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a Sunrise,  
Let's Tell the  
Good News!

By Linda L. Linn

Front Cover

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Bad news comes to Pine City, and halts a courtship that is just getting a good start. Can these two young people trust God for the outcome? How long will they be separated, and what questions might result?

They both agree to pray and leave it in God's hands, but they both feel very close to tears. They wonder how two bad things could happen so close together and spoil things for them.

They say a very sorrowful good-bye and God bless you. Life goes on for Matt almost as it had before they met, but now he has a big hole in his heart. Fiona has that same hole in her heart.

# Everywhere There's a Sunrise, Let's Tell the Good News!

By Linda L. Linn

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## Introduction:

This is a work of fiction, except for the Bible Scriptures, which are God's Word and are therefore true. No person in this novel exists in real life except for God the Father, God the Son, (also known as Jesus, the Messiah), and God the Holy Spirit. All the characters, places and events in this novel are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is purely coincidental. It is realistic fiction because many of the things and especially the miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit can really happen.

This novel is meant for adults, not children, although with parental guidance, it has parts that children might learn from or enjoy.

Scriptures are shown by italics, and are this author's paraphrase of the King James Version of the Holy Bible. I chose the KJV because it has no copyright. Basically, what I do is to change words like "thee" and "ye" to "you", "thy" to "your", take the "eth," etc. off verbs, and sometimes use synonyms, to make it sound like more modern English. You can do the same thing as you read the suggested old hymns in a hymnal.

The author encourages you to look up these scriptures in your preferred Bible translation and read them there also. The Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs chosen for this novel really do have meaningful words and teachings. I encourage you to look up the Psalms in your Bible and each hymn and spiritual song in a hymnal or songbook.

There is a list of the characters in the story in the addendum at the end of this novel. It might help you keep track of who is who as you go along. If you decide to print it out, you can use a regular bookmark to keep track of where you left off. If you are reading it off the computer screen, just write down the page number where you left off reading. If you are using an ebook viewer, it should have an electronic bookmark.

As you read this novel be aware that the five asterisks signal a change of scenarios.

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The author, Linda L. Linn, has lived in Colorado all her life. She has believed in, and loved Jesus since she was a young child. When not doing housework, cooking or baking, she likes to play the piano, sew, and read. She also enjoys photography and travel. Before she retired, she enjoyed teaching first, second, and third graders in the public school system for 27 years. Her husband, Richard, and she have traveled to see much of God's beautiful creation in the western United States. They are presently living near Montrose, Colorado. This is the first novel she has written but there may be others. Thank you for reading this novel.

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## Preview

This novel is an inspirational romance. Bad news comes to Pine City, and halts a courtship that is just getting a good start. Can these two young people trust God for the outcome? How long will they be separated and what questions might result?

Both of them agree to pray and leave it in God's hands, but they both feel very close to tears. How could two bad things happen so close together and spoil things for them? They say a very sorrowful goodbye and God bless you. Life goes on for Matt, almost as it had before they had met, but now he has a big hole in his heart. Fiona has that same hole in her heart.

You might be surprised, but some of the events in this story could be happening right in your city or in one near you! Jesus still works through believers to heal, do miracles, save people, change lives, and guide decisions.

Come spend some time in Pine City, and watch the believers who attend the Grace 'n' Faith Church. They function in unity as Jesus body to show his love and bring the good results of the Good News to their city and other places. As believers they desire to live for Jesus because they love him and appreciate what he did for them, and because lost people need him. Their lifestyle is a ministry that is accomplished by the power of God. It is by grace, through faith, and is done with love.

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#### Dedication:

This novel is dedicated with gratitude to God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for creation and the gospel, and for guidance and power to serve him.

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#### Prologue

\*\*\*Late winter\*\*\*

Fiona O'Connor was shivering by the time she walked into The Garden Store on this cold winter day. "Good morning, Ernest and Connie," she greeted her bosses. "How are you and your kids?"

"We're all fine. Ben and Amy like their new classes in high school. They even like this cold weather," said Ernest Clay as he waved and went back to work.

Fiona laughed, "This is the coldest winter I can remember in a long time. It's a good thing this place is heated. Otherwise the plants I take care of would all be frozen."

"You're right about that, but you look extra happy this morning in spite of the cold," Connie replied.

"Yes, I was thinking about a young man in the church small group that just started this January. I've been observing him for a couple weeks now and I'm very impressed," Fiona responded.

Connie asked, "Is he good looking?" They were talking as they walked into the break room where Fiona put her lunch in the refrigerator and hung up her coat.

"Extremely! He's tall, blond and very muscular. His smile lights up the whole room. But looks aren't everything. I'm also impressed with his comments and the way he acts. I'll keep you posted as I learn more. Right now I want to show you an idea I've been working on for the store." Fiona handed a stack of cards to Connie. "Would you please read these and see if you think they would be good to hand out to the people who buy potted plants? If you like them, would you proofread them and tell me if there are any mistakes that need to be fixed?"

"Sure. But here come some customers. It looks like I'll be too busy right now," said Connie. "I'll keep them with me and read them while I eat lunch. I'll let you know later today."

After lunch she found Fiona and told her, "These cards are fantastic! It's such a good idea to tell people how to take care of the plants they buy. It looks to me like you did a lot of research to be able to write such accurate information. You even made them plant specific and put the plant name at the top. I only found a couple errors that need to be fixed, and I would suggest that you put the plant name in bold. When you have that finished, bring them to the store on your thumb drive and we'll download them to the store computer and print them on some heavy paper. We can use the paper cutter to cut them into cards to hand out with the plants people buy."

"Thank you, Connie, for all your kind words. I'm glad you like this suggestion. I had fun doing the research. I feel like I know the plants even better now. Besides that, you are the one who gave me such good on-the-job training all the time I've been working here ever since I graduated from high school. I appreciate that very much," replied Fiona.

"It's been a pleasure for me. Wow, you've been working here for four years! Time flies," Connie exclaimed.



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Matthew (Matt) Anderson hurried from his pickup into the house the Evans Construction Company was building. "Walt, I sure am thankful that we got this house closed in and can use the heaters in here while we're working!" Matt exclaimed.

"I agree with you. It's been such a cold winter that we would not have been able to work at all otherwise," commented his boss and friend, Walt Evans.

"What's the plan for today?" Matt asked.

"Before I tell you that, I want to know when you are going to find yourself the perfect girl and get married so I can have some 'grandkids' to spoil. You're so much like a son to me, Matt. I wish I could legally adopt you, but I guess that at 24 years old, you are too old for that. But my dear wife, Betty, and I still claim you as our son in our hearts. You definitely take the place of the children we could never have," stated Walt.

