

December 2016

Days of Hope

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

The Joy & Pain of the Holidays

By Jon Wells

The holidays are upon us! This is one of my favorite times of the year. I carry many cherished memories of holidays past, and look forward to gathering with family to celebrate. Beyond the presents and the food, I am beginning to understand how precious these moments are surrounded by our loved ones. Exchanging gifts is nice; the treasure lies in the shared experience.

For those who have suffered loss, the great joy of the holidays is often inverted into a painful reminder of who and what we have lost. The children we serve in residential facilities are all processing loss. Many have been permanently removed from their homes. Others have a parent who is incarcerated. Many are still trying to grapple with the death of a loved one. Whatever the story, each child who finds himself in a placement over the holidays struggles deeply.

For the past six years, a small team of staff and volunteers from Days of Hope have been spending December

25th on the Great Circle campus in St. James with a motley collection of children and teens. We bring in carnival games and inflatables. We eat. We share holiday stories. Each child is given a stocking filled with small gifts and treats. We basically throw a big party.

The kids who arrive at the party are usually subdued, not sure how to deal with this difficult day. Some of them have it harder than others. Several years ago a young man was dropped off on campus on Christmas Day. His caseworker walked him into our party,

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Help us provide something special for a child this Christmas!

As you finish your last minute Christmas shopping this season, consider taking a minute to help us to provide a special event for a child who will be in a treatment program on December 25th. Folks from the Caring Center and the Sports Club in St. James have stepped in to donate much needed items. Thanks to the generosity of the people at Family Christian Bookstores & Hi Striker, we are able to get incredible deals on books and inflatables. Even with these savings, it will still cost us around \$1200 to cover the costs of the rentals, the stockings, and the supplies for this event.

Already, some of you have sent in donations to help cover these expenses. Thank You!! **If you want to be a financial sponsor this Christmas you can mail a check to our address in St. James, or donate online at daysofhope.net/give.**

Contributions are tax exempt, and 100% of designated funds will be used to cover expenses for our Christmas party.



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Joy and Pain continued . . .

exchanged paperwork, and left. That young man was understandably withdrawn and sullen. Another young lady never showed up for our event; she refused to leave her bedroom. After cleanup that night, I visited her cottage and delivered her Christmas stocking to her room. I asked why she had not come to the party. Her reasoning had a sad logic to it.

"I told my staff that if I leave my room I will have to deal with people and think about Christmas. I was gonna be unsafe. I know that I would start cutting. So I just stayed in here and hope this day passes quickly."

A few years into this Christmas party project we stumbled across something that helped to lighten the mood significantly. We began inviting each group of young people to volunteer a few minutes in a service project. Partnering with Sole Hope, we took part of our party time to cut out patterns and help make shoes for children in Uganda. The impact was immediate. The simple act of serving someone in need unlocked many of these kids from the self pity they were mired in. For the last three years, a volunteer project has been integral in helping sullen kids actually enjoy themselves a little bit. It has become the very first thing we do when kids arrive.

I set out wanting to provide a wonderful experience for these forgotten kids.

I have often had to settle for something less exciting but more profound.

Often we are unable to make the holiday joyous for a child. Sometimes all we can accomplish is to be present with a child as she navigates the pain of the holiday. Something selfish in me wants them to join me in celebrating. I want them to smile and laugh and sing.

There is great power in rejoicing with those who rejoice. I have learned that there is even greater power in mourning with those who mourn, and I think it does harm to tell the grieving child that her grief is wrong.

So at the end of December we will again be throwing a party for children out at Great Circle. Some of the kids will laugh and run and play. Others will slump into the corner and shed a few tears. God give us the wisdom to run and laugh and sit and cry. Either way, we hope to communicate that they are not alone; they are not forgotten.

Ask the Lord to remind you of those around you who may be struggling this Christmas. You too may have an opportunity to reach out to others and join them in the joy and the pain of the holiday season.



What Christmas means to me
Spending time with your family and loved ones
Having good memories, but since I been locked up
since I was 13 im trying to spend time with
those who are here right now to spend time
with me. I been locked up since I was 12
So I never really celebrated Christmas with
anyone so I dont really know what Christmas
means.





The Fallout

By Jon Wells

“They took me away from my mom cause she is sick. She has a heart problem and can’t take care of us. I was skipping school to take care of my little sister, and they said I couldn’t do that anymore.”

Stacey (name changed to protect privacy) went on to tell me how she had been shuffled through five different foster homes. One family had biological children who did not want foster siblings. Their kids made fun of her as she cried herself to sleep at night. Other families turned out to only be temporary placements. Finally Stacey was placed with Rhonda (name changed). Rhonda and Stacey hit it off, and soon Stacey was flourishing. She was getting good grades in school and working a part time job in her free time. In less than a year, Rhonda was diagnosed with cancer, and Stacey was again removed from the home.

“They won’t tell me how Rhonda is doing; they said that I am not a blood relative and I don’t really have right to know how she is . . . I ended up doing some stupid stuff at the next foster home cause I just gave up, that’s why they put me here.”

Stacy’s story is like so many others that I hear; disappointment and loss, separation from family, some tragedy that throws a child for a loop. The kids we encounter experience devastating fallout as a result of the pains they suffer. Many of them are on a road to becoming high school dropouts, others are drug addicted, all of them find themselves with no clear path forward and no idea how to get life back on track. They’re living in the wasteland that remains after their lives have been devastated.

They are living with the fallout.

In one of the facilities where we serve, I have learned that many of our drug addicted youth go to rehabilitation programs multiple times. Some kids are sent to rehab five, ten, fifteen separate times without ever achieving consistent sobriety. It brings to mind the question I asked Stacey that day. *How long will the fallout last?* It is true that the circumstances that created this mess were horrible. What happened to you was not fair. It was not right. But I still have to ask, how long will the fallout last? How many months, how many years will you be crippled by this tragedy?

If Stacey had a magic wand, she would wave it. I firmly believe that kids like Stacey don’t want to live a

broken life. She wants things to get better. But wanting things to get better is not the same as achieving that outcome. Hoping to be safe and clean and stable is a common sentiment among these youth. But so many of them suffer years of addiction and self-inflicted pain.

How long will the fallout last?

These are the moments when we need the intervention

of Someone bigger than us. These are the moments where the gospel truly becomes good news, when circumstances beyond our control can be entrusted to One who is able. I do not believe that the painful stories that I hear have to shape the future of every child that I see. I believe and I have seen how God can bring about changes to my story. The gospel is more than simple containment; God is able to weave beautiful things out of ugly circumstances.

It seems to me that God is often waiting for us to engage; waiting for me to come to a place where I am ready to abandon my broken ways and move towards something better.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. —Ephesians 3:20-21