

**Memoir written in preparation of
Statement from Jacob's father at memorial service
Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Cambridge, February 24, 2006**

I thank God for the life of my son, Jacob Kliman-Trimble. His life is a blessing for us, his adoptive family, for his birth family in Texas, for his friends, for his schoolmates, for his teachers and counselors, for the people of Heartland Ministries, and for all those whom he touched in his nineteen years of life.

On Sunday, we buried our Jacob as he was raised, as a Jew. Jacob found in Christianity, and in Jesus, the strength to save and redeem his life. I know that he would want for there to be a Christian observance in his memory. I offer these words in Jacob's honor, and in honor of his late grandfather Glen Trimble, Glen's father Delmar Trimble, Delmar's father and his father's father, and his mother's father, and so on through several generations of Christian ministry. I will need their help, and yours. Looking out over this congregation, I can see that there are those among you who know how to say, "Ay-men." Jacob and I will need your Ay-mens. I will also ask all of you to help me conclude verses of the Mi shebarach prayer, by singing with me, "Ah-ah-men."

Please know that whether you are Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, nonreligious or even atheist, this message is intended for you to partake in the blessing of Jacob's life. This, also, is how Jacob would have wanted it. At his Bar Mitzvah, Jacob read and interpreted the Torah portion Kedoshim, from Leviticus, chapters 19 and 20. Jacob argued against Biblical injunctions not to seed your field with mixed seeds, and not to wear garments made of mixed fibers. He rejected these prohibitions, because he was proud of coming from a family and having a group of friends that included people of different races, beliefs, and sexual orientations. When Jacob came home from his first worship service here at the Vineyard, he was radiantly happy about how welcoming you are to people of all races, sexual orientations, walks of life, and forms of belief.

Jacob would have said that God put his friend Ryan in the car next to him the night that Jacob lost his life, so that Ryan could call Silvana, whose mother Zulima, a member of this Christian Fellowship, could call to wake us and tell us that Jacob was in a very bad accident on Route 93. As I rushed to get dressed to get to our beloved son, his mother began making telephone calls to find out where he was and what had happened. The State Police told us to come to the Milton barracks rather than the accident scene, crowded with emergency vehicles. With Jodie at home to field telephone calls, I began the long drive down the late night, empty road, preparing myself for what I might hear. For several years, Jacob's struggles with substance abuse and destructive decisions had us living on the knife edge of uncertainty, not knowing when we went to bed whether he would arrive home safe or we would get the call that he was dead. Since his return from Heartland in January, those nights seemed to have been left behind, but this night I had had the old feeling of dread as I had gone to sleep. Now, as I drove down the empty street, I reached out to Jacob's spirit with the Mi shebeirach prayer. I could not tell if he was alive or dead, but I could feel his intense distress and confusion. An officer came from the scene to meet me at the barracks with the news that he was gone. He gave me a room, a phone, and privacy to wail with

the anguish of every parent who loses a beloved child. I called his mother to tell her that he was gone, and to hear her wails. Reaching deeply to find consolation for us, I told Jodie how grateful I was, and how lucky we were, for his life.

Driving home, I continued my search for a way to hold the pain of such loss. I remembered the *Mi shebeirach*, the prayer of healing that our congregation sings each Sabbath evening. Jacob's name had been read out before the singing of that prayer week after week, during the darkest days when we had to withhold our home from him because he would not take responsibility for himself, and through the days of his recovery this past summer, fall, and winter. We had only just stopped including him in the prayer when he returned in January. I ask those of you who know the prayer to join me in its beginning verse, and all of you to join at the end of the verse with, (sing:) *Ah-ah-ahmen. Mi shebeirach, avoteinu, m'kor habracha l'imoteinu - May the source of strength who blessed the ones before us, Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing, and let us say, Ah-ah-ahmen.* On that drive home, I started down the long journey of life having lost a child. I grew determined to find the full measure of blessing in our son's brief life, and to extend that blessing to others in a way that not only honored him but made the blessing of his life even more precious to us.

In the short distance that I have traveled that journey, I have found more blessing than I could imagine. There is not a story about Jacob that does not have in it some blessing, some source of grace that nourishes the spirits of those who tell and those who hear the story. For those of you who are getting to know him, let me introduce him to you with some of the words of his friends:

One friend wrote, "He never ceased to smile, nor did he ever cease to shine."

Another wrote, "He honestly was, is, and always will be loved."

