

Hello friends! It is Anthony and I hope you're all doing well today.

So, over the last few weeks, we've had the privilege of hearing the testimonies of several ILF leaders. Today, I get to share mine.

I was born in Seattle, Washington—the oldest of three boys—into a Christian family. Church was just what we did. Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights—if the church doors were open, chances were good the Nelsons were there.

Now, when you grow up in a Christian home, there usually comes a point when you have to decide: Is this my parents' faith, or is it mine? I accepted Jesus when I was young, but I struggled to understand what it really meant to have a relationship with Him. I remember asking myself, How do you have a relationship with God who doesn't speak to you? What does it mean to have a relationship with Jesus? I believed in Jesus—and all that He had done for me - I just didn't know how to walk with Him.

I went off to college, met a beautiful girl who is now my wife of 26 years, we got married, had kids, found a local church...and for many years, I'd say I was a cultural Christian. I believed. I showed up. But I wasn't truly pursuing the Lord. And there were definitely areas of my life that Jesus probably wouldn't have approved of.

But about ten years ago—God started to change that. Not through a sermon. Not through a conference. But through people that God had put in my path.

One of those people was my oldest daughter, Thea's- youth leader, Maddie Durrett. She prayed with Thea, encouraged her, and legitimately disciplined her. I will never forget - One night I opened the garage door and saw Thea sitting on the ground, eyes closed, with her phone on speaker while Maddie was praying over her. It moved me and honestly there was something in me that shifted. I remember thinking, Maddie was modeling Jesus so well—was I? I also saw my daughter, pursuing Jesus with her whole heart. It was one of those moments that sticks with you.

A couple weeks later, we had dinner with our friends Viet and his wife Tami. We got on the topic of faith, and Viet mentioned he had just finished reading through the entire Bible for the first time. Without thinking, I said, "I've been a Christian my whole life...and I've never read through the Bible." He just stared at me and said, "What?"

Two days later, there's a package on my doorstep—a one-year study Bible. I called Viet and told him he didn't need to do that. He said, "Yes I did. And we're going to read it together."

So we did.

For the next year, I read Scripture every day. And the more I read, the more it came alive to me. Verses I had heard my whole life suddenly started to speak in a personal way. I began to realize that God had been using people all along to draw me closer to Him — to show me His love.

Proverbs 27:17 says,

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

- Maddie sharpened me by how she loved and led my daughter.
- Viet sharpened me through bold accountability.
- Even my own children sharpened me by showing me what genuine faith really looks like.

Today, I am certainly not perfect. I stumble. But I’m no longer just a cultural Christian. I’m a man learning — daily — to walk with Jesus. Learning what it means to actually be in relationship with Him.

And as with any relationship, it goes both ways. Through reading His Word and spending time in prayer, I began to understand that I could be in a real relationship with Jesus — that He does speak, and that His love for me is far greater than I ever imagined.

I’m forever grateful that God loved me enough to place people in my life who sharpened me. God uses people to reach people.

So my prayer is simple:

Lord, make us that kind of person.

Someone who sharpens.

Someone who encourages.

Someone whose life points others closer to You.

God used people like Maddie, Viet, and even my own kids to help be the catalyst of change in my own heart and mind. I know — He can use any one of us to be that catalyst of change for someone else.

-Anthony