

THE PROJECT

A painting of a young boy with dark skin, seen from the back, looking towards a two-story, dilapidated white house. The boy is wearing a white t-shirt, dark shorts, and a blue backpack. He is holding a black bag in his right hand. The house has a green roof, a small dormer, and a porch where another person is standing. The scene is set in a dark, foggy environment with bare trees and a greenish-yellow sky.

Todd's encounter
with the dark side

DANGER!
NO TRESPASSING
Trespassers will be
prosecuted!

By L.M. Fontaine

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Todd's Encounter with the Dark Side

The leaves and twigs crackled under their feet.

“Where are you taking us?” inquired Todd.

“You’ll see,” responded Jake.

As Jake led Todd and his younger brother Justin deeper into the woods, the wind whipped Jake’s straw colored hair making him look like a scarecrow.

Finally they came to a cleared area, and looming in front of them was an old deserted house.

“Wow,” exclaimed Todd. “It’s so weird to see a house in the woods.”

“Do you think it’s haunted?” asked Justin.

“Please!” snapped Jake. “Only idiots believe in that kind of stuff.”

When they came up to the tall chain-link fence surrounding it, there was a large sign that said, “NO TRESPASSING.”

“Too bad,” said Todd. “I’d love to go check the place out.”

“No problem,” responded Jake. He pulled off his backpack and took out a pair of metal cutters. “I came prepared.”

The boys took turns cutting a hole in the fence big enough for them to squeeze through.

It was difficult making their way to the house because of all the overgrown weeds and bushes.

Jake’s foot hit a solid object and he swore. He pushed back the weeds and saw it was a ladder.

“Be careful guys,” he warned. “Who knows what’s lying around out here.”

“I hope there aren’t any snakes!” exclaimed Todd.

There was no doorknob on the front door so Jake kicked it open

with his foot. Broken glass and old clothing lay strewn throughout the house, mingled with pieces of charred wood which once had been a large section of the second floor.

“Wow,” said Justin. “I wonder if anyone died when this place caught on fire.”

“Is little brother afraid there are ghosts in here?” mocked Jake.

“Look guys, I been thinking that we could turn this place into our own little secret hideout. I could get my buddies, Pedro and Nick, to help us fix it up.”

“But,” protested Todd, “what about that big sign. It says, ‘No Trespassing’?”

“Yeah Todd, and what do you think you’re doing right now?”

Jake took a cigarette from his pocket. After lighting it and taking a few puffs, he said, “I got this from the old man I sometimes do odd jobs for.”

He continued, “Come on, who’s gonna know? Nobody is going to come near this place! That leaves us free to do whatever we want. The cops never come out here. We’re a quarter mile from the road. And we’ll just fix the inside of this joint so if anyone does happen by they won’t think anything.”

“Justin,” he said, “why don’t you and Todd go out and bring that ladder in here?”

The boys retrieved the ladder and Jake placed it on the only section of the upstairs floor that had survived the fire.

Jake climbed up the ladder and standing on the second floor, declared, “This is sturdy enough. From now on this will be known as *The Loft*. Can you imagine what this place is gonna be like after we overhaul it? We could even furnish it with some borrowed lawn chairs or something,” he said with a smirk on his face.

Jake then looked down at his watch, “Gotta get going, the old man has another job I need to do.”

As the boys made their way back to the main road, they discussed

what kind of renovations they would make and what tools they needed. Since they were all free after school on Monday through Wednesday, those would be the days they would work on what they termed, “The Project.”

As they drew close to where the wooded area ended, Jake said, “So do we all agree that no one is to know about our secret hangout except Pedro and Nick?”

“Agreed!” exclaimed Justin and Todd.

The following Monday Todd went home from school to get his dad’s battery-operated screwdriver. He was stuffing it into a knapsack when his dad happened to come into the garage.

“I don’t remember your asking permission to borrow that?”

“Sorry Dad. Can I borrow it?”

“Why do you need it?”

“Me and Justin are working on a project. I’ll bring it back tonight.”

“What kind of a project?”

“You know, something for school.” Todd’s voice was just starting to change at this point in his life and when he uttered these words his voice cracked.

Todd couldn’t believe he just lied to his dad, but he didn’t know what else to do.

“Well, okay then. But you’d better have it back here tonight.”

As soon as his dad left, Todd sighed a sigh of relief. He picked up his knapsack and headed over to Justin’s house.

Todd held a canvas bag open as Justin put in two hammers and a saw, along with an assortment of screws and nails. Todd said, “You know, I’m having second thoughts about this whole thing. My dad caught me taking the power screwdriver and I lied to him when he asked me why I needed it. I feel lousy about that. And I don’t really feel comfortable trespassing. I think you guys better count me out.”

Angrily Justin asked, “Are you serious? Is it because you’re

afraid of losing out on that car your dad promised you when you're sixteen?"

"No," protested Todd. "It has to do with a sense of honor."

"Well Todd, you've already broken the law by trespassing. You just lied to your dad. How much honor do you have?"

Todd hung his head and looked at the ground.

Justin continued, "Don't you see buddy, you've already blown it? Come on, Jake and the guys are already at the place waiting for us."

Jake and his friends were in their first year of high school and their school ended an hour earlier than Todd and Justin's middle school.

By the time Justin and Todd arrived at the old house, Jake and his friends, Nick and Pedro, were busy removing rubbish out of the living room area. Pedro had brought a boom box and the boys were singing along to the music.

Todd and Justin pitched in, and about an hour later Jake declared, "Time for a break." Looking at Justin he said, "Since we've been working longer than you and Todd, you guys can keep working while me and the boys head for the woods for a cigarette.

Smiling, Justin responded, "No problem."

About five minutes after they had left, Justin suddenly froze in fear when he heard the voice of a young girl in the house crying out, "Help me. Help me."

Justin looked at Todd and saw the fear in his face. Both of them bolted out the door. While they were running towards the fence to get out, they heard Jake and his friends roaring with laughter. Justin looked over and saw his brother laughing so hard he was holding his stomach.

Jake went over to Justin and slapped him on the back. "Did you see a ghost, Bro'? Pedro made a tape of his sister calling for help and timed it so it would play five minutes after he started it."

Todd and Justin looked at each other. Justin's skin turned bright red. It was times like this that Todd was thankful to be black.

"Alright guys," said Jake, "let's get back to work."

The next day at school, Todd and Justin's friend, Sarah, joined them at their lunch table. She sat next to Todd.

