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SPECIAL VACATION
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Jeremy put the final pieces of fishing equipment into the trunk of the car along with all the camping gear and packed luggage; then he closed the trunk with a satisfied slam. At last -- at long last -- his dream was almost reality. For some time now he had looked forward to this very special day that would mark the beginning of a six-day vacation for his dad and himself. It seemed almost too good to be true -- his dad and him, alone! Sure, he would

miss his mother and his two young sisters; he had no doubt about this. But the thought of being alone with his father -- and for six days and five nights! -- well, it was exciting and exhilarating. They had never done anything like this before.

His mother had shaken her head vehemently and laughed when his dad had asked her would she go along, answering sweetly but positively, "No way, Jon! You know how well I like sleeping in a tent and cooking over an open fire or the Coleman camping stove! That's not my life, my dear. You and Jeremy go, and have a good time. The girls and I had our vacation back in the early part of summer, when we went to my folks' and attended camp meeting with them."

"But we've always vacationed together," Mr. Root said, sounding a bit sad and disappointed.

"And we'll vacation together again, God willing, Jon. This will be your and Jeremy's special vacation, dear," his mother declared sweetly. "I feel it's going to be just that," she added emphatically. "Special, I mean. And, frankly, I believe the Lord has ordered and ordained this gift of time to you, Jon, for a special reason."

Jeremy recalled his father's deep laugh and his reply; "You know," he said, "you may be right on target, Doris. I never cease to be amazed at your wisdom and your intuitiveness. This, from my heart. I've been so busy working that I haven't been able to give my family the time they should have; Jeremy especially. Yes, I'm sure you're right. Jeremy and I'll have a wonderful time together. There's not another boy in this world with whom I'd rather spend this vacation time."

Recalling the words of his father gave a spring to Jeremy's steps as he hurried into the house. He felt as light as air and as happy as the singing birds in the trees. He loved his father and mother; loved them deeply. And he was proud of his father, whose excellent salesmanship and honesty had induced his boss to give him this sudden, unexpected six-day vacation with pay. His father, feeling that every boy should have the privilege of spending time in the silence and solitude of the outdoors, chose the distant mountains for the vacation time and Jeremy was ecstatic over the choice Especially since his father and he would be "roughing" it, every facet of which was a challenge to him.

"I'm ready, Jeremy; how about you?" Mr. Root teased, meeting Jeremy as he stopped at the kitchen sink to get a drink of water from the faucet.

"Ready! Why Dad, I guess you could say I was ready from day one; ever since you told us about this vacation."

Mr. Root slapped his tall son on the shoulder and said, "Then it's off and away for us. First, though, it's prayer time together with everybody," and Mrs. Root and the girls followed husband and father into the living room for a season of prayer then stood beside the car as it pulled out of the driveway, waving and blowing kisses until the car was no longer visible

Jeremy felt honored to be driving. His dad was an excellent driver, but he had asked Jeremy to drive on the first lap of the journey. His father trusted him and had confidence in him, he knew, or he wouldn't have asked him to drive.

The thought made Jeremy feel great, and he wanted to do nothing except to please his father and drive carefully and according to every rule of the road, and prove himself worthy of his beloved parent's confidence and trust.

He thought of Tucker Adams, one of his peers, and how reckless and careless Tucker was and how his father was forced to refuse Tucker any use of the car until he practiced driving with more care and less speed. "Poor Tuck," Jeremy said.

"What happened to Tucker?" Mr. Root questioned, breaking in upon Jeremy's silent thoughts.

"Uh? Oh, Tuck. I guess I thought out loud," Jeremy answered with a smile. "He lost his driver's license, for one thing, and his dad won't allow him behind the wheel again until he makes some changes in his driving habits. He's a tiger, Dad, when he gets behind the wheel. He's daringly reckless."

"So that's the reason you never cared to go anywhere when Tuck was driving, huh?"

Jeremy smiled then nodded his head in the affirmative. "He nearly scared me to death the few times I went with him," he confessed. "He took one chance after another, and while passing on a hill, he would have crashed head-on into the driver coming over the hill had the other poor fellow not had instant reaction and beaded for the berm. I told him I'd ridden with him for the last time, until he'd change, and I've kept that promise"

They rode in silence for awhile, breaking out into conversation as the mood struck, feeling completely comfortable and content with each other's presence and company. Jeremy felt the closeness and reveled in it.

They reached their destination before dark, and after signing up in the park's office and consulting with a park ranger as to their camping site and its location, they drove away. Jeremy's heart hammered with excitement. This was it; one of the greatest and biggest times of his existence so far.

Mr. Root seemed as excited as his son when they reached their "home" for the six-day stay and began putting up the tent and, ultimately, setting up housekeeping. The site was beautiful, canopied overhead by tree branches and carpeted thickly with pine and fir needles, the fragrance of which trees filled the air and sent softly whispered messages above him in a continual swishing sound.

What a perfect setting for a good night's sleep! Jeremy thought as he inflated the two air mattresses and took them into the tent before unrolling the warm sleeping bags and putting one on each mattress.

