



Lovely Lord of the Lord's Day

3. Soap Operas Down the Drain

May Hall becomes the object of a spiritual creation.

May Hall was a wife and mother of five children. The eldest, Mary, was seventeen. May had been a member of the Sabbath-keeping church for twenty-five years. But the last nineteen of these had been hectic.

She knew the "dos and don'ts," but she did not know the Lord, whom to know "is life eternal." She knew each week when the Sabbath began and when its sacred hours closed. But she did not have a sacred relation with her Lord. She knew the "letter" of the law that "killeth" but she did not know the "spirit" of the law that "giveth life." She did not understand the "philosophy of the Lord's day."

Early in life, May had been told what to read and what not to read. Yet she snatched books, magazines, and papers which were on the censored list. The more she read the more she was "taken." Stories of murder, divorce, theft, unwed mothers—all intrigued her, captured her imagination, and hypnotized her spirit.

She was told one day that the reading of this kind of literature destroys one's appreciation for an enjoyment of the things of God, and that bothered her, but not too much, for she was not really interested in trying to love God anyway. He was not real to her. She did not know that she could have a satisfying love experience with Jesus. Not merely as a trusted friend, but as a blessed Saviour.

As May grew older, she became involved in teaching in the children's division of the Sabbath School. It brought a kind of calm to her soul. But with it came a sense of guilt. Here she was professing Christianity but not living up to its principles.

As the years went by, May found herself sensing a responsibility to her growing family. After all, her innocent children deserved a better example than she was giving them.

Occasionally she attended revival services and found a growing desire to change her life. In fact, many times she went forward in response to altar calls in an endeavor to reform, and a temporary peace seemed to come into her heart. But without a love for the Word of God this experience was short-lived.

May's husband, Jack, was not a professing Christian. He loved his wife and children, but he realized that May's religious experience left much to be desired. He had learned from his own mother all of May's teen-age follies. He knew that she did not have a practical working relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Again and again, as the years came and went, May made a "decision" during special revival meetings. But each time, as the emotion died away, she sank deeper into her obsession for reading lurid magazines and watching TV soap operas. Finally she decided she would make a firm break with the TV soap serials. It was then that she awakened to the fact that she was a slave to the TV and the magazines.

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She found herself actually hurrying to get her morning work done so she could sit and watch another show. "I was even rude to people who interrupted my viewing of these things," she told me.

"It is bad enough," May thought to herself, "to have the Holy Spirit condemn me for my unworthy life, but to have my mother-in-law tell my husband and my children the mistakes of my teen-age years, on up to the present, is too much."

Her mother-in-law not only shared May's mistakes and weaknesses with others, she gossiped about mistakes that any of her in-laws made. She was expert at this. Had it not been that Jack understood his mother's exaggerating tongue he might have divorced May.

One summer when Mary, May's teen-age daughter, returned from an extended vacation at her grandmother's place, she was in tears. To have Grandmother glibly gossip about her own mother distressed her. As she shared with her mother some of the tidbits, both mother and daughter wept.

"She was not satisfied to tell what was true about me," May exclaimed, "She added many things that were false." Her bitterness became deep and deadly, but the more she hated the worse she suffered.

By this time May found herself spending four and five hours a day on TV and cheap reading. Every time she vowed to break these habits she discovered she was held in tighter bondage. She had no power to overcome that burning hatred for her mother-in-law.

Her trauma of heart is described in Holy Scripture: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I."

One Sabbath her pastor preached a sermon that struck home to May's heart. It was entitled "People Read Our Lives." Of course the point was brought out, "What are they reading when they see you?"

May decided that she could no longer live a false life. She had just been elected to an office in the children's department of the Sabbath School. So she used as an excuse for resigning that she found it difficult to persuade her husband Jack to come to Sabbath School and church unless they sat together. That was a plausible excuse, and no one seemed to challenge it.

Instead of May's coming more often with her husband, she now scarcely showed up anymore in church. Her excuse was that she was overworking as secretary in the high school where she was employed. But the facts were that she attended all kinds of social functions elsewhere whenever the opportunity afforded.

But the real crisis came when her seventeen-year-old daughter, Mary, returned from summer vacation at the grandmother's home as already mentioned. Everything had piled up. Now May found herself crying for hours every day. Her depressions were more and more intense. Finally she decided that she must either see a psychiatrist or commit herself to a mental institution.

While she was crying her heart out and considering what to do, the pastor called at her home. Before he left, May said later. "He had wormed everything out." She told all.

"He did not give me any advice." May told us. "He went outdoors to his car, picked up a book entitled, The ABC's of Bible Prayer, and brought it in. He said it had proved a blessing to many people. Others had felt that it contained answers to their problems. Then he suggested, 'Would you like to read it and tell me what you think of it?'"

