

## A REMINDER FROM GOD

Our son, Connor, was born in 2003 with cerebral palsy, semilobar holoprosencephaly, and agenesis of the corpus callosum. On all accounts, he should not have made it through the nine-month pregnancy. Miraculously, our precious little boy was born as a healthy baby. It was only in months following when the clinicians discovered he was to become a differently-abled child. We knew then that God had given an angel to our family.

When Connor was three years old, and shortly after my father passed away, I realized that God had a new special mission for me. During church one Sunday, I felt an obscure tap on my shoulder. God had my attention! However, it took a while for me to figure out what He had in store for me . . . eventually, I knew my calling was to write children's books about differently-abled children like Connor. God used the exercise of writing these special books to remind me of what is important in life – more specifically, about raising a differently-abled child with special needs.

*“CJ and the Angel Kids”* evolved into a mystery and adventure series featuring five children with different special needs – cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism, dyslexia and stuttering. The *Angel Kids* are portrayed as positive role models, working with typically-developing children to solve mysteries at different specialized camps while teaching everyone about respect and real-life situations including bullying, childhood obesity, autism, dyslexia and sensory processing issues.

The mission with *CJ and the Angel Kids* books is to increase awareness that differently-abled children want to be accepted for their special abilities and to be included in all activities with typically-developing children. *They just want to be kids!*

Throughout the three years of painstakingly writing the books, then self-publishing, God reminded me during the process of the parallel importance in writing the books and in raising a child with special needs. I cannot wholly explain anything associated with the books, or why Connor became a special needs child. As I sat at the computer at night writing the books, I felt God's infinite presence and just simply wrote what He was revealing to me. I cannot identify the origin of the ideas or creativity – it just evolved. I cannot expound on why I was up at 3:00am on several occasions writing. I just knew unequivocally that God had

entrusted to me this extraordinary opportunity and calling to do something really important on behalf of special-needs children and their caregivers. Connor, of course, is the initial inspiration, but the whole concept is simply inexpressible. I do not try to figure out why our son is a differently-abled child – I just know that God gave this honor and paramount responsibility to my wife Lisa and me. We most assuredly know, though, that our nurturing and raising Connor is a very special lifetime appointment from God.

*Perseverance.* An all-important prompting from God . . . *perseverance.* Perseverance is vital. Writing these books has been one of the toughest things I have ever done! There were days when I wanted to give up, thinking the effort was just not worth it. Yet, through some inexplicable buttress, an advancing thrust was encouragingly effected through joining forces with some special artisans . . . other authors, a gifted illustrator, and publisher. Following many sleepless nights, we were able to complete the first part of this special mission.

*Persistence.* There are similarities in creating necessary tenable literature as in caring for a differently-abled child. Raising a child with special needs is a lifetime endeavor, and you have to be persistent every single day in ensuring that your child has everything needed to be the best person possible. My wife and I worry daily about Connor's potential seizures . . . did he get enough to eat or drink . . . will he have a good day at school. Every parent with a special needs child experiences the same concerns. God reminded me that we simply *cannot give up!*

*Patience.* Patience is another lesson I learned while writing the books. As we go about our daily activities, it is hard to be patient in such an impatient world! Many times I wanted to push things along faster than what was reasonable or realistic. I wanted to get the books done quickly! But, it became quite clear that God, the master inspirator and creator of this commission, had a different plan. The inexplicably baffling obstacles along the way were obviously designed to make sure everything was completed at a logical pace. I remember sending proofs of each book to the other authors for corrections, expecting return copy within a few days. I forgot that these contributors had other responsibilities and that they would make their corrections in due time. *Patience!* To not be in control of the timing development of the books *really* unhinged me!

Patience is also critically important in raising a special needs child. Not everything can be done immediately, and as parents, we *must* be patient in every single aspect of our child's life. If we move too quickly, we may miss an

important milestone, or something unexpected. I am thankful that God reminded me that patience is a virtue.

*Enchantment.* Even though I have no explanation for it, enthralling ideas simply flowed and I knew to pay attention! During one of Connor's Buddy Ball baseball games one Saturday morning, tears quickly swelled as I observed a really overweight little boy approaching the plate for his turn to bat. At that very moment, another special element of *CJ and the Angel Kids* was consecrated to center on childhood obesity. There is no other explanation of how the idea was created – it just happened at that moment in time, and I knew that it came from God and that it was *very* important!

As I completed the main text of each book, I sent the manuscript to the other authors, who just happened to be speech and occupational therapists. They would add their vision and real-life knowledge to each of the books. Having the assistance of credentialed specialists provided credibility to the books, as well as to the featured social situations in each of the books. The manuscripts were sent to the illustrator who provided amazing illustrations for each paragraph, using water color-based drawings.

*Every day is special.* It was at that time when God reminded me that each day is special in raising a differently-abled child. When Connor gives me his unique look every morning, I just know that it will be a magical day! His precious eyes project hope and happiness! When he smiles at me during breakfast, I just know that I cannot have a bad day. You would never know from the innocence of his smile that he cannot talk or walk. He is wheelchair-bound and 'speaks' with the assistance of a communication device. We are blessed to have this very special child in our home.

*Teamwork.* I learned that teamwork is important in writing children's books, just as it is in raising a special needs child. Along the journey of writing the books, I was fortunate to have several people providing salient advice that was important to the success of the books. The team assembled for writing and publishing came from various parts of the United States and from Australia. We shared the special mission that would teach about differently-abled children.

Teamwork in our home is also a prerequisite in helping Connor. Lisa is the "General" who takes care of Connor's clinic appointments and medications, and directs the monthly activities. I provide the day-to-day support and lifting him. Bowe, our nine-year old son, is the special "gopher and emissary," running around

the house to fetch items Connor needs to make his life easier. Lisa's parents provide extra support and help with taking care of the children. The boys really enjoy and look forward to wonderful memorable times with "MaMa" and "PaPa!"

We are also infinitely blessed to have a team of therapists who work with Connor every week. He also benefits from dedicated teachers and aides in the school he attends. God reminded me that raising a special needs child cannot be done alone, and He provides "*Team Connor*" to ensure that our special needs child has excellent care at school and at home.

*Champions.* Through having Connor, and in the process of writing *CJ and the Angel Kids*, God also reminded me that special needs children require a team of advocates. Every parent, and every single person working with children, need to be committed champions! You *can be a champion* for your children . . . for your parents . . . for a special cause . . . for a person in need . . . in any significant situation requiring a special warrior. I am a passionate champion for differently-abled children. My special mission is to promote *awareness, acceptance and inclusion* for these special angels.

This series of children's books is a way to teach adults and typically-developing children about these *Angel Kids*, and that they will require thoughtful understanding and assistance throughout their lives. *But . . . they are still just kids!* I learned throughout the past three years that I can be a stand-up ambassador for Connor – whether during an IEP meeting . . . making sure he benefits from an appointment with the best doctor possible . . . or that his general needs are met on a daily basis. Through it all, I have the strength to be his champion. I believe that God gives us the fortitude and resilience to be reliable champions for our differently-abled children, as well as for other worthy purposes outside our homes.

While I cannot explain the evolution of the *CJ and the Angel Kids* books, I am grateful that through the often difficult process, God reminded me of the important things in raising a child with special needs. I am a better person today than I was three years ago, and I believe that one 'tap on the shoulder' can make a world of difference in your life and in the life of your differently-abled child.

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