

Days of Hope

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

(Desperate Prayers)

July 2014

****All names in this article have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.***

As I pulled up to a couple of cottages last week, a mixed scene played out before me. Several of the young men from the guys cottage were in the yard, along with staff members who were talking to them. The boys were pacing and yelling; clearly agitated. As the staff worked to keep the guys from running off or erupting in rage, several girls from an adjacent building looked on.

The presence of the girls simply served to add fuel to the fire. Soon several of the girls were pacing and yelling as well. While these young men often respond in anger, fighting or running off, these young ladies have a unique capacity to ratchet up the drama. They yell, they scream, they cry, they threaten. In the middle of all this chaos sat Amanda*. Amanda was by the porch, with a friend at her side. She was shaking and seemed ready to cry. Amanda immediately asked for my help.

"Can you talk to me? I don't know what I am going to do if I can't talk to someone!"

As the cottage staff worked to resolve issues throughout the yard, I sat down on the porch with Amanda and her friend, Josie*.

As soon as we sat down, Josie started in, "I am Amanda's best friend- I love this girl- She is just like me, we're like the same person! These other girls wanna beat her a**, but I'm gonna stand between them and Amanda. I won't let nothin happen to her. . . ."

Josie then shared a detail about herself. "I am an atheist- I don't go to church or do that religious stuff, but I still am here to help Amanda. Can I talk with you too?"

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Special thanks To Brett, Ben, and all the staff out at School in the Wilderness this year; throughout the summer our chaplains were able to share God's love with over 700 children and teens from all facilities all over the state of Missouri. Many kids responded to the messages, and we were able to work one-on-one with many more around the campfire!



Days of Hope

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 Boys and Girls Town of Missouri. We are supported by the prayer and gifts of individuals and churches in our community. We work alongside many dedicated professionals at BGTM 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.

Josie began to explain how many of the girls in the cottage were frustrated with Amanda, and were threatening her as a result. We began to discuss some ways that Amanda might be able to address the conflict in the cottage. "Can I just vent?" Amanda interrupted. "I just need to say some things."

Amanda proceeded to share her story, a narrative similar to so many other stories I have heard in this place. *Abuse at the hands of a trusted adult. Family conflict. Abandonment. Accusations.* And finally, residential care. In the span of a few months, Amanda's normal life had shattered into a million pieces, and it did not look like the fragments would ever be reassembled. It was Amanda's final statement that caught my attention.

"I believe in God. I have accepted Jesus. I talk to Him every night. I just want to know why. Why did all of this happen to me? Why me? I ask Him every night, I talk to Him every day, but I have not gotten an answer. Why won't He answer me? What does He want? . . ."

Josie reached over to comfort her friend. She began explaining to Amanda that God is just too busy for her right now, but eventually He will get around to helping her. "Back when I was a Christian," Josie shared, "my mom explained that God is helping people with bigger problems, but He will catch up to me later."

"Amanda, I hear you asking for God to speak to you, to answer you " I replied. "You want Jesus just to show up for a moment so you know that He is listening, that He cares."

Amanda nodded.

I continued, "When I pray desperate prayers, I have a specific expectation of what I want. The thing is, God so often sends me what I need in the moment, not the thing I want. But that's OK with me. In fact, since He is God, He knows better how to answer my desperate prayers."

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(Resident Poetry)

At our weekly services, we encourage the youth to come up and share— tell their story, sing a song, share a poem. This is often the most powerful part of an evening service. Recently, a young lady shared a poem she had written about her experience with self harm.

Self Harm is a common challenge that many of our girls and boys in residential care face. The practice of inflicting pain on oneself can become an addictive behavior. Residents who struggle with this issue will carve into flesh with any object, sharp or dull. They use erasers to burn the skin, salt to rub into wounds, and pick at scabs to prevent healing.

The author of this poem agreed to allow us to share it with you:

One Cut

One cut, that is it- That is all you told me.

One cut will make you stress free

One cut I said, that's all

One cut is such a big mistake.

One cut you said, won't hurt -I swear

One slit on your arm right there

I watched you slit your arm and then I did it too.

I don't know why I guess it seemed like a cool thing to do

One cut I told myself then I'll be OK

Then it started all the time.