May thanked the pastor, and after prayer he left. May picked up the book. Read a few sentences, and put it down. "I was too absorbed with my own problems," she said later. "I let it lie on the table for a day or two. Then I picked it up and started to read." May was thinking of the pastor's statement that it contained answers to other people's problems.

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"Problems! If it could solve just one problem, I would be delighted." This time she decided she would devote full attention to what she read in the book. "I read only a chapter or a chapter and a half," May remarked, "and I said to myself, If that man can get answers like that, I can too." She decided, "I am going to put into practice the instruction it offers."

She opened her Bible and put her finger right on a promise. Then she actually asked God to do what He has promised. Jesus commanded us to ask (Matthew 7:7). He also instructed us to believe (Mark 11:24). And He Himself set us the example of claiming by thanking God that He had the answer (John 11:41). The ABC's of this kind of prayer are summed up in one verse of Scripture. "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22).

"I had never before in all my life offered this kind of prayer," May reported. "Every time before when I prayed I doubted that I would get answers. So I didn't. This time I opened my Bible to Isaiah 1:18, 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' I asked God to forgive my crimson past and do what He promised—make it white as snow.

"This time I bent my whole mind to believing; I determined not to permit one thought of doubt to enter my mind. When I was through with that prayer, I sensed that my past was all taken care of, and that my prayer was answered. I had never had this experience before!

"Then I bowed before my Lord again and opened my Bible to Matthew 21:22. I asked Him to deliver me completely from the prison house of TV soap operas and unworthy reading matter. I had tried hundreds of times, it seems, to quit, but it was impossible. Now I asked; I believed; I claimed that I had received deliverance from all this trash.

"A little later I awakened as from a dream. I realized that I had no desire to watch or read this kind of story.

"I then became concerned. What would I do with those five hours a day I had spent on these things! It was a vacuum. Once again I fell on my knees and used the ABC's of prayer asking, believing, claiming the same promise, 'And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.'

"A little later I discovered that God had changed me completely. I was ravenously hungry for spiritual books to read. I read everything you have written. I asked the pastor's wife for anything she had to offer in the area of spiritual things. I literally devoured every book she lent me. God had dramatically switched my mind from one channel to another.

"The pastor lent me the book on a Thursday. The next Wednesday he was at my home. He told me he was hoping to find someone who had an outstanding experience of answered prayer. Timidly I replied, 'I have.' The pastor almost fell on the floor.

"Then I told him what happened in my life. "God had answered so wonderfully that I now told the Lord of my feelings toward my mother-in-law.

"I opened my Bible to the promise of Ezekiel 36:26: 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.'

"This promise and the one in Matthew 21:22, I claimed in faith. And while this disease of bitterness was deep and cancerous, yet I discovered that God was removing that heart of stone. The hard feelings were melting away.

"I had really been opening my heart to the Spirit of Jesus. Now I no longer hate my mother-in-law. She was, in fact, the only person on earth that I had hated."

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May had known of the "sign" of the holy life, namely, the Lord's holy day. Exodus 31:17. But that for which the sign stands—the miracle-working, heart-changing, redeeming power of her Creator—she had not known by personal experience.

Now all was changed. She was a new creature in Christ Jesus; for "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." 2 Corinthians 5:17. May's heart was new. Her motives were new. Her thoughts were new. Her purposes in life were new. God had made all things in her life new. For her to live was Christ. Philippians 1:21.

Now the same power that had changed her life was to work in her "both to will and to do" Philippians 2:13, as she began to reach out for the salvation of her family. Jesus has promised, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." John 15:7.

May had learned the simple ABC formula: "If ye have faith, and doubt not. . . ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done." Matthew 21:21. And she had the assurance of salvation for her children—also for her husband and her friends.

May's fifteen-year-old Jimmy could not be persuaded to attend any high school functions on the holy worship day. Yet Jimmy was as ignorant of the power of the Lord for which the day stands as his mother had been. Yet within ten days from the time May experienced that dramatic change of heart Jimmy requested to be in the baptismal class, and before a month had passed he was baptized "in the likeness of his death" with the divine promise that he should now be "also in the likeness of his resurrection." "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans 6:5, 4.

Jimmy had now found the God of two beautiful memorials. One, the Lord's holy day, in commemoration of the creative power of God. See Exodus 20:8-11. The other, baptism, the memorial of Christ's glorious resurrection. "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 3:21.

"If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Romans 8:11.

The miracles of answered prayer that May experienced from that day onward would fill pages. We conversed with May for several hours. The joy which registered on her face testified to the reality of the change of heart she had experienced. To her was fulfilled the experience related by the prophet of old. He cried out in holy glee, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts." Jeremiah 15:16.

And when May's husband Jack watched to see her backslide again, he was amazed to discover that the experience this time was for real. With the psalmist she could exclaim. "Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." Psalm 17:4.

