

Forever Changed  
September 6, 2004  
Joey Link

The Labor Day family camp had come to a close and we were on our way home from a great weekend of family ministry. I was just settling in from behind the wheel for the 3-hour drive home when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a white truck coming across the wide medium headed straight for us. I quickly moved over to the far side of the highway. I slammed on the brakes as the pickup truck, pulling a trailer carrying four horses t-boned our van. It struck right where our 15 year-old daughter was sleeping. The impact turned our van sideways, sending it rolling up and over the guard rail three times before landing right side up in a rock pile.

I passed out, and someone pulled me out of the driver's seat. When I came to, I saw cars stopped on the highway, a horse walking around and my daughter hanging out the shattered side window of our van. My wife Carla, was lying on the ground about twenty feet from me, moaning in pain. She had been thrown from the van although she had been wearing her seat belt. Holding a towel drenched in blood from a huge cut on my head, I walked over to see my wife and tried to comfort her, telling her everything was going to be okay.

Thirty hours later, my two other children, who had been in a separate vehicle as they were headed back to the universities they attended, and I were listening to a doctor explain the extensive injuries Carla was struggling with and why they had put her in a medicated coma. Her neck was fractured in what they call the "*hangman's fracture*" that should have killed her, but the coma was to stop her from moving in bed as any uncontrolled movement could sever her badly damaged spinal cord. The high levels on the ICP (Intracranial pressure) monitor and the 23 brain hemorrhages he showed us on a scan would, in his opinion render her a "*mental vegetable if she lives at all.*" This is why he wasn't moving forward with the surgery to repair her spine.

I told "Dr. Grim" (not the neurologist's name but this is what we called him because of his grim news) that our faith in God would carry us through this ordeal. I remember saying, "*I don't believe our heavenly Father has chosen to end her life like this. I plan on bringing Carla back to meet you again in six months so you can get to see and talk to my amazing wife!*"

As my kids and I stood before the doctor listening to his advice as to whether to do surgery or not on Carla (without which she would most likely never sit again,

much less walk), my daughter Briana stomped her foot and said “*You don’t know my God and you don’t know my mom!*” A few days later, Briana went back to Bible college and one afternoon the entire symphonic band she was a part of gathered together to pray earnestly for Carla. It was that very afternoon her ICP monitor dropped in a miraculous way so the doctors changed their minds about doing the surgery on her back! That God would impress the director of the band to stop and do this at that moment in time is something we do not take for granted. God’s timing is always right!

The 12-hour surgery to reconstruct her spine was successful. Thank you Lord! What we were not prepared for was the residual effect of disrupting the nerves in her lower back (L1-5 vertebrae) and how this would affect her legs. After three months in the hospital, she started to kick her legs. Another three months and she could stand in parallel bars with AFO (Ankle-foot orthosis) braces on each leg. For the next four years she was in physical therapy 2-5 days a week strengthening her muscles and teaching the nerves in her legs and at the base of her spine how to correctly interpret the signals from her brain. This was a very slow process. The best she has ever been able to do is walk in a walker, but that is okay with us because of what else came from this journey.

During the three months Carla was in the hospital, her father flew across the country to see her. He grew up in a Bible teaching church but the allure of the world stole his heart and pulled him away from God. He divorced Carla’s mother, abandoning her and her three daughters for another woman. He told me he knew God could not hear his prayers and he needed to pray for Carla, so he got on his knees, confessing his sins to God and made his life right with Him again. I thought of Psalm 66:18, “*If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*” He went on to say he had to come “*see his girl who helped me get back to Jesus.*”

Carla has often said she would go through this journey of daily pain and suffering she has lived with these 20 years since the accident all over again for her Dad to come back to Jesus. He is now living with Him in heaven and Carla is delighted she will be spending eternity with her dad. What journey are you willing to go through for people to come to Jesus?

When the neurologist, in the conversation when he explained why they put her in a medicated coma, tried to explain to us why he used the term “*mental vegetable*” to describe her condition, he said she would hear the doorbell ring, get up to answer it

and not remember how to open the door, my heart was broken. I just could not picture my strong, independent, wise and witty wife this way.

