

Made My Life

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9/13/03

I find it interesting to note that most of my entire life has been spent immersed in the academic community. Even many of my summers were spent taking summer courses. Being in four different university/college settings and living in three different states, it has been a wonderful experience. For others this may seem psychotic, but this is the path God set forth for my life and the process he chose to develop me. I've met many friends along the journey and some of those relationships, I continue to nurture and develop.

Ironically, having spent over 14 years in higher education, after a while it becomes somewhat like a home, a familiar environment, a place of safety. I guess any place one stays long enough can become somewhat like a home. As humans, we're somewhat like cats, we find a comfortable place and begin to burrow down and call that place home for some period of time. I have fallen into that trap several times.

Still, I have come to love and appreciate the academic life. Learning and personal development have always been a passion of mine and perhaps that was birthed out of the struggle of feeling different or out of place, and yes, even mocked by my peers; yet, in spite of my own learning difficulties, I wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. I still feel that way – both in my feelings of inadequacy and in my wanting to impact and enrich the lives of others.

Along this academic pilgrimage, I have been privileged to meet many wonderful teachers/professors. Many have touched my life in various ways – some spiritually, some on a particular subject, others on a more personal level. No matter what the topic or word of wisdom was, I was honored to be under

the guidance and direction of these educators who selflessly and, at times, painstakingly, gave of their time and insights to me over the years.

Some of them, in fact, have impacted me so deeply I've gone back to visit them or contact them by phone or e-mail just to express my thankfulness for their service to me. I find it interesting that after sharing my appreciation to them, some shared how much it touched them. A few even said, "Thank you for sharing that with me...that made my day."

For some reason the phrase, "that made my day" has rung in my ears for the past month; it's captured my attention because it brings me back to two very special people in my life - my father and mother.

Despite the wonderful academicians I've had throughout my training, none have influenced me more than my parents. They have sacrificially given and invested in my brothers and me more than anyone else. In my opinion, there will never be two greater models in my lifetime than they. I can never repay them or adequately express how much they have meant to me.

About two years ago while driving home to NY from Virginia, I remember reflecting on this very idea of sacrificial giving and how my parents gave so much of themselves, even to the point of giving up many of their dreams and opportunities. I felt prompted by the Holy Spirit that from that point on, I would commit myself to honoring them both privately and publicly.

Now I feel saddened I can no longer honor my parents together, in person, or in front of others. I have a very special mother whom I will try my very best to honor, love, and obey. And I have resolved to continue honoring my father even though he's no longer with me physically. I will tell his story to others. But together, I can never sit them down and tell them how much they mean to me and how grateful I am for their lives.

I don't deserve them in my life, nor will I ever feel that I should have been born into a home with parents like them. I can only wonder the pain I've caused them at times, or days when I've let them down. They loved me at my worst times, even when I caused them great pain. I wasn't a prodigy child or an ideal son. And now, as I've grown older and taken a healthy assessment of my life, I've come to see my own weaknesses and limitations; nevertheless - they still loved me in spite of me.

What more could a son ask for than that? Maybe God will tell me one day why he gave me two, special parents, while other children wish they had just one faithful parent, someone who would just love them as they are.

Why? Many questions seem to come to mind each day, but I try my best to focus on exclamations, things that I am certain of:

- I've been blessed with two wonderful, Christian parents!
- Each one gave in their own unique way; they gave themselves to me!
- My parents were gifts. I will choose to be thankful instead of resentful for the loss of my father!
- My parents have been faithful to me, even when I was unfaithful!
- Love is not a feeling; it's a choice!
- Even on his last day on earth, my father rebuked me amidst my confusion and said, "Remember from the very beginning when this all unfolded, I said, 'The Lord has a plan.' We must continue to trust him!"

Whatever angle I choose to look at this, I can't help but be thankful. Why should a prodigal receive such love from two very special people? I don't know. I simply trust that I can, perhaps, one day be like them and love my future wife as my father loved my mother and, love my children as my parents loved me. May I touch lives in some small way as my parents did mine.

Thought:

Dad & Mom, I've met many wonderful people throughout my lifetime. Yet, I can honestly say there are only two who have influenced my life to the degree that I can truly be what God called me to become; it was your faithfulness all along. Some have even thanked me for expressing my heart stating, "Thanks for sharing that...you've made my day."

But Mom and dad, I must thank you...you've made my life!"