Matt responded, "Thank you, and I hope that you know the feeling is mutual. You and Betty have become like parents to me, and that has helped me a lot after losing my own parents in that accident a little over two years ago. I miss them a lot, but my pastor, Don Ross, counseled me, and reminded me that I'll see them again in heaven when I die because all of us believe in Jesus. I hope someday soon you and Betty will believe in Jesus also. But, back to your question about the perfect girl. I have one in my sights."

"Tell me all about her!" Walt exclaimed. "Is she pretty? What does she look like? How old is she?"

"Whoa! How much time do we have? I don't want to talk away all our work time," answered Matt.

Walt replied, "We have enough time. You got here plenty early today and the other workers aren't here yet, so tell me as much as you can before they come!"

"Okay, I would say that she is more than pretty. She is beautiful. She's tall, slender, and has auburn, shoulder length hair. I would make a guess that she's a couple years younger than I am. She carries herself like a princess, and when she smiles, I just melt inside," responded Matt.

"Sounds to me like you are already smitten!" Walt exclaimed.

Matt answered, "I think I must be. I've only known of her for a couple weeks, but everything I've seen and learned about her tells me that her beauty is more than just skin deep. We met in the new small group our church organized the first week of January. When I listen to her voice as she shares what she's thankful for, or when she prays out loud, it sounds like music. Her laughter is even better than music."

"Please keep me informed. I think I'm a romantic at heart, and I'll look forward to everything you can tell me. Here come the rest of the workers. The plan for today is to just carry on from where we left off yesterday," said Walt.

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Fiona observed Matt at the small group meeting the next week and was even more impressed this time. After that meeting she was talking to her mother, Glenda. "Matt is the nicest young man I've ever met. I'll get to spend some time watching him in another setting because we'll be in a group of four doing a project next Saturday."

That weekend, all four of them in the group enjoyed working together to help an older couple repaint a couple rooms in their house. Lots of talk and laughter made the work go quickly. Afterwards, they all went to eat supper at a quiet restaurant where they had a chance to talk some more and get better acquainted. It was easy to see how they had paired off by the end of the meal.

At that time, Matt suggested, "Maybe we could do some more things together as a foursome, since this has been so much fun. I would like to get to know you better, Fiona."

She replied, "I think that's a very good plan. I would like it also, Matt. I can see our friends nodding so it looks like we all agree."

Consequently for the next four weeks they went together with the other couple to do something one day of every weekend. They did fun things like hiking on snowshoes, playing table tennis, ice skating, and eating out. They made sure to have time to discuss things as separate couples. They were learning what the other one believed and why certain things were important, plus plans and goals. Fiona was amazed at how often they agreed.

Fiona enjoyed telling her mother and her boss the new things she was learning and admiring about Matt. Likewise, Matt had something new to tell Walt every Monday after his time with Fiona and the other couple on one day of the weekend.

"In the early spring, Matt commented, "Fiona, I would like to be able to date you. What do you think about doing that?"

"I would like to go with you on dates," she answered. "My father, Patrick, is very old-fashioned and he would want you to come and ask for his permission to court me. I think he would expect you to promise certain things, and he will tell you what they are."

"I'll be willing to do that. When would be a good time?" Matt inquired.

"I don't know, since I've never done this before," she explained. "I think I need to ask my mother if I could have you over for supper. Then you can talk to my father after supper while Mother and I clean up the dishes."

"Okay. You can let me know at the small group meeting this coming week," said Matt.

So, instead of going with the other couple as a foursome, Matt had supper with her parents and got to know them a little bit. He was very nervous about asking for permission to court Fiona, because she was already 22, but he would do it so they could continue their relationship.

Patrick O'Connor was very nice about it and made it easy for Matt to ask and make the promise to take good care of Fiona and keep her pure. Permission was granted and the family visited for a while afterward.

For the next several weeks, Matt and Fiona enjoyed dating. It even warmed up enough to play tennis. Matt told her about the house he was planning to build. He had the blueprints ready and showed them to her. She was very interested and told him she really liked the plans for the house. He wanted to tell her it would be their house but he knew it was too soon to mention that. He didn't want to scare her away. He had even decided to keep living in his studio apartment instead of moving to a larger one bedroom apartment, so he could use the savings to help build the house. He was taking note of things she liked and wrote some of them down so he wouldn't forget them.

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Just when things seemed to be going so well, and they liked each other more and more each time they went anywhere together, the O'Connor family got some bad news one morning about Fiona's great aunt and her younger brother, Riley. Both reports came within minutes of each other.

"Glenda and Fiona," said her father, "that was my Aunt Cara on the phone. She is your great aunt, Fiona, my mother's oldest sister. She's gotten to the point that she cannot do her daily care because her arthritis has twisted her fingers so much and the pain is very bad. She needs someone to be there 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help with her care, and her son does not seem to be concerned about what happens to her. She's asked him several times for assistance, but all he wants to do is put her in a nursing home. She asked if one of us could come and help her."

Just then the phone rang again. It was the doctor at the hospital in the city where Riley was attending a university. Patrick turned on the phone's speaker so everyone could hear. "Your son, Riley, went on the last skiing trip of the season today and had an accident. Both of his legs are fractured, and so is his right arm. He needs to have you come pick him up at the hospital when we release him to go home in three days. He will need a lot of extra care until he recovers. If someone in your home could also help him with his studies, he might be able to finish the semester at the university using the computer and the web. In two weeks he will need to start physical therapy to keep his muscles from atrophying. The therapists will tell you how to continue the therapy."

When that phone conversation was over Patrick suggested, "Let's pray about these problems together and get the Lord's guidance about what to do. Everything has changed so suddenly and unexpectedly and we really need God's help."

When they finished praying Glenda said, "I feel that we, his parents, need to be here to care for Riley. Patrick needs to keep working, but he can come home from work whenever Riley needs a man's strength to do something. I can quit my job for as long as it takes Riley to recover, and I can help him with his studies."

Patrick asked Fiona, "Would you be willing to quit your job and go take care of your great aunt, so we can both be here for your brother? I know it's an awful lot to ask, especially since you just started dating Matt. But she really desires to stay in her home, and I can't say I blame her."

Fiona answered, "I can understand that. Many of those nursing homes are not very clean, and some don't do a good job of caring for people. I also know that Riley would not like me to be the one to take care of him here at home and help him with his studies. Mother can do that best. So we really have no other choice. I am very disappointed that I'll have to stop dating Matt. We were making good progress in our relationship. But our Christian responsibility is to take care of our family, so I will quit my job and go take care of my great aunt."

