

INTEGRITY: THE JOURNEY



PART 1

There is only one bathroom in our house for myself, my brother, and mom and dad. So, I got up early, just like every morning, so that I could check my email and take a shower before contention rises over the use of the bathroom. It was a cool morning; I could see my breath as I jumped into my normal seat at the rear of the white Dodge caravan (yes, the standard suburbia soccer-mom car). We were leaving promptly before 6:40AM so that I could make it to school before the morning bus picked me up to go to the middle school campus.

Everything was normal that morning, until minutes into the ride when I began to feel the car moving violently. As I looked through the front windshield of the car I could see that we were veering into the left lane with no sign of stopping. Ahead there was a steep drop-off without a guardrail followed by a high wall of earth. I immediately was taken to a whole different me. Adrenaline had taken over my 5th grade body in the back seat of the caravan. Instinctively, I felt we should stop this madness, so I yelled, "Hit the brakes" as loud as I could with as much authority I could muster. My mom retorted, "I am!"

The next thing I can remember is my book bag, CD cases, and all the rest of the junk in the car suddenly rising up to the ceiling of the car. Then nothing – my memory fails me.

I woke up with my face in some cold damp leaves, not sure where I was or what was happening. I could feel my book bag on me and that I didn't have a lot of room to move. I was laying half-way out of the vehicle through where the left rear window should have been. As I looked to my right, through the pale brown leaves, I saw a small tree supporting the van. This tree had prevented the car from rolling completely flat on the left-side. The tree had saved my life – giving me

three inches from being crushed and enough room to wiggle the rest of the way out of the vehicle.

I stood up, still pumped with adrenalin to survey the situation. I saw my brother several yards away in the woods on the ground. He must have been completely thrown from the car through the front windshield or passenger window on its last rotation down the steep ravine. Not knowing what to do, I scanned for my mother quickly realizing that she was still in the driver's seat. I ran to the front of the car as she began to come to with some groans. I relayed the vital information, "The car is on its side, you're going to have to climb through the front windshield."

The next thing my mom exclaimed was, "I can't see. I can't see anything! I can't see!" Without processing, I immediately said, "The seatbelt release is at your right waist. Move your right hand down to release the seat belt."



My mom was too shaken up to be able to release the seatbelt. So, I climbed around another tree and reached through the front windshield to release the seat belt. With my mom still unable to see, I instructed her out, "The roof of the car has been crushed in toward your head, you can't come forward." As her head was against the back of the headrest, there were only inches above her head and in front of her face before the mangled metal remains of the car. I took my mom's hand and carefully instructed her out through the front windshield.

About the same time, I could hear my brother begin to make some groans from over in the woods and rustle the leaves as he came to.

Now that my mom was safely out of the car and my brother had started to come over, I said, "I'm going to get help; stay here." I then took off crossing the short flat area and then climbing up the 30+ foot near vertical incline, keeping balance by pulling on roots. As soon as I reached the road at the top, I climbed around the mangled guardrail to start the run back home, but, first, up the long hill from the valley.

I don't remember much, but I do remember pushing my 5th grade legs to run as fast as I could up the hill and back another mile to the end of the driveway of the farm. I went in to my neighbor's house nearby and asked for a ride to find my dad (our driveway is another half mile long) since I was pretty exhausted.

I jumped out of my neighbor's truck and ran to my father seeing him at the barn. As I ran into the barn, I slipped on the black ramp. I'm not sure what I told my dad or what happened after that, but we got into his vehicle and drove down the road to the accident scene. We first encountered my brother running along the road back to the house and then my mother a little ways behind.

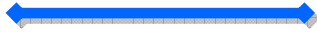
PART 2

But, this isn't a story about me, heroism or courage; this is a story about my dad. Why didn't I stand terrified at the scene of the wreck? Why did I instinctively react to help my family to safety? Why was I able to act independently and strive diligently for help? See, my dad had poured his heart and time into me since I was born. He consistently lived out characteristics of integrity, love, honor, sacrifice and commitment. Let me give some stand-out examples of my dad's character.



