

May 2015

Days^{of}Hope

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

Chaplain Jon Wells
jon@daysofhope.net

Associate Chaplain
Aaron Jeffers
aaron@daysofhope.net

Treasurer
Jo Ann Davidson
joann@daysofhope.net

PO BOX 12
St. James, MO 65559
573.578.3259



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www.daysofhope.net

Scripture Showdown By Jon Wells

It was a sunny Monday morning when I walked into the facility. I registered with the front desk, and made my way through several sets of locked doors to a treatment unit full of teenage boys who were taking a break in their dayroom. Under my arm I carried a box full of Bibles. As I entered, this mysterious box immediately elicited curiosity from the seven young men in the room.

Over their clamoring voices I informed them that I had brought Bibles for each of them that day, and that I would be passing them out in the next few minutes. I took the time to sit down beside each of the young men, carefully printing his name on the front page of his Bible. For each of them I wrote a note of encouragement, and took a few moments to look up a special passage just for that child.

"What's this in yellow?" one of them asked.

I explained to the group about our Bible sponsor program; how folks from churches all around the area take the time to highlight special verses so that kids can find them easily.

"Pastor Jon! My Bible has a lot of verses highlighted! Listen to this one: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want..."

"Pastor Jon! Mine are in orange! Listen to this. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God..."

"Pastor Jon! Pastor Jon! I have a really good one. Listen to this! I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord..."

After each boy received his personalized Bible, he would join the chorus of voices eagerly sharing verses that have been highlighted. By the time I was done, there was an

outright competition between the residents to get in their favorite verse.

The whole experience was a strange dichotomy. Here were these young men, none of whom had owned a Bible, all eagerly sharing special verses from their own copy. That was a beautiful thing. At the same time, I sat in a room full of young men who were desperate for attention, constantly one-upping one another, and competing for dominance. Some part of me was frustrated at the way they were approaching scripture. It seemed like what they were doing was great, but it was all for the wrong reasons.

Before I left, I shared with the boys the importance of actually reading their Bible, not just holding on to it as a treasured possession. I allowed the boys to share a few more verses, and asked them what they thought their verse meant.

Since meeting with those young men last week, I have often reflected on those strange moments where the boys were shouting verses at one another. There are certainly much worse things that are yelled in that building on a regular basis. What happened there last week seems much less like a deep spiritual moment of growth, and much more like petty bickering. How many of those boys were truly inspired by the verses they shared? How many of them really understood what they were reading?

As these questions flood my mind, God reminds me that I am not too far ahead of these young men. My motives are not always perfect; I don't always 'get it' myself. But I am grateful to the folks at Greater Faith Victory Church in Waynesville who took the time to highlight and donate those Bibles. I am so glad that we have the opportunity at Piney Ridge to reach out to these youth. And I trust that God's Word will be fruitful, accomplishing all that the Father intends.

It is the same with my word.
I send it out, and it always produces fruit.
It will accomplish all I want it to,
and it will prosper everywhere I send it.
-Isaiah 55

"How Do I 'Get Saved'?"

The topic was grace and law at our ladies chapel service. We talked about how our hearts need to relate to God on the foundation of His grace. At the end I asked, "Is there anyone who would like to get saved by receiving God's gift of salvation in Christ?"

At that point, a girl asked, "What's it mean to 'Get Saved'?"

I guess we start from the perspective of, "Get saved...from what?" Back in the days of The Great Awakening you had sermons like, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by Jonathan Edwards that would make a person quake in their boots until they made peace with God (Hence, "Quakers", from "Quaking before the Lord").



Now we're inundated with media and perpetual distraction to the point that the general population is far more aware of their daily emails and Facebook page than considering the eternal condition of their soul. It reminds me of the time one of my kids slipped away from our sight years ago. We

were terrified and frantic, but our child wasn't even aware they were lost while immersed in the choices of bubble gum two aisles over. We frantically found him approximately thirty seconds later.

We need a balanced approach to the process of salvation. The process of salvation goes like this: We are saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. John 6:44 says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..." So none of us "get saved" because of our own strength. We are saved by believing in God's redeeming love rescuing us from the anger our sin deserved that was put on Christ at the cross. We are saved from God's anger, Satan, sin, and self. God's love manifested by grace through faith saves us and keeps us so we can enter into God's rest for our souls (Ephesians 2:8 & Hebrews 4). Romans 2:4 tells us, "that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance..." Repentance (change of mind), is something the believer does daily to enter into the rest that God has for us so we don't slip into rebellion. Rebellion is purposely hardening yourself to the awareness of God's presence in your life and circumstances. An application question to ask ourselves is, "Am I in repentance, rest, or rebellion?"