"Thank you for being so unselfish and accepting, Fiona," her dad said. "You can call Matt and set up a time when you can talk to him and explain all that has happened. There's no way of knowing how long Aunt Cara will need your help. I guess we'll have to take it one day at a time."

"You're right. I'll call Matt and have him come over here so we can talk in the living room. Then I'll call Connie and tell her I have to quit my job without giving the customary two weeks notice. After that I'll start packing. I assume I need to leave tomorrow and drive to her home, so she can get the care she needs as soon as possible," said Fiona.

Patrick said, "Yes, that would be best. I'll call her immediately and tell her you will be there tomorrow evening. I'm sure she'll be relieved."

Connie was very understanding and told Fiona that she hoped there would be a way they could rehire her when she returned to Pine City after taking care of her aunt.

Matt came over within the hour and listened carefully as Fiona told the happenings of the morning. When he remained speechless because of the shock, she added, "I'm very disappointed that we cannot continue dating."

He was able to reply, "I am too. Would you like for us to use the telephone and write letters so we can continue our relationship long distance?"

She answered, "I don't think that would be fair to either one of us. We have no idea how long I'll be needed at my great aunt's house. You might meet someone else and then not feel free to get to know her."

"And the same thing could happen for you there in the city where your aunt lives," he added.

So they both agreed to not write or call each other, or continue the relationship they had started. Neither of them would ask the other to wait for, or even hope for the other one, but to pray and leave it in God's hands to see what would happen. But they both felt very close to tears, and wondered how two bad things could happen so close together and spoil things for them.

They said a very sorrowful goodbye and God bless you, before he left. Life went on for Matt in Pine City almost as it had before they had met, but now he had a big hole in his heart. Fiona had that same hole in her heart. Her life was going to change radically in the city where her great aunt lived.

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## Chapter One

One year and nine months later in some city in the USA, late winter

*Matthew 7: 7,8, Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened.*

Ted and Julie Blake came home from church one Sunday and just sat for a while in the car. Both of them looked discouraged and frustrated.

Ted said " Honey, we've tried every church in this city and haven't found what we're looking for."

Julie answered, "I know, and the Bible shows so clearly how Jesus wanted his church on earth to function, but it just isn't happening anywhere in this city."

Several weeks passed with Ted going to work at an auto body shop, and Julie working as a receptionist in a dental office. It just seemed so empty and useless.

Finally one evening, they sat down in the living room after supper to talk and pray about it. Then Julie suggested, "Maybe we could start a search for a city with a church that's doing it right."

Ted replied, "Good idea! We can look on the web, in newspapers, and call our friends in other cities. Surely, there must be one somewhere."

"Yes, I agree. Some people might think we're crazy, because we have our jobs and we're settled here, but they just would not understand how important this is to us. We might want to start a family sometime soon since we're both 24 years old. Of course it would have to be by adopting children, since I'm not able to have any, but this city and its churches would not be where we want to raise our kids, let alone where we want to continue to live," she said.

"You're so right. And it doesn't matter what other people think," Ted stated.

So they prayed and searched, and searched and prayed, and prayed and searched some more. Each one called people he or she knew in other cities and asked if they knew of churches in their city that were more like the church in Acts. Whenever they got a lead or suggestion, they would take off work if needed, and travel to that city to visit the church and see what they thought of it.

A couple months later, they had just returned home from visiting two cities and three churches. Ted asked, "What did you think about Pine City and the Grace 'n' Faith Church we visited while we were there?"

"Pine City seemed nice, and I liked the church a lot. It was good to see my friend, Maria, and listen to her enthusiasm while she told us how that church really functions like the body of Christ, as the Bible explains in 1 Corinthians. I think it's just what we're looking for!" Julie said excitedly.

"I agree." So Ted questioned, "How soon do you think we could get moved there?"

Julie answered, "Well, we have to give two weeks notice at work, and for our rent here, plus find a place to live there, plus jobs. Wow! It seems almost insurmountable - but oh, so worth it!"

Ted had the same opinion and said, "Let's pray about it and get started looking for new jobs and a place to live. The web will be very helpful to get ideas and then we can make another trip to Pine City for interviews and to look at apartments.

All that didn't take nearly as long as their search for the church had taken. They were happily moved and settled by the end of March in Pine City with new jobs and a nice apartment not very far from the church. Ted would be working at Superior Auto Body Shop, and Julie got a job as a receptionist in a dental office.

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\*\*\*Last Sunday in March\*\*\*

*John 4:24, God is a Spirit: and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

After they had moved, the first Sunday at Grace 'n' Faith Church in Pine City was such a pleasant change from all the other churches Ted and Julie Blake had tried. The people were open and friendly. The singing was filled with worship. They sang the words of Psalm 57:10,11 set to music: *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be above all the earth. For your mercy is great unto the heavens, and your truth unto the clouds.* They also sang the hymn: "O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus," Ephesians 3:18,19; and a Spiritual Song: "God So loved the World" based on John 3:16,17. The sermon contained a gospel message and later gave solid teaching on how to live the way Jesus told his followers to live.

Pastor Don Ross began, "Today I would like to begin with a story I heard somewhere, but I don't remember where. There was a boy who carved a boat, painted it, and played with it in his pond. One day, he took his boat to a little stream and raced it with some of his friends' boats. During the race, the little boat went faster than all the others, but it got further and further from the stream bank and the boy could not get it back. Eventually the little stream joined a big river and the boy sadly watched, as the rushing water carried his boat far away.

"Months later, the boy was in town, window-shopping. He saw his little boat in a pawnshop, so he hurried in and told the owner that the little boat was his and how he had lost it. 'Well,' said the storeowner, 'some other boy sold it to me and so, if you really want it, you'll have to pay the price to buy it.'

"The boy looked at the price and went home to count all his money. It took every penny he owned, but he went and paid the price. Soon the little boat was in his hands. On the way out of the store, the owner heard him say, 'Now you are twice mine. First I made you and second I bought you back.' The boy took the boat home, cleaned, repaired, and repainted it. Even though it had a few scars from what it had been through, the boy loved it anyway. (Source unknown)

"God did that for us. We call it the Good News or the Gospel. The big difference is the price God paid. Turn to John 3:16 and read it aloud with me: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* He sent his Son, Jesus, to earth as a baby to grow up and live a perfect life, so he could pay the penalty for people's sins by dying in their place on the cross. Only a perfect blood sacrifice could pay the penalty. But God raised him from the dead and now he lives in heaven.

