

Aaron's Funeral Message

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A week before Aaron's death, as I ate breakfast and opened God's Word, the first few verses of Isaiah 43 jumped off the page at me – I didn't know why. This is what is written...

"The Lord created Jacob and formed Israel. Now, this is what the Lord says, 'Do not be afraid, because I have reclaimed you. I have called you by name; you are Mine. When you go through the sea, I am with you. When you go through rivers, they will not sweep you away. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned, and the flames will not harm you...Do not be afraid, because I am with you...'" (43:1-3).

I knew those words were for me and I embraced them. A week later when I got the word about Aaron's death in an avalanche on Mt. Rainier, I threw a few things in the car and took off down to Monroe to comfort my daughter Megan. After we had spent some time together, I walked into Aaron's room, and lying on the middle of his desk was a piece of paper cut out from a Christian magazine with the words from Isaiah 43:1 written on it that I had read the week before on it...

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I. OUR LIFE

Aaron and I always had a lot in common. I was a pastor and his mom Kathy and I home-schooled our children, so Aaron and I had a lot of opportunities to spend time together. He would go out on hospital calls with me when he was three or four years old – he started riding on the back of my motorcycle when he was five or six years old.

When our family came to Monroe in 1995 to plant New Heart Christian church, Aaron and I went door to door, knocking on people's homes to see if they might want to come to Christ and attend our new church. When I attended our home groups, Aaron nearly always came with me, would sit on my lap and worship with us, share with us and participate in any way he could. He was a catalyst even then, 9 years ago. I was the pastor of this new church, and Aaron was my little Associate Pastor – he even wanted to start a youth group called 'Life-Discovery' for the church. Because we did a lot together, we had gobs of time to talk, to pray, to laugh, to worship and to seek God together – both of us loved those times!

† I should have known years before what his life was going to be like though. While we were on vacation at Sinclair Island in the San Juan's one summer, there was an old Yamaha 90 dirt bike there to use. Aaron was 6 or 7 years old and I sat him in front of me on the bike. As we were riding along, I saw a small tree that had blown down on the road ahead of us. I thought this would be a great time to goose the gas a little and jump over it. I hit

the gas, we jumped over the tree and flew up in the air farther than I anticipated, so when we hit the ground, we hit harder than I thought we would too, and Aaron's helmet slammed face down against the gas tank. I had this horrible sinking feeling about his face just being mashed. As soon as I could stop the bike, I looked down and asked Aaron if he was ok, fearing the worst. He just looked up at me with a big smile all over his face and said, "Wow Dad, let's do it again!!" I should have known right then what kind of guy I had!

- † Aaron and I spent thousands of hours together doing the things we both enjoyed – worshipping, playing tennis, motorcycling and backpacking. We'd laugh together until we thought our sides would split – we always hugged and told each other we loved each other. The funny thing about Aaron was that he took each of the four activities I loved and taught him to the next level...
 - I sang along with worship CD's – he learned to play guitar and lead worship.
 - I played tennis – Aaron took tennis lessons and entered tennis tournaments with me as his doubles partner.
 - I motorcycled more or less within the speed limit – Aaron had a hard time recognizing speed limits.
 - I taught him winter backpacking – Aaron took it to the next level of mountaineering.
- † Aaron was my 'bonsai boy' – he was afraid of nothing I know of. He wasn't afraid of people, of failure, of expectations or of attempting anything. In fact, in the last year, he told me he nearly got caught a few times by security police climbing up the sides of random buildings in downtown Seattle with his bare hands. That kid would try anything that was new and pushed the limits of his physical and mental abilities.
- † As he was becoming an older teenager I used to kid him and say, "Aaron, someday you'll be bigger than I am. Someday Aaron, you'll be stronger than I am – but Aaron, you'll always be ticklish!" That was the only leverage I had on him in later years!
- † Aaron and I had an exceptionally close relationship that few fathers and sons enjoy – and I'll be forever thankful to God for giving us those times – I couldn't have asked for a better son, or better times together.
 - § Frankly, the hope of my life was to minister together with Aaron and Megan someday. Aaron and I talked from time to time about planting a church together if God so led. I had always hoped He would.

II. AARON'S CHARACTER

I loved Aaron's heart and character. He was a giver, a helper, a supporter, an encourager, a lover without being mushy. He was real – he did nothing fake. He was a genuine guy who was the most interesting combination of an individualist who was also a team player I ever knew. I want to share with you two stories about Aaron's heart that stick out to me in particular...

- † Probably 3 years ago, Aaron and I went on a backpacking trip in the Cascades. Because of a big snow storm, we didn't get very far in the woods and basically had to hang in the tent together for a day and a half. We had a great time. I kept beating him at poker and taking his M & M's! While there, Aaron and I saw three dramatic answers to prayer in those 2 days – we prayed the snow would stop and not collapse our tent – and shortly it did. Later we prayed the rain would halt so we could cook outside the tent – and shortly it did, and

we prayed that my mini-van that was half buried in the snow fall would be pulled out – and miraculously God sent someone to do it! But during the time we had to lay in the tent and talk and laugh and pray and worship, Aaron asked me if we could pray for a girl named Danielle, who was a Satanist he knew in High School. We lay there in the tent in our sleeping bags and prayed together passionately for this girl for some time for her to come to Christ. It was awesome that Aaron cared even for Satanists!

- † The second story happened about two years ago. Aaron came over to spend some time with me on Bainbridge Island, and after worship, we went down to McDonald's to grab some lunch. As we got done with our meal, Aaron leaned over to me and said, "Dad, the guy sitting behind us – I'm going to go and talk to him about Jesus." I was totally taken back – I was focused on finishing my French fries. Before he went over, we prayed together for a moment and as I went and emptied our trays, Aaron talked to the man for a while about a relationship with Jesus Christ. As we left, we talked about his conversation and eventually pulled the car over because Aaron said God was really 'on him' for this guy named Al – and we prayed again intensively for Al and his wife's salvation. Aaron was completely in tears at the end of it – as was I. I was so blessed and impressed with Aaron's heart for God and people. I looked forward to seeing a lifetime of this with him.

CONCLUSION

- † In the winter of 2003, I began having visions of my son. They came over and over again covering a few months time and were always the same – I saw Aaron lying in a coffin, dead. I never told anyone about them. I prayed against it and on a motorcycle trip together to San Francisco in May of 2003, I shared the visions I'd seen with Aaron and we talked about them. I'm not sure our talk had much effect - I guess it wasn't meant to. Aaron always had a very sensitive adventure detector in him – he was always ready for adventure – but he didn't always have a very good danger detector in him.
- † As some of you know, I am starting a new ministry called Strong In Spirit Ministries. This new ministry is dedicated to my Strong In Spirit Son, Aaron who had agreed to be on the Board of Directors with me two months before he died. Therefore, Aaron's picture will always be on the website because his life was in many ways the epitome of fearlessness and inner strength that he got from his relationship with Jesus Christ, his Lover and Savior. Aaron is in many ways the poster child for what it means to be Strong In Spirit, and I will never forget him or his strength or his love or for what he stood for. I, and all of his family and all of his friends will love him to pieces forever.
For all that has happened, and for all that will happen from this – to God be all the glory.
"The Lord created Jacob and formed Israel. Now, this is what the Lord says, 'Do not be afraid, because I have reclaimed you. I have called you by name; you are Mine. When you go through the sea, I am with you. When you go through rivers, they will not sweep you away. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned, and the flames will not harm you...Do not be afraid, because I am with you...'" (43:1-3).