But that was the way she was during her hospital stay. She didn't recognize pictures of her family or friends and couldn't do simple math equations in therapy. But God had something else in mind to get people's attention.

Two months into her memory loss, she woke up one morning not knowing where she was. She tried to get out of bed, falling because she could no longer walk. Even though it was almost 5 a.m., she made the nurses call me and I quickly dressed and rushed to the hospital. Everyone and everything she had not recognized or been able to do before were now no problem for her. Another miraculous event! God restored Carla's mind, healing all 23 of the hemorrhages in her brain! I loved it when the doctors said, "*These are people of faith and their prayers must be working because we have no medical explanation for this!*" We think God just wanted to shake up the medical community a bit!

When we made the drive back to the hospital where the accident happened to have her halo, the iron brace screwed into her skull while her broken neck healed removed; we asked if her neurosurgeon (Dr. Grim, who I told I would bring her back to meet him in six months) was available. It was after hours, but when he heard we were there, he rushed in from several floors away to see how Carla had recovered.

He was totally blown away! For fifteen minutes he quizzed Carla and carried on a conversation with her. From the brain scan he showed us, he could not believe what he was hearing and seeing. He showed us where all the hemorrhages were on her brain and told us what skill and intelligence she would have lost with where each one was located. Then he took us back up to the SICU ward of this trauma hospital where Carla had laid in a coma for two weeks before they did the surgery on her spine. He called the nurses who were on the floor to come and see Carla. He reminded them of her injuries and that he didn't see how she could have come back to this normal mental state again. Twenty years later, there are virtually no signs of Carla's brain hemorrhages or memory loss. All the glory and thanks for this go to God and our faithful prayer warriors. Because of the ministry we are associated with, thousands of people all over the world were praying for us and continue to pray for us. We do not and will not underestimate the power of prayer.

Before the neurosurgeon went in for the twelve-hour surgery on Carla, I asked God for an opportunity to let him know there really were thousands of people praying

for him during that surgery by name. God gave me that opportunity and the doctor gave me a look saying, “*I have heard that before.*”

The next day, he came to Carla’s room to give me an updated report on Carla and a hospital aide had just brought me a six-inch stack of emails and cards that had come for us. I said, “*Remember yesterday when I said people all over the world were praying for you during Carla’s surgery?*” I showed him the pile in my hand and told him it was just that day’s mail and emails and pulled out some from Brazil, New Zealand, and Singapore to show him I was not exaggerating when I had told him “*from all over the world.*” It was rewarding to see the impact of the body of Christ on his face. He realized how strong our faith is and the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

It’s that hope that has carried us through the past 20 years with many complications, surgeries, and constant daily nerve pain that distracts us from the real purpose in life we believe God has called us to, ministering as parent educators to encourage, equip and empower parents to raise obedient, respectful and responsible children from a biblical perspective in today’s challenging world.

These distractions, however have never side-tracked our resolve to continue in ministry. God has used the accident to show parents if we can endure a life-altering accident and still keep writing and traveling to teach and empower parents across the country, then they can stay focused on raising their kids for the glory of God regardless of all they had going on in their lives.

Below is one of Carla’s favorite songs and it sums up our journey through what others consider a dark time. Despite her worst days of pain, Carla has never seen her life as a dark place because she has kept her focus on where it should be for all believers. Instead of whining and complaining, she always looks for the positive in every situation. These words are taken from the song “*In Christ Alone*” (by Stuart Townsend/Keith Getty copyright 2001)

*“In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song...My Comforter, my All in All. Here in the love of Christ I stand.”*

If you would like to know more about Joey and Carla Link’s ministry to parents, check them out at [www.parentingmadepractical.com](http://www.parentingmadepractical.com). They have written two parenting books, “*Why Can’t I Get My Kids to Behave?*” and the award-winning “*Taming the Lecture Bug and Getting Your Kids to Think*”. Their teaching on temperaments is available on video and book, both are used in the parenting class

*“How Temperaments Impact You, Your Spouse, and Your Kids.”* They also have a bi-weekly podcast on parenting *“Parenting Made Practical”* and weekly encouraging email blogs.