"Another big difference is that God wants each sinful person to confess his or her sins and ask God to forgive them, and believe, as it says in Romans 10: 9 & 10: *If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

"Maybe you are here today and you are like that little boat, lost from your maker and needing to be bought back by the one who created you and loves you so much. I would like everyone to bow your head and close your eyes while I pray a prayer that you can repeat in your heart with me if you want to be saved. I'll say it slowly so you can think about it and keep up. God, I realize that I am a sinner. ... I confess these sins to you. ... Name silently, the ones you think of. ... Please forgive me. ... Thank you that you already paid the



price to buy me back. ... I believe in Jesus. ... I want you to save me, clean me and repair me. ... Amen. My friend if you prayed that prayer with me, you are a new believer and a member of God's forever family because you have believed God's Good News. Be sure to tell someone right after this service about your decision, and please come and tell me also, so I can give you a little booklet that explains more about your new life and has a lot of verses from the Bible that will help you.

"Now, Let's look at John 15: 9-17, and consider how we can do what Jesus said to do there. Everybody follow along with me. *As the Father has loved me, (Jesus), so have I loved you; continue in my love. If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken to you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. From now on, I do not call you servants; because a servant does not know what his master does; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me but I chose you, and ordained you to go and bring forth fruit that will remain: that what ever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This is what I commanded you: Love one another.*"

Pastor Don continued, "Jesus said to love each other as he had loved them. That same week, Jesus died on the cross. Think about what God's love is like and how different it is from our own human ways of loving. Talk this over in your small group this week and practice it with each other. Next Sunday, we'll study love more in depth.

"Here is an announcement especially for parents of young children. Resurrection Sunday, which many people call Easter, will be in two weeks. Your children will be seeing and hearing a lot of things about the Easter Bunny. Be sure you teach them the difference between make-believe and reality so they won't be confused.

"Oh, and remember that next Sunday our church service time moves to 2 PM on Sunday. Call and remind your friends about that, if they aren't here today. Now, if any of you prayed that prayer with me, grab someone and tell him or her about it. He or she will be thrilled, and so will all the angels in heaven. I will be also, and I'll give you the booklet I talked about if you'll come see me. Now lets sing 'Love One Another' and then you are dismissed."

A couple of people went to tell the pastor they had prayed that prayer with him. He was thrilled and gave them a little booklet to read that would tell them more about being a new believer in Jesus.

After the service, many people greeted Ted and Julie like they had the other Sunday they had visited, so they felt welcome. Later, Pastor Don sought them out and asked if they would like to come over for lunch. They were glad to be asked. It was a wonderful meal and a nice time of getting to know Pastor Don, his wife, Anita, and their two children, Timmy, soon to be 5 years old, and Mary, soon to be 4 years old.

When they all had finished dessert, they went into the living room for more conversation while Timmy and Mary entertained themselves in the corner with some quiet activities.

"Ted, would you be comfortable telling us your story of salvation? We always enjoy hearing how others came to Jesus," said Pastor Don.

Ted replied, "I'd be glad to. I was a teenager, feeling rebellious about a lot of things. My parents were fit to be tied, because nothing they said or did made any difference. They finally grounded me except for going to a youth group they had heard about at a church in town. The youth pastor was very patient, and helped me to see that I was headed down a very destructive path. Then he told me what would eventually happen to me if I continued on that path. It says in Romans 6:23a, *For the wages of sin is death*, not just physical death sometime, but eternal separation from God and from all the members of my family who were saved. Then he taught me about how Jesus had lived a perfect life so he could die as the sacrifice for all men's sins, and offer forgiveness to all who believe in him. I needed that, so I repented of my sins, asked God for his forgiveness and for him to change me. He turned my life around!"

"Thank you, Ted. The angels in Heaven were rejoicing that day for sure!" said Anita. "Julie, will you tell us your story?"

"Of course. Mine is somewhat similar to Ted's except that I was not in rebellion. I always thought I was a good girl, and it wasn't until I was a teenager in that same youth group that I realized I was indeed a sinner in need of a Savior. The youth pastor was a good teacher. Ted and I both came to Christ at the same meeting. We were both baptized in water that same month. Before long, we started dating, and you know how that part of the story ended," laughed Julie, joined by the others. "I think our salvation is what has made our marriage so special."

"I certainly agree with that. Only a marriage with God and love at the center can ever be special. What made you decide to move to Pine City?" asked Pastor Don.

Ted answered, "After we got married, we moved away from the city that had the youth group, which we had outgrown anyway. For years, we've been studying about the church in Acts, and have attended many churches looking for one close to that model."

Julie continued by telling them about their web, phone, and traveling search. "I was so glad when I called Maria Gomez, my former college roommate, and she told us about this church. We visited here about three weeks ago and were very impressed. I noticed she wasn't here today."

"No, sometimes business takes Maria out-of-town for a while. It is usually on a weekend, but it can't be helped and it's confidential, so I can't tell you about it," said Anita.

Ted asked, "Would you please tell us more about the small groups you mentioned in the sermon?"

Pastor Don said, "Of course! They are really the church in action - where the real 'life of the church' happens. Without them we would not be all that different from many other churches. "

"That's what Maria said on the phone," interrupted Julie. "Oh, I'm sorry, I shouldn't interrupt."

"It's okay. ... Anyway, the groups meet at least once a week and have time for singing, praise reports, teaching on some topic related to living for Jesus, and a 'conversational' prayer time instead of prayer requests. Some people take notes during that time, so they can continue praying at home. Often during the prayer time someone will ask the Lord a question or for guidance and another person will have a prophecy or a word of knowledge or wisdom that answers it. After the prayer time, there's usually time for fellowship and refreshments."

Anita added, "The meeting typically lasts about two hours and is usually after supper on a week night in the home of one of the members, as it says in Acts 2:46. People take turns being the host, and there are facilitators for each group. If no home is available, the group meets in the lunchroom of the church annex building. Some members have only studio or very small one bedroom apartments that aren't large enough for a group of 10 to 16 people, but they want to take a turn as host so they bring refreshments and set the lunchroom up for a small group meeting."

"Each group is made up of the same people for the calendar year. This gives people time to get to know each other, learn to work together, and become comfortable using their spiritual gifts and other talents. Don't worry. We don't give people a 'spiritual gifts' test, because it says in 1 Corinthians 12:4 and 11, *there are different gifts, but the same Lord, and The Holy Spirit himself, distributes to every person as he wills.*" Don said.

"Wow!" said Julie, "I wish I'd been taking notes! It all sounds wonderful, but it's a lot to take in."

Anita replied, "It's not a problem, we have a little booklet with all that information and more in it, and we'll be sure to give you one before you go home."

"Where do we sign up? Ted asked enthusiastically.

"We'll check with the facilitators and find one that has room for a couple of new members and let you know just as soon as we can. Do you have a phone number where we can reach you?" asked the pastor.

