



Learning Lifeline

A LETTER ABOUT LEARNING FROM ESTHER WILKISON

When I listened to Raun Kaufman's book, I had no idea how his story about autism would impact my view of both Christmas and teaching.

From the back cover—"As a boy, Raun Kaufman was diagnosed by multiple experts as severely autistic, with an IQ below 30, and destined to spend his life in an institution. Years later, Raun graduated with a degree in Biomedical Ethics from Brown University and has become a passionate and articulate autism expert and educator with no trace of his former condition. So, what happened?"

You'll have to read his book to get the full answer. I'm not an expert on autism, so I am not in a position to confirm or deny the validity of the approach he describes in *Autism Breakthrough*—but he gave me a lot to think about, including this—

"Autism, [Raun] explains, is frequently misunderstood as a behavioral disorder when, in fact, it is a social relational disorder."

Like many children diagnosed on the autism spectrum, Raun seemed to live in his own world, practicing repetitive behaviors. When he would sit on the floor spinning a plate, his mom decided to also sit on the floor near him and also spin a plate. Over time, Raun got used to the safety of his mom joining his world. Eventually, having her join his world led to a relational connection. Once she made a relational connection, she could lead her son into her world.

How beautiful is that! And how like Christ.

God didn't stay distant and use force to control us so we would change our behavior.

God entered into our world to do the things we do, like crawl and walk and learn to talk. He took on a body, then took on every temptation, all our sin, and even our death. He stopped at nothing to join with us. And He is patient as He waits for us to respond and relationally bond with Him.

This week I heard Dr. Kay Ayre on the *Trauma Informed Education* podcast. She describes how she succeeded with students who present the worst behavior challenge. Each school day, for the first forty-five minutes to an hour, she and her co-teachers do nothing but welcome the children in, talk with them, and play games with them. Only after making relational connections do they invite the children into learning activities.

The power in Dr. Kay Ayre's relationship-based methods has a transformational impact on both the behavior and learning of her students. Once her students feel secure and connected, their brains and bodies calm down to take in the lessons.

I couldn't help but notice that her relationship-based approach was a team effort. Our work often leaves us isolated. Add to that the extended isolation of the pandemic and we understand why many teachers, parents, pastors, and administrators are totally depleted right now. What would it do for you to regularly connect with someone who cares about you and can coach you through the challenges you are facing as you guide others? To find out what is available in relationship-based learning coaching, simply reply to this email and let me know you want to find out more.

God's design is for us to be relationally connected to Him and to others. He was willing to do what it would take to connect with you. You are valuable. You are worth the effort. You are loved.