

Chapter 5

Business Rolls In

Two weeks passed, and it was Sunday, June 19th. Sundays were special days, and this one was extra special: Father's Day! Mom and the children made breakfast: pancakes, scrambled eggs, and sausage. Then it was time for church, where Pastor Thompson preached a sermon about God's gift of His only Son to man.

In the afternoon, everyone took naps. The evening included Dad's favorite meal, family devotions, and gifts. Dad had felt very loved and appreciated.

Monday evening, after Mollie had opened family Bible time with prayer, she seemed troubled about something.

"What's the matter?" Dad gently asked.

"I've been worried about no one contacting us about our businesses. I thought our flyers were really good, but no one has wanted us to bake or pet-sit. Maybe we had bad ideas for our businesses."

Dad smiled. "I think our chapter today in Romans will fit very well. Let's open our Bibles to Romans 8 and start reading."

When they came to verse 28, Dad said to Mollie, "Why don't you read this one?"

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to *his* purpose."

Mitch said, “I think that verse means that we need to trust the Lord. He’ll do what’s right for us. Even if we don’t get customers, He knows what is best.”

Mom added her thoughts. “Sometimes we want our own way. We think we know what we want, but as Mitch said, Jesus knows best. We have to trust that He’ll work everything out. I want another baby, but the Lord hasn’t seen fit to give us one. I know He has a purpose, and we can rest in Him.”

“Yes,” Dad agreed. “Mom and Mitch are right. The Lord, Who knows when a baby sparrow falls to the ground, knows about you wanting customers. If He thinks it’s best, He’ll give them to you. If not, you’ll have to trust that He’ll send you something better to do.”

“You’re right. I’ll leave it up to Jesus. May we pray about it right now?” The family knelt together. Mollie prayed, “Dear Jesus, You know how badly we want customers for our businesses. Dad’s right, Lord. You know what’s best for us. If it is Your will, would You please send business to us? Or, please help me be content if You don’t want us to have customers. Please show us what we should do with our time. Thank You, Jesus. Amen.”

Mitch said, “I think you forgot, Mollie, that we’re pet-sitting Honey.”

“You’re right.”

An hour later, the family was listening to Dad read a book aloud about the missionary Hudson Taylor. Dad stopped when he heard the phone ring. “Would you like to answer that, Max?”

“Oh yes!” Max agreed, thinking about pet-sitting customers. “Maybe this will be an answer to prayer!” he called, rushing for the phone. “HellothisisMax!” he blurted eagerly.

“Hello? Is this the Moodys? Anyone there?” a voice inquired loudly.

“Yes, hello,” Max responded a little more slowly.

“Oh, that’s better. I can understand you now. This is Maud Bagwell, your neighbor. I need to speak with Mix.”

“Hello, Mrs. Bagwell! This is Max. How may I help you?” He held the phone slightly away from his ear.

“I’m leaving on a trip tomorrow—it was a last-minute thing—and need you to watch Snickers. I know you will love him. He is easy to take care of, and I’m sure you’ll get along well. Can I stop over tomorrow morning to give instructions and leave Snickers with you?”

“Yes, ma’am. That would be great.”

After he hung up the phone, Mollie and Mitch rapidly fired questions at him.

“Who was it?—What did she want?—What kind of dog?—How big is it?”

Max realized he had no idea what kind of dog it was. “I really don’t know. I should have asked.”

Mom sat quietly as suddenly it hit her. This new pet-sitting business would entail animals in her house!

“Well,” Mitch said. “The dog can be in the backyard some of the time, but it can sleep in its kennel in the back room. I’ll even clean up the messes.” Mitch saw the look on Mom’s face. “I mean the messes in the backyard. It’ll be house-trained.”

Just then, Dad smiled. “Let’s celebrate. Do ice cream cones sound good?”

“Yes!” the children exclaimed together.

“Okay, then, everyone in the van!”

