



The Silent Witness

Or, How God Gave One Prodigal Exactly What He Needed

by **Joshua Tyra**, LIA Admissions Coordinator



Over the last five years at Love In Action, I have talked to a lot of people who love prodigals, those sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and godchildren who have gone to live for a season in the “far country,” who have decided to try their hand at the stacked decks and tilted roulette wheels of Vanity Fair. As a prodigal myself, I have a unique connection to those who love and pray for prodigals. If I can’t provide any easy answers (and I can’t), I can at least tell them the story of one prodigal who decided to return home, and what happened to him after he did. By now I have told my story hundreds of times, and although I still feel connected to it, this intense rehearsal of all its details has made me somewhat less aware of its uniqueness.

When your native language is English, you don’t think about what makes English unique. To you, English is blasé, while French and German are unique.

Recently God revitalized my view of what he has done for me by giving me new information and a different perspective about my prodigal years. When I share my testimony I always talk about my college resident heads, Scott and his wife Tamarin. For four years, from 1997 to 2001, they did an amazing thing for me: they lived out their evangelical Christian faith quietly and calmly in front of me at one of our nation’s most liberal liberal arts schools. Last week I had the opportunity to sit down with them and catch up for the first time in eight years. What they shared with me moved me deeply and filled me with gratitude for God’s loving kindness and provision. It also convinced me of the truth of what I have told many parents on the phone at Love In Action: that God really is in control, that he loves their children more than they do, that he knows what they truly need, and can be fully trusted to give it to them.

When I got to college, the irony of having Scott and Tamarin as my dorm parents was not lost on me. I had been expecting a break from, if not a total rupture with, my Christian upbringing; but for the next four years, their very presence was a constant reminder of the God of my fathers, this God I was trying so hard to outrun. In my heart I knew he had placed me with

them on purpose, and I was more than half annoyed with him for doing so! The deeply significant role they played in my life was not a consequence of anything they did or said that was overtly “Christian”:

God could use a simple “hello” from one of them as an arrow to pierce my heart. Their very presence was a reminder to me of the One I belonged to. I knew exactly what their lives represented, and how far away from that mark my current path would lead me.

When I first got to the university, Tamarin, knowing that my dad was a Baptist pastor (as he still is), asked me whether I held the same belief system as my parents. Inside I thought, “There’s no way I can discuss that honestly with her.” It would have forced me to ask myself a lot of hard questions, such as why my belief system wasn’t the same as my parents’, how it had gotten to be different, and what exactly my belief system entailed. These are the questions that an adolescent must ask during the struggle to become an adult. And as Tamarin herself pointed out to me only last week, I was an adolescent then. I was one chrysalis who still thought I could stay inside the cocoon forever. So I dodged. “Yes,” I answered her, “my beliefs are pretty much the same as theirs.”

During those years I was 18 to 21, and a walking ball of fear, shame, insecurity, confusion, pride, anger, and hurt. I worked hard to conceal this inner chaos. I also worked hard to avoid the Jesus who said, “Go and sin no more,” although I was still attracted to the Jesus who said, “Neither do I condemn you.” In college I started out attending a church that believed those traits were united in the same Christ, but I moved on to a church that jettisoned the first picture of Christ in favor of the second. Attending that church, with its beautiful outward forms of religion but hollow core, was a lot more comfortable than the one where I was likely to be confronted with myself. But it was also less than satisfying, and after a time I stopped going altogether. I knew in my heart it was pointless.

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The Silent Witness (continued from front)

But even after I dropped church attendance, Scott and Tamarin were a reminder of where I had come from, and I couldn't interact with them without feeling a confusing mixture of deep loss—mourning what I had given up—and comforting reassurance—the hope I could eventually get it back.

Seeing Scott and Tamarin again last week after eight years apart was a rich, warm experience. It was like suddenly finding a whole wing on your house you had forgotten existed, and walking through it to find your favorite rooms all in order, full of your favorite books and pictures, with sunlight streaming in every window. I had the distinct impression that no time, or hardly any, had passed since our last meeting. But some physical evidence suggested otherwise: when we parted company their first child was about two years old. Now their boys are seven and nearly 10!

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What I learned in the course of our interview was how much they had prayed for me during those four years. I learned how they correctly perceived my inner conflict in my interactions with them. For four years, they said, I would alternately sidle up to them and then pull away. I was a yo-yo, a boomerang! I never realized how clearly my behavior gave away my internal struggle. But they

correctly sized up the situation. They realized they represented not only my conscience, but also something comfortable and familiar. They knew it was my desire to connect with the familiar that kept me coming back to them, and each fresh and fearful encounter with my conscience that drove me away again. I learned of their concern over my obvious unhappiness, and how they debated long and hard whether to sit me down and ask me if anything was wrong. After much thought and prayer, they decided not to do anything resembling a confrontation, on the grounds that they represented my last tenuous connection with Christianity, and they didn't want to risk severing that cord by coming on too strong.

How very wise that turned out to be! Even though they never said a word about Jesus Christ, sin, redemption, or anything of the kind, to this day I cite their influence as among the most important signposts back to himself that God placed in my path during a specially crucial and vulnerable period.

My mother has lately told me that she and my dad avoided confrontation with me during my college years not so much from a fear of pushing me away, but from an awareness that confrontation had already been tried and proven ineffective. She spoke of the frustration and powerlessness they felt with respect to my choices, two feelings which ultimately propelled them deeper into prayer and into the arms of God. In 2003 came the beginning of the answer to their prayers: I realized for the first time my own powerlessness to find fulfillment apart from God, and the frustration that results when I try. In the end, the answer that availed for my mom and dad availed for me. The three of us found in Christ the peace that we were incapable of extracting from the circumstances around us. And that is the good news of the Gospel for prodigals and for those who care about and pray for them!

I came away from my visit to Scott and Tamarin (and their bright and energetic sons!) with a new appreciation for God's behind-the-scenes ministry to each of us. When I had no idea what I really needed, God provided me with friends and parents who prayed for me in the background while continuing a foreground demonstration of their unconditional love. God used this flood of unmerited grace, mercy and love to vet me for a position at LIA, where I could help channel the same flood into other lives.

I am deeply grateful for the last five years, which have been filled with rich experiences, rewarding ministry, and dear friends and colleagues. It is with mixed emotions that I announce the close of my time at LIA. Having been presented with the opportunity to pursue an advanced degree in Biblical studies beginning in August (only one month from the date of this writing!), I have decided to take it. This decision has not been an easy one, and I will always be grateful to those at LIA who have supported and encouraged me. Moreover, I will always look back at The Source residential program and the position of Admissions Coordinator as the place where God started to "grow me up" in him.

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In His Grip,
Joshua D. Frye

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Event	Location	Date	Time
Source Residential Move-In Dates	LIA Campus	Call to Schedule	1:00 pm
4-Day Intensive	LIA Campus	Call to Schedule	9:00 am
Family Freedom Intensive	LIA Campus	Flexible dates, call for details	
Within Reach Support Group	LIA Campus	Tuesdays, call to enroll	7:00 pm
Love Won Out Conferences	Metropol. Ch. of God, Birmingham, AL	November 7, 2009	8:00 am

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