"Yes." Ted gave his cell phone number. "Just leave a message if I'm at work and/or can't answer. Your children have sure been good over there while we've been talking. If you need to get ready for an evening service, we had better leave so you'll have time."

"Thank you for the compliment. They really are good children," agreed Anita. "Actually, we only have the one service on Sunday because other churches share our building. Do you remember that Don reminded the people that we would meet at 2 PM, starting next week? We'll explain the reason for that to you at another time so you won't feel so overwhelmed."

"Okay! We'll look forward to it. Thank you so much for the delicious lunch, wonderful fellowship and all the information. I'm feeling excited about this new adventure we're about to embark on," Julie said and smiled.

Handing Julie a booklet, Anita nodded. "Yes, with the Holy Spirit leading the way, it's bound to be an adventure! We'll be in touch soon."

Goodbyes were said, and Ted and Julie went out into a gorgeous spring afternoon. Pine City was in a beautiful part of the country, and signs of spring were already starting to appear. Not too far in the distance, snow-capped mountains made a majestic backdrop, and the sky was exceptionally blue.

When they parked at their apartment, Julie suggested, "Let's take a walk around the neighborhood since it's still early in the afternoon and not too cool. Besides, we've been sitting for a long time and I need some exercise."

"Great idea. Let's put our Bibles and the new booklet in the house and get some warmer coats and comfortable shoes before we leave."

As they were walking, Julie exclaimed, "Oh! Look, here is a crocus blooming already, and I'm pretty sure these will be daffodils and tulips soon. Spring is a good time to relocate and start on this new adventure. I'll have to admit though, I'm a little bit nervous."

"Me too, but remember who is really in charge. There might be some difficult things, but the Lord will guide and help us," returned Ted.

"You're right, of course. No sense borrowing trouble. This is a nice neighborhood. There's even a little park right over there. What's more, our apartment isn't very far from our jobs," said Julie.

Ted replied, "For sure. I can even walk to my job from here, so you can drive to the dental office since it's further away. That way, we can make-do with just one car, and it will save some money."

"Yes, and maybe I'll be able to find a teaching job at one of the elementary schools in the area. I miss teaching," sighed Julie.

"I know. It's too bad they had to lay off so many teachers last year," Ted concurred. "But maybe this city won't be as financially strapped. Spring might be a good time of the year to start your search. You're a good teacher, Jewel."

She warmed and smiled at his use of the nickname he had given her, and which only he used. She felt very blessed and well loved. "Thank you, Ted."

They walked some more, so they could enjoy and get better acquainted with the area. Then they tuned to go home along another street since it was beginning to cool off.

"Look over there, Ted! There's an elementary school right there and its only about two blocks from our apartment! Let's pray that I can get a teaching position there, if it's the Lord's will," bubbled Julie.

"Yes, let's! Just as soon as we get inside where it's warmer!" Ted said.

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Maria Gomez got home that Sunday evening, very tired from what seemed like an extra long weekend working out-of-town, taking care of some business her employer would entrust to nobody else but her.

"I'm not sure it's a compliment to me that my boss, Mr. Jason Beckett, will let only me to do this particular job for him. I simply know it really tires me out, and besides that, I missed church and seeing Julie on her first Sunday there this morning. Phooey!" Maria said all this to her cat upon entering her studio apartment. "Did you miss me? I see you didn't make too big a mess out of the place while I was gone. I'm happy about that." She picked up the cat and stroked her soft fur. Her calico cat answered with a contented purr.

She continued her one sided conversation with her cat saying, "Oh well, the overtime pays well, and I can give the extra money to the helps fund, which can help people in need at church. Now that I'm on the Helps Committee at the church, I've found out that they carefully screen the applicants so that only needy believers, like it says in Acts 2:45, are given money. They are assisted to find jobs so they can be independent as soon as possible, as it says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 and 12.

"Maybe Julie will call tomorrow and I can ask her over for a visit after work sometime. We have a lot of catching up to do. Well, I'd better unpack, then fix and eat supper so I can get to bed early and maybe catch up on some lost sleep before I go to work tomorrow."

Suddenly she realized her bad attitude. "Lord, forgive me please, for complaining and help me to be content. Thank you for safety going and coming, and also for my home. It really is just the right size for just one person, easy to keep clean, and a good reminder to not purchase things I don't really need." She remembered that Colossians 3: 23 says: *Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not as to men.*

Maria spent the rest of the evening at peace and thankful. She even remembered she could listen to the church service she had missed by going to the church web site on her computer. It was very good to listen while she unpacked and put her things away. She did get to bed early and had a restful sleep.

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\*\*\*Monday\*\*\*

The next morning after breakfast, Ted and Julie went to their new jobs and they were very much like the ones they had had in the other city. That helped with the transition and they started learning the names of their co-workers and finding out more about their schedules and what was expected of them.

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Maria woke feeling rested and went to work after breakfast. She was an accountant at Beckett CPA's, in a large office building downtown. Her boss, Mr. Jason Beckett, was the son of the founder of the company. He called Maria into his office shortly after she arrived. She gave him a full report about the weekend, and he seemed pleased. "You're doing a great job there, and I want you to know that I appreciate your willingness to do this on the weekends that I can't go myself," he said.

"You're very welcome, Sir. I'm thankful I can be of assistance, and it's good to know that you think I'm doing a good job. I'll go back to work at my desk now," Maria said. When she sat down at her own desk, the first thing she did was to pray silently for patience to continue going when he asked her to and she gave thanks that he was pleased with her efforts.

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Since Matt was the foreman now, he arrived 30 minutes early for the second shift of Evans Construction Company so he could talk to his boss. He needed to find out the plan for the afternoon, before Walt went home. At 60 years old now, Walt was ready for a rest. They were presently building a new home for the mayor of Pine City, and it was coming along nicely.

By having two shifts, the hours of daylight during daylight savings time, were used to full advantage without either crew getting too tired. Since breakfast and a late lunch, or lunch and a late supper were eaten before or after work, no time had to be taken off to eat a meal during the time at work. They did have a "coffee" break half way through, and most of the workers ate an energy bar and had a nutritious protein drink along with it. First shift workers started at 7 AM and left at 2 PM. Second shift workers started at 2 PM, and left at 9 PM. The foreman had one half hour extra on the beginning of his work time so he could listen to the boss' plan and prepare for the day's work.

When Walt saw Matt arrive, he hurried over and greeted him with a smile and a slap on the back. "Hi, Matt! It seems like it's been long time since I've seen and visited with you. I liked it better when we were both working all day together. But I'll have to admit that this two-shifts idea of yours is a good one, especially when people are in a hurry for completion."

