

Little Threads

Elizabeth Prentiss

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Little Threads

Elizabeth Prentiss

Edited by Joshua Schwisow



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Introduction

Little Threads is a tale of dramatic contrasts. Tangle Thread is thoroughly disobedient and dishonoring to her parents. She is proud, self-willed, and never repents. Golden Thread, on the other hand, is characterized by kindness, obedience, humility, and a servant's heart. Some readers might find these two characters to be unrealistically bad or unrealistically good. Yet, when we get to the end of *Little Threads*, Elizabeth Prentiss explains what she was doing with these two characters. In the last chapter, Prentiss explains:

But I want, before I bid you goodbye, to ask you a question. Are you the little thread in your mother's life that spoils it, or are you the little thread that makes it bright and beautiful? Perhaps you say, "I am not so good as Golden Thread, but I am not half so bad as Tangle Thread." And I daresay you are right. Little children are not often exactly like these. But, on the whole, which are you most like?

The reality is, no child is perfect, since we are all born in sin. But Tangle Thread represents the unbelieving, proud, and unrepentant child who does not look to Jesus to save her from her sins. When she is later renamed Silver Thread, it seems that Prentiss wants us to see Silver Thread as a child who has turned to the Lord, and though still struggling with indwelling sin, nevertheless believes in Jesus, and humbly repents of her sin.

There are many valuable lessons that come out of *Little Threads*. These include:

1. Sin makes us miserable. When we are selfish and proud, we don't find satisfaction. But God's ways are paths that are pleasant and peaceful (Prov. 3:17). We find true happiness in walking with the Lord in both faith and obedience.

2. We can't be good on our own. We need the Lord Jesus to save us from our sins. We need the Holy Spirit to transform us from within. Godliness is not possible apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Parents must not only teach obedience, but also faith in Christ. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

3. Trials are used by God to discipline us for our good, that we may share in God's holiness. God is good to His children not to leave them without discipline (see Heb. 12).

This edition of Elizabeth Prentiss' book is largely unaltered from the original 1863 edition. However, we made a few changes and added some features.

First, in the original edition, the word "punishment" is used in several chapters to specifically refer to corporal discipline (or spanking). We believe the word "punish" is not the right description of the purpose of physical discipline. The word "punish" involves *paying* the consequences for an action. It is important to remember that it is only Jesus alone who can pay for the debts of our sin. He suffered the consequences we deserved.

He is the propitiation for our sins (Rom. 3:23-25). We replaced the word “punish” with “discipline” to reflect the biblical teaching that discipline (whether verbal correction or physical correction) is meant, not as a form of retribution, but as a means of teaching and training. This is sometimes described as “discipline” (see Heb. 12 in the ESV) or “chastening” (see Heb. 12 in the KJV and NKJV) which is a translation of the Greek verb παιδεύω (*paideuo*). This verb means “to train.”

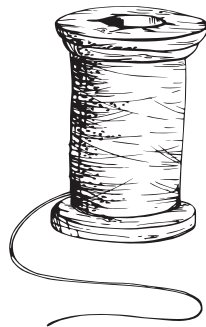
Second, we added explanatory footnotes that explain obscure vocabulary or phrases, provide Scripture references for quotations, and notes that occasionally comment on the story itself.

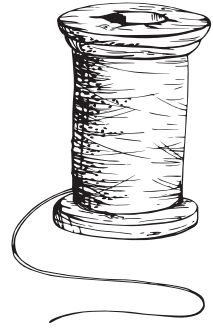
Third, we added a section at the end of each chapter called “Scripture for Reflection.” This section is designed to be read after the chapter is completed, and for parents and children to discuss the application of God’s Word to the content of the chapter, and thereby, the application of these lessons to their own home.

It is our prayer at Generations that this resource may be another tool that equips you to pass on the faith to the next generation.

Editor, Joshua Schwisow
February, AD 2025

Part 1
Tangle Thread





Chapter 1

There was once a very beautiful piece of white satin, which had been woven with care and skill. Yet those who saw it went away shaking their heads, saying: “What a pity! What a pity!” For there ran across this lovely fabric a tangled thread; and that one thread spoiled all.

And there was a lady who was very beautiful, too. She had always lived in a pleasant home, with kind and loving friends about her. She had never in her life known what it was to want anything she could not have. Indeed, she seemed born to be treated gently and tenderly. People who were ignorant were not afraid to go to see and talk with her, for they knew she never laughed at their mistakes; and poor people liked to go and tell her about their poverty, just as if she were poor too. And those who were sick or in trouble wanted her to know all about their trials. For those who went to see her with empty hands, came away not half so poor as they went in; and the sick and the sorrowful were comforted by her words of pity. You will think that this lady who was so good, who could dress just as she pleased, and ride when

and where she pleased, who had friends to love her, and friends to admire her, must have been very happy indeed. And so she was, for a time. Her life looked as smooth and fair as the white satin you have just heard of.

