their visitors.

When Patricia entered, all visitor chairs were taken except the one in the middle of the counter. Patricia walked to that chair and sat down. Five minutes passed and then Dave was escorted into the prisoner's half of the visiting room. He was dressed in an orange jump suit with short sleeves and he was wearing hand cuffs. On the back of his jump suit were large, black, stenciled letters which read "Cumberland Co Prison". Patricia couldn't stop the tears but she was able to hold her smile steady as she picked up the phone and looked at her Dave through the glass and bars.

Dave had a little trouble picking up the phone on his side of the partition because of the cuffs. Finally he got it in place by using a two-hand grip. "What did the doctor say last night?" he asked intensely.

"I love you, Daddy," Patricia answered with a broad smile.

"Thank you, Jesus," was all Dave could say before he broke down and cried.

Patricia waited as he struggled to regain control, her heart breaking as she watched him carefully lay the phone in his lap. He then wiped his eyes and nose on his fingers and

leaned way down to wipe his hands on a pant leg near the cuff. Apparently he didn't have a handkerchief or couldn't reach it with the cuffs on. She glanced at the other prisoners in the room and was irritated to note that Dave was the only one wearing cuffs.

Finally Dave was ready to pick up his phone again. "Are they treating you all right? Do you need anything?" Patricia asked anxiously.

"The thing I need most is to get out of here. Is Paul with you? Did he tell you about the problem with bail?"

Patricia nodded and for the next several minutes they exchanged the private small talk which acts as the adhesive of a solid marital relationship. In no time, it was two forty-five by the clock on the wall behind Dave. After saying she would be back in later, she blew him a kiss through the partition and walked to the door by which she had entered the visiting room. A correction officer was on hand to unlock it for her and the matron was in the hall to escort her back to the registration desk. Tears flowed freely with each step she took.

Debra went in next, and made small talk with Dave for about fifteen minutes. She hadn't gotten to know him real well and felt a little awkward visiting over the phone with all of the activity on both sides of the partition. After promising to keep both Dave and Patricia in her prayers, she left and it was Jim's turn.

Pastors were able to visit prisoners in a special locked room off the main visiting room which did not have a partition. Patricia had told Jim about Dave's need of a handkerchief and gave him some tissues to take with him.

The alcove in which they visited had a conventional cell door with bars. A correction officer remained within earshot at all times. When they first met, Jim hugged the young man fiercely and then they sat down to talk.

"First, I want to thank you and Debra for making arrangements for Paul Donaldson to represent me. He really seems to know his stuff and I appreciate all you're doing for me. I just don't know how we're going to pay for all this. Maybe we ought to use a public defender after all. You know we're going to have a baby and I can't let us get way in debt now, of all times."

Jim was firm in his denunciation of that idea. "You just concentrate on being a proud poppa and let Paul and me take care of the business end of things."

"I thought I'd get right out on bail as soon as my lawyer appeared. But now, I understand I may not be able to get bail because of the evidence they think they have against me." Dave's intense gaze demanded straight information. "What do you think about all this?"

"Well, Paul's the expert. All I really know is what he tells me, and I guess he's told you the same things. The DA and the sheriff's office feel they have very strong physical

evidence. They're denying you bail because they're afraid you may be a danger to other little girls in the community." Jim hated to be so blunt but he'd decided before he went in to visit Dave that we would tell him the facts as he understood them and not try to sugarcoat the situation one bit.

Dave struggled with his breathing for a few seconds. Then he said very softly but with great intensity, "Jim, you know I could never hurt little Tessa or anyone, for that matter. I love that little girl and she loves me, just like father and daughter. I don't know if you've heard anything about this, but she gets very little attention from her father and absolutely no affection. Carla told Patty that months ago, right after the Stetsons moved here and Tessa started going to day care. I guess he's on the road a lot with his job, or something. I really don't know all that much about him, for that matter. But I do know this much. We've had a real close relationship, right from the first time I saw her in Patty's class. But every thing has been absolutely innocent, as God is my witness. Totally innocent. And I'd say, at least ninety five per cent of the time we've been together, it has been right under Patty's nose, right there in the day care at the church, of all places." The broken young man leaned over, planted his elbows on his knees, and rested his head on his cuffed hands.

"How well do you understand what's going to be happening in the next week or so," asked Jim.

"Paul's explained it all pretty much, I guess," said Dave. "About the arraignment, and the preliminary hearing, and the Grand Jury. Stuff like that."

"Unfortunately for you", said Jim sadly, "this is a really touchy case. You know how stirred up the country has become over preschool sexual abuse cases lately. Everyone from Geraldo to Larry King has been focusing on this kind of thing with lots of TV and radio air time."

Dave stared off into space for a while and then asked, "Can you tell me anything about how Tessa is doing?"

It was Jim's turn to hesitate. "I did stop at the hospital late last night. She was sleeping under pretty heavy sedation but I got a chance to spend some time in prayer at the hospital before I left."

"She's going to be all right isn't she?" asked Dave, his blue eyes shining with tears. "That's the really important thing. What happens to her, not what happens to me."

"Paul told me he shared some of the medical facts with you this morning. She's been hurt very, very badly and we all must pray with all of our combined faith that she will heal completely."

"Poor, poor Tessa. Poor little girl," murmured Dave brokenly with his head once more propped on his cuffed hands. "Pastor, can we pray together right now? Let's agree together that Tessa will be completely well again," he said hoarsely.

"That was the very next thing on my agenda," agreed the pastor. The men took turns praying, with Dave going first. In Jim's prayer, he again emphasized Tessa's need for healing in her mind and spirit as well as her body.

After saying "amen", Jim glanced at his watch. "Dave, it's almost quarter to four. Why don't I leave now so Patricia can see you a couple minutes before visiting hours are over. Dave nodded and both men rose, shook hands, and Jim left.

Patricia hurried down the corridor to the visiting room, well ahead of the sauntering matron who carried the keys. She glanced at her watch. It was three fifty. Of course the matron had to try three times until she got the right key in the lock.

As Patricia rushed up to the counter between the two sections of the visiting room, Dave was being escorted to the exit which led out to the main part of the prison and his cell block. Quickly she picked up the phone and rapped it frantically on the glass. Dave turned, saw her, and stepped out of line to rush back to the partition and pick up the phone on his side. The clock on the wall showed two minutes to four. You might know that clock would be fast.

"I love you, Dave," Patricia said breathlessly, "and I'm praying for you every minute."

"I love you, too, Patty," responded her husband. "Be sure to take real good care of yourself." He wanted to say more but one of the correction officers who had been escorting the prisoners back to their cells took the receiver from Dave's hands and placed it in the cradle. Then the guard mutely pointed to the clock where the red sweep second hand was climbing the last thirty seconds to four o'clock.

Quickly Patricia blew Dave a kiss. But when he tried to return it, the man in uniform grasped him by the elbow and propelled him toward the visiting room exit. That didn't keep Dave from turning and mouthing over his shoulder "I love you" before the steel door slammed behind him.

"Visiting hours are over, ma'am," said the matron from over by the visitors exit. Numbly Patricia left the visiting room to rejoin the Hogans and Paul Donaldson in the waiting room.

Paul suggested that they all go across the street to a small mom and pop restaurant and have a cup of coffee while he brought them up to date. The cafe-style restaurant was quaint outside and cozy inside. They sat at a table for four with a red and white checkered tablecloth. The Hogans and Paul ordered coffee but Patricia asked for a glass of water only. She needed to take something for her headache.

Paul did have more information, but none of it was seemed to be good.

"Got a chance to talk to the DA a little this afternoon while y'all were visiting," Paul said. "Kind of a hard nosed guy, I'm afraid. Said 'preacher or no preacher, he's going to trial without bail'. Any ideas what he meant by that 'preacher' thing?" Paul paused to dump two cream containers and three packets of sugar into his coffee.

The Hogans and Patricia looked at each other and Jim spoke first. "He probably knows Dave is employed by the church as assistant director of Wesley Day Care."

"I thought Patricia was in charge of the day care," Paul said a little sharply."

"She is," answered Jim, "and Dave is her assistant. The board appointed him to that position effective August first. He'd been doing a lot of volunteering in his free time and he got along great with the kids, so the board agreed to make the Courts a team."

Debra spoke for the first time. "I suppose the DA just naturally assumed that anyone on the church payroll in a professional capacity would be a preacher, don't you think Jim?"

No one spoke for a while as Paul stroked his right jaw line. Patricia and the Hogans would come to recognize that as a sure sign of deep thought, or deep trouble, or both. This time it was both.

"Y'all know this already, but we need to get it out on the table and talk about it," Paul said in his North Carolina accent. "Most folks who aren't in the evangelical movement think born-again Christians are some kind of crack pots. The way the movies and TV show us Christians on the screen sure doesn't help none, either. When's the last time you saw a Bible-believing and church-attending Christian being shown as someone even close to normal? We're usually some kind of weirdo or sicko or both." Paul paused to take a sip of his heavily-laden coffee. "I'm afraid that when the press gets a hold of this preacher business, Dave's case and your church are going to get a lot of bad publicity."

"I can see how this could hurt the church," said Patricia, "but how can it hurt Dave's case?"

"Jurors," answered Paul with a heavy emphasis on the second syllable, "are human just like you and me. We lawyers try to screen out the ones who have been unduly influenced by what they've already read and heard before the trial begins. But there's a point of diminishing return with that. Do you really want people hearing Dave's case who don't read the papers, don't read *Time*, don't listen to network news on radio or TV? My guess is, you don't, because those kind of people are not going to be sharp enough to pay close attention to the testimony in a long trial and make an informed decision on innocence or guilt. Maybe not sharp enough to stay awake, even." Paul signaled the waitress for more coffee, having just finished one of his longer out-of-court speeches. The group was silent while the lawyer poured cream and sugar into his cup. Then Paul continued.

"So you got your choices. You can have a dodo who's never heard of a well-publicized case. Or you can have a sharper person who's been following the case in the media and may be prejudiced coming in. Tough choices."

"Do you really think this case is going to draw that much publicity in a small town like this?" asked Jim seriously.

"Count on it," drawled Paul. "When you put together a two-year-old child, alleged sexual assault, and a quote preacher, you have major news coverage. And I'm talking the three networks plus MS-NBC, Fox News, the AP, UPI, syndicated columnists-- and those are just the good guys. Add in the TV tabloids, to say nothing of the print tabloids. That last group will be on this thing like a duck on a June bug. After the OJ Simpson thing, all these guys have to do is punch a couple buttons and they're fully operational."

Jim glanced at his watch and then slapped the table in self-incrimination. "Will you look at the time! Four forty-five, and I'm on the air in twenty minutes!"

"You're not going to make it. What're you going to do?" asked Debra anxiously. Paul looked at both of them quizzically.

"Debbie, you pay the bill and Paul, can you take the ladies up to Mechanicsburg? Owe you one, buddy." He slapped Paul on the back and left the cafe at a dead run, door jingling in his wake.

Everyone else was ready to leave, also, so Debra paid the check and they left the cafe a little more sedately than Jim had done. They walked to Paul's Matador which was parked in the court house parking lot. Debra and Patricia were startled to see a cluster of reporters waiting at the car. Paul seemed to expect it.

"May as well get used to it, Patty," Paul said. "They're going to be part of your life to some degree or another for the next several weeks. Let's do it this way. Debbie, you take Patty's other arm and we'll keep her between us. Both of you ladies get in the back seat on the left side. I'll hop in the driver's seat and we're out of here." Both ladies nodded. "And remember, the only thing we say is 'no comment'. Makes 'em madder'n hops but that's the scenario for now."

At that moment a reporter spotted them and they all rushed down the sidewalk to meet them, shoving and arguing for position. Debra spotted a couple minicams from local TV stations and at least four reporters or sound men were carrying boom mikes on long extensions. Suddenly one of those mikes was thrust in Patricia's face.

"How do you feel about your husband's arrest, Mrs. Court?" bawled the wielder of the pole mike.

"No comment," drawled Paul laconically while batting the mike aside.

One of the local reporters recognized Debra and a mike was thrust in her face. "How come your church hired a child molester to run your day care?" the reporter asked abruptly. Patricia gasped and stumbled but her friends supported her. Again Paul batted the mike away and said no comment.

Finally the clot of reporters with Patricia, Paul, and Debra in the center reached the Matador. A man with a minicam put a leg up on the Matador's left fender in preparation for hopping up on the hood. "Off the paint, buddy, Paul growled as he grabbed him by the belt and jerked down firmly. The man stumbled back and sat down hard on his rump. His colleagues laughed hilariously.

Quickly Paul got the ladies into the back seat. "Lock all the doors, Debbie," he instructed as he pushed down the lock button on his door and slammed it. Then he turned and faced the reporters.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you're looking at a fully-restored 1972 American Motors Matador V-8 station wagon with air conditioning and full power. My dad bought this car brand new and it means a lot to me. My name is Paul Donaldson from Washington and I'm representing David Court. That means we'll be seeing a lot of each other for some time. Now get this and get it straight. Nobody touches my car. Got that?" and he looked directly at the camera man who was still brushing dirt and leaves from his clothes. Paul turned and signaled Debra to unlock the front door.

"Can you give us a statement, Mr. Donaldson?" called someone from the back row as a boom mike appeared above his head.

"I just did," drawled Paul as he slammed the door. Slowly he backed out of the parking place and they were on U.S. 11 headed north to Mechanicsburg.

"I can't believe that guy trying to stand on your hood," said Debra as she gazed around the interior appreciatively. "You did a great job restoring this old lady. Last time I saw her, she was a piece of junk, if you don't mind my saying so."

"You're right. That must of been soon after I brought her back from North Carolina. You see, while my dad still had her, the inspection station found major rustout underneath and wouldn't pass her. Said she was structurally unsound and that the front end was not being properly supported. It would have cost Dad five hundred dollars to get her back on the road and that was more than she was worth. So he junked her and got twenty five dollars instead of paying five hundred. The next week or so, I went down to Hickory to visit the folks and found out the Matador was at the junk yard. The owner sold her back to me for a hundred dollars. I got me one of those U-Haul towing rigs and towed her back to Ashtabula. Couple thousand and a lot of hours of hard work and look at her now," and he patted the dash board affectionately.

Debra checked her watch. "Oh, Paul," she said quickly. "Do you have FM? It's five minutes after five and Paul's program is coming on. I want to see if he made it in time."

"Of course I have FM," he said, acting insulted. "What's the numbers?"

"Ninety point seven, WMOR in Camp Hill."

"What's this radio thing all about, anyway?" asked Paul as he manually tuned to the proper spot on the old-fashioned analog dial.

You'll see," said Debra smugly.

Jim was torn between his need to get to his office before five oh seven and his long-standing policy of always driving no more than five m.p.h. above the legal limit. When he got to the Carlisle exit of the Pennsylvania Turn Pike just north of the city, he decided to take it instead of risking traffic jams and lights along the more direct route. He had his window down as he approached the toll booth. He punched the red button, got his ticket, and rolled up his window without coming to a complete stop. Ten miles to the Gettysburg exit where he would get off on US 15 North, just two miles below the church. A total of twelve miles in just a little over ten minutes. He'd have to watch and pray. Watch for cops and pray for safety. The Eagle's 1.5 engine was a puppy getting away from a light but it cruised very nicely at higher speeds. Jim laid the needle on seventy and pressed the cruise button.

