

— *an* —  
**AMISH**  
— *singing* —

FOUR STORIES



AMY CLIPSTON



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## CHAPTER ONE

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Sharon Lambert sighed with contentment as she strolled with Alice and Darlene toward the field of horses and buggies waiting for their owners to start the trek home. The church service and community meal had been held at Alice's family's dairy farm, which meant Sharon could walk home from the Blanks' whenever she wanted.

The early April air was cool and crisp as she breathed in the scent of a rain-soaked pasture and enjoyed the warm sun that kissed her cheek. Springtime had made its way to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and when she glanced at the cheerful flowers in Alice's garden, they seemed to smile as if they'd invited the warmer weather just for them.

"I heard everyone is going to play volleyball over in Ronks this afternoon." Alice pushed the ties from her prayer covering off the shoulders of her yellow dress and white apron. "Do you want to join them?"

Sharon looked her way. With Alice's reddish-brown hair and mocha-colored eyes, Sharon had always considered her one of the prettiest young women in their church district. Today was no exception.

"I don't know." Darlene blew out a sigh and looked toward

where her father and older sister stood talking to some neighbors. “*Mei mamm* hasn’t been doing well since her treatment on Friday. I’m surprised *mei dat* was willing to leave her today, but he insisted the rest of the family come. We all wish patients receiving chemotherapy treatments could be around large crowds, but since their immune system is suppressed, she’d run the risk of getting *krank*.”

“So she has some good days?” Sharon touched Darlene’s arm as concern about the Bender family slid through her. She’d known Darlene and Alice since they were all in first grade together fourteen years ago. They were best friends, and she cared about their families too.

Sharon noticed Darlene’s demeanor as she looked at her sister and father again. Sharon had always envied Darlene’s golden-colored hair and pretty brown eyes, too, but today she saw only the worry in her friend’s eyes.

“Sometimes, but most days are tough.” Darlene’s voice wobbled, and Sharon gave her arm a little squeeze as her own throat dried.

“I’m so sorry,” Alice said. “I know it’s Sunday, so we can’t help with chores today. But there must be something we can do to help out this afternoon.”

“No.” Darlene shook her head. “We’ll be fine. Go have fun with our *freinden*.”

“What are you three doing today?” Cal King asked as he approached them with Jay Smoker and Andrew Detweiler in tow.

All around the same age, the six of them had always been friends, but over the past year, they’d become a tight group.

Sharon tried to clear her dry throat as she looked up at Jay. Although she was taller than Alice and Darlene, which they’d once confessed to envying, Jay still stood a few inches taller than her—about six feet.

Inwardly, she sighed a little. Although Andrew and Cal were

handsome, too, lately Jay had stood out as not just good-looking but intriguing. At twenty-three, two years older than her, he was about the same height as his friends, but he somehow seemed even taller. And she'd noticed how well his light-brown hair and honey-colored eyes complemented his chiseled cheekbones and enticing smile.

She'd always thought he was attractive when they were in school and youth group together, but he also seemed more mature these past few months. He'd seemed more serious as well, especially during church services.

"I was just talking about playing volleyball with everyone else at Katie Miller's *haus*," Alice said.

"Let's do something different." The words seemed to burst from Sharon's lips.

"Like what?" Jay's gorgeous eyes focused on Sharon's, and her heart did a little dance.

"I noticed Martha Bontrager wasn't in church today. I thought maybe we could go sing for her and brighten her day, so I asked her *sohn* if that would be okay. He said it would, and he promised not to mention it to her, so if we go, it will be a surprise."

Jay nodded before dividing a look between Cal and Andrew. "I think that's a *wunderbaar* idea. Don't you agree?"

"Absolutely." Cal lifted his hat and pushed back his golden hair. "Let's do it."

Sharon turned to Darlene, suddenly feeling guilty. Why had she suggested they sing for Martha when Darlene's mother was so ill? "We can sing for your *mamm* instead."

Darlene shook her head. "No, it's okay. She likes it quiet after she has a treatment. She really doesn't want visitors."

"How is she doing?" Andrew asked.

"She's hanging in there. Anyway, I need to go check in with

*mei dat* and *schweschder*.” Her smile seemed forced before she hurried off.