"This is the only cafeteria food I like," Todd said as he scooped up a big spoonful of chili.

Justin asked Todd and Sarah, "Did you guys happen to see that show on TV last night called *The Haunted: Touching a Ghost*?"

Both Sarah and Todd shook their heads.

Justin asked, "Do you guys think ghosts are real?"

"Sure seems like it," responded Todd.

"I know they're real," Sarah said with conviction.

Justin's eyes widened, "Have you seen one?"

"No, but my grandmother often comes to see my mom at night. She comes and sits at the end of my mom's bed. And she died over ten years ago."

Justin gasped.

Todd's jaw dropped exposing a mouthful of chili. After closing his mouth and swallowing hard, he asked, "Does she talk to your mom?"

"Yes. She tells her how wonderful the afterlife is and that nobody ever has to be afraid of dying."

"But," protested Todd, "what about people going to hell?"

"Oh, Todd. My grandmother said there is no hell. That was just made up by church guys to make people live good lives. God is love. He wouldn't put His children into some fire that never stops burning."

"There is a hell," protested Todd. "But people don't go there because they're bad."

"Really?" Sarah mocked. "That's a new way to look at it. I suppose people go to hell for being good!"

“No, no,” Todd protested. “I’ve seen in the Bible where it says the only reason people go to hell is because they didn’t trust Christ to get them to heaven. That’s why Jesus died. He paid for all the bad things we’ve done.”

“Then why be good since we’re all going to heaven anyway?” she asked sarcastically.

“I didn’t say everyone goes to heaven. Only those who have believed in Jesus to get them there, go to heaven. Being good has to do with having God give you rewards and stuff.”

“How did you get to know so much about the Bible?” she asked scornfully. Ignoring her attitude, he explained, “A few months ago some guy talked to me and my parents about how to go to heaven.” Sarah’s face reddened. “Todd,” she said, “your dad is so educated. I’m surprised he’d fall for something like that. Your belief is kind of primitive.”

“It’s true!” Todd exclaimed as he banged his clenched fist against the table. His fist hit the handle of the spoon that was in his chili sending the spoon flying and its contents into Sarah’s long blond hair and on to the light blue blouse she was wearing.

Todd looked at her in disbelief as chili dripped from her hair. Sarah looked shocked and was speechless. Then big tears welled in her eyes. She got up and hurried away.

Justin started laughing. Todd snapped, “That was not funny!”

As news got around why Sarah went home, Ed, the class bully, approached Todd and punched him in the arm, saying, “Way to go Todd.”

He was thankful when the final bell sounded signaling the end of the school day. He wanted to apologize and offer to pay for a new blouse so he headed over to Sarah’s house.

Todd’s stomach churned as he knocked on her door. But those feelings disappeared as soon as the door swung open and he saw the smile on Sarah’s face.

“Sarah,” Todd said, “I can’t tell you how sorry I am.”

“Don’t feel bad. I know it was an accident. And my mom was able to wash the chili stain out.”

Todd said, “I would still like to pay for it.”

“No way,” she said. “But that was kind of you to offer. Come on in. I want you to meet my mother.”

Sarah led Todd into the living room. Above the fireplace there was a large portrait of a woman who appeared to be in her sixties. Pointing to it, Sarah said, “That was my grandmother.” Todd shuddered as he imagined her appearing to Sarah’s mother.

Sarah called out to her mother who was in the kitchen.

When she came into the room, she extended her hand to Todd. When he shook it, he was taken back by how icy cold it was.

As though reading his mind, she said, “Sorry about the cold hand, I was just getting some things out of the freezer.”

Todd immediately felt relieved. Her mother appeared so normal and nice.

Later when Todd was walking home from Sarah’s, he tried to figure out how visitations from dead people and his belief in the Bible could both be right.

The next day at school, when Sarah joined Justin and Todd at the lunch table, Justin said to Sarah, “You’re brave to sit next to Todd again.”

After laughing, Sarah said, “Todd, my mother wanted me to tell you something. She has psychic abilities, you know. She said that she sensed that you had once been a famous violin player in the seventeenth century and that’s why you long to play the violin.”

Justin started laughing. “Todd? The violin? I don’t think so.”

Nobody but Todd knew of his secret desire to play the violin. He felt shocked by what Sarah said. He said, “I don’t believe in - whatever it’s called - that people come back after they die and are born as somebody else, or an animal.”

“It’s called reincarnation,” she said, “and there’s proof it’s true. Some people have spoken in languages they’ve never learned when they’ve been hypnotized. Sometimes they even know detailed facts about places they’ve never been before. How else could you explain it?”

Todd couldn’t answer. He felt more troubled than ever.

Sarah asked, “Can you guys come over to my place after school for some popcorn and a game I want to show you?”

Todd asked, “What kind of game?”

“You have to see it to understand.”

“Are you sure it’s not boring?” asked Justin.

Smiling, Sarah responded, “I can promise you it’s not. Can you be at my place around four?”

Justin and Todd looked at each other and Justin said, “Why not?”

The boys arrived promptly at Sarah’s house at four o’clock. When she opened the door, the smell of freshly made popcorn greeted them.

She led them into the kitchen and motioned to them to sit at the table. She then scooped the popcorn into bowls.

After they finished eating she handed them paper towels and said, “Here - wipe your hands really good - I don’t want any grease or dirt on my board! I’ll be back in a minute.”

Sarah returned with what appeared to be an antique board game. It was made of wood with fancy letters painted on it that had been all but worn off from years of use. She set it carefully out in front of them on the kitchen table. “This was my grandmother’s.”

Justin, looking at it, scrunched his face and asked, “What are you going to do Sarah, teach us the alphabet?”

“Very funny, Justin. For your information this board is a way to contact spirits.” As she placed a plastic triangle shaped object on the board, she said, “If you ask questions, and then you and another person put your fingers very lightly on this, it will spell out the answer.”

Todd felt totally spooked. “I’m really not interested in contacting a ghost.”

“Come on Todd,” exclaimed Justin. “Let’s at least try it. And if you’re too scared, I’ll do it.”

Then Sarah and Justin put their fingers on the small plastic apparatus, and Sarah said to Justin, “Ask a question.”

Justin asked, “What’s the name of what my brother, and Todd and me are working on?”

At first nothing happened and Sarah said, “Sometimes I have to make it a little darker in the room for it to work.”