"Exit 17 Gettysburg 2 miles," the sign said. The Eagle's dash clock, which was synchronized to CROSS network time for just such an eventuality, showed 5:02. Jim fished a dollar out of his wallet and tucked it in his shirt pocket. As he approached the Exit 15 toll booth, he rolled down the window and got the dollar and his ticket in his left hand. He thrust them into a surprised toll taker's hand and said keep the change. Fortunately traffic was light on 15 and he was able to merge without breaking stride. As he approached the Wesley Drive exit of 15 he could hear WMOR start its sixty-second local weather forecast. As he raced into the church driveway, all four tires were growling hoarsely in protest. Instead of parking in back as he usually did, he squalled to a stop right in front of the main entrance. The weather was over and WMOR was doing a station ID and time check.

Jim forced himself to stroll leisurely up the walk and into the church. He knew if he ran, he'd be too out of breath to talk normally on the air. Sandy flashed him a relieved smile as he entered the reception area and strode into his office. He jerked on his headset and adjusted the boom mike. The program theme was playing in his right ear and suddenly the red light above the digital clock was on. Show time.

He vamped a little, giving the phone number and mailing address, stretching that meager information as long as he could. And while he did that, he checked the four calls showing on his monitor. A knot grew in his stomach as he realized that each call could have

something to do with Dave and Tessa. He picked the one which looked like it might be the least toxic and pressed its button.

"You're in 'The Pastor's Study'. Hello, Veronica in Chula Vista, California." Although she wanted to talk about day care, she surely couldn't know about Dave and Tessa.

G. Edwin Lint

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Chapter 16: Arraignment

Jim couldn't have been more wrong about Veronica, from Chula Vista. "What's this I hear about you having an assistant pastor at your church who goes around molesting little girls? I've been listening to your program since you first went on the air last month and I didn't think you would tolerate a thing like that. What do you have to say for yourself?"

That stung, no doubt about it. Jim was thankful for Paul's perception that this kind of thing would happen. That, and the calls on his screen, gave him a little warning of what might be coming while he was on the air.

"Veronica, you're referring to a criminal case which is going to end up in court. I'm going to make just one statement about this case and one statement only. So all of you who are on hold right now waiting to talk about this, and all of you who are planning to call in and talk about this some more, please take note. Here is my last word." Jim wished he had time to write his last word before he went on the air with it but he didn't have that luxury. He took a deep breath and plunged in.

"Last night, a member of this church, David Court, was arrested for sexually assaulting a little girl who attends the church's day care program. However, I can say as a personal friend as well as his pastor that Dave Court is innocent of all charges. The police and the district attorney think he's guilty so that means he may have to go to trial. And by the way, Mr. Court is not a minister in the Wesley Evangelical Church. However, he is the assistant director of our day care program. Pending the outcome of his trial he will be on leave of absence without pay." Jim paused a few seconds, wondering if he should say anything more. However, he was saved by the cutaway theme which appeared in his right ear at that moment. "I'll be back to take your calls which do not relate to the David Court situation right after these important messages from your local station."

Paul turned the ignition key from the accessory position to the off position and the radio died. They had been listening to "The Pastor's Study" while parked in the Court driveway. There was no sound except Patricia's sobbing for several moments. Silently Debra gave her a tissue and then held the crying woman's ice-cold hands in her warm ones.

"Do you want me to stay with you for a while?" asked Debra softly.

Patricia shook her head. "Thanks, Debbie, but no. I think I need to be alone for a while."

"I understand," said Debra as Patricia got out of the Matador. Paul waited to make sure Patricia got her door open all right.

As they drove away, Paul slowly stroked his jaw. "This sure is a bad one for all of you. Dave's facing serious charges with strong circumstantial evidence against him. Patricia's

husband is in jail and she's expecting a baby. And the press is going to try and smear you and the church because Dave was a church employee." Then he turned and gave Debra a wide, boyish grin. "But aren't you glad you called Paul."

"I sure am," she agreed. "You don't know how much Jim and I appreciate your being willing to take this case. It's such a comfort knowing that a Christian as well as a friend has everything under control."

"I wish!" said Paul, switching the radio back on.. "So tell me, what's Jim up to with this radio deal?" They could hear Jim in the background talking to a caller from Clinton, Iowa who wondered why the church service on Sunday morning used so many militant songs. The caller's name was Rodney. Debra turned the volume up a little.

"Could you give me some examples, Rodney, of what you consider to be militant songs."

"Well, I was listening to your worship broadcast this past Sunday and in that one service I heard "Sound the Battle Cry" and "Keep on the Firing Line". I guess my question is, how can this kind songs fit in with a worship service when Christians are supposed to be peaceful, and peace-loving."

Debra gritted her teeth, hoping the stress of the day would not prompt Jim to be sharp with this caller.

"For the rest of you listeners who may not be aware of it, some church administrators are trying to take all references to warfare out of our hymnals. Jim went on to explain about hymnology and spiritual warfare.

"Our next call is from Rayville, Louisiana. You're in 'The Pastor's Study'. Hello, Charles . . ."

Debra breathed a little easier. Jim had been a little acidic with what he had said to Rodney but he had kept his voice mellow. She then went on to explain to Paul about Ray Benson, CROSS radio, and "The Pastor's Study".

Paul stroked his jaw. "Does he use a call screener?"

"Yes, his administrative assistant, Sandy Simpson, does that for him and she's excellent."

"She'll need to be," Paul responded. That line is going to be jammed with people wanting to talk about Dave and Tessa. She'll really have to stay tough, in spite of the statement Jim gave a little bit ago."

The Matador rolled to a stop in the rear parking lot. Jim still had about five minutes of air time so Debra took Paul into the reception area and they chatted with Sandy.

"Have you seen the 'Evening News'?" Debra and Paul shook their heads so Sandy reached into her carryall and pulled out her copy, sliding it across the desk. The front page banner

headline read, "LOCAL MINISTER ARRESTED FOR CHILD MOLESTATION". Paul took one look at that headline and reached for Sandy's phone. Furiously he dialed 1-555-1212.

"In Harrisburg, the 'Evening News'," he said in response to the information operator. "City desk, please. . . Yes, I'll hold." Sandy's eyes were as big as dollars and Debra was a little tense, also. But Paul flashed them a big wink and they both relaxed. He switched the phone to his other ear, leaned back in his chair, and propped a well-shined pair of penny loafers on the edge of Sandy's desk. She grinned broadly, anxious to see what would happen next.

"Hello, City Editor? . . . Good. I'm looking for a little more information about the local minister in your top story tonight. Could you give me his name, please? . . . I see. Let me introduce myself. My name is Paul Donaldson and I represent both the defendant, David Court, and the church which employs him. Could you give me the name of the fact-checker who cleared this story for publication? . . . Of yes you can. Your freedom of the press only extends to printing facts and you have printed a major error. Therefore, you have forfeited whatever First Amendment rights you thought you had as far as this error is concerned."

Jim stepped out of his office at that moment and saw the paper lying on Sandy's desk. He snatched it up and began reading the first paragraph, fury flashing from his eyes with each sentence he read. Debra tugged his sleeve and pointed to Paul, mouthing the word "listen".

"Speaking for the pastoral staff and the official church board, I'll tell you what you can do to make amends. First, I am demanding a correction in tomorrow's morning edition which specifies that the defendant in this case is not a minister. And that correction will be set in the same point type as was the erroneous headline. . . Oh, but you will. Because if you don't, I will release a story to the wire services which will make you wish you had. . . . Good. Now, my second point. I want a reporter over here first thing in the morning to talk with Pastor Jim Hogan. Makes sense, doesn't it. If you want to print facts, you have to gather facts first, right? We'll give your reporter facilities right here in the church office to type up the final version of that story before he or she leaves so we can see it in print before anyone else does. . . . I know it's not your normal way of working, but then you're not dealing with a normal lawyer, either.

"Okay. Now, I'll tell what we'll do. If you print that correction as I have specified, and the story as it was typed up here, we'll guarantee you an exclusive which you can then feed to the wire services if and when you want to. That'll help us both. You'll get credit for the exclusive and we'll use your story as our standard statement every time a pesky reporter comes nosing around. . . . You, too. Nice doing business with you."

Everyone except Paul was speechless. "Sandy, can you give me a dollar?" Poor Sandy didn't quite know how to take this drawling, foot-propping lawyer from North Carolina. With eyes bigger than ever, she fished out a dollar bill and handed it to Paul.

The lawyer turned to Jim and said, "The official board has just retained me to represent you and your church's best interests in all matters pertaining to the David Court case." He paused and grinned. "Court's court case. That could get you tongue-tied, couldn't it? Anyway, I'm your lawyer now, too. Shake?" He stretched out a lanky arm and the two friends shook hands firmly.

"Paul Donaldson, you're something else," Jim said with a laugh and they hugged briefly. "I'm not sure I completely understand what happened on the phone a minute ago--"

"And it's just as well that you not know," interrupted Paul. "I won't tell you how to preach and you won't tell me how to lawyer. Agreed?"

"Agreed. Hey, I have an idea. Why don't we all go out tonight? Maybe Red Lobster. It's almost six thirty and Debra hasn't had a chance to do anything about dinner."

"That would be nice," commented Debra. "Sandy, how about it? You and Miles want to come along, too? Since Paul is now the church's lawyer, he may as well start getting to know the members of the board."

Everyone was agreeable and all but Jim left for the parsonage. He promised he'd be over by seven in time to leave for the restaurant. When the office area was vacant, Jim went back into his study and closed the door. He switched on the back lighting for a two-foot by three-foot transparency rendering of Warner Sallman's moving painting "Christ Our Pilot". In the foreground was a young man at the wheel of a storm-lashed ship at sea. In the background could be seen the wind-whipped waves. But at the shoulder of the struggling helmsman stood Jesus, his right hand pointing the way through the stormy night. Jim stared at the illuminated transparency for several minutes and then pulled out his battered college year book.

Jim Hogan had been assistant year book editor the year he graduated from Bible college. The class motto had been "Christ Our Pilot" and it was Jim's idea to get permission of the copyright owners to use the Warner Sallman painting in a full-page display of that motto. He then had volunteered to write the words and music for a class song built around the concept of that same motto.

With a wry smile, he turned to the song and studied it for a while. Never was sung in public except for the senior class struggling through it at graduation with Jim directing. A little corny in places. But it had been oh so comforting many times when the storms of life had threatened the frail bark of his soul. He still remembered the tune well enough to sing it all the way through:

*Now our stay at school is done,
And before our eyes is flung
The great sea of life so vast,
Into which our bark is cast.
Will we reach the blissful shore?
Will we sink to rise no more?*

*Many dangers mark our way;
Hidden rocks beneath the spray,
Rushing waves on every side,
Clouds that seek our goal to hide.
Winds and storms and sky so dark,
Try in vain to sink our bark.*

*Even though our fear is great
And our vessel soon may break
We must never cry and groan;
We are not at sea alone.
Let us ever trust the Lord;
Christ Our Pilot is on board!*

This time, Jim couldn't sing it all the way through, his travail of soul was so great. But the last two lines gave great comfort, even if he only mouthed the words: "Let us ever trust the Lord; Christ Our Pilot is on board!"

The phone rang and he roused from his reverie with a start, glancing at his watch as he picked up the receiver. "Pastor Hogan."

"Jim, it's seven o'clock. Are you ready?"

"Coming, Debra."

Wednesday was to be the day for Dave's arraignment, the day when everyone hoped Judge Schwartz would grant bail. But it was not to be, on Wednesday, at least. Just as the Hogans and Paul were getting ready to leave the parsonage for the Court House, Paul got a call from the DA's office. His face was longer than usual when he hung up.

"This is going to make Patty feel lower than a snail's tail," he said seriously. "That was the DA's office. Priscilla Lane has been called out of town on urgent personal business and Dave's arraignment has been postponed until Friday morning at ten o'clock. There was a moment of dejected silence. Everyone felt sorry for both Dave and Patricia.

"Think I'll redeem the time by driving down to Philly and getting up to speed on this Board of Education case I was telling Debbie about on the phone the other night," Paul said suddenly. If you don't hear from me, I'll meet y'all at the Court House Friday

morning. Here's a number in case you need to reach me before then," and he scribbled a number on the back of a "Call Paul" card.

"Jim, one of us has to call Patricia.," reminded Debra. Jim offered to do it, hating the thought of being the bearer of such bad news.

"Superior Court for the County of Cumberland is now in session," monotoned a young woman standing beside a steno machine. She was apparently doubling as the court clerk and the court recorder. "Judge Amos Schwartz, presiding. All rise."

Patricia, Debra, and Jim were sitting in the front row, right behind Paul and Dave at the defendant's table. While they were waiting for the judge to take his seat on the bench, the sound of a number of people entering the court room caused several folks to turn and look. And those who turned to look ended up staring in disbelief.

The judge did a fair amount of staring of his own. Seldom if ever was an arraignment attended by more than the lawyers, the defendant, and a few close family members. Now a group of about twenty-five people was filing into front rows on the defendant's side of the court room and taking their seats. And everyone was wearing some kind of uniform. Is this some sort of demonstration? He walloped his gavel three times with more force than usual. "Be seated."

Paul and Dave had a hurried, whispered conference. Then, Paul turned to Debra who was immediately behind him and there was more whispering.

Then Ms. Lane was on her feet. "Your honor, I'd like to know about the audience over here," and she waved a multi-ringed hand in the direction of the defendant's side of the court room. "If this is some kind of stunt cooked up by my esteemed colleague from North Carolina, I demand to know about it."

"Counselor?" invited Judge Schwartz.

"No stunt, I assure you," replied Paul. "Although I was not aware of this ahead of time since I just drove in from Philly this morning, these people are friends of my client and they are attending in his support."

"Attending an arraignment?" questioned the judge with annoyance. "Are they aware that all we're going to do here this morning is make formal charges, hear a plea, and acquaint the defendant of his constitutional rights during a judicial proceeding."

"One more thing, your honor," reminded Paul. "You're also going to hear my motion to grant bail."

"Yes, that, too," said Judge Schwartz dismissively.

Jessi had difficulty suppressing a smile as she listened to what was going on. Wednesday evening at dinner, her Mom and Dad had been discussing the postponement of the

arraignment until Friday. Suddenly Jessi had a brain storm. Since early Tuesday morning, she had been trying to think of how she could help Dave and Patricia in their great time of need. And then it came to her. Why not call all the members of Dave's all-star softball team and get them to attend the rescheduled arraignment on Friday. And by luck, Friday was an in-service day for Mechanicsburg teachers and there was no school. So, she could bring along all the members of the Ivory Club who attended Wesley Evangelical. And wouldn't it be extra neat to have the ball players show up in uniform and the Ivory kids to wear their sweatshirts?

Jessi hoped that folks didn't think her group was here as spectators or to provide passive moral support. They were here to work and work hard. Jessi had been very explicit on the phone when she made her contacts. "We're going to pray like we've never prayed before. And our prayer target is going to be bail. I understand the DA's office is opposed to bail. And if he doesn't get it, they'll keep Dave in prison until the trial, and that may be months from now. If Peter could be prayed out of prison, Dave can be prayed out of prison, too!"

Jessi jumped a little as Judge Schwartz whacked his gavel before speaking directly to her group. "Your presence here is certainly unusual but you are welcome to stay as long as you are not disruptive. If you disrupt these proceedings in any way, I'll clear the court room immediately and hold this group's leader in contempt of court. Who is this group's leader? Surely someone had to organize this appearance." The judge leaned over the edge of the bench and peered down at Jessi's entourage.

