

# Days<sup>of</sup>Hope

## The Power of Containment

By Jon Wells

Our services at the campground these past few months have been the highlight of my summer! Despite the schedule interruptions and adjustments necessary to accommodate COVID concerns, we have been able to minister to groups of children and teens who have been participating in camp programming throughout the summer. During these services the children sit on the grass by the lake for a few minutes to relax and listen to a few comments from a chaplain. If you had been there, this is what you would have seen:

I ask for volunteers to help me with a game, and I begin selecting helpers to join 'Team Victory.' I intentionally choose the smallest kids I can find. Every week I have been successful in assembling a ragtag group of tiny kiddos on one side while at the same time recruiting the biggest, strongest kids I can find to oppose them. Once the teams are assembled, I pause.

"Wait a minute here. This seems a little unfair." I observe as the crowd complains. "I need to make some adjustments. Do we have any more volunteers?"

As the kids protest, I add one more 75 pound child to Team Victory and ask the biggest, strongest staff member in attendance to join the opposing team. Then I pull out a large rope for our tug of war! I have to admit that the tenacity and commitment of the little ones on Team Victory has astounded me every week. Tiny little kids dig in and hold on tight as they are dragged across



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the grass helplessly.

"Ok, Ok, I am sorry- I didn't think this through. Let's try something else, this is not exactly fair. I line the teams up facing one another and holding hands.

"Maybe this will be better- we are going to play a game called Red Rover." The crowd moans as Team Victory deflates.

In every service I have seen tiny little boys and girls make the most courageous charges into the massive, hulking line of the opposition. Their tenacity is astounding, but the results are

a forgone conclusion. One week we had a 300+ pound staff member charge a line of littles, and when he hit the line, the line held! (It wrapped around his midsection and continued along with him for about ten feet) I have seen tiny guys who can't be more than 80 pounds dripping wet charge the line and wind up dangling from their opponents' outstretched arms, legs flailing

helplessly in the air. Despite their desperate efforts, Team Victory is completely crushed every time.

Once we applaud our volunteers and I apologize profusely, we move on to the point of this whole debacle. I begin explaining why I chose teams the way I did. For so many of us, this is how we experience life. The deck is stacked against us, at every turn we are opposed by overwhelming odds. We feel helpless to do anything in the face of the pain and unfair circumstances that threaten on every side.

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# What Would Jesus Do?

*Are we where we need to be?*

By Sean A Wilson

"What would Jesus do?" The question has been around a long time. In fact, this question originated in the 1800's by a writer named Charles Sheldon. He wrote a book called 'In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?' Most of us are very familiar with the phrase because we saw it everywhere in the 1990's. When it was written in the early works of Charles Sheldon, the idea was a revival, a totally new idea. With the things that are taking place in this nation and the world we may find it difficult to discern what and where we should be as a follower of Christ Jesus, but this is what we really need to focus on, following Jesus.

We see the country divided because of racial tension, politics, and even in our response to the COVID19 pandemic. Where do we go? What do we do? Where do we stand? As I was reading in the book of Matthew 9:9-13, I was reminded of our primary call as believers and followers of Christ. In this account Jesus calls Matthew from his tax collecting booth to follow him, which he does. Yes, without hesitation Matthew leaves his post and follows Jesus. Then as documented in the text, Jesus is reclining and eating with sinners and tax collectors. The Pharisees then as the disciples a question, "Why does your teacher eat with sinners?" Jesus overhears this and responds, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Jesus ends with this statement, "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

This text tells us as believers exactly where we are to go, what we are to do, and where we need to be. If we are following Jesus, then our actions would place us in the mist of who we deem as 'sinners' or the lost. Although, the religious leaders in this text judged Jesus for eating with the sinners, it did not bother Jesus one bit because he knew what he was supposed to be doing.

This leads me to my next question; Have you allowed what others say to detour you from doing the will of God? This is something we must take seriously because with respect to all that is happening around us many could be confused. In the first chapter of James, he defines pure and undefiled religion as visiting the widow and the orphan in their distress and being unstained but the world. Simply stated, we are to go and visit people in the time they most need our help. Where are people distressed today? When we find that out, we will know where we need to be.

God needs us to be the active hands and feet in this world. We can't get sucked into the political and racial divide. We must be the light and example to the world. "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:14-15) Let's shine as lights, let's go to the darkest places and bring hope, let's take the gospel to the ends of the world and let's glorify God in our deed. Be blessed and encouraged and place your hope in our Lord, for He is faithful and true to His word.