After closing the door to the kitchen and closing the window blinds, she put her fingers back on the device. It immediately went to the letter T and then spelled out “The Project.”

Todd was thinking Justin was pushing it to spell that out and said, “Let me ask it a question.”

Todd asked, “What was my grandfather’s name?”

It spelled, “C-u-r-t-i-s,” and then continued to spell out “He is here and he wants to talk to you.”

Todd exclaimed, “I don’t want anything to do with this! I’m sorry Sarah but I think it’s time for us to go.”

“Are you serious Todd?” asked Justin. “Was his name Curtis?”

“Yes. Are you coming with me Justin?”

“No. This is just getting interesting. Don’t you want to hear what he has to say to you?”

“This is creepy! See you guys later.”

Todd was shaken by this experience. As he headed home, he broke into a run while trying to make sense of everything.

At dinner that night, he had no appetite and was pushing the spaghetti on his plate around with his fork.

His dad noticed and asked, “What’s wrong, son?”

“Dad, do you think the dead can communicate with us? One of my friends says her dead grandmother talks to her mother.”

“Well, I’m no Bible scholar but I do know somewhere in the Bible it says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So if someone is in heaven, then he can’t very well be appearing to people here on earth.”

“Do you think it’s just her imagination? Or maybe some kind of trick?”

“Todd, it could be a lot more evil than that.”

“Like, what do you mean?”

“People who think they are communicating with dead people are really communicating with demons.”

Todd shuddered. The thought of communicating with one of Satan’s fallen angels sounded even scarier than talking to a dead person!

Todd took a deep breath. He looked first at his mother, then his father and said, “I think I’ve talked to a demon.”

His mother gasped and asked, “What do you mean, Todd?”

“Justin and me went to our friend’s house today and she had a board game with the alphabet on it. When I asked what grandpa’s name was, it spelled out ‘Curtis.’ It scared me so I took off, but Justin stayed.”

His mother said, “That was a wise decision on your part, Todd.”

“Yes it was,” agreed his dad. “I think you’d better warn your friends they’re playing with fire.”

“Fire? What do you mean? What could happen?”

“Todd, when people get involved with occult activities they are inviting evil spirits into their lives. And it’s a fact that those wicked spirits won’t necessarily leave when you want them to. Some people have been tormented so badly that they’ve even lost their minds.”

That night Justin called and said, “You won’t believe what you missed out on.”

Todd blurted out, “Justin, we shouldn’t have anything to do with that game. I found out it’s evil!”

“You’re crazy. I got some useful information today.”

“The whole thing is a lie. Those aren’t ghosts of dead people you’re talking to – they’re demons!”

“I don’t think so. Whatever. It is amazing, that’s all I know. Talk to you tomorrow,” Justin said as he hung up.

When Todd went to his bedroom and was closing the blinds to his window, he jumped when he saw a ghostly figure. As he looked again, he saw his ghost was simply a big white garbage bag blowing across the lawn.

Todd put a towel along the bottom of the inside of his door so his parents wouldn’t know he was sleeping with a light on.

When he got in bed he couldn’t sleep. After tossing and turning for a long time he got out of bed and got on his knees next to his bed. “Lord,” he prayed, “please protect me from those evil things - those demons - and please help me to show Justin and Sarah what they’re doing is dangerous.” When he crawled back into bed, he had a peaceful feeling and fell asleep.

When Todd awoke he could smell French toast. *Ahh*, he thought, *it’s Saturday*. Anxious to eat breakfast, he quickly was getting dressed when his cell phone rang.

“Todd,” said Justin, “Jake wants us all to meet at the old house at two o’clock today.”

“How come?”

“Jake told me that he wants to be the one to explain.”

“Do you want to come by here around 1:30 and we’ll go together?”

“Sure.”

By the time Todd and Justin arrived at the old house, Jake and his friends, Pedro and Nick, were already there munching on a day old pepperoni pizza.

Todd and Justin sat down on a couple of old crates and joined the other boys. Todd noticed that Jake looked serious. Pedro sank back

into the beanbag he had brought from home. Looking at Jake, he asked, “What’s up boss?”

Jake explained, “We agreed from the beginning that this place was to be our secret hangout. Well it seems that my brother has problems keeping secrets. He’s let some girl from school in on it.”

“That’s not true!” Justin protested. “I didn’t tell her anything. A spirit did!” Nick and Pedro burst out laughing.

Justin tried to explain over their laughter, “I know it sounds crazy but Todd was there. He knows what I’m saying is true. Tell ‘em Todd!”

Jake rolled his eyes and said, “It gets worse than that guys. Now Justin wants this ‘ghost whisperer’ girl to come here and prove to us that ghosts are real.”

Pedro’s eyes widened. “Man, Justin, did you really talk to a ghost?”

Jake snapped, “Hey, whose side are you on!?”

Nick said, “I’m curious. What do we have to lose? The girl already knows about this place. Justin, are you sure she won’t tell anyone else?”

“Sarah’s already promised not to tell a soul.”

Jake threw his pizza crust back into the box. “I can’t believe this. Are you guys serious?”

“Jake, what are you afraid of?” Pedro asked.

Picking up an empty soda can and crushing it with his hand, he said, “I’m afraid of nothin’. I think the whole thing is crazy but if you fools wanna do it, go ahead, call her!”

Justin called Sarah’s cell phone and when he got off the phone, he said, “She told me she’s close to where we’d meet her on the road. She had a feeling we’d want her to come.”

“Spooky,” Pedro said with fear in his voice.

Jake said, “I’ll go with Justin to meet her at the road.” Then looking at Todd, Pedro, and Nick, he mockingly said, “You three

guys can tidy up this place since we have a ‘lady’ coming. We want it nice for Miss Sarah, even though I don’t think the ghost will care that much.”

Todd’s stomach was in knots. He stood up and screamed, “Stop! You’re playing with the devil! I’m not going to have anything to do with this!”

The boys burst out laughing. “You’re kidding, right?” asked Jake with a smirk on his face.

Jake went over to Todd, put his hands on Todd’s shoulders, and shoved him back down on the crate. “Do you want everyone at your school to know what a big sissy you are? You leave and you can count on us getting the word out.”

“Yeah,” piped in Pedro, “and we’ll let everyone know you cried like a baby and wanted to go home to your Mama.”

“Hey Todd, I’m the devil and I’m going to get you,” mocked Nick as he put his index fingers against each side of his head so as to look like horns.