Our salvation was sealed in love with God's heart before any of us existed. Ephesians 1:4, "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love..." Salvation had many events that took place in God's heart, mind, and in this world to make it happen, but for us ***it is a process not just an event.*** Working in this ministry reminds me of this

fact almost every day. I didn't go into all this theological detail with the girls that night. I just simply answered, "To get saved is to receive Christ into your life: His life, His death, and His resurrection that took out every obstacle of sin, shame, and guilt between you and God so you can have a perfectly holy relationship with Him and relate to Him for the rest of eternity as His child."

The Intense Room By Jon Wells

An Intense Room is a very simple space. No furniture. Nothing hanging on the walls. A small area, perhaps eight or ten square feet. When a child in treatment becomes agitated and presents a danger to himself or to others, he often finds himself in the Intense Room. The youth we serve are easily triggered by sights and sounds that remind them of their traumatic experiences. When triggered, these kids experience what psychologists call 'Limbic System Overload.' They are flooded with powerful emotions; fear, rage, or desperation. Their systems are pumped full of adrenaline and they experience a fight or flight response. In the residential setting, youth will either explode or implode; they become aggressive towards others or run away. Oftentimes those who isolate will also attack themselves, banging their head against the wall or cutting their skin. Most of the facilities in which our chaplains serve utilize physical interventions when the residents get out of control. But children cannot be kept in a physical hold indefinitely. That's where the Intense Room comes in. Youth are placed in these rooms alone, with a staff member sitting in the doorway. There they are given time to regain control of their chaotic emotional states. This small space gives the child a safe place to be alone and away from the triggers that so easily set them off.

As I walk through the hallways of Piney Ridge every week, these Intense Rooms are filled with children and teenagers who are struggling to regain some sort of composure. These Intense Rooms are proving to be great ministry opportunities. I am careful not to enter where I am not wanted, but if the child is willing to have a conversation, those conversations are usually very fruitful.

Last week I encountered three young ladies sitting in silence at their unit. All of them were on restriction because of behaviors earlier in that day. When I stopped to check in on them, they asked about my guitar. I pulled out three songbooks, and we spent the hour singing worship songs

together. It is amazing how worship transforms a space.

This week I showed up on Unit 2 prepared to share a lesson on anger. I brought several bookmarks with me to give the guys on the unit. Each bookmark included several passages that address anger, as well as a prayer. For a number of reasons, we were unable to provide the lesson to the group. I was disappointed as I left, but I noticed Rodney (name changed to protect privacy) sitting in the Intense Room next door. I asked permission, and sat with him on the floor.

"How long will you be in here?"

"I don't know, probably all week."

"All week! That's a long time. You think you will be in here all week?"

"I really screwed up. Now everything is messed up." Rodney put his hands in his face.

We talked over the next half hour. He shared with me his story, and the recent altercation that resulted in his 'time out' in the Intense Room. I was able to share one of the 'anger verses' bookmarks with him.

"Did you bring these for me?"

"No, these are for a group I was going to do today."

Rodney shook his head. "How did you know I would need this? This is a weird coincidence."

I wasted a few minutes on Wednesday frustrated that I could not share my Anger group with the guys on Unit 2. It was great to see how God had a purpose in the material I brought with me. I was able to pray with Rodney before I left the Intense Room. As I stood up, a staff member from his unit stepped into the doorway.

"Are you ready to go? You can come to the unit if you feel ready."

Despite Rodney's dire predictions, he was only in the Intense Room long enough to cool off and have a conversation with me. Hopefully he won't land back in there again. But I am sure that next week when I walk past that doorway, someone will be.

Our chaplains provide pastoral care to children and teens in residential psychiatric facilities throughout central Missouri.



The services that our Chaplains provide are:

- Voluntary:** *We freely offer opportunities to worship and learn; we accept the choice of others to decline*
- On Site:** *Rather than bringing them to a church, we bring church to hurting people where they are at*
- Needs Based:** *We believe the pain and struggles of our clients are more important than any lesson plan or agendas of our chaplains, and intentionally defer to the needs of those we serve*
- Experiential:** *Games and activities help our clients to grasp spiritual truths in a concrete way*
- In Tune:** *Music is a powerful tool that helps us communicate to wounded people, and worship is carefully woven into all of our programming*
- Age Appropriate:** *We tailor our presentations to be age and developmentally appropriate*
- Bible Based:** *Setting aside fringe doctrinal differences, we continue to insist that a relationship with Jesus Christ is God's core solution to the problems that individuals face*
- Propositional:** *Our chaplains are not combative or argumentative. We do not defer to our own authority as spiritual leaders; rather, we invite hurting people to take a leap of faith, take ownership of their own walk with God, and find out for themselves that God is good!*

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