

The Gift of Life

We received news that Cody Thompson, age 26, died this past week of injuries from a motorcycle accident. We are sad about his life being cut short and hold his family near in prayer as they grieve their loss. For us, the last number of days have been spent reminiscing about our three years with Cody.

Of the many kids that came to live with us on New Direction Farm, I would have to say this one taught us more about how a life can be truly changed through immersion in Christian community along with lots and lots of prayer. Cody is the little guy 2nd row on left. One of the basic precepts of New Direction Farm was that each person was to be, individually, responsible as a contributing member of the community. Some kids were already well acclimated with this concept when moving onto the mountain and able to move right in with the flow of community. There were others, however, who were severely deficient in executive functioning: skills related to adaptable thinking, planning, self-monitoring, self-control, working memory, time management and organization.

I have, in my office, a glass box that houses a chess piece to symbolize a “fortressed” person. Although you can see the person and the person can see you.....there lacks an awareness of connection in relationship. Each of us is created in the image of God. We are made for relationship. When there are such extreme barriers it requires rigorous work to facilitate the setting free of these captives.

Scripture tells us: “Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, preach deliverance to the captives, recover sight to the blind, and set at liberty those who are bruised.” Luke 4:18 This describes each of us. Some are more obviously captive in their inability to function in life. Cody was one of these.



Born with fetal alcohol syndrome as well as being abandoned by his mother when a tiny tot, he was a captive in need of release. We didn't realize the day in and day out of hiking, schooling, eating together, playing football and board games, living in a dorm with other boys, working with horses and cattle and pigs, carpentry, Bible study and prayer were all working together, within Cody's brain to create new neural pathways. Didn't even know anything about that terminology until I began taking continuing education courses on attachment issues and the brain several years after Cody moved on from the farm. It was definitely trial by fire for us to coach Cody through each day. We had to be creative about a

number of techniques to keep him close as he was prone to wander and get lost...whether on a hike, in the classroom or at the farmhouse where we lived.

One day, after about 2 years of Cody living on the farm, there was an obvious difference. He had memorized all of the states and capital cities. He was able to actually engage with us in conversation. He no longer told lies. Cody even made a touchdown during an afternoon football game. He was no longer the fortress man in the box!!! Of course when he started strutting like a rooster saying "I'm bad. I'm bad" gloating over his score, the boys might have wanted to stuff him back in that box.

The wounding incurred from his mother was a huge one for Cody. She would drift in and out of his life. We noticed any time spent with her was detrimental to him. And then the visits waned which actually gave his heart time to heal. One night in Bible study the scripture for the evening was from psalm 27: "though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me. Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path..... I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

Cody's father and step mother were both godly, trusting in the Lord, parents to Cody. Many of the kids at the farm had been forsaken by fathers which was a deep wounding. There is something about being forsaken by a mother that cuts much deeper. Cody came up to me a couple days after Bible study and said "you know that psalm we read in Bible study? My mother left me.....but God never has." We witnessed the scripture, "The Lord heals the brokenhearted" become reality right in our midst.

When Cody first came to the farm it seemed next to impossible he would one day leave, track back into public high school and GRADUATE!!! Indeed he did. Every now and then we would hear from him and he would tell us about how he was doing. He always wanted to share about his family members for he had a deep love for them. We had not seen Cody in person since he left the farm. Last summer we were walking through Biltmore Village. A car pulled into the parking lot right before us and out came



Cody Thompson; no longer a boy but a man. When he said "Dave and Bridget do you know who I am?" We said, "Are you kidding? Cody, you are our poster child for the farm!" We heard all about his job and how he had his own place to live. Most importantly he shared about surrendering his life to Jesus Christ and getting baptized a few months before our providential meeting. We are so very thankful the Lord saw fit for us to have that special meeting with Cody. We know he is, eternally, in the presence of the Lord.

We give thanks for all the Lord taught us through that journey with Cody.....for Cody's redemption.....for that last meeting with him a few months ago.....

"For NOTHING will be impossible with God." Luke 1:37

Cody Thompson Biltmore Village 2020