

## **Tony**

It was a sad day for sixteen year old Tony as he packed the contents of his room into boxes, knowing within a few days he and his family would be leaving the only city he had ever known as home. Two years earlier his father had received a promotion at his job and the family had moved to a nicer neighborhood in the same city, but now Tony's father had been asked to move his family over a thousand miles south to the city of Pompano Beach, Florida.

The hardest thing for Tony was leaving Ron, his best friend, and Tracey, the young woman who taught Bible studies which were held at his house every week. As they were parting company for the last time it took everything Tony had not to cry. What made it harder were the tears that were streaming down the face of his fourteen year old sister, Sally.

That night as he lay in bed, alone in the confines of a unfamiliar room in a suite at Holiday Inn, he began thinking of the many experiences he had shared with his dear friends and the tears began to flow. He recalled how he had come to meet Tracey. It was four years earlier when he was walking home from his sixth grade class. Tracey, a very attractive girl in her late teens, approached him to talk to him about the Bible. Tony still vividly remembered the excitement he felt when he knew he was going to heaven. Tracey had explained that only condition to go there was to believe in Jesus Christ and that the way a person lived his life had nothing to do with it.

After Tony believed the Gospel he was anxious to share this wonderful message with his best friend Ron and was surprised when he didn't accept it. But rather than trying to persuade him any further, Tony didn't bring up the subject again until something happened that changed the course of both of their lives.

About three months later, Tony and Ron were with some friends at a lake diving off a barge when Ron dove in and didn't resurface immediately. At first the boys thought he was fooling around, but soon realized their friend was in real trouble. They began a frantic search in the murky water, knowing that each second was precious.

Tony silently pleaded with God to spare his friend, promising that if He did, he would serve Him. It was at the moment that his hands felt his friend at the bottom of the lake.

After Tony and his friends brought his seemingly lifeless form to shore, Tony was able to administer C.P.R. and resuscitate Ron. It was after that experience that Tony had Tracey talk to Ron and after he believed the Gospel, Tony asked her if she would get together with them on a regular basis to teach them the Bible. That's when she started meeting them on a weekly basis. But the Lord worked it out so that Tracey's influence would extend to the rest of Tony's family.

It happened when Tony's father received his first promotion and had bought a house in a nicer neighborhood about five miles away. On Saturday, when they were making the final trip to pick up the last of their belongings, Tony's dog, Fudge, was nowhere to be found. Tony and his family waited until dark, but had no other choice but to leave. Tony informed the neighbors and gave them his new number. The following Monday his father called the Humane Society and when that proved fruitless he placed an ad in the local newspaper offering a reward for Fudge's return.

At Bible study that Tuesday a heartbroken Tony asked Tracey to pray for Fudge's return. Fighting hard to hold back the tears, he said, "He doesn't even know where we live anymore." At seven-thirty the following Monday morning, their prayers were answered in such a way that no doubted that God's hand was behind it.

Tracey had gone to her friend's apartment that morning to pick her up for work and when she got out of her car to go to her door, Fudge approached her, wagging his tail. This was completely incredible considering that this girl lived over a mile from the place where Tony used to live.

Tracey phoned Tony and in an excited voice relayed the story that was nothing less than a miracle. She then called the place where she worked and told them she would be a few minutes late and she then dropped Fudge off to a very happy family. Tony's mother was so impressed she asked Tracey if she would start teaching a Bible study at her house, which Tracey was more than happy to do.

But now Tony was facing a new future without Tracey and Ron and that grieved him to his soul. But he drew comfort from the knowledge that his life was in God's

hands so he knew he had to look beyond his pain and trust that God had a purpose for this move.

Starting at new school was not as traumatic as he had thought it might be. For the most part the students were friendly and greeted him warmly. Tony's father installed a basketball hoop at their house and Tony invited some of his fellow classmates to join him after school. He always made it a point to share the Gospel with the guys before they left to go home.

There was one particular boy in Tony's class that was rougher than the rest. He was constantly in trouble at school and it was known that he had had one or two run-ins the law. Tony had the feeling that Mark Evans was going to prove to be a challenge.

One day at lunch, Tony approached Mark and asked him if he ever wondered about whether or not he would go to heaven. With disdain in his voice, he said, "I think religion is a crutch for weak people."

Undaunted, Tony responded, "If something's wrong with you, you may need a crutch, and like it or not, all of us have something wrong with us. After all, no one's perfect. "Most people think that you have to be good to go to heaven, but if that were the case none of us would make it."