“Is she all right?” Andrew’s dark eyes seemed full of worry. He was such a good guy.

“I’m not sure. She doesn’t share much about what she’s going through.” Sharon turned toward where Darlene now spoke to her family.

Alice frowned. “Maybe her *mamm* doesn’t want us coming to the *haus*, but let’s ask Darlene soon if we can help them some other way.”

“That’s a *gut* plan.” Jay stepped closer to Sharon, and his nearness sent her senses spinning. What was wrong with her? She’d known him since she was seven years old!

She saw Darlene nod at her father, and then she returned. “*Mei dat* thinks I should go singing with you. He just asked me not to stay out too long.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to go home instead?” Sharon asked. She didn’t want Darlene to feel obligated to go with them.

“No.” Darlene shook her head. “I want to go with you. *Mei dat* and Biena said they’ll take care of *Mamm* this afternoon. It’s the Lord’s day. Let’s go to Martha’s *haus* and bring her some joy.”

Alice looked behind her. “Let’s invite Dave too.”

When Alice approached Dave Esh and said something, Sharon saw him stick his hands in his pockets and look down, shaking his head. Alice frowned and nodded before returning to the group. Dave had always been a part of their activities until a tragedy occurred last winter, but Sharon wasn’t surprised he wouldn’t come.

“He said he can’t go.” Alice looked back at Dave as he made his way toward the knot of buggies. “I was hoping he’d say *ya*.”

“Dave has been best *freinden* with Cal and me forever,” Jay said, and then he turned to Cal. “We won’t give up on him, right?”

“Ya,” Cal said. “That’s right.” But Sharon thought Cal looked a little less sure about that.

“I just need to let *Mamm* and *Dat* know I’m going.” Sharon hurried to where her parents were talking to friends by the barn. She hoped Jay would wait for her and give her a ride to Martha’s house. The thought of sitting beside him in his buggy sent a thrill racing through her.

She stood near her family a little impatiently until her mother noticed her, but she didn’t want to interrupt her conversation.

“Sharon!” *Mamm* finally said. “Are you and your *freinden* going to play volleyball this afternoon? I heard that was the plan for all the young people today.”

“No.” Sharon jammed her thumb toward the buggies. “We’re going to go sing at Martha Bontrager’s *haus* since she wasn’t in church today. Her *sohn* said it would be okay.”

“Oh. I think she’ll like that.” When it looked like she wouldn’t be interrupting either, *Mamm* got *Dat*’s attention with a hand on his arm. “Ira, Sharon and her *freinden* are going to go sing at Martha Bontrager’s *haus*.”

“That’s awfully nice.” *Dat* smiled. “Be home for supper, though.”

“I will.” Sharon looked at her sister, who’d joined them. “What are you doing this afternoon?”

Ruby Sue nodded toward a group of teenagers behind her. “I’m going to play volleyball. *Mei freinden* and I are leaving in a few minutes.”

“Be careful,” Sharon told her before waving good-bye to her family. “I’ll see you all later.” She rushed back to where Alice was standing with Andrew by his buggy. “Where’s everyone else?”

Andrew opened the passenger-side door. “Jay said he had to run home for a minute, and Darlene and Cal just left for Martha’s. Hop on in.”

“Oh.” Sharon tried to disguise her disappointment as she maneuvered into the back of the buggy, doing her best to swallow a frown. She’d really wanted to ride with Jay.

Alice and Andrew sat on the front bench seat as Andrew guided the horse down the rock driveway toward the main road.

“*Danki* for coming with me to Martha’s,” Sharon said as the horse *clip-clopped* down the road. “While I was praying in church today, I felt moved to do something more meaningful than play games this afternoon.”

Alice looked back at her. “I’m glad you suggested this.”

Andrew nodded while keeping his eyes on the road. He was the quiet one in their group. When Jay and Cal joked and horsed around, Andrew just smiled as he looked on. Sharon often wondered what he was thinking.

“Martha’s *sohn* thought she’d appreciate company. She must be lonely since Herman died. It’s only been six months,” Sharon said as Andrew guided the horse onto Martha’s street.

“I’m sure you’re right,” Alice said.

