

*My name is Lincoln, and I am Damian Young's dad. Sometimes I've been asked by our friends or family questions like, "Do you think Damian will ever fully recover?" and 'Damian was so sweet, why do you think God would allow this to happen to him?' and even "I don't know how you and Ann do it?" To help give insight to these answers to Damian's friends, here is a copy of a message I gave this past Easter, 2013 at our local Easter Sunrise Service. I hope it helps you.*

Today we gather at the cross at sunrise to draw closer to God's love for us. A love so intentional and sincere that we don't experience it anywhere else in our lives. In 1 John 4, we read, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." In appreciation, we gather. In appreciation, we sing songs of worship and praise. In appreciation, we testify to one another of his love for us... That's why I am here today, I want to share a story of how God has touched my family. Here's my story...

- Describe our family. Married 30+ years. 4 Children, the older 2 brothers were adopted biological brothers, the younger 2 born to my wife & I. The oldest was Damian and his younger brother, LB.
- All 4 kids loved the same, but LB & Damian always had some doubts. Maybe some emotional scars remained from early childhood when in foster care? Who knows?
- LB rejected us as a teenager and left as young men sometimes do, never to look back again. As parents, we felt powerless to change his stance or direction at that phase of his life.
- Damian had a gentle heart and sincere faith in Christ. Yet, Damian always struggled with health. In & out of hospital with Crohn's disease, which made it hard to keep employment and stay up in school.
- Damian voiced to me that wanted strongly 3 things:
  - A fully surrendered life to serving Christ.

- His struggles to be relieved. Both work struggles and health struggles.
  - To convince his brother that we loved him... and I think he needed to remind himself of that same message.
- 5 years ago, when Damian was 28 years old, his church pastor preached a series of sermons on fasting and called the church to a 40 day fast. He likely expected people to give up Facebook, or Starbucks, or chocolate during this time... but Damian took him literally and started a 40 day, water-only fast. He had privately done a 7 day fast earlier that year and had told me he never felt closer to God than during that week (and he felt relief from his Crohn's disease since there was nothing going thru his G.I. tract).
- On this 40 day fast, his liver began failing on day 3. The doctors didn't think the fast caused the failure, it just put a stress on the liver to show more quickly what was already happening to Damian anyway. The liver failure wasn't typical, not viral or bacterial hepatitis, but likely an autoimmune hepatitis (his body was thinking something was happening that wasn't, and it's own response caused the liver failure). His liver failed quickly and there was no stopping it. He was quickly moved to San Francisco to be cared for by the brightest minds on the West Coast, but he was in a coma within a week and we were told that he wouldn't live another week unless he received a liver transplant. On day 6-1/2, they found a matching liver... but at this point he was on the brink of death. They stabilized him for surgery with heroic measures, but warned us that they had no way of knowing if there was brain damage from the swelling on the brain or if they reversed it just in time. Their brain tests all passed, but the neuro experts honestly said they couldn't tell since he was so sick. We had to choose life or death for him, whether or not to do the transplant surgery knowing there was no way to know if the brain was OK until after the surgery. When he woke up after the surgery, it was obvious there was massive brain injury. He was rigid in bed, not moving, staring blankly at the ceiling. His brain was working to allow him to breathe on his own and beat his own

heart, but not much else. I remember discussing with my wife about whether or not to turn off life support, then realizing that he isn't on life support if he could breathe on his own and his heart beats on its own. He had a trache and a feeding tube. If anyone remembers the case of Terri Schiavo a decade or so ago, that was Damian's situation. The only way to turn off life support was to stop feeding him thru the feeding tube, but we weren't going to do that.

During this time, I had many long drives to SF since we lived 3-1/2 hours away and still had a family at home to attend to. I remember searching for answers, trying to solve this problem. What to do? How to help? Looking for wisdom. Felt helpless. My mind kept going back to scripture from the Bible:

**John 14** "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. **I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**"

**Romans 8** "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.** And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And **we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**" Wordless groans... describes Damian's situation well... but I knew even though Damian couldn't talk, he was still being ministered to by God's Holy Spirit... and in ways we were unable to do for him. I also knew that Damian loved God, and so did Ann & myself... so God will work some good out of this tragedy. We may or may not get to see that good

that would be worked out, but I had confidence that God was working out some good. This verse leaves no other possibility.

**Deuteronomy 31** "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; **he will never leave you nor forsake you**".

Deep in my soul, I knew that **these were absolutes!** I knew it in the marrow of my bones! **These were promises that leave no room for doubt.** I couldn't see the ending, but I knew that despite what we see before us and what the doctors tell us, we knew these to be true.

