

# Days<sup>of</sup> Hope

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

## Unfiltered Jesus

by Jon Wells

"I'm a Satanist." [Colin] informed me. "But you can sit right here, I still want to talk to you." He nodded towards the log beside him.

I had just finished speaking to a group of young people who were staying the week at Great Circle's Meramec Wilderness Learning Ranch in Steelville, MO. Now the various groups had walked back to their campsites to finish the day around a campfire. [Colin] went on to explain about his experiences in the occult; how he had participated in animal sacrifice and various rituals. As we spoke, another camper interrupted our conversation.

"Hey [Colin], I thought you were a Satanist. You know he is a preacher . . ."

"I am," he replied, "But I still want to talk to this guy."

Not content to simply explain his past, [Colin] went on to confess a list just about every major thing he had

done wrong in the past few years. I listened as he shared.

"So is that something you want to be? Do you like being a Satanist?" I inquired.

[Colin] shrugged. "I guess it is because the people I grew up with were all Satanists, so I just was a part of that, and now I am a Satanist."

I shared some scripture with [Colin] and we spoke for a while longer. The next campsite we visited was filled with teen girls. As I sat down by the fire, one young lady came over and sat with me. [Jackie] and I discussed her life, and how she had come to end up in a residential facility. Eventually she made a confession of her own.

"So, I guess I am an atheist."

When I inquired about her atheism, [Jackie] admitted that she was not really sure about that choice.

"My family is all atheists, and so I just always was one too."

The power of association is a weighty influence. The ability of a parent or other adult to shape the

# It's OK to Be angry

by Sean A Wilson

I visited the residents of a local facility after conducting flood recovery within the community this past month. When I arrived I noticed there were a few new children on the unit. Many of the kids were upset including several of the ones I knew. My first encounter was with a pre-adolescent who was extremely agitated. He would not respond to my questions, and he let me know that he did not want anything to do with church. I responded that I wasn't there for church. I told him when he was ready to talk I would return and speak with him, but he was upset about something and refused to talk. Next, I spoke with a couple of young men who had tried to run away on the previous Sunday but got caught and brought back by the police. They ran away because they thought that they were supposed to be leaving the facility soon. These plans were delayed when their therapist made a different recommendation. Their anger fueled a decision to run away. Ironically, this actually made matters worse and the case against them stronger.

These interactions all centered around kids dealing with their anger. We can all admit to being angry at one time or another in the past. For some of us it may have even been earlier today! What I want you to know is that it is ok to be angry. Anger is an emotion that we will all experience at one time or another. It doesn't matter if you are a young believer, an elder or a pastor; we will experience feelings of anger.



Ephesians 4:26-27 reads, *"Be angry, yet do not sin. Do not let the sun set upon your anger, and do not give the devil a foothold."* Here we are told that it is ok to be angry, but we should not sin. What does that mean? It means that it's ok to have the emotion, but we are not to allow ourselves to be led by those emotions. We are encouraged to practice self-control, one of the fruits of Spirit.

The next instruction in the verse is *"Do not let the sun set upon your anger."* This means we should not meditate on whatever it is that makes us angry, dwell on it, or carry that anger into the next day. We are to give the situation over to God and trust that he will take care of it as quickly as possible. Scripture teaches that there are two things that belong to God; one is 'vengeance' the other is 'the battle'. Although the battle is the Lord's, we do have one thing that belongs to us, which is 'the fight.' We are to fight the good fight of faith and trust and believe God's Word because he is faithful.

Lastly, meditating on what has made us angry in many cases will lead us to making the wrong decision. The young men I mentioned earlier ran away because of the way they dealt with the anger they were feeling. It is clear that in order for them to get to the point of "running" they had to meditate on it, plan an escape and follow through with the plan. Paul calls this 'giving opportunity to the devil.' The devil wants nothing more than to stop the progress of our spiritual growth and suffer the consequences of our poor choices. We must always remember that God is only glorified through us if we are fruitful and that our fruit remain. John 15:8 *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples."* Therefore, we are encouraged to *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, outcry and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and tender-hearted to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you."* Ephesians 4:31-32

It's really ok to be angry but we must not allow our emotions to lead us into making the wrong decisions that may cause us even more distress. If we find ourselves angry take the time to calm down through prayer and clear our head. Don't allow the enemy to add fuel to the fire because this almost always leads to devastation.

spiritual path of a child is monumental. So many of the kids I encounter have not had a chance to engage in any real spiritual growth simply because the adults in their world have closed that avenue for them. For these youth, the door to a healthy walk with God is found in freedom. It will do no good to shame these kids. Listing the problems with atheism or arguing them into a corner yields poor results. An invitation into freedom gives the child the chance to lay hold of the gospel for themselves.

Jesus famously said, "When I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He was predicting his own crucifixion, but also reflecting a

powerful truth. Jesus carries his own kind of gravity. In the unfiltered light of the cross, the broken hearts of men and women are drawn to the savior like moths to a flame. Jesus does not need an angry



crowd of believers with torches and pitchforks driving the unsaved towards the cross. He did not ask us to adorn His cross with all of the superfluous trappings of our particular subculture. As a follower of Christ, the best I can hope to do is reflect the person of Christ in an unfiltered way to those I encounter, and allow Jesus to be Jesus. In my experience, this kind of living invites those around me into freedom.

Unfortunately, spirituality by association is not limited to atheist and Satanist families. There are many youth I have met who will make the same profession of faith as our atheist friend.

"My family is all Christians, so I guess I am a Christian too."

Having been raised in a Christian family, I can

identify with this kind of 'inherited faith.' There were many years when my testimony would have sounded a lot like these kids. I might have quoted a few scriptures at you and mentioned church attendance. Perhaps I would have given you the short list of stuff we don't do (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, tattoos . . .). Don't get me wrong, I am glad that I was not born into a coven of witches!

I am grateful that I was raised in a Christian home. But my experience helps me to understand the way that so many others have inherited their faith.

Those whose spiritual walk is limited to association have little ownership in their faith. As I visit and speak at

churches throughout our region, I have observed how so many of our young adults have abandoned the church. This has been going on for years, and I believe that many of these young adults fall into the 'faith by association' category. As long as they live in the context of their nuclear

family, Christianity and all of its trappings make perfect sense. When the association dissolves, our kids find themselves in a quandary. So many go off to college or move away, and find no good reason to press on.

What do you do with a teenager or a young adult who is questioning their faith? Again, shaming and threats are counterproductive. As long as a parent dominates the world of a child, these strategies may yield compliance. But when that little bird learns to fly and leaves the nest, these tactics prove counterproductive. A heavy hand in these matters often yields resentment. Like the youth we serve in residential facilities, our own kids need an invitation into freedom.

Darla and I have four children. As I write, there is a

*Unfiltered Jesus Continued . . .*

nineteen year old, a sixteen year old, and a fourteen year old in my house. Our kids are working through all of the tough questions and frustrations typical to their age. We are learning to provide them with a safe place to ask the tough questions and even push against what they have learned. I am hopeful to raise children who remain connected to the church into adulthood. But I am even more concerned that my kids will learn to take ownership of their walk with God. When Darla and I are gone, I pray that our kiddos can make a profession of faith that is bigger than me.

[Colin] and [Jackie] both took steps towards Jesus a week ago. I could tell that [Colin] in particular was puzzled by my reaction to his story. He expected me to respond forcefully to his confessions. When I did not reject him, [Colin] found himself in uncharted territory.

Turns out that [Colin] may not really want to be a Satanist after all.



We are currently scheduling speaking engagements for 2017. 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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