Andrew guided the horse into the driveway that led past the main Bontrager house to Martha’s small, whitewashed *daadihaus* at the back of the dairy farm. As the horse approached the little building, Sharon spotted Martha sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch.

Cal was tying his horse to a post beside the house as Darlene made her way to Martha. Andrew halted his horse beside Cal’s, and Alice and Sharon climbed out of the buggy to join the other women.

“Good afternoon, Martha,” Sharon called as she and Alice climbed the porch steps. “*Wie geht’s?*” Sharon took in Martha’s bright smile amid the many wrinkles that lined her face.

“I’m well. What brings you all here today?”

“We wanted to see you since you weren’t in church today,” Sharon said.

“And we thought we might sing for you too,” Alice chimed in.

Martha clapped her hands together. “What a blessing! I prayed for some company, and the Lord has provided it for me. And I would love to hear you sing.” She looked past them as Andrew and Cal joined them. “You brought your handsome boyfriends too.”

“Oh no.” Sharon laughed as Alice and Darlene shook their heads. “We’re all just *freinden*.”

“My Herman and I started out as *freinden*. You never know.” Martha pushed herself up from the rocking chair and then hobbled toward the front door with the aid of a cane.

“Let me help.” Andrew opened the door wide for her.

“*Danki*.” Martha gazed up at him, and with her tiny frame, she looked like a child next to him. She touched his arm. “You’re a *gut bu*.”

Sharon looked at Alice, and they shared a grin.

Martha beckoned them to follow her. “Come into the kitchen. My daughter-in-law brought me *kichlin* from the bakery yesterday.”

“May I help you get them out?” Sharon offered as she stepped to the counter.

“*Ya*.” Martha pointed to a box. “The *kichlin* are there.”

“What can I do?” Darlene asked.

“I’ll help too,” Alice said.

Martha directed them to plates, napkins, and glasses, and soon they were all eating oatmeal raisin cookies and drinking milk, crowded around the small kitchen table with the aid of folding chairs Cal and Andrew brought from a tiny utility room.

“How have you been?” Cal asked Martha between bites of a cookie.

Martha turned toward the window that looked out over a vast green pasture dotted with cows and outlined by a white fence. “I

miss my husband. We were together nearly seventy years.” She sighed. “It seems strange to wake up alone and then spend the day longing to tell him things.”

Sharon glanced at Alice, who looked at Martha with the empathy Sharon had come to appreciate from her.

“But God is *gut*.” Martha’s expression lightened. “After all, he sent you all to see me today. That’s just what I needed.”

Darlene smiled. “Sharon suggested we come, and we loved the idea.”

“You’re all so thoughtful. I didn’t sleep well last night, so I was too tired to get to church. I seem to have trouble sleeping now that Herman is gone.” Martha’s wrinkled hand shook as she picked up a cookie. “Now, what are you all going to sing for me?”

Sharon’s friends all turned their gaze to her.

“What do you think?” Alice asked.

Sharon bit her lower lip as her favorite hymns clicked through her mind. “How about we start with ‘Rock of Ages’?”

“*Ya*,” Andrew said, and their other friends nodded in agreement. “You sing the first verse, and then we’ll join in.”

Sharon closed her eyes and smiled as the Holy Spirit filled her with warmth. Yes, she belonged here, sharing the Lord’s love with this dear, lonely woman.

If only Jay were here to sing with them . . . Where was he?

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## CHAPTER TWO

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Jay blew out a sigh of relief when he spotted his friends' horses tied up next to Martha's house. He glanced down at his fresh pair of trousers and rolled his eyes.

When he told Andrew and Cal he had to go home first, covering the evidence the best he could with his hat, he couldn't bring himself to admit that just as Sharon left to talk to her family, he'd noticed he'd dropped peanut butter spread on his trousers during lunch. He'd tried to get the spot out in the bathroom, but that just made it worse. Not only was the spot then wet, but the peanut butter spread smeared.

He couldn't imagine going to Martha's like that. So he'd hurried home, changed, and hoped his friends would still be there when he arrived.

He was grateful they all wanted to do something today. He needed to get his mind off his loss. His grandfather had died almost a month ago, but he still missed him to the depth of his soul. He'd been more than his grandfather; he'd been one of his best friends and his greatest confidant. Jay felt lost without his sage counsel.

