PART THREE

A Team on a Mission
The Calling to Life & Adoption

CHAMPS Virtue

P U R P O S E F U L N E S S

The "P" for Purposefulness in the CHAMPS virtues refers to having a sense of purpose in your life and passion for that purpose. Mark Twain is often attributed with having said, "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born, and the day you find out why." Knowing why God put you on this planet is a gift of the Holy Spirit and enables you to live a purpose-driven life.

Chapter 7

Journey to Life

My return to the faith, whether we call it a reversion, conversion, or awakening to the gift I had been given at Baptism, led me to pray more and to action and engagement. While I was thrilled to be developing a relationship with Christ and had gone so far as to dedicate myself to full-time ministry at SportsLeader, God was calling Jamie and me to do something more. He was calling us to embrace life.

While living in Arizona, we regularly attended Sunday Mass, but had not fully immersed ourselves in or educated ourselves in the Catholic faith. We viewed the Catholic Church as a bit like a cafeteria. While we found many aspects appetizing, we chose to ignore certain teachings. First and foremost, among the teachings that we refused to put on our plates as we went through the cafeteria line were those on life. Certainly, the Church was not serious about birth control; the death penalty must be justifiable; abortion is just a political issue, isn't it? The rationalizations were endless and comforting, but they were wrongheaded and not from God. Additionally, these rationalizations had real consequences for the decisions that I made.

This thinking led to my having a vasectomy shortly after Jillian was born. Jamie had been very sick throughout the pregnancy. With Kyle, it was bad, but with Jillian, it was even worse. I remember being at a business conference in Wilmington, NC, when I got the call that Jamie had been taken to the ER with extreme dehydration and admitted into the hospital. There is no quick way to get home to Scottsdale from Wilmington, and the helplessness of that situation is still a vivid memory for me today. None of that, however, is a justifiable reason for the vasectomy decision. I decided to take matters out of God's hands and put them into my own. We were good with two children and didn't even explore the options the Church would have offered us, such as Natural Family Planning, had we bothered to ask. Society confirmed it was a good decision. I joked with my buddies that I was getting my "Jimmy V" – slang for vasectomy, not once stopping to think how the author of life itself might view that decision.

As my faith journey progressed, I realized the error of that surgery and recognized it for the sin that it was. At my first silent retreat, in that "it's been longer than I can remember since my last confession" general confession, I confessed the mistake of having a vasectomy. Afterward, I truly felt absolved of that sin, but as I continued to pray and consider my position on life, I felt I was being called to do more and to be open to new life. While my Spiritual Director confirmed to me that the sin had truly been absolved and I was not required to do anything else, I prayerfully made the difficult decision to have a vasectomy reversal.

While a vasectomy reversal is a significantly more complex and lengthy procedure than the original vasectomy, the reversal surgery was an eye-opener for me about Christian community. I had so

many people praying for me that it felt like Christ was holding me in his hands through the procedure. The surgery was a success, and we were ecstatic to be open to new life again. It was not, however, in God's plan for us to have additional biological children. Despite this reality, I was still glad that I had gone through with the surgery and even more delighted with the fully Catholic life that we were living with our two fantastic kids.

In November 2005, when I was blessed to attend the Office of Church and Sport Summit in the Vatican, I had a spiritual moment unlike anything I had ever experienced. Saint John Paul II's tomb was located at the time at the end of a series of tombs for many other popes, below St. Peter's. When I got in front of John Paul II's tomb, it was like a lightning bolt had gone through my body. I can't fully describe it, but it was genuine and felt like electricity coming through my veins. A long line of people was proceeding through the catacombs, so I could not just stop frozen in place and stare at his tomb as much as I wanted to. With Jamie's help, I was able to pull myself aside from the line to kneel and say a prayer. The prayer that I offered was the Prayer for the Pope. A beautiful prayer that I had learned went like this:

