

The Book That Kept Giving

Would our Prayer Group's Plea Work?

Maybe you know what it is like to have a child – or two – with whom you have not spoken for a period of time. Maybe that period of time is measured in years. If you, or someone you know, has experienced this, you know how I felt in August 2014. I was out of relationship with two of my four children. In my case, it was five years for one child and three years for the other. The after-effects of a bitter divorce had caused ostracisms that I had not been able to reconcile. Although I continued to attempt to heal our relationship(s), I had no reciprocal contact from them, despite my periodic outreach to both of them. For many years, I kept this “secret” bottled up inside me, too ashamed to share it with those who could most help me. I was a member of a small group through my church, and we were prayer warriors for each other's challenges we all faced in life. But not this challenge. No, this challenge was too personal and too painful to involve my small group. I was just too pessimistic that prayer would work to end this standoff.

As I came to the end of my self-reliance, I finally embraced our prayer group leader's petition that we pray as a group for contact and subsequent reconciliation with my two “lost” children. Our group prayer session occurred Monday night, August 10th, 2014, when we, holding hands as a group, asked God to take the relationship with my two children into his hands and reconcile us in a way He saw fit. I did not know what to expect. I knew that finally giving my frustration, hurt, and

disappointment to God in prayer and supplication finally brought me peace that God was in control. I had now changed my mindset: I fervently believed I would be re-united with my two children.

But that is not exactly what God had in mind...

The next day came and went with nothing notable in answered prayer. But, Wednesday, I received an unexpected text message. I still have it on my cell phone. I will never forget it. The message arrived at 1:24 pm on Wednesday, August 13th, 2014. I was sitting in my driveway, just having started my car, when I heard my phone indicate that I had an "unidentified" incoming text. Many thoughts raced through my head. Maybe my prayers were answered? Had one of my two children finally decided to contact me? But that is not exactly what God had in mind. Here is the opening thread of that text:

Stranger: Is this Charles Brown?

Me: It is.

Stranger: You don't know me, but I recently purchased "*Raising a Modern Day Knight*" from Amazon. I just finished reading it and noticed your number was in the book. Can I ask why you wrote it down?

Me: Hmm. No idea. The program, which was offered by my church, was for myself and my two sons.

Stranger: I just became a father six months ago and soon after, I realize that I have no foundation or ideas with which to impart on him. So, I got the book and only made it through the first half chapter before I started to tear up. That's how it was for most of the book.

Me: I sure don't know how my book got on Amazon. I wish I could go back with a six-month old like you have and read the book. I'm 59 now and I would have so longed to have that book 30 years ago.

Stranger: I can't instruct my son until I clean out my own closet. This book dredged up a lot of anger and resentment that I harbor towards my own father. I know this is a lot outta left field, but I feel like I'm back against a wall. Any advice on how to repair that?

That dialog above is verbatim in our text exchange. At this point, I said "I really need to talk to you and understand what life circumstance you are in right now." So, we set a time for the following day to talk.

In our phone call the next day, I found out this young man was 26 years old, and his name is David Lamb. His father had abandoned the family when David was young. A late teenager now with no father-figure in his home – and no father even in his life at all -- David fell into a bad crowd. He started taking drugs, followed by dealing drugs. As his habit turned to darker behavior, he was arrested and jailed for possession and trafficking. It got worse. After being released from prison, he continued to sell drugs. His anger grew and he committed a felony attack on a shopping mall employee. As this was his second felony, the penalty was far worse: he would serve two years for this offense.

When he was released from prison this second time, David was determined to turn his life around. Yet, he was still struggling to make healthy and wise decisions for his life. He fathered a child out of wedlock, a beautiful little boy named Roman. David was living with Roman's mother, Autumn, splitting time between his mother's home and the home of his girlfriend's parents. He was grasping for wisdom as he struggled to find his way to being a gainfully employed provider for his family.

Roman was born February 15th, 2014. Knowing that he, David, was abandoned by his own father, David was determined not to follow in his father's footsteps. David set about to educate himself so that he could take control of his own life. He was determined not to repeat his own history with Roman. By the summer of 2014, now living in southeastern Pennsylvania, David was still confident he could do this on his own.

