

“Beginning at the End”

First Person Essay

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First Assembly of God

1,193

James. The name echoed in my mind. I still couldn't believe he was gone. I knew teens died every day, but I'd never had anyone I knew...die. I sat in my room arguing with God. "Why did he have to die? I prayed so hard that you'd bring him home safely, Lord! Why didn't you?!" A small tear rolled down my cheek. I listened in silence as I heard God's soft whisper upon my heart. "*He is home,*" God's words echoed in my mind almost audibly.

"But God, he was my friend, and now his life is gone! Finished!" I pleaded.

"*And he was my child,*" God replied ever so gently.

I asked again, now in tears. "Why did you take him? I don't understand."

Then God answered me in love, no reproach in his voice. "*So that my name could be glorified. Through his sacrifice many who are lost will return to me. Although there may be pain now, a day is coming when I will wipe every tear from your eyes. And that which you do not understand will be made clear.*"

This is what I needed to hear. I needed to know why James, my friend, had been taken only a few years after he had begun living a lifestyle for the Lord. I needed to know that God had a plan. I contemplated God's words for a moment, and then I asked one final question, "Lord, how will lives be turned to you through his death?" I waited for an answer. I was expecting some profound powerful reply. But all God said was, "*Be patient, and you will see.*"

I closed my eyes once more and let out a long sigh. God wanted me to be patient and rely on his strength. For in one's weakness, He is made strong.

Over the next few weeks, I watched in disbelief as thousands of teens and adults alike gave their testimony, all claiming it was because of James and his death that woke them from their

state of complacency. On his Facebook page, I scrolled through hundreds of messages sent to James, thanking him for being the difference in their lives and helping to lead them back to Christ. I looked on in disbelief as two rival schools set aside their differences and came together because of James. This was what God had been telling me. Through his death, James was able to accomplish and reach more people than he could have in life. I hadn't been looking at the big picture; I only had my little piece, my pain. Now, as I stepped back, I saw God's hand. I saw the plan He had in store for James the whole time. I now understood, even if only in part. After I read the many testimonies of how James had impacted all those lives, I thought of how knowing and meeting James, years earlier, had changed my life.

I had always been shy. Not many people knew who I was, and if they did remember me, it was always as Tenette's little sister or Savannah's big sister. It seemed that no one ever remembered my name. However, one summer everything changed. I was at soccer with my sister, and James was there. I had met him not long before that. My sister had walked over to introduce herself. Before she could speak, he said, "Hey, you're Bethany's sister, right?" I couldn't believe it. He had remembered me...my name! It made me feel important. Because of his words, I realized that I was my own person, and I had something unique to bring to the world. It was then I decided I no longer wanted to be shy. I was finished hiding behind others. As I thought back to this day, I knew if it hadn't been for James, I wouldn't be where I am today. While alive, he had touched so many lives, and through his death even more were led to Christ. After realizing this, I once again returned to God in tears. "I'm sorry," I said. "I'm sorry for questioning your plan and not trusting in you."

*“My child, you are forgiven,”* He said with more love in those five words than one could express in a lifetime. *“If you return to me, I will always return to you.”* He spoke with gentleness and love in His voice.

“What would you have me do now?” I asked.

*“Share how James changed your life, how he helped you.”*

“But how?” I queried. To this, my final question, there was no reply. He wanted me to figure out in my own way how, I too, could use this tragedy for God’s glory, to discover my own way of carrying on his legacy. His parents had done this by speaking of James’ life to their community and various engagements across the nation. They would most often share his last writing. He wrote it after the death of a fellow student in his school only months before he went to be with the Lord as well. These are the words he wrote that inspired me and pushed me to do more to finish my calling, he called it “The Clock is Ticking.”

“Take the time to love someone. Today, tomorrow, for the rest of your life. Because when that unexpected day comes that they pass on, you’ll be left wondering what you could have done better. How you could have made them feel more welcome, and show that you do care for them. Don’t wait until it’s too late like I did. Show the love that Jesus has for you to everyone you see. Let your heart break for what breaks His. Christ is enough. Let Him show you life. You never know who He may touch through you. It is so sad that it takes a tragedy like this to comprehend how our days are numbered. Only He knows. Keep your faith in Him. He will bless you beyond belief. Our job is right now. This very second. So often God gives me a little nudge towards someone...and I put it off until the next day...and then the next and then the next. Stop stalling. God put us on

this earth for HIS glory...not ours...and so many times, the things I do always point back to me and my self righteousness. So do something with me. Everyone. If this just touches one person, I will have done my job. Don't stall. Judgment is a heartbeat away.”

What James wrote is so true; our time here on earth to share God's word could soon be finished. Little did James know, what he wrote would touch thousands of lives. He truly would do his job.

Since that day, I have spoken to many about James' legacy. I have shared my testimony in order that more might come to know God. Because of James, I realized the difference one person can make. I also learned that a name means more than one can ever imagine. And now, I am determined to finish what James started when he first spoke to me and remembered my name.