Christ Jesus, King and Lord of the Church, in your presence, I renew my unconditional loyalty to your Vicar on earth, the Pope. In him, you have chosen to show us the safe and sure path that we must follow in the midst of confusion, uneasiness, and unrest. I firmly believe that through him you govern, teach, and sanctify us; with him as our shepherd, we form the true Church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Grant me the grace to faithfully love, live, and spread our Holy Father's teachings. Watch over his life, enlighten his mind, strengthen his spirit, defend him from calumny and evil. Calm the

erosive winds of infidelity and disobedience. Hear our prayer and keep your Church united around him, firm in her belief and action, that she may truly be the instrument of your redemption. Amen.

It was the perfect prayer at that moment, the one I had prayed so many times as I was discovering my faith for the man whose tomb was just a few feet away. Still, as I tried to understand why I had this incredible reaction to his tomb and none to the other great popes' tombs I had passed in the tunnels, I knew it was because John Paul II had tangibly brought Christ to me in my lifetime. Like millions of Catholics, I have a particular affinity for this now Saint. He was indeed "Mio Papa," as the Italians would say. Even more, he was the voice of truth, telling me not to be afraid. With that experience in front of the tomb, I sensed that God had more to ask of me – I didn't know what it was yet.

Soon, I was to learn that the Vatican experience was leading me to delve deeper into prayer about adoption, something I knew was growing on Jamie's heart. But was it true? Could it be that at the age of 44, Christ was asking me to open my heart to adoption? A few months after returning home from Rome, I went on my annual silent retreat with the intention of further discerning this notion of adoption that would not go away. On that retreat, in the clarity of silence combined with insightful spiritual direction from our good friend Father Todd Belardi, I could clearly hear the call to adoption, and my heart was opened to the possibilities it would bring. While Jamie had never pressed me or told me she would adopt if it weren't for me holding her up, I knew that when I went home and told her that I was open to adoption, there would be no looking back.

Adoption was not anything we had talked about for the first decade of our marriage, but Jamie had adoption in her family as her Mom is one of six adopted children. We had seen the witness of friends in our school community who had adopted. I knew Jamie was ready to go, but she gave me my space because she wisely knew that this had to be a call for both of us, and now it was!

We took the next step of asking our children how they would feel if we adopted. Kyle, who was 11 at the time, went into the school chapel and wrote us a letter about how much it would mean to him if we were to adopt. Without any fanfare, he came home and put it on our bed for us to discover. In that letter, he wrote, "...for a long time, I've wanted a baby brother or sister. I have always wanted to adopt someone and have prayed about it..." Soon, Jillian wrote a similar letter, which included, "...I would like to have a new baby brother or sister because it would be a great experience, and I've always wanted to be a big sister..." These letters would ultimately be included in our adoption profile book.

Jamie and I didn't want to make it as simple as writing a letter, though. We wanted to ensure our kids understood what they were signing up for, so we presented them with the realities and trade-offs that would inevitably arise. *That ski vacation envisioned next year would probably not happen with a baby in the house. Mom and Dad's time would be more divided; we might not be able to attend all your games. Are you ready to share your room if needed?* We presented them with various scenarios, but they never flinched; this had become a family calling. Aware that the adoption call would change all our lives, we were ready to take the plunge.

Chapter 7 Quote, Passage, Song & Questions

Quote

"Through adoption, Americans can forever change not only a child's life but also their own."

Former President George W. Bush

Bible Passage

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.

Matthew 18:4-5

Music Lyric

"You're going to do great things, I already know. God's got His hand on you, so don't live life in fear. Forgive and forget, but don't forget why you're here. Take your time and pray..."

Sidewalk Prophets – The Words I Would Say – Word Records – 2009

Questions

Have you ever viewed the teachings of the Catholic Church as a cafeteria?

Do you struggle with the Church's teachings on life? Why?

Has adoption been something you have contemplated as part of your pro-life stance?

Reflect on how you support and promote life.