

A Loving Response

There is a servant who saved my life. There is a man who gave himself away selflessly. This man is my hero. This man is my dad. My dad is my hero because he loves and serves like no one else. From day one I have always known that my dad loved me, and now it is his continued affection for me, even through the times where our relationship was most strained, that keeps me believing. Love is what drives him, and our family follows. From the moment the sun rises to when it sets, the churches we go to, the jobs he works, the punishments I receive are all examples of my dad's devotion and service to God, my mother, my brothers, and me. I don't even know how blessed I am. There is something about a love like that, a certain rarity that it takes on these days. It doesn't seem like it's natural anymore to see someone who gives himself to others without any thought to his own desires. It seems, rather, that selfless love is something that has been lost, now only spoken of in fabricated fairy tales of faraway lands. But, my dad's love is real, as real as this paper you are reading. In fact, it is the very reason you are reading it.

In the summer of 2008, my family moved from The Woodlands, Texas, to a suburb of Washington D.C. called Ashburn, Virginia. God had moved me to Virginia for a reason, and I had heard all my life that He had a plan for me, that He would be the ultimate Mentor to lead and guide me in everything I do. It should have been the most exciting thing in the world to see Him carry it out, to see Him use me for something greater than myself, but it wasn't. I was so angry that my easy little life I had led for so long, my soccer team, my friends, my number one class rank, was turned upside down. I wasn't going to let all that be ruined. Still, I was falling apart, and it was my dad who had it all together.

Nothing went the way I wanted. My life seemed to be going in the complete opposite direction of what I had planned for myself. I stopped trying. In hindsight, I know I gave up

prematurely. But, at the time I was so mad. Even so, everywhere I turned my dad was there for me. He said he loved me and was there if I ever needed a friend or someone to talk to. He wanted me to adjust to living here. I knew he was right. He was always right, and he always knew the right thing to do. He told me to turn to God. He told me to trust in Christ. He told me God had a plan for me. He was the rock I needed. He stuck with me, even though things would just get worse.

I had always been the “good kid” growing up. “Rule-follower” and “churchgoer” was how people would have described me. But, what do people do when they are lonely and angry? I got so deep into things I had never been a part of, so deep that I thought I could never get out. I remember one night, it was a night in November, I was just sitting there thinking about where I had come to. It would have been so hard to get out of all the stuff I was in. Giving up seemed so easy, just right there at my finger tips. I could just taste defeat, and it tasted so good to me. What could I do? I had rejected God and rejected my family. The person I was closest with, the person I thought I loved, was using me. I knew it too. It hurt me so bad, so I drank defeat without second thoughts and committed myself to my demise. And I was miserable for it.

The funny thing is I thought I had my parents fooled. But, I didn't, not for one second. My mom and dad had been keeping a closer eye on me than I thought, and praise God for it! My dad couldn't be fooled by my mask. He was too smart. I couldn't imagine in my state of turmoil that he could have had it all together, but he did. How could he not? And he watched, and he waited for his chance to step into my life once again. It was winter break. We finally took a trip to visit family and friends in Texas. I was ecstatic to see the place I remembered so lovingly in my dreams. By that time I wanted to leave my life behind so bad, but I was too deep. I tried to escape, but the way I had been living haunted me all the way back to my hometown. So, once

again I succumbed to it, and, once again, only I was to blame. A couple days after Christmas, my dad and I were sitting on the top of a mountain at my uncle's ranch near Marble Falls. He told me he knew. He told me he had always known. I was amazed and ashamed and worried and afraid all at once. But, he kept loving. He told me he wasn't mad. The tears started to flow. He kept loving. He told me he wanted to help me, that he had been through the same thing I was going through. He had rejected everything just as I had rejected. I couldn't stop. He kept loving. He asked me if I wanted to leave all this behind me. He asked if I wanted to turn back to the Lord. All I could do was nod. I was so broken. He told me he loved me, and then we prayed. I didn't realize even then the magnitude of that moment. There are moments in life that define you, that make you who you are meant to become. This was just such a defining moment.

He was always there to lead me. But, how could he be? He could have been anywhere, but he was right there beside me. I had pushed and pushed him away. I had rejected his love and his advice and his friendship, but still he swooped in like a superhero to save me. Looking back, I know God had his hand in everything that occurred. How could my dad have been the exact person I needed otherwise? He had the intelligence to see through the image I wanted him to see, he had gone through the same things I was going through, and, most importantly, he had a love that could weather the storm I would throw us into. And that is how my dad and my God served me the most, how they led me to live in the same way they had: love. They held on despite the pain it caused them, and it is this type of selfless action that is the greatest form of love and service that can possibly be shown to another individual. My mentors taught me that if I want to seek a servant's heart, I must seek a heart that loves like this, that loves with action and gives no thought to self.

Now, my dad and I are closer than we have ever been, and he never ceases to rub off more and more on me. I smile every time my grandma looks at me and says, “You are so much like your dad.” There are few words I am prouder of hearing. For one, he has taught me so much. Every day, I follow his example in loving others with my actions. This takes many forms, including serving in my church’s children’s ministry, tutoring my peers, and having a servant’s heart in my simple, daily interactions with others. Also, recently I went on a mission trip with a church group to Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua where we served children in an orphanage for a week. It was so amazing to be able to respond to the service that I had been given by serving those around me and even people in other countries. My dad’s heart and ultimately my God’s heart have opened up mine to so many ways that I can help others. This is my loving response to all the work God has done in my life. I don’t even know how deeply He has impacted me. And how could I? For I have no idea what would have become of me if my dad had not been my hero, if my mentor had not led me to the Mentor. But, I know it wouldn’t be like it is now. I wouldn’t be the same person I am today, and I owe everything to both of them.