

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD

They were close in age but they were not close as sisters. Jenny was in fourth grade and Debby was in fifth but they were as different as night and day. Jenny had dark brown hair that was curly and Debby had blonde hair that was perfectly straight. Jenny was jealous that Debby was so pretty and that she wasn't.

She was also jealous that her parents favored Debby over her.

Debby though, didn't even realize that she was her parent's favorite. She, unlike her sister, was not a jealous person. Debby's concern was that she live a life that was pleasing to God, so she strove to always obey her parents. Jenny disliked Debby all the more for that. Debby's goodness only made Jenny's badness look worse.

One day Debby was in the kitchen quoting verses from the Bible to her mother that she had memorized the night before. One of them was Romans 8:28, which says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

"Isn't it fantastic, Mom," said Debby, "that we can know that God is going to work things out for good in our lives?"

"It certainly is," her mother answered, "but that promise is not for all believers; it's only for those who love God. And the way we can know we love God is if we obey Him. Jesus said, 'if you love Me keep My commandments.' Only if we keep His commandments can we have the assurance that all things are going to work together for good in our lives."

Jenny, who was getting something out of the fridge at the time, heard their conversation and she thought to herself, "Well I guess that puts me out." When she looked over at Debby and saw the angelic look on her face it made her sick. She wondered if Debby were to have some real problems if she would still have the same confidence that things would work out for good.

Jenny started thinking about what she could do to upset Debby just so she could see how Debby would react.

Debby was born in April and her grandfather had bought her a small diamond ring for her birthday the year before. Jenny knew how much that ring meant to Debby. It had special significance because their grandfather died shortly after her birthday and Debby had been very close to him.

When Debby was taking her piano lessons the next day, Jenny went into Debby's room and opened her jewelry box and took out Debby's diamond ring. Jenny took a small sharp knife and started loosening the prongs that held the diamond on to the ring. She loosened it just enough so that the diamond would eventually fall out and no one would even suspect foul play.

Jenny knew that Debby wore the ring only on special occasions so she could hardly wait until Saturday night because their father was going to take them all out to dinner.

As the family was sitting at a table in the restaurant Jenny looked at Debby's finger and saw that the diamond was missing. She felt like laughing but restrained herself. She was hoping someone was going to notice it and when no one did she finally said, "Debby, what happened to your diamond!"

Debby immediately looked down at her finger and saw the diamond missing from her ring. She started looking all around her but couldn't find it. After their father had looked under the table he told the manager of the restaurant about it and left their name and number in case someone found it.

Debby was really upset and when she got home that night she began to cry. Her mother tried to comfort her by telling her that maybe they would find it.

Jenny said, "Don't cry Debby. Didn't I just hear you quote a verse the other day that says that all things work together for good?"

Jenny's words did stop Debby from crying. Debby started thinking that even though that ring meant so much to her, God could have a reason for her losing it. If God wanted her to find her ring then she would and if He didn't want her to find it then she wouldn't. One way or the other she was going to trust God.

Jenny had no idea that her words would have such an effect on Debby. When she saw how quickly she stopped crying she wished she hadn't said anything.

Several weeks went by and the diamond was never found and Debby took it very well. So Jenny tried to think of some other problem she could cause Debby.

Jenny knew that the thing Debby loved the most next to her family was her cat Cuddles. She had had the cat since it was a kitten. She had gotten him as a Christmas gift three years ago.

Jenny wondered how Debby would react if one day Cuddles were missing. Jenny didn't plan on having the cat permanently disappear, she just planned on having it go on vacation for about two weeks. She thought of putting it in a cage and feeding it every day and then after two weeks she would let him go.

She looked in the basement for a hamster cage that had been there for about five years. It was buried beneath a bunch of junk so she knew no one would even miss it. She waited until she was home alone to take the cage from the basement and put it in a wooded area about two blocks from the house. She found what she thought was a safe spot and hid the cage under a pile of leaves. Jenny then went back to the house and got Cuddles and put him in the cage.

That evening Debby was calling for Cuddles to come to dinner and when he didn't come she got worried.

What Jenny had done really started bothering her when she could hear her sister crying. There was a wall separating their bedrooms and she knew her sister

must be crying hard for her to be able to hear her. Jenny decided that what she had done was too cruel, so she planned on letting the cat go in the morning.

She got up early so she could leave for school alone and that way she could let the cat out of the cage. When she arrived at the spot where she had hidden the cat both the cage and the cat were gone!

She couldn't believe her eyes. Was it possible that she had put the cat in another place? But the more she thought about it the more she realized that someone had taken Cuddles. The only thing she could think to do was pretend that she knew nothing. She felt bad that she was responsible for losing Cuddles.

It was miserable hearing Debby cry every night. But Jenny could see that even though Debby was in a lot of pain she still had faith that God was working things out in her life.

About two weeks later while the family was having breakfast they heard a cat meowing at the door. Debby jumped up from the table and ran to the door; it was Cuddles. Debby screamed with happiness, "Cuddles!" and swept him up in her arms.

All the feelings of remorse that Jenny had vanished and she felt jealous that her sister was so happy.

About a week later Jenny and Debby went with their mother to a farm to pick up some fresh vegetables. They also got a gallon of honey.