"And who isn't?" inserted Matt. "But, I agree with you. I miss our times of working together also. You've taught me so much about contracting and building! It's way more than I could have learned by going to a special school. Besides, you've become like a dad to me, and that means the world to me. I really appreciate you."

"The feeling is mutual!" Walt said and they both smiled. "Now here is the plan for the second shift crew," and Walt went on to explain the next phase of the project.

"Thanks Walt. Now, I do hope you are headed home to get some rest. You look tired. Maybe this coming Saturday we could take some time to visit since we don't work on weekends," Matt suggested. He had been looking for a chance to question Walt about the discussion they had had about a month ago.

"That sounds good," answered Walt. "And yes, I intend to go home and rest. I am tired. See you tomorrow."

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The Blakes got home within minutes of each other after their first day at their new jobs. Each one shared how they day had gone while they both helped getting supper on the table. Ted prayed before their meal, "Father, thank you that Julie's and my jobs are off to a good start, and for your provision of this good food, nice apartment and a good church. Please continue to guide all our decisions and help us to do your will. I pray in Jesus precious name, Amen."

After supper and cleanup, Julie said, "I've been thinking about Maria Gomez. Would it be okay to ask her to come over here for supper tomorrow?"

Ted nodded. "That would be fine."

"Okay, then, I'll call her right now," she said. Julie dialed and waited for Maria to answer. "Hi, Maria this is Julie. ... .. I was disappointed that I didn't get to see you at church yesterday, but Anita explained that sometimes you have to be out-of-town on business. ... .. I'd like to see you soon. Could you come to our apartment tomorrow evening for supper at about 6 PM? ... .. Well, maybe you could bring a few of your famous sopapillas for dessert. ... .. Great, we'll see you then. Bye and God bless you. ... .."

"Sounds like a go," Ted said. "I think I'll go to bed early tonight."

"Me too, Julie agreed. "I think the move and all the new things are catching up with me. Even though they're good things, they can tire us out, since we're not used to them." Ted nodded and they both went to get ready for bed.

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\*\*\*Tuesday\*\*\*

At breakfast, Ted remembered to look at his cell phone. "Oh, here's a message from Pastor Don! I forgot to check yesterday!"

"Oh, well. Let's listen to it now while we eat, okay?" asked Julie.

"Yes, here it goes with the speaker on. "Hello, Ted and Julie. This is Pastor Don. Anita and I talked with the other facilitators and decided we would like to start a new small group. It will meet on Saturday mornings, from 9:30 to 11:30 and will accommodate some people who work evenings and can't get to an evening group. Do you think that time would work for the two of you? Talk about it and let us know. You have our phone number in the little booklet we gave you. Goodbye."

"What do you think, Ted?" Julie asked.

He answered, "As far as I can tell, it sounds like it should work. Plus, it might be better to get into a group that's just starting up rather than one that has already been going for three months."

"I agree. Will you call him back and tell him it sounds good to us?" After Ted nodded, she continued, "Thanks! I can hardly wait to see what it will be like. I wonder if they'll start this coming Saturday? Maybe you could ask when you call."

"I'll do that now, and turn on the speaker so you can hear." They heard the dial tones and the rings.

"Hello, Don Ross speaking."

"Hi, Pastor Don, this is Ted Blake. Julie and I think that time will work out well for us," said Ted.

"Great!" Don said. "We'd like to get started this coming Saturday, but have a few details to work out about a place to meet and some more people to call who might want to join the group. We like to have at least ten but not more than 15 or 16 people in a group. I'll call you later this week and let you know the location." Ted thanked him and they both said goodbye and God bless you.

"Wow! You didn't even have to ask! They seem like such nice people. Well, we better hurry and get ready, or we'll be late getting to work. I love you, Ted!" Julie finished.

"And I love you too, Jewel, my precious jewel." ... (Hugs and kisses) ... "Now, let's go get ready for work," laughed Ted, and they both went to do just that.

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It was his usual time to arrive for work on Tuesday, but Matt was a little preoccupied, thinking about the phone call he had received from Pastor Don that morning. He had been hoping and praying for a way to get back into a small group since a couple weeks before, when Walt had agreed that two shifts would be a good idea. If only Walt had wanted the second shift, he would still be in his group. But of course, the older man needed to take the first shift so that he could go home and rest in the afternoon. It wasn't easy to make time for rest in the morning when you didn't feel tired yet. So it had been the best decision.

Therefore Matt had left the small group desire with the Lord, because he knows best how to work it out anyway. When Matt got the phone call about a Saturday morning small group starting this week asking if he would be interested, Matt almost jumped up and down for joy like a kid, in spite of his "mature" 26 years of age. "You did it, Lord! I had no idea how you would, but you did, and I thank you very much!" he had prayed.

Now he was still thinking about it and smiling, so when Walt spoke to him saying, "You look mighty pleased about something, Matt!"

"Oh! My mind was somewhere else. Did you say something before?" asked Matt.

"Nooooooooo, I just watched you smiling for a while and wondered why," said Walt.

Matt answered, "Well, I am very happy about something the Lord did for me. Do you want me to tell you about it?"

"Sure! Did he bring you a girlfriend? That would sure be nice," Walt kind of teased.

"No, I'm not really sure I want one. Unless it could be Fiona, but no, I'm not allowed to even think that. But this is very nice for me. I haven't been able to attend my church small group for a couple weeks, and Pastor Don called this morning to tell me about a Saturday morning small group that's just starting this week. He asked if I'd like to join it and I told him of course. Our church small group meetings are very special. I'll

tell you more about it some time if you like, but right now I better have you tell me about the work plans for second shift!" stated Matt.

"Okay, but I'm a little disappointed because I would like to see you happily married, with some little ones I could treat as grandkids," returned Walt

"I understand, and I'll tell you what!" said Matt, "I'll pray about that very thing and keep you posted."

"Maybe I'll pray about it too," said Walt.

"Please do! Perhaps I need all the help I can get," replied Matt.

Then they got down to the business of plans for the second shift in time to be ready when the workers arrived and they were usually all on time.

Later that day when Matt and Jeff Spencer had a chance to talk at break time, Matt asked, "Jeff, did Pastor Don call you ---"

"Yes," interrupted Jeff, "about a new small group starting this Saturday morning and I've been so excited about it that I could hardly keep from asking you while we were working, if he had called you also!"

"Yes, he did, and I felt like jumping up and down for joy like a little kid. I didn't realize how much I would miss going to a small group until it happened. This is very good news for us." replied Matt.

"For sure," said Jeff. "This is an answer to prayer! Karen is overjoyed as well. She had gotten her hours changed at Subs are Great so we could have some morning time together, and therefore she hasn't been able to attend a small group either. Besides it's much nicer to be able to go together!"

