

Peace on Earth?
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“Get out! Now!”

Jimmy stared at his father, his face stinging, his eyes watering, his anger building.

“Did you hear me?!” his father yelled. “Get out now before I slug you again!”

Jimmy looked at his crying mother, her eyes pleading with him. Seven-year-old Britney and ten-year-old Michael Jr. huddled in fear behind the couch. Jimmy’s father took another step toward him, and Jimmy, overwhelmed by the stench of alcohol and sweat, grabbed his coat and was out the door, leaving the chaos behind him.

He walked as fast as he could until he was three blocks away. Then he slowed his pace and took a deep breath. The quiet enveloped him. Words and tears welled up inside him but he resisted the urge to swear. Swearing was as natural as breathing in his house, but as a new Christian, he knew swearing did nothing to remedy the situation and was dishonoring to God.

“Why does he have to ruin everything!” he finally said.

He looked up and down the street. Christmas lights twinkled, and through a window he could see a Christmas tree.

He felt a heavy sadness. There had been no Christmas tree at his house, which is what had started the fight. His mother had suggested they go down to the tree lot where they gave away leftover trees on Christmas Eve, but the suggestion had thrown his father into a rage. He wasn’t about to accept charity. He had slapped his mother across the face, the red imprint of his hand appearing almost immediately. Without thinking, Jimmy had stepped in and pushed his father away. The next impact was for him, a full right cross that sent Jimmy sprawling. When he managed to get up, his father had demanded he get out.

But now what? he thought.

He took a deep breath. “Lord, I could sure use some of the ‘peace on earth’ tonight.”

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“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace tonight. May someone see your love and protection through me.”

Officer James Keegan prayed those words every night before going on patrol. He was a rookie cop, who saw his role as a police officer as the perfect parallel of a loving heavenly father: protector and conveyer of justice and peace. Tonight, Christmas Eve, he felt a heightened sense of anticipation, for even though he was a bachelor, he had made himself a huge Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. Now four-fifths of it sat in his refrigerator. He could be eating turkey for a long time. Then there was the last of the Blue Santa gifts still in his trunk -- a mixup at the station as shoppers had bought for one family twice, so the presents would sit in his trunk until it could be sorted out after the holidays.

“One Edward Four, ten-eight,” James called in. He was now officially on duty.

“Roger that One Edward Four,” came the reply.

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Jimmy shivered. The chill of the evening air was settling in. His stomach rumbled, reminding him he hadn't eaten. He pulled his jacket tighter and prayed. Though hungry and cold, he knew there was more pressing business. The options churned inside him, but finally he felt a peace and his actions became clear. It wouldn't be easy, but it was the right thing to do. He took a deep breath, got his bearings, and headed down Main Street, destination a couple of miles away.

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Officer James Keegan started his patrol down Main Street, the police radio crackling in the background. Off to his right, he saw a walker, hunched over, bracing against the cold, and walking deliberately toward him. Curious, Keegan pulled over. Who would be out walking in this bitter cold? The walker approached the car.

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Jimmy's heart caught. The patrol car saved him the two mile walk to the station but also meant he couldn't change his mind. When the passenger window rolled down and Jimmy stepped to the curb, relief washed over him. This was God's confirmation that he was doing the right thing, for behind the wheel was Officer Keegan, the man who helped out his youth group, the man who had led him to Christ.

"Jimmy!" Officer Keegan exclaimed. "What are you doing out in this cold? Get in."

Jimmy willingly obliged, shutting the door on the cold.

"What's going on?" Keegan asked.

Jimmy stared at his hands and took a deep breath. This wasn't easy.

"My father," he said. "He hit my mom."

Keegan let out a sigh. Michael Price was at it again -- and on Christmas Eve no less. He shook his head.

"Jimmy," he said quietly. "You know when I get there, your mother won't press charges. And if she doesn't, then there isn't much I can do."

Jimmy continued to stare at his hands but when he looked up, in the dim light, Keegan could just detect some lividity on Jimmy's cheek.

"Jimmy?" he asked softly.

"He hit *me* this time," Jimmy said. "I want to press charges." He paused before continuing. "I figure if he is willing to hit me now, then it is only a matter of time before he might start on Mike Jr. or Britney"

Keegan nodded. He didn't tell Jimmy that it was unnecessary for him to press charges. Jimmy was a minor and Keegan was now obligated to report and investigate, but he knew the decision had been hard for Jimmy. Keegan smiled weakly. This was indeed a bitter blessing. A young teen and his family were hurting, but they would at least have a peaceful Christmas Eve for once. He depressed his mic.

"One Edward Four," he said. "Sarah, I'm taking Jimmy Price to my house for a minute while I go get his father. I'll explain when I get in. Then I'll take him home."

"Roger that One Edward Four."

As they drove toward Keegan's home he looked over at Jimmy.

"Jimmy, you need to know that God has had His hand in all this," he said.

Jimmy just looked at him. As a new Christian he wasn't used to seeing God in the middle of such chaos.

"How?"

“Oh, you’ll see,” he said with a slight smile. “Let’s just say it involves quite a bit of turkey and a trunkful of presents.”

Jimmy’s stomach rumbled at the mention of turkey and he smiled at the thought of presents. Then another thought occurred to him.

“Do you think God could throw in a Christmas tree?”