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# 1

## *The Prospect of Sam*

WE HAD LIVED on Parsonage Hill so long that, when Dad finally decided to accept the call from the church in Lake Port, I started to get a sick feeling in my stomach. Roy and I were only about two years old when we moved here, so somehow I guess I just thought we would live here forever.

If Dad had asked me today what I thought about his accepting the new church, I probably would have told him that I didn't think it was God's will for us to leave Parsonage Hill. But you might know, Dad talked it over with God, not with me. I'm pretty sure Dad thought God was a whole lot more reliable than his very own daughter. And since this next Sunday was going to be our last Sunday here, I guess it was pretty obvious that God must have told Dad it was OK to leave.

Now that it was so close, I decided maybe I should have talked to God about it too—more than I had. I could have told Him that it would be better for us

to stay here a little longer. When I got to thinking about leaving Susan and some of my other friends, boy, I really felt terrible. And then there was David Tanner. For all the years I had known him, he had only thought of me as Roy's twin sister. And now that we were leaving, his eyes must have been getting much better, because lately he treated me like I was a girl, not like Roy's dumb sister.

"How can Dad be so sure that we should go to Lake Port?" I asked my mother, while we were stacking the dinner dishes.

"Because he feels God is leading us there."

I knew she'd give me that kind of an answer. Somehow a preacher's wife, even though she is your mother, always comes through with a spiritual answer to all your not-so-spiritual questions.

"Would it matter to Dad if I thought maybe God was telling us to stay here a little longer?" I finally dared to ask the question that had been on my mind the whole time. I don't suppose I really thought God was telling us to stay. I guess what I was trying to figure out was a way to convince God that it was OK to stay. Didn't He know that all my friends were here, that I really didn't want to move?

I remembered all the times that I heard Dad preach about knowing God's will and being obedi-

ent when He told us to do something or go somewhere. Dad always used the story about Abraham being willing to give up his son if that's what God wanted.

And I really knew that I couldn't just pray and tell God how He should lead us. But oh, how I hated to leave the only home I could ever remember.

Mother must have known how I felt, because all of a sudden she got terribly serious.

"Why, Honey, you know that Daddy and I prayed about it for a long time, and we talked to you and Roy, too. Why didn't you say something about it earlier?"

I opened my mouth to answer the question but even before one word popped out, Roy came through with his smart answer.

"She didn't realize it would mean leaving David Tanner. It just dawned on her now."

I grabbed the dish towel, whipped it over at Roy, but missed him completely. It was OK for me to think about David. But Roy? Did he have to say such a stupid thing right in front of Mother?

Either Mother wasn't listening, or she decided to ignore Roy's bright comment. I think she felt it was more important to explain to me about God telling us that He had a new place of service for Dad.

“Joy, when God leads, it’s for us to follow, not ask why. Evidently our ministry here is over.”

Boy, with that kind of an answer, how could I say why again!

But these were the bare facts: I’d have to be going to a brand new school and since Lake Port was bigger, I’d probably feel awful lonely there. I knew I would especially dread the first day.

Then too, I’d have to find all new friends. I knew one thing for sure, I’d never find as good a friend as Susan Tanner.

“I wonder if God would ever lead the Tanners to Lake Port?” I asked, hardly realizing that I had said it out loud.

Before Mother could tell me that it wasn’t likely that God would tell Mr. Tanner to pack up his business and follow us to our new church, Roy butted in again.

“Hey, I know! God could tell David Tanner to propose to you, and you could be a child bride and live happily ever after.”

“Roy,” Mother said, a shocked look on her face. I was surprised she didn’t scold him about being sacrilegious.

I could have slapped my brother right across his

talkative mouth, but instead I glared like I'd never glared before.

"Nobody asked you for your smart remark," I snapped. "Anyway, I don't think you want to move any more than I do."

"I think moving is neat. Maybe there'll be a chance to get into sports in Lake Port. Here it's all sewed up."

"Sports! That's all you ever think of."

"Sure, that's life."

"Life? That's stupid."

"Children!" Mother finally said.

I knew, if we kept at it long enough, Mother would step in as a referee. She always did.