As time passed, :

- He began to move. Thrashing movements.
- He began to make eye contact.
- He stood up and walked like a zombie.
- Over a year and a half, step by step we walked with him on the path of recovery thru rehab, thru assisted living... each step God opened just the right doors when we were helpless to do so and just the right people into our lives when we needed them most.
- Finally, against the advice of family, we brought him home.
- Today, 5 years after his brain injury;,
  - He has clear eyes that are focused on the world around him.
  - He still hasn't learned to speak his thoughts, or sign.
  - He is curious & explores his surroundings.
  - He's gone thru phases of running, skipping, playing (jumping on a trampoline & dribbling a basketball)
  - He has emotions. Laughs. Has fits of frustration.

- In the summer, we bring him swimming at the beach with his life jacket.
- He needs lots of help with daily life, but he is learning to participate in that help instead of fight against it.
- He is very much like Olivia our 1year old granddaughter, although he is almost 33 years old.
- Most importantly, he is loved and he shows love to others.

**I shared this story not to focus attention on Damian or on my family.** But on how God used Damian's situation to reveal the depth of his love. Over these 5 years, I've never once doubted God's promises. Remember the promises from scripture....

- **I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you**
- **He will never leave you nor forsake you**
- **We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose**

When I say I've never doubted his promises, I'm not just putting on a brave face and reciting what I think is the right "Christian" things to say. I truly had a gentle confidence that these were promises that I could take to the bank. How is it possible that I've **never** doubted God's promises? Because Jesus didn't just die on the cross as a martyr ... **He died on the cross AND he rose again 3 days later.** **Because** he rose again, he is still alive today and longs to be involved in every detail of our lives **today**... Because he rose again, he sent to us the Holy Spirit to live inside me and be my counselor... my comforter... to guide me through Damian's challenges... and to remind me that his promises **will be fulfilled.** Because he rose again, when he said, "It is finished"... I trust it is finished for me. Doubt is removed.

In addition to Damian's physical recovery, God has healed more than just that. Let me return to Damian's younger brother, LB. In his mid-20's and comfortably entrenched into his rejection of family. Except for Damian, who was his "blood brother" and they got together every weekend. They needed each other, back to back as they faced the world. Yet, life was still incomplete and was missing something. Damian's brain injury rocked L.B.'s plan and placed him back in our lives, which was probably the last thing that he wanted. But... he didn't want to abandon his brother in his time of need and because he loved him. Yet, there was this wall that L.B. built between us that I was powerless to take down as his father. However, over time as we loved and cared for Damian, **God began to dismantle this wall.** Literally, **love dismantled this wall.** Today, the wall is completely removed. Our relationship is stronger than it has ever been in our life. L.B. knows the depth of our love... not just for Damian... but also for himself. **God has taken this tragedy and used it to take something that was broken and restored it.** In hindsight, I believe Damian's brain injury was the only way to restore our family. I don't know if it was planned by God, or if God simply used it to accomplish this result... I suppose it doesn't matter. All I know is Damian, in his 40 day fast, was open to God and simply said, "Here I am... use me." And God took him up on his offer.

And, today... isn't that also the way God deals with each of us? Each of us have had this wall that separated us from God's love that we've built up in our sin. God desires this relationship to be restored a close, intimate relationship with each of us; but to do so, it requires radical intervention. He sends his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Jesus' death on the cross is the only way to the Father... because it is the way God **chose** it to be. It wasn't easy for God, but it was the **only way.** Listen to his words.

1. Knowing what suffering awaited him just before his arrest, Jesus was in prayer to his Father, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.... And

being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”

2. He said, “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?

No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”

Although difficult for him, Jesus’s death on a cross wasn’t something that happened to him... it was his purpose. It was his mission. Consider the words written 600 years before Jesus describing this in the book of Isaiah:

He grew up before him like a tender shoot,

and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,

nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by mankind,

a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces

he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our pain

and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,

stricken by him, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;

**and the LORD has laid on him**

**the iniquity of us all**

That, my friends, is Jesus.

That, is love

“For God so loved the world that he **gave** his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

I can testify with my own experiences that his promises are true. His love unbreakable. The life God offers through the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus is real. **He will take what is broken and incomplete, and make it whole again.**

Damian’s story is unfinished. But, it is a good story. From what I’ve already seen in what has happened in my family... and with people whom Damian has touched while recovering... these words from Isaiah seem to fit Damian,

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,

because the LORD has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim freedom for the captives

and release from darkness for the prisoners,

to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of **beauty**

**instead of ashes,**

the oil of **joy**

**instead of mourning,**

and a garment of **praise**

**instead of a spirit of despair.**

They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the LORD  
for the display of his splendor.