Tony hoped so much that Mark was realizing that Tony was in no way putting him down or trying to condemn him; he was simply letting him know that all human beings have a problem and the solution doesn't come through the efforts of man, but the work of God.

Mark was simply staring at Tony, so he silently prayed for help and continued. "The Bible says we're all less than perfect and because of that we are disqualified from entering heaven. But God out of His love for us, came to this earth and paid our way to heaven by dying for our sins. Contrary to popular opinion, we don't go to heaven because of what we do for God, but we go to heaven because of what He did for us.

"Heaven is God's gift to us. We don't change anything, we don't turn from anything, we simply believe in the One who died and paid our way to heaven." Tony paused waiting for Mark's response. At this point Mark's stare became a

glare. With words dripping with contempt, he snarled, “I don’t believe in God and I don’t like people who talk about religion.”

Tony knew that he had to draw this conversation to a close and he wanted to end it on an upbeat note so he said, “I hope someday you will believe.” “Don’t count on it.” Although Mark seemed like a brick at this point, Tony prayed that Mark would soften up, hoping someday he would be able to reach him. After this conversation Tony went out of his way to be friendly to Mark and it did seem like Mark was responding. One day after school Tony asked him if he’d be interested in coming over to play some basketball with him and some of the other guys. He accepted his invitation.

While they were playing, Tony’s younger sister Sally came outside. After she went back in the house, Mark said to Tony, “Man, your sister is beautiful. How old is she?”

“She’s only thirteen.”

“She sure looks older.”

“She’s just a kid.”

“To you, maybe.”

Tony was very protective of his sister and he wasn’t happy in the interest Mark was showing in her. Before Mark and the other boys left, Sally came outside again to tell Tony he had received a phone call. After Tony had gone in the house, Mark struck up a conversation with her and he could tell she was flattered that an older boy was interested in her.

The next day he hurried from his last class and went directly to the middle school she attended which was only a few blocks away. When he did run into her, he asked if she minded if he walked her home from school. She was delighted. When they were about a block away from her house, he said, “I don’t think it’s a good idea for me to walk you all the way home. I don’t think Tony would be happy if he knew I came to see you.”

“Oh, I don’t think Tony would mind.”

“Well just in case, I wish you wouldn’t mention it to him. “Sure.”

After a long pause, Mark said, “And if you don’t mind, I’d like to meet with you again.”

“I’d like that.”

Two weeks later, shortly after Tony had arrived at school, one of Tony’s friends approached him and asked, “Did you know Mark Evans is dating your sister?” Tony thought he was kidding.

“No, I’m completely serious. I saw her with him at the bowling alley.”

“When was this?”

“Saturday afternoon.”

Tony thought for a moment and remembered she had told her parents she was going to the bowling alley with Sandy, her best friend so Tony asked, “Was Sandy with them?”

“Yeah. She was there with some guy.”

Tony was flabbergasted. He had no idea that Sally would do something behind her family’s back. And it grieved him that she had anything to do with Mark Evans. Although he was fifteen, in many ways he was much older. He was outraged at Mark’s gall and felt like giving him a piece of his mind, but decided to confront his sister first to see what she had to say.

As soon as school was over, he started walking towards her school, only to see Mark Evans apparently heading in the same direction. Mark didn’t see Tony and Tony purposely slowed down so he could follow him at a distance. Mark stopped about two blocks away from Sally’s school to sit down under a tree. Tony hid behind another tree to see what would transpire.

Tony was heart sick when he saw his sister embrace and kiss Mark. Everything in him wanted to run over to them and pull them apart and then pull him apart. But he restrained himself and went home undetected. As soon as she approached the house, he went out to meet her and in a voice that could not hide his displeasure, he inquired, “What are you doing with Mark Evans?” She was taken back that he knew about them and immediately became defensive. In a snippy voice, she said, “I really don’t think that is any of your business. You’re not my father, you know.”

Remembering the Proverb that says, “A soft answer turns away wrath; but grievous words stir up strife,” he immediately changed the tone of his voice and said, “I know that Sally. It’s just that I know Mark and he’s a guy that gets in trouble at school a lot and he’s even had some run-ins with the law.

“And Sally, the guys not even a believer. You know the Bible teaches that we’re not to get involved with unbelievers.”

Sally softened as Tony tried to reason with her and she knew biblically speaking she was in the wrong. She hung her head and quietly asserted, “I know, but I like him.”

“You don’t want to disobey God, do you?”

