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Youth Feature . . .

## A TALE OF TWO BRIDEGROOMS (WHICH MAY NEVER HAVE HAPPENED)

C. MERVYN MAXWELL

FIRST, there was Gary. Rugged, athletic, six-foot four with a build to match, and a straight 4.00 GPA in premed.

His friends (and he had a lot of them) especially admired his attention to detail. When he skied, for instance, he waxed his skis meticulously. He asked numerous questions of the pros and tucked their answers in logical sequence into his computer-like brain. It was the same when he played tennis or golf, or tuned up his car. Everything Gary had was maintained in tiptop condition, and everything he did was organised and well done.

When he went courting, he showed the same concentration and attention to detail. He had the pick of the crop. Girls were flattered if he but asked them to relay a message to his best-loved.

Come his wedding day, Gary got ready in his customary grand style. Nothing but the best was good enough for the most wonderful girl on earth. He ordered tuxedos, of course—then re-pressed the left pant leg in front to correct a double crease two inches from the top. He bought *new* shoes, then polished the soles so they would look shiny to the congregation when he knelt for the wedding prayer.

Gary arrived at church forty-five minutes early. When his little bride caught a glimpse of him talking to the minister, she beamed with a very precious sense of warmth. What a lucky,

lucky girl I am, she thought, to have a guy who lets everyone see how proud he is to marry me!

So much for Gary. Now the flip side.

Phil had his ups and downs. In one of his better periods he, too, wooed and won a lady fair. "She's too good for him," many people said. But Phil was not altogether bad. He was sometimes very lovable. And there's no doubt he needed a dependable girl if he were to get anywhere in life.

On Phil's wedding day, the church, under his bride's creative touch, was decorated more graciously than ever before in local memory. His cuddly darling was a vision of smiling sweetness, and all the wedding party matched her mood. All the party, that is, except Phil.

By the time Phil arrived, the mood had changed and the eyes of his bride were as red as her roses. He was an hour and fifteen minutes late! Worse, he was wearing a faded sports outfit, composed of two earlier outfits.

Part of a meal was attached to his shirt. And his shoes, which were *not* polished top and bottom, were ripped open at the seams.

As Phil burst into the frantic bridal party, his sweetheart gasped in dismay. But he ambled up to her in his friendly, confident way, kissed her cheek, and explained: "Sorry to keep you waiting, hon; but you know how I am. I always have to see how my favourite baseball team

come out. They won, too," he added. "Three runs in the bottom of the ninth!"

"When it was over," he continued, "I suddenly noticed how late it was and, to save time, I came just as I was. You're so sweet, sugar lump, I knew you wouldn't want me to go to a lot of trouble with my clothes."

"So, here I am, everybody! Will someone pass the word to the preacher?"

All of which provokes some questions—in my mind, anyway. Was Gary a "legalist" because he made a point of getting ready on time? Was Phil the "real Christian" because he trusted his relationship with a real person to make up for his carelessness?

Does our little story, perhaps, shed any light on familiar words from our motherly prophetess?

"We should jealously guard the edges of the Sabbath."<sup>1</sup>

"Before the setting of the sun, let all secular work be laid aside and all secular papers be put out of sight."<sup>2</sup>

"Before the setting of the sun let the members of the family assemble to read God's Word, to sing and pray."<sup>3</sup>

Being ready on time for the Sabbath *can* be a kind of legalism. But it seems to me that legalism is not so much what you do as why you do it. And if our motives are joy and love and gratitude, then punctual readiness for the Sabbath isn't legalism, but is a loving anticipation of a very special occasion with a very special Friend. ■

1. Ellen G. White, "Testimonies," Vol. 6, page 356.

2. *Ibid.*, page 355.

3. *Ibid.*, page 356.

## "Hang Loose"—But, Just a Minute

W. A. TOWNEND

HE URGED me to read it, assured me "it will brighten your whole concept of Christianity." The idea in the book would, he further claimed, "give you a whole new freedom of outlook." His sincerity I did not doubt. His predictions sounded good.

I should rush off to the nearest bookshop and get me a copy. That was the implied motivation. But I didn't do that. Instead, I further listened to what he had to say about his newly found treasure of emancipation. We, that is he, I, and possibly most of us, had been "on the wrong track." What we needed was to grasp the central idea in this "great book." We needed to understand that "brethren hang loose," meaning, he explained, that if you are a Christian you are a member of "a very loosely jointed thing that kind of binds us all together; there should be no such thing as a well-structured organisation." What I needed was to "jump into the new concept—be free, brother." At this point his animation was quite marked. I don't doubt his sincerity. But I didn't rush off to buy the book.

What I did was to go to *the* Book. And you

know what book that is. I often describe it as "Book Alive!" Thus I know it.

This "hang loose" idea for Christian believers, was it really there? I was pretty sure it wasn't. But then, had I carefully studied it with that concept in mind? Perhaps I had missed something in the New Testament, for I knew from my teaching of Old Testament history it wasn't there. Far from that.

So, beloved brother enthusiast, "give me a minute," as we say, before I take up your "hang loose" ideas.

Everybody knows, I guess, that the Christian church got off to a great start. So much so that we read that the faith of early believers was being "reported all over the world."<sup>1</sup> And the church wasn't yet a hundred years old, not by quite a bit!

Well, what part had the "hang loose" idea played in bringing about those amazing results? Frankly, I do not find "hang loose" in the New Testament as either a theory or a practice. What I do find is this . . .

At the time of the huge power release, or, if you like to think in more concrete modern terms

"the opening of the biggest-ever powerhouse with unlimited continuous supply available at all times," the people of the embryonic church "were all together in one place."<sup>2</sup> Hardly "hang loose" there! Nor is it here, "every day they continued to met together."<sup>3</sup> And with rather spectacular results, for "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."<sup>4</sup> And, mark you, those were not the results of "hang loose" theories.

Then, when a problem arose for the early church—some of the leaders were gaoled—we find the rest of the church "raised their voices together in prayer to God."<sup>5</sup> Note that word "together." And only a few verses further on we read "And the believers were in one heart and mind."<sup>6</sup> Hardly a "hang loose" situation.

And then there arises an administration problem recorded in Acts 6:1-7. It's a bit more than interesting to note how it was handled: "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."<sup>7</sup> The next verse starts off, "This proposal pleased the whole group."<sup>8</sup> Those words—"whole group."

Then, in the providence of God, there strides into the church scene "that rugged little individualist, Paul."

"Hang loose, brethren," advocates Paul. Does he? Acts 15 certainly does not reveal it. Do read the whole chapter. And the rest of the Book of Acts, for that matter. It just isn't there. There is not even a "hang loose" hint. But