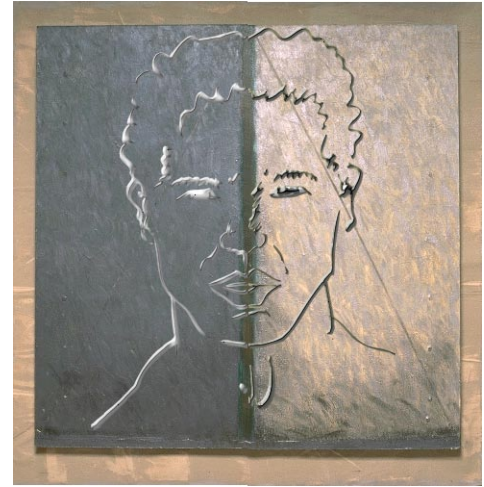


He was raised in a loving home. His parents were attentive, supportive. They cared about his well-being, his progress toward maturity. Even so, there were times when he wondered if anyone really cared about his struggles. He wondered if anyone truly understood the sweet torment of growing up. ■ But then he remembered the quarry.



Choices

Life Lesson

ON ONE OF HIS EARLY BIRTHDAYS he and his dad had spent several hours together roaming about the craggy face of an old, abandoned quarry out east of town. The day formed one of his happier memories, for it was not usual to enjoy such times of quiet intimacy with his hardworking, blue collar dad. During their outing they had talked—talked of things both trivial and important.

They had shared feelings.

And in a moment of pleasant release, he had told his dad, again, how sorry he was for taking his pocketknife and damaging its blade. But this time he went on to confess the overwhelming allure of his dad's tools, how hard it was for him to leave them alone.

His dad was silent for a long while, but just when the boy thought perhaps his dad hadn't heard what he had said, he spoke.

Staring out over the barren expanse of the open pit, his dad quietly began, "I always wanted to be like him. I always wanted to be like my father." His dad smiled at the boy. "I, too, did things I shouldn't have. But there were other times—times when I was tempted to do wrong—when I would stop and think about my father. I thought about how much he meant to me, how much I respected him, and wanted to be like him. I thought about how it would hurt him if I gave into the urge to do this wrong—and what he would think of me if I did.

"I thought about his life, his way of doing things—his integrity, his honesty, his generosity—and I knew that if I wanted to be like him, I'd have to start living like him. I'd have to learn from his life, and apply those lessons to mine."

Knowing Him

The boy had never heard his dad speak this way—had never heard him share such private thoughts about his past.

“So whenever I am tempted to do wrong,” his dad continued, “I just remember your granddad. His life. Oh, sometimes I still give in and do what I shouldn’t. But more often than not, the thought of Father and his life keeps me on the right track.”



Now, on the verge of becoming a man himself, he wonders when he forgot the lesson his dad had taught him. When did he become such an island unto himself?

When did he decide to choose shame over integrity?

Lived Out

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Hebrews 2:14-18

Somehow, as the years passed, I forgot that Jesus holds the answer for my battles against temptation. Perhaps I thought *my* trials unique. Perhaps, in my arrogance, I thought I could contrive a measured response that would satisfy both sides of the equation.

Not just philosophy, not just calculated advice, Jesus’ solution is practical and tested.

Jesus *lived* the answer to my temptations.



Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

Matthew 4:1-3

Satan wrote the book on deceit. He cloaks his vile enticements in simple practicality. “You are God. You know it and I know it. It’s

a small thing for You to satisfy Your hunger by changing this rock into a loaf of bread. What’s the good in being God if You can’t meet Your basic needs?”

But the Son of God did not become flesh to “meet His needs.”

“...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Matthew 20:28

Jesus denounced Satan’s offer as, among other things, shortsighted. Bread may quiet the belly for a time, but only the word of God sustains the whole person.

He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

Matthew 4:4

Just as those who are serious about losing weight train themselves to select healthy foods over the unhealthy, I must train myself to choose the eternal nourishment of God’s word over the junk food proffered by Satan. Jesus lived His answer. Though physically weak from hunger, He chose the more substantive word of His Father over the fleeting pleasures of the immediate.

Faith and Trust

Having failed with hunger, the devil tried a different tack.

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, So that you will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”

Matthew 4:5-6

Because He came to this moment armed with a deep knowledge of Scripture, Jesus immediately recognized Satan’s seemingly reasonable demand for what it was: sin.

“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.”

Deuteronomy 6:16

Jesus demonstrates that my relationship to Him is to be based on the purity of my faith and trust—not the cynicism of testing God’s

“faith” in *me*. Trials will surely come my way, but I cannot use them as an excuse to try my Lord.

With Jesus Near

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.”

Matthew 4:8-9

This last, desperate plea was Satan tempting Jesus to enjoy kingship without servanthood, lordship without sacrifice. A very real temptation indeed. Who *wouldn’t* bypass misery and death, if given the chance? But Jesus could spot idolatry a mile away, and He was having none of it. He had come in flesh so that He might die, and without His death and resurrection there would be no kingdom to rule.

Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”

Matthew 4:10



The answer to my moments of temptation is to keep Jesus beside me, and God before me.

With Jesus near, I will not forget His example and sacrifice. I will not forget the day He resisted the urge to take an easier path. I will not forget the day He chose my eternal salvation over His own pain and suffering.

And with God the Father before me, the right path will always be set, and the destination clear.

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