But that is not exactly what God had in mind; which was connecting strangers (Dave and I) for His purposes.

Back in Illinois, my wife and I had sold our business in February 2014. Ironically we would later discover, this was just two weeks after David's son Roman was born. My wife, Alice, and I had decided to move away from Chicagoland to a small town in southeastern Wisconsin to begin the next phase of our lives. In doing so, we needed to sell our Chicagoland home, and downsize our belongings. As I looked through book after book in my library, I came upon one entitled "*Raising a Modern Day Knight*." This book, which was really a study-course book for a six-week "fatherhood" curriculum, was a program I attended as an impetus to help me be a better father to my young boys – boys who were now becoming teenagers. Knowing that my own father had spent precious little time with me in my youth, I sought wise council from other fathers who were facilitating this

program. But, as this moment, the memory of my attending *Raising a Modern Day Knight* program was bittersweet. Having taken the program in 2007, I was now estranged from one of the sons with whom I had attended this program. As I sat there choosing which books to take with me to our new home, I looked at the book and decided that it brought back depressing memories, which was too hurtful for me to bear as we moved to our new life in Wisconsin. That decision made, I tossed the book in the pile of books that Alice was going to donate to our local Goodwill Store. I did not have another thought about that book until the text message arrived from Dave Lamb.

He and I retraced the steps of this book's journey. That's when we realized that someone must have bought the book from Goodwill; and later sold it on Amazon's Market Place. David, with very limited resources, went to the Amazon web site to search for an inexpensive book on raising a young boy into a God-loving man. He was intrigued with the book's title and bought it.

He told me that he got just a few pages into the book when he realized that *he had become his own father*. He fathered a child and was not prepared with a successful marriage or fatherly insight to raise that new baby. As his frustration and remorse mounted, he threw the book across the room in anger. When he did so, the pages "sprayed" apart, revealing my name, phone number, and the date: March, 2007. It was in March 2007 that I had first registered for the *Raising a Modern Day Knight* program. David saw my name, phone number, and date on the page in that book. Thinking that maybe there was a reason I notated my name and number on that page, David sent a text, hopeful that the phone number was still mine and the phone line was still in service. And, now you know what was said:

David: Is this Charles Brown?

Me: It is.

David: You don't know me, but I recently purchased "*Raising a Modern Day Knight*" from Amazon. I just finished reading it and noticed your number was in the book. Can I ask why you wrote it down?

Years later, I really don't know why I wrote my name, phone number, and date in that book.

Maybe the instructor asked us to do so. What I do know is that even though I gave away my book to Goodwill, God had another "life" for it.

David and I began a mentor / protégée relationship that lasts to this day. I live in Wisconsin; he lives in Pennsylvania. In our weekly conversations, I encouraged David to join a church, develop male relationships in that church's Bible Study group, and to marry Autumn, the mother of his son, Roman. David and Autumn's relationship did not start out on the best of terms. Being in their mid- (Dave) and early- (Autumn) twenties with a child without a marriage commitment is a difficult way to start a family. Nonetheless, this couple was determined that they were not going to become another "statistic." David has done – and continues to do – the work necessary to become a true man of God.

Data show that less than 5% of men incarcerated for two years or more are able to rehabilitate and become contributing members of society. David is in that 5%. I am so proud of the Christian man he is becoming – and equally as pleased with his willingness to share his story with others in the world.

Incredibly, as I am writing this story, David and I met each other in person for the first time on Wednesday, June 8th, 2016, at his home in Pennsylvania. We are shown here with the book that brought us together, the book that united us in the most unlikely circumstances. Of course, I do not believe it was circumstance at all, but God's intervention in two men's lives. I was praying to reunite with my children, and God provided David. David was looking to reconcile with his father, and God provided me. But that is not exactly what God had in mind.

During our mentoring time, I have, indeed, reconciled with my two children. And David has also reconciled with his father. But that is a story for another time.

We both remain blessed today, knowing that this was the book that kept giving!