The leader rose. "I guess I'm the leader, your honor," she said hesitantly.

"And who might you be?"

"Jessica Lee Hogan," your honor. "I'm a friend of Dave-- of the defendant."

"Go off the record," said Judge Schwartz to the young lady who was clicking away on her steno machine. "Now, Miss Hogan, just what kind of group have you brought into my court?"

"The guys in the pin stripes are members of a church soft ball team which Dav-- which the defendant coaches. And the kids in the sweatshirts like mine," and she gave a little tug to her shirt's hem, "are members of a club at school who happen to go to our church."

"I see," mused the judge. "And what kind of club might this be?"

"We're a virginity support group," your honor. "We encourage everyone to restrict sex to marriage, and we help kids who're having a struggle with that concept."

"Could you come a little closer," asked the judge. "I'd like to get a better look at your shirt."

Jessi stepped into the aisle and walked to stand by the defendant's table. Debra was amused to see she had her pin stripe scorekeeper's pants on, in addition to the Ivory sweatshirt.

"'Ivory. One hundred percent pure'," read the judge out loud. "Hmmm. You want to restrict sex to marriage, do you. Why's that?"

"Because that's God's plan for how we should live, as outlined in the Bible," said Jessi simply.

"Your honor, please--" began Ms. Lane, rising to her feet.

"Counselor, didn't you notice we're off the record, here. If you don't want to listen to this, leave."

The Assistant DA resumed her seat with compressed lips.

"Now, Jessica," continued the judge, "do your parents know you're out gallivanting around the county on a school day?"

"They're right here, your honor," said Jessi, turning to her right. "May I present Rev. and Mrs. James Alan Hogan.

Judge Schwartz truly smiled for the first time since entering the court room.

"May I congratulate you both on having such a fine daughter." The judge nodded in the direction of the Hogans. "If this county had more like her, I could retire early."

Jim rose. "Thank you very much, your honor. Her mother and I want all of you to know we'll very proud of her today," and he stepped into the aisle and kissed her on the cheek.

The Assistant DA was seething. *Gag me with a spoon!*

As Jessi was turning to go back to her seat, Judge Schwartz had one more question. "Are you a Yankee fan by any chance, seeing you're all wearing pin stripes?"

"Sure am," answered Jessi proudly.

"Think they'll take the AL East this year?"

"I think that Game One of the World Series will be played in Yankee Stadium!"

"Good girl," agreed the judge. "Me too!"

Ms. Lane rose. "Your honor, I move we go back on the record and complete this proceeding."

"Relax, Ms. Lane. The day is young." Judge Schwartz swiveled in his chair and faced back toward Jessi and the rest of the audience seated in the court room.

"Now, Miss Jessi. May I call you 'Miss Jessi'?"

"Sure", smiled Jessi, while watching the Assistant DA out of the corner of her eye. She was definitely wearing another "gag me with a spoon" expression.

"Miss Jessi, will you approach the bench?"

Approach the bench? Wow! That sure sounded legal, not in a scary way but in an official way. Maybe it might be kind of fun to be a ...

"Yes, Your Honor."

Judge Schwartz pulled his chair closer to his desk and leaned over the edge to peer down at Jessi through his half-spectacles. He spoke with normal volume and everyone in the room heard all that was said. "Miss Jessi, could you tell me just exactly what all your friends are doing in the court room today? This is the biggest crowd I've had at an arraignment since I've been sitting on this bench. I have an idea there's something a little unusual going on here and I'd kind of like to know what it is." The judge leaned a little closer. "I have a strong sense that you're a completely honest person, aren't you?"

"I always try to be," responded Jessi, not really sure what was coming next.

"Good!" Then tell me exactly why you brought your softball friends and your Ivory friends into my court room this morning. Can you do that please?"

Why not? Jessi raised her clear blue eyes and looked straight into the judge's serious brown ones. "My friends are here to pray for you. Right this second, they are asking the Holy Spirit to give you a full measure of wisdom in making the right decision about Dave's-- about bail for the defendant.

"I see," said the judge slowly, leaning back in his chair for a moment of contemplation. Then he leaned forward again.

"Are you saying that these robes," he plucked a fold of black fabric "and this gray" and he tweaked a tuft of his own hair above his right ear, "--this gray and mostly bald head, and all those diplomas hanging on the wall back in my chambers, are not sufficient evidence of my judicial perspicacity?"

There was a collective holding of the breath among Paul, Dave, Jim, Debra, and even Patricia. The Assistant DA was sneering openly.

Jessi maintained her clean, level gaze and answered meekly. "Your honor, if I were a defendant in your court, I would feel very comfortable with you hearing my case, as comfortable as any defendant can be, at least. In fact, sir, I kind of like you." she confided in a moment of teenage candor.

"But even King Solomon needed wisdom from God, and he was the wisest man who ever lived."

"That's something I'll never turn down, wisdom from God," said Judge Schwartz sincerely.

"Your Honor," said the assistant DA in a near-childish whine, "I move that we--"

Whack. "Motion granted," said the judge, matter of factly. He nodded at the court recorder who resumed clicking quietly on the keys of her steno machine. "The matter before this court today is the arraignment of David E. Court on the charge of felonious sexual assault against the person of the minor child of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Stetson, by the name of Tessa Stetson."

The judge continued in his court monotone, "The District Attorney's office has submitted the police investigation and arrest reports, as well as the preliminary medical report. I have reviewed these documents in chambers and it is my conclusion that there is sufficient evidence to hold Mr. Court for the Grand Jury."

"Mr. Court, will you and your counsel approach the bench.?" Dave and Paul moved forward and were joined by the court recorder, complete with her steno machine on a stand which she was able to lift to a height which permitted her to continue clicking away while standing erect.

"How do you plead?" asked the judge.

"Not guilty," answered Paul promptly.

The judge glanced at Dave to confirm the plea and he nodded briefly. The judge nodded in return and the court recorder clicked "not guilty" into the official court record.

"You may resume your places," said the judge to the small gathering at his bench.

Judge Schwartz then detailed the rights which Dave would enjoy during the trial process as outlined in the Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendments to the Constitution.

Then Paul stood. "Your honor, we move that the defendant be released on his own recognizance pending the convening of the Grant Jury and other court proceedings in this matter."

Priscilla Lane shot to her feet. "The People object, your honor. We request continued incarceration during the trial period on the basis of the severity of the charge, as well as the strong physical evidence which links the defendant to the crime. We contend that his continued presence in the community will constitute a clear and present danger to other little girls such as Tessa Stetson."

As soon as the Assistant DA took her seat, Paul was on his feet, speaking calmly but with conviction. "My client has no prior arrests and has been living and working peacefully in his community for several years. Defense will contend that the physical evidence noted by the People is based on mistaken identity. Therefore, the defendant is no greater threat now than he has been during the seventeen years he has lived in the Mechanicsburg area.

"Your Honor, may I present a character witness on behalf of my client's being released on his own recognizance?"

"You may proceed, but with a warning for both of you," the judge said, including both Paul and the Assistant DA in his stern glance. "At this time, I will hear nothing but testimony which speaks directly to the defendant's suitability to walk the streets of Mechanicsburg during the trial period. Is that clear?" Both lawyers responded in the affirmative. Then Paul said, "Defense calls Grace Carson."

"Ah, Dr. Carson," replied Judge Schwartz with a broad smile of recognition. "So nice to see you again. Would you mind coming forward and being sworn?"

"Of course not," answered Grace briskly. She strode to the witness stand and waited while the court recorder, in her role as court clerk, asked if she would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth under threat of punishment by almighty God.

Jessi focused all her prayer energy on what Grace was about to say and how Judge Schwartz would receive it. Up and down the rows occupied by her friends, the same thing was going on in the minds and hearts of Dave's softball team and the kids from Ivory.

Grace did her part, speaking calmly but with sincere intensity.

"I have known Dave Court since he entered kindergarten at High Street Elementary School. I taught sixth grade and was serving as Head Teacher at that time. Since then, I have had numerous occasions to observe him as a student and an athlete in my various capacities as elementary principal, and high school principal. Never in my thirteen years of contact with Dave in the Mechanicsburg school system have I observed violence in this young man. Of course he was mischievous at times, but never in an attitude of viciousness, always in clean fun."

Paul called Jim to the stand next and Jessi continued in a spirit of prayer as her dad offered his testimony.

"I have had several occasions to observe Dave with young children in general and with the victim in particular. In every instance, he has been friendly and fun-loving without the slightest connotation of anything sexual."

Suddenly the court room's double doors burst open with a double bang.

Chapter 17: Carla

"But Preacher, you yourself said last Sunday morning on the radio that people look at each other on the outside only, but God looks down into our hearts!" Carla Stetson was standing in the court room doorway, red-faced and screeching, clenched fists flailing the air. **"How do you know what lustful thoughts are in his heart while he's carrying my Tessa around on his back, playing horsey. Yeah, horsey! Stud is more like it!"** She paid no attention to the mighty gavel whacks Judge Schwartz was raining on his bench, except to direct her venom in his direction. Carla started down the aisle, still screeching and waving her fists.

"How can you call yourself a judge and allow people to suggest that this kinko creep is fit to be in the same room with my Tessa? Lock him up and throw away the key! That's what I say!" Carla had clearly lost control. Her face was beet red and contorted with hatred. As she screamed, flecks of foam flew from her mouth.

Two uniformed officers finally appeared in the doorway of the court room, assessed the situation, and hurried down the aisle toward Carla with handcuffs ready. But she reached the bench before the officers reached her. With an agility Jim didn't think a person could have in such a state of mind, she got a toe hold on a piece of ornamental molding on the front of the Judge's bench and hopped up to crouch on her hands and knees on the top where, she continued screeching right in the judge's face.

"If you let this weirdo out on bail after what he's done to my Tessa, I'm going straight to the Governor! No, I'm not! I'm going to the United States Congress! In fact, I'm going to the President!. You'll never sit up here in your sissy robes, you pompous, old --" and then Carla lapsed into a tirade of vitriolic obscenities and vulgarities which spewed out of her mouth like sludge from the sewers of hell itself. Jim was amazed that any human being could have such an articulate and fluent command of the obscene vocabulary which was now scorching the air around poor Judge Schwartz's ears. By now, the judge had pushed his high-backed leather chair back against the wall in a vain effort to escape the disheveled banshee which was continuing to vomit verbal atrocities in his face. The poor judge's glasses were lopsided and covered with her spittle. Carla had a firm hold on each arm of his chair and was violently slamming the chair against the wall behind the bench, over and over again. Down went the Pennsylvania flag. A couple more slams and the American flag was down also. Finally the officers got control of one of one of Carla's wildly flailing arms and snapped a cuff on it. That proved to be a mistake. Before the second cuff could be affixed to her free arm, the woman emitted such a violent roar of rage it seemed to rise up from the very caverns of Hell itself. With a strength beyond human knowledge, she broke free from both officers and started running down the aisle toward the door.

Carla was a mess. Her face was covered with blood, probably from a bloody nose received in the scuffle with the officers. Her blouse was ripped half-way open and her fitted skirt was up around her waist.

The burly desk sergeant from the prison down the street was in the doorway toward which Carla was racing, a police radio up to his face. The crazed woman ignored the officer and skidded to a halt right beside Jessi, who was sitting on the end of her bench, close to the aisle. And then to everyone's horror, especially Jim and Debra's, Carla lifted her hands from the folds of her skirt where it was bunched at her waist to reveal a police revolver which she was holding in a remarkably steady two-hand grip. Calmly Carla stepped up to Jessi and pressed the muzzle of the revolver firmly against the frightened girl's forehead, just above her eyebrows.

When Jim first heard Carla's vulgar, obscene, and profane outburst, he had known the true cause. Carla Stetson was demon-possessed. This was no clinical reaction to grief and rage. This was no situational maladjustment. This was nothing which could be explained by Freudian or Rogerian pschobabble. This was demonic power in its crudest, rawest, and most savage form. Although Jim had counseled many victims of demon possession, without exception their symptoms had shown a suave, smooth, almost undetectable form of evil. But this evil was different. This evil was straight from Hell itself, undiluted by the conniving posturings of snide and sophisticated demons. This was the work of one or more demons of the very lowest order in the demonic hierarchy.

When he realized Carla had snatched one of the officer's revolvers, he whirled to the front of the court room expecting the other man to have his gun trained on the woman's head. No hope there. Only one gun was in the court house and Carla had it. The other man was armed with nothing more lethal than a riot club, a flashlight, and a two-way radio.

From the first moment of Carla's outburst, Jim had been praying. Praying for the Holy Spirit to intervene. Claiming the power of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Now in a moment of inspired boldness, he began to pray aloud, beginning with the words of Bill and Gloria Gaither's song he loved so well. "'Come, Holy Spirit, we need You. Come, Sweet Spirit, we pray. Come in Your strength and Your power. Come in Your own gentle way'. Heavenly Father, if we ever needed you, we need you now. Cover us with the blood of your Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross as our Lamb of God, as our sin sacrifice. He died so that we won't have to die for our sins. We pray that right now you will send a detachment of Your Holy Angels to this court room and intervene on Jessi's behalf, right now, Lord! Right now."

As Jim prayed aloud, he was joined by Debra. And then, he began to hear Jessi's sweet voice, tremulous with fear, and very faint at first, but growing in volume and intensity. She, too, was saying those precious, ageless words of power, which had been used down through the centuries in the continuing conflict between God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Angels on the side of Good, in spiritual conflict against Satan and his

demons on the side of evil. Precious words. Powerful words. "Heavenly Father, we adore you as the one true God of all the universe. . . Cover us with the shed blood of your Son, Jesus Christ . . . Come, Holy Spirit, release your power in this room right now . . . Heavenly Father, You have promised that your Holy Angels will watch over us so we won't stub our toes on the path of life. Send those angels right now. Come, Holy Spirit."

One by one by kids from Ivory and the softball players overcame their temporary fears and joined their voices with those of the Hogan family. With ever increasing volume and intensity they prayed, using those same sweet and powerful words, knowing full well that it wasn't the words but the faith behind the words which transmitted their wishes straight to the throne room of Heaven. Some of those who prayed dropped to their knees. Others stood, arms lifted to Heaven with tears streaming down their faces. Not tears of fear. Not tears of horror. But rather, a curious blend of joy and exultation.

Then those who prayed began to join hands. It started with Debra walking to Jessi's side and, right under the baleful glare of Carla, taking Jessi's hand. Jim took Debra's hand. Paul came back from the defense table and took Jim's hand. Dave and Patricia quickly joined the chain of faith. And so it continued until every born-again believer in the court room was a link in the prayer chain which ended with Jessi. And as people moved about the court room to join the chain, the volume of prayer continued to increase.

During the praying and the linking, Carla listened and watched with a cynical smile on her face. Her eyes were hollow and lifeless, almost as though her face was carved from chalk. She began to speak, causing a lull in the praying.

"Where is your Heavenly Father? Where is your Bleeding Lamb? Where is your Holy Spirit? Where is that detachment of Guardian Angels? Do you see them. I sure don't see them. But I'll tell you what I do see. I see a Smith and Wesson .38 police special with its muzzle pressed against the forehead of the darling daughter of the Reverend and Mrs. James A. Hogan." As she spoke, she twisted the revolver so the barrel ground cruelly into Jessi's flesh.

