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WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Interview with Sophie

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Interviewer: Sophie thanks for sharing your story with us today. Can you remember what it was like growing up before your parents separated?

Sophie: I think I was probably too young to notice what was going on so it wasn't till mum actually came and said hey I'm leaving that it was like ok something's wrong. But I don't remember having an unhappy childhood. We had a lot of fun. We went on family holidays and did all of that sort of stuff. It probably was a little bit of a shock actually when it happened coz I hadn't sort of seen it coming.

Interviewer: You were 8 years old when your parents separated, can you remember how you felt about it at the time?

Sophie: I didn't deal very well with it at all. It's really interesting talking to a friend of mine whose mum passed away around the same age and she went straight back to school the next day and just wanted to be around people. It was 3 weeks later my dad - coz it was my mum that left - dad had to get the principal to come over and drag me back to school coz I didn't want to go. So I don't know exactly what it was that I was feeling, really hurt and a bit confused probably but I just didn't handle it very well, didn't want to deal with anything that was happening and shut myself off a lot from the rest of the world.

Interviewer: In what ways did you shut yourself off?

Sophie: I just wouldn't talk to anyone, like physically shut myself off so when dad brought the principal over to drag me back to school I hid behind the couch - as an 8yr old, that's kind of the logical thing to do when you know someone's trying to come and get you to do something you don't want to do. And yeah just didn't really talk to people about how I was feeling which in hindsight is probably not the best option.

Interviewer: Can you remember what you felt, back then, about yourself?

Sophie: I don't know whether I felt like it then but its definitely been something I've had to deal with since then of feeling like unworthy and unlovable and the way I often say it when I'm talking with people about it is: you get to this point where how could anybody else love me if a parent cant even love me enough to stay? So that's been a really difficult thing to work through. I don't know if that's something that I felt right away or if its been a process of having to deal with the emotions but definitely unlovable, unworthy yeah not worth fighting for.

Interviewer: How have those feelings affected your life?

Sophie: Massive, massive question. I think a lot of the emotions that I felt because of being part of a broken family, so the feelings of not being worthy or not good enough and those sort of things, kind of became a lens for how I saw the rest of the world. So every time I had an interaction with someone or didn't get a good enough grade at school, I'd be seeing that through the feelings of not being worthy or not being good enough and so it's been a long process to get to the point of ok that's not who I am. And having to learn different tools so having to put things in place for when all of those emotions take over. So for me it's a process of going through the bible and finding all the cool things that God says about who I am coz he's adopted me into his family. And then just speaking those things over myself whenever I'm not feeling like I can keep going, so that's been a big thing for me this year.

Interviewer: So that's over 16 years, they're things you still have to face?

Sophie: Yeah, so even though I've been through the process of forgiving both my parents, there's still a level of emotion that comes up every time I talk about it. And so I think, I've forgiven them but there's still underlying hurts that I don't know whether they'll always be there or if that's another thing to then work through but yeah it's definitely an ongoing thing and the emotion can still be very raw some days. Which is a crazy thing to think about, as you say 16 years later.

Interviewer: You mentioned being adopted into God's family, so does that mean you weren't a Christian or involved with a church before?

Sophie: Yeah that's right. When I was a fair bit younger we had these crazy Baptist next door neighbours and they invited us to go to the Lutheran church they were attending. And for some crazy reason my parents said yes to that and we started going to church. But none of us really understood what we were doing or why. We hadn't had anything to do with the church before then. So I may have been sitting in church for a long time but I would say it wasn't until I was 13 when I experienced God's love that was the starting point of my Christian faith and before then I was kind of dragged along to church and ignored as much of it as I could. Then later on when my family fell apart, we were still involved in the church but even though the church handled it well my family one by one decided to stop being involved in the church. But by then I was involved and had found a place so I decided to stay. The youth community in the churches really kind of just supported me through that and so I was even talking to someone at church on Sunday and she was like 'wait, you're the only person in your family that goes to church - do you ever feel isolated?' And I was like 'no, the families in the church have adopted me'. Some of the young people I mentor, their families have adopted me into their family. They invite me over for dinner and they are just really lovely. I think that's possibly the most overwhelming thing that's happened is that the church really has become my family. They're the ones that are always there. They definitely have become the support network that people with families that aren't broken would possibly have within their families so it's been really cool.