But by and by there began to run across it a thread not at all like the soft and even threads of which it was made; here came a soiled spot; there were knots and tangles; as far as you could see, its beauty was gone. How did this happen? Why, there came into the house one day, a little baby. A little, soft, tender baby, that did not look as if it would harm anybody. Her mother was very glad to see her. She thought herself almost too happy with such a treasure. The most sunshiny, pleasant room in the house was given this little thing for her own. All sorts of pure white garments were bought for it, and everything possible was done to keep her well and make her happy. Before she came her mother used to lie down to sleep at night as sweetly as you do, little rosy child, who read this book. But now she slept, as people say, with one eye and one ear open! That is, she kept starting up to see if the baby was nicely covered with her soft blankets, or to listen to her gentle breathing, to know if she was quite well. If the baby happened to be restless or unwell, her mother would sit up all night to take care of her, or walk with her hour after hour when anybody but her own dear mother would have been out of patience, or too tired to keep awake.

And before the baby came there, this lady used to spend a good deal of time at her piano, singing and playing. She used to draw and paint, and read and write. But now she had almost forgotten she had any piano. The baby's cooing was all the music she cared for. And she left off drawing and painting, and thought the sweetest picture in the world was that tiny, sleeping creature in her cradle. To be sure, mother and baby together did make a lovely picture indeed. As for books, she had not now much time to read anything but *Combe on Infancy*, which she studied every day, because it is a book about babies, and tells how to wash and

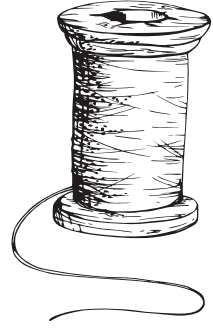
dress them, and what to give them to eat.¹

Perhaps you will begin to think that this lady loved her baby too much. But no, a mother cannot do that, unless she loves her child better than God, and this little child's mother loved God best. She loved Him so dearly that if He had asked her to give this little one back to Him, she would have given it without a word; He would not ask her to do it without tears.

Scripture for Reflection

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
The fruit of the womb is a reward. (Psalm 127:3)

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1. Andrew Combe (1797-1847) wrote *A Treatise on the Physiological and Moral Management of Infancy* published in 1840. The book provided detailed advice on the care of infants including breastfeeding, nutrition, hygiene, moral and emotional development, and the responsibility of parents towards their children.



Chapter 2

The baby had a name of her own, but she was called “The Baby,” and nothing else, just as if there never had been one in the world before, and never would be again. As she had nothing to do but to grow, she did grow, but not very fast. Her mother said she liked a tiny baby better than she did a big one. When she showed the baby to her friends she always said, “She isn’t a very large child, I know; but you see her bones are very small, and of course that makes a difference.” And they would reply, “Certainly, that makes a great difference. And she has the prettiest little round face, and wee bits of hands and feet, there ever were!”

The day on which the nurse who took care of the baby and its mother at first was obliged to go away, another young woman came to fill her place. Her name was Ruth. She was very glad to come indeed. For she thought it would be very nice to sit in that bright, pleasant room, holding that pretty little baby on her lap. She thought she should never know a care or a trouble. But she

was quite frightened when she undertook to wash and dress the pretty little creature, to find how the baby screamed. The truth is, if there was any one thing this baby could not bear, it was to be touched with water. What was to be done? Let it go unwashed? Oh! No, that would never do! Her mother really trembled when she saw such a young, feeble creature cry so. The mother knelt down by the side of the nurse, and with her soft hands tried to hurry through the washing and dressing. They never knew how they got on the little shirt, or how they fastened on the little petticoats, or which of them tied the clean, white frock. The nurse was red and warm, and the mother pale and tired, when this great task was over. But they both thought things would go better next time, and Ruth said so to herself as she walked up and down trying to quiet the child, and the mother said so to herself as she lay all worn out on the sofa, watching them.

Day after day passed, however, and every morning the baby screamed. As she grew older and stronger, her mother was less frightened when the baby cried, but it was painful to hear such an uproar, and her mother began to dread the hour for washing and dressing it.

“What can be the reason the baby cries so?” she asked the nurse every morning, till at last, tired of saying,

“Perhaps she won’t cry so next time,” poor Ruth-cried out, “Why, it’s the temper, ma’am!”

“Her temper!” said the mother, much astonished. “Why, I should as soon think of talking about the temper of one of the cows in your father’s farmyard!”

“And you might well do that, ma’am, for cows have tempers of their own as well as babies and other folks. There was old White Spot, now. She couldn’t cry and scream like this baby, but she could kick over a pail of milk equal to anybody. And did it many a time when she was put out.”¹

1. “put out” here means upset or annoyed

The baby's mother hardly knew what to think. *Combe on Infancy* did not say a word on this subject. She thought she would write to her own mother, who lived not far off, and beg her to tell her whether little babies really did cry because they were angry, and ask her advice about a great many other things just as important. There was a small spot on the child's forehead, and she wanted to know if that would be likely to go away, of itself. And how soon would the baby begin to "take notice?" And what playthings had she better be buying, to be ready for her when the baby was ready for them? And, oh! How would it do to tie up a raisin in a rag and stop the baby's mouth with that while they were washing it?² For Ruth said she was sure that would do so nicely!

Scripture for Reflection

My son, hear the instruction of your father,
And do not forsake the law of your mother;
For they will be a graceful ornament on your head,
And chains about your neck. (Proverbs 1:8-9)

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2. To "tie up a raisin in a rag" refers to an old-fashioned method of soothing a baby during activities like washing or dressing. The idea was to wrap a raisin (or another small, sweet item) in a piece of cloth, allowing the baby to suck on it. This functioned much like a modern baby pacifier.