"Now, let me tell you what's going to happen here, and it has absolutely nothing to do with a Heavenly Father, or a Bleeding Lamb, or a Holy Spirit. And it surely has nothing to do with Guardian Angels, whatever they are." She paused to wipe her bloody nose on a bare forearm. "Here's what's going to happen. This gun has room for six bullets. And there are six people in this room who will be dead in less than five minutes. The number one victim will be the preacher's kid here. She dies first because I want to make her father watch her brains run down the wall back there. The night my Tessa was in the hospital and near death, where was he--" and she repeated the tirade Jim had received over the phone the night Dave was arrested. And I want the mother to watch and suffer, too, because she's so hoity-toity and thinks she's better than anybody else. And I want that kink-headed weirdo who's been such close friends with this preacher's kid" and she jerked her chin in Dave's

direction, "to suffer because he's the one who almost killed my Tessa. That's the first bullet." And she held up one bloody finger.

Poor Jessi was crying silently, the sounds of praying dimmed by the perverse drama of the moment. Jim noted the silence with a start and resumed his praying. Others did, also, and soon, the volume of prayer was at its previous level.

Suddenly Carla moved the muzzle of the gun from Jessi's forehead and jammed it in her mouth, cutting her bowed upper lip with the sight. "Stop that infernal racket or I shoot her right this instant!" she bellowed. The praying ceased, audibly, at least, and Carla continued her monologue.

"Number two bullet goes straight up the belly button of kink-head's wife. I hear she thinks she's going to have a baby." Dave and Patricia's faces were misshapen with agony and tears flowed freely. "Well, I'm gonna save them the trouble."

"Number three bullet goes in the head of Old Baldy up there," and Carla pointed to Judge Schwartz who had slumped in his chair during the monologue. He'll probably let weirdo kink-head get off Scot free, anyway.

"And Brother Preacher-Man gets number four.

"Of course I can't forget kink head himself. Gotta save a bullet for him. He gets number five. Think I'll save number six for me. They'll just send me up to Bellefonte to fry in the Rockview chair anyway, so I'll just save them the trouble."

Then Carla's manner became almost professorial and her inflection was didactic. "All right, let's review", and she used the fingers of her left hand to count and pointed with the index finger of her right hand. "Preacher's Kid gets one. Big Belly gets two. Old Baldy gets three. Preacher Man gets four. Kink Head gets five. I get six. Any questions?" Calmly Carla surveyed her prospective victims, staring at each in turn, waiting for a response. No one spoke. The only sound was the tick-tocking of the old school-house clock hanging on the far wall, its pendulum swinging rhythmically below its octagonal face in a case of oiled walnut.

The praying Christians continued to pray in their spirits but the rest of the group just stared dully, too stunned with the macabre scenario to even react.

Jim prayed like he'd never prayed before, at the same time carefully calculating if he'd have a chance to knock the gun out of Jessi's mouth before Carla pulled the trigger. And then he heard the faint wail of a siren in the distance.

Finally! Here we are, practically on top of the county prison and this demoniac was about to perform the massacre of the decade.

"You in there with the gun," rang a metallic voice from outside the court house. "Open that back window and throw out that gun. This is the Pennsylvania State Police. This building is completely surrounded. Throw that gun out now!"

Carla might just as well have been listening to a weather forecast on the radio. And then she spoke, slowly, and with a voice that was not a voice, but rather a montage of sounds of various pitches, volume levels, and timbres, clearly understandable, but nothing like what had ever been heard by anyone in the room. A little like a voice concocted for an episode of Star Trek, only much more horrific.

"I'm going to slowly count to three," said the voice which was not a voice. Carla's lips were synched perfectly with each syllable. "On three, the kid dies." Jessi's knees started to sag and Jim, Dave, and Paul all tensed their muscles, united in their intent to spring on Carla just as she started to say the word "three". Although no cognitive message had passed among them, each knew what the others were planning to do. They were in one accord, in the truest sense of the concept. Then Jon King got the message, and he coiled to spring as well.

"One," said the voice of a demon speaking straight from hell. The muscles in the unified strike force continued to coil and tense. The gun's hammer started to come back and Carla's mouth opened, ready for the voice to say "two". And then, click! the hammer fell-- on an empty chamber, and Jessi sank to her knees.

Out of Carla's open mouth spewed howling, cackling, demonic laughter, echoing and reverberating, as though coming from a series of huge interconnected caverns deep underground. "Fooled you!" howled the voice in sulfuric merriment. "Dummies! You didn't think they'd give this rent-a-cop a slug in that first chamber, did you? Why, the first time he went to the rest room, he'd--" and the voice made a lewd and biologically specific remark about emasculation by accidental gunshot during urination. After an extended period of the hideous laughter, the voice resumed Carla's earlier didactic manner, as though instructing a class of slow learners.

"Well, let's see now. I started with six victims and six bullets. But now, I find I have only five bullets." Again there was pointing at prospective victims and counting on the fingers. "Here was the original plan. Preacher's Kid gets one. Big Belly gets two. Old Baldy gets three. Preacher Man get's four. Kink Head gets five. I get six. But now I seem to have lost a bullet." Now the voice took on a childish inflection. "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do? I know! I know!" said the voice while Carla's body jumped up and down. I won't shoot Carla! See how simple that can be? Six bullets take away one bullet equals five bullets. Six victims take away one victim equals five victims. Problem solved!"

Next the voice assumed the characteristics of a NASA capsule communicator as heard over national radio and television during one of the early space launches. Male. Military inflection. Stripped of all highs and lows, as though heard over a squawk-box system. "Uh, hello, Victims. This is Mission Control. We've had a brief hold in the countdown due to

technical difficulties, but, uh, everything is go right now. So, uh, we're resuming the count on my ... mark. T minus ten seconds to the first firing. Ten, . . . nine, . . . eight. . ." Again Carla's finger tightened on the trigger with the muzzle in Jessi's mouth. "Seven, . . . six, . . . five, . . ." intoned the capsule communicator voice. The Court Room was electric with the sense of spiritual forces in conflict. Although nothing physical could be seen which might be judged out of the ordinary, all the born-again Christians in the room could discern the strong ebb and flow of spiritual energy. Jim and Dave were again in one accord. Dave would hit her high and from the front. Jim would hit her low, and from the rear. And it would happen just after the count of two.

Again muscles tensed, sweat rolled, hearts raced, adrenaline flowed. Meanwhile the voice continued the count as Carla's finger kept easing back on the trigger. The hammer nicked back, one millimeter for each count. "Four, . . . three, . . . tw--"

Carla's body cheated and gave Jessi a short count, pulling the trigger all the way home. This time the hammer didn't fall on an empty chamber, but on a round of live ammunition, resulting in a resounding--

Click. Misfire!

Everyone froze. No one breathed. No one blinked. Just like in a large tableau at a wax museum. Carla moved first, jerking the gun out of Jessi's mouth and whirling to aim it at Dave's head, pulling the trigger without hesitation. Another click! Misfired again. A window-rattling roar of rage exploded out of Carla's mouth, as again and again she pointed the Smith and Wesson Police Special at victim after victim. Judge Schwartz. Another click. Debra. Another click. Patricia. Another click. As Carla's body was swinging the gun back in line with Dave, he put an end to the futile clicking. From the top of the defendant's table, he launched a vicious tackle which caught her just below the jaw line and flung her backwards toward the door.

At the instant of impact, the double doors leading from the court room to the hall were flung open to show a bullet proof riot shield with a state police sergeant crouching behind it, shouting "Freeze! Polic--" But before he could finish his command, ka-wham! Dave and Carla's bodies slammed into the upper portion of the shield. In the white glare of TV lights and the eerie pulsing of strobe flashes, Dave and the officer could be seen untangling themselves on the floor as the sergeant quickly cuffed Carla, who was lying on the bottom of the pile. The chatter of the numerous automatic 35 mm cameras was continuous.

The cuffs weren't needed. Carla was out, stone cold.

Back in the court room, the prospective victims looked at each in wide-eyed amazement. For the rest of their natural lives, they would be bonded in that special kind of union known to all survivors.

Jessi had fainted but was now responding to the ministrations of her father and Mother who were down on the floor with her. Hugging her, kissing her, bathing her tear-stained face with their own tears of joy.

Suddenly a strong tenor voice rang out in the silent court room with a soaring song of triumph. Everyone turned to look, and there was Paul, arms raised to heaven, belting out the powerful song of praise written by Rich Mullins: "Our God, is an awesome God! He reigns from Heaven above, with wisdom, power, and love. Our God is an awesome God!" Then he jumped down from the table and grabbed Jim's hand as together they marched down the center aisle of the court room, linked hands above their heads, repeating the chorus.

As they passed along the aisle, the chain grew and the singing continued. Debra. Jessi. Dave. Patricia. Jon. The softball team. Ivory. All singing. All with linked hands raised high in victory. When the singing, praising chain reached the front of the court room, Judge Schwartz stepped out from behind the bench, down off the platform, and joined the chain right between Paul and Jim. This time as they passed down the center aisle the judge led the chain straight through the double doors into the lobby, out the main entrance, and down the court house steps. The media people went berserk. Minicams hummed. Strobes flashed. Automatic cameras click-clacked. It was a media event never equaled in the memory of anyone there.

WPIA-TV, a Philadelphia ABC affiliate with a bureau in Harrisburg, was on hand with their mobile dish, broadcasting live to the world via satellite. In a rare moment of corporate unity, ABC agreed to join in a pool with CBS, NBC, and MS-NBC, and Fox News for the widest coverage of a single event since the San Francisco earthquake of 1989. Around the court house marched the singing, praising chain with Judge Schwartz singing the loudest, if not the most accurately, of all. After seven revolutions of the court house by actual count, the judge led the group back into his court room and took his place behind the bench.

Quickly he gaveled the court to order, ended the recess, heard Paul's motion for release on the defendant's own recognizance, granted it, ordered Dave to report to the Grand Jury next Monday, and adjourned the court, all in less than fifteen minutes.

Several times during this whirlwind process, Priscilla Lane sprang to her feet and opened her mouth for an objection, but then quietly took her seat without voicing her complaint. She was last seen that day getting on the elevator without so much as a first-generation Polaroid pointed in her direction.

"Bail"? shouted Jessi with elation when it was all over. "We don't need bail! We got 'defendant's own recognizance'! Our God is indeed an awesome God!"

Chapter 18: News Conference

The press did not ignore Jessi when she exited the court house. In addition to her being a key figure in the drama which had just taken place, she was attractive, articulate, and poised. All the old hands in the news-gathering business knew in a flash that she would look great on camera and in press photos.

As she walked down the court house steps, the first to reach her was the ABC team headed by their White House correspondent, Rex Canfield. Canfield had been traveling by helicopter from Washington to New York when news of the strange goings-on in south central Pennsylvania reached him by phone. Within minutes he was on the ground and racing by taxi to the court house.

Jessi gulped when she looked down and saw the familiar ABC logo clipped to a mike being held by a man she had seen on the ABC nightly news numerous times. "Jessi, can you tell us what happened inside the court room between you and Carla Stetson," asked the newsman smoothly. He'd been well briefed while still on the chopper, including the fact that Jessica Hogan preferred to be known as Jessi.

"She jumped one of the officers and got his gun. Then she began waving it around and threatened to shoot five or six of us." Jessi's throat got tight at the memory of what happened next. "When my Dad and a lot of my friends started praying out loud, she put the gun in my mouth and screamed that if everyone didn't stop praying, she was going to shoot me right away." Tears were trickling from the corners of both eyes and she turned away from the correspondent to wipe her face.

Canfield filled while Jessi regained her composure. "For those who just tuned in, we're talking live with Jessi Hogan outside the county court house in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Just moments ago, the mother of the victim in a sexual assault case being tried here went berserk . . ." After the update, the ABC correspondent turned to Jessi again with the standard "how did you feel?" question.

"I was scared to death, of course," Jessi answered simply. "And a gun barrel tastes terrible."

"I'm sure it does," chuckled Canfield. Then he came back with a more substantive question. "I understand the gun Carla was using, a Smith & Wesson Police Special, I believe it was-- this police revolver misfired five times in succession. Do you have any idea how something like that could happen?"

"As far as guns are concerned, I know less than nothing. I've never even fired one in my life. But--" The newsman had started to speak but quickly moved the mike back below

Jessi's chin. "But I do know something about the power of God. And what just happened in there was a miracle from God's hand. Nothing more, nothing less."

Canfield, knowing he was broadcasting live with no chance for editing before this scenario got on the air, was visibly uncomfortable with the turn this interview had taken. But Jessi wasn't shy about stating her beliefs. As the ABC mike started to move away from her chin, she gently placed her hand above the news man's hand and eased it back into its original position.

"I just want to say one more thing. I know there will be tests to see why that gun didn't shoot, or why the bullets didn't go off. And I'm positive those tests will show that the gun and the bullets are perfectly okay. That gun didn't go off while it was in my mouth because God wouldn't let it go off. And God wouldn't let it go off because of the prayers of my Mom and Dad, and all my friends who were in there with me."

Canfield gave Jessi a sincere but off-camera wink as he regained control of the mike. "We'll be back with more from the Cumberland County Court House in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, but now back to New York. Peter?"

Jessi just had time to wipe her face and blow her nose when a Fox News mike was thrust under her chin. The correspondent was a young woman with red hair and a well-concealed Georgia accent. She introduced herself as Joy Apple. "Tell me about your sweat shirt. I see a lot of the young people who were in the parade a while ago are wearing this kind of shirt. Does it have any significance?"

Proudly Jessi told about the Ivory Club and the lady from Fox News seemed genuinely interested, not restive and anxious to move on to another more news-worthy topic. "Does this mean that all of you are virgins and plan to be until you get married?" asked Joy.

"Part of that is true," said Jessi, happy to tell any one who would listen about Ivory. "All of us have taken a vow of celibacy until we marry. That part is true. But Ivory only deals with the future, not the past. So the primary issue is celibacy for the future, not virginity in the past. Right? Celibate, and proud of it. Aren't we guys?" Several Ivory members had gathered around Jessi and Joy Apple during the interview. Their support of the concept of celibacy until marriage was spontaneous and enthusiastic.

True to the Fox News style of coverage, Joy was unhurried and thorough in her efforts to learn more about Ivory and the idea of celibacy until marriage. "I understand that celibacy support groups are a growing thing on high school and college campuses. Would you mind if we put your name and address up on the screen so our viewers can contact you if they'd like information on starting such a group in their community?"

"Love to," responded Jessi, thrilled to see information about Ivory on national TV.

As soon as Joy Apple and her camera team moved on to interview Jim Hogan, a print reporter from the Philadelphia *Inquirer* asked Jessi for an interview. This time the

questions focused on what Ivory did for its members in support of their continued celibacy. "One of the main things we do," explained Jessi, "is help kids from lighting the fuse in the first place when they first start a relationship. Back when I was in junior high, my dad-- that's him over there, talking with the Fox News reporter, my dad gave a little talk on sex for our youth group at church. He called a guy and a girl up to the front of the church and he gave the guy a big firecracker with a fuse about this long--" and she held her hands about ten inches apart. Of course the firecracker was a fake, just a towel roll covered with aluminum foil. The fuse was real, though. Then he gave both of them a pair of asbestos gloves, and they each had to wear a lab apron, too, to protect their clothes.