"I'm sure you are right about that, since you're an 'old' married man!" teased Matt.

Jeff laughed. "Do I hear a little longing there?"

"You know it!" exclaimed Matt.

"Yes, I do, and you know that Karen and I continue to pray for you about that issue. Don't give up, Matt. Keep being patient. Remember, God is in control and his timing is best," encouraged Jeff.

"You're right of course," agreed Matt. "Thanks, I needed that reminder."

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After work, Maria hurried home and took a batch of dessert sopapillas out of the freezer and put them in the oven to reheat, humming as she worked. They would be ready to take over to Julie and Ted's apartment when it was time to go. She was glad she had helped them get unpacked after the moved to Pine City, so she knew right where it was, not very far from her own apartment. While the sopapillas were in the oven, she changed into something more casual than her work suit and wrapped the housewarming gift she was going to take to them. Having Julie back in her life was like a balm to her soul. They had been as close as sisters in college, and even though Julie was married now, Maria hoped they would get to spend time together often, now that they lived in the same city.

When she arrived on time at Ted and Julie's apartment, Julie was right there to greet her with a warm embrace. "Yummy, those smell so good! Maybe we'll eat dessert first! Welcome, Maria we're very glad you could come over tonight - and not just for the sopapillas either. I've been thanking God that I can have such a special friend living in this city!"

Maria smiled, "And I've been thanking God that you moved here because I have never yet found another friend as good you've been!"

"You're going to have me in tears and then Ted will laugh at us. Come on into the kitchen and we'll put this dessert where it can stay warm while we 'clean up our plates' first. Oh, what's this?" Julie asked, seeing the package.

"Just a little welcome to Pine City gift," answered Maria. "Let's wait until after dessert for you to open it. I'm starved and it all smells so good! Here, put the honey in there where it can stay warm also."

The meal was delicious, and they all got a good laugh when Ted tried to eat his sopapilla after declining a lesson on how to do it. He had powdered sugar all over, and honey running down his chin and dripping from his fingers, but he declared, "Those are the very best dessert ever!"

Fellowship and fun continued in the living room and when Julie opened the present, she exclaimed, "Maria! This is just perfect. You always did know how to pick out just the right thing to give someone. That's really a special talent. I'll enjoy putting this picture in my kitchen and will think of you every time I see it. Now this place seems more like home. Thank you very much Maria!" Ted agreed.

"You're very welcome, Julie and Ted. This has been a fun evening, and now I had better hurry home. Morning comes incredibly soon on weekdays," replied Maria.

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Meanwhile during the day, Anita had been making more phone calls to people who might be interested in joining the small group and maybe even hosting the first meeting. When Anita called the Suehiro home about 9 AM, they were thrilled with the news of a group they could attend and offered their home for the first meeting without being asked.

"What a blessing to have such generous people in our church," Anita told her husband when he got home. "Now we can tell the rest as we call them, when and where the meeting will be."

"Yes, and since we only know about a few other people who work evenings, our first meeting may be rather small. But that might be good because then the Blakes won't have so many new people to meet all at once. I can announce the group at our new 2 PM Sunday service time, and maybe we'll have some others who want to come to the next meeting," concurred the pastor.

Then they called the other people they knew about. Pastor Don had called Matt, and then Jeff and Karen Spencer before he went to work. They were overjoyed about the group and said they would be there. A single woman said she would plan to come on Saturday. Of course, by the time they called Ted, he wasn't available, so they left a message telling them of the location for the Saturday meeting and giving directions to the house.

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After Maria had left the Blakes, Ted and Julie listened to the message from Pastor Don, looked at a map of Pine City and figured out that it was only a few blocks from their apartment. It would be easy to find. Julie called and thanked the pastor for leaving the message. With great anticipation they sat down and started to read the little booklet the pastor's wife had given them about small groups so that they would feel more prepared for Saturday morning.

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\*\*\*Wednesday\*\*\*

After work and supper on Wednesday, Julie told Ted that she would like to understand why the church time was changing from 12:00 to 2:00 PM.

Ted replied, "So would I. Noon seemed like an odd time anyway, so I'm glad the time is going to be at 2 PM instead. I'll call Pastor Don and see if we could meet with him or them so it can be explained."

"Thank you, Ted. I'm so glad you listen to me and understand how I feel," said Julie.

"You're welcome, and the feeling is mutual." Ted smiled and squeezed her hand.

Then Ted called the pastor and they set up a meeting for 7 PM the next evening. "He said we would have time for other questions also if we have any, so this gives us a day to think about it."

"Oh, before I forget, Maria called me on our lunch break today and asked if I would be able to come over for a "girls only" chat on Friday after supper. I told her I would check with you and let her know," Julie explained.

"Sure," Ted answered.

Julie said, "Okay, I'll call her and say that I can be there at about 6:30. I'll plan to stay only a couple hours so I can get back home and have time with you before an early bedtime so we can be fresh for our first small group meeting on Saturday. Did you have any questions about what we read in the little booklet?"

"Yeah, I had a couple, I'll mark them in the booklet and we can ask Pastor Don about them tomorrow. How about you?" Ted asked.

Julie answered, "I did also, and I'll mark mine when you are finished with yours. Perhaps it will all be a lot clearer when we've been to a few meetings."

"Yes, this is all so new and different for us, since we've never attended a small group before. But even if we had, it would probably have been very different from what this one sounds like," added Ted.

Julie agreed, and asked, "How was your day, Ted? Is your new job going well?"

"It was a good day. I'm getting better acquainted with my co-workers and have learned my way around the shop, so to speak, so I know where the tools and materials can be found, and what is expected of me, so I'm not quite as tired as I was the first two days after work. How about your job, Julie?" he asked.

"I was pretty overwhelmed and lost on Monday, but the lady who trained me was very helpful and thorough. I'm thankful that she agreed to come back to the office on Monday morning for an hour to train me, even though the Friday before was her last day. Her baby is due in about two weeks, and she wants time to

arrange things in the nursery and finish the baby clothes she's been making. She is very excited, and I'm glad for her. Somehow I don't think we are ready to be parents yet. Maybe after we feel more settled in Pine City and in the Grace 'n' Faith Church and in the small group, we can pray and think more about it.

"Anyway, back to the original topic, I had a good day too. Since this is a dental office for children instead of adults, it's fun to see the kids come in with their mom and/or dad and watch how the hygienists and dental assistants and dentists help them to relax and have fun, in spite of whatever procedure they're having. I'm glad to be working in such a nice place!" Julie stated enthusiastically.

"I'm happy to hear that, Jewel. Even though you aren't teaching, you'll still have opportunities to help, interact with, and enjoy some children," encouraged Ted. She smiled and nodded and he said, "I think I'll go get ready for bed."

