

Days of Hope

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

The Rising Storm

By Jon Wells

Trauma. Dysfunction. Intervention. A rising storm.

Every child I have ever encountered in my work at residential facilities has had two things in common, trauma and dysfunction, in that order. Although each story is unique, these two ingredients seem to be represented universally among the youth we serve.

Each of these children carry a distinctive history of trauma. The types of abuse and neglect that they have suffered run the spectrum. I have worked with beat-up kids, molested kids, homeless kids, kids who have been starved, kids who have been locked up, prostituted out, and treated like animals. I have spoken to kids who suffered ritualistic satanic abuse as well as your average, everyday verbal abuse. Just when I think I have heard it all, I listen to a new and unique story of pain.

And for every form of mistreatment, a child walks away with a related set of dysfunctional behaviors. Some fall into deep addictions, others become violent, lashing out at those around them. I have met many young men who have no capacity to interact with the authority figures in a responsible way. Others become violent, but turn their malice on themselves and do physical harm to their own body. Some kids respond to trauma

by running away, and this pattern becomes an imprint that defines the way that they react to the world around them. Those who have been sexually assaulted often lose any sense of boundaries around others and reflexively touch those they encounter, while others hide their feces in unusual places. Young men who were molested by adult women have a very difficult time in the education system as they cannot stand to have to deal with female authority figures. Kids who were not fed as children overeat. They sneak around and store up foodstuffs wherever the can, even years after the threat of starvation has passed. Every child has his or her own version, but the pattern is simple: **trauma** and **dysfunction**.

Once the dysfunction establishes itself, a third reality sets in: **intervention**. In response to the destructive behaviors, all kinds of interventions begin to surface in the child's life. These natural consequences start small and build in strength as time passes. Perhaps it begins with a visit to the counselor's office at school. Or maybe the local police have a few interactions with a child. Before long the youth shows up in the Emergency Room for an accidental overdose or a self-inflicted cut that went too deep. Perhaps they are detained by law enforcement for a fight where someone was hurt. They are expelled from schools, removed from their homes, sent to outpatient youth counseling services. Without correction, the dysfunction they are living out has put

them on a road of escalating interventions. When a child fails to correct the issues in a foster home, a treatment center is considered. A child is placed in a residential facility. This is when our chaplains first meet her, but her growing storm of escalating interventions is only getting started. Short stays turn into long stays. Medications and dosages increase. Kids are shifted from the Family Support and Children's Division over to a caseworker at the Division of Youth Services. Residential placements get tougher, stays get longer, and life gets harder. Juvenile detention centers become a familiar setting.

Years ago I was working with Chris (name changed to protect privacy), a young man who had been in the system for many years. His state worker came in to the building one day to speak with him. The case manager literally got on his knees and begged the teenager to attend school. The only reason that Chris was still in care was because he refused to attend school. This young man spat and cursed at his worker, and refused to comply.

For as long as I knew him after that, Chris refused to attend school, and bounced from one program to another. I used to think that the system was built this way, an intentional structure designed to funnel kids into harsher and more difficult interventions as time went on. But I am learning that the entire universe is arranged around this principle. You see, my dysfunction invites a rising storm into my life. Your bad habit will bring about a set of consequences whether or not there is a juvenile officer keeping track of you. Pick your poison- it matters not the flavor of brokenness you embrace. Fail to pay your taxes, or license your vehicle . . . drink and drive repeatedly . . . Show up to work late on a consistent basis . . . Ignore your spouse and treat her badly . . . Gossip and stab your friends in the back . . . take advantage of others with dishonest business dealings . . . let your temper get the better of you . . . get behind on your rent and make excuses to your landlord . . . Eat an exclusive diet high in sugar, fat, and prepackaged empty calories. But as you wallow in your particular dysfunction, look to the horizon and see that you are inviting a storm of your own making.

The Biblical term for such broken living is sin, and scripture is

filled with simple warnings. *Be sure your sin will find you out!* The natural consequences attached to every kind of broken living are meant to help us see how very dysfunctional sin is. And I am learning that a small squall may be all the intervention needed to help me right my course. If a minor natural consequence in my life will suffice to teach me a lesson, then I have no need of the big, painful ones. But when I ignore the small pains, I am sure to find bigger discomfort around the corner. What if my first traffic ticket

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Galatians 6



does not help me learn? Or the second? Eventually the authorities will take my driver's license! What if I still get behind the wheel with the same bad habits? What if the fines, arrests, and lectures from a judge are insufficient? Sooner or later I will find myself in a jail cell contemplating what went wrong. The amazing thing is, there are many who

have reached that pinnacle of pain without any insight into their own dysfunction! They wonder aloud why life is so tough for them. No wonder that Solomon refers to such people as fools.

But what a blessing to be truly chastised by a \$50 traffic ticket! How fortunate is the one who heeds the small pains and avoids the big ones as a result! In this way he pays a cheap price for an important lesson.

