The Joy And Pain of Parenting (A Father's Day Miracle)

June 3, 2011 By Angel Mason

INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED GAY AUTHOR IS REUNITED WITH HIS SON AFTER 10 YEARS

It is said that there are over 100,000 children in the foster care system and at one time, my son Rickey was one of them. At a very early age, he was taken away from his mother because of allegations that she had abused him and was not caring for him properly (something I did not know when I first met her).

I will never forget the day Lydia (not her real name) walked into my church! She appeared to be an intelligent woman who was very strong-willed and very self-motivated. Even still, I was able to discern anger, bitterness and a deep kind of pain not visible to the naked eye. As the months went on, I learned the source of that pain. Lydia was going through the final phases of regaining custody of her only son, Rickey. Even though the process seemed daunting and rigorous, Lydia prevailed and her son was returned to her after living three years with a foster family.

Little Rickey, as his mom affectionately called him, was now living in a two bedroom apartment with his mom and his little sister Sherry (not her real name). Routinely, his mother would bring them to church and eventually the family became an intricate part of our congregation. As time went on, Lydia began to express to me that she was having some difficulty rearing her son and asked for my advice and intervention. Since I had an excellent relationship with all the children, youth and young adults at my church, I was more than willing to do anything I could to help.Because my ministry was so new and I was so busy, I enlisted the help of one of my most trusted deacons and also the youth pastor in my church. Together, the three of us took Rickey under our wings and began providing mentorship, and spiritual guidance, in addition to providing clothing and other much needed items because the family was financially challenged.

Since I had more time to spend with Rickey, we became very close and it was through this weekly interaction with him that I discovered that he was one of the most extraordinary kids I had ever had the opportunity of meeting in my entire life! He was polite, super considerate, had an appetite for spiritual knowledge, talented, had a sincerity about him, and so many other noble attributes which endeared him to the entire congregation. I will never forget the one Christmas in which many of the people in the congregation heaped tons of Christmas presents upon him because he was always willing to help anyone out and never expected any reward for his generous acts of love. At one point, I even recalled becoming angry with him because he had a particular need and refused to ask for help when I felt he should have, especially since he was more than deserving of anything we could do for him.

Because Rickey was so extraordinary, I got a little curious and questioned his mother as to his father's whereabouts and why he was not playing a more active role in the life of his son. His mother immediately

responded by saying that his father had a problem with drinking, and had other substance abuse issues, and that she did not want him negatively influencing her son in any way. Since she seemed to be so adamantly opposed to the idea and I could see that my questioning her was drawing out deep feelings of resentment, bitterness and anger, I left it alone, but kept it in mind to maybe revisit the subject at a more opportune time.

Even as my relationship with Rickey began to evolve, his relationship on some levels with his mother began to deteriorate and became very strained. As I observed the interaction between the two, I was quickly able to discern the reasons why. Rickey was maturing and like most teens, he desired more freedom and independence, and this was something his mother was totally unwilling to allow in any fashion. The things that a normal teen was allowed to do was simply out of the question and this frustrated Rickey tremendously and admittedly, me as well. Still, I never openly demonstrated my frustration, but rather tried to do whatever I could to ease the tension between the two. To some degree, I was successful because while his mother was adamantly opposed to allowing her son to have the normal freedoms that a child his age should be enjoying, I was able to convince her to at least let him participate in certain activities at church. This eased some of the tension and diverted Rickey's attention away from the emotional trauma he was experiencing at home.

After awhile however, his mother's behavior became even more irrational and it was so obvious that other church members began to comment about it. At times, she would openly embarrass her son by saying inappropriate things while in the company of other church members; statements that demeaned him and would break his spirit. If I would try to correct her about her inappropriate behavior, she would withdraw for weeks and would not allow her son or daughter to attend church services, punishing them for her chastisement, even though I corrected her lovingly.

It was at that time that Rickey reached a point that he could not stand living with his mother any longer and began running away. I will never forget how on one occasion after learning that he had run away for the second time that I searched for him all night long until by the grace of God I was able to locate him. Because it was approximately 2:00 am in the morning when I found him, I took him home, allowed him to shower, gave him some clean clothing and put him to bed and phoned his mom, letting her know that I had found him.

Early the next morning, I again phoned but received no response, and decided to take Rickey to get a much needed haircut since I could not locate his mother. After he returned home from the barbershop, I could see that his disposition had really changed. It seemed that the haircut, a good night's sleep, some good food and lots of good old fashioned fatherly love had worked miracles in this child's life. But to my dismay, there came a knock at the door and there in the doorway stood his mother and two sisters. I was stunned. First of all, I knew that Lydia was extremely angry and somehow felt she needed back-up to retrieve her son (something to this day I don't understand).

I greeted her and invited them in. She immediately asked, "Where is Rickey?" in bossy kind of way, typical of her nature. I responded by saying, "He is in the next room talking with my assistant youth pastor." Reluctantly, and at my request, Rickey emerged from the other room and his mother spoke to him in a very harsh tone, literally commanding him to get his things and to come home now! Tears streamed down Rickey's face and he looked at me and said that he was never going back to his mother's house and that he wasn't leaving with her. This infuriated his mother and she looked at me and asked why I did not phone her and let her know that Rickey was at my house (as though I was intentionally hiding him). With a look of bewilderment on my face, I responded by stating that I had phoned twice and

couldn’t reach her and was puzzled as to why she did not hear my messages.

She immediately turned to her son again and said, “Rickey get your damn things! You are going with me or I am going to phone the police and have them take you away!” I could see that the situation was getting out of hand, so I asked if we could talk with Rickey for a few minutes. She reluctantly agreed and Rickey, my assistant youth pastor and I went into the other room to talk. Even though Rickey was crying buckets of tears, he was adamantly opposed to going with his mother and nothing I could do or say seemed to be able to change his mind. That was the first time Rickey and I ever seemed to bump heads about anything. I had always been able to talk with Rickey about anything and he was always willing to submit to my authority as a pastor and as a father, but this time he would not give an inch.

