

CONNECTED

YOUTH FOR CHRIST of Northern Ohio - Newsletter

Connecting Teens To Jesus Christ And His Church

March 2024



Adults Who Give So Much | Steve Pausch

The success of this ministry depends on the hard work and dedication of so many caring adults. You are reading this today because you care enough to support this work with prayers and financial support and we are so blessed to partner with you. This ministry reaches out to hundreds of young people weekly because our ministry staff recruit, train, and motivate followers of Jesus to use the gifts given by God to pour into the lives of young people. We have been entrusted with a very committed and faithful team of adult leaders who give of their time and talents to get involved with the lives of young people and help lead them to Jesus. These adults often deal with the ups and downs, hopes and disappointments of the lives of the teens, while keeping the long term picture in mind. Many of our adults still have contact with young people into adulthood and continually point them to Jesus.

This month, one of our leaders who has taken up the torch and carries it for the young people incarcerated in the youth detention process is Herb Miller. Herb has been leading our Juvenile Detention Ministry in Fremont and doing a great job recruiting and training leaders, working with corrections staff, meeting with teens and living out a relationship with Christ to those around him. We asked Herb to share a little about the ministry to which God has called him.

Ministering at SCJC | Herb Miller

40+ years ago, I remember James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, saying that as the family goes, so goes the country. It would be hard to view our society today and argue against that prophecy. Traditional families seem to be going the way of the dinosaurs. The evidence exists in any community. Marriage is pointless/optional for many. Domestic abuse, child endangerment, substance abuse, and all kinds of violence are common. So many kids being raised by grandparents. Divorce rates for Christians are nearly the same as for non-Christians. All this brokenness spills into our culture and contributes many stories to the evening news.

My parents divorced back in the early 60's. Mom raised 5 kids mostly by herself. I was about 10 when my Dad left for good. I remember crying myself to sleep many nights trying to figure out how I could keep him from leaving. It wasn't until sometime after I came to Christ, that I realized how much of my life I spent searching for a dad. Sad to say that the trauma from my parent's divorce was significant. I don't say this to cast stones at those who have gone through divorce, but rather, to highlight the challenges we deal with in working with the kids of today.

I've been going to the Sandusky County Juvenile Detention Center for seven years. I often ask the kids who they live with. Most live with just mom, mom and her boyfriend (or stepdad), grandma, or in a foster home. I've met only two kids who still live with their married parents! In seven years! I've heard too many stories about dads who are in prison.

So much for the good news! There are two things I draw from this information.

I think I've too often made inaccurate assumptions in visiting the JDC. While not true for all, many of these kids have no idea (or very flawed ideas) about God, Jesus, salvation, creation, or even believe the Bible is relevant today. Even those kids who believe there is a God, and that the Bible is from Him, have been indoctrinated with evolution, naturalism, and a whole host of other isms. How confusing is that! What this means is that I must back up a little and find out what they do believe. Their worldviews are so much different than mine; today and when I was their age.

You've probably heard the expression *people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care*. Sometimes I think I can win kids for Christ with my beautifully prepared lesson and/or my brilliant, thought-provoking questions. I'm finding I need to do a better job of building relationships with kids. The problem with that is that kids often listen and I'm encouraged by their response during my visits, but when they leave the JDC, they go back to their old ways. The evidence is in how often they return to jail. That can be quite discouraging. But then, I keep reminding myself that God is the one who brings the results. No farmer has ever grown his own crops!

Fortunately, God still uses me even when I miss the target. I must admit, I heard the gospel a lot of times growing up. I spent many years avoiding God and wandering in the desert before I came to trust Jesus to save me from myself. I'm so glad that God never gave up on me. I bank on the promise of 2 Corinthians 12:9. *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*. By His strength, I'll keep trying to get it right.

Girls Overnight | Laurie Beal

One of my favorite Garage events is the annual girl's overnighter at the lake house my family has in Chippewa Lake. This past weekend, we were blessed to continue the tradition! Based on the count the evening before, I thought there would be a small crew of 3 girls and 2 or 3 of us mentors. I planned a lesson that also was an interactive game to get to know one another on a deeper level and figured it would take up about 15 to 20 minutes of the evening. Within minutes of arriving at the Garage to meet and load up in my car to head to the lake, girls started piling out of cars and we ended up more than doubling our anticipated number of gals and headed to the lake house with 8 girls and 3 mentors.

