



# Days of Hope

March 2015

## Pining for Spring

*Jon Wells*

Every time I hear the weather man describing the latest cold front heading our way, I find myself secretly hoping that this will be the last one. Perhaps this biting wind will push through and reveal a turn in the weather that ushers in the warmer breezes of spring. I am longing for yard work and bright sunshine; I daydream about planting flowers in the yard and enjoying the sunrise with a cup of coffee from my front porch. I am more than ready for spring, and I may respond poorly if I hear the term 'polar vortex' one more time!

Unfortunately, no amount of wishful thinking will speed the arrival of the seasons, and I remain unsure how much more of this long winter we will yet endure. I am powerless to rush the arrival of the new life that spring brings. In the same way, I find myself rooting for a new 'spring' in the lives of so many of the kids we serve in residential care. I have observed so many times how children spin their wheels in facilities throughout the state, bouncing from one placement to another, with little progress to be seen. I have listened to many youth recite a history of five or ten residential placements. Some have lived in these facilities for most of their young lives. They arrive plagued by a history of trauma, addiction, and abuse. But instead of working through these difficult issues, they often remain immersed in the emotional pain and ugly behaviors that characterize their stories.

Kids arrive in care and promptly get swept up in peer conflicts, boyfriends and girlfriends, old grudges, and power struggles with staff. All the while I watch and wish for a core change that shifts them out of their broken patterns. I am waiting for spring in the lives of so many kids; hoping for the bitter winds of trauma to pass, and the refreshing arrival of a new life. Paul states this sentiment best in Romans Chapter eight (inset).

But I am learning that each child is given the ability to usher in a new season in his or her story. I have seen it happen so many times. Call it 'growing up' or 'maturity;' call it what you will. But it seems that one by one these

*Continued on page 2*

# The Bad Voices Stopped!

Aaron Jeffers

I recently went into a cottage and I saw a sullen young man. I asked him, "How are you man?"

"I'm depressed."

I thought to myself, "It's a beautiful day outside. The sun is shining and it's unseasonably warm. God, please help me to know what's troubling this kid." Then I gazed at the outward scars of his inward depression below his sleeves... the cuts, gashes, burns, and marks of attempted suicide. I ask him, "What do you think is making you feel depressed?"

"My dad abused me sexually. Now I constantly hear voices in my head that tell me to kill myself. I'm afraid to kill myself, but I don't find any peace until I start cutting myself. I know God doesn't want me to die so I don't go all the way, but I still self-harm."

I felt the Lord put on my heart to say, "That wasn't your fault. You know that don't you? He never had any right to do that. It was his fault. He should have been celebrating the fact that he had a son like you, but he messed up. It was not your fault, it was his."

"But what about the voices in my head keeping me up all night and telling me to kill myself?"

"Somewhere in your pain and wounding, maybe something spiritually got a foothold in your mind. It's not uncommon for Satan to try to get a stronghold in our minds to destroy our bodies when we are weak and vulnerable. I think that's when he attacks most. He knows that God has an awesome plan for your life. Let's pray." He and I prayed for healing in the areas of his wounding, and we bound any demonic strongholds that might have been ushered in during his time of abuse.

Three days later at the same cottage, all the boys swarmed around me and the boy. "What's up guys?"

They didn't even give the young man time to tell his own testimony; they burst out, "He's been sleeping Pastor Aaron!"

Another boy piped up, "Yeah, it's the first time he's been sleeping since he's been here!"

I looked at the young man and asked, "For real?!"

"Yes. After we prayed, all the voices stopped. I've been sleeping, and I haven't self-harmed in three days."

I just saw the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 1:16 come to life in this boy, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...**"

## *Pining for Spring cont.*

youth wake up at some point to find their petty pursuits unsatisfying. They no longer find fulfillment in the small satisfactions and trivial disputes that punctuate their daily lives. They realize that it is time to move on.

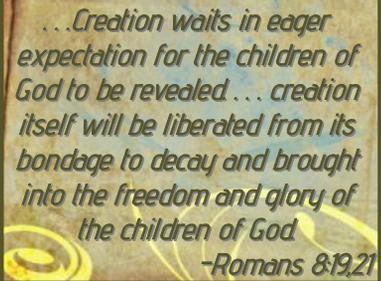
I have been witness to this type of shift in the lives of so many residents. It seems that as soon as a young man gets to this place, he quickly grows out of residential care and moves forward in life. When a young lady arrives at this turning point, she is no longer drawn into the daily cottage drama; she is ready to move on. As many times as I have seen this happen, I have no idea what causes this kind of change in a person's life. What ushers in the spring?

I wish that I had access to the light switch! I wish that I could tug on an ear and they would 'wake up' and engage in their own healing. At any given time, our

Chaplains are interacting with a sea of listless, lost kids; only a portion of those are genuinely engaged in change.