The family enjoyed talking on their drive. When they arrived, Dad decided they would take the drive-through. He pulled up to the large sign that listed all of the flavors, toppings, choices, and meals. A crackling noise came over the intercom. "I'll be right with you," an older man's voice said.

"No rush," was Dad's response. He turned to face the family. "Is everyone good with a chocolate dipped cone? That'll make it simple."

"Yes!" came the response along with several nods.

The intercom crackled to life. "I'm sorry for the wait. How may I help you?"

"We'd like three single-scoop vanilla cones, dipped in chocolate, and three double-scoop vanilla cones, also dipped in chocolate."

There was a pause. "Great. Your total will be eleven fifty-three. Please pull around to the second window."

Max enjoyed watching employees busily working inside. "It looks like someone is getting a huge banana split sundae," he observed.

Mitch nodded. "And I think they're having trouble with their soda machine. I see two people working on it. One looks like he might be a manager."

Several minutes passed, and Max announced, "Our cones are sitting in a holder, and I think they're melting."

Dad yawned. "That could make eating them a little exciting."

The man, who had taken their order, tried to slide the drive-through window open, but it stuck. He yanked on it until he succeeded. "This place is falling apart," the man grumbled. "Sorry for the wait."

Mitch strained to see his badge so he could read his name: *Charlie*. Charlie handed a cone to Dad, which was dripping vanilla ice cream down the sides. Dad gave Mom the cone. “You’ll want to start on it right away.”

When they got to the final cone, Charlie reached out with it, but the top scoop slid off and plopped onto the concrete. Charlie let out a loud sigh.

Dad smiled. “It really is okay. We can wait for a new one.”

Charlie seemed surprised at Dad’s gracious response. “It’s not been a good night. Everything seems to be going wrong. I’ll get you another one in a minute.”

Dad rolled his window back up and looked at Mom, who was licking her cone. Mom patted Dad’s arm. “Thank you, Dear. This is a special treat!”

“Yes, thank you!” Mitch agreed, crunching into the chocolate topping. “It is delicious!”

Soon, Charlie handed Dad his cone. In return, Dad gave him a gospel tract. “When you have a chance, you should read it. It talks about eternity.”

Charlie’s face brightened. “Now I know why you didn’t get angry with me about the wait and the cone. You’re ‘one of them’!”

“One of them?”

“Yes. Like my neighbor lady. I don’t know how to describe her, so I just say she’s ‘one of them.’ You know. She’s got religion.”

“I see. Well, eternity is the biggest thing you will ever face, so I hope you take the time to read it.”

“I will.”

Dad pulled away from the drive-through while he began to eat his cone before it melted. Max cleared his throat. “Dad, the ice cream is making us cold, so I was wondering if we could turn off the air-conditioning and roll down the windows?”

“Sure,” Dad agreed. “I think it would feel good, but it’ll speed the melting process of my cone.”

That night, Max, Mollie, and Mitch were so excited about their new pet-sitting job they could hardly sleep. All three thought they saw every hour go by on the clock. Morning seemed to come slowly. But, when it did come, they were up preparing for the arrival of Snickers.

Finally, at ten o’clock, the doorbell rang. Mom opened the door. Mrs. Bagwell bustled in with a small dog carrier and a bag of supplies. She walked straight into the living room. The children, who knew that shoes were not allowed on the carpet, couldn’t help but stare at Mrs. Bagwell’s feet. Then they each, almost in unison, looked at Mom questioningly. She was standing behind Mrs. Bagwell, and she shook her head, putting her finger to her lips.

Mrs. Bagwell peeked in Snickers’ home. “Now, Snickers boy, I’m going to leave you for a little while, but these children will take care of you. I want you to be good. I’m so sorry you can’t come.”

Mrs. Bagwell set the carrier on the floor and opened the door. A small rat cautiously crawled into the middle of the living room.

Mollie gasped, “This is Snickers?”

Max and Mitch stared wide-eyed at the rat. Mom swallowed hard. She had not been expecting a rat.