The lesson I had planned was intended for a smaller group due to the nature of the questions requiring transparency and the time it would take for a handful of us sharing deep thoughts. Within minutes after arrival at the lake house, there was a major issue that involved one gal hyperventilating and in tears and saying she might call her mom to come get her. Basically, she did not want to sleep in the same area as some of the other girls. She said she didn't trust them because she didn't really know them (even though they come to the Garage every week together) and wanted to sleep in the room that they had selected. I'm a no-nonsense person/ parent and like to empower teens to solve those types of issues themselves. I said something like, "That sounds like a problem you can all solve together while I'm carrying things in and getting ready for the evening, and you can call your mom anytime you want, but I bet you can figure this out and have a fun night." They all figured it out in less than 5 minutes.

After that, I debated just coming up with something else for our lesson and wondered if it would be too much for some of the specific girls that were there to share their heart and be vulnerable with so many peers, especially some that they felt very distant from. However, I felt God leading me to just go for it. So, we ate pizza and gathered in a circle of chairs to play what I called "musical chairs without the music." Each chair in the circle was either a prop itself or had a prop sitting on it and had a built-in question that each participant answered when they switched to that chair, and it was their turn.

The game I had initially planned on was 5 questions and 5 gals answering each with a grand total of 25 responses...so maybe 20 minutes. I was thinking I just had to come up with 6 more questions, which was easy. I didn't think ahead to the fact that we'd now have 11 people answering 11 questions each, making it 121 responses and even more thoughts provoked for the larger group of gals to interject their own stories as others shared! Whew. But we had already started the game when THAT realization hit me.

As I was wondering, again, if this was a mistake and wondering if the girls would really share their true hearts and be vulnerable, one of the girls said something that brought a smile and oddly gave me hope. One of the 11 chairs was a seat with a mirror. Each person who held it had to say 3 things they liked about their looks. This proved to be very difficult for some, but it was neat to hear the other girls give suggestions of things they liked about that girl with the mirror. The discussion at hand was now about eyelashes and the need for mascara for some. To commiserate with and help unalienate one of the girls complaining about her light eyelashes, I said, "Whenever I don't wear mascara people will ask if I'm tired." Here is the line that brought the smile. One of the girls said in her sweet little voice, "You

always look tired, Miss Laurie." I said "Thank you." And she very sincerely said, "You're welcome." Even typing this brings back a smile and chuckle. It may have upset some, but to me it prompted the thought, "Good. I think that is a good sign that they are going to say what they are really thinking!" And they did!

The 10 other chairs/ questions consisted of: something you'd like to change in the world, steps you've taken to do something hard, where are you with faith and God, what masks do you wear to hide true feelings, what is a dream you have for the future, what is something weird about you, what is a coping mechanism you use for stress, what is something people would be surprised to know about you, what makes you uniquely you and a seat with random question cards/ "would you rather" cards to draw from and answer.

The gals quickly opened up and began sharing fun facts and sharing hard things. There were solemn moments, lots of laughter and bonding amongst all eleven of us! We ended up getting to know each other in new ways and gaining an understanding of what makes each of us tick. About 2 hours in, I apologized for the length of the game, explained how with the original count it wouldn't have taken that long and asked if they wanted to stop. EVERY one of our crew enthusiastically wanted to continue. When we were all done with the last share, we talked about the fact that we all had more in common than different, yet for some reason we often tend to think otherwise. Then we talked about how cool it was that God created us ALL as His masterpiece in the image of Christ, on purpose, with purpose, to do cool stuff that He already planned in advance for us. We were all then united with matching Ephesians 2:10 friendship bracelets before we left the circle. And the rest of the evening had a cool united feeling as we made homemade perogies and cookies and memories...way different than when we started the evening.

It all had a "Breakfast Club" feel the next morning as the girls were loading up in their cars at the Garage parking lot and leaving with their parents. Will these girls now say "Hi" in the hall to the other girls from a different clique? Will they bravely venture over to a new lunch table? Will they talk to each other at the Garage on Thursday nights now? I'm not sure. But I left knowing 2 things: 1. These girls now know they have at least 10 people that want to hear what they have to say. And 2. I didn't have to wonder if the less than 3 hours of sleep was going to be evident to others!

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