Another wrote, "He always promised to take care of me. But he always mentioned the parents. He always talked about how caring you two were and how much love there was...He is the most selfless person I know. And I have known him since I was 9. And he was 10. He has the biggest heart...He is always going to be in the hearts of many. He will always be loved."

Another wrote, "I can just remember all the times he would say to me, 'My parents gave me a second chance and I'm not going to mess it up, I am going to work hard in school, graduate, and go to the University of Texas and study mechanics.'...I just wanted you to know how much he loved you both and the only thing he wanted to do was make you guys proud of him.... there was never a time that I was with him, that he didn't express how grateful he was that you two gave him a second chance."

Another friend gave us a letter she wrote to him after his death: "You were one of the best people I knew and you were so kind and generous to others. You were smart, funny, bright and very caring...A person who had gone through things that many people do not experience in their entire lifetime. Your strength, courage, ambition, and drive inspire not only me but everyone you've befriended...It's amazing how you had changed your life for the better. That courage alone is not within everyone, you've accomplished so much more than people your age usually

do accomplish. You were and still are an inspiration. Your soul, so kind, and you had such a youthful sense of mind that most people do not have. You were never bitter or mean, just a sweet, gentle person.”

Another friend wrote, “Jacob, a seemingly tough young man, in reality was soft on the inside with a fun energy and goofy sense of humor...I enjoyed many energetic learning center sessions and homework club after school periods...Although you could not usually count on any of us to concentrate for more than ten minutes at a time, you could always count on our endless positive energy amongst a sometimes very negative and frustrating academic experience. For me, Jacob will always be this playful child.”

His substance abuse counselor wrote, “The most important thing I want to tell you is that Jacob loved you both very much , and knew you loved him too.”

A guidance counselor wrote, “I was comforted today by some of Jacob’s friends, another example of how his kindness will be extended through all those whose life he touched, especially his peers. I will always remember his sparkling eyes and beautiful smile.”

Jacob gave us the first of those beautiful smiles when he was two days old, hours after he was placed in his mother’s arms by his birth mother. Jacob had been as hungry for his new mother’s eyes as for the formula that she was feeding him. When she broke the eye contact by lifting him up to her shoulder to burp him, he twisted his whole body around to keep gazing at her face. Startled to discover that he had such strength and control in his infant body, his mother gasped and brought him back to face her, as he gave her his first radiant smile. We were to have many more smiles - and many more tricks - from Jacob over the next nineteen years. He blessed our lives, and the lives of people whom he touched, with his amazing abilities to feel and share joy, to be fascinated by the world around him, to love, and to care deeply about respecting other people. He hated boredom, he loved excitement, and he was full of tricks.

As a child, Jacob often found it difficult to be satisfied. He would want what he didn’t have, and when he got it, it often wasn’t enough. We tried to help him with this by talking with him about resisting insatiability, “not letting Mr. I beat him.” When he was around nine, I came in the door after a long day of work, to find him greeting me eagerly with the words, “Daddy, I want this one hundred dollar Lego!” I greeted him, and told him that we weren’t going to buy such an expensive toy. Undeterred, he responded, “But Daddy, I really want it!” “Jacob, I already said no.” “But Daddy, I really, really want it.” As he kept it up, I wore down. “Jacob, if you don’t stop, you’ll just make me angry, and you still won’t get the Lego.” “Jacob, listen to my voice; can’t you hear that I am getting angry?” And so it went, until, my face contorted with anger, I yelled, “Jacob!!!” And Jacob whipped out the camera that he had been holding behind his back the whole time, and captured the picture of my angry face before I dissolved into laughter.

A couple of years later, he and his friend Sam were clowning around as they often did after dinner as their parents absorbed themselves in conversation among old friends. As usual, they would cook up some performance in Jacob’s room, then come in and divert us, returning to Jacob’s room to cook up the next scenario before returning with the next performance. This night, the schtick was to put on costumes, adding more and more pieces between performances.

They were unusually distracting. As their costumes grew, they became positively obnoxious. Finally Jacob, his face covered with a fake beard and sunglasses and his head with a hat, crossed the line. I challenged him sharply and severely. In response, Sam took off the beard and sunglasses. They had switched costumes!

On our way to Jacob's burial, as we passed through Cleveland Circle, I looked back to see cars from the procession continuing to pour over the hill in Washington Square, more than half a mile away. Thinking of impatient drivers waiting to make their way across Beacon Street, we laughed over Jacob's one last chance to piss people off!