“No.”

“Then you know what you have to do.”

The very next day after school, Sally talked to Mark and broke off their relationship.

Mark wasted no time venting his wrath.

The following day, Mark smashed a rock through the car windshield of their math teacher, Mr. Sanders, as Tony watched in horror. With fiery eyes and a snarl on his face, he looked at Tony and said, “Say one word to anyone about this and you’re dead!” Tony knew Mark had committed this act of vandalism with no other witness other than himself hoping Tony would report him, thereby giving him a reason to inflict some bodily harm on him.

Tony simply looked at Mark without saying a word and headed off to class. It was very hard to keep his mind on schoolwork. He kept thinking about what Mark had done and he wasn’t sure what his obligations were. Should he report him, thereby putting himself in harms’ way, or should he overlook it, so that Mark might be more responsive to the Gospel? As he wrestled with these questions, his thoughts were interrupted by an announcement on the intercom system.

*“THIS IS YOUR PRINCIPAL, MR. DARSEL. THIS MORNING SOMEONE BROKE THE WINDSHIELD OF ONE OF OUR TEACHERS. ANYONE WITH ANY INFORMATION CONCERNING THIS DESPICABLE ACT IS ASKED TO PLEASE COME FORWARD. I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT YOUR IDENTITY WILL BE KEPT IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE.”*

Within seconds, the classroom was buzzing. The teacher had to bring the class to attention. Tony could feel his face flushing and he was praying no one was noticing. Now he was more confused than ever about what to do. He dreaded going

to his next class. It was Mr. Sander's math class and not only would he have to see him, but he was also have to see Mark Evans.

As he headed to his next class, his feet felt like they were made of lead. As he sat down, he tried to avoid eye contact with Mark, but Mark addressed him.

"Hey, Tony," he said with a smirk on his face, "have you seen anything interesting today?"

When Mr. Sanders entered the room, it was obvious that he was shaken. He immediately explained that he was the one who had his windshield smashed. He said, "I'd like to believe that it was a random act of violence and wasn't directed at me personally. I can't see why anyone would target me."

Barely able to manage a smile, he added, "The worst thing I've done is fail a few people."

Tony felt so sorry for him. At that moment he wanted to leap from his seat and shout, "It was Mark Evans, Mr. Sanders!", but he knew he couldn't. As he lay in bed that night, he tossed and turned as he grappled with his dilemma. Finally, he turned on his light and began reading his Bible. He drew comfort from a verse in James which says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

The next verse explained that the only requirement to receive this wisdom was that the one asking have faith that God would give it. Tony had that faith and with that assurance he fell asleep knowing that God would make His will known to him. Even though he wasn't sure at this point how he was going to handle this particular situation, he did have a confidence that God was going to work things out for him.

Tony had a lot of reasons to have such confidence. Even though he had only been serving the Lord since he was twelve, he had seen God answer a multitude of prayers and work out situations which he thought were unsolvable at the time. The next morning, Tony began his day as he did every day with his daily devotions. He would get up an hour early so he could spend that time reading the Bible and praying. All the turmoil and confusion he had experienced the preceding day was gone. Tony felt very strongly that the Lord's will was for him to do nothing at this time.

That day at school he was stopped in the hall by Mark. “Hey man,” he said, “I guess you ain’t as stupid as I thought. I thought you were gonna squeal.”

As the days went by Mark became more friendly with Tony and it seemed like he was no longer holding it against him that he had broken him and his sister up. Mark even began asking him questions about the Bible. Mark believed the Bible was abounding with inaccuracies and contradictions and hardly a week would pass in which he didn’t try to challenge Tony concerning some passage or another.

Tony was happy for all the interest Mark was exhibiting and was praying he eventually would be convinced of the reliability of the Bible. His goal was to have him realize that Jesus Christ is God Almighty and to trust Him alone to get him to heaven.

As Spring Break was approaching, Mark approached Tony and said, “Ya know, I’ve really been giving a lot of thought to the things you’ve been telling me. It is starting to make sense. Do ya think we could get together at your place sometime and discuss it. You know, maybe sometime when you’re home alone so we can have some privacy?”

“Sure. Actually, next Tuesday morning would be good. My mom leaves at nine to do volunteer work at the hospital for a few hours.” The following Tuesday morning Mark showed up at his house and they sat down at the kitchen table to talk. They hadn’t even gotten fifteen minutes into their conversation before they were interrupted by the ringing of the phone. It was Tony’s classmate, Cindy Crammer, and she told Tony she really needed to talk to him. When he explained that he had company and would call her back, Mark motioned to him to go ahead. He got up from the table and whispered, “Look man, I’ll be back in about a half hour.”

