

# Be Yourself

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It was a normal day at school when all of a sudden our parents came in, took us by the hand, and lead us out of the public elementary school, starting us on an amazing journey that would change our lives forever. Of course, I can't speak for my younger brother, Tyler, but I can speak for myself when I say that I would not be who I am today if my parents had not homeschooled me those ten wonderful years (Of course, there are countless other factors which helped shape me, but homeschooling was by far the main ingredient which made everything else possible.).

To begin with, I attended public school from kindergarten to second grade. According to my mom, I was always a happy child, open to learning, yet reading was never easy for me. Therefore, I suffered as a student in every other academic subject where reading was a necessity. Naturally, this had a tremendous effect on my personal sense of identity and self-worth, which affected me in every area of my young life. Of course, nothing had as strong an effect on my mom, regarding what was going on with me, as when she heard me say something which really shook her up. Here's what happened, in her words:

*It was in April of Joel's 2nd grade year when I had a wake-up call. I always took the children to school and picked them up. They were both usually happy and cheerful when they got in the car. However, on this particular day, when Joel got in the front seat, he began to cry. I said, "What's the matter?"*

*He said, "I'm so stupid I could blow my brains out."*

*Wow! I was shocked, but I didn't show it. Where would he even have learned such a horrible thing? I said, "Baby, there is nothing stupid about you. You are a very smart boy."*

*I don't remember exactly when this happened, but it was very shortly after this incident that I heard the Lord inside me say, "Get them in the ark." I knew what this meant.<sup>1</sup>*

For these reasons, against the advice of some of her friends and family and against the pull of personal convenience, mom and dad pulled us out.

Of course, as is true of any parent, homeschooling was a major sacrifice for mom. She worked as a registered nurse on the weekends and was free all week to teach us, but she liked her free time and had a lot of deep-rooted selfishness to overcome, as she's admitted to us many times. As expected, we all learned a lot those ten years.

For example, the power of peer pressure had a fairly firm grip on me in my early years, but as I grew up and became increasingly certain of who I was – of who I was born to be in this world – I learned more and more that it wasn't wise to compare or measure myself with others. Obviously, we are constantly bombarded with a culture that thrives on following the popular path of least resistance in line with conventional wisdom, but who has the courage or passion to be themselves in a world that is constantly trying to make him/her something or someone else? The tyranny of deindividuation through the

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<sup>1</sup> To read my mom's complete homeschooling story, go to <http://joelkillion.wordpress.com/2009/09/15/homeschoolingstory/>

massive sucking sound of group-think is a giant in our world that must be conquered by the individual, who is incidentally the largest minority group on the planet. For this reason, I guess I chose to live this one life with an all-consuming appreciation for God's blueprint for me so that I could truly love and serve others the right way, without the gnawing fear of offending someone simply because I wasn't exactly who they wanted me to be, the way they wanted me to be it.

Additionally, while growing up, we were exposed to all kinds of wonderful people, varying in age, mindsets, and backgrounds. We were given the opportunity, on numerous occasions, to learn from everyone we connected with, shaping our young minds and hearts with a broad view of life. In a way, each person I met had something I gleaned to make me who I am today. As I mixed this with the increased understanding of who I knew Christ made me to be, I became more and more bold in expressing myself as a friend, a son, a husband, a father, a writer, and as a person in general. In the end, the question is, who are you? Academic education is vital and easily attained, but personal identity and character is central in a time when virtue is nearly extinct in our world.

Obviously, my path is my path and your path is your path and God knows what we need in order to learn the lessons that will bring us peace, joy, and security. Thus, to compare our journeys would be useless. The point is, are we brave enough to walk in our own shoes, to be our own persons, or will we bow to the familiar idol of popular sentiment?

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