

# *Journey of the Heart*

## *Chapter One*

**D**awn came to southern Michigan.

It began slowly, the stars fading as the sky changed from coal to dove gray. A faint rose line etched the eastern horizon as birds began to stir, and a breeze ruffled the leaves of the apple tree. The pink line stretched higher, shades of yellow and orange beginning to appear. High on the branch of the old hollow oak in the pasture an owl blinked sleepily, shook his feathers, and dived into his hole. The light grew, spreading streaks of gold across the sky. Somewhere a robin paused in his search for a worm to greet the morning. The sun, a vermillion sphere, climbed over the dark line of firs. A new day had begun.

No one stirred on the farm, for it was still very early. The sun's rays intensified, but it was an hour before Janet McLean turned over drowsily. She yawned and sat up, trying not to wake her sisters. They were still the "little girls" to her, although Rachel was thirteen and Becky was eleven. Soon it would be time for everyone else to get up, but Janet wanted a few quiet moments alone. Dressing as noiselessly as possible, she made her way downstairs.

The colors of the sunrise were gone, but the sky was a brilliant blue. For a long moment she drank

## *Journey of the Heart*

in the beauty of the morning, then turned away and pulled her Bible off the shelf. After years of sporadic attempts to become consistent in daily reading of the scriptures, Janet had found that reading first thing every morning was the only way she could make sure she would remember. Sometimes she felt nourished by what she read, and other times she wasn't sure if she got anything at all, but she knew that God would bless her efforts. This morning she read the second chapter of Philippians, and verse thirteen stood out to her: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

*I do want to do Your good pleasure, Lord, she prayed silently. Please show me how to live for Your glory.* From the sound of the footsteps overhead, Janet knew the whole family would soon be astir. She sighed softly. *Lord, help me today. I have so much to do.* Returning her Bible to its place, she headed to the basement for the milk pails. Even in bitterly cold weather Janet loved taking care of the family's dairy goats, but on a June morning like this one she couldn't imagine a better way to begin her day.

The barn door creaked open, and the goats immediately began their chorus of bleats. Bright eyes and soft noses showed over the rough boards of the pen as Janet laughed and returned the incessant greetings.

"Good morning, girls!" she called, ducking as a barn swallow whisked overhead. "How's my Nutmeg this morning?" she added, greeting the queen of the herd. The old goat got stiffly to her feet, stretched, then followed Janet out of the pen and up to the milking stand, patiently chewing her cud as her

## *Journey of the Heart*

hoof was examined. Janet straightened up with a triumphant smile. “Still a little stiff, but I believe we’ve whipped that infection, old girl,” she asserted, giving her an affectionate pat. Then she grinned sheepishly. There stood two of her brothers, who had come out to do their own chores.

“Do you think she understands what you’re talking about?” Steve prodded. At sixteen, he was always finding ways to make his family laugh. “How’s the spice cabinet today?”

Janet joined in the laugh. She had named the goats after spices according to their colors. Currently Nutmeg, Cinnamon, and Ginger were milking, and Steve insisted he could taste those spices in the milk. “Nice and spicy,” she returned.

Steve chuckled. “I’ll start the water for the heifers,” he told his eighteen and a half year-old brother.

“Go ahead,” Ben replied. “I’ll get the mineral block and be right out.” He paused to smile at his sister. “You’re a good shepherdess, Janet. Thanks for taking care of the goats.” Then the boys were gone.

As Janet milked, her thoughts were on the day ahead. The night before, Dad had mentioned moving the yearling steers to the north pasture, and the fence would have to be checked before that was done. The McLeans made their living raising beef cattle, and enjoyed working together. The boys did much of the work, but there were many times that Janet’s help was needed as well, especially since her oldest brother was no longer living at home. Jeff, at twenty-five, had married Jenny Barker two months ago, and was busy

## *Journey of the Heart*

working on his own farm a few miles away. He was glad to come and help if there was a big job, but the burden of daily chores fell on those still at home.

The warm smell of fresh muffins met Janet at the kitchen door. Rachel, wearing a floury apron, informed her that breakfast was ready. “Do you know if the boys are about through with their chores?” she questioned.

“I think so,” Janet replied. “Maybe Samuel can get them,” she added, as she caught a glimpse of tousled hair and a freckled face. The seven-year-old didn’t wait for her to finish, but dashed out the door. Rachel and Janet laughed. It was a good morning.

As she had expected, it was a busy day. The fence was checked, the steers were moved, bread was baked, and more lettuce was planted. Janet was washing the lunch dishes when the telephone rang.

“Can I get it?” Becky asked hopefully. Janet shrugged, and Becky took that as permission. Suddenly Janet felt irritated. *Why didn’t I just get it?* she asked herself as she listened to Becky.

