

## Steven Kukulka's Testimony Given Thanksgiving Day 2018

Good Morning. My name is Steven Kukulka and I have been a member here for about 5 years now. I was born in Myrtle Beach and grew up in Conway, SC. I moved to Charleston in 2003 to attend The Citadel and have been living here since. I was a public high school teacher for 8 years and now I am in lumber and building material sales. And on this Thanksgiving morning and every morning I am Thankful.

I almost didn't give this testimony which I will explain later.

My life story is one of seemingly unfortunate events and periods of trial that are actually blessings and a part of God's glorious plan. This ebb and flow in my life began at my birth.

### **Adoption:**

I was born in Myrtle Beach to an unwed, underage mother with no man at the hospital. My APGAR(health) score was lower than normal which characterized me as a potentially unhealthy child. My parents, Dan and Jane Kukulka could not have children on their own. They had fostered children and had been in the adoption system for a while. I later read in my mother's journal that by the time I was born they had begun to give up hope.

### **But God was at work and would use this for good.**

My dad received a call that there was a baby boy up for adoption He immediately said we'll take the baby. They didn't even have a crib. I slept my first night at home in the top drawer of a dresser. I didn't have a perfect childhood but I grew up with two loving parents who actively loved, taught, and provided for me. I always had enough food to eat and a roof over my head. We ate as a family around the table with the TV off almost every night. They exposed me to the Catholic faith and we almost never missed a Sunday. I am incredibly thankful for the family I grew up in and for God making sure I made it to the right place.

### **Mom's Death:**

My life was normal with its small ups and downs until my mother was diagnosed with Ovarian cancer in 1998, when I was 13. A boy has a special bond with his mother and I was no different. Her illness and watching her suffer was difficult for me. My mother outlived her diagnosis by over 3 years, long enough to see me get accepted to and commit to The Citadel and to graduate high school. Because of her extended illness, she had to face the reality of her own death which she then had the strength to prepare me for in her own way. She would trap me at the beginning of an hour-long car ride to the beach by starting a conversation with "So what will you do when I die?" How will your ..... change? That's not what a 17-year-old wants to discuss on the way to the beach. She passed away 6 weeks before I reported to The Citadel in 2003.

### **I surely didn't know it then, but God was at work.**

While at The Citadel, I had a knob under my care that lost his mother suddenly to cancer. His mother's disease was aggressive. The responsibilities of knob year at The Citadel don't allow a person to process or grieve. I was able to be there for this 18-year-old and help him process and grieve in a healthy way, because God and my mother had prepared me to do so. Going through what I did allowed me to comfort him and relate in a way other cadets could not. Without that significant loss in my life, I would never have been mature enough to counsel him the way I did. This had to be God's design.

### **College Years and Divorce:**

Some of you have a prodigal son type story- That was me. As I said before I grew up Catholic. We went to church every Sunday. I probably missed ten Sundays my entire childhood. The combination of my mother's death and the freedom that college afforded me meant my college years were a time of rebellion. I partied, drank, chased girls and barely graduated. I met and started dating a girl my junior year whom I married right out of college, because society said it was the next step. Because we did not have a firm foundation of faith and we rushed into things, the marriage ended in divorce. I lived in extra rooms, and on couches for 8 months while I got my life back on some sort of track. The owners of some of those couches are here this morning.

### **Even when I wasn't paying attention God was at work.**

It was during the months I was living adrift that Nik and Susan Holum, James and Mary Driver, Tim and Sherrie Driver, dragged me to Alpha where I met my wife Rebecca. She is such a godly woman whose positive influence on my life I could talk about for the next 3 days... But the we wouldn't get to eat Thanksgiving dinner. I also directly attribute my coming to that Alpha with my return to the faith. I Thank God for the people he put in my life during this season of my life. I am a blessed man with a wife who loves me. I have wonderful friends who I can call family. And I have a strong church family.

**This is a good time in my story to say that I have not realized God's purpose for all of the things that have and continue to happen in my life. It has taken me years and lots of reflection to see God's hand at work.**

### **Father's Death:**

My father and I had not been close because of some of the decisions he and I both made after my mother's passing. My father started showing signs of Alzheimer's and Dementia in 2012. He slowly deteriorated and died in June of this year. I don't know what good will come out of my father's death but my faith in God means that I believe something good will. **God is at work.**

## **Rebecca's Illness:**

My wife and I have a wonderful relationship rooted in faith, but it is not without its trials. Rebecca has Lupus, a chronic autoimmune disease that can be nothing and can be completely debilitating. I knew about it during our courtship and she tried to prepare me for what the eventual downturn would look like before we got married. She gave me articles to read and I went with her to education days. She was healthy during our engagement, wedding and honeymoon. 6 months after we were married, her lupus flared. It made her unable to work, she was sick often and severely for years. Even now some of the symptoms of that flare linger. I don't know why she developed lupus or why I have to watch her suffer, but I know that **God is at work and there is a purpose to this season of our lives.**

## **Children:**

The medicine that Rebecca has to take to control her immune system is effective but toxic. It prevents her from being able to safely carry a child. This is a fact that we struggle with mightily because we've both always wanted a family of our own. We have considered other options and are currently praying for guidance and a Godly outcome. Sometimes I think the roadblocks are put in our path to teach us patience. **God is at work and He has a plan.**

## **Transition:**

I said earlier that I almost didn't give this testimony this morning. I sent Randy and Al an email Thursday of last week saying that I would be willing to give the testimony. My grandmother, my last remaining grandparent, went on hospice care Sunday and passed away Monday. We are flying to Pennsylvania for her funeral tomorrow. Al and Randy were gracious enough to give me an out, offering to relieve me of the responsibility of preparing for my testimony this morning, but I felt called to do it. Even though I haven't been able to celebrate her life with family and process not having her anymore, I know there is some good that will come of it.

Thank you for listening to my reflections this morning. I shared some things with you that were difficult to talk about but felt called to open up with you. In spite of all that has happened to me in my 33 years on this earth, I am grateful. **I know that God is at work in all things in my life.**

*1 Thessalonians 5:18 says: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

## **Happy Thanksgiving!**