

MAGH – Fatherhood Part 1 Thalia – 24 Feb 2025

By Juan Perez

A) Introduction

First a big thank you to Ps Lakers for all he does for us in the background and choosing me to share today.

Also a special thank you to our Bro Nelson for sharing his testimony yesterday. It was next level! We are so blessed you shared your story. As a fellow lawyer I too have experienced challenges in running a practice and it's so encouraging to not feel alone in these tests.

I originally planned to share on a different topic but on Fri last week I felt I needed to change it up and to instead share my testimony on being a father and step dad. Hearing Bro Nelson share his testimony yesterday and the impact it had on all of us let me see the Holy Spirit is guiding us to share more of our testimonies to glorify Him.

Today I am sharing my testimony as a step dad. My message today is one of hope and gratitude to God.

As we begin reflecting on our roles as fathers and in some cases as step dads, let's start by giving thanks for our Father in Heaven.

In Isaiah 64: 5-8, we are reminded that while we are sinners and can stray, God remains our Father, our potter and we are formed by His hand:

We are constant sinners;
how can people like us be saved?
We are all infected and impure with sin.
When we display our righteous deeds,
they are nothing but filthy rags.
Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall,
and our sins sweep us away like the wind.
Yet no one calls on your name
or pleads with you for mercy.
Therefore, you have turned away from us
and turned us over to our sins.

And yet, O Lord, you are our Father.
We are the clay, and you are the potter.
We all are formed by your hand.

Let's pray.

B) My Testimony – Meeting Thalia

Yesterday, Bro Nelson shared some nuggets. One that stuck was that when you share what God has done, you weaken the devil's hold. Testimony is so powerful. It is for the fear of man that we don't share but we need to share to put the devil to shame and give glory to God for what he has done.

So please let me share with you about Thalia, our 21 year old daughter. Yesterday my wife and kids discussed as a family that I'd be sharing about Thalia and she was very supportive and happy for me to share. This in itself is a miracle – as you'll come to learn.

First some background – Paola and I came together 13 years ago – a blended family of 4 kids. A lot of hurt and confusion at the time.

I became Thalia's step dad when she was 8 years old. I was living in Sydney and Paola and Thalia soon moved from Perth to live with us in NSW.

It was not my first rodeo as a dad or step dad. At the time I already had 2 kids – then Luisa was 19 and Carlos was 12 (they are now grown up at 33 and 25 years old).

So I thought I was well equipped to step in and help raise her especially as her biological father was out of the picture – that’s a big story in itself for another day. But boy was I wrong. Being a step dad is hard!

We each brought to the relationship our own hurt and pain.

[Share briefly Thalia’s history as a child with her biological father].

The result was a defiant nature – always pushing the boundaries. Yet she is so talented – an incredible voice and artistic flare – but always under shadowed by her unruly behaviour.

What I brought to the relationship – I’d been raised with discipline and love. So I tended towards being authoritarian - if my rules weren’t followed then the discipline would escalate.

She was quite lost but so was I as my attempts to connect and straighten the behaviour just weren’t sticking.

And the behaviours got worse and over the years escalated... [I’ll provide examples – including dependencies, leaving home, hospitalisation etc].

Gentlemen, at the time this was all happening I wasn’t a Christian. I was lost and it felt like my life was tumbling down. My marriage was close to collapse and the family splintered. I was holding on by tender hooks.

Who of you have felt or are even feeling now that they have lost control of a child or their family?

We are reminded in Isaiah 40: 26-31 to trust in the Lord who is our hope and strength:

Look up into the heavens.
Who created all the stars?
He brings them out like an army, one after another,
calling each by its name.
Because of his great power and incomparable strength,
not a single one is missing.
O Jacob, how can you say the Lord does not see your troubles?
O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights?
Have you never heard?
Have you never understood?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of all the earth.
He never grows weak or weary.
No one can measure the depths of his understanding.
He gives power to the weak
and strength to the powerless.
Even youths will become weak and tired,
and young men will fall in exhaustion.
But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.
They will soar high on wings like eagles.
They will run and not grow weary.
They will walk and not faint.

Let’s pray.

C) Breaking Point and The Circuit Breaker

Yesterday when we were talking as a family Thalia asked me what I learnt from being a dad with her?

It was a poignant question.

I responded that I have learnt so many things. But one that stands out is that God turns our hurt and challenges to good in a way we can't imagine. That sometimes His hand isn't evident until years later and His timing is always perfect.

When our family reached breaking point in Sydney some 5 years ago, my wife and I sat down and looked at our options. These included separating, moving homes or moving to another State.

Up to that point I had no intention of moving back to Perth. All my career and life was on the east coast including my biological son and adopted daughter from my first marriage and they refused to move to Perth. So it didn't feel like a choice to me.

But the situation with Thalia and our marital relationship had degraded to a point that all options were on the table even moving back to Perth.

And after carefully considering all options, it turned out that some 5 years ago we moved back to Perth.

I must say at the time I was not happy. Not because I don't love Perth – I do as it's my home town and my parents live here. But I had to leave behind two older kids and it was going to impact my career and I felt jaded and resentful.

But what God revealed with time, with his perfect timing, was that it was the circuit breaker we needed as a family and for our marriage. It was also the game changer for me as a father and man.

The changes included me coming to church 3 years ago and giving my life to Christ. This led to the restoration of my marriage. I started to lean in and pray – first with Greenhouse and then with MAGH and also praying as a family.

Then the Holy Spirit helped me open my heart to Thalia and my attitude towards her changed. First I started to feel unconditional love towards her and I started to show it to her. For one I stopped threatening to throw her out of the home if she didn't comply with our rules.

It was a game changer – slowly our relationship started turning and she started following our family rules.

Praise God – thank you Lord for being our way maker, our miracle worker!

Let's pray.

D) Thalia's Breakthroughs

Thalia will be the first to admit she's a work in progress and can slip into old behaviours at times.

But over the last year she has achieved more than we could have imagined!

Tafe; driver's licence; first car; steady job... and now...

Greenhouse – 2 courses paid by her and she's on campus!!!

All this is nothing short of a miracle with our young Thalia. We are so proud of her.

In Ephesians 6:1-4 we are taught our roles as children and parents:

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

Being a father or step dad can be war. War against the enemy who aims to disrupt the harmony in our families and to steal our children's hope and futures. But also war against our own egos and the trauma and examples we grew up with.

History can repeat itself. I was brought up with a strict but loving hand. So I brought up my kids the same way. It worked for the other kids well. But for Thalia I now see it was too strong as her unique background meant she was feeling abandonment by her biological father and a lack of belonging. My strict "obey or leave" approach meant she felt she didn't have a safe home and so she left.

That's on me – first for not being smart enough to see that history was repeating itself and for allowing it to happen. For not breaking this curse. Secondly for not bringing her up with God's Word and the instruction of the Lord.

In Ephesians God teaches us how to be a good father. To bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

But it's amazing to me that in that very chapter 6 of Ephesians we find Paul's Word on the armour of God. Here we see God reminds us that being a father or step dad is a war and so he tells us to put on the armour of God and how it works to protect us and our family and children.

Gentlemen join me in reading Ephesians 6:10-20:

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.

For we are not fighting against flesh-and- blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil.

Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.

Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.

For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.

In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.

Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion.

Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

God is so good!

Does anyone wish to share?

I pass back to Ps Lakers.