

Tell Me  
About  
Heaven



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## CHAPTER ONE

# Into His Arms

Every June since he was three, Jake had spent two weeks with Papa and Grammy. They lived in Oregon, out in the country. Trees and streams were everywhere. Jake loved fishing in the lake and looking at the dark night sky through Papa's telescope. He loved smelling Grammy's roses blooming and eating the best strawberries he'd ever tasted.

But that cloudy Monday afternoon, as his dad turned up the road to Papa and Grammy's, Jake didn't feel his usual excitement.

Papa and Grammy had stayed at Jake's house for a week at Christmas, and Grammy didn't feel well. Then one cold night in February, she had a heart at-

tack. The doctors did their best, but Grammy died.

Jake's parents thought maybe he shouldn't stay with Papa this year, but Papa insisted. "Jake and I will be buddies for two weeks."

Jake liked the sound of being buddies with Papa. But he didn't like the thought of Grammy not being there. His parents encouraged him to talk about Grammy, but he didn't know what to say.

As they drove up the long dirt driveway, Papa came out of his old white farmhouse smiling. He hugged Jake first, then Jake's mom and dad. Then Papa stepped in the house and came out with a

puppy—a brown and white English springer spaniel. “Meet Moses,” Papa said. The puppy’s whole body wagged. He batted at Jake’s socks with his oversized paws and tugged on Jake’s shoestrings. Jake rolled him his soccer ball. They made friends instantly.

“Jake, stay away from the creek bank,” Mom warned.

“Have fun wading in the creek,” Dad told him. “But stay close to Papa.”

As his parents got into the car, they both said, “Have a great time!”

Jake waved goodbye. Moses wriggled in his arms and nibbled Jake’s nose with tiny needle teeth. Papa put one hand on Jake and one on Moses. “I’m so glad you came!”

Papa took Jake’s suitcase to the room full of soccer, football, basketball, and baseball stuff. It had been Jake’s mom’s room when she was little, but Grammy had made it into a boy’s room for him and his brother Ty and cousin Matt, who took their turns visiting each summer.

“Come on,” Papa said, walking toward the kitchen. “Dinner’s nearly ready.”

The smell of spaghetti filled the room. It looked

pretty good. But the bread wasn’t warm and fresh baked, and the spaghetti was lumpy. The sauce tasted different, but it had lots of meat. Later Papa took a store-bought apple pie out of the oven. It tasted good, but it wasn’t Grammy’s pie, the world’s best.

Papa asked Jake questions at dinner. But Jake was quiet. After cleaning up, they went into the living room. Papa sat in his big brown recliner, and Jake plopped on the end of the old blue couch.

“You don’t seem very happy, Jake,” Papa said. “What’s wrong?”

Jake hung his head. Finally he asked, “Why did Grammy have to die?”

Papa sighed and propped his hands on his knees. “She’s been gone four months. I wake up and reach over, then realize she’s not there. Once I had a tooth pulled, and my tongue kept going back to that space. That’s how every part of me feels about your grandmother. She’s missing, and nothing seems right. After Jesus, she was the best friend I’ve ever had.”

“I know she’s in Heaven ... but I wish I could bring Grammy back.”

Papa walked over and sat by Jake, putting his arm around him. “We both miss her and want to be

with her. But if I had the power to bring her back, I wouldn’t.”

“You wouldn’t?”

“Your grandmother’s with the most wonderful Person in the universe—Jesus. She doesn’t have heart problems or arthritis anymore. Wouldn’t it be cruel to bring her back to this world where there’s pain and disease and death?”

“I guess so, but ... what’s it like where Grammy is?” Jake looked up into Papa’s eyes. “Tell me about Heaven.”

“Well, Heaven is God’s home. There’s only one reliable place to learn about it: God’s Book. He wants to leave some surprises for us; so the Bible doesn’t tell us everything, but it does say a lot.”

“Heaven seems sort of spooky to me,” Jake admitted. “I saw a movie about people becoming ghosts when they die. I don’t like ghosts, and I don’t want to be one. You know my friend Daniel? His sister Lacey died a few months before Grammy. Lacey was only six.”

“Your mom mentioned Lacey,” Papa said. “She loved Jesus, didn’t she?”

