

Tim and Shawna Laffoon deal with grief by giving to others

# Unmistakable Assurance

By Kirk Noonan

Tim and Shawna Laffoon huddled in heartbroken disbelief around their 17-year-old son, Ryan. Earlier in the day he had bounded out the front door for a day of fun and sun at a local lake.

Now, he lay unconscious in a hospital's intensive care unit. An intricate network of tubes and wires monitored him and fed his body oxygen and medication.

"We love you and are so proud of you," Tim whispered to his eldest son, then a junior at Republic High School in Southwest Missouri. "We're praying, and hundreds of others are too."

Relatives, friends and classmates had gathered in a waiting room down the hall. Prayers, murmurs and sobs filled the room as they clutched one another and asked God for a miracle.

One was already taking place within Tim, Shawna and their youngest son, Trenton. As they prayed, they say, God gave them an unmistakable assurance — the kind that only comes from a life well lived.

#### A good kid

By all accounts, Ryan was a fun-loving teenager with a gift for music and a penchant for making others laugh. He was a prankster, the life of the party, a skilled musician, a car

junkie, and most importantly, a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

On the morning of May 23, 2003, Tim and Ryan had agreed to meet for lunch. But as the noon hour approached, Tim got held back at work and had to cancel their lunch plans.

A couple of hours later Ryan waded into the water at a swim beach at Stockton Lake, an hour northwest of Springfield, Mo. The plan was to swim, get some sun and have a good time with his girlfriend and her classmates as their summer vacation began. But after only a few minutes in the water, Ryan went under. When he came up, he was yelling for help.

Those who heard him thought he was goofing around, Tim says. But when Ryan went under again and did not resurface, the students began a frantic search for him.

They found him on the bottom of the lake unconscious. According to the Army Corps of Engineers, it takes only 60 seconds for an adult — without a lifejacket — to drown.

In what probably seemed an instant to the students, Ryan went from being the fun-loving kid everyone liked to one of the 6,000 people who drown in the United States each year.



Ryan Laffoon

Cruel reality

Hours after racing to the hospital, Tim and Shawna consulted with Ryan's doctors. They were told that everything had been done for Ryan that could be done.

"As a parent, your goal is to love and train your children so that one day they will stand beside the Lord in heaven," Tim says. "But you never anticipate that could happen before you die."

"The only thing that got us through that night was the assurance we felt. If the Lord was going to take Ryan, then Ryan was ready to go."

With that confidence and peace, the Laffoons gathered around Ryan as the doctors shut down the machines that were keeping him alive.

Within a few minutes, Ryan Michael Laffoon died.

"I can't imagine how anyone could go through that without hope in Jesus," Tim says. "Life is fragile and can be taken from us at any moment — that's why we need Jesus in our lives."

Christ-centered compassion

Less than a year after Ryan's death, Tim, Shawna and Trenton were fast at work putting on the first Ryan Laffoon Memorial Golf Classic. The goal of the tournament was to keep Ryan's memory alive and raise scholarship money for Republic High School students headed to college.

For the past six years the tournament has grown and enabled the Laffoons to present several scholarships to college-bound seniors. The Laffoons also use portions of the funds to help stock local food banks and sponsor educational programs.

"After Ryan died the community reached out to us in a big way," Tim says. "God challenged our family to meet people's needs on an ongoing basis and not just in times of crisis."

**ABCs OF SALVATION**

**To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:**

**A. Admit you are a sinner.**  
 "There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

**Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.**  
 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

**B. Believe in Jesus** (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.  
 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

**Become a child of God by receiving Christ.**  
 "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

**C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.**  
 "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

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Since Ryan's death, the Laffoons have not only been able to give tens of thousands of dollars away, they have shared their story and their faith with countless people.

"By helping those in need, we earn the opportunity to share our faith," Tim says. "That's one reason Christ wants His followers to exercise compassion — it opens doors for the gospel."

Gone but not forgotten

Just beyond a country cemetery, cows wade in a nearby pond. Fields stretch for miles in every direction, and insects that could be mistaken for small birds pester visitors.

At the edge of the cemetery a beautiful granite headstone is engraved with Ryan Laffoon's name.

Tim and Shawna visit Ryan's grave regularly. When it's needed, Tim mows and trims around the

headstone, and Shawna maintains the flowers and mementos friends leave behind. On every holiday, Ryan's birthday and the anniversary of his death, the Laffoons can be found at his grave.

"We know Ryan isn't here, but coming here makes us feel closer to him," Tim says. "Ryan taught us that God gives us today, and it's our responsibility to do with each day what He wants us to do with it."

For the Laffoons that means keeping Christ and others at the center of everything they do. It's their way of spreading the unmistakable assurance God gave them the night Ryan went to stand beside the Lord. **e**

KIRK NOONAN is the former managing editor of the *Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to [pe@ag.org](mailto:pe@ag.org).

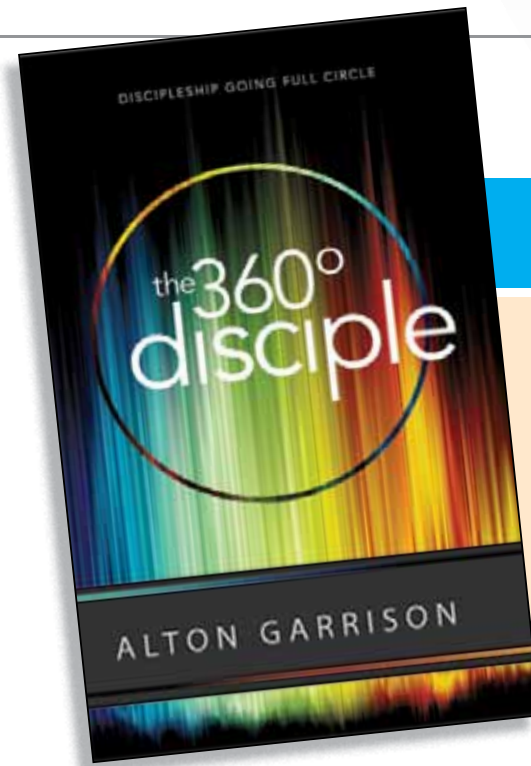
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