

When I think of who the Lord used to be the most influential people in my life, ones who helped me know God for who He truly is, ones who taught me the importance of surrender and service, ones who didn't just use God's Words but lived them with their life – Wayne Aarum is always at the top of that list.

I had the greatest blessing to have Wayne as my youth pastor growing up. And while every teenager needs guidance and direction at that age we usually don't seek out our parents. Though my mother and I had a good relationship, I always went to and counted on the godly wisdom of my youth pastor, Wayne Aarum. He would always bring my questions and troubles back to the Bible, back to what the Word of God says about Jesus, what He has done, and how that has freed me. No matter what the question, whether it be about some obscure group found in Genesis or the well-known teaching of Paul, Wayne knew it all.

Wayne was open and honest about everything, including the difficult topics. He didn't shy away from talking about hot button teen topics like drinking, dating, lying, praying, sex, the Holy Spirit, relationships, etc. He shared truth about spiritual attacks and ways the enemy works and why he works the way he does. It was Wayne who taught me how to pray in the Spirit, claim my throne rights as a child of God, cover myself, my home, my children in the blood of Jesus, command the devil to leave, and invite the Spirit to fill those places now free from those dark forces. It wasn't until a decade later that I had to use that prayer, but how grateful I was that I had that knowledge, that I had a youth pastor who loved me enough to equip me with such spiritual armor. Thankfully, Wayne serves God and not a specific church or establishment. Because even though he stopped being my official youth pastor when I turned 18, I can still reach out to him about anything, I did in college, in my twenties and still do in my 40's.

To be perfectly frank about the accusations, if Wayne had a deviant will I would have been a perfect candidate to exercise that will. I came from a twice broken home, raised by a single mom who had four children who worked fulltime and went to school fulltime. I had "daddy issues," an eating disorder, low self-esteem and more. My mom would drop me off early to get one-on-one counseling from Wayne. There was never, not ever, a time that I felt uncomfortable or that the boundaries of a pastor-student relationship were being crossed. There was never, not ever, a time that Wayne was inappropriate in any way. Always, every time, I felt safe around Wayne. Always, every time, I felt loved around Wayne. Always, every time, I felt the presence of God and His peace and His truth when around Wayne.

This isn't a letter of hero worship. This is a testimony of a man who has and continues to loves Jesus with all his heart, mind, and soul.