

Be Opened ... to New Life



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Hello! I'm Damian! As a young boy I loved playing rugby. At every opportunity I was in the backyard running and tackling with my mates. In my latter primary school years I attended a private boys college where I was selected in the A Rugby team for my first three years. We went on to win all 3 premierships, having lost only one game over that time. It felt good to be a part of something so successful.

In the U14s my rugby coach took me aside one day at school. I had yet to develop and had been left behind in height and weight compared to the other boys. My time playing front row forward in his team was over. I was dropped to a lower team.

Looking back I realise that this was a turning point in my life. Playing in this team meant a great deal. But more than that a male figure who I saw as a type of mentor told me in no uncertain terms that I couldn't make the cut and that I just didn't have what it takes to keep playing in that team. He didn't use those words – he was a very decent and caring man. But as a boy that's what I took from what had happened.

When I was three years old my father left the family home. My only memory of him was through photographs. - I was an only child raised solely by my mother.

So there was a story already in play when this situation with my rugby coach emerged. A deep wound of sadness and loss had been developing inside me. Without knowing it the absence of my father came to shape to a large degree who I was. My attitude towards that coach changed and over time I resolved never to trust another male person again. I felt deeply hurt and let down. I didn't need reminding that I was not likeable, not good enough and unworthy of love. Instinctively I lacked confidence and was plagued by self-doubt – something I have endured even up until this moment.

My mother and I became part of a Christian community and I spent my teenage years growing up in the youth group. I have come to realise that the abandonment I had experienced with my earthly father somehow became a barrier to my relationship with God – I never believed it was for me. While I saw others having

personal encounters and conversion experiences with God, I never gave it a second thought. I knew it just wasn't for me. Life had taught me that.

And so I found as I grew to adulthood I began to drift away from the principles and values my mother had taught me. I lacked confidence and desired to be part of the group. I had many girlfriends. I found the attention of women made me feel good about myself and became something I sought constantly. I drank too much and treated myself and others poorly. I have deep regrets about this part of my life. I was rudderless and highly impressionable. I had no idea who I was. It changed with the crowd. I lacked a solid male presence to take an interest in me and steer me in the right direction. I thought I was alone and that real and meaningful relationships were for everyone else not me.

At 19 I joined the Police Service and found an identity in this. My work became my life. I saw the worst parts of society and compensated by binge drinking and pursuing negative relationships with women I just wasn't compatible with. This led to a relationship with a colleague and a pregnancy. The conversation I had with my partner at the time still haunts me. She had told me the news and I had looked to distance myself and let her deal with things alone. Instead of offering strength I abandoned her and our child. The relationship and our child's life ended.

Without ever knowing him I had become my father.

A year or so later I met a beautiful young woman who later became my wife. Shortly afterwards I became a father and we had our first child Amelia. I remember weeping when Amelia was born and becoming overwhelmed at the gift that she was. I had never experienced anything like this before.

The negative habits in my life however continued to plague me. I continued to drink and go clubbing. I almost lost everything for a pattern of behavior and lack of responsibility that sought to destroy me and everything around me.

Three years later I took a job in an isolated town in central QLD. It was during this time that I would sit out on our back stairs and look at the beautiful landscape that surrounded our house. We became involved in the

local Catholic community and I slowly came to sense a spiritual presence. I came to recognise the presence of God in the beauty and isolation of the bush. There is a book by John Eldredge called *The Sacred Romance – drawing closer to the heart of God*, and this was what began to happen for me. The walls and layers I had erected around my heart started to come down and I began to realise that perhaps God did love me and that there was hope for good in my life. Before we moved back to Brisbane our second child, Lily was born.

In 2006 our third child and my only son Sam was born. My journey as a father has been littered with highs and lows. It is something that has never been modeled to me and I often feel that I fail more than I succeed. I think over time I have been able to learn and grow a great deal. There is however a lot more room for improvement. Whilst my relationship with my daughters has been wonderful, my relationship with my son takes on special significance for me.

It is the only real masculine bond I have ever experienced. And frighteningly enough it is me expected to lead and impart wisdom on the other. I hardly feel equipped.

In recent years I have taken steps to let go of my past and look to the future. I have chosen to ensure that the curse of fractured fatherhood in our family goes no further than me.

In 2009 I got word that my father had brain cancer and was in the last stages of life. I spent some time by his bedside. He could only communicate by facial expression. The conversation was limited. I had never known this man. I left the hospital and wept. I think a lifetime of grief and sadness had caught up to me.

My father died and I attended his funeral. It was strange seeing a photo of my father holding me in his arms when I was a baby. The whole thing was overwhelmingly sad. I would have liked to know him.

I have since reconciled myself to my Heavenly Father and this has coincided with me coming face to face with the deep father wound I have carried my whole life. I went to a Men Alive weekend a few years back and received some prayer from a couple of mentors of mine. It was during that prayer that I felt like a weight was lifted from me. I wept for three days, went to counselling and now have been able to acknowledge that my father's failing is not my own. I have been able to let that go and forgive him. I have also come to terms with my own sin and sought forgiveness.

And so me confronting my father wound, letting go of the hurt, and surrendering to the healing power of God has presented me with an opportunity to correct the failings of the past. The loss and grief as to what might have been with my father is now a passion and commitment to not repeat these mistakes and to live and serve my family in ways my earthly father could not. Like the life of Jesus and the model of childbirth, although there is pain and suffering, there is always a promise of new life and hope for a better future, for this generation and those to come.