There is not a story about Jacob that does not include blessings. We must find them to make our own lives blessings for others. In these stories of Jacob's playfulness about anger in relationships are lessons about his own struggle to find peace in a life where his distractibility, his learning disabilities, and his trouble with his moods often felt unbearable. His anguish over these problems came out mostly at home, too often in situations where one or more of us, overcome by frustration and helplessness, would lash out with angry voices. He always had the 'youthful sense of mind' that his friend described. His mother and I could see the sweet child behind the angry, provocative teenager, crying out, "Mommy, Daddy, I'm hurting. Why aren't you making it better?" For years, Jacob tried to make it better with drugs, alcohol, and increasingly risky behavior. When times were at their worst, he would accuse us bitterly of not knowing how to love him, even of not loving him at all. Even then, although he would not tell us that he did love us, he almost always refrained from telling us that he did not.

When Jacob was seventeen, his birth mother, knowing that she was dying, reached out to hasten the reunion both had dreamed of all his life. She died days before Jacob was to meet her. He reacted with more substance abuse, placing himself in greater and greater danger, and withdrawing more and more from productive activity and loving engagement with others. We came, finally, to the painful decision to tell him that we could not provide food and shelter as long as he was destroying his life. For months, we did not know whether or not he would choose life. Finally, as his friends were graduating from the High School from which Jacob had dropped out, he made the decision to go into detox, from there into a rehabilitation program, and from there to Heartland Christian ministries.

We knew that Jacob had been seeking a spiritual life in Christianity, and prayed that he could find in religious belief a way to stay sober and the strength to go on. In my letters, I tried to help him with his search for a meaningful relationship with God. On June 11, I wrote, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...were regular people who had a special relationship with God. They made lots of mistakes and had lots of weaknesses, but they tried to do what they believed God wanted them to do. We can learn from their lives.

Drugs made you learn a lot about tricking and deceiving others and yourself. Looking at the life of your namesake Jacob, you can think about how trickery and deception shaped his life and the lives of people around him. Like Jacob, you struggle with powerful forces like the angel who came to him in the night. Jacob's struggle gave him the name Israel, which became the name of the people who are his descendants. Mom and I hope that your own struggle will bring about its

own great future for you, for our grandchildren, and for many generations to come. Love, Dad”

On June 27, I wrote, “You have the opportunity at Heartland not just to ‘become a Christian,’ but to feel and know what it is to have a relationship with God. The Heartland way is through a direct connection with Jesus, which you can find if you want it with all your heart and soul. Once you have found it, it can guide your actions and decisions for a happy and meaningful life.

God is always ready to enter our hearts, at any time or place. It is up to us to open our hearts to Him. You may find that it doesn’t come to you right away. You may need to show God and yourself how strongly you want to feel His presence in your life. Don’t be surprised to find that, even after you have made up your mind to accept Jesus, the joy of feeling his presence may not come to you right away. In every spiritual tradition in the world, the joy of being in the Divine Presence comes to those who yearn for it with all their minds, all their hearts, all their souls, and all their beings. You may be on your knees in despair when it finally comes to you. God will know when you are ready, and God will not fail you.

I love you deeply, and pray that you are able to find the spiritual connection that can, at long last, give you the peace and calm that you have ached for, and tried to find in so many dark and destructive places. Love, Dad”

On June 30, I wrote, “You know that I have been doing a lot of thinking about how you can make Christianity work for you to help you to stay sober and to live a good life. One thing I have been thinking about is remorse and repentance.

Most religious traditions in the world talk about how to use remorse to change your life for the better. Remorse is different from guilt, which tends to be a self-centered feeling. If you have done something bad and you realize it, you can deal with the knowledge that you have done bad by feeling remorse. Remorse is the process of enduring emotional pain as you think carefully over what you have done, remembering what it was like to do what was wrong, who it affected, and how it affected them. By enduring the pain of remorse, and thinking as clearly as possible about your wrongdoing, you train yourself not to do wrong again. If you have suffered remorse, then the next time you get the impulse to do the wrong thing, you remember the pain of remorse, and it helps you to control yourself so you don’t end up feeling remorseful again.

