

Family Forever—Book Two

just another
Dream

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This book is dedicated to our Heavenly Father, from Whom every good thing comes.

And to Jeffrey David Banet, my husband of thirty-six years, seven months, and nine days. You were my greatest gift from God. Thank you for everything. I pray we are reunited in eternity.

*Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart,
because I have overcome the world. (John 16:33 NLT)*

prologue

Sam Grayson crossed his arms. *I shouldn't be this cold in June.* The rising nausea didn't help either. He pulled himself together to focus on the doctor's words.

"I'm sorry." The emergency room doctor had bags beneath his eyes. He placed a hand on Sam's shoulder. "There's nothing more we can do. We can keep him comfortable, but he won't last through the morning."

Sam swallowed hard. "Will he wake up? Can he hear me?"

"I doubt he'll wake up. I don't know for certain if he can hear you but talk to him just in case."

He nodded. There was nothing else to say.

The doctor left the room.

Sam turned toward the bed where his father lay. The antiseptic smell of the hospital room mixed with the sight of his father connected to tubes and machines made his nausea worse by the second. He exhaled a breath he hadn't realized he was holding.

He pushed his hair away from his eyes. The bedside monitor's beeps were loud and irregular. The lines across the top of the screen grew more erratic with each passing moment. He

reached for his father's lifeless hand. *Please, God, I've messed up these last few months. There are things I didn't get to say.*

From what he'd been told on the phone, he didn't think he'd make it here in time, but by the grace of God, he did. Now was his chance to say what he wanted to say.

"If you can hear me, I need you to keep fighting." Sam's voice was barely audible. *Pull it together. Stay strong.* "We haven't had enough time together." As cold as his own hand was, his father's was colder. His color was even worse than when Sam first arrived. Pale. No, not pale. Ashen.

Why can't I cry? Maybe the shock of the situation kept the tears at bay. Or maybe he was just ... numb. Regret replaced the tears. The period apart from each other had been a mistake, and time and distance made Sam see that.

"Sam." The weak voice registered above the beeping and whooshing of the machinery in the room.

He snapped his head up and stared into his father's half-opened eyes. "You're awake!" God had heard his prayer.

His father spoke again, but his voice was hoarse.

Sam lifted a cup to his lips and used a plastic spoon to place ice chips in his mouth. He smiled slightly.

"I ... have to tell you something." A deep, rattling cough racked his entire body.

"It's okay, you don't need to say anything." Sam grabbed the remote from the bedside table and pushed the call button.

"Yes, you need ..." The cough worsened, his face more ashen than before.

"Shh, it's okay." Sam prayed the nurse would hurry.

His dad's chest rattle became louder, and his cough was relentless.

"Have to tell you ..." His father gasped each word like it might be his last. "Closer."

Sam moved his head next to his father's. "I'm right here. What is it?"

His father whispered four words. Chopped, clipped words, but Sam understood them just the same.

His heart thudded, and he couldn't catch his breath. The words pierced him to the core. All he could do was stare. *Breathe, Sam. Just. Breathe.*

After a long moment, Sam opened his mouth to ask one of many questions running through his head, but his father gasped.

All the monitors blared, and the doctor and several nurses rushed in. An older nurse guided Sam by the shoulders and moved him away from the bedside.

He could no longer see his father for the action surrounding his bed. His eyes were glued to the monitor. He held his breath as the jagged lines flattened. All the beeping and varying tones grew monotone, flat, like the lines on the display.

The doctor called out the time of day. As if in slow motion, he turned away from the bed and walked to where Sam stood. Once again, he placed his hand on Sam's shoulder. "I'm sorry. He's gone." The doctor paused. Even he didn't know what to say. "You can sit here as long as you'd like."

Sam was unable to reply or even nod. And he still couldn't cry. Why couldn't he even now?

The nurses slowly unplugged the wires from his father's lifeless body, while Sam remained in his chair.

Eventually, the nurses left the room.

Paralysis gripped him. He had no idea how long he'd sat there, motionless. He replayed the man's last words at least a hundred times.

How do I move forward, Lord? What do I do with this information?