

MARK'S REMARKS

Late this fall I drove out to the farm to see a new tillage unit my dad was pulling across the earth. I took my son along (who has asked to remain nameless) and a friend of his. They asked to ride Grandpa's 4-wheeler around the yard while I road the 4-wheeler Grandpa was testing in the field. A voice of fatherly caution mentioned they should explore, on foot, the grove in an attempt to stir up some rabbits or climb the ladder to the haymow to awaken some cats. Looks of instant disappointment on the faces of two young adventurers, and they shuffled away.

I mentioned their request to my dad as we rode together. He assured me his grandson was already well skilled in driving the 4-wheeler. I didn't ask. After some time I made my way back to the farm and informed these young trailblazers I had a change of heart. It would be okay to explore the grove by machine in an attempt to stir up some rabbits.

Poof! They were gone. A little trail of dust was the only evidence remaining of two boys who had sprinted to the machine shed. From a distance I saw them, in one swift coordinated move, jump on, start, reverse, and punch the throttle of this 4-wheeler. In an instant, they were gone.

Periodically they would dash by, gleefully sporting smiles and windblown hair. Their biggest challenge lay in determining whether speed or doughnuts were more thrilling. Before long they simply combined the two. The voice of fatherly caution informed everyone it was still vying for a part of the afternoon. "Slow Down", "Don't tip it" "Make sure you always respect the machine." I was proud of his driving "skills" yet nervous at the same time. After a time, and a few other cautionary shouts and looks, they parked the 4-wheeler in the shed.

They dismounted and began to run toward me; full of joy, empty of disappointment. And to think I almost prevented the entire adventure. And then it happened. Suddenly my little boy was gone and I knew he wasn't going to return. Running toward me was a young adolescent growing up right before my eyes with every stride. As he ran, I saw his first solo bike ride; I heard when we first sang together in the kitchen "This Little Light of Mine." I recalled the day he was born, the first time I held him, those initial months when his proud sister delegated who would hold him and for how long. Other thoughts came and many would have to wait as I was snapped back into the present by two excited voices anxious to report on their recent escapade.

Although she appeared suddenly that afternoon, nostalgia leisurely drifted away, certain to show up again. While her presence left several impressions none as clear as this: My son was growing up and growing up fast. And while he still needed me to direct and guide him, that direction and guidance was moving from a circle of control to a circle of influence. Be sure... smiles, words of encouragement, hands on the shoulder, laughter, conversations, hugs, discipline, and secret handshakes exist in both circles.

In this busy season with our plans, our get-togethers, the stories we will retell, and the new stories we will write, some shaded with sadness, some sprinkled with joy, I graciously ask you for a favor. Slow down. Discipline yourself to see the smile, the twinkle in the eye, the innocence, the uniqueness, the profound treasure of life lived in relationships.

"LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be... An entire lifetime is just a moment to you; human existence is but a breath." And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you" (Ps 39:4a, 5, 7)

Recollecting,

Pastor Mark