Ever since you were a little kid, it has been very difficult for you to feel remorse. You just could not stand to feel bad about what you did. You would start attacking yourself (“I hate myself!”) or, when you couldn’t take your feelings of self-hatred, you would get angry at Mom, or me, or both of us, telling us that we were the reason that you did bad things, or the reason that you were feeling bad. This problem got worse year after year.

I am very grateful that, when you talked with your counselor and us at the rehabilitation center, you took responsibility for the destructive things that you had done, and for their negative effects on Mom and me, as well as on you. I could see that it was very hard for you to stand your painful feelings as you told us you were 90% responsible.

Here is where Christianity can be very helpful to you. Christianity has a very special and particular way of helping people to deal with the problem of their sinful behavior. If you are a Christian, and you confess your sins honestly and wholeheartedly to God, you will experience Divine forgiveness. Christians believe that Jesus chose to take on His suffering on the cross as a way of paying for the sins of all humanity. If you take responsibility for your sins, Jesus has assured you of God's forgiveness. With this comfort, you can think about your sins without having to be angry at yourself or anybody else, and you can make clear-minded decisions about how to avoid those sins in the future. I hope that you can find a way to make this work for you. Love, Dad"

At Heartland, Jacob did find Jesus in his life, and he flourished. He wrote to a friend, "I love to work because I am being paid to learn how to fix cars and trucks, I love it. Life is a lot better these days. I don't ever wanna use again. I like how I am now and it makes me happy...Are you still gonna be around next summer? Cuz if you are, maybe I could take you out somewhere in my new car...P.S. Pray for me - That can't be too religious, can it? I need people to pray for me." To another friend, he wrote, "I have been sober since you have last seen me at AA. I'm working really hard. I go to church every day, work out, lift weights, work in a kitchen and save up money..." Later, to that same friend, "I'm working in a truck shop now. I fix up trucks and 18 wheelers from 7 AM to 6 PM, 7 days a week. It's really fun and the best part is I get fat paychecks...By the way, it's ok to cry. I ain't gonna lie, I cry a lot. Especially lately, ya know, all I got here is Jesus/God, and me...I'm really proud of my self ya know. Been sober almost 2 months. I got money saved up; things are looking great for me."

After nearly seven months of sobriety, Jacob started talking about coming home. He told us, "I know that if I stay at Heartland the rest of my life, I won't have problems and I will be safe. I know that if I leave Heartland, I will have to accept every day that I do have problems, and that I am not safe." He trusted that he could rely on his relationship with Jesus to make it. He wanted to get his high school degree to prepare for the work he loved, and he felt alienated by Heartland's conviction that theirs was the only true belief in God, their condemnation of unbelievers and sinners to Hell, their intolerance of differences. As we made our way through a series of telephone calls, we saw Jacob deal in a new and better way with disagreement, with our worries and concerns about him, and with the process of difficult negotiation. We finally agreed to a detailed contract, which Jacob knew he had to keep in order to stay at home. Jacob planned to put his earnings into a substantial downpayment on his dream car, a Pontiac GTO, and we would carry his payments as long as he was in school and keeping the contract. Jacob arrived home New Year's Eve, committed to regular drug counseling with weekly urine tests, and to serious effort in school. He was truly transformed. After years of fear and anguish, we had our beloved son back in our home. He had never left our hearts.

There is not a story about Jacob that does not include blessings. We must find them to make our own lives blessings for others. Jacob's friends have blessed our lives, and theirs, by telling us after his death how he loved us, and how he knew we loved him. It was hard for him to tell us he loved us, even after his redemption from substance abuse. He returned from Heartland to a world in which he had problems every day, and was not safe. Although we were respectful of each other, and able to contain our expressions of anger and frustration in ways we could not

have imagined before Heartland, there were still misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and much left unsaid or unheard. He worked harder than he ever had since he began high school, yet he still needed to work harder in order to succeed. Although most friends respected his determination not to use, not all did, and his own standards began to slide. Thanks to his friends' honesty, we know that he drank at least once the week before he died, and that he drank the day before he died. We suspected a relapse, because in the morning, Jacob was difficult to rouse, and difficult when roused. He was particularly impossible the morning of the day he died, mistreating his mother, setting off her anger, then reacting indignantly to hers. Yet, as he left the house for school, he called up to his mother. She called down, "have a good day." He called back, "*You* have a good day, *too*." That afternoon, checking in by phone with his mother, he was proud and happy that he had earned As on his lab reports. He spent some time with friends who shared his love of cars, doing gearhead things. He drove a young woman whom he cared about to a park, taking her to surprise her with the beauty of a place where he and his mother had eaten peanut butter sandwiches together several times a week when he was a little boy. And, he had a couple of beers with some other friends.