“Hello,” she was saying. “Who are you? . . . What? Oh. Well, I’ll see if Janet wants to talk to you.” Putting her hand over the receiver, she said loudly, “Janet, it’s Stephanie Kemp. Do you want to talk to her?”

Janet rolled her eyes. “Becky!” she hissed, frowning. “She’ll hear you!” Wiping her hands on a towel, she took the phone from her sister. “Hello, Stephanie! How are you?”

The voice on the other end sounded emotional. “Hi, Janet. I’m okay, I guess.”

## *Journey of the Heart*

“What’s going on? You don’t sound like you’re okay.” Janet was warm and sympathetic.

“Oh, it’s just things with Micah,” Stephanie sighed. “Courtship certainly isn’t all roses. We’re having some disagreements and I’m worried that maybe things won’t work out! Janet, we’ve been courting for five months now and if we end up breaking it off . . .” Her voice faded away. Janet found herself groping for words.

“It will be okay, Stephanie,” she began. “God has a plan for your life, and He has one for Micah, too. I know you’re in a hard situation and it’s difficult to see how it will all work out.” She didn’t know if she was comforting her friend or not, but she wanted to help. “Are these major disagreements? I mean, can you work them out?”

“Oh, probably. His family just does some things differently than mine does, and it would be hard to get used to it! For example, his dad sets up the homeschooling curriculum and schedule, and his mom does the teaching. My mom has always planned the school year in our family. Wouldn’t it be hard to teach using someone else’s plans?”

“Maybe, but I can actually see some advantages,” Janet answered. “If your children argued about a subject, you could say, ‘Talk to Dad!’ Besides, isn’t that the way regular schools do it?”

Stephanie laughed. “That’s almost exactly what Micah said. I guess I would get used to it, but it sure sounds different. Another thing is cars. I don’t know anything about car care besides filling up with gas. And he wants me to learn to check oil and belts

## *Journey of the Heart*

and fluids and I don't know what all! Starting out in law enforcement, he has a lot of unpredictable shifts, and he said it would help him if I could do that.”

“We're in the same boat on that one!” Janet exclaimed. “I've heard all about my ‘mechanical abilities,’ or lack thereof, for years.”

As the conversation continued, Janet realized that Stephanie's problems were not major ones, and certainly possible to solve. In fact, the process of working them out would help her relationship with Micah to grow deeper. It sounded like Stephanie was having an emotional day, and had let her problems grow out of proportion, making them look worse than they really were.

“Well, thanks for listening,” she was saying. “It sure helps to talk to you and know that you care! Thank you for praying, too. I really need it!”

“I'm glad I can pray for you,” Janet replied. “I just wish you lived closer so we could see each other!”

Stephanie laughed. “Any time you feel like coming to Arkansas, you just go ahead!” The girls had met twice, once at a homeschool convention, and once when Stephanie had a wedding to attend a few hours away. However, they had been pen pals for years, and had a close friendship despite the geographical distance.

“Well, I should probably let you go,” Stephanie said.

“I should probably finish the dishes!” Janet answered. “Thanks for calling . . . and Stephanie, don't worry. God has everything planned.”

## *Journey of the Heart*

As Janet turned her attention back to the kitchen, she saw that Becky had finished drying all the clean dishes and had put most of them away. She had also wiped the table and swept the floor. What a hard worker she was, and so good natured. What did it matter if she wasn't very gracious on the phone? That would come with time and practice.

"You should apologize for the way you acted," Janet's conscience whispered.

*Oh, it probably didn't bother her,* she argued.

"If it didn't, that means you do it a lot."

*Well, she ought to know how to be polite! After all, she is eleven!*

"And you ought to know how to be polite to her. You're twenty-two."

Janet cleared her throat. She felt her face turn red. Then she started washing the dishes again. *I'll apologize in a little while,* she told herself. *I don't know exactly how to say it.*

"Just say, 'I'm sorry, Becky,'" her conscience prompted. Janet knew the longer she waited, the harder it would become, but still she hesitated. Two forces were wrestling for control, and suddenly she thought, *I'm resisting the Holy Spirit.*

"I'm sorry, Becky," she began. Her voice sounded hollow, and to her surprise, it shook. "I was rude to you."

Becky just smiled. "That's okay," she responded. "I don't mind."

Her answer cut Janet to the heart. Was it possible that she had been unkind to Becky so often that it no longer bothered her? "Becky," she added,

## *Journey of the Heart*

“I’m rude to you a lot. I’m sorry.” It was hard to say, but the relief was immediate.

“That’s okay,” Becky said again.

Dishes finished, Janet turned to the other tasks for the afternoon, glad that she would have some time alone. She needed to do some deep thinking.