

# Peace Through Prayer

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As far back as he could remember he had been afraid of storms. Back there in the early years, some member of the family had set the pace of fear when a storm came. There was an old belief — probably a superstition — that if one sat on a feather bed, lightning wouldn't strike. Anyway, there was a general migration to the bedrooms during a storm. Mother became nervous if the storm was severe, and sister would have a fit of trembling. Brother made a vain show of bravery, which only intensified the uneasiness. All through his seventeen years the boy had had a dread of storms. Perhaps the psychologists would say it was conditioned by those early experiences.

So that night he lay huddled among the covers, as the storm raged. The room was dungeon-black, lighted only by the vivid flashes of lightning. All other sound was swallowed up in the crash and rumble of the thunder. He could feel the house shake as the wind dashed against it, seemingly in a mad effort to tear it apart. The rain beat against the window pane in a solid phalanx. And he was scared — a pointless, unreasoning, foolish fear.

The storm would slacken a little, but just when he thought it was about over it would renew its attack with added vengeance. He was afraid to stay there alone. He might go down the stairs. No, someone might hear him, and tomorrow they would make no end of fun about it. So he slid deeper among the covers and tried to shut out the sound of the storm.

As he lay there, trying to forget the storm, he began to try to understand this feeling. What was he afraid of anyway? He wasn't afraid of what the storm would

do. It wasn't that he was afraid that he would be killed. He was prepared to die — or was he? He had joined the church and attended more or less regularly. He prayed — not as often as he should perhaps — but he did say his prayers now and then. He had prayed tonight.

What good was praying anyway? His mother prayed long, earnest, tearful prayers when he had been unusually vexatious. As he looked back now, he wondered why her prayers hadn't done more good. Wonder if Mother prays during a storm.

Is that the secret of her calmness? With all the worries and tasks of the home since Dad died had prayer helped her face the days with her customary smile and gentleness? She used to be afraid of storms. How did she get over it? Had her prayers helped her? Maybe prayer would help him.

The preacher had said that if you prayed for something, and really believed, it would be answered. But he'd prayed and nothing had happened. Maybe he hadn't believed strongly enough. What was faith anyway? How can you believe any other way than just believing? Then he remembered something else the preacher had said, "Just forget yourself and think of the Lord. Believe His promises as you believe the promises of a friend."

He had never thought of it like that before. There are different ways to believe. So his thoughts went from his part in the prayer, to God's part in answering. He had made the motions and said the words, but he had not got the meaning. Finally, he began to see the truth — that prayer was not a charm to work magic, but a means of strength and courage.

Well, he certainly needed courage now, with the storm steadily mounting in its fury. Could prayer free him from this senseless fear? Had he ever really believed? Had he ever expected anything to happen? Then, in the darkness of his room, while the storm continued its boisterous campaign, he prayed: "Lord, I don't know how to pray right. Maybe I don't know the right words, but I'm afraid of storms and I don't want to be afraid. I do believe you can help me. Take away the fear and give me courage."

And it happened. Before the prayer was finished, before the storm had lessened

its force, there was a difference. There came a sense of relaxation, of unloosening, which started at the top of the head and moved down his body. He could put his finger on the spot, almost, it was so distinct. Gradually it moved down his body, as though someone were pulling the covers from over him, until his whole body was alive with a new feeling of freedom. He tingled all over with the wonder of it. His heart stopped its painful pounding; his head wasn't filled with the noise of the storm; the darkness was not so oppressive. A real sense of peace and courage enveloped him. He wasn't afraid of the storm!

## Infant Climbs A Mountain

PEGGY O'DONNELL

Ever since they'd left New England behind to come west, Infant had been excited; there had been so many things to see, all new and different. At first she had thought that Indiana would be like it was in her first grade reader; that they'd live in a log cabin, that she'd wear a coonskin cap and deerskin breeches just like Dan'l Boone, (only smaller, because Infant was only six) and that there would be real live Indians with tomahawks. Mother had explained that that had been a long time ago, and that Indiana now was just like New England. But that, reflected Infant, was not strictly true.

Her big sister had turned around a little while ago and said, "Infant," (everyone called her Infant, which wasn't her real name at all) "we're almost there." She had looked out the window, interested in seeing what Indiana was like. There were endless strips of grass and weeds beside the road, long lines of telephone poles, farmhouses between fields of corn

and wheat, and animals in pasture. All these things were the same, but it wasn't as Mother had said, just like New England. There was something wrong. She removed her head from the window and scooted back into the corner to meditate. What was wrong? As the wheels kept turning, rolling them farther and farther away from New Hampshire, Infant's thoughts turned back over the miles toward home.

She remembered the New England village made up of clusters of spotlessly white houses on the green hillside. She recalled how it looked at dusk as she was going up the hill toward home, when the lights began to pop out of the darkness one by one, like stars, until the twinkling hillside looked like the sky turned upside down. It always seemed that when she got up close enough she'd be able to reach out and pluck a star for her very own.

Infant lived in a big cream colored house, way up high on the hill. From there she could look out over the village