There is a powerful spiritual application of this dynamic. I have become convinced that so many of us would be moving into a new season in life if we would just engage. God is ready, we are spinning our wheels; content with the petty satisfactions of our current state. I Peter 5 tells us that God is patient with each of us, and I wonder how much we stretch that patience. In the end, I am the one who suffers from my unwillingness to move forward. Like so many of these youth in residential facilities, my unwillingness to engage in my own healing leaves me repeating the same scenarios over and over again, desperate for a new season to come.

Even if we could redirect the groundhog, you and I have no power to rush the arrival of spring. Likewise, we are powerless to force a child in a facility to really engage with God and pursue their own healing. It is only my own story over which I hold any power. And it is only in yours that you can choose to pursue life.



*... Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed... creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God*  
-Romans 8:19,21

# A Modified Gospel

*Jon Wells*

There once was a farm boy who ran away from home. He did not sneak out at night, as so many do. He left in grand fashion. He impetuously marched into the study and declared to his old father, "I want what's mine! I want what I have coming." The elderly man accommodated, and that simple farm boy wandered off, pockets filled with cash.

He made his way out of town. He made his way out of state. He did not stop his roaming until he landed in a whole different country. He was surrounded by strangers, but in his new-found home he quickly became the life of the party. He lived it up for a time. But all good things must come to an end. The economy in that place turned south, jobs were hard to find, and his money ran out. As the party died down, he realized all those new friends were not around anymore. He was alone, destitute, and without any help. He could not stay in the city. He lost his penthouse apartment, all the trappings of wealth. He quickly found himself doing the only thing he really knew how to do. The farm boy returned to the farm.

The job was exhausting; it was dirty. He spent his days plodding around in a stranger's fields, feeding pigs. The boy finally hit his low point in this dirty place. He found himself one day looking down at the slop that he was pouring out for the hogs. In that moment, he came to his senses.

"Here I am drooling over the scraps, but even the lowest servant on my father's farm eats pretty well. Even the hired field hands are treated well." In that moment the son decided that somehow, someday he would return home. In fact, he set out that very day.

It was a long trip home. Without the benefit of affluence, without money to speed him along, this threadbare soul limped his way home. Back to his own country. Back to his home state. Back to his hometown.

For the duration of that long trip, one thought crowded out all the others. He spent the entire journey rehearsing his speech, preparing the words, trying to get the phrases just right.

"Father I don't deserve to be welcomed back home again. What I did was wrong. Please just make me like one of the hired hands. I would gladly sleep in the barn. I'm so sorry..."

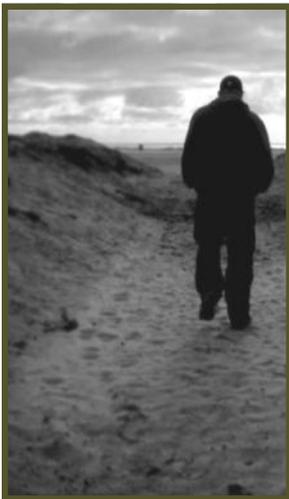
The boy was actually rehearsing his speech when his eyes spotted the old man on the horizon. Shuffling along as quickly as his worn frame would allow, the old man was rushing out to greet the boy.

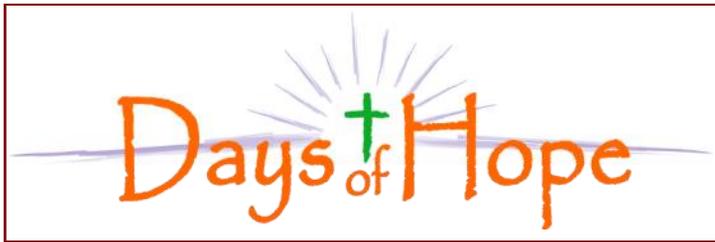
As they drew closer, the boy took a deep breath, and launched into his speech.

"Dad I am so sorry. I was wrong..."

The old man cut him off midsentence. With a sweep of his arm, he said "I appreciate your confession. I accept your remorse. I want you to know how disappointed I am with you. I'm so ashamed of you. I will accept your apology, but you need to know that I am still angry with you because of these foolish things you did. They were very wrong. I'm a man of justice, a man of judgment, after all. I may forgive you for what you've done, but it doesn't change the facts. I suppose you are welcome back home as long as I don't see any more of that stupidity. Remember, at any moment, I am waiting to let you know what a disappointment you have been to me. Watch your step! Be careful, justice is swift."

And so the boy lived out his days on the farm, always aware of what a failure he had become. He spent each day fearful, wondering whether his father would lash out, or give him a pass. He labored desperately to earn the approval that he knew he would never really attain. But he tried to comfort himself with the certain knowledge that his father really did love him, as long as he did the right thing.





PO BOX 12 | St. James, MO | 65559 | 573.578.3259



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[www.daysofhope.net](http://www.daysofhope.net)

## Our Staff

Chaplain Jon Wells

[jon@daysofhope.net](mailto:jon@daysofhope.net)

Associate Chaplain

Aaron Jeffers

[aaron@daysofhope.net](mailto:aaron@daysofhope.net)

Treasurer

Jo Ann Davidson

[joann@daysofhope.net](mailto:joann@daysofhope.net)