But twenty minutes hadn’t passed before Tony heard a loud knock at his door. He was startled when he opened it. Instead of it being Mark whom he expected, standing before him was a very tall policeman.

“Are you Tony Avolon?”

“Yes sir.”

“Do you own a blue mountain bike?”

“Yes sir.”

Then the policeman pointed to a bike stationed next to his car and asked, “Is that



your bike?”

“It looks like it, sir.”

Tony was very perplexed. Then the police officer explained, “About twenty minutes ago one of your neighbors phoned the police and reported seeing a young man stealing your bike from your garage.

“You certainly do have exceptional neighbors. This lady followed him in her car and phoned us from her mobile phone.

“If you’d be so kind as to verify that the bike is yours, and sign some papers, I’ll be on my way.”

Tony looked at the squad car and saw Mark in the back seat with his head down. It finally dawned on him that he had been set up by Mark and Cindy. While Tony was on the phone with Cindy, Mark had gone into his garage and taken his bike.

“Sir,” said Tony, “I’m afraid there’s been a terrible mistake.”

“How’s that?”

“That young man in your car is a friend of mine and he was just borrowing my bike.”

The police officer looked at Tony with skepticism. Tony had a young fresh face which portrayed his innocence. It was obvious by his demeanor and manners, he was a person of integrity. Mark, on the other hand, was rough and coarse, and he had a rap sheet as long as his arm. It seemed unlikely to the policeman that these two were friends. But he knew as long as Tony denied his bike was stolen, he was powerless to make an arrest.

He went to the his car and got Mark out and took his handcuffs off, while saying, “Your friend here says you didn’t steal his bike, you were just borrowing it. Why didn’t you explain that to me?”

Mark said, “Would you have believed me?”

“You have a point.”

After the policeman drove away, Mark stood there looking at his feet and asked, “Why did you do that for me?” Then he looked at Tony with a perplexed expression, and asked, “Are you some kinda angel or something?”

“Hardly.”

Mark’s lip started quivering and he asked, “Can we go inside to talk?”

“Sure.”

Mark could hardly restrain his tears as he poured out his story to Tony of how he had been moved from one foster home to another. He explained that his biological mother was a drug addict who was barely able to care for herself and that when he was three years old he was taken away from her.

At thirteen, he had turned against God because he thought He was responsible for all the pain he was suffering. Because of his hatred for God, Tony became a special target for him; he confessed that the only reason he had shown an interest in Sally was to bug Tony. Mark wanted to provoke Tony to the point that he would expose himself as being a phoney like all the other religious people Mark had known.

But there was no question now in Mark's mind that Tony was genuine.

Within the next hour, Tony was able to convince Mark of the trustworthiness of the Bible and of the truth that eternal life is a gift received by having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Tony explained that the only reason we are accepted into heaven is because of what God did for us, not because of what we do for God.

As Mark was leaving, Tony said, "Any time you want to borrow my bike, let me know."

That summer Tony began having weekly Bible classes in his backyard for children. This was the first time he had taught and he could see that God had gifted him with a special ability to teach. Sometimes when he was relating Bible stories, the children's eyes would be as wide as saucers as they learned about the wonderful things God had done for His children in ancient times.

As Tony entered his final year of high school, he started praying about going to a Bible college. He began writing letters to various schools requesting information about enrolling and he made it a point to ask that they include a sample of the literature they used to reach people with the Gospel. When he began receiving their responses, he became very discouraged. Not one of them was sound on the Gospel. Instead of teaching that eternal life is received by faith alone in Christ alone, the literature he received said things like "turn from sin", "make Christ the Lord of your life", and "ask Christ into your heart".

There was no doubt in Tony's mind that God had called him to teach, but he knew he couldn't learn from people who weren't sound on the Gospel. Tony was thankful for the instruction he had received from a young woman named Tracey

when he had lived up north. Before his family had moved to Pompano Beach, Florida two years previously, she had taught him a lot about the Bible. One thing she had emphasized was that a requirement to serve the Lord was to separate from those who teach false doctrine.