Mrs. Bagwell smiled. “Yes, Snickers is a rat. You won’t find a friendlier rat than him.”

Mollie nodded, but she wasn't so sure she wanted a rat as a friend.

Snickers' black eyes looked back and forth at the children. He rapidly made his way to Maddie, who was sitting on the floor. He climbed onto her lap. Maddie giggled. "I like this wat!"

Mrs. Bagwell hurried to Maddie. "I told you he was friendly. But, whatever you do, don't pull his tail. That is the only time he will bite. Also, he needs to be let out once a day to run around the house. Don't worry, he shouldn't cause any problems. Snickers also likes to sit on shoulders. Oh, yes, one last thing. Don't be surprised if he chatters his teeth. He'll do that when he's happy."

"Okay," Max said, trying to process all that Mrs. Bagwell was telling them.

Mrs. Bagwell gave Mollie the bag of supplies and said there were instructions inside. "You take good care of him. I'll be gone for ten days, and when I'm back, I'll pick him



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up and pay you. Do you have any questions?" Mrs. Bagwell had noticed their quietness.

Max smiled. "No, ma'am. I think it will be easy enough. Thank you for trusting us to watch Snickers for you."

Mrs. Bagwell patted Max. "Thank you for taking care of him. Well, I'd better be going."

Mom walked Mrs. Bagwell to the door and waved good-bye. She came inside and sat down with a big sigh. "I was not expecting a rat. I suppose we'll have to get used to having Snickers around, although," she added, "I'm not sure about him running loose."

After the children petted Snickers, Max carried him back to the dog carrier, being cautious not to touch Snickers' tail. Maddie bent down and peeked in. "He weally is a nice wat," was her comment.

Mitch said, "I guess our pet-sitting job will be interesting. He is sort of cute, but that tail is the strange part. It looks like a snake, and I expect it feels like one, too."

Dad and Mom decided that Snickers could be let out to run each day in the house, but the children had to keep a close eye on him. The children were now pet-sitting two animals, Snickers and Honey. They were learning to be diligent and responsible as they had to go over and feed Honey twice a day, take her for walks, and clean up her messes in the yard. Snickers was a little easier. They fed him special rat food and allowed him to have daily "exercise."

One evening, after spending half an hour trying to coax Snickers into his carrier for the night before finally succeeding, Max said to Mollie and Mitch, "When we decided to do pet-sitting, I didn't think that we would be taking care of rats. I guess we're in for a little adventure!"

Chapter 6

Never a Dull Moment

Several days later, Max woke up a half hour early. He didn't feel like going back to sleep, so he decided to have his Bible time on the back porch. As he slipped from his bedroom, he saw Dad and Mom's bedroom light on. *Dad's probably getting ready for work*, Max thought. He got dressed in the bathroom before going downstairs.

Max located his Bible in the living room and tucked it under his arm. He stepped outside onto the back porch and sat down on a chair. The sun was rising, so it was light, and birds were singing. Max watched while two squirrels chased each other up and down a tree. Max flipped his Bible open to where his marker was. *I'm on Ephesians 4, and maybe 5 if I have time.* "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." *Paul calls himself a prisoner of the Lord. I wonder why he says that; a servant of the Lord sounds nicer. Dad encourages me to ask questions about this, so I'm going to think of questions I can ask myself. What does a prisoner do? Well, he does whatever the guard tells him, and he's not free to go outside the prison unless he's with a guard or he's released. So, Paul must be trying to say that he is the Lord's, and he does what the Lord tells him to. He isn't free to serve himself or the world. The Lord Jesus is his guard! Max looked at verse two. Lowliness, that must be another word for being humble, so I'm supposed to forbear in love. I wonder what forbear means?*

Max's Bible had a small dictionary of Bible words, so he found the word. *It means to overlook something, maybe not even an offense, maybe something that bothers me about someone else.* When Max was through reading the chapter, he paused, noting the birds chirping. *I wonder how they know to be happy in the mornings. I wonder if one starts to make a happy noise and then the others follow.* Max contemplated what he had read about being a prisoner of the Lord and walking worthy of the vocation. *I know what I'm going to do. I feel You're convicting me of needing to be more loving to Mollie, Mitch, and Maddie. I'm going to find ways that I can do things for them and show my love in a real way.* Max looked at his watch. *Everyone should be up. I can start off with making Mitch's bed. I dislike making that top bunk, but it would be good for me, and it's a way I can bless him.*

Max turned around to go inside and met Dad at the door. "Good morning, Son!" Dad hugged him. "Isn't it beautiful this morning? I think it's a little cooler than it has been."