“Come on Todd,” Jake said sternly, “just stay where you are. Me and Justin will be right back.”

Within fifteen minutes they arrived back with Sarah who was carrying her board game. She set it up on one of the crates and looking at Pedro and Nick said, “Please don’t introduce yourselves.”

She sat down and motioned to Jake to sit across from her and put his fingers on the plastic device. She then asked the board, “Tell us the names of the two boys here.”

The device moved and spelled out P-e-d-r-o and N-i-c-k.

“Man, that is awesome!” exclaimed Pedro.

Nick picked up his crate and moved closer. “That’s quite a trick - show us how you did that?!”

“Wait a minute,” Jake said, “how do we know you didn’t know their names already? Todd or Justin could have told you.”

Sarah said, “Okay, then, why don’t you ask a question I couldn’t

possibly know the answer to?”

“How ‘bout if I don’t ask out loud, but just think it? Will that work?”

“Why not try?”

Within seconds the device was moving again. Jake’s eyes widened and all the color drained from his face.

In response to Jake’s unspoken question, it spelled out, “stealing the old man’s car.”

Pedro gasped and Nick’s mouth dropped open.

Justin couldn’t believe his eyes, “Jake! Is that true? Have you been taking that old guy’s car that you mow the lawn for?”

“Let’s just say I’ve borrowed it during the night a few times. I always have it back by morning. Hey - I even put a little gas in it.”

Jake’s eyes narrowed. In a threatening voice he said, “This information better not leave this room.”

Then Sarah stood up and raised her arms. All the boys became quiet. She closed her eyes. Addressing the spirit she asked, “Oh spirit, show yourself in some way.”

Suddenly the room became very cold and Todd’s baseball cap flew off his head and landed about ten feet away.

The cigarette dangling out of Jake’s mouth fell out. He didn’t even notice until it started to burn a hole in his jeans. He yelled in pain as he jumped up and brushed the ashes off his pants.

“Can I have a cigarette?” asked Nick. Jake’s hand trembled as he reached into his pocket to retrieve one and he said, “Maybe that’s enough for today.”

The boys watched in silence as Sarah put her “board game” back into its box. Jake tried to lighten things up a bit. “Hey Sarah, have you ever seen my brother’s “Michael Jackson” dance routine? It’s really hysterical!”

“No, I haven’t.”

Jake pointed to the ladder. “Come on Justin, get up on that stage

and do your thing!”

Justin climbed up the ladder to the second story and onto “The Loft.” Pedro turned on some music.

Everyone laughed as they watched Justin clowning around.

When he finished his routine, Todd held the ladder steady for Justin as he started to climb back down.

Suddenly, a force stronger than Todd, unseen to his eyes, tore the ladder from his grip, knocking the ladder over.

Todd watched in horror as his friend plunged toward the ground and landed on his right leg with a loud “CRACK!” There was no mistaking the sickening sound of a bone breaking.

Justin started screaming in pain. Everyone gathered around him and Pedro exclaimed, “You guys, look at his leg! We’ve got to get him to the emergency room!”

Jake put his hand on Justin’s shoulder and said, “You’ll be okay, Bro’. Just hang in there.”

Todd said twice, “I didn’t do it, honest!” but no one paid attention to him.

Pedro asked, “Should we call 911, or your dad, Todd?”

Jake exclaimed, “You fool! If you call 911 the cops will come with them. You know I’m on probation.”

Nick, hearing mention of the police, said, “Sorry guys, I’m outta here,” and started to make a quick exit.

Jake yelled, “Get back here! Nobody’s calling the cops! You have to help us carry Justin.”

Nick stopped in his tracks and turned around.

Todd looked at his best friend lying on the ground holding his leg in pain. He felt sick at heart, not only for his friend, but also for himself, because now his dad was going to find out what he was involved in.

Todd asked, “Can’t we call someone else’s parent?”

“No way, Man!” Pedro shouted. “It’s your fault he fell off the

ladder. You call your dad.”

Todd’s hand was trembling as he reached into his pocket to get his cell phone, and he struggled to hold it still as he dialed.

When Todd’s father answered, Todd stumbled over his words. Pedro grabbed the phone from him and in a loud voice said, “Mr. Richards, Justin has a broken leg and we need to get him to the hospital. Can you come pick him up?”

After Pedro explained to him where to meet them, he handed the phone back to Todd, and said, “Your dad says he’s going to meet us where the dirt path meets the road.”

Jake shouted “Pedro! Get the blanket - we can carry him on it!” Pedro ran to the window and yanked down the old hole-riddled blanket that served as a curtain. Todd looked at it in horror and prayed it would hold together until they got Justin to the road.

They put him on it as gently as they could, but each movement caused Justin to cry out in anguish.

Jake yelled, “C’mon everybody grab a corner and lift!”

The boys strained down the path with their heavy load. Within a short time, they were drenched with sweat and gasping for breath.

Todd felt the blanket slipping from his grip. “Guys stop! Put him down. I can’t hold on!” Todd wiped his sweaty palms on his shorts. Pedro was thankful to take a break.

Jake barked, “Come on you guys! There’s no time to waste!”

Grabbing their blanket corners once more, the boys trudged onward for what seemed like forever. Justin yelped with pain with each jostle.

Sarah followed behind carrying Justin’s backpack.

Todd’s dad drove up and parked his black Escalade at the side of the road just as the boys and Sarah arrived.

He swung the back door open and ran to help the boys lift Justin into the car. Justin screamed in pain as they placed him on the back seat.

On the way to the hospital, Todd's dad tried to console Justin.

When Justin's father arrived at the emergency room a couple hours later, Todd's dad said to him, "Justin has a broken tibia and the doctor is putting a cast on him. He'll be fine."

As Todd and his father were leaving the hospital, Todd's father said, "I want you to start at the beginning. I need to know how this all happened."

As soon as Todd got in the car and fastened his seat belt, he said, "Dad, I'm responsible for what happened to Justin." Todd confessed everything to his dad, starting with how he got involved in renovating the old house.

After explaining the incident with Sarah and what happened to the ladder, he said, "I know that when I tried to warn them and they didn't listen, I should have left right then. None of this would have happened to Justin if I had."

Todd's father was silent for a few minutes. He then said, "I'd be lying if I didn't say I'm terribly disappointed in you. But I'm not going to even talk about disciplining you because I think the Lord is doing that."