Putting those thoughts aside, Jay secured his horse and then jogged around to the front of the little house and up the porch

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steps. He raised his hand to knock on the screen door but then froze when he heard a single beautiful voice singing inside.

His heart seemed to turn over in his chest as he took in the lyrical tune and angelic voice singing “How Great Thou Art.”

His lips turned up in a smile. That had to be Sharon. He’d caught her singing “Jesus Loves Me” with one of the toddlers in their church district a few weeks ago, and he was struck by the beauty of her voice. But he’d noticed more than her singing voice lately. He’d seen her in a whole new light.

They’d known each since she started school when she was seven and he was nine. As the years went by, he’d always found an easy friendship with her. During the past couple of months, though, he’d found himself wondering if they could be more than friends. The feelings had seemed to come out of nowhere, and they’d stunned him. Was it even possible that Sharon could see him as someone to . . . love? Or would she reject that idea as a crazy notion?

He pulled open the screen door and stepped into the small family room. After navigating past the furniture in that tight space, he stood in the doorway of the kitchen to listen. Sharon was still singing alone, her eyes closed.

Jay was mesmerized, his own eyes glued to her face. With light-brown hair, baby-blue eyes, high cheekbones, and pink lips, she was so pretty. Had she grown more beautiful just this week?

Sharon opened her eyes and stopped singing when her eyes locked onto his. Her mouth closed, and then her cheeks turned bright pink as she glanced down at her lap—as pink as her dress against a white apron.

What did that mean?

“Jay!” Martha said, her greeting enthusiastic. “How nice of you to come. Please sit down and sing with us.”

Cal grinned at him. “It’s about time you got here. We saved you a chair.”

“Sorry I’m late.” Jay cleared his throat and entered the kitchen. The empty chair was next to Sharon. *Perfect*. He smiled to himself as he sat down next to her. “Hi,” he whispered. “I’m sorry I interrupted you.”

“It’s no problem.” She gave him a little shrug and then looked across the table at Alice, who seemed to give her a strange expression.

“We have *kichlin*.” Sharon pushed a plate of cookies toward him. “Would you like some milk?” She popped up from her chair. “I’ll get you a glass.”

“Oh, you don’t have to—”

“I’m *froh* to.” Sharon took another glass from a cabinet and brought it to the table. “Here you go.”

“*Danki*.” He poured himself some milk. “You sounded amazing.”

She waved off the compliment. “I lost my place . . .”

Had she been about to say more? That she lost her place when she saw him? Maybe she felt the same growing attraction between them he did. Was it even possible for her to care for him after being just his friend nearly her whole life?

“Should we start over? Or should we try a different hymn?” Alice asked.

“Have you sung ‘Peace Like a River’ yet?” Jay asked.

Sharon turned and blessed him with a sweet smile. “Oh. One of my favorites.”

“Mine too.” He returned her smile, and he was certain something special passed between them. He felt the sudden urge to ask her if she’d like a ride home so they could talk alone.

“Great.” Alice said before she gave them the first note. It was a blessing so many of his friends had perfect pitch.

Everyone joined her as Martha nodded her head along with the beat. He discreetly leaned a little closer to Sharon and enjoyed the lovely lilt of her voice.

They sang and talked with Martha until it was close to supper-time, when Sharon stood and started gathering glasses and plates. “We’ll clean up before we leave, Martha.”

Alice scooped up the napkins and utensils, and Darlene lifted the plate, now empty of cookies. Soon all three of them were at work.

Martha pushed back her chair, and both Jay and Cal jumped up to help her as she stood. Andrew handed her the cane. Then Martha looked up at Jay and patted his cheek with a frail hand. “I appreciate that you all came out to see me today.”

“It was Sharon’s idea.” When Sharon turned from the sink and gave him a shy smile, warmth seemed to rise from some new place in his heart.

“May we make supper for you before we leave?” Darlene made the offer as she dried a plate Sharon handed her.

“No, *danki*.” Martha shook her head and then leaned against the counter. “*Mei sohn* and his family insist I share meals with them.” A smile broke out on her lips. “I suppose they’re afraid I’ll leave the burner on under a pot and burn down the *haus*.”

