



January 2017

# Days of Hope

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

## The Coming Spring

January is supposed to be the dead of winter. For the past few years, it seems mild weather has given us a break from the endless weeks of freezing temperatures and snow. But these warmer afternoons do not erase the rest of what January brings: shorter days, naked trees, and muted fields filled with dead grass. Nothing is green, nothing seems alive. Grey clouds pass over dead landscapes. We are entering that time of year when Spring begins to make its appearance ever so slowly, and the occasional sunny January afternoon makes the new season seem much closer than it actually is. In reality we have many more weeks of winter to weather. The leaves won't be making their appearance any time soon.

I find myself pining for this whole thing to move along a little faster. I am ready for lush green growth, songbirds, warm breezes, and flowers poking up through the mud. I know that I am not alone in my desire. We have built an annual event on Groundhog Day around this longing for spring, televising a giant rodent in the hopes of hastening the arrival of the changing season.

Paul refers to this deep yearning for the coming of Life in one of my favorite passages of scripture, the eighth chapter of

Romans. Speaking of the coming restoration, he waxes poetic. "The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed . . . creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." You can feel the ache, the deep resonating desire Paul has to see everything restored.

The work we do with at-risk youth has many parallels. These kids are reeling from the effects of abuse, neglect, and loss. They live in an icy winter of brokenness and sin. To lost kids like this Jesus declares, "I have come that you might have life, and have life to the full."

Yet as I watch God work in the lives of these young people, I find myself wanting the whole thing to move along a little faster. I much prefer the quick, clean kind of testimonies, the ones where God flips the switch and a person is instantly transformed out of old patterns and into a model citizen. But I do not see many of those. Instead I am witnessing a slow, steady march into the kingdom, a process that takes way more time than I would like to admit. I want these addicts I meet in rehab to get clean overnight and rise above their addictions in short order. I want these

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*The Coming Spring Continued . . .*

poor wretches who spend their days cutting on their own flesh to wake up set aside such ugly compulsions. I want to see the violent ones embrace kindness; I want the manipulators to begin telling the truth. Somewhere along the line I developed the impression that Jesus' promise of new life was a brief transaction; turns out this whole 'new life' thing is a life-long endeavor.

Over and over I have to concede that time plays a role in the redemption of the soul. As much as I want to see quick and clean spiritual transactions, it turns out that spiritual growth often moves along like spring in late January, maddening slow at times. The Gospel is not a fast food drive through. A child who has embraced the Savior still has much to learn and a lifetime of growth ahead.

Above all, I am maddened at the desperately slow pace of my own restoration. Perhaps this impatience that I direct towards these kids is just projection of my own frustrations! I do want to see them transform out of brokenness; how much more I find myself wishing for total transformation in me. Perhaps I appreciate Romans eight because it resonates with my deep desire to be restored fully and completely. No more poor choices, no more selfish or lazy responses, no more brokenness. I have embraced the Savior, yet I have so far still to go. When will this redemption be complete? Why does spring take so long in coming? It seems Paul is speaking to me when he admonishes:

"But we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

I am learning to extend patience to those around me who are in process. The kids we work with may make huge gains one day and then turn back to old habits the next. Family members and friends may at times disappoint. But those of us who have placed our trust in Christ are all moving towards the coming spring. Despite our stumbles, we fix our eyes on that rising sun and trust that we will all step out into the daylight in due season.

## Staff Transitions

As some of you may know, Aaron Jeffers has stepped out of his role as a chaplain with Days of Hope. His increased responsibilities as a District Executive with Boy Scouts of America have made it impossible to fit the chaplaincy into his schedule. We so appreciate his service to youth at the Great Circle campus in St. James. I saw myself how well he seemed to connect with these kids. One of my favorite 'pastor Aaron moments' was captured in this picture. A few years ago the guys in Emerson were playing with a makeshift vehicle they had fabricated from a scooter and an old milk crate. Aaron saw the contraption and immediately volunteered to take a ride. The Emerson guys were lining up for a chance to see how fast they could make Pastor Aaron go down the road— I think they gave him the ride of his life! Aaron also wrote the 'Questions Kids Ask' articles in this newsletter, and I know many of you have expressed appreciation for his writing. Aaron showed genuine love for the youth we serve and his presence will be missed. We wish him the best as he continues to serve youth in communities throughout the state.