I became addicted

I needed to cut my wrist.

A few more cuts I told myself won't do any harm.

But then one day my dad walked in

What are you doing? Why'd you start & when?

These are questions that he said

As all the memories rushed through my head.

I got help and now I am better

So I wrote you this letter

When I got home I asked where is she?

She never got help, Dad said

Something terrible happened to her.

One cut that is all, you said

And anyways you ended up dead

I know now one cut is all it takes.

One cut is such a huge mistake.

(Questions Kids Ask)

by Aaron Jeffers

“I believe in Jesus, but how do I know he’s really in my heart if I don’t feel like he’s there and I still fall into sin?”

This question was asked at our last chapel service. Funny thing though; after he asked it, five boys wanted to receive Christ as their LORD and Savior, and four of those five asked to be baptized.

Romans 10:8-10 “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

I started out by reminding these young men not to base the salvation of your soul on feelings. Feelings can be a good indicator for us; they bring us to repentance, remind us to reconcile with one another, etc. But feelings are like wet sand, fun to sink your toes into, but not good foundation material for the house of your soul.

Then I shared with them a story from when I was a wrestler in high-school. My friend Butch had another guy in a hold during practice, and the guy yelled, “I can’t breathe!!!”

Butch replied, “If you couldn’t breathe, you couldn’t talk.” Then Butch pinned him to the mat.

You may be saying, “I believe Jesus is LORD, but I don’t know if I have him in my heart because I’ve made so many mistakes, and keep messing up.” Well, welcome to the human package and problem. God is our only salvation from this, and the good news is just like we don’t base our salvation on feelings; we also don’t base our salvation on our works or abilities, but on Jesus’ work and His ability.

Now I’m going to pull a Butch on you! Read these two passages and the verses above .

John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”

1 Cor. 12:3 “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”

Simply put, if you confessed with your mouth and believe that Jesus is LORD, there’s no way you could’ve come to that conclusion without the Holy Spirit. And, you couldn’t be spiritually breathing in your heart if God hadn’t placed that belief there in the first place. If you can say and believe that Jesus is LORD and that God raised Jesus from the dead to cleanse you of your sins, my friend, you have your salvation in Christ! Jesus just pinned your sin to the cross, and you are a child of God!

It was God’s power that drew you by the Holy Spirit, and it’s God’s power (not your flesh -power) that keeps you in Christ. Our work is to believe in Him and the one God has sent (Jesus said that in John 6:29). So draw near to God and walk with Him. And, if you haven’t already followed your faith up with baptism, now is a good time.



"On top of that, God's answers are usually totally unexpected. All of the times that I have called out for help, God's answer is always out of left field. He is a master of the unexpected."

"Here you are begging God to send Jesus to give you a fist bump and tell you 'hi,' but God's answer is so much bigger. He took the time to find a precious young lady to send to you here in this place. A friend who just told me, *I love Amanda, it's like me and her are the same person.* He sent someone to comfort you and be with you in this cottage, to encourage you and remind you that this will get better. And the amazing thing is, He sent an atheist to do His work! God is so much bigger than my simple prayers and concrete expectations."

I asked if we could pray, and the three of us bowed our heads in a noisy yard and began to talk with Jesus about tough circumstances, a broken family, and gratitude for the encouragement of a friend. As I stood up to leave, I reminded Amanda that our church service was at 6 pm in the chapel.

"I will be there!" was Amanda's reply. Then came a second.

"I am coming too!"

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In the past few months, we have had many young people inquire about baptism. Below is a picture of a baptism service we held recently with a young man on campus. Many of the guys in his cottage joined us for the baptism, then we all spent about an hour relaxing by the river. There were a lot of crawdads caught that day!

Kids who request baptism are always encouraged by

our chaplains to pursue that course. We have developed a small workbook that helps a child review the pertinent scripture passages that discuss baptism. They are able to express their reasons why they want to be baptized, and talk with a chaplain about the issue.

We also take the time to call the child's guardian and contact the treatment team, and make sure that any parent, relative, or pastor from home who wishes can be involved as well.

Please remember to pray for these kids who are stepping forward to be baptized. It is such a privilege to be involved in this pivotal step towards life and healing!