Now, I am now going to ask you two difficult questions. The only way we can get through this together is by being honest as we take care of each other. Even if you are with your parents, or with your kids, today, for Jacob's sake, please answer my questions honestly. Perhaps this may start an important family conversation. Please now raise your hand if you have ever in your life said the words, "I had a couple of drinks," or, "I had a couple of beers." Thank you. Please keep your hands in the air. Now, if even once in your life, when you said "I had a couple of drinks," you actually had more than two alcoholic beverages, please lower your hand. Thank you. From now on, in honor of Jacob's memory, whenever you say or hear the words, "couple of drinks," or "couple of beers," say these words, to yourself or aloud: "That's drinking, not thinking." Thank you.

Around 10:30 that night, Jacob picked Ryan up in his beloved GTO. He told Ryan that he had had "a couple of beers," and, later that evening, Jacob had another. The two of them went cruising down Route 93, talking about how determined they were never again to smoke weed. Jacob had his seat back tilted way back, driving with his arms extended in front of him. They followed 93 as it turned toward the north, and Jacob sat forward in his seat, fully focused as he opened up his muscle car for as much as it could perform. The road whipped away hypnotically before them as the speedometer made its way to 147 miles an hour. A car emerged in the road ahead of them, too fast for Jacob to do more than cut the wheel to the left, trying to make his way between the car and the guard rail on the left. The car rose up onto its nose, sliding down the road as Jacob and Ryan looked helplessly through the windshield at the guardrail whizzing by in front of them. The car, with plenty of momentum left, then tumbled over and over all the way across the superhighway, heading for the treeline on the right hand side. As it rolled, it left two wheels and Jacob's door behind. A tree sheared off the engine compartment, and the car finally stopped as it struck another tree, its engine resting 30 feet away. With the last of its momentum, it tilted up against the tree, then fell back down onto the ground on its roof - and onto Jacob, who had been thrown from the car. Injured, dazed, but conscious, Ryan was helped out of the car by two passersby, and they tried and failed to lift the car off Jacob. Ryan could see Jacob's legs extending out one side of the car. His fingers were visible on the other side. Over and over,

Jacob screamed his friend's name, as Ryan and the two strangers called back to him. Jacob was crying out like a child in pain and confusion, seeking comfort and safety. Ryan could tell that his friend Jacob knew he was there. After some time, which Ryan remembers as ten minutes, Jacob stopped calling out his friend's name. He said nothing more for the rest of his life, but, for at least several minutes he continued to breathe. Finally, his leg stopped quivering, both legs relaxed, and, as he stopped breathing, his legs curled up as though his body were seeking the fetal position in which Jacob had lived in his birth mother's womb.

There is not a story about Jacob that does not include blessings. We must find them to make our own lives blessings for others. Let us seek for blessings in this awful story of Jacob's death.

The road to recovery is not a straight path, nor a smooth one. Jacob had begun to relapse. Already, caring adults at home and school were seeing telltale shifts in attitude and mood. Had he lived, he would have had to confront the consequences of his stumbling on the path. According to the terms of his contract, to live with us and to keep his car he would have had to agree to a plan of action that he would have to follow. He would need to restore the humility he had learned at Heartland, and commit himself to consistent attendance in groups. Painful as it would be, he had already shown himself and others that he could handle the process of recovery. As his friends witnessed him picking himself and restoring his sobriety, he would have continued to make his life a blessing by inspiring others.

At Heartland, Jacob had written to his friend, "I have to stay sober for the rest of my life because I have so much on the line. Mainly my life, yea my life. If I go back to using and all that crap I will die in a matter of time. A short amount of time. I'm not ready to die, there's a lot of things I want to do in my life that I haven't got the chance to do yet. I want to race cars one day, I will have to be sober to do that." If Jacob knew that, how could he have made the decision he made to drink again? Some friends suggest that Jacob wanted to show that he could drink so that he could live out his proud identity as a redneck born in East Texas; an antiracist redneck like his grandmother, aunt and uncles and cousins. In fact, his aunt and uncle, fully mindful of the genetic risk for substance abuse and mood problems that cast its shadow over Jacob's birth mother's life, do not find that their abstinence from alcohol at all compromises their proud identities as East Texans. What was wrong with Jacob's judgment?