They ate their supper around the open fire which Jeremy's father started in a sort of pit in an open area, away from anything that may catch fire and which was surrounded by rocks and stones. The food tasted delicious and the closeness between father and son was wonderful and sweet.

They sat for a long while watching the embers glow in the darkness, savoring every precious moment of the beautiful night, saying little but feeling much. A brisk breeze rustled the branches above them and swept over their backs with a chill. Jeremy rushed into the tent and returned with the jackets they had brought, draping one over his father's shoulders and shrugging into his own.

"That sure makes a difference, Son," Mr. Root remarked, as he slipped his arms into the jacket. "Thanks much."

"And thanks to you for that delicious supper, Dad. It certainly tastes different out here. Wonderfully different."

Mr. Root laughed. "You can say that again!" he exclaimed, adding, "You know, Jeremy, there's something about this silence and the quiet of these mountains that whets my appetite after God, too. My soul is reaching out to Him for a deepening in Him. I sense His sacred Being and His holy Presence in such a wonderful way and, in sensing, I long for a time of prayer with Him. A time to get closer to Him. Don't you sense this?"

"Very much so, Dad. Why don't we pray now, right here where we are?"

"That's what I wanted, Jeremy. He said for us to draw nigh to Him and He would draw nigh to us. My soul thirsts for Him; for a new infilling and a new outpouring. . . ."

The crescent moon which had hung its silver lantern in the eastern sky when father and son began praying, had traveled some distance toward center when they finished and bedded down inside the tent for the night, refreshed wonderfully and gloriously in their souls and bonded together more strongly than ever in the parent-child relationship.

Jeremy awoke the following morning to the tantalizing odor of sizzling bacon. He crawled out of the sleeping bag and stuck his head out of the tent and said cheerily, "Good morning, to the best chef in these mountains. Dad, I feel starved. When do we eat?"

"Within ten minutes. Or less. Everything's ready except the eggs. How do you want yours, Jeremy?"

"Like yours, sunny side up. I'll be there in less than four minutes, Dad."

The air was fresh and clean and ever so fragrant with pine scent, and the hash browns and bacon and eggs never tasted better. Something about the mountains seemed to put extra flavor into the food, Jeremy thought, as he washed and dried the dishes and put them back into the cardboard box in readiness for the next meal.

The morning was spent in fishing. They rowed out into the lake in a boat they had rented. The water was crystal clear; so clear, in fact, that the reflection of the mountain surrounding it looked like a mirrored piece of perfect art work. Jeremy was overwhelmed by the beauty, and time and again he gave a silent exclamation of praise to the Lord.

They anchored the boat and cast their lines, reeling in, then casting again, and soon each had caught a trout. Then more. And still more.

"We'll take only what we can eat," Mr. Root stated. "There'll be more here when we need them again. What a feast these will make! I can almost taste them, baked in foil over the hot stones and seasoned with that Lemon Pepper seasoning your mother packed in for us. She doesn't forget a thing, Jeremy. Not a thing!" he added emphatically. "What a woman, and what a wife!"

"The best mother in the world," Jeremy declared. The day passed pleasantly with fishing, hiking, picking wild huckleberries and blackberries and reading. Jeremy knew that no matter what other great experiences and times he may have in his life, this vacation time alone with his father would always be at the top of everything. So many times he had longed for something like this, and now the Lord had granted him his deepest, inmost desire. And it had gone way beyond that inmost desire, even. It was, indeed, the "shaken together, and running over" blessing of fulfillment.

Rainy days -- two in all -- found them on the lake in waterproof slickers and hats catching their supper fish then reading inside the tent, and falling asleep at night to the sound of rain washing the A-frame "house."

"Dad," Jeremy said one night midway into the vacation as they sat by the fire watching the glowing red-hot embers, "I want to thank you for this very special time. It's meant more to me than I'm able to express and to tell. It has made me realize again just how sincere and genuine your love is for the members of your family; me in particular, in this instance

"I've never told you this before, but tonight I will. It was your exemplary Christian walk and close contact with God that gave me my first ever desire to be saved as a very little boy. I felt Jesus must certainly be a very kind and loving Savior because you have always been so kind and loving and gentle

to us and with us. And because of your example, and your likeness to the Christ whom you extolled and loved and praised so much, I became converted and then was sanctified wholly later on. Your influence, and your constantly consistent walk with the Lord, led me to the Heavenly Father, whose likeness you portrayed and demonstrated every day of your life.

"I've wanted to say this to you--to tell it to you-but just never did. Sitting here, around the fire, just the two of us, I felt I must let you know. You will have at least one star in your crown, Dad. And with all this very special vacation time which you are investing in me, I want to say thank you. I love you, Dad. You are special/" Tears paraded down Mr. Root's cheeks. In a brokenly-hoarse whisper, he said, "Thanks, Jeremy. Thanks. I love you." And suddenly the specialness of the vacation took on a deeply-lasting significance.

They looked at each other and smiled.