



# Days of Hope

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

## The Fourth Dimension

*by Jon Wells*

One of the constant challenges our chaplains encounter as we minister among youth in residential facilities is the ongoing battle that these kids have with their own sin. They have placed their trust in Christ, and so many are taking steps of faith. But for most of these kids, habitual sin is woven into the fabric of their young lives. These are the children who were given alcohol and drugs as toddlers to entertain the adults in the room. These are the survivors of sexual abuse and assault, abandonment and cruel imprisonment. Many of them are victims of human trafficking. It should come as no surprise that they carry baggage in the form of addictions, bad habits, and intentional learned behaviors.

And so we have your run-of-the-mill drug addicts. We have violent kids whose rage sparks at the slightest provocation, assaulting anyone who sets them off. We see manipulative liars who don't seem capable of speaking truth. Many of the girls and a few of the boys habitually carve up their own skin with any sharp object they can get their hands on. This mutilating behavior can become so addictive that they are

triggered by the color red or a simple reference to 'cutting.' We often encounter suicidal children in treatment programs; over the years I have met a few who were later successful in their desperate quest to die. Children who have been systematically starved often steal and hoard food; hiding it under beds and in closets. Boys and girls who have been molested carry a whole range of problem behaviors with them. Some are hypersexual. Others are predatory, compulsively seeking out and grooming a new victim. I cannot count the number of young men I have worked with who compulsively steal women's undergarments when they get a chance. Forgive me if the details here offend; I want you to understand the challenges these kids face. I could go on . . .

The brokenness in their young lives cannot be reduced to simple bad behavior. Their wounds are multi-dimensional. Depression, manic episodes, hallucinations, and all manner of diagnosable mental illnesses abound. Family systems are so compromised that many of these youth do not have a single positive family member to offer support. Organic deficits resulting from fetal alcohol syndrome and substance abuse are common. The complexity and depth of the sin in their lives is staggering.

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These kids have taught me that sin is like some horrifying weed; its roots penetrate deep beyond simple behavior into emotion, thought, and identity. Sin is pervasive. It is relentless; choking the soul and crushing the spirit. I should not be surprised. Jesus stated clearly that we have an enemy who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy.

So what do you tell a kid who is struggling with one of the above listed sins? He has jumped through all the spiritual 'hoops.' He has confessed his mistakes and professed faith in Christ. He has repented and asked for forgiveness and strength to live a victorious life. But he continues to struggle.

What do we offer to this young man and the thousands like him? While they ask questions, we easily slip into a theological debate. *I know I shouldn't use drugs anymore, but how do I make a change?* We parse the finer points of backsliding vs. assurance of salvation. *How do I put to death the sin that rages in my soul?* We are attached to our 'silver bullets,' although the preferred ammunition varies across the denominations. Some pin their hopes on water baptism as the answer. *What do I do with my sexual addiction?* Others insist on baptism in the Holy Spirit. *How do I stop cutting?* We advocate for specific styles of worship. We suggest joining an accountability group. If you can't get your act together, perhaps a small group of peers can help you. *When will my rage subside?* We prescribe Bible reading and memorization, church attendance, daily prayer. *Why can't I stop living this way?* We recommend some altar time and deliverance prayer. *How do I make this eating disorder disappear?* We suggest a different translation of the Bible; perhaps the one you are reading is compromised.

Before you protest, know that I am OK with all of this stuff. Like many of you, I have been baptized in water, I have attended many an accountability group, I firmly agree with the need of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. I see the value in all of these things- I even own a King James Bible!

But the ongoing sin of the believer remains one of the most difficult challenges we deal with in residential care. Perhaps you are thinking that this kid never got saved in the first place. Perhaps you think she is not trying hard enough; she just needs to buckle down and work harder. Perhaps you are thinking that he needs a little more of your favorite spiritual 'silver bullet.' Whatever you are thinking, our chaplains are working weekly with kids who sincerely want to get better, and are struggling to find some answers.

The answers to the questions these kids ask are not quick and simple. The sin in their lives runs deep. It is complex and multi-faceted. We serve an infinitely creative God who applies the truths of the gospel in a unique way to every believer. When God pursues you, He is writing a story of redemption that is brand new. It follows that your rescue would be totally unique- your story of brokenness requires its own special set of redemptive circumstances. But as God brings redemption to so many of these youth, I cannot help but ask, "When does this get better?"

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**We are currently scheduling speaking engagements. 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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This past month, in a moment of study and reflection in my house, I was overwhelmed with a simple insight into the multi-dimensionality of the Cross. This revelation left me wondering if I really comprehend what the death and resurrection of Christ really meant. I am not sure that I get it.

