

## A CALL TO THE FAITH

Darrell Petska

Mother always chose the wrong time for prayers. With Father adrift in his recliner, Shirley giggling over the phone to a friend, and me rapt in suspense while two gunmen stalked each other on the picture tube, Mother would think to say: "Isn't it time we pray?"

"Oh, Mom!" Shirley wailed from the other room.

"Not NOW!" I cried. "This is the best part."

Father roused, yawned, and looked silently at Mother.

"We haven't been saying our prayers regularly enough. It's time we get back into the habit." She sat on the sofa, her left leg--painfully arthritic--propped on a hassock, her crippled hands clasped in her lap.

Shirley and I kept quiet then, wondering if our preoccupations or Father's lethargy might stifle her zeal until another, more convenient time.

"Come on," Father sighed, straightening in his chair.

"Let's say our prayers."

Father and I shared a closeness which enabled each to sense the other's thoughts. Glimpsing the workings of his heavy eyebrows, exaggerated nose and firm mouth, I knew--or believed I knew--he was muttering to himself: "What can you say to her: 'No, let's not pray.'?"

Mother's lips came together no less firmly, however, and her eyes prodded forcefully, whether you saw them being leveled at you or merely imagined them to be.

Shirley hurried around the corner, her pained look saying, "Well, let's get it over with." Father rose, stooped with weariness, then slowly lowered to his knees. He groaned all the way down.

My attention raced back to an all-out gunfight which had erupted on the screen. I could not miss it.

"Darrell, shut off the TV." Mother's eyes began their slow, sure work at the back of my head.

"But Mom, I've been watching it for an hour and a half. It'll be over in just a little while." I spoke without turning from the action.