

WHY LIVE FOR
ANYONE OTHER THAN
JESUS?

Nathan Stiles

Written By
Donnie Prince

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Preface

Oftentimes when we see or read stories about someone in the news, we get a glimpse into a single event of someone's life. But these singular events are not enough information for us to know or understand who that person really was, or the impact their life has had on their friends and family, the people closest to them.

The book you are about to read is a true story about a young man from Spring Hill, Kansas; Nathan Stiles. Nathan was a straight-A student, captain of his Spring Hill High School varsity football team and a member of the varsity basketball team. He was voted Homecoming King of his senior class. Nathan was a member of the Madrigals Vocal program at his school and he sang in his church choir. Nathan was active in his church youth group. He was also a member of a Christian rock band that he and some of his church and high school age friends had formed.

In October of 2010, while playing in a high school football game Nathan collapsed on the sideline. He was life- flighted from the field and in the early morning hours of October 29th, Nathan passed away. Nathan's death quickly became a national news story covered by print and television media outlets around the country.

This book is written to give the reader an insight into the life of Nathan Stiles; what made Nathan the amazing young man he became, and how he developed his strong Christian faith and love of God. How did his family in the midst of their grief after losing Nathan, find the strength to continue to praise God and start a ministry that would touch so many lives, and what can we learn from this inspirational true story?

It has been a blessing to me to get to know his amazing family. I am honored to help them share their story.

Joshua 1:9 New Living Translation
(NLT)

“This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Foreword

Written By
Natalie Stiles Smith

The most recent affair I had with death was when my brother died. I would like to be able to say it in a more flowery, delicate type of way but when it comes to this, I never know quite how to start. Nathan, that is my brother, was 18 months older than me, but only a grade above me in school. We have been friends since we were little and we were pretty typical siblings in some ways; like in the fighting, tattling, and teasing each other. In other ways though, we were very different. He was one of my best friends, and I mean seriously best friend. Our relationship had become a "let's go on a double date, match on nerd day for spirit week, say "Hi" and hug in the hallway at school every day" type of friendship. More importantly we could talk about anything with each other. One of the most important conversations I had with him was in September after watching "To Save a Life" at the church in town. As we were driving to school the next day we were talking about the movie and how we want to be different. We do not want this passion we have for God to fade this time. We want to live for God in a life changing way and get our classmates in on it too. We were determined that things were going to change for the better.

On October 28, 2010, my brother was playing in the last football game of his senior year in high school. This is the part that is hardest to talk about. There are so many emotions going

on, so much happened but I do not know what order, or if the "memories" are really from what other people or the news said that happened, but I'll do my best to remember. My mom saw my brother stumble to the sidelines at halftime. I got a call from a friend on the sideline telling me that my parents should go over there because something was wrong with Nathan. I got a second call soon after saying that my parents REALLY needed to get over there. I don't know what happened after. Someone told me Nathan screamed in pain that his head hurt and then he had a seizure. People kept patting, hugging, watching, and asking what was wrong. Somehow, I ended up on the sidelines with my family. One of the coaches looked like he was doing jumping jacks and kept yelling frantically for help. I am told that the last time my brother moved was when he lifted his hand up towards my mom.

In what seemed to be hundreds of hours later, a helicopter came to take my brother to Kansas University Medical Center, and we raced there by car. The doctors talked to us in a little room and I never knew what they were saying exactly, but it was something like, "we are going to do all that we can but don't get your hopes up." Although I had such a sick, this isn't good feeling, I was sure that my brother would live. My brother cannot die, not yet. Pets die, the old and sick die, but young, God-fearing brothers do not die. Not mine anyway.

I have so many scenes ingrained into my mind that replay over and over again, but when I try to piece it together it is all foggy and a literal blur. My contacts had to be thrown away because they had become so foggy, I am still not sure on the science behind that. Some of the blurs are praying, walking to the waiting room, waiting in the waiting room, praying, people continually showing up to wait in the waiting room, the doctor telling us that they are going to perform surgery on his brain, praying, waiting, more talking, hugging, mostly crying, waiting and praying, doctor talking to mom and dad in the small room again, then, mom screaming. The doctor put an expiration date

on my brother of a couple of hours. Nathan was fine that morning and now he is hours from death.

