

“A Good Christian Girl”

It was the month of May 1964 on the Mediterranean. Leslie and Joyce Baker* and their two children showed up at a Sunday morning service that Trans World Radio conducted for the American Sixth Fleet dependents residing in Southern France. The Bakers lived in the neighboring town of Beaulieu, but they were not navy; they were American business people. And, like all English-speaking people on the French-Italian Riviera, they were more than welcome to attend our English-language meetings. After the service, I was chatting with people outside the Villefranche public school that we were renting for our Sunday School classes and worship services.

At one point, an inner voice said to me, "Do you see that young family walking toward their Jaguar?" I looked and saw the family leaving, although, I had not yet talked with them. "I want you to get to know them, to befriend them. It won't be easy, but don't give up." On the way home to Monte Carlo (a half-hour drive up the coast), I told Betty and our three sons about our unexpected local, non-radio assignment. The following Sunday, we as a family got acquainted with the Bakers. Joyce seemed to be interested in our getting together, and their son and daughter were about the age of our boys.

But Leslie was distant and indifferent, or so it seemed to me. The relationship grew slowly. I must confess that at times I felt out of place with them and their lifestyle. Then I would remember: "It won't be easy, but don't give up." As it turned out, Leslie had Hodgkin's disease (cancer of the blood). He was only 30. At 17 years of age, he had been called into full-time Christian service. He rejected Christ's invitation and went into his father's business instead. Joyce came from a main line Protestant denomination. She had her spiritual ups and downs – one day feeling unworthy of salvation, the next day thinking she was a good person and didn't need to be "saved." Her mother (periodically visiting from the States) frequently told her she was a good Christian girl. But Joyce wasn't always convinced.

Well, to make a long story slightly shorter, our relationship with the Bakers was two years old and a breakthrough didn't seem to be in sight. Leslie was occupied with his work and his therapy. Once, when we were together with Joyce, she said, "I don't think I could be a Christian because I lose my temper and I love to dance." I remember saying something like, "The main thing is securing the salvation of your soul. When you receive Christ, you're free to dance and lose your temper all you want."

One Monday morning Betty phoned me at the office. "Joyce called. She wants to come over and settle the salvation question. Could you come home and join us?" I did. We talked at length over lunch. But, to our surprise, Joyce seemed to be preparing to go home, having settled nothing. "Didn't you say you wanted to settle this today?" we questioned her. We sensed confusion and indecision.

Betty asked her, "If the Lord were to return today, would you be ready to meet him?" Joyce thought about it and said "No."

I said, "Joyce, this can be settled now, but you have to want it bad enough. "Do you?" "Yes, I do." "Then, let's get on our knees and pray. Do you want to do your own praying or do you want to repeat after me?" She would repeat after me. We went through a form of sinner's prayer. Things were moving along well until I said, "And Lord Jesus, thank

you for dying on the cross for me, for my sins..." Dead silence from Joyce. I thought maybe she didn't hear or understand, so I repeated the statement. She leaned back on her heels. "I can't pray those words! Jesus died for the sins of the world. How could Jesus die for me, for my sins? I am such a sinner! So unworthy!" To that I replied. "All of us are unworthy! Jesus didn't die for us because we are worthy but because we need his love, his mercy, his forgiveness. Joyce, if you were the only sinner in the world, Jesus would have died for you. Do you want to continue?" She did.

And when she did, all heaven broke loose. The struggle was over. When she got up off her knees we knew she had been born again – born of the Spirit. Her demeanor, her face, her eyes showed she was a new person! I asked her not to say anything to Leslie for a few days: "Just enjoy the Lord's presence all on your own, all to yourself." But, on the third day, Leslie said to her, "You're different. Did you get saved?"

Months later, I asked Joyce: "Do you remember your concern about dancing and losing your temper if you became a born-again Christian?" Joyce smiled. "Well, that's the funniest thing. I did go to one more party shortly after my conversion. I couldn't believe how much my interests and tastes had changed. The Lord gave me his values, his perspective and his temperament." ◇◇◇

Before he died at age 33, Leslie got right with the Lord. Joyce was a single mom for 12 years. Then, she met and married a widower in the USA, in church, where they are active members. In the fall of 1970 we relocated to Denver, Colorado, a move that involved our children's education.

* Not their real names