Later that night, Jake called Todd. Angrily, he asked, "Why did you push the ladder over? Did you think you were being funny? Believe me, you're going to pay for this and pay big. You'd better watch your back! And don't you ever speak to me or my brother again!"

Todd protested, "I didn't do it!" but Jake had already hung up.

On Monday, Justin came to school with a cast on his leg. Todd stood several feet away from him waiting for Justin to acknowledge him. Todd watched as several students gathered around him.

Ed asked, "What happened?"

Justin explained, "I was coming down a ladder and Todd pushed it over."

"You're kidding, right?"

“I wish I were,” Justin responded.

The students turned around and glared at Todd.

That day, Justin’s story spread like wildfire throughout the school. Todd tried to avoid eye contact with his fellow students when he saw the hateful looks they gave him. People that regularly would greet him now gave him icy stares.

At lunch, Justin sat with Sarah and some new friends he had acquired, while Todd sat alone and isolated.

Then, Chamita, a girl that normally didn’t pay any attention to Todd, approached the table where he was seated and asked, “Do you mind if I join you?”

Taken back, he answered, “Of course not.”

They chatted for a few minutes and then she asked, “Would you mind refilling my iced tea?”

“No problem.”

After setting the glass down in front of her, Todd went to sit back down but Ed had moved his chair. Todd plunged backwards hitting the floor with a thump. Everyone around him burst out laughing and someone said, “How does it feel Todd to be the one getting hurt?”

Embarrassed and humiliated, Todd got off the floor and sat back down, alone once more.

When he got home from school he decided to call Justin and explain what really happened. Justin didn’t pick up so Todd left a message. “Justin,” he said, “I want you to know it wasn’t me who pushed the ladder over. It was a demon! Believe me, Justin, I would never hurt you on purpose. I tried to warn you guys and when you didn’t listen I should have left. Please call me back so we can talk,” he pleaded.

About an hour later, Todd felt restless and headed for a park near his house. He was relieved when he saw the park was empty since he wanted to be alone and sort things out.

He started walking on the jogging path. The more he walked the

calmer he felt. Then he heard some sounds behind him. Startled, he turned around and gasped when he saw Jake, Nick, and Pedro advancing toward him. Todd started running, but Jake caught up to him and shoved him so hard that he fell to the ground landing on his hands and knees. Jake and Nick each took one of his arms and pulled him up. Nick then got behind Todd and twisted one of Todd's arms behind his back. Then he put his arm around Todd's neck.

Todd screamed at the top of his lungs, "Help me! Help me!" even though he was sure no one could hear him.

Jake put his face close to Todd's face and snarled, "Didn't I tell ya you'd pay big!" He slapped Todd's face a couple times. Then he put his mouth close to Todd's ear and whispered in a mocking voice, "Wait till you see the surprise we have in store for you!" Then he barked, "Pedro, bring the bag!"

Pedro was holding what looked like a laundry bag. Jake opened it up and pulled out, to Todd's horror, a live snake about four feet long.

Todd screamed, "No! No! Please, no! I swear to you Jake, I didn't push that ladder over. A demon did it! Please believe me!"

"Yeah, right." Jake dangled the snake in front of him and said, "Too bad you told Justin you're scared stiff of snakes."

Everything went dark for Todd. When he regained consciousness he was lying on the ground on the walking path. He was trembling, but breathed a sigh of relief the boys had left. He was thankful he had fainted.

When he got up and brushed himself off he saw his pants were torn at the knees. The palms of his hands were scraped and burning where they hit the gravel.

Sore and bruised, Todd headed home. Shortly after he arrived at his house, his cell phone rang. He couldn't believe it was Justin. He hesitated to pick up since he figured Justin just wanted to give him a piece of his mind. But finally, he did.

“Todd, I’m so sorry for what my brother and his friends did to you. Are you okay? They told me you fainted.”

“Why should you care?”

“I want you to know I never told them about how scared you are of snakes.”

“Huh? That’s amazing,” Todd said sarcastically. “I guess they just read your mind.”

“Listen Todd! You claim you didn’t push the ladder over, right?”

“Right.”

“I believe you now. I’m telling you I do believe a demon pushed that ladder over and that it was a demon that gave the information to Jake and his buddies. It talked to them, Todd!”

Todd’s jaw dropped. “Wh-what?” he stammered, “The thing spoke to them!?”

“Yes. Sarah came over to my place today and told us we didn’t even have to use the board. She said the spirit could speak directly through her.”

“You’ve got to be kidding!” exclaimed Todd.

“I wish I were. She went into a trance and her whole face changed. It was creepy! Then a deep voice came out of her and asked Jake if he wanted to get revenge for what you did to me. When he said ‘yes’ it told him that you told me you are terrified of snakes and that you were at the park. That’s when Pedro went home and got his pet King snake. I begged Jake not to do it, but his mind was made up.”

“But,” protested Todd, “why didn’t you at least call me and warn me?!”

“Jake took my phone!”

“Do you know if he has any other plans for me?”

“I don’t think so. He seemed shook up that you fainted.”

Todd let out a sigh of relief.

Justin continued, “It’s so weird. I wanted Jake to believe this stuff is real and now he does. And I’m the one who sees it for what it is.

“Todd, when I heard the spirit telling them how to cause you grief, I realized it had to be an evil force. I knew then it wasn’t you who pushed the ladder over. I wish I had listened to you in the beginning. I’m scared for Jake. He’s really being sucked into this.”

Todd asked, “Didn’t it bother him how weird Sarah looked or that it wasn’t her voice speaking?”

“No. To him it was just proof that she was in contact with a spirit.”

Todd’s eyes widened just imagining Sarah under the control of a demon. “Justin,” he gasped, “do you realize that Sarah must be demon possessed?”

“Oh man, you’re right. That’s scary!”

“Justin, how do we convince them this is evil? Sarah will never believe it,” lamented Todd.

“I don’t know. But if we don’t do something, maybe worse things could happen.”

Todd asked, “What are we going to tell the kids at school tomorrow? We can’t tell them a demon pushed the ladder over. That sounds crazy.”

“I’ll just tell them I know now it was an accident,” Justin responded. “When they see us together, they’ll know we’re friends again.”

Todd felt like a 100-pound weight had lifted from his shoulders.

When Todd was walking to school the next day, it was hard for him to keep a smile off his face, but he didn’t want anyone to think he was crazy.