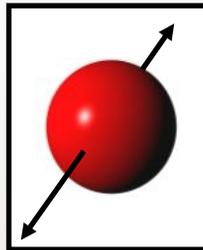
C.S. Lewis famously used the illustration of dimensionality to help explain the concept of the Trinity. "You know that in space you can move in three ways — to left or right, backwards or forwards, up or down. Every direction is either one of these three or a compromise between them. They are called the three Dimensions. Now notice this. If you are using only one dimension, you could draw only a straight line. If you are using two, you could draw a figure: say, a square. And a square is made up of four straight lines. Now a step further. If you have three dimensions, you can then build what we call a solid body, say, a cube — a thing like a dice or a lump of sugar. And a cube is made up of six squares." (Mere Christianity, pg. 88)

What would a person on a one dimensional planet see when a sphere passed through their one dimension? Perhaps they would just see a set of points intersecting their line. The folks on a two dimensional planet would understand a sphere much better. To them it would appear to be a circle. Like a tennis ball passing through a sheet of paper, it would gain in size and then shrink until it disappeared. But a sphere cannot be perceived clearly unless it is experienced in three dimensions. It is in this way that I think I have missed out on understanding the cross. I never thought to view it in the fourth dimension.

How is the power of the cross applied over time? Let me ask you a few questions. When you became a believer and asked forgiveness for your sin, was that the last time you ever sinned? More generally, who gets saved and then never sins again? The very idea seems ludicrous. Perhaps if you had the bad (or good) fortune of being killed immediately after a profession of faith, you could pull that off.

If it is true that salvation is not the moment when I achieve complete holiness, what are we to make of the cross? However profound, however theologically complete your conversion, it did not make you perfect in thought and action. I wonder if Jesus knew that this would be the case?

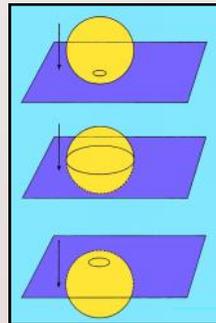
Does the power of the cross apply to the sin I commit after I become a believer? Is it possible that my need of the cross does not evaporate when I profess faith? What if I need the work of Calvary to be applied in my life today just as much as I needed it 20 years ago? We have done a pretty good job explaining the power of the cross, by grace through faith, to completely forgive and restore us for all the sins of our past. What about the sins of my present? What about the sins of my future? Is it possible that the redemptive power of the cross exists across time throughout my story, meeting the need of my brokenness in real time, bringing restoration in the moment as I invite Jesus to do so?



One of the few recorded phrases that Christ uttered on the cross was a simple declaration, "It is finished." Jesus was not just announcing his death. He was declaring the end to the power of sin.

**Sin is finished.** The power of abuse is forever broken. Addictions are finished.

Compulsive sins, violence, all of it is broken. The root of sin is destroyed. Only He could make this pronouncement, because His work on the cross is living and active across the fourth dimension. It is sufficient to cover you and bring restoration to every sin in your past, present and future. How



long will it take you to learn new ways of living? How many years will you struggle with your favorite sins? The very question is irrelevant in light of the incomprehensible immensity of the cross. Always and forever, the Father will wrap his arms around the broken prodigal. Always and forever, the cross will bring healing and forgiveness to

the sinner. Jesus did not lie. It is finished. If you sin next week His blood will cover you. The death and resurrection of Christ is bigger than the things you have done. It is more powerful than the brokenness you are struggling with in the present. It will overwhelm any sin you can conceive in the future.

I used to think the cross was one in a series of steps the believer must make. I am beginning to see that God calls us to the cross, and there we must stay. The life of the believer is necessarily a call to bow a knee and embrace Jesus; my need of Him is never satisfied. Jesus explained this to his disciples in John fifteen when he instructed them to 'remain in Me.' And for those of us audacious enough to do so, sin is finished. Paul later refers to our ongoing need for Jesus in his letter to the Colossians with a curious turn of phrase.

"You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3)

None of this gives us an excuse to wallow in our sin; read the rest of Colossians 3. Jesus calls these children of abuse to rise up out of the ugly realities they come from. It may take some of them a lifetime to really recover from the fallout. It may require hundreds of baby steps over months and years to leave behind broken habits. Is it possible that Jesus is willing to walk with the addict throughout her days, always forgiving and encouraging, teaching her what it means to be whole? Is He truly that patient? What if she stumbles again? And again? And again? What if she is sober for decades, only to fail yet again many years later? Can the cross really be sufficient for such a thing?

After all these years I am just now beginning to see the cross, and it leaves me speechless.

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*<sup>12</sup> I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. <sup>13</sup> No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. <sup>15</sup> Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. -**Philippians 3***