The doctors graciously allowed each visitor to say goodbye to my brother. I will never forget what my brother looked like on that hospital bed. His head was bandaged and he was utterly helpless. The machine that helped him breathe made all of this gross snot stuff come out of his nose; I got to be the one that wiped his nose. What else are best friends for? I held his hand, not the one that had tons of IV tubes in it, the one with the clamp on his finger to read his heart or something. Then he took his final breaths, somebody prayed, and we cried with our whole bodies, more than we ever thought was physically possible. After that we talked with a social worker and all the doctors, and eventually left the hospital. After making a stop at another hospital to tell my grandpa that his grandson died before he found out on the news, we went "home." It really did not feel like home anymore. That feeling that I said could only be described as knowing something was missing was there. Is it possible to call a place home when it feels like that? On November 2, what would be my brother's 18th birthday, we instead held his funeral. He also had a visitation the day before and a celebration of life a couple days after. Now, this is where it gets good. I guess you can say that this is how my family dealt with the grief and try to evaluate it as our family's resiliency or some other textbook definition, but I cannot deny the presence of the Lord I encountered that week. It actually began when we arrived home from the hospital that early morning. We went downstairs to see my brother's Bible on the end table and the imprint in the couch of where he had been sitting there reading it one day earlier. This really put things into perspective for us. So, we believe that there is a Heaven and hell and when we die, we go to one of them. So why am I not living as if that is truly what I believe? Is my life giving people a glimpse of Heaven, or hell?

That night my mom got a vision from God to buy Bibles. So, we brainstormed with local church pastors, friends, and family of how to piece together Nathan's death, our convictions, and this vision. Through these people and pieces, God showed us the Nathan Project. It is not our goal to promote my brother and his life through this, but to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ that we, including Nathan, believe and that is why we are able to celebrate his life and death. We want to literally give people the Good News so that they can have a chance to know God for themselves. There were 1,000 Bibles at the celebration of life to give away, and since then there have been over 31,000 Bibles sent to many individuals, multiple states, various groups, and other countries.

Writing this I know I said it was hard to know where to begin, but I am finding it to be even harder to know where to stop. I think that is because it never stops. The hurt never goes away, it just changes and I learn how to deal with it or hide it better. And life never stops, and sometimes that makes the hurting more painful knowing that my life will not consist of any more memories with my brother in it. Nothing will ever be the same. But then again, would I want it to be the same? Isn't that what my brother and I were so passionate about on our car ride that day; to change our lives and lives of those around us for the glory of God? So, while the hurting never stops, the grace and unfailing love never stops either. The revelations and miracles never stop. I could not begin to tell you of all the amazing "coincidences" that have occurred, the friendships formed, family growth, and lives saved as a result of this death.

The last thing I learned about death was that it brings life.

Introduction

“I met him a couple of years ago when I was in the youth detention center,” the young man said. “It was a Friday night when they showed up for Bible study, that was the first time I met him. He gave me a Bible and then once me and the other kids took our seats that first night, we read the chapter in Proverbs for that day of the month and discussed what we had read.

“Once I went to the detention center I was forced to slow down and reflect on my life. For the first time I was forced to be away from all the distractions, the cell phone, the drugs. You have to slow down, and you have that Bible with you that he gives away to everyone who asks for one in the center. That Bible was the only possession that I could keep with me all the time, it was the only personal item I could take with me even after I left there, that Bible was mine to keep. I still have that Bible today.

“Every time he came into the center he would ask if anyone needed a Bible, he would give a brand-new Bible still in the plastic wrapper to anyone who wanted one. Even at first, I knew there was something different about this person, but I did not know why he was doing what he was doing, but as I began to read the Bible I would see verses in the Bible that explained to me why he was coming to the center and doing the Bible studies.

“After reading the story in the cover of the Bibles, I thought, ‘*What does he have in his life that he can do this work after losing his son?*’ When I would read my Bible, I came across verses that would remind me of what he was doing, he was

living it out. There was one verse in particular that stuck out to me that reminded me of what I saw in him.

John 14:27 "I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So, don't be troubled or afraid."

“As I would read this verse, I would immediately think of him, because he has this peace. And I would think, ‘That verse is his life.’ That is what I saw in him, before I could spiritually verbalize it; I saw that peace in the way he lived.

“I would 100% credit that being able to turn my life around came from having that Bible and the work he is doing. I stayed reading my Bible every day and that changed me. It saved me.

“Now a major goal for me is to find ways to share my experiences with people who are in difficult situations in life; because I have been there myself. I know where those roads lead. I was in that spot; I know how deceiving that lifestyle is. But I can honestly say to someone with a 100% truthful heart; that no matter where you are in life, that there is a silver lining in the clouds, when we turn to Jesus and He begins to pull you out of that lifestyle, from the depths of despair, that with Jesus, there is always hope.”