He spotted Justin from the back. He was leaning on his crutches standing in front of the school library. Todd came up behind him and lightly slapped him on the back and said, “Hey, buddy, how ya doing?”

When Justin turned around and Todd saw the upset look on Justin’s face, Todd’s stomach turned. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

“It’s Jake. Last night I told him about how we’re friends again and he went into a rage. He told me if I had anything to do with you he was going to break my other leg. I think he meant it.”

Shocked, Todd asked, “W-what, did you tell him?”

Justin frowned. “You know Jake. When he’s mad you can’t talk to him.”

“You’re not thinking about us not being friends, are you?”

“No way. It’s just that for now I think we should lay low. Now that Sarah and Jake are buddies, she’ll squeal if I hang around you.”

Todd felt like someone kicked him in the gut. “You mean, for now, everyone at school is going to keep thinking I’m a rat and treat me like dirt.”

“Come on, Todd. It’s just until I can get Jake to see things differently.”

“Yeah right.”

“Sorry Todd. For now that’s the way it has to be. Gotta go.”

Todd’s jaw clenched as he watched Justin hobble away on his crutches, and a feeling of loneliness overwhelmed him.

As he went through the rest of the school day, he felt numb, as though he were watching himself go through the motions.

As soon as Todd got home, he ran to his room and slammed the door behind him. He was thankful no one was home. Pounding his fists on his desk, he swore. He yelled, “God, I know I was wrong, but You must hate me to make me suffer like this!”

He pulled out his MP3 player from his desk drawer and flopped down on his bed and stuck in his ear buds.

Around six o’clock, his dad knocked on his door and said, “Dinner is ready.” Todd heard a muffled sound and removed one of his ear buds. His father knocked on the door and said again, “Dinner is ready.” Todd didn’t move, but yelled out, “I’m not hungry.”

“Todd, can we talk?”

Angrily, he responded, “Not now!” and put back his ear bud.

About an hour later there was another knock at his door. Todd bellowed, "I already said I'm not hungry!" He went to the door and flung it open, expecting to see his dad. He was shocked to find himself face to face with a tall, blond haired man who taught the Bible study he and his parents attended.

"Don!?" he said, "Man, I can't believe my dad called you!"

"Can I come in?" Without waiting for an answer, Don walked right past Todd and made himself at home in a chair next to Todd's desk.

"Your dad told me what happened."

Todd said nothing but wanted to shout, *Man, you don't know the half of it!!* Todd sat down on his bed and picked up the latest edition of *Boy's Life* magazine and started leafing through it.

Don leaned forward. "Remember I told you I did some missionary work in Haiti? There are a lot of people over there involved in the occult. Voodoo is widespread. Todd, the reason people believe in it is because it's real; but, as you know, real doesn't mean good."

Todd, still looking down at his magazine and ignoring what Don just said, decided to express himself. He said, "I've been doing a lot of thinking this afternoon. If God is so great and so good, and He supposedly loves us, why does He seem so far off and distant?" Then closing his magazine, he asked, "Why won't He help people who are trying to do the right thing? I've begged Him to answer my prayers but they seem to be bouncing off the ceiling. Yet my friend Sarah can access spirits at will."

Todd's eyes narrowed just thinking of the injustice of the whole thing, and said with bitterness, "Why does Satan make it so easy and God make it so hard?"

Todd looked up at Don expecting him to be upset with him, but his facial expression conveyed concern and kindness.

Don asked, "What's easier, Todd, being good or bad? And why is it harder to go up a hill than come down?"

“It’s true that God does demand a lot from His children, but think of what you get in return – things like answered prayers, peace of mind, help with your problems, and on top of all that, rewards in heaven.

“Todd, do you remember what the Apostle Paul said about the suffering we experience here on earth as compared to what we’re going to get for our service for Christ? In Romans 8:18, he said he didn’t even consider that our suffering is worthy to be compared with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

“I’m not sure about what all you’re going through right now, but I do know that if you look to God and are faithful to Him you’re going to see Him work things out for you.”

“But,” protested Todd, “I have looked to God and He’s ignoring me!”

“Are you reading the Bible every day?”

Todd looked down at his magazine, and said, “Not every day.”

“Are you telling other people about how to go to heaven?”

“I’ve told a few,” responded Todd.

“Maybe it’s time to read the Bible daily and determine you’re going to share the Gospel with a lot of people. That way you can claim the promises of God. It says in First John 3:22 that whatever we ask from God we’ll receive if we keep His commandments.”

“But it’s so hard!” protested Todd. “I’m afraid people are going to laugh at me.”

“Todd, it was hard for me too when I first started serving the Lord, but I realized it came down to this – what do I care more about? Is it what people think about me or what God thinks about me? I decided it was more important what God thought about me.

“The truth is, people are on their way to hell because they haven’t trusted Christ alone to get them to heaven. God expects those who know this truth to share it.”

Todd was silent for a moment. He then asked, “If God is so

concerned about people believing the truth, why does He let Satan trick people? I mean, I can see why people do believe in things like ghosts and reincarnation. My friend Sarah's dead grandmother regularly appears to her mother."

Don said, "You mean she *thinks* it's her grandmother."

"Yeah, but she is seeing something that makes her think it is her grandmother. And you've got to admit it's pretty mind blowing to think of someone under hypnosis speaking a language he doesn't know. If God is so concerned about people believing the truth why is Satan allowed to do that kind of stuff?"

Don answered, "There is a battle raging right now between the forces of good and evil, and God hasn't seen fit to let us in on all the details. But God is good, and what He does want us to know is revealed in the Bible.

"Satan is a liar and a deceiver. He was created perfect and he chose to sin. He knows that someday in the future he is going to be cast into hell, and he's trying to take as many people as possible with him.

"When you look into the so-called messages from the other side they have something in common: Jesus isn't God and there is no hell. The whole idea behind the belief in reincarnation is that you somehow can pay for your sins, but the Bible says only Jesus could do that."

"But," asked Todd, "how do I convince Sarah of that?"

"You need to help her see that the Bible is true. There is a really great website called *greatestnews.org* and she can read something on there called, *Evidence For the Honest Skeptic*. It has changed a lot of people's minds. Why don't you ask her to check it out?"

"Sounds like it's worth a try," responded Todd.

"How about calling her now. Your parents and I will have a quick prayer meeting for her and her mom."

As soon as Don left the room, Todd picked up his cell phone and

called Sarah. He swallowed hard as the phone rang and he could feel his heart beating fast. When she answered, Todd could tell she was surprised to hear from him.