Interviewer: Sophie, you obviously don't shut the world out anymore. How did that change come about, when did you start to let the world back in?

Sophie: Dad kept taking us to church so when I was in year 8 I guess one of the expectations of us was to go to on a Christian camp called Christian life week. I still remember throwing a tantrum because I didn't want to go and like you know what person in year 8 throws a tantrum? I couldn't really imagine why going away for a week with a bunch of Christian people would be a cool thing to do. But I went anyway or kind of got forced to I suppose. And it wasn't probably until, like I had fun the first few days but it wasn't until later in the week when one of the other leaders on camp shared her story about what had happened with her family. She'd come from a broken family as well and she shared and I don't remember much from that night besides crying a lot and not knowing why. One of the explanations I've been given since then is that when God's love fills you so much, everything else has to come out and so whether that's tears or whatever, that's what it was for me. I just remember feeling loved for the first time and probably feeling peace for the first time as well in that last five years. And just not being angry anymore so that's pretty cool.

Interviewer: Just like that! What was it that made that happen?

Sophie: I have absolutely no way to put it into words. God's love is just so good. There was still a lot of pain and stuff that had to be dealt with after that but I just remember going away from that night feeling very free from a lot of the things I'd been carrying for so long.

Interviewer: Do you still have a relationship with your parents?

Sophie: Yes. So somewhere down the track of that was the year 8 youth camp experience. I was still going between both houses right up until I was in year 11 when dad moved to Adelaide to work. So we were forced to stay with my mum full time, which putting us in a house full time with the parent you were angry with was interesting. But we just had to learn to get on with life. And so lots of conversations have happened since then about why it happened. They both decided when I turned 18 I was old enough to hear both sides of their story which was a bit special and a whole bunch of other things to deal with. So I still have a pretty good relationship with both of them. I'm still their child and we still have arguments about silly things as all children do with their parents but there's definitely been a lot of reconciliation and even to the point where they sort of get along now which is kind of cool.

Interviewer: What's helped you to forgive?

Sophie: Definitely nothing in me. I think if it was left to me to be forgiving I wouldn't because I love holding a grudge. But I think understanding that God loves me and that he's forgiven me of more than I could ever have to forgive anyone else of, and going well part of him forgiving me is because I need it but also part of him forgiving me is teaching me how to forgive others. And so I guess the way that I see it, it would be horrible of me to accept his forgiveness for everything that I've done and to not extend that same grace and forgiveness to others.

Interviewer: Have there been benefits then to that forgiveness?

Sophie: Definitely benefits around Christmas and Easter when the whole family gets together. Obviously you can imagine if the anger and unforgiveness was still there it makes family gatherings a little bit awkward. But I think just the idea of not forgiving and holding on to that anger is really detrimental to you as a person. And so the amount of weight you carry around holding onto that anger and bitterness and unforgiveness isn't actually worth it. I think I'm one of those people that when I'm feeling really stressed or really angry it outworks itself physically in my body. So I might get sick or get a bad migraine. Holding onto that stuff really does make me sick. I don't know if other people experience that sort of thing but in terms of forgiving was the right thing to do but it was also better for health reasons to let that stuff go. It hasn't been easy but it's been the most worthwhile thing.

Interviewer: Thanks Sophie for sharing with us today. In closing, what's important for you about sharing your story.

Sophie: The first reason I share my story is to be able to say that I've walked through this and it's been God's love and what Jesus has done for me on the cross that's gotten me through. I seriously think that if it wasn't for meeting God on that first youth camp, if you take God out of the equation, I can't imagine what my life would be like if I had have let the anger, the bitterness and the unforgiveness continue. I just don't want to think about what life would've been like if I hadn't let go of that stuff. But also I love to share my story because what a testimony for the world to hear. I've walked through something that I wouldn't have chosen, that I didn't like, that I wouldn't have asked for but God is still good in that. For me it's a matter of, I think it says in 2 Corinthians 4, at the end of that passage, so we fix our eyes on the things that are unseen not the things that are seen because the things that are unseen are eternal but the things that are seen are temporary. And I go well my circumstances are the things that I see and they're the temporary things. God's the thing that's unseen but that's eternal. So it's just of matter of choosing that no matter what I walk through, no matter what situation I face that God is still good and he's going to work all things together for the good of those who love him.

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