"I think so."

"Did you sleep okay? You were up a little early," noted Dad.

"I slept well, but then when I woke up, I didn't really feel tired, so I thought it would be nice to have my Bible time outside."

They went in the house, and Max went to his bedroom. Mitch was sitting on the floor next to the dresser, digging through socks. He glanced at Max. "I couldn't figure out why you weren't turning off the alarm this morning. Where did you go?"

"I woke up early and had my Bible time on the back porch."

"Oh! I was wondering."

Mitch left the room, and Max quickly climbed the ladder to the top bunk. He set Mitch's pillows at the top of the bed and pulled the sheet up. He tried to tuck the sheet in at the sides, and while he was pulling the blanket up, the door opened. Max almost fell down the ladder in his haste. "It's me," Mom poked her head in the room. "Are you okay, Max?" she asked, noting Max's rapid descent.

"Yes." Max laughed quietly. "I was making Mitch's bed, and I thought it was him."

"Bless you. I know he'll like that. I wanted to make sure you all were awake, but I answered my own question."

Mid-morning, Max, Mollie, and Mitch were in the living room. What were they doing? Memorizing Scripture! They had set a summer goal to memorize Romans, chapter six.

They were still pet-sitting Snickers, and Max let him out of his cage so he could have some exercise. After scampering around the living room, Snickers perched on the edge of the fireplace. Mom was resting in her room, while Maddie played quietly in the girls' room. Mom had given specific instructions not to let Snickers run upstairs, so Max had placed a piece of cardboard across the bottom of the stairs.

Mollie was sprawled across the floor with her Bible in front of her. She had her eyes tightly closed and her mouth was moving as she worked on committing God's Word to her memory. Max, who was sitting in Dad's recliner, stared at his Bible. Mitch, being easily distracted, hung off the edge of the couch, making faces at Snickers, who didn't seem to notice.

Max stopped rocking. "Ummm, Mitch. Remember we are trying to memorize! I certainly wouldn't be able to concentrate if I was you. Besides, Snickers doesn't seem to notice!"

"You're right, Max. I wasn't paying attention. I'll try to be serious now. By the way, thanks again for making my bed!"

I was so happy when you did that for me.” With that, he pulled himself upright on the couch and began to memorize.

The doorbell interrupted their work. Mom had given permission for Max to answer the door, since they were expecting Mrs. Clifton’s neighbor lady to drop off a house key. Mrs. Baker and her husband were going on a trip and wanted the Moodys to have the key in case something happened while they were away. Max hurried to the door. “Hello!” Mrs. Baker greeted them. “I have the key, but I wanted to explain something to your mom.”

“Oh sure. Come on in,” Max replied.

“Thank you,” Mrs. Baker stepped into the living room.

At that moment, Snickers spotted their guest. Curious, he scampered toward her as if to say hello. In a flash, her eyes were drawn to the moving rodent.

“A mouse! Oh no, it’s a mouse!” Mrs. Baker screamed. She glanced around, spotted the piano bench, and leaped on top of it—all in an instant. The elevation and relative safety of the piano bench did nothing to calm her, however, so she continued making strange excited sounds. Snickers stopped when he reached the piano and stood on his back legs, innocently looking at her while twitching his whiskers.

