



Days of Hope

April 2017

Passionately communicating the love of God to hurting kids in a gentle way

Achilles had a Heel by Jon Wells

Years ago I worked with Charlie (name changed to protect privacy), a pudgy 12-year-old with an inquisitive smile and a great sense of humor. Charlie had a lot going for him. He was smart and loving; a gentle kid. Charlie had suffered the trauma of childhood sexual abuse. Like many of the kids who endure this kind of ordeal, Charlie began reenacting that abuse around other children. He ended up in residential care because of his grooming and perpetrating behaviors on the playground. Charlie struggled with a sexual attraction to small children, the fallout from the abuse he had suffered as a youngster. These compulsive behaviors caused him enormous amounts of shame.

As a part of our daily routine, I would greet Charlie at the door when he would return to the cottage from school. It is common in residential settings for the staff to search kids as they transition from one place to the next. Staff members are careful not to allow kids to bring contraband items like 'sharps' or notes that are being passed between residents. Every day, Charlie would have to be checked. He wasn't fond of weapons. He did not collect cigarette butts or lighters. Charlie's downfall was always in the art room. Charlie would rummage through the stacks of newspapers and magazines that were used to make collages. He would come up from school with crumpled pages torn from these magazines, hidden away in his clothing.

Charlie would smuggle pictures of small children that he would find in these magazines, and use the images later as a kind of pornography.

I remember one afternoon stopping Charlie at the front door and helping him to empty his pockets. "What have you got there Charlie?"

"Nothing bad, nothing bad," he insisted.

The staff and I began reviewing the contents of his pockets with him. The first ripped page was an image of a woman in a tight fitting dress.

"Good job Charlie! She's pretty isn't she?"

The next page was an advertisement for brassieres from a local retail store. "There you go Charlie, that's an adult woman, that's better than the other stuff you've been bringing up, right?"

The third page brought a groan from the staff member who was helping me. "Oh no Charlie, haven't we been working on this? Isn't this something we talked about?"

There on the wrinkled page was an advertisement for Precious Moments figurines, complete with an image of a little boy and girl holding a puppy.

"This is the kind of stuff we're working on Charlie, this is what we are working on."

"No, no you don't understand! Look on the back-look on the back!" Charlie insisted that his motives were pure.

We flipped the page over, and there on the other side was an

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Living in the Negative

by Sean A Wilson

I would like to take a moment to share some of my observations from my experiences working with residents this last month. I have been talking with the residents from different units and building relationships with them. During my time with them, I noticed that most of these kids were living in the 'Negative.'

I want us to think back at the 80's when we used to take pictures of our loved ones with a camera. Remember how we had to drop off the film at the local convenience store for development? Once our pictures were done we would not only get the photographs that were developed but we would also receive the negatives. These negatives resembled the final product, but they did not look exactly like it in color or definition.

As I communicated with the kids this month many started to open up to me and would share things about themselves.

"I hate myself."

"I'm gay."

"I'm ugly."

These comments came from the young ladies that I met. I couldn't help but to think of their faces; they had no hope and they were very distraught. Many of these young ladies had been sexually abused, neglected, or abandoned. As a result they became self-harmers, aggressive, addicted to drugs, or loners. I came to the conclusion that these young ladies remind me of undeveloped film, they need to go through a process of development in order to see the finished product with clarity.

When developing film, certain conditions are necessary. Limited light exposure and adequate water are essential. How does this compare to the young ladies? Development is nothing more than discipleship, which takes patience. I think of the water in the developing process as the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When I mentioned limited light exposure I'm referring to a process of hearing truth in doses we can handle. Second Kings Chapter five records how the prophet Elisha healed the pagan general Naaman. As Naaman left to return to his home he asked Elisha about the worship of idols in his homeland.

"But may the Lord forgive [me] your servant for this one thing: When my master [the king] enters the temple of Rimmon to bow

down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this."

Elisha's response was simple. "Go in Peace."

This is significant because Elisha could have told him, "No you better not bow down, even if you do not mean it." Elisha could have lectured him on the evils of idolatry, but he didn't. This is an example of truth in doses. The Lord never asks us change everything overnight but through the process we learn and grow in our faith, leading to the right choices. The water is also represented throughout scripture as the Holy Spirit, and is essential to our development. We remain saturated in these elements throughout the process but allow God to do the work in our lives. Just as Paul said:

"For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings."