"Then he said that this was their first date and they were alone. He lit the fuse and told them to pass it back and forth until he said stop. When he said 'stop', the one who didn't have the firecracker had to pinch out the lit fuse with the gloves. Then he said they were on their second date and he lit the fuse again. And again they passed the fake firecracker back and forth until he said 'stop', and they pinched out the fuse again, too.

"Well, after they did this a couple times, the fuse started getting really short. The next time when he said 'stop', the guy had the firecracker and the girl had to pinch out the fuse. But just when she started to pinch it out, BAM! there was an explosion. Actually, it was my mom sticking a pin in a big balloon back stage. It sure made everybody jump!. Made us think, too. Later, Dad said that kissing and petting on a date was like passing that firecracker back and forth. Sooner or later the fuse will get short and BAM! an explosion. I never forgot that lesson with the firecracker."

"So that's what you tell your members?" asked the reporter. "No kissing and no petting?"

"Definitely no petting. That has its place in a marriage relationship because it prepares a couple for having sex. But it has no place for people who are not married."

"What about no kissing?" persisted the reporter. "Isn't that a little unrealistic?"

"We encourage kids to limit kissing to a form of communication. I have a boy friend and we kiss to say hello. We kiss to say good-bye. And we kiss to say we care for each other. But we don't make kissing a major activity on a date. That kind of kissing is for the purpose of sexual arousal and that's just like petting."

By this time, several reporters had gathered and were either writing furiously in their notebooks or poking boom mikes in Jessi's direction as she found herself the center of attention at her own impromptu news conference.

"What makes you such an authority on human sexuality?" asked a young woman in the back row, and her question was covered with the slime of sarcasm.

"I'm not an authority, in a general sense, that is," answered Jessi pertly. But I am an authority on what God has to say about human sexuality, because I read the book!" and she held up her NIV Bible with a pink leather binding.

"How do you know you're interpreting the Bible correctly," asked another reporter in the same vein of sarcasm. "Have you attended seminary?"

"No, not a formal seminary," responded Jessi while keeping a smile on her face and in her voice. Underneath, she was a lot more tense than her behavior displayed and she prayed constantly for the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. As she talked to the reporters, Jim and Debra, Dave and Patricia, Paul Donaldson, and all the Ivory kids made a big circle which enclosed Jessi and her questioners. Silently and unobtrusively everyone moved into position, and then they all joined hands. The average observer couldn't tell by looking or listening, but Jessi knew in her heart that once again this band of prayer warriors was lifting a volume of prayer on her behalf.

This time, the enemy wasn't in the form of a demon-possessed woman with a lethal weapon. This time she was taking her stand against liberal members of the press. And every prayer warrior in the circle was determined that she hold the banner of normalcy, and decency, and scriptural holiness high.

"What do you mean, 'not a formal seminary'?" asked another print reporter"

"I was raised in a parsonage," declared Jessi proudly, "and I learned what the Bible says from day one."

"And I suppose you were taught that sex outside of marriage is a sin," sneered still another reporter. What had started as a neutral interview was turning into something more gritty as more and more reporters gathered inside the circle of prayer warriors.

"Yes, I was taught that. And I was taught that because it's precisely what the Bible says," answered Jessi archly.

"And how do we know that's what the Bible says?" persisted another reporter. "Why should we believe you, just because you're a preacher's kid?" Well I, for one, don't believe a word of it!"

"Big mistake," whispered Jim to Debra as Jessi whipped her Bible out from under her arm and flipped it open. "Now watch this!"

"You can certainly ignore what I say. After all, I'm nobody special. But you can't ignore what the Word of God says. Here, let me show you," and Jessi performed the manual of arms flawlessly on the topic of God's requirement that all human sexuality must be limited to a heterosexual marriage. From Leviticus to Romans to Corinthians and back again, expertly she cited verse after verse which pounded home the ageless truths of sexual purity. She found each verse in a whirl of riffled pages. She used a carefully manicured

forefinger to point to the exact point on each page where the verse began, and she quoted each verse from memory, complete with book, chapter, and verse.

Many of the reporters began to warm to Jessi, in spite of their liberal leanings. Here was a born-again Christian who didn't fit their stereotype. They liked the way she staunchly stood up for her beliefs and backed up those beliefs with a dazzling display of Biblical swordsmanship. Before long, a Fox News cameraman was poking the snout of his minicam right down on the pages of Jessi's NIV as she pointed out each verse while quoting it. And when Jessi realized what the minicam operator was up to, she played to the camera, holding the Bible at a better angle so he could get a good shot.

Meanwhile, the prayer warriors on the perimeter of the ad hoc news conference maintained their silent volume of prayer. Jim turned to Debra and they exchanged smug smiles. They had never been more fiercely proud of their daughter as they were right now.

Quickly the media people tired of harassing Jessi and her conservative convictions. A few hung around to ask another taunting question or two but Jessi still held her ground. In fact, at no point in the entire exchange did any of the crafty and experienced news people penetrate her defense. "If I was an Olympic boxing judge," said Dave to Patricia, "I'd say she definitely won all three rounds!" Everyone around the prayer circle agreed. Jessi just smiled and said, "To God be the glory."

Immediately after the court house drama ended, the State Police collected the gun Carla had attempted to use, as well as the five rounds of ammunition which had refused to fire. The gun was stripped, inspected, reassembled, and taken immediately to the outdoor firing range. There, a State Police weapons specialist, Sergeant Elmer Zimmer, fired one hundred rounds as fast as he could pull the trigger and reload. Total number of misfires. Zero. In fact, Zimmer claimed the gun Carla had tried to use not only failed to misfire, it worked as smoothly and fired as accurately as any Smith & Wesson .38 Police Special he had used in thirty years of police work.

With the prior approval of Judge Swartzendruber and the district attorney, Zimmer loaded the gun with the five rounds which failed to fire during the attempted massacre. With the Pennsylvania State Police Commandant looking on, the sergeant snapped the gun closed, assumed the firing position, and ripped off five quick shots. Not one misfire!

That night at nine forty-five, the entire Hogan household plus Paul, Dave, Patricia, and Jon King were gathered in the parsonage family room to watch a Fox News special summarizing all that had happened in Carlisle during the day. Ben and Shelley were bubbling with excitement and vowed they would be wide awake for the entire sixty minutes.

"Can you believe it?" squealed Shelley. Jessi's gonna be on TV!"

That was Ben's cue to hop off the arm of the couch where he had been perched while pestering Dave. He and Shelley joined hands to perform one of their ritual chants as they pranced around the area of the carpet where Jessi and Jon were resting with their heads propped on throw pillows.

"Jessi's on TV! Jessi's on TV!" they sing-songed over and over again.

"Yes, and you won't see her if you don't settle down," warned Debra.

But still the twins chanted, too excited to settle down. "Jessi's on TV! Jessi's on TV!"

Debra began a deliberate and measured count. "One . . . two . . ." Before she got to three, the twins were up on the couch between Dave and Patricia, knowing full well that if Mom every reached five in such a count, her promise would become their reality.

Then it was ten o'clock and the program began with what appeared to be a standard advisory for parents of young children, warning that some of the scenes might be too graphic for young viewers. After the warning, the announcer said something rather mysterious, Jim thought. "For the first fifteen minutes of this program, we will be showing you rare and exclusive footage of today's events in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. This segment will not be interrupted by commercial announcements. We advise you not to change the channel during this period or you may miss pictures which are not available to any other network, and which we may very well never show again. At the end of this special segment, you'll get a chance to meet the people responsible for this spectacular camera work." Jim glanced at the VCR on the shelf under the TV. The red "record" tally light glowed, confirming that the tape was running in the record mode.

The special segment began with a blank screen and no audio. After about ten seconds of dead air with nothing on the screen but the Fox News logo glowing in the lower right corner. Suddenly a ghoulish scream ripped out of the TV's speaker and the twins went scampering into their dad's lap, eyes wide and lips trembling. Jim felt an electric charge begin at the base of his spine and terminate in the short hairs at the back of his neck. Everyone in the room gasped as a picture gradually came into focus which showed a glaring and blood-stained Carla crouching on Judge Swartzendrubber's bench and reaching for his throat.

Thus began the most amazing real-life scenario ever shown on national television. Somehow, someone had gotten a television minicam into the court room that morning and had recorded every lurid detail of what had happened. There was Carla, with a firm hold on each arm of the judge's chair, violently slamming it against the wall, over and over again. There were the officers, finally snapping a cuff on one of Carla's arms. Then the camera zoomed in on the gun being filched out of the officer's holster and hidden in the bunched waistband of Carla's skirt. And there she was, pulling the gun out of her waistband and pressing the muzzle of the gun firmly against Jessi's forehead.

Following Carla's opening scream, the audio had been killed as the camera mutely depicted the horrible events. As Jim remembered it now, Carla had been spewing such a flow of non-stop expletives, it couldn't be shown on television, even by the most liberal of standards. Now the audio began to come up and praying could be heard in the background. And there was the muzzle in Jessi's mouth and Carla was identifying her victims one by one. Preacher's Kid . . . Big Belly . . . Old Baldy . . . Preacher Man . . . Kink Head . . .

When the audio was potentially intelligible but not fit for broadcast, it was kept too low to be understood, with voiceover commentary. But the rest of the time, the sounds were clear and easily understood. Jim's eyes misted over at the first misfire with Jessi slumping to the floor. And there was Dave's lean, hard body flying through the air like an arrow. And then it was all over but the shouting. And that was there, too. "Awesome God" was even more awesome on national television than it had been live. The realization that major portions of the civilized world were seeing the power of God overcome the power of Satan was indeed awesome. There it was in its entirety. Every note of "Awesome God". Every link in the victory chain. Every circumnavigation of the court house.

The network cut to commercial and Jon muted the audio with the remote control so they could talk. Jim spoke first. "The Bible says that every eye will see Him when He returns to earth in triumph. I think we just got a sneak preview of just how easily that will be done."

"Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus," said Paul reverently.

Everyone said "Amen", including the twins, who were still wide awake.

[G. Edwin Lint](#)

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Chapter 19: Going To Trial

The day after the arraignment was a Saturday and Jim and Debra indulged in indolence and slept until six-thirty. It might have been later, but Ben came clumping into the bedroom dragging a 36-inch bat and begging his dad to hit him some grounders. Jim begged for a reprieve, promising he'd be down in an hour.

As the senior Hogans yawned and stretched, Debra suddenly sat bolt upright. "Jim, that big bat Ben just had in here made me remember something that happened down in York, back during the tournament."

"What's that, Hon?" Jim mumbled. He had just started to doze off again.

"Dave says he lost his bat, that Louisville Slugger-- didn't he say he lost that bat at the tournament."

"That's right," Jim yawned.

Debra had that faraway look in her eyes which meant the wheels were really turning.

"And how did that bat get in Tessa's bedroom--"

"You're not saying you think Dave--"

"Of course not. That's my point. I'm just trying to figure out how that bat got from the York sports complex to Tessa's bedroom. And just a while ago, when Ben was in here clumping around with that bat, I started remembering something about the tournament."

"Debbie, Paul says we can't prove a link between that bat being stolen down at York and Tessa's attacker."

"I know that's what he said. But if we knew more about how that bat turned up missing, maybe it would help Dave."

Jim was starting to doze off again when Debra hopped out of bed and started pacing back and forth like a caged lion. Suddenly she slapped her hands together and Jim eyes flew wide open.

"Debbie, I don't know who's worse. Ben and his bat, or you and your--"

"Jim, I think I remember what's been bugging me about that bat ever since Dave was arrested. This was down at York during the tournament and it was when we had a break between games. I was resting in the shade and talking to a couple of the wives when I saw this strange man over behind the backstop where we had played the last game."

Jim yawned again. "Strange. How do you mean, strange?"

"Just really strange. Kind of weird looking. Odd, somehow."

Jim was bending over the side of the bed, looking for his slippers. "Do you think you can get a little more specific with that word 'strange?" There must be a couple hundred people within hiking distance of where we sit who could match that description."

"Jim, if all you can do is make fun . . ." Debra replied with irritation.

"I'd not making fun," Jim soothed, "but if all you can remember is that he was strange, I'm not sure I see how that can help." The aroma of fresh coffee was wafting up from the kitchen where the timer had kicked in about thirty minutes ago. "Tell you what. Let me get my shower and some toast and coffee. Then we'll talk to Paul about this before he drives back to Washington. Maybe he knows how to get it out of you when I can't."

"Uummm. Okay. You take the main bathroom and I'll take my shower in here."

Forty-five minutes later, the Hogans and Paul were around the kitchen table having toast, coffee, and the stuff people were never allowed to call jelly.

"Y'all need to tell me some more about this strange man at the tournament," stated Paul with his untied Nikes propped on another chair. Although he was very relaxed, his eyes were bright and Jim had a sense that the North Carolinian was very interested in Debra's stranger.

"Finally, somebody around here wants to take me seriously," said Debra with a sideways glance at Jim.

"Yeah, yeah . . ." said Jim good-humoredly.

Debra went over to the counter and poured herself another half-cup of coffee. "Paul?"

"No thanks. I'm fine. I want to at least get over the Mason-Dixon line without needing a rest stop."

Debra settled herself with her coffee and took a sip. "The word which always comes to mind is 'strange'. Strange in the sense that I'd never seen him before. And strange in the sense that he appeared to be odd. He was shorter than average and had an oversized ball cap pulled low over his face. And, even though it was warm enough for the twins to be running around in T-shirts and shorts, this man was wearing a buttoned-up trench coat which was at least three sizes too big for him. The coat's belt was not buckled and one side of the belt was dragging on the ground."

Paul dropped his feet to the floor. "Hey, Debbie, maybe you got something here. What else did you see?"

Debra couldn't resist a small, smug smile at Jim. "Well, this guy seemed to be rooting around in a bunch of bats leaning against the backstop. I know I was thinking that this guy has no business messing with our team's bats. But then, somebody came up and starting talking to me. When I looked back, he was gone."

"That it?" Paul asked.

"That's about it, Debra replied. "I wish there was more."

"Hey, that's more than we had yesterday this time," said Paul as he stood and reached for his suit carrier and duffel bag. "Tell you what let's do. I know this gal down in Alexandria who does this thing with her computer. Gets witnesses, victims, folks like that to tell her about what a person looked like and she comes up with a pret-ty good picture. Faster than a sketch artist, and a lot better picture, too."

"Do you think she can get Debra to remember exactly what this guy looked like," asked Jim with interest.

"I watched her work a couple times and it's kind of like landing a twenty-pound bass on ten pound test. She puts in a facial feature, like the eyes or nose, and then asks the witness if that is close. Keeps doing that. Little by little, with a few clicks of the mouse, a picture comes into focus. It's really neat, the way she does it."

"What's the next step?" asked Debra with real interest.

"I'll make an appointment with my computer friend and then have you down for a session of a couple hours or so. When we get a picture you think is pretty good, we'll start looking for this guy. If he was unusual-looking to you, chances are some other folks will remember seeing him, too."

"Let's do it," said Jim decisively. "Just tell us when and where."

"I'll be on it Monday morning like a duck on a June bug," drawled Paul with his suit carrier over his shoulder and his duffel dangling from a long bony arm. "One thing though. Let's hold off telling anybody about this computer thing until we see how it turns out."

"That's wise," agreed Debra. Dave and Patricia have enough right now without worrying how I make out with this computer lady.

Within a week, a computer-assisted likeness of Debra's stranger was on every vertical surface of the York Sports Complex. Do you remember seeing this man at the Memorial Day tournament last May? each flyer asked.