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**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!**

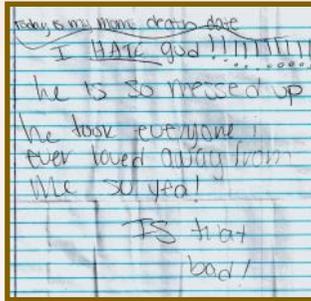
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And where is God in all of this? So many of us are resigned to the idea that our spiritual life is a cosmic game of Whack-A-Mole. If we dare to stick our head up, God takes a swing. Deep down, so many of us are convinced that God is against me. . . He is out to get me. . . God is angry at me. Like poor Team Victory, we are fighting an unwinnable battle. There are few triumphs- mostly losses in this sad story.

"We have come to this point tonight, we have played tug-of-war and Red Rover all for one reason." I tell them. "I have come here to ask you a simple question: What if you discovered that God is for you, not against you? What if, in a moment of revelation you realized that God was on your team? More to the point, what if you were on His team? What if God was for you, not against you? Not angry at you, not out to get you, not trying to hurt you? What if He was holding your hand?"

Every week we have taken time to really dig into this concept. I read a passage from the eighth chapter of Romans. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*

I take time to unpack what our difficult moments look like. We talk about the court date that ends in heartbreak as a judge declares that your mom is no longer your legal guardian. We talk about abuse and abandonment. This week I shared a little about how I had recently suffered the death of a family member. In our most desperate moments when we are most in need the love and mercy of our Heavenly Father, we are tempted to believe that He is distant, angry, and even coming against us. What if He is heartbroken, not amused at my suffering? Is it possible that the Savior weeps with the brokenhearted? What if, even in those dark moments, He is for me, not against me? We close with prayer and an invitation. I make myself available to speak with them after the service during their group fireside time that evening. Every week I have had conversations with kids who are



stirred by the notions presented in our brief lakeside service. Last night was no exception.

As I walked through the campground, I was approached by a teen girl who I will call Lisa. (name changed to protect privacy) She said nothing, simply handed me a sheet of paper and sat down on the log next to me. The note

explained how this was the anniversary date of her mother's death. She had written 'I hate god!'

"You were talking about me tonight." She said quietly.

Lisa explained how mom had died under difficult circumstances. The fallout left Lisa locked up in a residential program. For the past few years Lisa has been acting out and actively suicidal. Her anger and confusion and pain were palpable as we sat there by the fire. In that moment I became so aware of God's ability to provide loving containment to hurting people.

Modern nuclear reactors are built to code with containment buildings surrounding them. Layers of ceramic, steel, concrete, and lead are woven in walls up to five feet thick with the sole purpose of holding in an accidental nuclear leak. These massive structures are designed to withstand a direct impact from a passenger jet. I sat by Lisa last night and felt her rage and grief ebb and flow. I realized the enormous power of our Heavenly Father to provide loving containment to the chaos that sometimes erupts out of us. God does not respond to my rage with rage of His own.

"Have you ever seen a two-year-old throw a fit?" I asked Lisa. "I mean really lose it. They scream, they cry, they hit, they bite. Snot flies and they wet their pants. They absolutely lose it."

Lisa nodded.

"Do you know what a good dad, a good mom does with a little one who is falling apart like that? A good dad, a good mom will hug that little one and love on them despite the messy, noisy chaos. I have seen enraged little ones actually bite a parent. But a good dad, a good mom just contains all of that rage and loves on them and waits for the anger to subside. God is not angry at you, He is not trying to stick it to you, He loves you. I think the Heavenly Father is hurting with you. I think God is waiting patiently for you to finish raging and

receive His love.”

I prayed with Lisa there by the fire, and proceeded to speak with several other girls who wanted to talk. As I was getting ready to leave that campsite, Lisa popped up in front of me.

“Can I have a hug?”

One of the unique facets of the world of residential care is that we don't do any traditional hugging, for a multitude of reasons. Over the years I have learned and perfected the practice of the residentially approved 'side hug,' a one-armed variant where you bump hips and squeeze a shoulder. I gave Lisa a hug (of sorts) and encouraged her to press into a new season of her life.

Will you pray for this young lady, and hundreds more like her who are trapped in dead-end situations? It is so easy to interpret my ugly circumstances and assume that God is angry and distant. Kids like Lisa need a new revelation of the love and grace of God.

I think sometimes I do too.

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**Every year, thousands of children and teens are sent to the residential facilities we serve to receive help with the overwhelming problems they are facing.**

**At Days of Hope we continue to insist that God's core solution to all of the innumerable challenges 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 in residential psychiatric care at facilities throughout central Missouri. We are supported by the prayer and gifts of individuals and churches in our community. We work alongside many dedicated professionals including educators, therapists, doctors and nurses, child care workers and so many more who strive to help these children who have been scarred by every form of abuse, abandonment, neglect, and harm.**

**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.**

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**Thank you for helping us communicate the love of God to hurting kids in a gentle way!**