One answer to that question, a short one, is that all kids are damn fools. Science will tell you that the front part of the brain, the part that controls the faculties of planning, judgment, and practical sense, does not fully mature until your mid-twenties. Whether or not parents know the science, they know that their kids are in most danger when they can drive cars and be out in the world on their own before they understand the gravity and complexity of life's dangers. When I was seventeen, my friend David Bendler was driving when his car hit a patch of ice, and we were skidding sideways, looking through the windshield as the roadside stone wall rushed past us. David pulled out of the skid; there was a moment of shocked silence, then we both burst out laughing. We then turned the car around, drove back, and tried to skid again. Perhaps I survived that damn foolishness because God wanted me to talk with you today.

There is more to the story of Jacob's relapse than simple immaturity of judgment. Jacob had told

us at his school re-entry meeting that he relied on Jesus to control his craving to use substances. Three Sundays ago, he did not go to church, then again the next Sunday, then again the next. Each occasion had its plausible reason, but a pattern was emerging. In a conversation with his mother about religion during these last three weeks, Jacob said that a person might not necessarily need Jesus; that what was important was a belief in a God. Fine words for his ecumenical, religiously liberal parents to hear, but I remember wondering at the time: Is Jacob backsliding?

Backsliding is a word that would have been familiar to Jacob's and my ancestors the Methodist ministers. A Christian who has made a passionate commitment to a relationship with Jesus and a life according to Jesus' ways, who then loses sight of that commitment as he or she is drawn into the temptations of the world, is backsliding. Our ancestors knew that backsliding happens, that we are all fragile human beings striving for God's perfection, and that most efforts to live a Christian life are marked by periods of salvation and periods of backsliding. The Indian sage Meher Baba taught that turning away from God is as much a part of the Divine plan as turning toward God. He taught that God is a universal unity beyond time and space. There is nothing outside of God. God's self-awareness is a process that begins when God gazes into the void that is nothing and imagines the universe of Creation. The most sentient beings in Creation, human beings in the case of planet Earth, are created with the capacity to know God - and to ignore God. It is through the human yearning to seek the presence of God that God knows God's self. We are the instruments of Divine self-awareness. If we could not be ignorant of God, we would not have the impulse to seek God. Backsliding and redemption are part of the natural cycle of our mortal existence.

Let us go back for a moment to Jacob in his last moments of life, no longer crying out to Ryan but still alive. His relationship with Jesus was strong enough that he needed only a moment to prepare himself to meet his God, to accept responsibility for his sins, to ask for forgiveness, and to believe with all his heart and soul in Jesus Christ's promise of redemption. You may remember that, when I reached out in prayer on my drive to the police barracks, I found Jacob's spirit in a state of confusion and fear. Hours later, after wailing with his mother and finally lying down for what was left of the night, I reached out for his spirit again. It was a clear, bright, coherent pillar of light. Over the next few days, I witnessed Jacob's spirit as it continued its journey to his God. The pillar of light that is his spirit moved toward an enormous pillar of the same light, gradually becoming less and less distinguishable from it. Rabbi Meshullam Feivush of Zebriza described this journey with a metaphor: "It is like a single drop of water that has fallen in the great ocean. When it returns to its source, it becomes one with the waters of the ocean, and it is indistinguishable on its own at all."

Jacob is not the only God-wrestler in this family. In this year that Jacob became a Christian, I am becoming a Jew, and his sister became a Buddhist. Each family member would have something different to say about what happens to Jacob's spirit after death, but all of us respect the human need for deep meaning, whatever form that meaning might take. If our planet is to survive, the human family will need to share that respect. May the Source of strength who blessed the ones before us help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing. After days of urging Jacob's friends to take the blessing of his life to make blessings of their own, I found

myself responding to this good advice. It is my practice before I rise in the morning to thank God for the gift of spirit that animates my body with the prayer, Modeh ani lefanecha, Melech chai v'kayom, shehechezarta bi nishmati b'chemla - raba emoonatecha. My spirit has followed Jacob's on its journey to reunion with God as far as my spirit can go and remain attached to my mortal body. As it returns from its close encounter with the Source of strength that blessed the ones before us, it has helped me find the courage to make my life a blessing by sharing these words with you today.