Although Debra was amazed at how realistic the picture was, there were no responses during the following week.

Paul checked in that Friday afternoon. "How y'all doing with your poster boy?" he asked. "Any leads?"

"Nothing so far," answered Debra dispiritedly. "But it's not the fault of that picture your computer lady made. That couldn't look more like what I remember than if I'd snapped his picture."

"Then let's crank things up a notch," responded Paul. "Tell Jim to call a local press conference. I'll fax y'all a statement to read. Get as many print and TV people as you can. Then, if that don't get results, I'll pull some strings and we'll go national."

Again no results from the local press conference Jim held in Fellowship Hall. The print and electronic media were well represented and the reporters seemed interested, taking notes and asking questions. When Jim called Paul a week later and reported another apparent dry hole, the lawyer said it was time to go national.

Before the national press conference, Paul had Jim and Debra drive back down to Washington so there could be another sessions with the computer artist and her clicking mouse. Again Debra searched her brain for any slight improvement that could be made to the already-realistic computer image. A few changes were made and Debra was satisfied that what she saw on the screen and what rolled out of the high-resolution laser printer was exactly as she remembered the man at the bat rack.

Paul drove up from Washington for the national press conference he had instigated. This time, Fellowship Hall had a standing-room only crowd. There were recognizable names and faces from ABC, CBS, NBC, CNBC, CNN, AP, and Reuters. Everyone was given a glossy camera-ready original of the slightly improved likeness of the mystery man.

The national press conference drew dozens of leads and quite a few crank calls, as well. When each possibility had been checked out, the results were the same. Debra's strange little man with the oversized rain coat seemed to have vanished from the proverbial face of the earth.

Two weeks after the last lead and crank call had led to a dead end, Paul drove up to meet with Dave Court, Patricia, and the Hogans. The trial was scheduled to begin in less than a week.

The mood was pretty somber around the table in the church conference room as Sandy served coffee to those who wanted it. Most declined but Paul loaded his with the usual two creams and two sugars. He took a good swig and spoke first.

"Y'all know we're scheduled to go to trial Monday. And I can't think of a better thing to do right now than to call on Jim to ask the Holy Spirit to sharpen my mind so I can do the best possible job by Dave, here, in this accusation against him. Pastor?"

As Jim began to pray conversationally and sincerely, Debra couldn't keep her mind from straying back to the strange little man. She had been so sure that the computer, and the press conferences, and all the publicity would provide some information on how Dave's bat came to be in Tessa's room the night.

The computer artist had sure done her job and the press had done theirs. How could thousands of copies of that crisp, sharp image been distributed and broadcast around the world with no valid result? Several victims' rights sites on the World Wide Web had even included a scan of the picture on their home pages. But the end result of all the coverage had been a big, fat zero.

Maybe I don't remember how he looked. Maybe I should have asked for the eyes to be closer together, the nose a little longer. Maybe if I could have remembered the logo on that ball cap . . .

" . . . in Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Jim's Amen brought Debra sharply back into focus.

"Dave and I are going to meet in a bit to make sure we're singing from the right page," said Paul. "Before we do that, though, I wanted to make sure y'all don't have something else we need to know about or talk about first. Jim? Anyone? Paul was about to close the meeting when Debra spoke hesitantly. "I know we've been over this before, but is there any chance we can get the DA to postpone the trial a little? Give folks more chance to respond to our pictures and all the publicity?"

Paul sighed, and spoke gently. "Debbie, I know how y'all feel about that little man at the tournament, and the mystery about how Dave's bat got into Tessa's bedroom. Fact is, we don't have much to go on far as a continuance is concerned. With all the publicity and no solid leads, the DA's gonna want us to show cause how more time before the trial will make any real difference." Paul perched on the corner of a table and folded his arms on his chest. "I don't think there is any more I can say or do to convince him. Sorry, but I think this is it. Unless the People ask for more time, the trial starts at nine Monday morning."

There were a few minutes of silence. If the clock had been spring-wound instead of quartz, you could have heard it ticking loudly.

"All right," said Paul softly. "Maybe Dave and I'll see y'all someplace round lunch time. Dave, why don't you and I go down to my office." Paul's office at the church during the trial would be small counseling room with a table and four chairs.

"Superior Court for the County of Cumberland is now in session," intoned the court recorder doubling as court clerk. "Judge Amos Schwartz presiding. All rise."

I'm about sick of hearing this prattle, thought Patricia with irritation. It was a lot more than the mindless courtroom litanies which were causing the irritation and Patricia knew it. Dave was obviously innocent, but where this all was going to end, she couldn't say. Would God allow an innocent man to go to prison? He answered their prayers about bail, but would that apply to the actual trial itself? What if Dave was still in prison when the baby was born?

The early fall sun was shining through the windows on Patricia's side of the room, but she still hugged herself with an involuntary shudder.

[G. Edwin Lint](#)

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Chapter 20 Star Witness

By the end of September, Patricia was convinced her baby would come into this world with an incarcerated felon for a father. She and Dave hadn't talked about the trial at all, and she hadn't had a chance to get Paul alone and ask him how he thought it was going. But closing arguments were scheduled to start next week, so that meant that everyone knew pretty much what each side had to say. With strong circumstantial evidence against Dave, and him with no alibi, it didn't take a crafty defense lawyer to tell her things didn't look good at all.

The last witness scheduled to be called by the defense was to be Pastor Jim. Patricia already knew what Jim would say, and that he would say it very well. She just hoped the jury would be as moved by the pastor's articulate eloquence as the bulk of the Wesley congregation was each Sunday.

"The Defense calls Rev. Hogan," drawled Paul from his seat at the defense table. Jim would be elaborating on what he said at the arraignment, but with the Assistant DA having the privilege of cross examination. As Jim was sworn, Patricia realized anew how much she couldn't stand the Assistant DA. Couldn't stand her voice, couldn't stand her clothes, couldn't stand her hair, couldn't stand her, period! Not a very Christian attitude. But after all, Ms Priscilla Lane was the embodiment of all that Patricia feared would happen to Dave at the end of this trial. Patricia surprised herself by mouthing the mother dog word.

An hour later, Patricia's fears were confirmed. Jim had been eloquent and fervent as he recounted the information about Dave's character presented at the arraignment. Certainly nothing wrong with anything Jim said. But I'm already convinced of Dave's innocence. Suppose I was a juror on the fence? Had Jim said anything which would move me one way or the another? Doubtful.

Then Patricia heard Paul turn his witness over to the People for cross. Again the mother dog word surfaced, unbidden.

Ms. Lane ignored Jim's recent testimony and took a different tack. "Rev. Hogan, I understand that you're something of an expert on demon possession. Is that true?"

"Objection," drawled Paul without rising from his seat. "Irrelevant and immaterial."

"Your Honor, the People plan to introduce evidence which speaks to Rev. Hogan's beliefs on demon possession as those beliefs relate to the charges against the defendant."

Now Paul was on his feet with his objection. "Objection, Your Honor. There's nothing in the People's depositions that says anything on beliefs about demon possession."

Judge Schwartz motioned the litigants to approach his bench. "Now, Ms. Lane, mind telling me what you're up to?"

"Your Honor," this week the People discovered some information relevant to Rev. Hogan's testimony. I just finished studying it last night."

Paul spoke softly but with strong emphasis. "Your Honor, I object to the introduction of evidence at this late date without the defense having a chance to review it. The People have already called all their announced witnesses."

"What sort of evidence is this, Ms. Lane," queried the judge.

"We have an audio tape of Rev. Hogan speaking on demon possession and his beliefs on the implications of witnesses testifying in a criminal case," answered Lane with a sly smile for Paul.

"How long are these tapes?" asked the judge.

"Total run time is less than an hour. I had a transcript made, also."

The judge nodded. "I'll see what this is all about during noon recess. Judge Schwartz dismissed the litigants to their places.

"I'd like to instruct the jurors to disregard any reference to demon possession. We're in recess until one o'clock." Whack!

Around the lunch table at the Carlisle Tea Room, Paul turned to Jim with an unusual amount of irritation in his voice. "Y'all have any idea what this is all about? She says she has a tape and a transcript."

Jim had been wracking his brain since the question of demon possession came up in the morning session. "The only thing I can think of is a question I answered on the air a couple months ago. Something about 'what happens if a demon possessed person commits a crime?'"

"Yes, well?" prompted Paul.

"I'm trying to think of exactly what I said. This is a paraphrase, now, but I think I said that demons give a sex criminal the ability to lie to a judge and jury with a straight face, and to do it with such conviction that who would believe the word of a young child against a teacher."

"Man! Aside from my questions about the theology of this whole thing, if the jury hears your voice saying something like that in open court, sure ain't gonna help." Patricia's conviction that things were going bad for Dave were being confirmed.

Paul smacked his fist in his palm. "I'm gonna go over there and bust in on ole Amos in chambers. We gotta get a side-bar before he reconvenes. If he allows the jury to hear that tape, we're up the crick with a short paddle."

Before the tinkling bell had announced Paul's exit for the court house, Patricia was leaning across the table and grasping Jim's and Debra's hands. "Jim, we really need to pray like we never prayed before. Remember at the arraignment, how Jessi talked to the judge about praying for the wisdom of Solomon? I believe we need to do that again, right here, right now."

Across the street, in the court house cafeteria, there was tension at the People's lunch table, also.

"You may know all about the law, Ms. Lane, but I know my Tessa," hissed Carla through clenched teeth. "We have to do anything we can to get that kink head behind bars!"

"I want him convicted, too," Mrs. Stetson. "But we have to be careful. Putting a child on the stand with the jury in the court room can be dangerous. You can never be sure of what kids will-- "

"I tell you, I know my Tessa! Maybe she hasn't said a word since she came home from the hospital. But every time I ask her if she wants to get the bad man that hurt her and lock him up in jail, she always nods here head!" Every time!"

The Assistant DA was torn between her knowledge of good courtroom practice, and her desire for the prestige of a conviction. "Maybe we could get Dr. Chambers to help us. She's already testified to Tessa's catatonia since the attack--"

"Get her," snapped Carla.

"Trouble is," I've already told the judge I've called my last witness. If I try to call Dr. Chambers back with Tessa, that hick from the sticks will throw a fit."

"Let him throw his fit, if he wants to. Aren't you smarter than he is?"

Another gavel whack started the wheels of justice turning again. Judge Schwartz addressed the jury. "I want to reemphasize my direction about disregarding the reference to demon possession. There will be nothing introduced as evidence on this topic."

The Assistant DA already knew she'd lost the tape battle. Something about the judge thinking the whole area of demon possession was too controversial. Now she was planning a new strategy. "Your Honor, the People would like to recall Dr. Chambers to the stand but I'll wait until tomorrow morning."

"For what purpose?" asked the Judge.

"Dr. Chambers will be assisting me in having Tessa Stetson testify for the People."

The entire court room was stunned by this announcement. Paul was about to drawl an objection, but he felt checked by the Holy Spirit to hold his peace. Judge Schwartz didn't hold his.

"Are you serious about this, Counselor? And do you want the jury in or out?"

"Definitely in." The primary purpose of this whole exercise was to get the sympathies of the jury on the side of the prosecution.

The judge just shook his head in a mute statement of I hope you know what you're doing. "We're in recess until nine o'clock tomorrow morning."

Whack!

That night, Dave and Patricia just held each other and alternately cried and prayed. Both would claim in the morning they hadn't slept a wink.

"The People call Dr. Olive Chambers and Mistress Tessa Stetson." The back doors of the court room opened and a well-dressed and stately black woman came slowly down the aisle, leading a two-year-old child by the hand.

Patricia hadn't seen Tessa since that rainy day months ago when the little girl and the rest of the day care kids had played horsey with Dave. If she hadn't known that this definitely was Tessa, she wasn't sure she would have recognized her. The strawberry hair was still in pigtails. There was still a light brush of freckles over a ski-jump nose. But the bright blue eyes no longer sparkled with either intellect or mischievousness. In fact, Tessa's eyes reminded Patricia of an Annie-style cartoon: just two empty circles. And her gait was stiff and stilted, in a way which seemed to go beyond the fact she was still recuperating from the physical assault and reconstructive surgery. This surely wasn't the same child who had stayed on a jumpy-horse for the full count.

As the little girl came abreast of her, Patricia tried to make eye contact. Nothing. Tessa looked neither right nor left; she just walked woodenly with a limp hand held by her guide.

When Dr. Chambers was seated on the stand with Tessa on her lap, the Assistant DA asked the older woman to review her professional qualifications. "I'm a pediatric psychiatrist, and I've been retained by the District Attorney's Office to serve as a consultant in cases involving young children."

"And do you have any experience with victims of sexual abuse or assault?"

"Yes, in my private practice, I'm seeing several such children."

"Would you describe for this court your clinical impression of Tessa's current emotional state?"

"Tessa has the classic symptoms of a child suffering from post-traumatic stress with evidence of catatonia."

"And how would you describe this catatonia, and how long have these symptoms been evident?"

"The patient has been in a severe catatonic state since the night of her attack. Since that night, she hasn't spoken, and makes no response when spoken to."

Makes no response when spoken to, thought the lawyer, That Carla lied to me. This kid has been nodding her head when asked about finding the man who hurt her!

Ms. Lane moved forward and placed a hand lightly on Tessa's head; no response. "Does she hear?"

"There is no evidence of damage to the faculties of hearing. However, she still makes no response when spoken to."

If I had that lying Carla right now, I'd wring her neck!

Paul rose. "Your Honor, may we approach?"

Judge Schwartz motioned the lawyers forward, the court recorder trailing in their wake.

"Your Honor. This seems to be a cheap trick on the part of the People to get the sympathy of the jury. Defense stipulates that Tessa has been horribly injured, mentally as well as physically. But I can't figure how her mental wounds can add any information to this case. Especially, seeing as she can't speak. I object to continuing this testimony. And I waive any cross examination."

"Counselor," said Judge Schwartz sternly, looking at Ms. Lane. "You have exactly five minutes to provide this court with some competent, relevant, and material information, or Defense's objection will be sustained and your witnesses will be dismissed. Now get on with it."

The Assistant DA returned to her table with her tail down. Might as well get to the point and be done with it. She moved to the witness stand and smiled at her diminutive witness.

"Tessa, honey, I want you to look all around this room," said Ms. Lane with an exaggerated sweeping motion of an arm laden with costume-jewelry bracelets. "Look all around the room and tell me-- do you see the man who hurt you that night in your bedroom. That was the night the ambulance came and took you to the hospital. Look at each person real carefully, and tell me if you see the person who hurt you that night in your bedroom."

No response. The Assistant DA tried again. "Tessa, honey, please. We need you to help us find the bad man who hurt you that night."

Tessa continued to gaze blankly at a spot slightly to the left of the ticking clock. Her thumb was in her mouth and she was drooling slightly. Dr. Chambers gently wiped her chin with a tissue and signaled the lawyer with a glance that it was time to end it.

Ms. Lane nodded irritably and returned to her seat. Carla had moved up during Tessa's "testimony" and was now sitting at the People's table. "I told you this was a mistake," whispered the lawyer.

"Any further questions," asked Judge Schwartz from the bench.

"No more questions," said Ms. Lane glumly.

"All right," said the judge, "we'll take a fifteen minute recess. Be back at two-thirty.

Whack. "Mr. Donaldson, Ms. Lane, may I see you two in chambers?"

