

Brotherly Love

by Melissa Zabel

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GENRE: Light drama

SYNOPSIS: A man summons the courage to call his brother in order to discuss the care of their mother.

AUTHOR'S TIP: Once Steve and Joe begin their actual conversation, it can be a nice touch to have them start on opposite sides of the playing area and slowly move toward each other as they talk. Be careful, though, to remember they're on the phone and can't see each other.

TIME: 5 minutes

CAST BREAKDOWN: 2M

THEME: Communication; Encouragement

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Philemon 4-7

CHURCH YEAR SEASON: Any

SUGGESTED USE: Worship Service; Sermon Starter

CHARACTERS:

JOE—a slightly neurotic man

STEVE—Joe's brother

PROPS: Two telephones, a chair

COSTUMES: Modern day casual

SOUND: Two wireless microphones

LIGHTING: General stage

SETTING: Two homes

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The author has an excellent director's note: *Once Steve and Joe begin their actual conversation, it can be a nice touch to have them start on opposite sides of the playing area and slowly move toward each other as they talk.* Be careful, though, to remember they're on the phone and can't see each other. Try this direction with your actors to see if they can pull it off. If they can do it subtly without making it obvious that they're moving closer together, it will be very effective. The key to making this work is that the audience is so wrapped up in what they're saying to each other and how they are relating to each other that they don't notice that the brothers' physical proximity has changed until the end. This will take some work on your part as director and on the parts of your actors and it will take careful planning and orchestration. Don't leave it to chance—block the moves carefully. If done well, it will add extra dimension to your scene.

A Unique Twist

This script has a wonderful, unique twist to the standard theatrical phone conversation. The first two times we see Steve, he isn't actually there on the phone with Joe. He is in Joe's imagination. It isn't until Joe's third attempt at a call that he and Steve are having a real conversation. For this delightful convention to work, you need to make sure your audience gets it. It needs to be plain to them that Joe hasn't dialed the phone and that Steve 1 and Steve 2 are figments of Joe's imagination. You might have Steve help with this by not looking strangely at the phone, by not storming in or out or doing anything but walking normally. If he just calmly comes in, picks up the phone, delivers his line (vehemently), then calmly steps back out, the audience will get it. The second conversation gets a little farther, so again, we need no overt emotion from Steve as he enters and exits. And for the third conversation—the actual one—Joe needs to be very obvious and deliberate in dialing the phone. And this time, Steve needs to be three-dimensional, not the two-dimensional, imaginary brother he's been up to this point.

Once you have this down, you can work with the actors on the emotional state of the brothers for the rest of the real conversation. Both brothers care deeply about their mother and are saddened by her declining health. Joe feels a bit put upon because he's right there, dealing with their mother's issues every day. Steve probably feels guilty that he's not right there to help, but also feels some vindication in that he's sending money to his "starving artist" brother to help take care of their mother. Dealing with an ill parent stirs up a cauldron of emotions in adult siblings. Explore those with your actors and you'll end up with a very moving, touching performance.

Know Thy Audience!

Just as in the sketch *Marriage Bank*, this one calls for you to know your audience. The character Steve in this sketch uses the word *schmuck* quite a few times. In some circles, that word is offensive as it is seen merely as a replacement for more vulgar language and perhaps has some vulgar roots itself. Check with your pastor: what's his take on the word? Is it acceptable or not? Check with several random members of your congregation. Ask not only their personal opinion, but how they think the congregation in general will react to the word. (Be selective in your randomness—ask people from different genders, generations, and backgrounds.) Your pastor has the ultimate say in the use of the word, but it's helpful to go to him with information gathered from a little informal research. If *schmuck* is deemed offensive, substitute a word that will still have some punch to it but that won't offend your audience. If they are offended, they won't listen. And we want them to relate to these brothers and sympathize or empathize with them. They have a great message to share about brotherly love.