

My Husband

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Alcoholic

MY HUSBAND WAS AN ALCOHOLIC

Lester and I personally do not care if people know our names and our background, but this is not a "pretty" story, and for the sake of our families, we are not revealing our real names. The story itself, however, is entirely true.

I had trusted in Christ as my Saviour when I was a child in our north-western Iowa community. But when I went to high school, popularity with the "smart set" seemed very important, and I decided not to let my Christianity interfere with my fun.

Our gang didn't drink. That came later. But we set up our attitudes and ideals far from God. We were the sophisticates, the best dressed group in school. We frequented the most expensive places. By the time we were graduated we had become brittle, materialistic, and jaded. According to our standards, we had already done everything that offered any fun.

I didn't often date Lester in high school, but when we began attending the same college, we dated a lot. We were engaged before he was called to active duty in World War II, and married before he shipped overseas.

When the war ended, Lester came back and set up a highly successful

real-estate office. It wasn't long until we had a beautiful home, a fine car, and a summer place on a North Woods lake. We joined the country club and were invited into the most select bridge club in Elmdale. Oh, yes, we went to church, too. Almost everybody did in Elmdale. It was good for business.

Our church didn't preach anything about salvation or living apart from the world, but we would have paid no attention if it had. We wanted only to hear about our responsibility to clean up the slums, to help our children become good citizens, and to become better and better Christians by being kind, good, and generous.

Lester had been brought up in that church and accepted it without question. But I knew better. Yet I was having such a good time that I closed my heart to the real issues.

Lester got started drinking while he was in the service. I had my first drink at the country club. I felt a little pang of guilt at first, but I didn't stop—I didn't want to be called a prude.

It wasn't long until we began serving drinks at bridge club. Not every time, just special occasions like Christmas, Thanksgiving, or somebody's birthday. Before the year was out, it was so commonplace that we didn't

think anything of it. Then Lester and I started to drink by ourselves at home.

"I'm tired, honey," I would say when he came home from the office. "Why don't you fix me a highball?"

Of course he always fixed two. I wasn't aware of the fire that was beginning to rage within him.

The first time I saw Lester drunk, I was so disgusted I didn't care if I never saw him again. We'd been out to the New Year's Eve dance at the country club. Lester got so drunk I had to have help to load him into the car. I drove him home and watched him stagger into bed.

The next morning he was apologetic. "It'll not happen again. I swear it," he promised.

But it did happen again, and again—and again!

When we went to our lake cabin, he drank up all the liquor we brought. Then he brazenly went into the summer homes of our friends, opened their refrigerators, and took what liquor they had.

Lester's habit got so bad our friends began dropping us—even friends we used to drink with. About this time I began thinking of my sister who lived in town. Mabel and I had never been very close. She and her husband, Joe,

plodded along in the same church I'd been brought up in. We didn't travel in the same set at all. To be truthful, we were a little ashamed of them.

But I had to talk to somebody, so I started calling her. She was so understanding and so sympathetic I began to bare my troubles. I asked her if Joe would talk to Lester. But it didn't do any good. Lester was surly and contemptuous.

The weeks and months stretched on. He drank our business into the red. Payments were due on our car and home. I couldn't take anymore. I sued him for divorce and locked him out.

After this, Lester decided that he needed help. He committed himself voluntarily into the Iowa State Hospital. Since no one had forced him to go, he was free to leave any time he wanted. And he did. He came back a week later and called Joe and Mabel because he knew I wouldn't have him. They took him in for the night.

I imagine they quoted to him from the Bible, because he kept telling them that sin wasn't his problem. He just had a little trouble controlling his liquor—that was all.

That night they prayed, and God began to work in his heart. When he came into their kitchen for breakfast

the next morning, he said, "This is no good; I can't go on. I've got to turn my life over to God."

Joe called Dr. Theodore Epp of the "Back to the Bible Broadcast," in Lincoln, Neb., and made an appointment with him.

They insisted that I go with them, but I didn't want to. I was through with Lester. But Joe finally persuaded me to come along.

In Dr. Epp's office I was bitter and unyielding. I imagined this was all a trick designed to make me take Lester back. If so, things would be just as they had always been—and I couldn't stand that.

Once Dr. Epp was satisfied that Lester understood and desired salvation, we knelt for prayer. Though Lester professed to trust Christ as his Saviour, I had many reservations.

That night at a motel, Lester and I began to talk. "I want you to know," he said, "that even if you leave me it won't affect this decision I have made. I've completely committed my life to God. I can stay with you in Elmdale and prove myself, or I can go somewhere else, but I'm through with our old life."

This wasn't Lester, the real-estate salesman, trying to sell me a line as he had done so many times before.

This was a new Lester I had never known before.

We talked all night. I began to see the self-righteousness in my own life, and how far I had drifted from the Lord. Conviction overwhelmed me. Before we prayed, I opened the Bible to the place where I had put the bookmark at random the night before.

Psalm 119:71 stood out clearly: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes." And then I understood how this had been true in our case.

That night in a little church in Omaha, Lester and I made public our decisions—his to receive Christ, mine to return to Him.

Driving home the following day, we talked about Lester's drinking habit, and Joe said he'd been praying God would remove it. From that day on, Lester had no more desire to drink. It was as though his thirst for alcohol had been surgically removed.

That victory carried over into other facets of our lives as well. Lester's conversion story traveled rapidly in our small town. After a couple of weeks, one of my friends invited herself over for coffee.

"What do you think of this religion bit Lester is putting on now?" she asked sympathetically.

"I think it's the most wonderful thing that has ever happened in our lives," I answered.

Her eyes widened. "You do?" She could scarcely believe it.

"I never dreamed a couple could be so happy," I told her.

It wouldn't be the truth if I said everything has been easy. We've had some hard decisions and adjustments to make. Yet how different our lives have been. People who know Christ as Saviour are looking forward to heaven, and so are we. But Lester and I are experiencing a little foretaste of heaven right here in Elmdale this year.

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