After about what seemed like hours, though only minutes, I was finally able to reason with him and convince him to go home with his mother, something I regret to this day! At that time, Rickey was a senior in school and had about a semester more to do before graduating. To my horror, it was only days after returning home with his mother that Rickey ran away for the very last time and I had only one other occasion to see him briefly before he disappeared totally from my life. Like before, I spent days and hours scouring the streets of San Diego trying to find my son. I refused to sleep and thought that I would wear the engine out in my car, having driven what seemed like thousands of miles.

All I could think to myself was how great this child was, and how all the people in the church dearly loved him, and the tremendous potential that he possessed. Memories of the hours we spent together working at church flooded my mind and I recalled the time I took him on the train with me to Los Angeles and how much he loved being on a train for the first time. I thought about the first day he looked into my eyes and affectionately, called me “Dad!” and how that shocked me. My mind began to play back all the scenes of times when I had attended his track meets, parent/teacher meetings with his mom and without her (but with her consent), and how bonded we had become. I even thought about the one time Rickey needed a minor surgery and how I had gone to the hospital to pray for him, encourage him, and to let him know that he would recover rapidly, and he did! And who could ever forget his 16th birthday party celebration that I gave him and how happy he was and how handsome he looked in the brand new clothing he wore so proudly. Even though these were pleasant memories, somehow they haunted me and I was faced with the reality that perhaps I would never see my son again.

Without my knowing, God had literally grafted Rickey into my heart. Even though I was not the paternal father and had not facilitated his natural birth, I had birthed him spiritually, and his life showed the evidence of my love and care. The truth of the matter is that I couldn’t love him anymore, even if he had been my own and it was apparent that he felt the same way. For the first time, I realized why the apostle Paul penned this famous passage found in I Corinthians 4:15: “Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.”

I will never forget the day when I went to pick him up from school and began to search for him. When I couldn’t find him, I walked into the office and was greeted by the school receptionist who knew me well and I told her I was looking for my son. She and I had talked on many occasions before and briefly began to discuss Rickey again. To my surprise, tears began to stream down her face. I was shocked and I immediately asked what was wrong. She responded by saying that in all the years that she had worked at the school, she had never seen such a wonderful father-son relationship and that she wished that she had this kind of relationship with her father. I hugged her and let her know that God loved her and that I was just loving my son, the way God loves each of us, so if anyone deserved the praise and credit, it was God the Father, because He was my example!

Later, I found my son and his friend standing by the curve outside of the school waiting for me. But when I drove up, I observed something I had never seen before. There stood Rickey with his chest out, so proud that his dad was there to pick him up and I could see it. Though amazed and flattered by what I was seeing, I just acted normal, not letting on about what I had observed. Immediately, Rickey and his friend got into the SUV and he asked me if I could take his friend home. I immediately consented and before you knew it, I had become acquainted with most of his teammates. I quickly gained their respect, and was able to mentor some of them as well.

These fond memories were now a thing of the past, and my son was now gone and I could not find him. I knew that he would not come back to my home fearing that if he did, his mother would come there and drag him away again. The first few years were like a living hell for me. Days on end, you could find me curled up in my bed in a fetal-like position, suffering from an emotional pain that no words could ever adequately describe. The more the days went by, the more pain, feelings of hopeless and despair grew. After awhile, that despair grew into immense anger and admittedly, I had to pray a lot to keep from becoming bitter and resentful.

After about 10 years had passed, I received a message in my e-mail from my son. Ironically, I had just finished listening to an audio excerpt written about Rickey that I had previously recorded on CD from my best-selling book, Love Won't Let Me Be Silent, and moments later there appeared this message. I couldn't believe it! When I reached him by phone, I was not sure about what to say. I didn't know how to tell him how much I loved him, how my life had been turned upside down, and how I had never been the same since he ran away years ago. As I glanced through his pictures on Facebook, I just sat there amazed at how differently he looked and how much he had matured, but also feeling deeply hurt that I had been robbed of seeing him grow and mature into the man that he is today.

Before boarding the train yesterday to go to church, I was finally able to express to him the magnitude of pain I had suffered for years, and he echoed back the same sentiments to me and then concluded the conversation by (beginning the healing process for both of us by) stating, "Dad, I went through the same extreme hurt and pain too and I am just glad it's over!" I replied, "Son I am as well - I love you and I am grateful to God for this miracle!"

One Final note: June 9th will be Rickey's 27th birthday and June 19th will be Father's Day, and in anticipation of sharing these joyous days together, there is one Gospel song that I believe expresses both of our sentiments as we anticipate our reunion: "When all God's children get together, What a time! What a time! What a time!"

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A message to my readers: Often same-gender-loving parents experience many challenges living in a world that is filled with discrimination and inequality. About 10 years ago, my son was taken away from me and my life was turned upside down. It wasn't until today that I was reunited with him and there are no words that could express what I am feeling now! All I can say is, "THANK GOD FOR TAKING CARE OF MY SON ALL OF THE YEARS THAT WE WERE APART! TODAY MY PRODIGAL SON HAS RETURNED TO HIS FATHER'S HOUSE!"

Below is a link to an excerpt from my bestselling book, Love Won't Let Me Be Silent - A MUST HEAR!

AUDIO LINK TO EXCERPT ENTITLED PRODIGAL SON - Portrait of a Gay Parent

Also check out another dynamic article written by Mason entitled:
FOR THOSE WHO WILL NEVER KNOW THE JOY OF A FATHER'S DAY

By Bishop Terry Angel Mason, Global Author
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