Part 1

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If you were to make a short list of the best places to raise a family in America, you would place Spring Hill, Kansas near the top of the list.

Spring Hill is a small town with a population of just over 6900 people, where quiet neighborhoods and a well-kept historic downtown district are surrounded by scenic rural farms of row crops and livestock that line the gently rolling east Kansas landscape. Spring Hill offers the peace and quiet of a small-town Midwestern community, while being only a 10-minute commute west to the larger city of Olathe, Kansas with its population of 139,000, and a 45-minute drive north up I-35 to Kansas City.

In addition to its deeply rooted history of agriculture, Spring Hill is now considered a part of the Kansas City metropolitan area, making Spring Hill a popular real estate destination for families who want to raise their children in a small community where neighbors know each other by name, and yet have easy commutes to the larger communities of Olathe and Kansas City.

A lot has changed in Spring Hill over the years as the Kansas City metro area has grown to encompass Olathe and Spring Hill, but one thing that has not changed, is the small-town farming community values of faith, family and fellowship that make Spring Hill such a special place to live.

Ron Stiles grew up on a farm in Spring Hill, Kansas. And many of the life lessons he learned as a kid growing up and working around the farm, have had a positive influence on him throughout his life.

“I was very blessed growing up on a farm and having a dad that was blessed with wisdom,” Ron recalls, “which is something I wish I would have better understood at the time. He was always teaching me a valuable lesson in a humble way, so that I could learn on my own while he kept watch over me.”

The Stiles family always had a garden that Ron says was a very necessary part of the farm. Ron remembers that taking care of the family garden was a lot of work. It was working in the family garden where Ron’s dad, Robert Stiles, came up with a plan to teach Ron a lesson about the value of money, and the importance of making his own way in the world.

During the fall of the year when it was time for the Miami County Fair to be held in nearby Paola, Kansas, the family farm’s potato crop would be ready for harvest. Ron says it would take a lot of buckets being filled with potatoes by hand to harvest all those potatoes. So, Robert Stiles came up with a plan for Ron to participate in the harvesting, allowing Ron to make some money to spend at the fair. Ron would help harvest the potatoes and be paid for gathering the potatoes into buckets. For every small bucket Ron would earn a dime, and every large bucket a quarter. This would give Ron the money he would need as a small boy, to pay for the things he wanted at the fair. He had to work for it, and that way of thinking would continue to guide Ron throughout the rest of his life.

As Ron grew to be a little older, his dad gave him additional responsibility. Ron recalls one year when Robert Stiles put Ron in charge of two pigs that he was to feed and take care of, and later those pigs would be taken to the fair where they would be sold. Ron would then get the money from the sale of the two pigs to use as his spending money for the rest of the year.

The two pigs were being kept in a barn with an outside run area that had a door that led into a barn that would protect the pigs from the sun. One day, Ron's dad told him he needed to secure, nail, that gate door open, so the pigs would not accidentally push the door shut and be stuck out in the hot sunlight where they might die. Ron ignored that instruction. Later one hot afternoon, he found that the pigs had done just that. The pigs had pushed the door shut and been trapped outside in the summer sun. Ron's pigs had died. Not only did he feel terrible about the pigs dying while in his care, but in addition to that, Ron says, that when the pigs died, his whole net worth had vanished.

Later that very night, Ron overheard his mom asking his dad if he was going to give Ron some of the other pigs on the farm to take care of until it was time for the county fair. Ron remembers that his dad had over 100 other pigs on the farm at the time. Ron felt a glimmer of hope until he heard his dad tell his mom, "I told him to secure that door open."

Ron did not receive any of his father's pigs. That was an important lesson for Ron, his dad was teaching him how to work his own way out of his own mistakes.

Years later when Ron was in high school there was one evening in particular when he had not been so good, as he recalled he had, "caused some problems at home." Later that same evening after dinner, there was a load of shelled corn that needed to be scooped into a bin at the barn. This was a task that Ron and his dad would usually do together and would go fairly quickly. That evening though there was only one shovel in the trailer as Ron and his dad backed the pickup truck into the barn. Ron's dad told him to unload the load of corn by himself. To Ron it looked like a mountain that would take forever. So, Ron asked his dad how he could ever get all of this corn unloaded. His dad's response was, "one scoop at a time."

“Many times, in my life I have seen mountains before me, and that advice from my dad has helped me ever since,” Ron remembers. “I have shared these stories many times with the youth I work with today, trying to pass on some of the valuable lessons Dad blessed me with while I was growing up on the farm.”