

June 2021

# DAYS of HOPE

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

## A Bumper Sticker Family

*by Jon Wells*

“Pastor Jon, I really like what you said, I wonder if you would pray with me about something?” The heat was sweltering even in the shade. The sun was setting as I sat down to speak with Maya at her campsite. (Name changed to protect identity)

“Sure sis. What’s up?”

“I have been praying for a family. I really need a family, and I am asking God for a family of my own.” I

could immediately sense the pain and desperation that made her voice quiver as Maya shared the next part. “My real mom and dad went to court and signed the paper that says they don’t want to be my family anymore.” Her eyes darted to the ground.

This particular issue has to be one of the top three prayer requests of all time among kids in treatment facilities. The reality is that there is a thriving demand for adoption of infants here in Missouri. Prospective parents are lined up looking to take in a baby. Small children see less demand but still have a good chance of being adopted. Teenagers rarely get considered by

potential adoptive parents, and even have a hard time finding a healthy foster home to join.

Maya began to describe in detail the very specific prayer she had been praying; a request for a foster home where the mom and dad would eventually love her so much that they would adopt her and keep her forever.

“I see what you are after,” I interjected. “You are looking for the bumper sticker.”

Maya gave me a quizzical look.



“You know, the decal that shows up on every other minivan rear window. The ‘stick people’ family. A dad and a mom, big brother, little sister, baby

brother, Dog, cat, cat, hamster, fish . . .”

Maya’s face lit up like a sunrise. “Yes! That’s it! Except I am praying for just 2 siblings . . .” Maya went on to explain the ages and gender of siblings, the personalities of the different family members, types of pets, and the amazing way that she would fit in with this all-American group.

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# Campfire Stories

by Logan Stark

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

What's so special about summer? Is it the fun that can be had playing in the lake during the season's heat? Is it that the days are longer, or that fireflies roam the night? Is it ice cream, watermelons, or fireworks? What's so special about summer?

For many of the kids at Great Circle, it's the chance to come out to the Meramec Adventure Learning Ranch down in Steelville, MO. Throughout the summer, kids from across the state have gotten a chance to spend a week out at the Ranch. Not only do they get a break from their normal surroundings, but they are able to enjoy some pretty neat experiences, such as swimming, games, and horseback riding.

Spending a week at the ranch is a ton of fun, but entertainment is not the main purpose for the ranch program. These kids also get the chance to experience therapeutic exercises, such as journaling, and group processing. They join in on team building activities, like a low-ropes course.

Throughout the last few weeks, I have been honored in joining these kids for an evening, having the opportunity to sit around many campfires and fellowship with them. I watch them cook and enjoy their s'mores, listen to them talk about their life experiences, and talk with them about their week and about themselves. We have the privilege of being able to encourage and pray with these campers.

There was one little guy I spoke with who confessed that he wanted to jump into the campfire. I warned him that being burned isn't fun, and his reply was confusing.

"Then I will be able to be with my dad."

"What do you mean?" I had asked him. He shared how his dad had passed away a couple of years ago from colon cancer, on the same day he had been released from another facility. Since then he had struggled with suicidal thoughts. He admitted that he normally didn't tell people about his story, but felt like he could trust me for some reason.

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There was another boy who asked me to join him at a picnic table. He asked me to pray for his family, and told me about some of their experiences in Mexico before they had moved to the USA. He told me the story of how he and his brother had hidden in a park, while some of their friends were



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“You know sis, when I was in middle school, I was at the very bottom of the social ladder. I had no fashion sense, no idea how to act in public, and no idea how to talk to girls. I had a goofy haircut, I was all thumbs and left feet. I was a mess.”

“I knew who the cool guys in my class were. I was desperate to be like them. Their parents had money. They had cool clothes. They had cool 80s guy perms with mullets, they knew how to spin a pen on the tip of their finger. They knew how to joke around with girls. I was lonely and I needed a friend- a cool guy friend.”

“But God has a funny way of giving us what we need, not what we want. My best friend in middle school turned out to be a kid who was just like me. He was goofy, he was weird, he was not exactly a social genius. But for a lot of reasons, he was the very kind of friend I needed at that moment.”

“Maya, what if God brings you a family and it doesn’t look like the bumper sticker? Will you even see the people God is sending you in this season? You are so busy searching for this specific thing that you may not see the people God is sending you right now. I wonder if God has already sent you a kind of a sister in the cottage already.”

Maya’s eyes darted back to the girls seated around the campfire. A smile flirted across her face. But she held fast to her ideal. “I just really think I need an adoptive family with two siblings and . . .”

I reminded Maya that God commits in His word to help her in this situation. David said as much in Psalm 68 when he wrote, ‘God sets the lonely in families; he leads out the prisoners with singing.’ But exactly how God works and plans is in His mind alone.

I prayed with Maya there at the campsite. I walked away from that interaction astounded at how her story had revealed my own stubbornness. Like Maya, I have everything figured out. My prayer life often looks like a person placing an order at a high end restaurant- *I know just what I want, but tell the kitchen to hold the mushrooms, please.* It seems pretty silly as I write this down, but it turns out that our Heavenly Father is not a short order cook! Nonetheless, I am pretty attached to my preferred outcomes, and my prayer life often reflects that truth.

I wonder how many times I have failed to see providential intervention because of a narrow focus on my path to resolution? What would it take to accept that God’s answer is better than my aspirations?

I spoke with a friend recently who told me that ‘sometimes God gives you what you want to show you it wasn’t what you needed.’ Regardless of my short-sighted preferences, God is faithful to us and provides in ways that He sees fit.

*Lord, teach me to surrender my ways and seek Your hand!*

DAYS OF  
HOPE



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*Campfire Stories continued . . .*

shot and killed by a gang. He asked me to pray for his family, because they were still struggling with other challenges, but he had faith that God would take care of them.

There was a group of girls who had been excited about their day and were being praised by their staff. Their staff told the girls how she was proud of them by how they had encouraged each other during the high ropes course. Though many of them had been scared to ascend the great heights, they had been able to because of the encouragement from the other girls.

There were many other stories around those campfires; stories about bikes and horseback riding . . . stories about bugs, food, and nose picking . . . stories about joys and struggles. I have heard too many stories to tell them all. There's a lot of fun being had out at the Ranch. I have seen so much growth, encouragement, challenges, and hopefully healing. Not only is it a place for these kids to try new things and create stronger bonds, but it is also a safe place for them to express and seek help for the hurts and struggles that they have gone through.

What's so special about summer? I don't know for sure. But I do know that for many of these kids, the most special thing about summer is a week spent out at the Ranch.

The logo for "Days of Hope" features the words "Days of Hope" in a stylized, orange, cursive font. A green cross is positioned above the word "of". A sunburst graphic with multiple rays emanates from behind the cross. The entire logo is set against a white background within a thin red border.