

May 2014

Days of Hope

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

News from the Front

By Jon Wells

Perhaps it is a little melodramatic, but I often feel like we are on the front lines of a battle in the lives of the youth we serve. This month, we decided to send out some short vignettes to communicate some of the amazing things that God is doing in the lives of these kids. ****All names have been changed to protect the identity of the children we serve.***

Charles is one tough cookie. He is shorter than his peers, but scrappy. Charles is often the kid that takes a lot of grief from the other guys in his cottage. Usually when I see him, he is sporting a black eye from a recent conflict with bigger kids on campus. It's easy to feel pity for this little guy, to think that he is always getting 'punked on.' It's harder to discern if he is hiding behind his victim status, and starting all of these fights himself.

Above all, Charles is tough. He perpetually sports a rock hard demeanor that shows little or no emotion. Indifferent. Detached. Charles may be little, but he carries a defensive armor.

During a recent service, we were talking with the boys about abuse, and how it affects our walk with God. At the end of the service, Charles approached me, tears streaming down his face.

"How do you forgive, I mean, how do you forgive yourself?"

Like so many of these kids, Charles was born into a very broken home. During one particular conflict, he had it out with mom, yelling at her and cussing. Mom proceeded to walk away, pick up a gun, and shoot herself. Now mom is dead, and Charles is left alone. Alone and hard.

"How do I forgive me?"

Together we read through some scripture passages. We talked about the impossible notion that God himself forgives Charles. Charles asked for me to pray with him. He cried; I think I cried a little, and we prayed there in the chapel before he headed back to his cottage. Turns out, Charles is not such a tough kid after all. He's mostly just a really hurt kid.

These days something has shifted in Charles. The difference is discernible, if you look. Not like a light switch being flipped, more like the incremental rising of the sun on the horizon. Charles has asked to be baptized, and is even smiling sometimes.

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Aaron and I were recently visiting some girls in Hawthorne cottage. We arrived right before dinnertime, and sat down with the girls at the table, to check in and see how they were doing. After a few minutes, Aaron walked over to a couch in the great room and sat down.

A lively conversation soon erupted at my table, as I was introduced to Danielle*, the new girl. Danielle seems like a sweet kid, but the other young ladies quickly informed me that she is a Satanist. All of the girls are aware that our services are voluntary, that they are not required to attend or participate. Many of them quickly assured Danielle that I was okay with her being a Satanist, because "he doesn't *make* anybody anything."

"Isn't that right Pastor Jon?," One girl inquired, "You respect her freedom to choose, right? It's okay if she's a Satanist, right?"

This was the beginning of a long and deep conversation. I quickly explained to the girls that I'm not necessarily 'okay' with someone being a Satanist. There are many kids who arrive in residential care angry at God, and they tell me that they are an atheist, a Satanist, Wiccan, or any number of things. Many of these kids don't realize what they're saying. I explained to the girls that there is a difference between that, and actually growing up in a family of people who practice Satanic ritual.

"Being 'okay' with the fact that you are a Satanist would be like saying I'm 'okay' with you doing meth five times a day."

I explained to them that a lot of the practices and the rituals that Satanists observe are hurtful and ugly things.

"I have a good friend who grew up in a family of practicing Satanists. When he became a teenager, he let them know that he did not want to be a Satanist. When he left the group, they attacked him. He was hospitalized with broken bones all over his body. He paid a heavy price for leaving his family's 'religious preference.'"

I explained to Danielle that if she has had an experience of being raised in a family that practices satanic cultic ritual, then 'No, I'm not okay with that.' I don't want to see her hurt. The enemy comes to steal kill and destroy, but Jesus came so that I could have life and have it the full. I want Danielle have an awesome life, a fulfilled life, a life of love and light. I don't want ugly things for her.

As you might imagine, this was a very involved conversation, with lots of twists and turns. Just a few minutes in, I noticed one of the girls stand up from the table, walk across the room, and sit down with Pastor Aaron. I did not make anything of it, continuing to talk to the girls near me. When I glanced over again, I saw Aaron praying with her. A few minutes after that, another young lady stood up from our



Resident being baptized at the pool in the Centre



Outdoor worship at School in the Wilderness

table, walked across the room, sat down, and begin praying with Pastor Aaron.

Before our conversation ended, a number of young ladies from my table and from other parts of the room had decided they needed to pray.

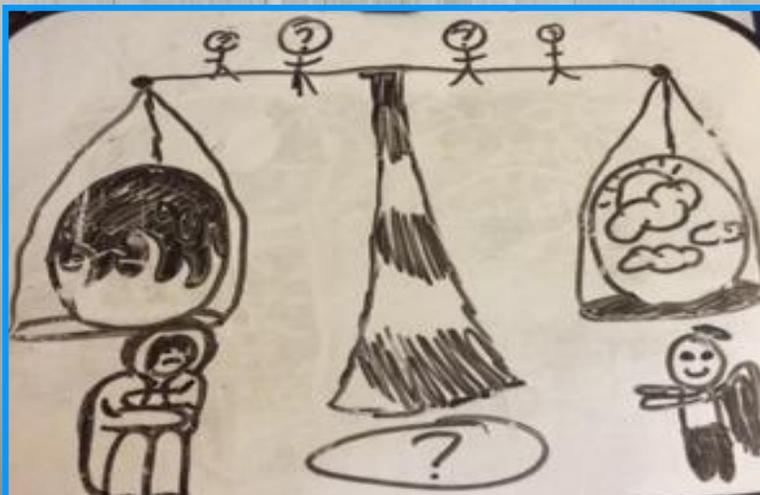
It was definitely a strange scene. Each of the girls approached Pastor Aaron and discussed very different issues that they were dealing with in their own lives. Aaron was able to minister compassion and encouragement to each one, and to join them in prayer, asking God to bring resolution and healing to the issue at hand.