Their mother put the bucket of honey at Debby's feet and said, "Watch the honey will you, Honey," and started to laugh. It really made Jenny jealous that her mother was kidding with Debby like that.

As they were driving home Jenny thought how upset her mother would be if that gallon of honey were to spill all over the carpet of the car. The car happened to be the first new car her mother had ever owned.

Jenny also thought how wonderful it would be if the honey spilt and it looked like Debby was the one responsible.

Debby was holding the honey between her feet so Jenny figured that she had to distract her somehow, then push the bucket with her foot.

That way it would look like Debby was responsible.

"Debby," said Jenny, "I wanted to show you something."

Jenny then went in her purse and pulled out a pocket knife. "I found this on the playground today, isn't it neat?" As she was showing Debby the knife she slipped her foot against the bucket and gave it one quick, hard push and the contents quickly spilled all over the carpet.

"Oh no!" yelled their mother when she realized what happened. She pulled over to the side of the road and stopped the car. The honey had gone everywhere. It was not only on the carpet in the front seat but also on the carpet in the back. When their mother saw how badly Debby felt she tried hard to hide her own

feelings. "Accidents happen," she said. "Don't worry Debby; I'm sure we can clean it up."

Jenny couldn't believe her ears. Her mother was letting Debby off the hook. Jenny thought that if she had been the one her mother had entrusted with the honey and if she had accidentally spilled it that her mother probably would have been really mad at her.

When they got home Debby went right away to get a bucket of warm soapy water. When her mother saw her, she said, "Oh, don't you do that, I'll clean it up."

Debby protested, "Please Mom, let me clean it up. I'm the one who caused the mess and I want to be the one who cleans it up."

When Debby's mother saw how much it meant to her to clean it up she said, "Okay."

Debby felt so bad over the mess she thought that she had caused that while she was cleaning up the globs of honey, tears were streaming down her face. But within minutes the tears that had been tears of sorrow became tears of joy. When she was cleaning under the seat she came across what she thought was a small pebble but when she looked at it she saw her diamond engulfed in honey. She went into the house in a state of ecstasy with tears running down her face.

"You guys aren't going to believe this," she said, "I've found my diamond!" She held out the diamond for her family to see.

At dinner that night her mother said, "What happened to Debby today is a good example of Romans 8:28 which says that all things work together for good to those who love God. Who would think that a bucket of honey spilled on a new carpet could work out for good? But the Lord knew that when we went to the restaurant in that car a while back, that Debby's diamond had fallen out in it. It took the spilled honey though, to find it."

It was that night that Jenny decided she was going to give up trying to cause her sister problems. Everything that she had done to hurt her had turned out for her good. Jenny felt even more jealous of her sister. Not only was she treated special by her parents but she was also treated special by God!

The next day Debby and her mother were having a discussion about the fact that God is not a respecter of persons. Their mother was explaining that the way God treats us is not based upon how we look or how smart we are but rather on how we act. "God wants to be friends with all His children," she said, "but it is up to us to obey Him so we can be His friends."

Jenny, who overheard the discussion, asked, "Does God have favorites?"

Her mother was happy that Jenny was showing an interest in spiritual things. Usually whenever she and Debby would have discussions about the Bible, Jenny would go out and play.

"Well, dear," her mother answered, "God does have favorites, but it is the people themselves who want to be special to God that do become special to God."

Jesus said, 'if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor.' If you want to be special to God then you have to serve Him. To serve God means you do what He says, which means you obey Him."

The idea of serving God really didn't appeal to Jenny. She could never understand how Debby could stand to sit and read the Bible every night. It was a lot more fun for Jenny to read mystery books.

Also she didn't like the idea of talking to people about God. There were too many fun things to do. Jenny decided that she wasn't cut out to be a servant of God.

About six weeks later Jenny got really sick and her mother took her

to the doctor. They weren't sure what was wrong with her so the doctor took some blood from her to have it tested.

Later that day when she was back home in bed, the doctor called to say he wanted Jenny to go into the hospital for some tests. Jenny got really scared because she hadn't been in a hospital since she was born and she knew the doctor must think that something was really wrong with her.

Going to the hospital was a terrifying experience and the tests they gave her were really painful. While she laid in that hospital bed that night she began to do some serious thinking. She thought there was a possibility that she was going to die. She knew there was only One Person she could turn to that could help her in this situation. As she laid on her back with tears falling from her eyes, she prayed, "Please Lord, don't let me die. The things that I thought were more important than serving You aren't and I know it now. Please let me live and I'll serve You."

The next day her mother came into the room all excited. She embraced Jenny and said, "Honey you're going to be alright. You have a very bad virus but you don't have what they thought you had."

Jenny prayed to herself, "Thank you, Lord."

After this happened Jenny became a different person. She found out that her parents had never loved Debby more than her. The only reason they treated her differently was because she deserved to be treated differently. And when Jenny started acting the same way as Debby she received the same treatment as Debby.

Jenny also found out that it was fun to read the Bible and talk to people about God. She started seeing God work things out for good in her life. And that was exciting.

Jenny and Debby still don't look alike, but now they're a lot alike. They aren't just sisters anymore, they're friends.