Judge Schwartz resumed deliberations by announcing that both lawyers in the case had agreed to make their preliminary closing statements in the better than two hours that remained in the court day. Full closing statements would be made when court resumed Monday morning at nine.

Priscilla Lane loved this! She would get to give the jurors an overview of the People's case against David Court while the victim, Tessa, was right in front of them. Then they could incubate the image of this poor, mentally-impaired little girl all weekend.

During the break, Patricia had changed her seat so she could have a better view of Tessa's face during the proceedings. Now as the Assistant DA's irritating voice droned on and on about all the horrible things her Dave had done to Tessa, Patricia kept her eyes fixed on the little girl's face.

By two-forty-five, there was a little more color coming into Tessa's cheeks.

By three, the child was starting to visually track the lawyer's movements as she paraded back and forth in front of the jury box.

By three-fifteen, Tessa was consistently turning her head and following every movement Ms. Lane was making.

By three-thirty, light was beginning to dawn in the girl's normally-bright blue eyes. Patricia had a strong sense that Tessa was not only hearing, she was fully comprehending every word that shrilling voice uttered.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I remind you that it is your sworn duty to make sure that this man," and she stood right in front of Dave Court and pointed a crimson-tipped finger point-blank in his face, "that this man is locked up in jail so he can't hurt little girls like Tessa Stetson any more!"

The full light of comprehension broke across Tessa's face, and immediately there was a thunderstorm.

"No! No! No!" screamed Tessa with tears streaming down her face. She was standing on top of the People's table, fists balled in anger, punctuating each syllable with a stamp of a tiny Mary Jane. "Not Unca Dave! Not my Unca Dave. Unca Dave didn't do it! Not my Unca Dave!"

And then she took off running across the top of the People's table, straight toward her Unca Dave.

In high school, Dave had played third base on the base ball team. His specialty was snagging screaming line drives hit down the line with a diving stab of his glove. Now with the combined grace and skill of Gregg Nettles, Mike Schmidt, and Brooks Robinson, he made the play of a lifetime. From his seat at the defense table, he dove through the air and caught that precious little body just inches above the polished hardwood floor!

Dave landed flat on his brisket and had all the wind knocked out of him. But Tessa was none the worse for wear! In a split second she was on her feet and hopping up and down, beribboned pigtails flying.

"That was fun, Unca Dave! C'mon let's do it again! C'mon, Unca Dave Let's do it again! Let's do it again!" Gone was the post-traumatic stress! Gone was the catatonic stupor! Gone were the orphan-Annie eyes and drooling month!

Tessa was back!

The rest of the case took nine seconds, by the ticking school-house clock on the wall.

"Move for dismissal," bawled Paul from his seat, with a broad smile.

"Motion granted," agreed Judge Schwartz with a matching smile. Case dismissed."

Whack!

And it was over.

Chapter 21: Holy Land

The Monday after Carla's deliverance at the baby dedication service, Jim strode through the reception area, smiling and whistling a happy tune which Sandy thought might be *Thanks for Sunshine* by the Gaithers. Kind of hard to tell with the trills and warbling being added by way of variations. She was happy to see him relieved of the enormous burden he had been carrying over the months since Dave was arrested. Not that he had been rude or offensive but just so up tight, so tense, so-- just plain old-fashioned worried. In fact, everyone in the office area was happy, saying to each other by way of pleasant nods, "That's the Pastor Jim we came to know and love and it's great to have him back."

Jim was in a good mood, no doubt about it. Dave's case had been dismissed after the star witness's spectacular performance. The Court baby had been dedicated to the Lord. With the "help" of Tessa, a very proud witness. And now, Carla's deliverance from demon possession was nothing short of a miracle. Of course she was still a baby Christian. She would need to take one small step of faith each day, just as any baby Christian should do.

Jim leaned back in his chair, laced his fingers behind his head, leaned as far back as gravity would allow, and propped his feet on this desk. The phone rang. He glanced at the flashing line-one button, toyed with the idea of picking up the call, but decided against it. Sandy or one of the other ladies would get it. Instead, he swiveled in his chair and looked at the illuminated "Christ Our Pilot" transparency.

Thank you, Jesus, for being my pilot here in Mechanicsburg. I couldn't have made it this far without you. And I'll surely need you during the coming months and years, just as much. Maybe more.

Sandy popped her head in the partly-open door. "Can you take a call from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Pastor Jim?" she asked in a tone close to awe.

Jim swiveled to face her so abruptly he almost lost his balance. "Did you say 'Saudi Arabia'? As in 'middle east'?" Swiftly he ran "Saudi Arabia" through his memory banks but came up blank. He had no idea of who could be calling him from Saudi Arabia. Slowly, almost fearfully, he picked up the phone as Sandy closed the door.

"Pastor Hogan," said Jim.

There was a hesitation of two seconds or so and a faint crackling could be heard in the background. Then a male voice spoke. The voice was distinct, but with a slight reverberation, as though it had passed through some sort of electronic processing before arriving at Wesley Evangelical Church.

This is the secretary to Rahmir Moniz of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Is this the Pastor Jim Hogan of Wesley Evangelical Church in Pennsylvania, United States of America?" The man's voice was cultured, with a distinct accent Jim judged to be Oxford.

"That's right. My name is James A. Hogan, pastor of the Wesley Evangelical Church, here in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, United States. How can I help you?"

Again there was the crackling hesitation, followed by the Oxford accent. "It is perhaps we who may help you," the secretary said dryly. "My name is Hassar Zid. My employer has authorized me to discuss with you a matter of finance. Are you in circumstances where we may speak privately? The content of this conversation is to be held in strict confidence. No one but your closest and most trusted advisors may know anything about what is discussed here. And most important of all, no word of anything we discuss here may ever reach the news media. May I have your assurance on the point of confidentiality, Pastor Hogan?"

"Can you hold one moment, please?" asked Jim, bursting with curiosity. What in the world is this all about? He jumped up, opened the door, and asked Sandy to transfer the call to his private extension which could be accessed by no one but Sandy and himself. Each head turned in his direction and each expression asked What's going on. He just winked and quickly resumed his seat. He took the call off hold.

"Back again, Mr. Zid," he said a little breathlessly. You may speak with complete privacy, now." He trusted Sandy completely. She'd never pick up on his private line unless she was asked to do so, no matter how intense her curiosity might be.

"Pastor Hogan," resumed the Oxford voice, "my employer has become a rather careful student of Christianity as a result of the radio broadcasts of your Sunday morning services. I believe Mr. Moniz hears it over a short wave station which emanates from somewhere in your home province of Pennsylvania. A place called 'Red Line', perhaps?"

Suddenly Jim was in focus. "Oh, you mean Red Lion. That's a small farming community just southeast of here. And yes, there is a Christian broadcasting organization in that community which has a short wave station, as well as AM, FM and television."

"Very good," said Mr. Zid. His tone indicated he was glad to hear the sense of comprehension in Jim's voice. "Mr. Moniz is by my side as we speak and he wishes to ask some questions through me as interpreter. He understands English quite well when it is spoken but has some degree of difficulty expressing his thoughts in anything but our native tongue. Will you be open to such questions?"

"Certainly," said Jim readily, but he could feel the excitement draining out of him. Probably wanted to engage him in a pointless and convoluted comparison of the merits of the Bible and the Koran. "Please begin."

"Oh, and one more concern before we do begin. May we impose upon you to record this conversation? Mr. Moniz would like to have a translated transcript for more careful study after the call has been terminated.

Again Jim agreed while still wondering what this was truly all about.

"Here is the first question, Pastor Hogan," said Zid rather formally. Jim heard paper rustling in the background and surmised he was about to be subjected to a list of written questions.

"Mr. Moniz would like to know the monetary relationship between the talent and the U.S. dollar.

"The talent and the dollar?" Jim said, half to himself.

"Yes, sir. We are aware that the talent is an ancient medium of exchange in precious metals but we are unable to obtain an exchange rate to U.S. funds. Have you such information?"

"I'm afraid I don't," said Jim slowly, still not at all sure of what was going on.

There was a rather long pause in the conversation during which Jim could hear a rapid-fire discourse in what he assumed was Aramaic, or maybe Farsi, or whatever their native language was. Then Zid was back on the line.

"Mr. Moniz has just provided additional information," said the secretary in his precise Oxford tones, colored with an Aramaic overlay. I now understand that you used the term 'talent' rather extensively in a sermon you delivered two Sundays ago."

At last it was clear. Jim had preached on the parable of the talents two weeks ago. "Yes, Mr. Zid, that is correct. How may I help Mr. Moniz regarding that sermon?"

Now it was Zid's turn to sound confused. "Mr. Moniz would like to respond to your warning about burying a talent in the ground. Is this an allusion to failing to use your resources to achieve some good end? I'm not sure we have phrased that correctly but perhaps you will understand the intent of the question."

Now the pastor could sense the electric presence of the Holy Spirit all around him. It was as intense as the day in the court room when Carla was on her demonic rampage. He had an overpowering sense that something extremely important was about to transpire.

"Mr. Zid, you and Mr. Moniz are completely correct. That is the true meaning behind the warning against burying your talent in the ground.

"I am pleased," responded Zid, and true pleasure warmed his voice. "Now another question in this regard. Are you still accepting funds in the Holy Land Ministries non-profit corporation to recreate the Holy Land in the United States?"

Jim dropped the receiver. It bounced off his knee and popped under the desk. In a trance, he reached down, snagged the coiled cord, and hauled in the receiver.

For the last fifteen years or so, Jim had entertained a dream that some day he would be involved in developing an inspirational and educational destination resort which would replicate some of the artifacts and scenes from scripture-- by means of access to unlimited funds, of course. And do it right, on a par with Disneyland, or the Epcot Center, or The Old Country. A life-size, precise copy of Noah's ark, complete with a petting zoo. The Tabernacle in the wilderness, with priests and attendants reenacting the ancient rituals of salvation by sacrifice. Maybe even Solomon's Temple . . .

"Pastor Hogan! Pastor Hogan! Are you there?" finally the tinny Oxford voice roused Jim from his dream. He snatched up the receiver and pressed the mouthpiece against his ear. Frantically he reversed the receiver, dreading the possibility of a dial tone when he finally got the instrument in the proper position. Thank the Lord, there was no dial tone. Only the faint crackling of the overseas line.

"Hello! Mr. Zid? Pastor Hogan here. Sorry. I dropped the phone."

Mr. Zid's wry sense of humor was again detectable in his inflection. "Pastor Hogan, I believe we were discussing the matter of your receiving a contribution for the Holy Land from Mr. Moniz in the amount of one million dollars U. S. funds.

This time Jim hung on tightly and didn't drop the receiver. But he felt a little woozy for a couple seconds.

At the conclusion of his message on the talents two weeks ago, Jim had made a few light comments about his Holy Land dream, saying something like, "If you have a few talents buried somewhere you'd like to dust off and put to good use, I have a proposal for you."

At the time he said this, he'd actually thought he was off the air, and speaking to his live church congregation only. Apparently the sermon had run a little shorter than usual and the CROSS network had kept him on the air in order to fill to the end of time. As a result, the casual Holy Land remarks had been sent out over the entire satellite network. He struggled to remember exactly what he'd said. Something like: "And I'm not talking to you folks with a few dollars under the mattress or an oatmeal box hidden behind the corn flakes. We're talking big bucks here. Let's make it a minimum of one million dollars to become a member of the GroundBreakers club and receive a framed deed to one square inch of land on which The Holy Land will be built. And please understand one thing. This money will not go to me personally, or even to the church. This money will go to a non-profit corporation I will set up to be known as 'Holy Land Ministries'. This money will be held in escrow until it's time to start building. How about it? Who will send the first million? for the brand-new Holy Land Ministries?"

After making the remarks about the million-dollar GroundBreakers Club and Holy Land Ministries, he'd regretted it, even when he still thought his audience was limited to the four walls of the sanctuary plus the nursery and corridors. At the time, it had seemed frivolous, and maybe a little crass. But yet, here was a man on an overseas call talking about just that very thing. Contributing ten million dollars to help The Holy Land get started.

Again the Oxford tones were clipping in his ear. "Pastor Hogan. Are you there?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Zid," replied Jim briskly. "I believe I heard you mention a ten million-dollar contribution toward helping us start building The Holy Land. But I must be honest with you, Mr. Zid. My request for people to contribute ten million dollars was made somewhat in jest. In fact, I didn't think we were really on the air at the moment and I . . . I guess I--"

"If I may, Pastor Hogan," injected Zid smoothly, "we are not speaking of making a single contribution of ten million dollars. Mr. Moniz would like to see an executive summary of your startup proposal. Upon a favorable review of that summary, we are prepared to fund the entire project. In the meantime, the ten million dollars U.S. will be wired to you at once as a surety from Mr. Moniz that his intentions are serious as well as honorable. Can you give me an estimate of when you can e-mail me your executive summary?"

Jim's brain was finally in high gear. "One week from today, noon U.S. Eastern Standard Time. May I have your e-mail address please?"

"Of course," responded Zid, "We use several on-line services for e-mail. Our English service is EarthLink. Do you subscribe to Earthlink? Our e-mail address is moniz@earthlink.net"

Jim jotted the address on the margin of last night's sermon notes. He also grabbed a scratch pad and wrote a note to Sandy: What is EarthLink?

Zid's Oxford voice spoke again over the many miles between Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. "Now I will need some information in order to wire you the funds. Are you prepared to write down several items we will need?"

"Please go ahead," said Jim with a tight feeling high in his throat. He pulled the page of sermon notes on which he had been writing a little closer and wrote as Zid dictated.

"First, the name of the bank where the Holy Land Ministries funds are being held. Second, the city in which this bank is located and the branch number, if it is a branch. Third, your bank's ABA routing and transit number. Fourth, the number of the account for the Holy Land Ministries. And lastly, your own social security number." Jim scribbled furiously as Zid spoke, and then asked him to repeat the items to make sure he had everything straight. It wasn't every day he made arrangements to receive ten million dollars by wire. Zid repeated each item distinctly and Jim ticked off each one on his list.

Again the Oxford voice was on the wire. "Our business manager believes you can expect the wire to arrive in the destination account in about five business days. Will that be satisfactory?"

Satisfactory! Could Jim wait five days to receive ten million dollars? With a high degree of anxiety, to be sure, but how could a five-day wait for the beginning of the odyssey of the century be anything but satisfactory?

"Pastor Hogan," said Zid suddenly during the lull in the conversation. My assistant just reminded me to ask you about the Apple Macintosh computer. Do you use one by any chance?"

"Looking at one right now," answered Jim cheerily, wondering what difference it could make since Mr. Moniz would probably want to see the executive summary in his own language anyway.

"Excellent!" said Zid with equal cheer. May I be so bold as to ask if you have a modem? A 56K modem, if possible.

"We'll have one by this afternoon," said Jim, making more scribbles on his sermon notes. "May I ask why we need a modem?"

"We use Power Macintosh computers in our offices here in Riyadh. And, we have modems and Apple Remote Access file-sharing software, as well. But the main reason I am asking you about a Macintosh and a modem is this. We have translation software which can read an English document which has been saved to disk as an ASCII text file and translate it into quite passable Aramaic. In our own alphabet, also.

"In this way, Mr. Moniz and his advisors can have anything you send us by English e-mail in our language, just seconds after it arrives. You will need to attach a Rich Text Format word processor file to the e-mail message. Will this method be agreeable with you, Pastor Hogan?"