In just the few years Tony had been serving the Lord, he had encountered many who were teachers of erroneous doctrine. It saddened him to know that so many of those who claimed to be representatives of Jesus Christ were in reality being used by Satan to blind people to the truth of the Gospel. These teachers taught that Jesus died to pay for our sins, but that it wasn't enough just to believe in Him to go to heaven; they always added an element of human effort. And then there were the "grace teachers". These were men who knew eternal life was totally undeserved and unmerited and that faith in Christ was the only requirement to gain everlasting life. But instead of teaching that it is the responsibility of every believer to share this wonderful message, these teachers were saying that God didn't call believers who were young in their faith to share the Gospel.

So even though these teachers were believers, they were being used by Satan to hinder God's work. God has commanded all His children to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15), and these false teachers were saying "don't go, wait until you grow in your faith." Tony knew only too well that growth could never take place unless the believer is obeying the command to preach the Gospel.

It grieved him that so few believers were involved in the work of spreading the Gospel. He thought of the words of Jesus to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37,38). This was Tony's constant prayer.

There wasn't a day that passed that Tony wasn't out talking to people about the Bible. He was simply following the example of the early disciples concerning whom it was written, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42).

Tony started wondering if perhaps the Lord wanted him to go to a secular university, but the more he prayed about it the clearer it became to him that the

Lord would have him learn a trade rather than attend college. After graduating from high school, he got a job at a place called Quality Printers. The couple that ran the shop, Marcia and Mac, really liked Tony and Mac asked Tony if he would be interested in becoming a printer. Tony had no doubt that the Lord's hand was behind his finding this job and learning this skill.

A few months later, Tony felt burdened to start a Bible study for high school age students. He didn't tell anyone about this desire that God had placed in his heart, but prayed about it, waiting for God to let him know when and where to start it. Three weeks later, his sister Sally, approached him and asked him if he would consider starting a Bible study for her and her friends. Of course, she had no idea that this was the very thing the Lord had laid on his heart. She also suggested that they ask their parents to see if it would be okay to hold them at their house, which it was.

The following Tuesday night, Sally and her best friend, Heather, were able to round up fourteen people for Tony's first Bible study. One of the things that was unique about Tony's study was that he began his class by asking the people there if they had any questions. The response was great. Everyone had a good time and those people returned the following week along with some of their friends. When Tony was nineteen, he felt the time had come for him to get a place of his own. His parents wanted him to continue using their house to conduct his Bible studies because it was their way of contributing to the Lord's work, which suited Tony just fine.

One day during the summer, Tony had gone to the Broward Mall to witness and he approached a bearded man who looked to be about forty-six or seven. The man immediately identified himself as a person who rejected the existence of God. Instead of trying to present intellectual arguments as to His existence, Tony said, "If you don't mind, I'd like to tell you what I believe." "I'm waiting for my wife to finish shopping so until she comes I'll listen." "Thanks."

Tony then explained to the man that there is a big difference between Christianity and churchianity. He expressed how most churches teach heaven is a reward for one's good behavior, but the Bible teaches heaven is a gift. The man seemed genuinely happy to hear that Jesus Christ paid the full price to get us into heaven.

The reason Tony didn't give the man proofs of God's existence before he explained the Gospel is because he was well aware of the fact that many people reject Christianity because they think that the Bible teaches that God sends bad people to hell, which would mean that they would up in hell if that's true. So rather than gives proofs of the Bible, Tony always made it a point to first explain the wonderful truth that God loves us all and He paid for what we have done wrong. Tony explained clearly that it's not what we do for God which gets us to heaven, but what He has done for us. And because of his approach, Tony had seen many an atheist trust Christ as his Savior without ever hearing any proofs. This man proved to be one of them.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed, "that is really good news. If that's true, there's hope for me." Tony smiled and said, "If we could have gotten to heaven by our goodness, then Christ's death would have been unnecessary. We're all in the same boat; we've all sinned, and nothing less than God coming to earth and dying on a cross could have paid for our sins. If you believe in Him to get you to heaven, you can know right now that heaven is your home."

Tony then pulled the small New Testament from his pocket and showed him First John 5:13, which says, "These things have I written to you who believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know you have eternal life."

"Makes sense to me." The man then introduced himself as Bill Haley and explained he taught biology at Broward Community College. Bill then asked Tony if he believed in a literal creation.

After a conversation which lasted about ten minutes, Bill expressed an interest in attending Tony's church. Tony responded, "I'm not with a church, but I do teach a Bible study on Thursday evenings you're welcome to come to. When Tony walked away from Bill, he knew the time had come for him to open up his Bible study to all ages. As a servant of the Lord, Tony knew it was his responsibility to not only reach people with the Gospel, but also to teach those who believed and were willing to learn.