Jay and his friends laughed.

“They keep asking me to move in with them, too, but I enjoy my privacy here.”

When the kitchen was clean, they told Martha good night and then filed outside.

Jay turned to Sharon. “Could I give you a ride home?”

Her pretty eyes widened as she nodded. “That would be nice.”

Alice sidled up to them. “Could I ride with you, too, Jay? Since my farm is beside hers?”

“Oh, of course.” Disappointment threatened to strangle his excitement, but he managed to keep his expression pleasant.

“Have a *gut* week at the store.” Cal patted Jay’s back.

“You too. Sell a lot of horses for your *dat*.” Jay shook Andrew’s hand. “I hope you have a *gut* week at your *dat*’s furniture store.”

“*Danki*.”

Darlene asked Cal for a ride, then they both waved good-bye to everyone before climbing into his buggy.

When Jay slipped into his buggy with Sharon on the bench seat beside him, his happiness returned. At least he could enjoy having her there during the short ride home.

“That was fun,” Alice said from the back as Jay guided the horse toward the road. “I think Martha enjoyed it.”

“I do too.” Jay snuck a peek at Sharon, who was smiling as she gazed out the windshield. He took in her profile and tried to commit it to memory.

“I’m so glad we went,” she finally said. “First, I just kept feeling like we needed to do something meaningful this afternoon, and then during the second sermon, it was as if God put the idea to sing for Martha in my heart.” Sharon looked at Jay, and her expression grew sheepish. “Does that sound *gegisch*?”

He shook his head as he peered out at the rolling patchwork of green on the farms they passed. “I don’t think it’s silly at all.”

“I don’t either,” Alice piped up from the back.

“Have you ever felt led to do something?” Sharon asked him.

“I have.” Jay opened his mouth to share a story, but he was cut off by Alice.

“We need to do this more often,” she said. “We should sing for more church members who are alone or *krank*.”

Sharon turned around and nodded. “I agree.”

Jay once again longed to be alone with Sharon so they could really talk. Maybe he could give her a ride home after church in

two weeks. Or if they all sang for someone before then, he could ask her if she needed a ride and maybe ask Cal to give Alice a ride.

“How is your family doing?” Sharon’s question broke through his thoughts. “I’m so sorry about your *daadi*.”

“We’re okay. We really miss him, but we’re leaning on God’s comfort. *Danki*.”

“Of course,” she said. “How’s business at your *dat*’s lawn ornament store?”

He glanced toward her and found her looking at him rather intently. “It’s *gut*. This is the start of our busy season, and we get a lot of rush orders too. We’re already selling quite a few wishing wells and lighthouses. We had to hire more carpenters to keep up with the demand.”

“That’s exciting.” Sharon tilted her head as if studying him. “Do you like making lawn ornaments?”

“I do.” He nodded. “I like working with my hands.”

“Do you think you’ll take over the business someday?”

“I hope *Dat* will ask me to when he’s ready to retire. After all, I’m his only *kind*, and of course, his only *sohn*. At least I hope he does instead of asking one of *mei onkels*.”

“I’m sure he will.” Sharon looked out the side window at the traffic rushing by.

He merged onto a road that would lead them to Alice’s farm first. “How’s your *dat*’s dairy farm doing?”

Sharon shrugged. “Well, I think it’s fine. *Dat* seems *froh*, and he has two farmhands to help him.”

“*Mei bruder* helps *mei dat* on our farm,” Alice announced from behind them.

This time Jay was startled by Alice’s voice. He’d almost forgotten he and Sharon weren’t alone in the buggy.

Sharon’s smile faded slightly. “I used to wonder if *mei dat* regrets not having a *sohn*, since Ruby Sue and I don’t help with

the farmwork as much as a *bu* would. We mostly help *Mamm* in the *haus*.”

Jay was struck by this comment. Could a father truly regret not having a child the “right” gender? Wasn’t each child a gift from God?

“I doubt that,” Alice said. “Your *dat* is so loving and patient. He adores you and Ruby Sue.”

“I suppose.” Sharon’s smile returned. “Do you like being an only *kind*, Jay?”

He shrugged. “It’s all I’ve ever known, so I’m not sure if I like it or dislike it. And I have a lot of cousins, so I’m never lonely, especially at family gatherings.”