Pastor Hogan was thinking about how the entanglement of languages which occurred at the Tower of Babel was now being unsnarled by man's expanding computer technology. "Yes, of course, Mr. Zid. Very agreeable. It's amazing what can be done with computers. Makes you wonder where it will end. But I do have one concern. If we send you something which will be translated into your language by the computer, how can you be sure that Mr. Moniz will see exactly what we sent to you in English? Isn't there a chance your translation software will made a mistake in the process, maybe fail to catch some nuance of meaning which was intended at the time the document was originally written? Is that being too fussy?"

"Not at all, Pastor Hogan," replied Zid smoothly. I agree with you that such a possibility does exist. But may I remind you that I am fluent in five languages, including English and

Aramaic? Several members of my staff are fluent in English and Aramaic, as well. You may be assured that Mr. Moniz will get the true sense of what you write."

Jim cleared his throat, feeling like he was out of his element. "Well, that clears up that point, I'm sure."

"Might you have additional questions or suggestions?" asked Moniz's secretary courteously, his tone carrying the light but distinct message that the conversation was all but over.

Jim hesitated to hang up, checking his notes to be sure he had all the information needed to complete the wire transfer and to submit the executive summary of his proposal. Two things seemed to be missing. "Two more things, if I may, Mr. Zid. I don't seem to have your modem number in my notes.." Jim had the nagging feeling he was missing something. He hated to break the connection and suddenly remember what he had failed to ask about.

Zid quickly gave his fax and modem numbers. "Regarding transmitting files back and forth between our countries, I suggest we use Apple Remote Access file-sharing software. With ARA, we can access shared folders on each other's computers. Are you familiar with ARA, Pastor Hogan?"

"I think I've seen the box around here somewhere but I'm not sure we're using it yet." He'd have to ask Sandy to bone up on ARA, as soon as they had their modem hooked up. Although he had given his pledge of confidentiality to Zid at the beginning of the conversation, Sandy surely fit the definition of "closest and most trusted advisor."

The conclusion of the phone call was routine, although the things talked about were anything but routine. Jim and Zid exchanged good-byes and Jim put the handset back in the cradle. It was over. And it was just beginning.

Debra was incredulous, but not speechless. She still didn't believe it was really happening. She rattled on and on about why would this happen to them. Maybe it was a money laundering scheme for terrorists or money for some middle east drug lord. It's a scam. They want to take away the few dollars we are saving for Jessi's wedding. Ten million dollars for a preacher's wife who had made do on a parsonage income for twenty-five years? Never happen! Jim hadn't even tried to convey the concept that this first ten million was merely a token, that Moniz meant what he said about his willingness to fund the total Holy Land project, subject to his review of the complete proposal. Or, at least a summary of the complete proposal.

They were driving over to the PNC Bank's main office in Harrisburg. Since moving to Pennsylvania, the Hogans had done all their personal banking with PNC and Jim had given their personal account number to Zid as the destination account for the wire

transfer. Jim and Debra had an appointment with Jane Carter. Jane was a faithful member of the church and worked as branch manager at the PNC main office. She was the epitome of banking decorum and was another person who would be added to Jim's short list of people who would need to know what was happening with Moniz and his seemingly endless supply of millions. Jane was in her late fifties, had never married, and she wore round steel rims which matched her steel gray hair. Her mind was keen, not only regarding banking matters, but life in general. Her bright eyes snapped alertly behind her steel rims and she never missed a pitch.

Jane was training a new teller when the Hogans arrived at the bank but she quickly handed that chore over to the head teller and led Jim and Debra to an empty office which, according to the sign on the door, belonged to the customer service representative.

After the door was closed, Jim summarized the fiscal aspects of Zid's call. Jane listened intently but said nothing until he was finished. "How do you think we should handle this?" Jim asked in conclusion.

Even though she had first heard about the ten million dollar wire transfer just seconds ago, she was on top of the situation and ready with a few questions. "Is this a personal gift or a contribution to Holy Land Ministries?" she asked with a coy smile on her thin but still-attractive face.

Jim coughed lightly in embarrassment. "You didn't think I was serious about the Holy Land non-profit corporation when I mentioned it from the pulpit, did you?" he asked almost boyishly.

"No," replied Jane with a teasing grin, "but someone in Saudi Arabia apparently did."

"Jim gave this Mr. Zid our personal account number. Now what do we do?" asked Debra tensely. "I can just see it now. Another big hee-haw in the media over an evangelical preacher gone money mad."

"I think we can prevent that," said Jane calmly. "Here is what I suggest. First, we'll open a new joint account for your personal use and transfer your current funds into this new account. Next, set up an appointment with one of our trust officers to draw up the necessary papers for the creation of a non-profit corporation to be known as Holy Land Ministries. There will be a fee for this of course." Debra suddenly looked alarmed, not at all sure they could afford the fees a fancy lawyer might charge. Jane continued, unruffled. "But of course such an expense can be legitimately charged to your HLM account.

"The last thing we need to do right now is change the official name of your old personal account to Holy Land Ministries and show you, and your social security number, as Executive Director. We should designate an administrative treasurer, also. Someone who is authorized to write checks and disburse funds."

"That's easy," answered Jim. "You're the treasurer."

Jane paused a moment. "Why don't we say the bank is managing the account with me serving as an agent of the bank. Again, there will be a fee for these services."

Debra jerked a little each time the word "fee" was used; Jim ignored her, for the time being. "I like that approach," said Jim sincerely. Since Zid's call, he'd had visions of enormous amounts of mishandled money with a proportional scandal. That was the last thing he wanted. To bring dishonor to God's name. To make himself, his church, his profession a laughing stock and the fodder for every writer in the late-night TV industry. Long ago he had dedicated his life and his talents to the business of drawing men to Christ, not driving them away.

Minutes later, Jim and Debra were driving across the Harvey Taylor Bridge, on their way home to their parsonage in Mechanicsburg. Debra was still tense. "Jim, you must have forgotten that I'm just a country girl at heart. I can't deal with money when so many zeros are involved."

"I guess I better tell you the rest of the story."

"Rest? What rest?"

"There may be more than just ten million involved in the generosity of Mr. Moniz. According to Mr. Zid, this first payment is just to make us sit up and take notice. Then, if they like our proposal, Mr. Moniz will be prepared to fund the entire project."

"And how much may that be," may I ask?"

"In round numbers, maybe \$500 million."

Jim was glad Debra wasn't driving or they'd be in the Susquehanna River.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

[G. Edwin Lint](#)

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Chapter 22: The Holy Land Proposal

Parsonage

*A novel about life behind the scenes for an evangelical pastor's family:
in the church, the parsonage, the community.*

Continued from Chapter 21

A fictional account of the development of a major destination resort known as
The Holy Land USA made possible through the benevolence of a major donor
from Saudi Arabia

An Appendix

This appendix contains some of the information included in The Holy Land USA Proposal prepared by Pastor Jim Hogan for Rahmir Moniz of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and sent to the attention of Hassar Zid.

Proposal Overview: The Holy Land USA
to be funded through The Holy Land USA Foundation, financed via Moniz
Enterprises LTD

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A Proposal

This proposal was born in the fictional account in [Parsonage](#) of the development of a major destination resort known as The **Holy Land USA**, made possible through the benevolence of a major donor from Saudi Arabia

The Holy Land of Pennsylvania will be a major inspirational destination resort located in central Pennsylvania, USA. It will be within a two hour drive of Washington, DC, Philadelphia, PA, Hershey, PA, the Pennsylvania Dutch Region of Lancaster County PA, and Gettysburg, PA It will be within a four-hour drive of New York City and Pittsburgh, PA. Funding for building and operating The Holy Land PA will be made through major contributions to a nonprofit foundation managed by [DiskBooks Electronic Publishing](#).

The primary focus of The Holy Land PA will be the education and spiritual edification of the guests. Shopping, sit-down dining, fast-food refreshments, and rides will remain available but will be secondary to the primary focus of telling the world the truth about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, God's Plan for our Salvation, and the lands in which they took place.

General admission and parking will be free to all visitors. Access to major attractions and rides will be via "ride tickets" to be purchased by visitors, in the style of the [Knobels Grove Amusement Park](#) of Elysburg, PA. However, Holy Land PA tickets that are unused at the end of a visit may be redeemed for a cash refund equal to 90% of the face value of the tickets.

All guests will enter the park through the Gates of Heaven Concert Hall where they may receive a 30-minute multimedia orientation to The Holy Land PA experience, as well as an overview of God's plan for our salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The orientation presentations will run on the half hours from 9:00 A.M. through 6:00 P.M.

Guests who do not care to sit through the orientation presentation or who have already seen it may enter the park directly. The visit will be a self-guided tour of The Holy Land PA but will be assisted by numerous information stations equipped with DVD depictions of the specific point in the tour where the information is activated.

Automatic ticket dispensing machines will be situated throughout the park and at all major attractions and rides.

Examples of Major Attractions and Rides

General Information

All attractions will be constructed to actual scale with full attention to detail as specified in the Bible. Where the Bible does not provide sufficient specific relevant information, archeological data, classic art, and history will be used to authenticate the settings.

At no time will overall guest safety or access for guests with disabilities be sacrificed in the interest of authentic settings and activities.

All persons working in scenes involving simulated violence will work according to specifications provided by OSHA. When actors are involved in theatrically simulated actions of violence, simulated blood will be used according to the latest theatrical techniques. At no time, will planned physical interaction be more dangerous than that in a closely supervised high school varsity soccer match.

All animals used in the attractions will be treated humanely and according to guidelines provided by the International Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. For example, scenes portraying animals being sacrificed on the altar of God in the temple will use simulated blood and bloodletting. The same lambs and bullocks will be *recycled* and used over and over via camouflaged underground passageways.

Tabernacle in the Wilderness

God ordered Moses to build a Tabernacle in the Wilderness according to His specifications:

Exodus 25:9 Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

The prominence of this attraction within the Holy Land complex is based on the fact that this is where God's plan for our salvation was born. Animals would die a sacrificial death for our sins so we wouldn't have to die, first in the Wilderness Tabernacle, and then in the ornate Temple of Solomon. [Although Solomon's Temple was rebuilt by Herod, only the Solomon version is shown in the Holy Land.]

This attraction shows the complete, exact-size tabernacle built according to God's specifications as detailed in Exodus Chapters 25 through 40.

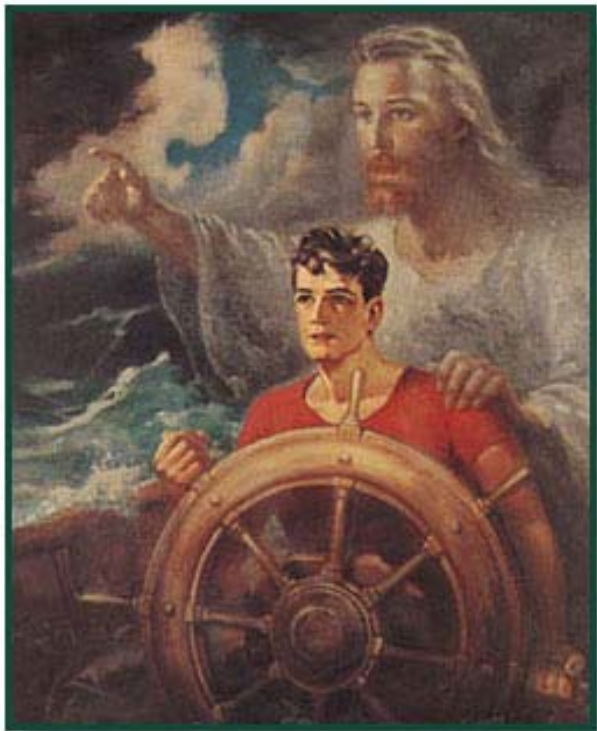
Via Dolorosa and Calvary

Background music provided by Sandi Patti, singing *Via Dolorosa*

Christ's journey through the narrow, winding streets of Jerusalem from Pilate's judgment hall to Mount Calvary will be reenacted in vivid detail. Guests will view this panorama from tiered seating along one side of the street; the "crowd" will occupy the other side of the street. The processional to the cross will run every hour on the hour. Costumed volunteer extras who serve in exchange for free ride tickets will augment the "crowds" of Jewish citizens who clamored for Christ's execution or pleaded for mercy. The crucifixion scene will be viewed from a distance by guests. A detailed crucifixion scene will be included as one of the Bible Alive Theater presentations.

Solomon's Temple

The full-scale glory of the Temple will be captured through an artful combination of sprayed foam, fiberglass, papier mache, anodized aluminum, and gold paint. The sights will be augmented by the sounds of the shofar, trumpets, cymbals, and singers. The smells will include incense and a controlled amount of the odor of burnt offerings.



Sallman's Chapel

[Warner Sallman's contemporary Christian art masterpieces](#) will be presented in full-size backlighted transparencies in a colonial-style chapel, with the interior illuminated primarily by light from the transparencies. The paintings will include such classic favorites as *Head of Christ*, *Christ at Dawn*, *He Careth for You*, *In His Presence*, *Jesus the Children's Friend*, *The Nativity*, *Portrait of Jesus*, *The Lord Is My Shepherd*, *Christ at Heart's Door*, *Christ in Gethsemane*, *The Good Shepherd*, and *Christ Our Pilot*. The Sallman Chapel exhibits will be presented courtesy of Kribel and Bates, copyright owners.

Bible Alive Theater

Eight film shorts showing major Bible stories will be projected in an I-Max style rotating theater that revolves to a different auditorium every 20 minutes. The Old Testament scenes will include Adam and Eve's fall at the hands of Satan, Abraham offering to sacrifice Isaac to God on the mountain, David slaying Goliath, Elisha praying down fire

on the altar, and Daniel in the lion's den. *[Although Adam and Eve wore no clothes in the Garden of Eden, their depiction here will show them artfully clothed in garments of vines and leaves.]*

New Testament scenes will include The last supper, Christ's trial, before Pilate, The Crucifixion, The Resurrection, the Acts-Two gift of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room, and the Ascension. The resurrection scene will feature hand-to-hand combat between holy angels and Satan's demons.

Noah's Ark

The ark will be created according to Biblical specifications and floating on an outdoor lake. Guides representing Noah and his family will conduct tours. However, the live residents of the ark will be limited to domestic animals and herbivore creatures, in the interest of guest safety. Wild animals such as lions, tigers, and bears will be shown as animated life-size models.

Christian Concerts

Gospel and contemporary recording and concert artists will be featured in nightly two-hour concerts in the Gates of Heaven Concert Hall. Guests who have paid the full admission via ride tickets will have reserved seats. Any remaining seats will be open to the general public at no charge on a space-available basis.

G. Edwin Lint

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Sample Price List for Rides and Major Attractions, Expressed As Quantities of One-Dollar Tickets	Adults	Seniors	Children, up to 12 years
Via Dolorosa and Calvary	7	6	Free
Solomon's Temple	3	2	Free
Sallman's Chapel	3	2	Free
Bible Alive Theater	7	6	Free
Raging Tempest	7	6	Free
Tabernacle in the Wilderness	7	6	Free
Noah's Ark	3	2	Free
Christian Concerts	12	10	5

Warning: Parents of young children should read the general information brochure very carefully before taking their entire families into activities that depict Biblically-accurate violence.

The End of the Proposal

G. Edwin Lint

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