So many times he would get really excited over the interest shown by believers to serve the Lord, only to have those feelings dashed to the ground when for one reason or another they would lose their interest. The Lord spoke of this very thing in the Parable of the Sower. He relayed the story of a sower who in the process of

tossing seed on the ground to plant had some of the seed fall by the wayside which was then devoured by birds. Other seed fell on rocky ground, which because of lack of depth of soil, sprouted then withered. Some of the seed fell among the thorns which after growing for a period of time was choked by them. The seeds that fell on good earth were the only ones which lasted to produce fruit.

Jesus explained that this story illustrates how God's word is received by those who hear it. The seed which fell by the wayside speaks of persons who hear the Gospel and don't believe it. The seed which fell on rocky ground are people who believe and express a real interest in serving the Lord. But as soon as any persecution arises because of their service to God, their interest quickly is extinguished.

Believers who are compared to seed falling on thorny ground are those who fall away from the Lord because of the cares of the world and their desire for wealth. It was only the seed which fell on good ground which ended up enduring in God's service. And Tony lamented the fact that he had seen so very few believers who could be compared to seed which fell on good ground. But over the next few years, the Lord sent Tony a handful of people of whom it could be said had good and honest hearts. And to his delight, one of these was Bill Haley.

Bill spent a lot of time reflecting on things that he had taken for granted as a biology professor such as evolution and the theory that the universe was billions of years old. Things he had once believed were scientific facts, he concluded, after careful consideration and research, weren't scientific at all.

Another very special person was Elaine Parsons. She was a young woman with dark hair and hazel eyes who was going to school to become a nurse when Tony met her. Of the many people she invited to Tony's Bible study, only one showed any real interest in serving the Lord and that was another nursing student, Lynn. When Tony first laid eyes on her, he thought she seemed like a troubled person; someone perhaps who had gone through hard times. But he knew that it didn't matter what kind of past a person had if that person served the Lord. The God who transforms caterpillars into butterflies transforms the lives of those who submit to Him. One whose life is characterized by turmoil is filled with peace; those with depression, joy; and those with anger and resentment, forgiveness. Tony hoped and prayed this beautiful young woman would become one of the few who experienced the miracle of a transformed life.

That night at Bible study he spoke about these things and explained that qualities such as joy, peace, and love can only be experienced by those who live their lives to reach the lost with the Gospel. After Tony had gone home, Elaine called him, unable to hide her excitement. She explained to him that after Bible study, Lynn had approached her and asked if she could accompany her the next day to listen to her speak to people about the Gospel. Tony was excited too, but his excitement was tempered with the realization that most who get involved in serving the Lord end up falling away.

The following evening Elaine called to let Tony know how great things went that day. Tony was delighted to know that Lynn wanted to go out again the following day. "That's great!" he exclaimed. "But did you let her know she is going to be facing a battle between her old and new natures?"

Tony was referring to struggles that all believers face when they first start serving the Lord. This believer soon discovers that his greatest impediment to his service to God comes from within himself because within each of us lies a nature that does not want to submit itself to God. And along with the internal battle, the obedient believer must face opposition from Satan. The Evil One will do whatever he can to silence the witness of a child of God.

Tony and Elaine knew only too well from personal experience and from observation, the methods Satan was likely to employ in his attempt to destroy Lynn. And unfortunately, it was only months after seeing Lynn really soar in her Christian life, that she did take a nose dive. In her case, the bait that Satan used to snag her was a man who had no interest in spiritual things.

As Lynn's heart grew cold to the Lord and her Christian friends, Tony and Elaine never stopped praying for her or caring for her. Only someone who has been deeply committed to the Lord could understand the pain that Tony and Elaine knew. It was the pain of a broken heart.

When a believer is close to the Lord, the Lord produces His feelings through that believer. Lynn, by her actions, had hurt God's feelings and those hurt feelings were also being experienced by Tony and Elaine. The Lord as the Good Shepherd that He is, seeks out His sheep that have gone astray. Even though few respond, Lynn proved to be one that did. The Lord had to bring some very hard times into her life,

but always God's chastening is administered in love. And when the straying sheep did return to her Shepherd, she was also welcomed back by her Christian friends who rejoiced that the prodigal had come home.

And it wasn't long after this that Tony started having feelings for Lynn that made him question if this was the woman that Lord was giving him to be his wife. But he would have to wait and see.

**TO BE CONTINUED...**