“Todd,” she said, “I’m so sorry about what happened to you at the park. I didn’t even think something like that was possible. I thought only good spirits could speak through me.”

“That’s okay Sarah. I never blamed you. Hey, could you do me a favor and check out a website a friend told me about?”

After giving her the details, she said, “I guess that’s the least I could do considering what happened.”

“Thanks Sarah. And if you ever want to talk or have any questions, the guy Don, who told me about this site, could talk to you. He really knows a lot.”

Todd’s parents and Don were seated at the dining room table when Todd entered the room.

Don said, “I guess the smile on your face means she’s going to check it out, right?”

“Right.”

Todd joined them at the table. After they finished praying, Todd heard his cell phone ring. He quickly went to his room and saw it was Sarah.

She asked in a frantic voice, “Can that guy you told me about come over and talk to me? I need help! I need help now!”

“What’s wrong Sarah?”

“Oh Todd, I’m being tormented,” she said in an anguished voice. “I don’t know what to do about it. I’m scared to death.” Then she screamed “Ouch! Stop it! Leave me alone!”

“Sarah, who’s hurting you?”

Sobbing, Sarah said, “I’m here alone. My mom’s at work. Please come over with your friend. Please come now. Please!”

Todd’s whole body trembled as he explained to Don and his parents what Sarah had just said.

Don jumped up from the table and pulling his keys from his pocket, said, “Let’s go Todd, we have no time to waste.”

As they pulled up to Sarah’s two-story house, they could see her through the living room window. Todd watched in alarm as Sarah acted as though someone were hitting her. He questioned at that moment if perhaps she was crazy. But he quickly changed his mind. His mouth dropped open as he witnessed her sleeve being torn off her blouse. At that moment she ran out of the house screaming.

Don and Todd met her in the driveway. Todd was horrified as he saw she had several abrasions on her face and neck.

Don tried to calm her down. “Come on, Sarah. You’re going to be all right.” He put his arm around her shoulder and guided her back to the house.

As soon as she sat down on the couch, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed uncontrollably. After a few minutes she calmed down and managed to ask, while trying to catch her breath, “How do I get rid of these tormentors?”

Don asked, “What happened exactly?”

After she composed herself, she explained, “I’ve been confused since what happened with Todd. I always thought only good spirits could speak through me. When I told my mom, she explained that there are good and bad spirits and that I just happened to get in contact with a bad one. That blew me away.

“Then tonight, Todd told me about a website; and when I looked at it the first thing that caught my eye was a picture of a ghost. I read the article, and according to it, I could be possessed by a demon! That really shook me up.

“That’s when I asked God to reveal the truth to me, and I asked Him to send a good spirit to help me see things clearly.”

She looked at Don and asked, “Have you ever heard of automatic handwriting?”

Don nodded, and Sarah looked at Todd and explained, “When

I want to know things, I sit down with a pen and paper and ask my question and a spirit writes through me. Sometimes I go into a trance, and sometimes I don't.

"Tonight when I asked for understanding I went into a trance. When I came out of the trance and saw what I had written I almost passed out! Everything I had written was disgusting – it was vile! I tore up the piece of paper, and the pen flew off the table and hit me in the face!" Sarah breathed a few deep breaths and continued. "Then something started hitting me and pinching me and pulling my hair."

She closed her eyes for a few seconds and then looked at Don and said, "Thank you so much for coming. My mom will be home in about a half hour. Would you mind staying until then?"

"No problem," he responded.

"Sarah," Don said, "Do you mind if we talk about how to go to heaven before we talk about how to get rid of these demons?"

"But," protested Sarah, "when all of this started, I did ask Jesus to come into my heart. But it didn't help."

"Sarah," responded Don, "I know you're very sincere, but somebody made that up about asking Jesus into your heart."

Sarah's eyes widened. "Really? How come all the these guys on religious T.V. tell you to do it?"

Don sighed deeply. "It's very sad, but a lot of preachers are either purposely deceiving others or they are deceived themselves. Either way, if someone's message doesn't square with the Bible, that person is preaching a false message."

Don pulled the small New Testament out of his pocket, opened it up and pointed to a verse. He said, "I'd like you to read John 6:47."

She took it from his hand and read aloud, "Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." She pondered what she read. "That's it?" she asked in amazement.

"If you were drowning and someone pulled you to shore, what did you do? Nothing, right? It's the person who pulled you in who

did all the work. We have no part in getting ourselves to heaven because God already did the work when He died for our sins. Jesus didn't die to be our Assistant, He died to be our Savior."

He continued, "Don't get me wrong. Being good is very important; it's just that it has nothing to do with going to heaven. It has to do with being happy here on earth and getting rewards in heaven. But heaven itself is a gift, not a reward."

Sarah looked perplexed. She asked, "Are you saying a person could be really bad and still go to heaven?"

Don answered, "Think of a family situation. If you had kids that were bad, would you let them get away with it or would you discipline them? Of course you'd straighten them out, but you wouldn't kick them out. Let me show you a verse where Jesus said He would never cast us out for any reason." He had her turn to John 6:37.

She read, "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." She paused for a moment and looked up at Don and exclaimed, "Wow!"

Don smiled and asked, "Would you mind looking at one more verse? It's John 5:24."

She read, "Most assuredly, I say unto you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

A big grin came across Sarah's face as she read the verse. "Thanks, Don. Now I get it. I know I'm going to heaven!"

She then asked, "How do I stop these demons from tormenting me?"

Don answered, "You've got to get rid of your board games and anything else that has to do with the occult. And, of course, ask God to keep them away from you."

She responded, "Believe me, I will. And please pray I can get my mother to see things."

Sarah looked at the clock on the mantle over the fireplace and said, “My mom is going to be home soon. Please excuse me so I can change my blouse.”

Within a couple minutes she came back wearing a t-shirt and Todd couldn’t believe all the marks on her face and neck were gone.

He asked, “How did those marks on your face and neck disappear?”

“Todd, that’s the wonder of make-up!”

They laughed and Sarah sat back down.

“You know, I really don’t feel scared anymore. Maybe you guys should leave before she does come home.”

“No problem Sarah,” said Don, “and if you have any questions or if you’d like me to talk to your Mom, just let me know.”

On the drive home Todd’s head was spinning from the whole experience. He said, “That is so creepy what happened to Sarah. If she really was demon possessed, could she still be now?”

