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# Abundant Living Ministries

## HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

by Sharon Charles

James had given up... well, *almost!* For years he prayed and hoped and prayed more. Now another year was drawing to a close. Christmas was just a week away and Simon apparently was no closer to softening.

Less than a year apart in age, the brothers were almost like twins. Their parents often referred to them as two peas in a pod. As boys, they played baseball together every spring. They spent crazy fun days swimming in the lake and going on adventure hikes every summer. Each fall, they gathered mountains of pumpkins at their Grandpa's farm and had wild battles on his hay wagon. In the winter, both became amateur hockey stars on the frozen pond behind their house. And of course so many Christmases with all their excitement and celebration! What memories!

In those growing-up years when it was just the two of them at home, they would wrestle each other mercilessly ... sometimes because they were angry, but mostly just for the fun of it! At school and among their friends, their loyalty was fierce. Their preferences, likes, and dislikes were almost identical: food, music, sports, even girls!

Then they turned 18. The two young men headed off to different schools to pursue different career paths, but were absolutely convinced that their close bond would endure forever.

The change was gradual but James saw it coming. Simon's return calls weren't as immediate. Then they stopped altogether. When James did manage to reach his brother, Simon cut their conversations short. And it became clear that, in one particular and very important area, the boys were no longer "in the same pod."

The faith that had been consistently taught to them in their early years had been a firmly-engrained and fulfilling part of their childhood. But as young adults,

when James made any reference to spiritual topics, Simon clammed up.

It bothered James. He prayed for Simon and tried to talk to him about his connection to Jesus. At first Simon simply changed the subject but one day he exploded. "James... I'm beyond all that God-stuff now. It's fine if *you* want to keep believing. If that somehow pacifies you, then by all means keep deluding yourself! But quit trying to force it on me! I don't need Jesus or the Bible or church... to me it's nothing more than a bunch of childish fables. So please... never... and I mean NEVER talk to me about anything Christian again!"

The years rolled by... decades actually. The brothers saw each other from time to time at family get-togethers... weddings, funerals, birthday parties. James longed for connection with his brother but Simon, though always courteous, was no longer a soulmate. When he abandoned Jesus, he had also abandoned James. But James kept praying and hoping and then praying more.

Now it was almost Christmas again and James admitted to himself that his faith on Simon's behalf was dwindling. He picked up his Bible and started aimlessly flipping through the pages. His focus zeroed in on a random verse in the book of Micah, "*As for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior, my God will hear me.*"

"I needed that reminder, Lord," James sighed. "I know You never quit working for Your children... so I don't know what else to do, but just keep on asking and trusting for Simon. I miss my brother and I want him back... but mostly I just want him to be back with You! Please Lord, bring my brother home... to *You*... for Christmas!"

It was late in the afternoon, not many days later, when the call came... from a matter-of-fact medical clerk who explained that Simon had suffered a heart attack. It was serious... He wasn't expected to survive. He might have only a few more hours. James dropped everything and rushed to the hospital.

"Well, Bro... they tell me I'm dying," Simon's voice was shaky and his eyes looked bleak. "I guess I'll soon find out what, if anything, is on the other side."

"Simon you know you can step right from here into heaven... if you want. Just reach out to Jesus."

"I think it's too late for me... too many years of a hard heart and more than my fair share of sin."

"Listen, Simon... when the criminal on the cross beside Jesus reached out to Him, Jesus assured him that he would be with Him in Paradise that very day! I'm tellin' you, man... it's not too late!"

Simon's eyes closed and for a moment James thought perhaps his brother had stopped breathing. But then he saw the slow rise of his chest. James settled in the chair beside his bed and prayed... with intense and desperate faith.

James would love to have been able to see into Simon's heart and mind to witness what went on between him and Jesus during those next few hours. But when

Simon finally opened his eyes, James saw a bit of a sparkle. A slow grin spread across his brother's face. It was as though James was seeing his childhood best buddy, as a warm flood of memories raced through his brain.

James grasped Simon's hand... the hand that he had wrestled with so many times... now so weak. Simon opened his mouth to speak and James leaned close to hear.

"I'll see you **there** Brother," Simon whispered. "You were right... it *wasn't* too late!" James felt his brother's hand tighten on his own, and then his breathing stopped.

"You did it, Lord," James whispered. "You never quit and You answered my prayer. You brought my brother home for Christmas!"



**Are you praying for a loved one? Perhaps you have almost given up hope. This story, though fictional, was inspired by a true testimony a friend shared with my wife Sharon a couple of months ago. (Thanks J. E. for telling about God's amazing answer to your prayers!)**

**The Christmas story is not a fable. It is the authentic account of a real Savior... a Savior each one of us desperately needs! Let's be reminded, and encouraged, that God hears His children's prayers and He never quits working! May this Christmas be one of renewed faith and hope, not only in our own lives, but also on behalf of loved ones who need to *come home to Jesus!***



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