We will be closing this service with the Lord's Prayer. Jews and Christians are close cousins, and this is a prayer that can be easily shared between us. Like the scribe Ezra, Jesus assembled texts from those who came before him to make a coherent message. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." In a closing prayer of the Jewish service, we pray, "Y'hayah Adonai l'melech al-col-ha-aretz; bayom hahu Adonai echad ooshemo ehad: God will be sovereign over all the world; on that day God will be one and God's name will be one." I believe that God gave us the gift of Jacob's spirit to help us take responsibility for our role in Creation. We will need to plant a mixture of different seeds in the soil of humanity, and weave a garment made up of different threads to clothe the whole world.

These words are particularly for those who struggle to understand why Jacob died so very young. If Jacob's seat back had been, like Ryan's, firmly against his back as he made his race drive, he probably would not have been thrown from the car. Our family might today be dealing with a different burden than his death. We, the parents in the room, live with our helplessness as our children make their way through these years of dangerous damn foolishness. Perhaps Jacob's blessed life ended early as it did to save the young people whom he loved, and who loved him, by teaching this lesson: It is human nature to stumble and to fall. You may stumble and fall less as you get older, but you will still stumble and fall. God seems to need us to have this human frailty, from which we find redemption by rising up from our mistakes. Jacob was making some mistakes, and could have risen up from nearly all of them. Driving at 147 miles an hour on a public highway, though, is like walking on a tightrope wire hundreds of feet above the ground. If you stumble from such a height, there is no opportunity to rise from your mistakes. If you all can survive through the next few years of brain development, nearly all of you will come to recognize and avoid danger intuitively. Until then, please remember Jacob. He was high enough above the ground for everyone to see him stumble, and to show everyone what it costs when you make a bad judgment in a dangerous situation.

Jacob's family asks that all the young people here help us to extend the blessing of our son's life by making Jacob's life a blessing in your own life. Be inspired by his love of life, of people, and of the world. Treat each other with respect. Have fun, and laugh. Thank Jacob for showing you that, no matter how bad your life may seem to you, it is possible to redeem yourself, to turn yourself around, to discover what it is that you are really good at and what you can do to make the world better for people around you. As you make life-shaping decisions in the future, please remember the pain in your heart as you hear these words now. As hard as it is to believe that you are mortal, that your own acts can bring yourself or your loved ones harm, please remember that Jacob did die. Make your lives a blessing by taking the blessing of Jacob's life into your heart the next time that you are confronted with a decision about whether to get into a car with someone who has been drinking, whether to take just one chance on risky sex, whether to let an

argument escalate into physical violence, whether to tempt the law to try to make a fast dollar. If you can hold Jacob in your heart, and honor Jacob by accepting that you are mortal and vulnerable to harm at such moments of decision, you will help us continue to make our son's beautiful life a blessing to the world.

Believe it or not, I will stop talking in a few minutes. Other family members who choose to do so will share a few memories. After family members have spoken, if you want to share with us some memory of Jacob, please rise quietly and come forward here to form a line. Please show Jacob respect in the dignity of your sorrow. It may be that there will not be time enough for all of you who want to speak to do so. We will be working to assure that those who want to speak and most need to do so will be brought to the front of the line. If you get in the line and don't get to speak, you must promise us that you will not leave this hall without having made a commitment to a member of the Vineyard community to join a group at the Vineyard to share your love and memories of Jacob. All of you here are invited to do so, but those of you who rose to speak and were unable to do so must promise me that you will make the commitment to join a group. Pastor Chuck will help identify the members of the Vineyard Fellowship with whom you may talk after the service.

Near the moment of his death, I connected with Jacob's spirit with the Mi shebeirach prayer of healing. It is no longer a prayer for Jacob. Now, we say the Kaddish, which praises the name and magnificence of the God with Whom Jacob's spirit has reunited. With so many hearts in this room freshly wounded by his loss, there is plenty of use for a prayer of healing for the living. I am going to ask those who know the prayer to join me in the two verses of the prayer, each of which ends with Ah-ah-ah-men. Please, all of you, join us in the Ah-mens.

(Sing)

*Mi shebeirach avoteinu
M'kor habracha l'imoteinu
May the source of strength
Who blessed the ones before us,
Help us find the courage
To make our lives a blessing,
And let us say: Amen*

*Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M'kor habracha l'avoteinu
Bless those in need of healing
With r'fua sh'leima,
The renewal of body,
The renewal of spirit.
And let us say: Amen*