"Let's not fight about things that haven't even happened yet," she added. "It would be a great deal better if you would go upstairs and start packing some of your things. It has to be done and today's as good a day as any to start."

"But we don't move until Wednesday," Roy argued.

Now it was my turn.

"So some of the things will be in a box for a few extra days. Big deal!"

Roy looked at me as if to say none of your busi-

ness, and he probably would have except that Dad walked in just then with the morning mail.

"Anything for me?" I asked.

"Nope." Roy put in before Dad could answer. "David can't write until we move."

Neither Dad nor Mother saw the face I made at him. They were too interested in an airmail letter that was in the stack.

"Oh. From Carl and Ethel," Mother said, eagerly opening the envelope.

"Let me have the stamp," Roy said, jumping up, trying to grab the letter that had come from South America.

Mother jerked it away just as fast, and Dad started toward the door, looking over some of the other mail.

"I wonder what they have to say?" Mother asked no one in particular. Dad stopped in his tracks and raised his eyebrows.

"If you read it, I think you'll find out." He spoke soft, like he wasn't sure he wanted Mother to hear him. But she did, and now it was Mother's turn to pass out the dirty looks. If Dad hadn't been checking another letter, he would have seen that it wasn't exactly a preacher's-wife look that she gave him either.

"Oh my," Mother said as she started reading. That's how she usually reacted when something bad was about to happen.

Dad must have thought she was about to faint or something because he came dashing back to the table. Well, dashing for Dad. For anyone else it would have been sauntering.

"What's the matter?" he asked, speaking louder than he had before.

"Sam. They want to know if Sam can come and live with us this next school year."

"Neato!" was Roy's reaction.

Dad took the letter from Mother and at the same time turned and looked at Roy.

"Would you please stop using that ridiculous word."

"Neato?"

"Yes. Neato." Daddy said with a harshness that he didn't often use.

"What's wrong with neato?"

Neither Mom nor Dad answered his question so I felt I should take care of it.

"It's a stupid word, that's what it is."

"Stupid!" Roy pounced back. "You use *that* dumb word all the time. So what's the difference?"



"Well, you say, 'dumb.'"

By this time we had Mom and Dad's attention again.

"Children!"

When Dad said, "children" that way, it really meant, "Button up now before I do the buttoning for you."

He turned back to the letter.

"Hm. Carl actually wrote this time. He must be pretty concerned about it."

"That's probably because Sam's a backslider," I blurted out.

"Joy," Dad replied, "You shouldn't call your cousin a backslider."

"Well, he is. He's—and anyway you use that word in the pulpit."

"Joy!" It was Mother's turn to chime in this time, and then with hardly a breath she started reading the letter aloud.

"'And so we are very concerned that we have Sam in school and settled in a good Christian home before we go back into the interior.'"

"See, I told you he was a backslider. Even Uncle Carl knows it."

"Oh my," Mother managed again. "Moving to a new place and then taking on a boy like—" She

stopped suddenly. Either she would have to admit that Sam wasn't exactly the kind of Christian he ought to be, or she would have to stop short. She stopped short.

So I finished her sentence with a question.

"A backslider, Mom?"

Without answering, Mom and Dad took off for the study, and Roy and I started talking about how things would be if Sam came to live with us.

"I think it'd be neat to have Sam here."

"Don't you mean it would be 'neato'?" I said with sarcasm.

"Okay, neato!"

"I agree with Dad. That word sounds stupid."

"You haven't answered my question. Do you think it'll be good or bad to have Sam here?" Roy was serious as he spoke this time.

"I don't know. A new church, new friends, a new school—and Sam too?"

Roy whistled like he suddenly got the point.

"Come to think of it, it would be a rotten way to start a new school. Having your wild cousin set the reputation for you."

That really made me think. Just because he was a missionary's son didn't mean he had to be a good Christian, and just because Roy and I were preacher's

kids didn't mean that we would be good Christians either. Everyone had the same responsibilities. God expected us to be good Christians, but He always let us choose. He never forced us to live a certain way.

These weren't really my own thoughts. I had heard Dad preach like that. What Roy was saying was true. Sam's testimony and life would sure make things hard on us at school. But there was something even more important—what would it do for Dad and a brand-new church?