As we left the building, Aaron and I marveled at the strangeness of that circumstance. God is definitely moving in the hearts of these young ladies!

During a recent campus service, I was preparing to share a message on confession. We were focusing on communicating some simple truth. *Confession is the act of telling the truth about me to God and safe people. Confession is when I tell God what He already knows!* As the service started, Denise* approached the front of the chapel. She gave me a hand drawn picture she had made, an image with a set of scales. On one side was heaven and angels. On the other side was her depiction of hell and Satan. Denise is a new believer, and had just been baptized that week.

“Can you explain this to me? It’s like my life is balanced between really good things and really bad things, and I am stuck in the middle. What am I supposed to do with the really bad stuff?”

What a great question! Our service that night shifted to answer her question. I used her drawing as an illustration, and we unpacked the simple truth that confession is a healthy way to deal with the broken parts of my life. We do not live in denial of



our poor choices and mistakes. On the contrary, we ask God to search our hearts and illuminate the dark corners, so we can take ownership and confess our sin.

Later that same week, when we presented the ‘confession’ material to the young men on campus, we gave them an opportunity to make a confession of faith in Christ. Five of those young men responded, admitting they had never taken that step and joining us in a profession of faith!



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Questions Kids Ask

By Aaron Jeffers

“Will God save me and relate to me if I’m a homosexual?”

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”
-Romans 5:8-10

I was recently asked this question by two different kids within a ten day span. This can be a very loaded topic. There are a lot of people in our culture who are loudly arguing on different sides of this issue. On one side, you’ve got a person who has a genuine struggle, and folks who are endorsing and empowering him. Their message, “If you’re a homosexual, embrace it, don’t fight it!”

The argument gets compounded exponentially when they hear a religious person spout, “God hates homosexuals! You’re an abomination to God!”

One of our core principles at Days of Hope is that *my sin and brokenness is not any better than your sin and brokenness*. Homosexuality is not ‘more fallen’ from the glory of God than pornography use, gluttony, or gossip. In fact, gossip is mentioned right along with homosexuality as sin in Romans 1. God does not have a list of ‘good sins’ and ‘bad sins.’ However, we do not get to casually redefine sin when it is convenient for us. With that said, if you willfully and habitually engage in sin of ANY kind, it will hurt and harden your heart.

I shared these simple truths with the kids who had inquired about the issue. I let them know that Jesus took every obstacle of sin and shame that would ever get between us and God. The cross of Christ created a way by faith to relate to God as our Father despite our weaknesses and struggles. We don’t use the sacrifice of Christ to give us a license to sin or live however we want to. But that sacrifice does give us the full rights of a son and/or daughter to repent, draw close to God, and to do His will. This is where life to the fullest is found.

Sy Rogers said it well, “God would rather have a son or daughter that struggles with homosexuality than no son or daughter at all . . . People don’t go to hell because they’re gay but because they’re not reconciled to God through Jesus. Heterosexuals don’t go to heaven – redeemed people do!” Put simply, God relates to those who are reconciled by faith in Christ.

So my answer is this: *be reconciled to God*. When I think of reconciliation, I think of my checkbook. A checkbook is only “reconciled” if there’s enough money to cover the debt that’s owed, and the account is in good standing. The good news is that Christ paid the debt of homosexuality. Being reconciled to God means letting Christ take every single transaction of sin,

shame, struggle, and imperfect desire that you’ve ever had or will have, and receiving Jesus Christ by faith into your heart. His death takes your sin and fallen nature and gives you a new life and a new nature. In Christ, you’re no longer a slave, sinner, or homosexual . . . you’re a new creation in Christ (Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21).

Don’t dwell on your sin or struggle, that’ll just bring you down. Use your faith in Christ’s sacrifice to draw near to God and have a relationship with Him. When you relate to God, don’t focus on your problems, past struggles, or sin. Use that same energy and time to focus on and draw near to God, and all that junk starts falling away.

Hold on to the fact that you are saved by grace through faith (Read Ephesians 2). That’s faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, not faith in your ability. *Notice that it does not say that you’re saved by works when you get your life together, stop messing up, and overcome all of your struggles with attractions and desires.*

Don’t wait to get your life perfectly fixed and figured out before you draw near to God. Draw near to Him now! He sent Jesus to take all that is fallen about you so that you could rest in God. And that rest is where you will find your life and peace.



Aaron taking the ride of his life!