Jake nodded.

“Whenever somebody who loves Jesus dies, they leave their bodies here, but I think they walk right into the arms of Jesus in Heaven. Can’t you just see Jesus hugging Lacey?”

“I guess so.”

“I’m sure He hugged your grandmother too. She probably felt like a little girl again. Jesus was a carpenter, a builder, and He promised He was going to prepare a place for us, a home just right for us. Maybe there’s a big sign over Heaven’s entrance that says, Welcome Home.”

“Samantha Perry says dead people are asleep. Is Grammy sleeping?”

“No, she’s wide awake. Samantha may be confused because sometimes the Bible calls dying “falling asleep,” since dead bodies appear to be sleeping. But the Bible says our spirits go right to Heaven. Do you remember what Jesus told the dying thief on the cross?”

Papa opened his big red Bible, and Jake looked at all the underlines.

Papa pointed to Luke 23. “Jesus said to the thief who repented, ‘*Today* you will be with me in paradise.’ The apostle Paul said that to die is to be with Christ.

And to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. To be with someone wouldn't mean much if you were sleeping, would it?"

"Then what's Grammy doing?"

Papa turned to Revelation 6:9-11. He read about some people who died, went to Heaven, and talked to God about things on earth. Papa said, "These people are alive and awake, and they're not like ghosts at all. They remember what happened on earth. And they're asking God to do something about it. That means they know about things here, and they're praying to God."

"So when you die ... you don't really die?"

"You die, but that doesn't mean you stop existing or fall asleep. It means you go to another place. In Luke 16 Jesus told about a rich man who died and went to Hell, but the man remembered his life on earth and his five brothers. He was sorry about how he had lived. I expect people in Heaven will remember their lives and families too and be interested in their loved ones."

Papa looked outside. "We've still got an hour's daylight. Let's take a walk."

Jake jumped up. There were lots of great places

to go near Papa's house. After they'd walked for ten minutes on a path in the woods, Papa said, "Okay, stay here."

Papa walked off the path twenty feet and stepped behind a thick Douglas fir. Moses was watching a squirrel. When the dog looked back, he cocked his head because, like Jake, he couldn't see Papa.

Jake waited. "Papa? What are you doing?"

Jake stood still, but he couldn't hear anything. Finally Papa stepped out from behind the tree and joined him back on the path. Moses jumped all over him, like he'd been gone a year.

"Okay," Papa asked, "when I went behind the tree, could you see or hear me?"

"No."

"Then I must have stopped existing, right? Or been sleeping?"

Jake laughed. "No. I knew you were there. I just couldn't see you."

"And we know where Grandma is, even though we can't see her. People's spirits go on living even after their bodies die. Only they're living in a different place where we can't see them. Those in Heaven are very happy, but they're also looking forward to

the resurrection, where their spirits will be joined to their bodies again."

They came to a creek, and Jake stuck his hand into the cold water. "I don't like it when people say, 'I heard you lost your grandma.'"

"Why don't you like that?"

"Because I *didn't* lose her," Jake said, wiping his hand on his jeans. "When you lose something, you don't know where it is. But since we know Grammy's in Heaven, we haven't lost her, have we?"

Papa got quiet. All Jake could hear was the water against the rocks. Finally Papa said, "Here I am trying to teach you about Heaven, and you're teaching me." He put his hand on Jake's shoulder.

"Twenty years ago your grandma went with our pastor's wife to Romania to visit an orphanage. For a whole week she couldn't phone me. I missed her. But

I never once said I'd lost her. I knew where she was. I knew who she was with. And even though we couldn't talk to each other, I knew I'd see her again. The same is true now. I know she's in Heaven. I know she's with Jesus, God's people, and angels. I know she's safe and happy in her new home. And I know that eventually I'll join her there."

"If Heaven's our home, does that mean the earth isn't?" Jake asked.

"That's a good question, and the answer is both yes and no," Papa said, eyes smiling. "But it's late. Let's get back to the house and make a fire."

"What about some hot chocolate?"

"That sounds good, doesn't it?" Papa said.

Moses barked and stared up at Papa, who leaned over and patted him on the head.

"Yeah, fella, we'll find a treat for you too."



