

How to Find Freedom as the Prodigal Son

This past May, millions of Americans gathered to pray from coast to coast in more than 43,000 local gatherings—the largest National Day of Prayer ever recorded. As Vice Chairman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force, John Bornschein plays a key role in mobilizing this annual event. His own testimony reveals a raw, difficult journey that affirms life in unexpected ways.

In my young adult life, I went through a rebellious phase—ultimately redeemed in a way that recalls my mother's story.

A victim of sexual abuse, my mother made her way to California where she found a group of other troubled teens. In her mind, she would never again be the victim. Yet in the midst of bad choices and a lifestyle that was sure to lead her to prison, she became pregnant.

The man responsible encouraged her to abort the baby, and she did. The effects to her body were harmful. She bled horribly, and the scar tissue was severe. Suddenly aware of the brutal reality that she had just become the victim of her own choices, she cried out to God for help—a God she didn't know and resented.

But this experience didn't stop her from returning to the lifestyle she knew. It wasn't long before she became pregnant again, despite the scar tissue. Shocked and disbelieving, she again determined to end this life interruption.

As she contemplated in exasperation, the God she had cried out to answered her. At that moment, she knew she had to take a stand. God had intervened. My mother made the decision for life and chose to carry her baby to term.

But here is the cold reality: There wasn't a red carpet awaiting her when she returned home that night. There were no flowers in a thoughtfully positioned vase. No, there was only the reality that she was about to become a young mom.

She still had no idea how she was going to make it through tomorrow. She had no support and no plan. But that wasn't a problem for the God who had just touched her heart. He was about to make a way in the wilderness.

She moved, took a new job, and tried to create an environment suitable for her new son. She knew the best place for her son was at church.

My mother did one of the bravest things I can remember: She walked with me right through the front doors of that little church. And you know what? Not one person put their finger to her chest and judged her for her previous life. No, the body of Christ acted as the body of Christ, welcoming her with open arms.

I don't remember much about Sunday school, but I have fond memories of friends, fun and stories of hope and redemption. I took home all of my art projects—those illustrated stories of Noah, Moses and Jesus. My mom would take those projects into her hands, smile and pull me in with a warm embrace.

Little did I know that each weekend, those stories were opening her heart to God more and more. At just 8 years old, I was an evangelist.

As a result, my mother started attending regularly, gave her heart to Jesus Christ—and I accepted Christ right there with her. What a turnaround. Sure, she'd made some mistakes. But God had a greater plan for her life, and she took the baton and ran with it.

When I was around high school age, my mother was working hard and doing all she could to put food on the table, pay the

bills and take care of the home. But she was also dating a man I struggled to connect with. He and I were at odds with one another, and I didn't have the heart to bring it up to her.

Instead, I got caught up living for myself. I left home before I was 17, which broke my mother's heart. Despite her pleading, I refused to come back. I found my own place, moved in with my girlfriend, Brandi, and we got pregnant.

I remember that Brandi was so distraught by the first pregnancy test. To double check, we consulted the Planned Parenthood brochure we had received at school. We ended up at the clinic, where the nurse suggested that we "terminate" the pregnancy (carefully chosen words).

She made a compelling argument—mentioning our youth, our future, our need to go on to college without the burden. Nevertheless, without wavering, Brandi made the choice to carry this baby to term.

All those years at church had made me aware that I was acting in disobedience with my lifestyle. The confirmation that we were pregnant and the reality of the situation drove me to my knees in prayer. I attempted to re-engage the God I had pushed aside.

Brandi and I prayed together and started going to church. I reconnected with my mother, and not long after, Brandi and I were in the hospital welcoming our baby girl.

We wouldn't have a baby without first being married, so we had an unofficial ceremony to seal the deal. Then, after my wife was able to fit into a wedding dress, we finally had our "official" ceremony in February of 1995.

My family's story is still being written, but we know that we have made the right choices—ones that we can live with for all eternity. The enemy tried taking life at every opportunity. He wanted my mother to abort me. He wanted my wife and me to

abort our baby girl. He hates life.

But God loves life. He intervened at every turn when we submitted to His will, despite all odds.

Get the rest of the story in John's book For LIFE: Defending the Defenseless, from which this article is excerpted with permission.

John Bornschein serves as the Vice Chairman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force.

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