“That makes sense.”

Jay spotted Alice’s farm ahead of them and Sharon’s in the distance. The ride with Sharon would soon end, and disappointment gripped him almost as hard as he gripped the reins. But at least he’d have a few minutes alone with her.

“*Danki* for the ride,” Alice said as the buggy moved up her rock driveway.

“*Gern gschehne*.”

Jay halted the horse by her back porch, and then Sharon jumped down from the buggy to help Alice make her way out. She gave her friend a quick hug. “See you soon.”

Alice waved at Jay. “*Danki* again.”

He waved back. “Have a *gut* week.”

Sharon returned to the buggy as Alice climbed the back-porch steps. Then as his horse started down the driveway, Jay wished he could just keep riding around Bird-in-Hand with Sharon at his side.

“Do you have any special plans this week?” she asked as his horse *clip-clopped* up the street toward her father’s farm.

“Just work, as far as I know.”

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“Oh.” She looked at him and smiled again. “I appreciate the ride home.”

“Anytime.” He guided the horse into her driveway and halted it by the back porch before angling his body toward hers. “Let me know if you want to sing for another church member. I’d love to join you.”

“Of course. We need your voice. Singing wouldn’t be the same without you, Cal, and Andrew.”

His smile wobbled at the mention of his friends’ names. Did she like one of them? She’d accepted his offer for a ride, but maybe she would have preferred to ride home with Andrew or Cal. He ignored the threatening jealousy and concentrated on her sweet smile.

He was glad he did. Somehow, it felt as though it was meant for only him.

Sharon pushed the buggy door open and stepped out.

“Remember. Call me if you want to get together to sing again this week,” he said.

“I will. Be safe going home.” She pushed the door closed.

He lifted his hand in a wave and then started his journey home.

He smiled as he recalled his afternoon with Sharon and their friends. He could still hear her beautiful voice singing ‘How Great Thou Art.’” He would be so blessed to have her as his girlfriend. But how could he ask her for a new relationship after all these years? And what if she said no? That would make everything awkward between them.

The questions lingered in his mind as he stowed the horse and buggy in the barn before entering his house. He left his boots and hat in the mudroom and stepped into the kitchen, where his father sat at the table. His mother carried a warmed dish from the oven, and Jay’s stomach gurgled with delight at the delicious smell he recognized as chicken and broccoli casserole—his favorite!

“How was your afternoon?” *Mamm* asked as she placed the casserole on a hot pad she’d placed on the table.

“It was *gut*.” Jay crossed to the sink and began washing his hands.

“What did you do?” *Dat* asked.

“Sorry I didn’t tell you before we left.” *I was distracted*. “We visited Martha Bontrager and sang for her.” Jay turned to face his parents and leaned back against the counter as he dried his hands with a paper towel.

“I’m certain she enjoyed that,” *Dat* said.

“She did.” Jay tossed the paper towel into the trash can and then took his usual seat, his parents on either end of the table.

After a silent prayer, *Dat* scooped a pile of casserole onto his plate and then scooted the dish to Jay.

“You made my favorite, *Mamm*. *Danki*.” Jay grinned at his mother before placing a mountain of casserole on his own plate.

“Of course. I told your *dat* it was your turn for a favorite meal. Didn’t I, Moses?”

“That’s right.” *Dat* held up a forkful of casserole as if to toast her. “You’re a *gut mamm*, Louise!”

*Mamm* grinned and reached for the casserole dish. “So I made it last night after you went upstairs to your room to read. I’m surprised you didn’t smell it baking. Who all went to Martha’s today?”

“The usual group—Cal, Andrew, Alice, Darlene, Sharon.” He smiled as he said her name. “It was Sharon’s idea to sing for Martha. I told her to let me know if she wants to sing for more members of our church district.”

*Dat* pointed his fork at Jay. “That’s a *wunderbaar* way to serve the Lord.” His smile faltered a little. “Your *daadi* would be *froh* to hear you’re helping others like that.”

“*Ya*, I agree.” Jay nodded. “And I hope we do it again soon.”

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In fact, he longed to spend a lot of time with Sharon while also serving the Lord.