Last month I spotted one of Chris' younger siblings at a facility where I was working. When we got a chance to visit, I learned that Chris is in prison now. Years later, an adult Chris still cannot learn the tough lessons that are coming his way.

Trauma. Dysfunction. Intervention. A rising storm. This pattern I am learning as I work with at-risk youth is a reflection of a universal reality in my life as well. In light of this lesson, I would be well advised to ask some simple questions of my own life.

What are the storms I am inviting into my own life?

What are the small lessons that I refuse to learn?

What are the traumas that lie beneath my own dysfunctional hangups?

Proverbs states that the motives of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out. In the Psalms, we hear David invite God into that process, asking God to search his heart and find any offensive way in him.

God give us the grace to see our own brokenness clearly and learn our lessons quickly!

The Logical Insanity of Regression

By Aaron Jeffers

“So how old do you think he is?” The therapist asked me.

“I don’t know, eight?”

“He’s thirteen. He acts like he’s six because he struggles with regression. Every time he gets stressed he acts, talks, and thinks like a six-year-old.”

In this ministry we deal with a heap of emotional issues, but I’d say that regression is one of the top three. Sexually acting out and anger would be the other two. Kids act out in regression in a myriad of ways: bed wetting, tantrums, baby talk that matches the age of regression; basically they just don’t act age-appropriate.

For the first two years that I served as a chaplain, I’d see this and just not understand it. I was completely at a loss of how to address it, let alone comprehend it until it happened to me. Not that I regressed to being a five-year-old, but I’ll give you the Readers Digest version.

My wife and I recently took in a foster kid. I can’t give out the details, but it brought about many changes and new stresses. We’ve got a new baby ; it’s been twelve years since we had one of those. We may have the child for a day or for years (lots of unknowns). We’ve remodeled the house to take on an extra youngling. New fire extinguisher, new escape ladders, new bills, doctors’ visits, parent visits, and padlocks. These new stresses mix with the challenges of everyday life. My work, our own kids, a lawnmower breakdown, overgrown grass, leaking pool, a new teen driver, deadlines for bosses, and vacation times that turn into work days.

Then it happened. My patience evaporated and a forty-three year old skill-set reverted to the psyche of a twenty-year-old. For some reason I found myself just wanting to hop in the car, go live in a yurt in New Zealand, rent a jet ski on the ocean, and file bankruptcy on life. I wanted coffee and sleep to be my only priorities. I felt like hitting the eject button, and going back to that time when I was on a honeymoon in Paris with my wife. Make no mistake, I emotionally and spiritually regressed. If you want to see what this looks like when an adult does it, visit your local WalMart- People do this all the time .

But the reality for these kids is they don’t have the luxury of just being able to unplug from adult-sized trauma. Their parents have dumped their own brokenness on these kids like a truckload of nuclear waste. They can’t unplug or detach, so they do the only things that come naturally: Either get really mad, or abusive, or the least lethal of the three...regress.

No wonder the psychological articles say that regression is actually one of the “healthier” ways to deal with trauma. With Days of Hope we simply ask the kids to invite God into their brokenness and pain. We ask them if they’re tired of carrying very adult-sized trauma, and see if they’d like to trade it in for a new childhood in Christ, who is big enough to carry their burdens.

Isaiah 53:4, “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...”

Days of Hope

PO BOX 12
St. James, MO 65559
573.578.3259

Program Director Jon Wells

jon@daysofhope.net

Chaplain

Aaron Jeffers

aaron@daysofhope.net

Treasurer

Jo Ann Davidson

joann@daysofhope.net



Visit us Online!

www.daysofhope.net

We are currently scheduling speaking engagements. If you are interested in inviting one of our Chaplains to come and share with your church, class , or community group, let us know!

Want to share this news letter with a friend?
daysofhope.net/newsletter

Our chaplains provide pastoral care to children and teens in residential psychiatric facilities throughout central Missouri.



The services that our Chaplains provide are:

Voluntary: *We freely offer opportunities to worship and learn; we accept the choice of others to decline*

On Site: *Rather than bringing them to a church, we bring church to hurting people where they are at*

Needs Based: *We believe the pain and struggles of our clients are more important than any lesson plan or agendas of our chaplains, and intentionally defer to the needs of those we serve*

Experiential: *Games and activities help our clients to grasp spiritual truths in a concrete way*

In Tune: *Music is a powerful tool that helps us communicate to wounded people, and worship is carefully woven into all of our programming*

Age Appropriate: *We tailor our presentations to be age and developmentally appropriate*

Bible Based: *Setting aside fringe doctrinal differences, we continue to insist that a relationship with Jesus Christ is God's core solution to the problems that individuals face*

Propositional: *Our chaplains are not combative or argumentative. We do not defer to our own authority as spiritual leaders; rather, we invite hurting people to take a leap of faith, take ownership of their own walk with God, and find out for themselves that God is good!*