"Okay, Honey. I'll be there just as soon as I finish calling Maria," responded Julie.

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\*\*\*Thursday\*\*\*

When Matt got to the work site on Thursday, Walt hurried over. "Matt, would you be able to come to lunch with us on Saturday at about 1:00? The other day you mentioned wanting to get together on Saturday. My wife came up with this idea, since she hasn't seen you in a long time. Betty would love to have you come to eat and stay to visit as long as you can."

"That's a great idea, Walt. I'd love to see Betty also, and it solves the problem of us leaving her alone while we go some place else. This way we can all visit. I'll bring some of her and your favorite candy," suggested Matt.

"Yum! I'm glad you can come, Matt. Now here's what's planned for the second shift ..."

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That evening after supper, the Blakes went over to see Pastor Don and Anita. Julie walked over to the corner of the living room where Anita was setting up some games for Timmy and Mary. Julie talked to them about the games they were going to play. "Those are fun games. I remember playing those as I was growing up." Then she and Anita went over to join the men.

Pastor Don started right in about the church time. "We have 12 churches who share the same building in this central part of the city. The auditorium can seat 300 people, but no church has that many yet. The congregations for each church come from wedge shaped neighborhoods, radiating out from the church building to the edge of the city. Sometimes people might join one church from another part of town, so there is some overlap. All the churches have the same Grace 'n' Faith name with a number for its wedge. We are # 4. Each one has a separate pastor who can shepherd up to 275 people leaving room, for 25 visitors. Mega churches lose that ability. There are six services each on Saturday and Sunday, at 8, 10, 12, 2, 4, and 6, for one and one half hours each, to allow time to fill and clear the church and parking lot each time. The churches all rotate through the time slots, a year at a time starting on the first Sunday in April. The idea of having one church per wedge is to try to pray and reach out mostly to that area so the whole city is being covered. Any questions so far?"

"Yes, what happens if a church has more than 275 people?" Julie asked.

"I'm not sure what we'll do when a church grows to more than 275. I think we will pray and ask God for a creative solution," answered Don.

"It sounds like a well thought out plan and is a very good use of the building. I've never heard of a place doing that before. I think it's extraordinary and amazing! How many years have you been doing this?" asked Ted.

"This is our fifth year. It started out pretty small, and then when the pastor of the church in this building reached three services on each weekend, he realized he could not really be a pastor to that many people. So he and the associate pastors met to pray and plan.

"At that time, there were about 1200 people attending from all over town. We felt the Holy Spirit was telling us to split them into 12 groups of 50 to 150 each. Some had more and others less because of the wedge idea, and where the people lived. We had four pastors at the time and needed to find eight more who would also be willing to work at a separate job to help support himself and his family while being the pastor of his church and who would agree to the beliefs of Grace 'n' Faith Church."

"I like that name," inserted Julie.

Anita agreed, "Yes, it comes from Ephesians 2: 8&9. *For by grace you are saved through faith, not of yourselves. It is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*"

"What are the beliefs of this church?" asked Ted.

"I'm glad you asked that," said Pastor Don. "Grace 'n' Faith Church, like many other churches believes in the trinity, the Bible as God's inspired Word, God's plan of salvation, and all that includes, that Jesus is alive and in Heaven interceding for us, and has sent the Holy Spirit to believers to empower them to serve, and that Jesus will return some day and take believers to be with him.

"Unlike many other churches, we believe the church is made up of Holy Spirit filled believers who live like Jesus as a lifestyle, not just go to church on Sunday. Jesus works through them by the Holy Spirit, giving power and guidance to do his will in evangelism, solving problems, and edifying each other. The Holy Spirit distributes his gifts according to his will to do his work.

"We believe the church is Jesus' Body functioning on earth to do what Jesus himself did and would do, but not just in one time and place but also through many churches around the world. That doesn't all happen in just one service on the weekend. It needs small groups and pairs of believers who are sent out to minister by Jesus through the Holy Spirit"

"Like they did in the Gospels and in Acts," said Julie.

"Yes," agreed Anita. We try to do the effective things they did in the New Testament."

Pastor Don continued, "At the weekend service and small groups we teach a concept to be practiced in daily life. If you or anyone else brings or knows of an unbeliever in the weekend meeting, get a note to me about it, and I'll include a gospel message before or just after the teaching time. Then I'll give them an opportunity to pray silently the words I say first, leading in repentance, accepting God's forgiveness, and stating their belief in Jesus, like I did Sunday. And, praise the Lord, two people came up to me after the service to tell of their decisions and ask for a booklet."

The others all joined in praise and thanks to God, and then Ted said excitedly, "This is wonderful! It makes 'church' a place where we can bring someone who is seeking, who might listen to you, even if he hasn't wanted to hear it from me!"

"Right," agreed Pastor Don. "It's always wonderful when a believer gets to lead a friend or co-worker to Jesus for salvation, but when that fails, sometimes an invitation to church works. Very seldom, a person might invite someone who is an unbeliever to a small group meeting, and gives the leader a note so he can present the gospel as I did in church. If that is the case, the format of the group will change for that meeting so the invitee won't be confused by gifts of the Spirit in action."

"That was one question Julie and I both had about what the booklet said. I assume from what you've said that you'll be the leader, and will teach us about those things very soon," surmised Ted.

"Correct, and the Suehiros will also want that kind of teaching since they haven't been in a small group before. I think the first meeting this Saturday will probably answer most of the questions you have about the small groups. If not, you can ask me later," said Don.

"Good," said Julie. "It looks like the children have almost had enough of those games. They are so sweet. It's nice of you to share your time and all this information with us. I think we should head home. Thank you very much."

"You're very welcome. It is good to meet new people who are as interested as you are. We'll see you at the Suehiro house on Saturday morning," the pastor said.

Ted replied, "Right, we'll be there at 9:30. We're looking forward to it. Bye." They all waved and then the door closed.

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\*\*\*Friday\*\*\*

Maria's boss, Jason Beckett, called her into his office on Friday morning, and she worried all the way there that he was going to ask her to go out-of-town again this weekend. "Your will be done, Lord, but I was hoping to have a nice visit with Julie this evening and be able to go to church on Sunday," she prayed on the way to his office.

"Have a seat, Maria. I just wanted to tell you I'm headed out-of-town this weekend. In the event that I don't get back in time to open the office on Monday morning, I would like to leave this key with you so you can open the door. Then you and all the other employees can carry on as usual. All you need to do is be here ten minutes early, unlock the door and start the coffee. Then you can leave ten minutes early in the evening. Will that work for you?" Jason asked.

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