**James 21st speech**

As I am not physically with you all tonight, I’ve decided to take advantage of the available technology and speak words of pride, encouragement and love from afar.

Furthermore, as I like talking and I have a captive audience (I hope) I have labored for countless hours over this inspirational, entertaining and very long speech. So please make sure you have a drink, make yourselves comfortable and grab your note pads. Pens ready, deep breaths taken, let us begin. My speech is titled How Do You Measure Success?

(pause)

Just kidding about the length of the speech. I’m not the star of the show. The star is of course the tallest man in the room; an intelligent and passionate young man named James: my son. Look if you will, and behold the fruit of my loins and the product of 21 years of nurturing.

Although my speech will not be long, I think the question is worth addressing. How **do** you measure success?

Is it:

1. How much money and stuff you have
2. How many accolades and awards you’ve received
3. The quality of your relationships
4. How happy and peaceful your life is
5. The impact you’ve made on others, the legacy you will leave, or is it
6. How close you have come to God’s call on every man and woman: to love him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and to love others as yourself.

I’m not going to answer the question. Everyone at some stage in their life will decide for themselves what success means to them: what it looks like, what it feels like. Over the course of the journey most of us will redefine success for ourselves, perhaps multiple times as we try to figure out this thing called life.

James, I believe that your mother and I have invested sufficiently in your life, with not insubstantial assistance from your friends, family, and teachers, so that you are fully equipped to answer the question for yourself.

My greatest success has been raising two awesome children. James, as your people gather to celebrate your birthday tonight, I say this to you.

I loved you when I first learned of your existence in your mother’s womb. It’s probably true to say I loved you before that as I had often dreamed of having a son and naming him James. I loved you when you wouldn’t stop crying and you made me cry because I felt helpless. I loved you when you emptied the contents of your stomach on me, and when I dealt with the surprising volume of waste with which you filled your nappies. I loved you when you learned to walk, and to talk, and when you learned to read. I loved you when you did well at school and when you didn’t. I loved you when you scored a try or made a tackle and I loved you when you got smashed though that was rare courtesy of your size. I loved you when you scored runs, took catches and dismissed batsmen with your slightly inconsistent bowling skills. I loved you when you cheered for the Doggies and wept for them, when you learned to play guitar and so quickly surpassed my proficiency, and I loved you when you learned to drive. I loved you when I took you to your first metal concert (scary wasn’t it?) I loved you during your obsession with Metallica, and I loved you when you introduced me to Parkway Drive (Sleepwalker). I loved you when you accompanied Alana on the guitar as she sang at MADD night. I loved you when you got your first job at Dominoes and you stuck at it despite being bullied.

I loved you when you were close to me and when you were far away. I loved you when you were talking to me, and when you were not. I loved you when you disappointed and frustrated me, when you made me angry, when you were careless and selfish. I loved you when you disregarded my advice, and I loved you when I did all of those things to you.

To paraphrase Paul when he wrote in his epistle to the Romans about the love of God. There is nothing that can separate you from my love, nothing in all the earth or in heaven, no angels, no demons, not distance, nor time; not misunderstanding, not your mistakes or mine. There is nothing at all which can separate you from my love. Nothing.

I have loved you since your conception and I will always love you. No matter what. Always,

Happy Birthday my precious son. Have a great night.

Thanks for listening everyone. My thanks also to all of you for attending and for those who put the party together, and I lastly I want to give special thanks to two people:

To Ohn for helping me mold James into the outstanding human that he is today.

And to Alana, my wonderful koala princess, for being an absolute champion of a sister to James.