I was with my dad in the garage when he handed me an older non-working circular saw. He encouraged me take it apart while handing me several screwdrivers and tools. He came back a little later and saw that I had it fairly well taken apart. He then pointed out the electric motor, brushes, electromagnet and then slowly demonstrated the basics of how an electric motor works. After talking through the various parts of the simple electric saw, he left me to put it back together. I tried putting it back together, but ended up with various parts still in a pile after I thought I was done.

Dad, you showed me that you (a) had faith in me to be able to take apart the saw, (b) knew that I would be curious how it would work so you patiently went over the basics of the motor, (c) knew I would enjoy working on my own and asking for help, (d) had already created a safe environment for me to learn. You always have a demeanor where I feel comfortable asking any question and for help whenever I need it. I know you will immediately come to help with a loving smile, compassionate patience, and realistic yet gently challenging expectations.



Learning to ride a bike is a difficult, but necessary, childhood task. My dad pushed me toward independence by first teaching me to ride my bike. Not only did my dad teach me to ride, but he showed me the importance of teaching others. He wisely encouraged me to teach my brother how to ride his bike. I've taken this mentality into much of life – as soon as I learn something I want to share it with somebody else. I don't need to be an expert, I just need to be a little better than another – then I can bring them up to my level.



Dad, thanks for showing what it looks like to care about others and to fill me with the passion to serve.



I woke up at 5:45AM, snuggled deep under several layers of blankets and down sleeping bags with my cat sleeping at my feet. Although I couldn't see anything, I could hear the cows breathing nearby. I then prepared for an invigorating start to my

morning. "Jeff, let's go," I say. 1...2...3... I'd throw the covers off, quickly put on my clothes, a jacket, and slid my bare feet into a pair of tall black cold plastic boots. Jeff followed as I descended down the square bales

of hay. I reached the inside of the barn door, opened it, and realized that it was my turn to close the door (a three step process). Jeff ran on, while I fumbled with the door slipping on the ice of the ramp into the barn. I then ran through the dark to the house with the morning sleet hitting my face. We both rushed to get our boots off on the porch, rushing into the house, slamming the door on the cold. The daily morning routine has begun.

"Affirm, Affirm, Affirm, Say Yes as much as you possibly can. Say yes lots and lots and lots and lots. Point out the wonder, mystery, and awe every chance you see it. Affirm." ~ Parenting advice from Rob Bell (Mars Hill, Jan 10, 2009)

Dad, I pray that I do not become an overprotective parent, but allow my children to pursue their passions, explore curiosities, and live an adventurous childhood. Thanks for constantly affirming me giving me all of these.



"It hurts," I whined. It's the 4th time my dad has run with me to the end of the driveway and back. I've had side cramps for the last two times up the driveway and back, but my dad convinced me for one more, and then another. I don't know why or how it happened, but that evening was the inception of my love for distance running. I was in the second grade and had just completed running nearly two miles with my dad. I was exhausted, but I learned something very important – I could continue even though my body feels as though it is exhausted and enduring much pain. Only several weeks later I won a race for the fastest distance runner in my school for grades 1-5.



Dad, I know perseverance because you showed me that there really is 'no such thing as an undisciplined champion.' Thanks for believing in me to be the champion I am.



I was scared. I was in the driver's seat of a vehicle for the first time without my dad doing the pedals. This happened twice. The first time was in 2nd grade when my dad placed me on the riding lawnmower all



by myself. We had spent time mowing the lawn together with me on his lap as he told me how to handle different situations.

Now I was on a machine that could seriously maim me with my father nearby, but not right there with me.

The second time I was in the 9th grade, my dad, brother and I were walking out of Sears when he took out the keys to the truck, handed them to me and said that he thought I should drive home. I was pretty

scared, but my dad didn't exhibit any lack of faith in my ability. As we walked out the doors, sleet and cold hit our faces as we looked into the dark for the truck. Apparently winter had come while we were shopping, leaving the roads fairly icy since the plows weren't out clearing the streets yet. I let out that I was scared by asking my dad as we approached the truck, "Are you sure?" This would be my first driving experience on public roads. I guess my dad didn't want me to start with anything easy – so I started with a manual transmission rear-wheel drive truck with a very difficult clutch in the dark with roads covered in ice and snow and even more coming down further reducing visibility. I cautiously made it home, with much guidance from my dad. I got into one skid going around a corner and then followed that by stalling out the truck in the middle of the road going up the hill where I had the unfortunate accident years earlier. We all jumped from the truck at home relieved that we arrived in the same condition we left Sears – with the exception of the adrenalin I was feeling from the hour long drive.

