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Breaking Free from Sin's Grip: Holiness Defined for a New Generation

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There are times when
parenthood seems nothing
but feeding the mouth
that bites you.
—Peter De Vries¹

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AN ADVENTURE STORY

The Bag Lady

She passed in front of our Cincinnati home every day, usually about midmorning. I didn't know exactly what time of the day she'd scuff down the sidewalk, but I always knew what she'd be wearing: no matter what time of year, or what the weather, she'd wear a black wool coat buttoned all the way to her neck. And she always carried a big paper bag with plastic handles, the kind you get at the entrance of a mall department store. She walked by our house picking up stray paper, cans, and bottles, and putting them in her paper sack.

She lived just around the corner from our house. I had a clear view of her backyard from my front yard. None of the neighbors knew much about the little old lady. She never talked to any of us, and she always kept her house window shades pulled. I guess you might call her a mystery lady who lived a very private life.

I wondered about her occasionally as she passed in front of our house but wrote her off as an eccentric old woman who marched to the beat of a different drummer—a very different drummer!

One warm, summer day she missed her walk. Another day passed. When the third day came and went without her regular stroll through the neighborhood, the neighbors worried. They called the police. When the policemen knocked on the lady's door and received no response, they broke the door in.

A scene of shock and horror greeted the policemen as they stepped into the house. From floor to ceiling in the living room, like some bizarre

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art form, were stacked the stray paper, cans, and bottles from the lady's daily walks.

A narrow, tunnel-like path led from the living room to the dining room where they found the same type of junk collection. The path to the front bedroom yielded even more. Every room was completely filled, floor to ceiling, with garbage. When the policemen reached the back bedroom of the house, they found the old woman dead in her bed.

The police called the county coroner to take the lady's body away.

Our little old trash-collecting neighbor had lived in dire poverty with nearly \$2 million cash at her fingertips.

The next day a semi delivered a large Dumpster to the driveway for the garbage. Yellow tape outlined the entire property making it off-limits to all of us. The police began hauling the refuse from the house to the Dumpster with wheelbarrows. When they dug their way down to the couch, they noticed the couch pillow appeared rather lumpy, so they unzipped it. Much to their surprise, they found the pillowcase filled, not with cotton stuffing, but with money. A second lumpy pillow guarded the same treasure. So did the third. Their interest now piqued, they searched the couch cushions.

You guessed it—all the pillows served as safe-deposit boxes for large sums of money. Now the police took an entirely new interest in their room-by-room cleanup of the house. Nearly every room had drawers or pillows stuffed with cash. The back bedroom contained the mother lode, with the largest jackpot found in the bed pillows and mattress.

When the garbage was all sorted and loaded into the Dumpster, and the money all stacked and counted, the police determined that our little old trash-collecting neighbor had lived in dire poverty with nearly \$2 million cash at her fingertips.

Living as if We're on Our Own

I've often thought of that lady's circumstance and wondered if it is similar to some of our circumstances on the Christian path. So often I hear Christians talk about how hard they find it to live admirably or resist temptation or remain consistent, or control emotions and reactions. I hear the struggle of living in this fallen world described in vivid detail and sympathize with the plight. We do live in hostile territory—trying to live righteously in an unrighteous world, trying to honor God in a world that doesn't make a place for Him.

However, I also know God provides indescribable resources for victorious living at our fingertips. We don't always remember His ample provisions, though. My bag lady neighbor reminds me of our tendency in Christian circles to live with the presence and power of God all around us yet respond to spiritual needs as though we are completely on our own. That's never the case; we're never on our own. A loving Heavenly Father involves himself in our lives in the most intimate ways. His personal involvement is incredibly special.

A Special Night

A half dozen events hold a special place in my life. One of those events began in the middle of the night when my wife, Sue, awakened me, announcing the time had arrived to take her to the hospital to give birth to our child. All our anxious anticipation over several months had pointed to this moment.

The wake-up call came several weeks early, so neither of us expected it. We hurriedly loaded the car and headed toward the hospital, 75 miles away. Nature moved faster than our speeding vehicle, so we welcomed the state police officer's red and blue flashing lights as he pulled us over to the side of the road with the news that an ambulance was on the way.

Our journey soon continued at an even faster pace in the ambulance. Paramedics worked with Sue, while the driver and I talked with the doctor on the radio. Should we continue to try and reach the hospital or pull over to the side of the road and deliver our child in the ambulance?

As each mile passed, we reevaluated the decision to continue. We contacted another nearby hospital, but they had no delivery staff on duty. So, we continued toward our destination. We finally made it—not a minute too soon! Nurses raced Sue directly to the delivery room where a staff of experts waited, prepped and ready. I hurried to the hospital's Admitting Office. I had just finished signing the admission papers when Sue and our new son rolled out of the delivery room to greet me.

Words mock my attempt to capture the flood of emotion that washed over me as I held Brent in my arms for the first time. I began talking to him like I would talk to a longlost friend. In a single moment, all my hopes and dreams for his lifetime flashed across the screen of my mind. I assured him I would love and care for him as long as I lived. I told him all the things we would do when he got old enough. I promised him I

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