Don responded, “Tonight Sarah trusted Christ alone to get her to heaven. That means that God is now in her. If there was a demon in her, it’s gone now.”

“Phew, good! exclaimed Todd. After a moment’s reflection, he asked, “Is it possible to sell your soul to the devil?”

Don asked, “I own this car; so is it possible for you to sell it?”

“No.”

Don continued, “Who owns you since you trusted Christ as your Savior? God, right? So if you belong to God, you can’t very well sell your soul to the devil.”

“I get it.”

“Now, young man, you must be starving. Do you want to pick up something before I take you home? It’s on me.”

“Thanks Don, but I’m not hungry right now.”

But when Todd arrived home, his appetite returned with a vengeance.

The next day at school, Todd spotted Justin with a group of kids around him. His stomach turned, and he started to walk in the opposite direction when he heard Justin call out his name. Todd turned around, and when Justin approached him Todd could see he had a black eye. “Hey Todd,” he said, “what do you think of my shiner?”

Todd, still startled that Justin was talking to him, asked, “What happened?”

“Let’s just say it’s the price I had to pay for our friendship. I realized I was being a jerk and I told Jake we were friends. And that’s all there was to it. That’s when he let me have it. I explained to the other kids that I know you didn’t mean to let the ladder fall over.”

Todd let out a sigh of relief.

On the way to class, Todd explained what happened the previous night with Sarah. Justin batted his eyelids a few times and said, “Man, that is incredible!”

Todd said, “I hope we get to see her at lunchtime.”

Later when Todd and Justin were in the cafeteria, Sarah approached the table where they were seated and sat down next to Todd. Justin said, “Sarah, how can you sit next to Todd on chili day?”

They laughed and Sarah looked at Todd to say, “Wow, Todd, that website is awesome! I read *Evidence for the Honest Skeptic*. I had no idea there was so much proof the Bible is true. I hope I can get my mother to read it too.”

Looking at Justin and then Todd, she asked, “So are we all still friends?”

“Of course,” answered Justin.

Todd just nodded his head and smiled. He offered a silent prayer, *Thanks Lord. With You all things really are possible.*

Things to Consider



Things To Consider

If you were a farmer and you planted cucumber seeds, would you be shocked if corn sprung up in your field instead? *Impossible*, you say. You're right. It's a law of nature that what you plant is what you will harvest. This is also a spiritual law. The Bible says, in Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." We are only deceiving ourselves if we think we can break God's rules without suffering consequences.

You might be asking, "What kind of consequences?"

Let me give you an example from the Bible. There was a group of believers at the church in Corinth who were guilty of getting drunk at the Lord's Supper. It's a sin to get drunk at any time but even a more serious sin to get drunk at an event dedicated to remembering the Lord's death. This group all experienced God's discipline. Some, it says became weak, others sick, and still others died an early death.¹

You might wonder why they didn't all suffer the same discipline since they all committed the same sin. The answer is that these believers were at different stages of spiritual growth. If you had three sons who were all guilty of misbehaving, you wouldn't discipline the youngest as severely as the oldest. And the middle son would be disciplined somewhere in between. If you are doing something you know is wrong and you want to avoid God's chastening, then you need to confess it to God and change your ways. First Corinthians 11:31, says, "For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged." But avoiding God's discipline is just one reason to live a good life.

God Wants To Be Our Friend

God wants His children to experience joy and peace and answered prayers. These are the earthly rewards promised to His children who obey Him. There also are eternal rewards. Believers are promised treasures in heaven for what they do for Him.²

At this point I'd like to clarify that there is a big difference between what you do to become a friend of God and what you do to go to heaven. To go to heaven requires nothing more of us than our faith in Jesus Christ. God, Himself, paid the full payment for all sins nearly 2,000 years ago.

Jesus said, "Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." ³

The Bible explains that if a person thinks he has to do more than believe to go to heaven he won't make it. The reason for this is because he is thinking that the work Christ accomplished on the cross wasn't good enough. Instead of trusting Jesus as a Savior, he is trusting God as a Helper.

Ephesians 2:8,9, say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

The Bible clearly teaches that we become God's children because of nothing we do apart from believing. But to become God's friend we have to do a lot. Jesus said, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." ⁴

What has He commanded us to do?

One thing He said was, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." ⁵ Think about it. If God loved us so much that He left heaven to take on the form of a man and suffer the punishment we deserve, doesn't it make sense He'd want everyone to hear that message?

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people claiming to represent God and giving a message contrary to the Bible. Instead of presenting the biblical message that going to heaven is by faith alone in Christ

alone, they add you must also do something else, like make a confession, or turn from your sins, or ask Christ into your heart, or surrender your life to Christ.

John 3:16 doesn't say to turn or confess or ask or surrender. It says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." If you want to be a friend of God, you are going to have to be willing to speak for Him and let other people know they don't have anything to do to go to heaven except to believe in Jesus to get them there.

Another command given is to study the Bible. The Apostle Peter wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."⁶

God's Word is our spiritual food. Just as there can be no physical growth without eating food, there can be no spiritual growth without reading the Bible. What would you think of a baby who didn't want to eat? Wouldn't you think that baby was sick? When you have no desire to read the Bible, that is an indication things aren't right in your life. How often should you read it? How often do you go a day without food?

God uses His word to point things out to us. As we conform our lives to what we are seeing in the Bible, there will be a transformation of our lives. We see things differently when we are obedient to God. Instead of wanting to be popular in the world's eyes, we want to be popular with God. The world doesn't think moral impurity is any big deal. In God's eyes it's a big sin. If you want to be God's friend you are going to have to live a pure life characterized by honesty and integrity.

As a child of God, you can invest your life in what really matters. As someone once said, "Only one life will soon be past – only what's done for Christ will last." Think about it. Right now you have an

opportunity to become a friend of God and know the Lord is pleased with your life. And at the same time you can know you are making an investment in eternal rewards.

Consider these promises and let them encourage you to make good decisions for your life:

“No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” ⁷

“Delight yourself also in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” ⁸

“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” ⁹

Why not decide to serve God and reap the many benefits promised in His Word!

¹ First Corinthians 11:30

² Matthew 6:20

³ John 6:47

⁴ John 15:14

⁵ Mark 16:15

⁶ Second Peter 2:2

⁷ Psalm 84:11

⁸ Psalm 37:4

⁹ First John 3:22

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