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

What Paul was essentially saying is that he would be patient through the process of those he ministered to without compromising or violating his own conscience. So the **Holy Spirit, Discipleship over time, and Truth in doses** are all essential to the development of these young ladies.

I try to always remember that it is the Holy Spirit that does the work; I just need to be there for them. I hope and pray that I'm there to see that moment when these young ladies truly see themselves for who God created them to be and they no longer choose to live life in the negative.



advertisement for beer complete with a beach scene and two women in bikinis.

“Good job Charlie! That’s right, these women are adults, this is the kind of stuff that we need to be attracted to!” We confiscated the pictures along with an assortment of items from Charlie’s peers before we went on with our afternoon schedule.

I remember returning to my office that day bewildered; saddened that a little boy should be so deeply damaged. I was shocked that I should be encouraging him to look at women in bikinis. Was I really cheering for a kid to collect pornography? A boy like Charlie had so much going for him, but this one area of dysfunction held the potential to ruin his entire life. If not reformed, Charlie would become one of the most reviled types of perpetrators in our society. This one broken area had the potential to ruin every part of his life.

Lashaun was practically an adult by the time I met him. He arrived in care on the orders of the judge, who wanted to give him one more chance for treatment before he got kicked over into the adult penal system. Lashaun had a rap sheet that involved stupid and petty crimes, school truancy, and general delinquent behavior. Lashaun had a lot going on in his life. He was burdened by lots of problems that need to be addressed. One day when I was talking to him, he confided in me that he did not know how to read. Lashaun did not understand basic math concepts. He was a total failure in the area of academics, an illiterate adult with no idea how to fix this problem. It was something he was deeply ashamed of.

People say kids like Lashaun are the ones who have ‘slipped through to the cracks’ of our education system. It is true that Lashaun attended a school riddled with all sorts of dysfunction. Beyond that, Lashaun could care less about school. His family culture was one of total disinterest in education. Lashaun was a high school dropout, and he was OK with that. All of the important people in his life were high school dropouts too. The sad part of this story was that Lashaun was not stupid. He was an intelligent kid. In the right environment, he should’ve been able to succeed in the academic world. Lashaun had a ton of potential.

“School’s not for me, I’m not good at it,” he insisted. By the time I met him this lesson

had been deeply imprinted into his identity. And while Lashaun had a lot of strengths, his total surrender in this area of his own intellectual life made his prospects for the future very poor. How would he provide for a family? How could he support himself? How is he going to accomplish a simple task like filling out a job application or reading a street sign? Lashaun had more than one challenge he was facing in life, but this one area of complete failure in educational attainment seemed to me to be a disabling blow.

Each of the children we serve reflect the same dynamic; a list of strengths and abilities combined with an area of crippling dysfunction. And many times that one area of weakness has the potential to completely destroy their lives before they get a chance to begin. Like a cancer, this one area of dysfunction can metastasize. Soon a person’s entire life is affected.

Like so many of the children we serve in residential settings, the adults I encounter on main street reflect the same dynamic. We each carry a unique set of strengths combined with one or two areas of real dysfunction. One person suffers from a bad temper, while another struggles with addictive eating patterns. Some folks never really learn how to manage their money. Some suffer from what I like to call poor ‘stuff management,’ a.k.a. hoarding. The chart on this page illustrates some of the categories that make up my life. While not exhaustive, this list helps us think about the many areas where we can experience brokenness. All of us know someone who has been affected by problems in one of these areas. And like the children who are being treated in residential, our ‘problem areas’ have the potential to ‘sink the whole ship.’

Just as I challenge the youth we serve, I would ask you. What areas of your life are a liability? Where are you experiencing dysfunction? Many of us live in total denial of these tendencies. If

you can’t see it clearly, simply ask your spouse or a close friend. Perhaps they will be courageous enough to give you an honest and kind answer. As followers of Christ, we are called to invite the Spirit of God into every corner of our lives. I want the Kingdom of God to be established in every relationship, every task, every role I fill.

Ask the Lord to open your eyes. What areas is He working to bring healing and wholeness in your life this month?



Pieces of Me



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