Mom heard the scream from her room. Alarmed, she ran for the living room. When she reached the third to last step, she saw the makeshift cardboard gate and managed to take a flying leap to clear it. With a thud, she stood still for a moment, catching her balance as all eyes turned to her. “What was the—” Then she saw Mrs. Baker on the piano bench, and Snickers standing watch. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Baker.” There was no question what had happened.

Mitch dove for Snickers, who proceeded to race to the other end of the living room.

“Oh, oh!” Mrs. Baker cried. “Please catch that mouse!”

Maddie giggled. “It’s only a friendly wat.”

Mollie joined Mitch in trying to capture Snickers, and after a minute, they were successful. Mom apologized to Mrs. Baker. “I am so sorry. The children are watching a pet rat for a neighbor, and we’ve not had anyone come to visit, so I didn’t realize Snickers would want to check you out. Here, let me help you down,” she said sympathetically, walking to the bench.

“Oh, thaaannkkk you,” Mrs. Baker said in a shaky voice. After she was standing on the carpet, she laughed until tears streamed down her face. When she was finally able to talk, she turned to Mom. “I’m sure I looked so funny. I just thought it was a mouse. Years ago, one ran up my leg, so I can’t stand to be near them! I was certainly not expecting to meet one in your living room and have it charge me!”

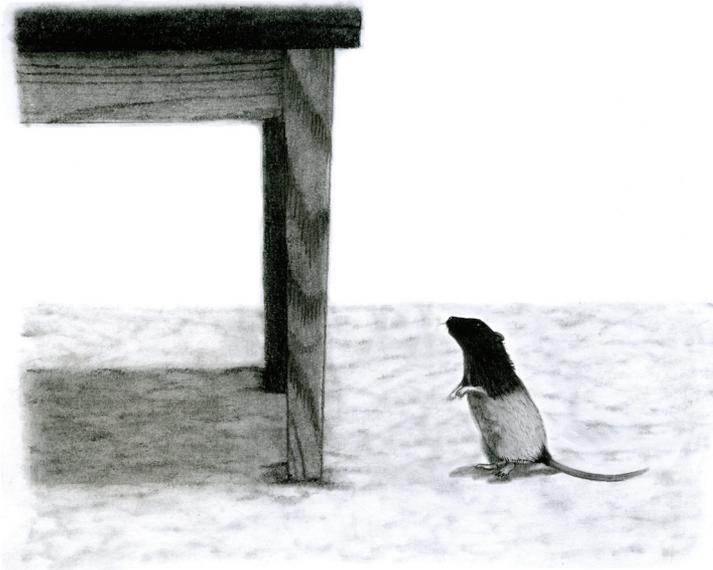
Following a few moments of friendly talk, Mrs. Baker gave Mom the key to Mrs. Clifton’s house. She explained where to put the mail and where Honey’s extra food was, and she also asked them to mow the yard, since her husband had been doing it, and they would be gone for two weeks. After Mrs. Baker left, the Moodys talked through Snickers’ situation. Mom said, “I think we’ve all learned a lesson. Next time we have a visitor, someone needs to make sure Snickers is in his cage.”

“Yes,” Max agreed. “It was really my fault.”

The rest of Snickers-sitting was much calmer, except for some minor excitement. One evening, while he was on his usual bedtime “roam-the-house” routine, Snickers disappeared. Max and Mitch searched everywhere for the rat. Dad even helped them. Dad was dreading telling Mom that there would be a loose rat in the house that night. Finally, Mitch had the idea to check under the sofa cushions. They found

that Snickers had been sitting in the corner of the couch with only his head showing and his body below the cushion. He had managed to eat a hole in the cushion fabric. Dad was relieved that they had found the mischievous rat but not happy about the damage it had done.

When Mrs. Bagwell came to retrieve Snickers, the children were a little sad. Even with all Snickers' quirks, he had still been an interesting pet. Upon her arrival at their house, Mrs. Bagwell commented over and over how "well" Snickers looked. She was so pleased with their care that she paid them double what they charged. She said she would be sure to recommend their services to her friends. After she left, the children wondered what animal they would pet-sit next.



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