

## JUNE 12, 2011

On Sunday, June 12, 2011, after spending a lovely morning on our front porch, our family headed to church. We got the kids dressed, had breakfast, and off we went. Since my wife, Brea, and our girls planned to stay after church to set up for Vacation Bible School, we drove separate vehicles—our son, Jacob, and I would go grab lunch. Then he and I would go home so he could take his afternoon nap.

It was the Sunday that all the kids moved up a class based on their ages. Each Sunday school classroom was named after an animal, and Jacob had been in the Monkey class which consisted of about twenty two three-year-olds. Brea and I sometimes volunteered in there and it was aptly named; with toddlers running around, it was like a zoo. Now Jacob was moving up to the three- and four-year-olds class—the Frog Room.

The change in scenery and new teacher didn't make for smooth drop-off. Jacob started crying and wouldn't stop. I stayed behind and hung out with him until he got comfortable and stopped crying. This was usually a job for Brea, so it was nice to be able to comfort him and sit and play with him until he relaxed. If I'd known what the rest of the day would bring, I would have never left his side.

After church, Jacob and I went to eat at one of our favorite restaurants. It was rare for just the two of us to have a meal, so I was happy to get some one-on-one time with him. Jacob had eggs, bacon, and a Sprite; he was excited when I said he could have Sprite with his meal. We talked and laughed all through our meal together.

I was so proud to be his dad. My whole life I had dreamed about having a little boy. I wondered what he would look like. Would he look up to me the way I looked up to my dad? Being a father to a son was something I was especially thankful for. And Jacob was certainly all boy—rowdy, energetic, and adventurous. We often wrestled in the back yard when I got home from work. He'd meet me outside as I drove up the driveway. I could barely get my clothes changed before he made me go outside to play with him. First he wanted me to push him on the swing-set. As I pushed him and he swung back

toward me, I tickled his little feet and he'd laugh. He would tell me to stop, but then he'd want me to do it again.

Jacob was a lot like me as a kid—the scrawniest kid in class. When we wrestled, he tried so hard to knock me over. Picking him up and swinging him around took hardly any effort, and we had to be extra careful not to play too rough with him.

It was in these sweet simple moments of playing together that I noticed what a magical bond we had formed as father and son. While I had developed a wonderful relationship with each of my daughters, my relationship with Jacob was different. And as the only two males in the house, we naturally gravitated toward one another.

After leaving the restaurant, I buckled Jacob into his carseat in the back of our SUV and got in behind the wheel. But when I turned the key, the motor didn't turn over. In fact, the ignition made no sound at all. I put my head down in frustration because this had been happening off and on for the last few weeks, and I was afraid the starter had gone kaput. I tried it again; still nothing. Brea was just across the street at the church, so I thought about calling her to come get us. But I waited a few more seconds and then turned the key one more time. This time the engine started right up.

When I look back on moments like this, I think of every little thing that could have gone differently that day. If the SUV hadn't started, for instance, Brea would have given us a ride home. And everything would have turned out differently.

As Jacob and I drove home, he asked me if he could have some M&Ms. I gave him a few but didn't want him to eat the whole bag because he was supposed to take a nap when we got home. Then he started singing along with a song on the radio. "I will follow you." He sang in a sweet quiet voice. "I will follow you." It was the chorus of a song on Christian radio that we'd heard dozens of times.

When we got home, I lay down with Jacob in his bed, and we shared the usual nap routine: lie down with him for a few minutes, rub his back, maybe sing a song or talk a bit, then leave him in his room to rest. When we finished our routine and Jacob was settled, I decided to take a little Sunday-afternoon nap myself.

A couple hours later, I woke up, made some coffee, and flipped on the TV. When Brea and the girls came home, she asked if Jacob was still taking a nap. I said yes. Eventually Brea thought it was getting a bit long for Jacob to be sleeping, so she went to get him up.

This is the moment that my life changed forever.