Through these situations, my dad carefully challenged me knowing that I would be scared, but he had faith that I could do it. He was right there, watching - ready to jump in should I be in a position that was dangerous. He carefully avoided micromangement, but allowed me to learn and accomplish on my own. He knew he didn't need to point out my mistakes, because I knew well when I had messed up. He knew that I strived to do well and carefully avoided comments where I could infer that he wasn't proud of me. He would remind me that I did a great job and that he was proud that I took on the difficult and scary challenge and did very well.

Dad, I pray that I can live out the wisdom you constantly demonstrate. Oh, how my children would be so blessed if I can gently and lovingly challenge them to grow, accomplish, take risks, experience joy, and grab stories that will last forever. It must have been tough for you, but you always do what is good, right, and beautiful and do not take the path of least resistance.



I sat there at the table, in Orlando, FL. It was our family's Disney vacation, and I had a science test the following week. My dad and I had been going over the chapters, arguing about them, for at least four hours now as the clock stuck 11pm. I just couldn't get the material. My dad suffered patiently as I tried to absorb the information. His dedication to my educational success required great patience, consideration, and energy.

Dad, it's been paying off every day. Thanks.



I tossed off my mucky boots on the porch, walked into the house smelling terrible, and sat down at the kitchen table as my mom placed a tasty, balanced meal in front of me. I ate hurriedly since I was very hungry and totally exhausted. My dad and I had just spent the past 2

hours feeding the cows after I got home from school and karate. We had a system where we carried 40 five-gallon buckets of cow feed (chicken litter) from the back of a large truck to the various cow troughs. Of course, after feeding the cows, we refilled and stacked all 40 buckets each night, no matter the weather – sleet, rain, hot, or cold.

Dad, you never complained. I realize now that you worked hard at work, and then even more each morning and evening on the farm. Natural disasters and misfortune create much frustration on the farm. Yet, you go out and take care of the problems without complaining year after year. Your selfless spirit is absolutely humbling and I owe my tendencies to help others to your continual dedication and perseverance.



I got up before anybody else in the house, put on my clothes, jacket and gloves. I then grabbed the milk bottle, some milk-replacement, and started the water. For the past three months, since the calf was born, I carried two jugs of calf-milk through the dark to the barn every morning and evening. As I opened the gate, my calf would run to me, eager for his breakfast. The routine continued each day no matter when I got home or what else I had to do because if I didn't bring the calf food, it wouldn't eat.

Dad, you show me that I need to live by my priorities. You sacrifice for what is good, right, and beautiful. Sacrifice – to give up something of value for something of greater value. You are able to discern what is of true value and what isn't and then continually sacrifice for your priorities –your wife and your children.

PART 3

But this isn't just a story about my dad. It's a story about hope, forgiveness, joy, and peace. There is "hope for a better tomorrow" (Obama jab). We can change what looks to be destiny.

My father didn't have a good relationship with his dad. My grandfather (dad's dad) died a few months ago. When our family was heading to the funeral my dad said, "You know I was ten times more devastated about breaking my fishing poles last week than hearing that my dad died." While I listened to my dad and his sister talk about the frustrations they had with their father and how they didn't care too much for him, I remembered those statements my dad used to make when I was quite young, "I will not turn into my father." Those statements didn't mean anything to me (since I didn't know my grandfather too well) until after my grandfather's death.

Now I think to myself, "I hope to someday be the father to my children that my dad was to me." Dad, based on what I knew of your father, you aren't anything like him. I have been blessed by God to have you dad, as my dad!

Dad, as I've said before, you have demonstrated the character of God to me all my life – whether you meant to or not. You continue to amaze me with your conviction to your priorities – your amazing wife and your children. You are not dissuaded by money, status, and the frail shiny, yet less valuable things, of this world.

Do not worry yourself with concerns of the past. As I've said before, "I'm so blessed that I do not have any memories with my parents that I wish didn't happen." Dad, you aren't like your father. You ARE an amazing, loving, sacrificing, compassionate, and noble father. You do actively love your wife. I dream that I will be half the father to my children that you are to me.