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K I N G D O M : N O W

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More Than Math

By Jennifer Klitzke

It's a bad dream: I'm searching the endless, dimly-lit hallways of high school trying to find my locker.



A great way to mentor the next generation is to live out what we believe and model godly character and integrity.

Credit: photos.com

When I find it, I can't remember my locker combination. This hassle causes me to be late for math class – again. Math is the last class I need for my diploma. Year-after-year in my grandma-age, I'm still trying to graduate high school.

Thankfully this is just a bad dream. I graduated with honors twenty five years ago – so what's this dream about? Perhaps it's that algebra is one of the last classes needed for my college degree. I'm one of the many middle-aged adults who have gone back to college.

A couple months ago, this bad dream returned. Only this time it was for real. My heels clicked on the shiny marble floors as I weaved

through the endless hallways on my first day of the summer semester. I hustled to be on-time for my college algebra class.

With a minute to spare, I slipped into the packed classroom. A sea of piercing stares, young and old, met me at the door, and I discretely took a seat in the last row. Professor Larson cut through the silence and soberly stated, "You don't want to sit in the back row. That's the "D" row. To get an "A", you need to sit in the front row."

He was kidding of course, but doing well was important to me. Two and a half decades have passed since I last thought about square roots, pi, and function formulas. They

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have long been erased from the hard drive of my memory with no backup in sight.

Panged with the memory of this bad dream, I promptly collected my heavy pile of newly purchased math books and shuffled to the “A” row. This is where I sat for the next two months. My anxiety grew when I learned that the gentleman sitting next to me had failed this algebra class four times.

In the first hour of class, Professor Larson spelled out the formula for success: effort equals results. This formula was far more than success in a math class and Professor Larson knew it firsthand. It is the formula for life and he lived it.

A mentor of life

Professor Larson is one of the most substantial people I have ever met and I’m privileged to have been his student. He models what he believes by backing up his words with his actions. Everything he puts his hand to exudes integrity and character. His “yes” is “yes” and his “no” is “no”. What he speaks of, he lives.

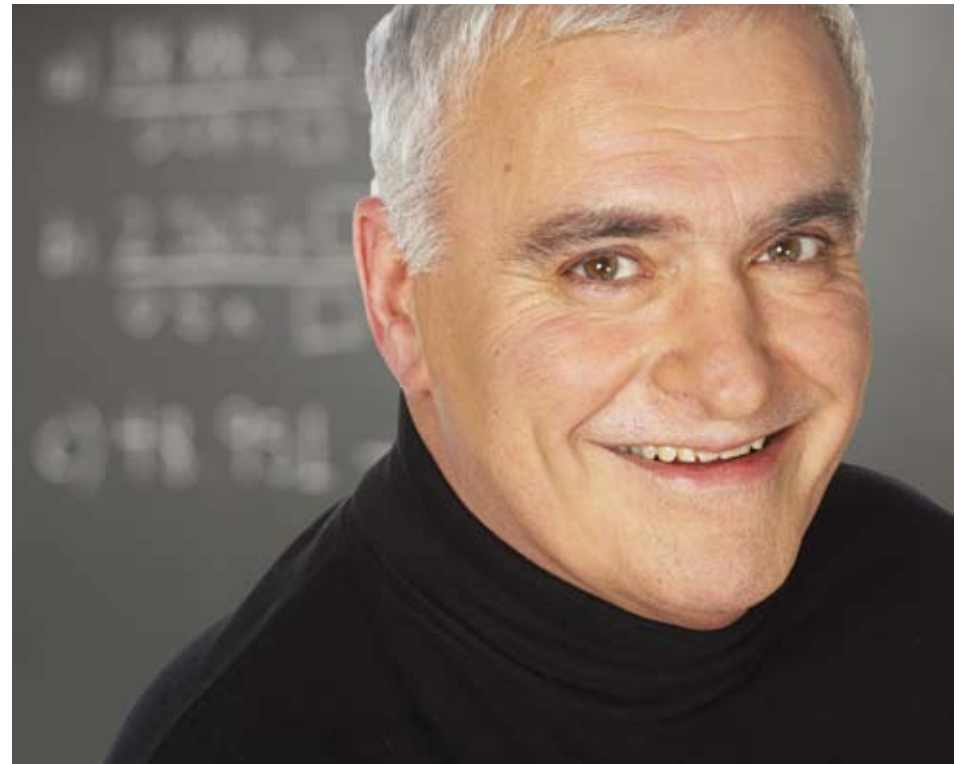
How Professor Larson relates to people spells text-book character:

the way he engages the students with respect, humor, firmness, relevance and encouragement; the way he talks so lovingly about his wife and long-term marriage, grown children, and grandchildren; how he immerses himself in his passions of sailing, photojournalism, and fishing; and how he approaches his teaching career as a career student even in his advanced years. His humble spirit seems to drink in the opportunity to learn more, become an even better teacher, and impart what he learns to the next generation.

Faith and deeds

I remember something James said, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” (James 5:14). The brother of Jesus goes on to illustrate Abraham’s example and said, “You see that [Abraham’s] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” (James 5:22). James completes his thoughts by saying, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (James 5:26).

Whether Professor Larson is



Credit: photos.com

teaching glazy-eyed students the principles of algebra, holding his wife’s hand, tickling his grandchildren, cutting through the whitecaps on Lake Superior, or capturing a high-speed race car on camera, he lives every moment as if it’s his last. He fully engages in the lives of those he encounters through his career, home life and hobbies. He models well something we often say “living it out in the everyday”.

Observing this, I realize that godly character breathes life. As his student, I felt safe under his leadership. His clear direction, patient and listening ear, the high standards of excellence he upholds, and the encouragement he gave us each time we inched our way toward understanding. He didn’t withhold what he knew, he imparted it generously with the greatest hope that every one of us would succeed.

Over the weeks, the fear of failing melted away and a confidence grew. Algebra became fun like a mind-bending puzzle. Not only did I pass, I got an “A” and the gentleman next to me, who had previously failed algebra four times, passed with a respectable grade. It wasn’t that Professor Larson is an easy grader. On the contrary, he was quite firm and by the end of the semester; a quarter of the students had dropped out of the class. Those of us who applied the formula of success – succeeded.

The fruit of a tree

This experience left me wondering: As a Christian, what kind of fruit does my tree bear? In the orchard of God’s family, how fruitful are we in our interactions with those around us? Yes, it’s true that we can’t earn our way to Heaven by our good works, because the Bible teaches us that salvation only comes by grace through faith in Jesus (Eph 2:9). However, the next verse continues to instruct us that Jesus has good works for us to do (Eph 2:10). As followers of Jesus, He even gives us the Holy Spirit to empower us to be fruitful and attract others with a sweet fragrance to know God’s eternal love, acceptance, and grace – to impart to others what we have been so graciously given.

Math wasn’t the greatest lesson I learned from Professor Larson. It was witnessing the fruit of his life that stemmed from godly integrity and character, purposing to live out what he believes and attracting others to follow. Professor Larson is far more than a math teacher; he’s a mentor of life. ∞

Whether it is tutoring math and reading to inner-city students, being a Life Coach to children with a parent in prison or a light in the workplace, giving a neighbor a hand, or walking alongside a new faith follower, we have an opportunity to model God’s love, integrity and character where ever we go.

Photos in this true story are fictitious.



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