

Never Give Up

February 2025

Corey was in 6th grade when he first came to the Kids Klub tutoring program in the Bronx. He was an angry child, often getting into fights in school. He lived with his grandmother and younger brother and sister. He was difficult to handle in our tutoring program, so much so that one of my staff requested we release him from the program. I remember my response, "I will let go of you before I will let go of him." We eventually learned one of the sources of his anger: he was reading at a first grade level in sixth grade. He couldn't understand the teacher's instructions in school or homework, making him lash out in anger from the shame. We took a special interest in Corey. When he was behaving poorly, I would bring him to my office where he would sit sulking as I tried to instill in him a belief in himself and God's plans.

Corey's anger led him into trouble. He wound up in prison in Upstate NY for eight-and-a-half years. Less than two weeks after his release in 2022, Tommy and I heard someone yelling, "Pops! Pops!" as we were walking down Brook Ave. Corey embraced us, and that began a new chapter in his life. It was then that we learned that Corey never forgot the love that he was shown as a child. I became "Pops." Lidia became "Ma." Angel and Tommy became brother and sister. We became his family, and his love for us was deep and from the heart.

It was tough at first, as it is for all who have been gripped by the streets, but Corey hung in there and we held him accountable. He acquired a cleaning job at a hospital. He became a good husband and a good father to his three children - a young man from an earlier relationship, a 12-year-old girl, and a 10-month-old son. He was proud of his children.

Corey would frequently come to the Harvest Center to spend time with us. We would talk, laugh, eat together, tell stories, share the Word, and pray with him every time. We could see his tender heart for the Lord and his love for our family. There were many fun times with him, too, like at the Betances Block Party in 2023. A man dressed as Spiderman was taking pictures with the kids. Corey came to Lidia saying, "Ma, did you get your picture with Spiderman yet?" Corey took Lidia by the hand, blew past more than 20 parents waiting in line with their children, and got Lidia to pose with him for a picture with Spiderman. That was Corey.

Last week, Corey had an asthma attack in his apartment. He and his wife tried to handle the attack as best they could, but he could not breathe. His wife called 911, but by the time EMS arrived, Corey had stopped breathing. He was 38 years old.

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His funeral was the last Friday of January in Harlem. More than 250 people came to the funeral. I shared about the brevity of life, reminding the people no one is guaranteed tomorrow. I confronted the lies about "he's a good person" and "I believe in God" with truth from God's Word: Good works will not save you, and James 2:19, **"You believe in God? Good for you! The demons believe in God, but they fear Him!"** I shared that **"There is only one name in heaven and earth by which men can be saved, and that is the name of Jesus"** (Acts 4:12). I spoke about repentance and the call to a changed life. I ended saying,

"Why do I share this word with you today? Because we are not guaranteed tomorrow. I have loved you and brought the message of God's unconditional love to you for 30 years. Yet, many of you continue loving the world and the streets. If I do not speak the truth to you as I speak to you today, I fail you."

I shared two more scriptures: *"We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ, no matter who we are ..."* (Romans 3:22) and *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (Romans 10:13). I then asked who in that funeral home chapel was ready to truly give their lives to God and live for Him. I was amazed when more than 35 people raised their hands to be saved.

For more than one hour after the funeral, we were talking and praying with people inside the chapel and outside on the streets. Young men embraced me, crying on my shoulder. A young woman called me the next day to ask me to text her the sinner's prayer so that she could have it in her phone and pray it every day. I was blessed by her child-like faith.

It is difficult to understand why God calls certain people home. Corey's life had finally come together. He has a 12-year-old daughter and a 10-month-old son. But at this funeral, **the Word of the Lord went forth and it fell on ears that were open to hear and hearts receptive to eternal seed being planted in their lives.** I can only imagine Corey rejoicing in heaven with the angels over these souls.

Our leaders in the Bronx stand ready to reach out to these who are hungry to follow Jesus. **God is certainly not done touching souls in the South Bronx.**

We never gave up on Corey. We will not give up on the young men on the street corners of the South Bronx. We will not give up on the precious people in the villages in Vietnam, no matter what pressure and oppression from the government continues to occur. The Holy Spirit is sowing eternal seed, and God promises it will **"always produce fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it"** (Isaiah 55:11 NLT).

Pray for Corey's family. Pray for all who responded to the Gospel at the funeral. Pray for our workers and leaders in the South Bronx who faithfully serve and reach out to the lost in this community. And pray for our faithful workers in Vietnam who continue sharing the Good News and showing people the love of the Living God despite the oppression and opposition. *"For God so loved this world that He gave His one and only Son, that WHOEVER believes in Him will not perish, but will have eternal life"* (John 3:16). **May the name of Jesus be on all these lips in praise and may God be exalted among all these people!**



Corey ran to the front of the chapel for a picture with us on our anniversary.