

The Spirit Found the Runaway Boy

by Walter L. Wilson, M.D.

In a little village on the Atlantic sea-coast, there lived a godly family in whose home the Son of God and the Word of God were honored. The father said grace at the table before meals, the mother prayed with the children before they left for school, and in the evening before retiring the father read the Scriptures and commended the family to God in prayer.

There was one son in this home who resented so much religion, as he called it. He was embarrassed before his friends when they came to the home and found that prayer was offered at the table. He was irked by the constant prayers of his father and mother for God's gracious care of him, and their pleas for his salvation. He preferred a life of careless resignation to the call of the world and the invitations of his worldly friends. Paul was his name, but he was quite unlike the Paul who was God's servant and loved the name of his Lord.

Day after day, Paul planned and schemed some way to escape the religious atmosphere of his home. He did not want to grieve his mother's heart, nor cause a scandal in the little village, but he finally decided that he would quietly slip away, leaving no address, and make his way to some distant city where he would not be known, and where he would not be pestered with the prayers of Christians and the pleas of his loved ones. This he did one dark night, after arranging with a stranger who was travelling west to take him as a passenger. He gathered a few things together secretly and slipped away for parts unknown. The Holy Spirit arranged it so that his pocket Testament was in the hip pocket of a pair of trousers which he took with him.

Paul was not a lazy boy. He had learned a good trade in stucco work and therefore decided to go where there was a stucco factory. He had learned that there were two such factories in Kansas City, and therefore made his way to that western city, where he applied for work. His splendid training and excellent ability soon won for him a place of responsibility in the stucco factory.

Of course, there was consternation the next morning in the little eastern home when it was found that Paul was missing, and that he had taken his garments with him as though he intended not to return. His mother and father gathered the family together to pray. Earnest pleadings went up to God for the runaway boy. They told the Lord that the Holy Spirit knew where the lad would be found, and asked that his heart and his footsteps might be directed back to the home again. They knew he had left because of their godly activities. They supposed that he would seek the company and fellowship of the ungodly, where both his life and soul would be in great danger.

Nearly a month went by with no word to calm the heart of the weeping mother, or to quiet the spirit of the praying father. One day a companion of Paul incidentally mentioned to the father that he had received a postcard from Paul bearing the Kansas City post-office stamp. This at least was a clue to his whereabouts. Inquiry was made as to the names of the various stucco firms in the West, and the names of the two in Kansas City were ascertained. The father at once sent a letter to each of these institutions, asking whether Paul had been hired by them. Both firms replied to the inquiry, and one of them in the affirmative, stating that they had such a young man in their employ.

The next step was to find out some point of contact in Kansas City. An evangelist was holding services in the church where the boy's parents had their memberships. In talking to him about their sorrow, they mentioned that the lad was in Kansas City, and whether he knew any person who might be interested in the welfare of their wandering lad. He replied that he knew a doctor there who was engaged in soul-winning work, and would no doubt be happy to look up their son. He gave the parents my name and address, and soon I had a letter from them with the details.

After reading the letter from this heart-broken father and mother, I kneeled in prayer and read the letter to the Spirit of God, knowing that He could and believing that He would direct me to a meeting with Paul. I then wrote a letter to him and asked whether he would come to my home on Friday evening to have supper with me as my guest. I mentioned that being away from home, no doubt his heart was hungry for fellowship with some young people, and he would find such an opportunity in my

house. It happened that on this particular Friday evening, the young people from our church were to have a fellowship party in which they would sing gospel songs and choruses, have Bible games, and listen to some message from the Word. In the letter I gave him my telephone number and asked him to phone his acceptance. The letter was sent on Monday.

No word was received until Thursday evening. About 5:30 that evening, I answered a ring at the front door, and found standing there a tall, splendid-looking young man about twenty years of age. I greeted him and asked how I could serve him. He replied, "I am brother Paul J-- from --, New Jersey."

"Did you say you were brother Paul?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"Since when did you become my brother?" I asked very earnestly. "Come in and tell me all about it." We were soon seated in the living room, while my heart was praising God for such a quick answer to prayer.

He related the story of his departure from home, the hardships along the way, and the strife that was going on in his heart because of his decision to turn away from God and from his godly parents. He had obtained a room not very far from the place where he was employed and had become a chum of another godless young man who was working in the same plant. He had gone with this evil companion and entered into things which were quite wicked even in his own sight. There was a battle going on in his soul, because he knew he was wrong and that one day he would have to reap what he sowed. The story he related concerning the wonderful way his heart had been reached was about as follows.

"Last Tuesday my chum and I were working on a scaffold, placing some stucco work in position, when my pal lost his balance and fell to the pavement below, striking his head, and was instantly killed. I saw him fall, heard him strike, and knew that he must be dead. Quickly I hurried down to him, but found that he was dead. God spoke to my soul immediately with terrible conviction. Why was he taken instead of me? Why did God leave me when I was such a rebellious sinner? Why did God spare me instead of punishing me? All of these questions rushed

through my soul with great vividness, until I was in a tremble and could work no more. I knew that back home mother and father were praying for me. My Sunday-school teacher was praying; my pastor was praying. Was it possible that these prayers had preserved me, so that I was kept from death and given another opportunity to be saved? After the body was removed, I returned to my room miserable, wretched and convicted. There I found your letter which had arrived in the morning mail. As I read it I was sure that God had put you on my trail to bring me to the Saviour. I wondered, of course, how you knew about me. Who had told you that I was here! How did you know that I had no friends and really did want the company of some young people!

"The conviction of my danger in view of eternity made me forget for a while your invitation and I began searching through my things to see whether I could find a Testament. That evening a special delivery letter came from my mother, having been addressed to the firm for whom I was working. In the letter was a plea from mother not to try to run away from God, but rather to receive the Lord Jesus and let Him satisfy the longing of my heart. She enclosed in the letter a Gospel of John with some verses marked for me to read. One of these was John 3:36 — "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." This verse deepened my conviction and stirred my soul greatly. I read mother's letter again and read the verse again, then kneeling beside the bed, I told Jesus Christ that I would believe Him and accept Him. I did not want to die and go to hell. I was miserable in my sins and rebellion, and knew deep down in my heart that only He could give me peace. I took Him gladly, and immediately telegraphed mother that her prayers were answered and her lost boy was "found."

What a time of rejoicing we had together in my parlor! I had asked the Lord to let me win this boy for Christ, but He graciously did it through his own mother. I had thought of the Scriptures that I would use in dealing with him, but the Holy Spirit had other plans. He answered my prayer for the boy's salvation, and also permitted me to find the boy; but He did not give me the honor of pointing him to the Saviour, as I had hoped. The mother's prayer, the mother's Gospel of John, and the mother's marked verses were used by the gracious Spirit to do

the work in the boy's heart.

I wrote a letter to the parents, telling them all the story as far as I had touched the boy's life. Shortly afterward I baptized him and sent him home rejoicing.

Thus we see a duplication of the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. The Spirit knows where the troubled heart is; He knows where the praying souls are. He controls the chain of events. He sends the right message just at the right time. Let us learn more and more to depend upon His wonderful ability to reach the hearts and lives of those who are dear to us.

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