On the other side of this same coin, I am excited to announce the addition of Sean Wilson to our staff in the new year. Sean is a retired Military Veteran of 22 years of Service. He is a native of Chicago and is married to his wife Janice of 18 years who is also a retired Army Veteran. They have two children, Sean II (boy) and Aniya (girl) who attend school within the Waynesville R-VI school district. Sean and Janice serve as local pastors at Greater Faith Victory Church and enjoy leading God' people into the adulthood of ministry.



Pastor Sean, Janice, and their little ones

Sean is an author of two books, a musician and songwriter, which compliments his wife's gift of singing. They love to do the work of ministry and make a difference in their community. Sean's desire is to encourage the children and young adults that he encounters by sowing seeds and watering with the Love of Christ Jesus.

Pastor Sean and his church have been a strong encouragement and support to Days of Hope in the Waynesville area, and when he heard about our staff vacancy, he immediately jumped at the opportunity to be a part of the ministry. We are excited to see how God will use pastor Sean as he begins to work with youth in the facilities we serve!

# Happy Christmas

2016 was one of the biggest Christmas Day Parties we have ever hosted. The staff at Great Circle work hard to try to find a respite placement for each child over the holidays. Even if it is just a twelve hour pass, they allow the residents to visit a grandparent or foster home if at all possible. But many of these kids simply have no good option available. Others are not safe to return to their family, due to ongoing runaway risks, self harm behaviors, or a host of other complications. In spite of staff efforts to allow these kids to get a break from residential, we still had around eighty youth who spent their Christmas Day on campus.

For the past six years, we have been throwing a Christmas Day party for these kids; bringing food, games, and a special gift to help them celebrate an otherwise difficult day. Every year I see how people and organizations from all over the state come together to make this event happen, and I so appreciate the varied ways in which so many contributed. The folks at **Family Christian Bookstores** came through for us again, allowing us to provide an encouraging, age appropriate devotional or nonfiction book for each stocking at a big discount. The **St. James Sports Club** and the **St. James Caring Center** helped to provide much needed items for these stockings. Families at **Life Church** in Houston prepared cookies and other treats enough to cover the whole day. Several teachers at **Rose Acres Elementary School** donated time and money to provide a small stuffed animal for every stocking. The staff at the Mitchell Clinic in volunteered an evening and helped us assemble the stockings. **Hi-Striker Rentals** in St. James provided our inflatable obstacle course at a discount. Many of you contributed towards offsetting our expenses as well. Finally, we simply could not have accomplished anything without the support of the staff at **Great Circle**, so many of whom joined us in celebrating Christmas Day with the kids.

We had youth who arrived to the party quiet and withdrawn, and did not respond with much enthusiasm. On the other end of the spectrum, we had volunteers and residents laughing so hard on the obstacle course that they could not catch their breath! On the whole, most of the kids expressed heartfelt gratitude. One young lady in particular thanked me at least 5 different times. She could not seem to understand why we were doing this for her, and was overwhelmed by the gesture.

Whatever the response, we had a wonderful opportunity to reach out to these young people. We reminded them that they are not forgotten, and that Christmas demonstrates God's intent to come near to us.

Please pray for these kids, that the seeds that were planted on Christmas day will bear fruit as the year progresses.



Our friends from the Mitchell Clinic in St. James helping to assemble the stockings



Some of the volunteers who came out to spend time with the kids on Christmas Day



We are currently scheduling speaking engagements for the end of 2017 and into the new year. If you are interested in inviting one of our chaplains to come and share with your church, class, or community group, let us know!

*Visit us Online!*



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