

Days of Hope

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



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The Jump Hug By Jon Wells

The nation mourned in February at the news of the death of the evangelist Billy Graham. Graham rose to prominence in the 1940s through large evangelistic crusades. During his lifetime, he preached to direct audiences of more than 220 million people in 185 countries. He spoke at diverse venues; from a four month nightly crusade at New York's Madison Square Garden to tiny villages in Africa. Graham had a singular focus on preaching a simple Gospel. Relationship with God the Father is possible through his Son Jesus Christ. Graham's influence grew to include every modern US president in the second half of the century and beyond, yet his particular message never wavered. He developed a radio show called Hour of Decision. He began to publish Decision Magazine. He was consumed with one thing; inviting people into a moment where they could choose to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Many of us are the spiritual children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of those original crusades. We too have been invited into a decision point, provided an opportunity to invite Jesus into our lives. And for so many of us, that decision was the original leap of faith that launched us out into a life of faith. A leap that kind of reminds me of Lincoln.

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A few years ago, our youngest son Lincoln invented the jump hug. It was his normal routine to come waddling down the stairs and stop a few steps from the bottom to give me a big hug. One morning, he stopped short of his normal spot.

With a wry smile Lincoln said to me, "I want to jump."

That first three-step jump soon evolved into four. Then five.

These days, our four-year-old is spanning about half of the staircase as he leaps into his daddy's arms. The jump hug is an exercise in risk, delight, and tenderness. It is more than daily

occurrence, it is one of the repeated liturgies in our home. After completing one successful jump, another is begged for, then another. At some point I have to hold him tightly and simply walk away, or else our entire day would be filled with the thrill of the leap and the ecstasy of the catch.

God is using Lincoln to teach me that my walk of faith is more than single leap. In fact, the Christian life is not defined by a single decision point. Yes, it begins at a specific point in time, but the Christian life is an intentional choice to spend the rest of my days leaping into the arms of my Heavenly Father.

We in the religious set easily default into theological arguments about our original point of salvation. *Can my salvation be lost?* The children we serve in residential facilities struggle with many things, and this is an issue that seems to surface often. *I have stumbled along the way. Do I need to 'get saved' again?* It seems to me that such



questions have missed the point entirely.

As you read this, it is my hope that you have already come to that decision point in your life. But even more, I hope that you are discovering that your walk with God is more than a single confession of faith. Spiritual life, *real* spiritual life, is a rhythm of leap after leap. Not a weekly rhythm of church attendance, or an obligatory 'daily devotional' time. More than a formal meal blessing or other religious observation, I'm beginning to learn that the

Father is inviting his children into moment by moment choices to engage with the kingdom of God. Not just in religious contexts, or only in religious spaces; God is calling those of us who will listen to engage with Him in every space and place we

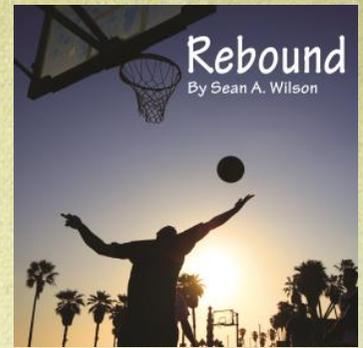
occupy. In our parenting, in our career choices, in our friendships, and our daily activity, we choose to invite God's presence and direction, real time, into our existence. *Does God want to interact on that level? Does God*

even care about the details of my life? Will my Heavenly Father bother to attend to the insignificant details of my life? Such questions can only be answered in the wild wonder of a leap.

Dear reader, if you have never seriously taken a leap of faith, may I, in the spirit of the Reverend Billy Graham, gently invite you to consider trying something that will revolutionize your life? You have tried so many other things, invested in so many other ways to find that



What is a rebound? In basketball a rebound is known as 'a statistic awarded to a player who retrieves the ball after a missed field goal or free throw. Rebounds are also given to a player who tips in a missed shot on his team's offensive end.' What does that really mean? Well, we only have the opportunity for rebound if a shot was attempted. Essentially it means if we don't take a chance and shoot the ball, we will never have the possibility of a rebound.



I have terrific news! About two months ago I shared a story about a young man who I will call Nash. He was looking for love in all the wrong places. Nash had been recruited to follow a group called Insane Clown Posse (ICP) which promised to treat him as family and accept him the way he was. Nash at the time did not fit in and had no one to talk to; he thought this ICP group were Christians because they said they were. On my return visit, I shared more information about the group after further research. Nash decided he didn't want to be a part of the organization. He admitted that he had been having second thoughts for some time now. The good news is this; Nash no longer wants to be a follower of the ICP group and wants to know more about Jesus. How awesome is that? So during my visit I shared the Word of God with Him as it pertains to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and he was more at ease than before. The door was wide open to share the message; I didn't have to force my way in. One thing that we must always realize is that when we share the gospel with people initially, we should never feel discouraged because it may appear that we missed an opportunity to save someone. It is not our job to save them but it is our responsibility to present the way of salvation to them. The Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies, justifies, and sets them apart. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3:7, 'So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.' We must remember that God is the one who provides the increase. Nash and I were so excited as I gave him a Bible. I shared scriptures with him while also personalizing his copy.

I stopped in to check on the girls and ran into a young lady I will call Sarah. I had an opportunity to speak with her some time ago when she was searching and wanting to know more about God. Sarah was a self-described atheist at our first meeting. She has transformed into a person filled with joy every time I see her. With a big smile, she shared with me that she was reading the Psalms. Sarah has grown tremendously in the past month and it is truly a joy to see that progress. Today I would like to encourage each of you who have the opportunity to read this newsletter. Do not be afraid to take the shot (sharing the Gospel) because as long as you follow your shot you have a chance to get a rebound. Don't give up on people, continue to pray for them and leave it all in the hands of the Lord; He knows exactly what is going on in their heart and mind.



Jump Hug Continued . . .

'one thing' you are seeking. Take a leap into the arms of God. The work of Christ on the cross makes possible an unbelievable journey. The Father is waiting to embark upon an adventure with you. Waiting for you to pray a simple prayer, to take a simple jump.

If you are considering making a leap of faith, understand one thing. Lincoln does not have a good grasp of physics. My preschooler doesn't comprehend acceleration velocity or launch angles. He has not taken the time to study trigonometry and estimate a safe landing zone. The jump hug is all about knowing and trusting that your Father will catch you.

Dear friend, God does not expect you to be a theologian. The crazy truth is, even the theologians don't really fully comprehend it (1 Cor 13:12). But there are some of us, theologically sophisticated or not, who have had the wild audacity to jump in the Father's arms. Take it from me, it is a jump you will not regret. And once you take the leap, never stop jumping!

For over 15 years, **Days of Hope** has been bringing the good news of the gospel to thousands of at risk youth. We continue to insist that God's solution to all of the innumerable challenges these youth face is found in the person of Jesus Christ. We are a not for profit, inter-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to address the spiritual needs of children and teens who are living in residential psychiatric care at facilities throughout central Missouri. We are supported by the prayer and gifts of individuals and churches in our community. Through the ministries that are offered at Days of Hope, Bibles are distributed, pastoral counsel, services, and groups are provided, and these children are given an opportunity to respond to the gospel message.



Special thanks to our agency partners!