May had now begun to learn the true philosophy of the Lord of the Lord's Day. She was no longer in the class of the religionists of Christ's day who knew not the significance of the Scriptures or the power of God. Now May's belief took on meaning.

As we looked into May's face, there was a glory, a delight, that we cannot describe. Oh, what a change from abstract theory to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

May had heard and read the scripture containing the first angel's message of Revelation 14:6, 7. She had accepted the fact that this message was prophesied to be given to the world just prior to the return of our Lord. She had even heard this message spelled out in sermons preached during various evangelistic campaigns. But the Philosophy, the real significance, had not become personal to her.

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For God to herald a special message to the world just before the return of our Lord, merits careful study, prayerful consideration. And the One whom that message commands earth's people to worship should be given more than passing thought. Of all the pictures of our Lord in the Bible it is noteworthy to which one this message calls attention in "the everlasting gospel."

Among the greatest events of earth's history up to the present is the birth of our Lord. The angels heralded the "glad tidings" to the humble shepherds on the hills of Bethlehem.

The death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord form the very heart of the gospel; "We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Romans 5:10.

"If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." 1 Corinthians 15:17.

As glorious as are the events of His birth. His death, and His resurrection, the prophecy of the special message of God to the last generation of men and women does not allude to any of these specifically as the basis of worship. Instead it singles out God as Creator. "Worship Him," it commands, "that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Revelation 14:7.

Is this great and solemn message intended to belittle such glorious events as our Lord's birth, His death, and His resurrection? Far from it. Rather, it calls attention to the very basis on which all of these great events rest. Were the Godhead not Creator, our Lord could never have been born into our world without a human father. The angel who appeared to Mary explained, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee. and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35.

The expression, "the power of the highest," is the power of the Creator. "Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion." Jeremiah 10:11, 12.

Every miracle in the life and ministry of Christ has for its basis His creative power. It is because the One who made the world was in their midst that He could make the water into wine. It was because He was God that He could forgive sins. It was because He was God that He could declare, "I have power to lay it [my life] down, and I have power to take it again." John 10:18.

And because He is Creator, He could and did create in May a new heart, so May could give to her family the invitation: "Come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." Psalm 95:6.

Before her change of heart May was in the class described as follows: Thou "forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth." Isaiah 51:13.

"Of that Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee." Deuteronomy 32:18.

But as we sat and observed May's sparkling eyes, her rejoicing voice, and her beaming face, we knew the change was real. She was now in love with Jesus Christ, the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Revelation 1:8.

Miracles took place repeatedly. Answers filled her with delight. She had asked for a new heart. She had received a new life. Now her joy was full, and she wanted to share it with everyone.

Dear reader, you too can experience what May did. It may not be as dramatic, but it can be as real. In fact, the cure for her hatred of her mother-in-law was not sudden like the change that took place in her obsession for TV and reading, it was a growth. Also accept this caution: We cannot keep the new heart experience except through a daily death to sin and a daily rebirth. Scripture testifies to this. See 1 Corinthians 15:31; Philipians 1:21.

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Multitudes of victorious children of God can say, Amen. Just as an electric cord has power only as it is connected to a power source, so humanity has divine power only so long as it is connected to Christ. Yet to take a quiet hour daily with the Master is not arduous. It is not a yoke. It brings a peace which is rewarding. It assures, when combined with a daily witnessing program, fullness of joy; not necessarily ecstatic but always soul satisfying.

We recommend that this hour with the Lord be one of faith, firm and sincere. If agony is necessary to overcome the flimsy feelings that Satan uses to becloud the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, cry out, "Dear Lord, You have promised me 'Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.' Jeremiah 29:13. Lord I believe You are fulfilling Your promise of Philippians 2:13 right now, to work in me "both to will and to do of . . . [Your] good pleasure." And now I thank You that I have received in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection: We suggest that in your prayer circle, or personal meditation, you review the seven great Bible facts. turning to the Bible texts and reading them prayerfully. Then try to reconstruct the story.

Seven Great Bible Facts:

1. It is "life eternal" to know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ," whom He "hast sent" (John 17:3).
2. Our Lord states that the purpose of the worship day is that men might experience a very personal relationship with Him; that is "that ye might know that I am the Lord your God." (Ezekiel 20:20).
3. As we observe God's worship day, He wants us to know His power to sanctify or make us holy. (Ezekiel 20:12).
4. God has given us the record of how He took the helpless and humble "dust of the ground" and "created man in his own image" (Genesis 2:7; 1:27).
5. Today, "dust-and-ashes" humanity cries, "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (Romans 7:14, 15).
6. The answer to man's cry for help is found in these words of Scripture: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17).
7. It is "not of works, lest any man should boast." "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. . . . For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:8-10).