

In Their Own Words | Steve Pausch

It's that time of year....seniors are graduating! And one of our own seniors, recently posted on social media about what Campus Life (our program for middle school and high school students) has meant to her. So, in her own words, a graduating senior from our Brunswick ministry site:

Tonight was the last night of Campus Life. I remember one day a girl I had just met at school asked me to come to youth group with her. After asking me a few times and finally convincing me to go, I decided to go and give it a try. Little did I know this would change my life. What made this group so special to me was no matter what, each and everyone of them always had your back. If you were having the worst day, they would always try to make it better. I have made so many amazing friends over the years at Campus with most of them being best friends. These people were there for me through my worst and through my best. These people are my family. Who I've created some of the best memories with. I want to thank Campus Life for all the amazing opportunities you have brought me. And I want to thank the staff for doing what you do. This group will always hold a special place in my heart. And I dreaded having this part of my life come to an end. But without this group I wouldn't be the person I am today. I love you all so much. Thank you for making these 3-4 years so great!

Thank you for helping us build relationships with teens right where they are, sharing Christ's steadfast love and hope!

**YOUTH
FOR CHRIST**

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Just a Simple Easter Basket....Or Was It? | Steve Pausch

Over the years of working with young people, I have realized that maybe they listen more than we think. I can remember many times years later when I hear a young person recite something from a talk or conversation that we had even years before. I think that is true as a parent also when we hear our children sharing some of our sage advice.

Recently, I went to dinner with some young men that I coached in high school baseball 7 years ago. We have gotten together every year at least once to catch up on life and share some time together. Coaching has been a really great ministry tool for us, because it puts me in the lives of students nearly every day for many months in a row. While at dinner, we were just talking about things when one of the guys mentioned the Easter baskets I gave each team member when they were freshmen. My wife and I put some baseball candy, some gum, sunflower seeds, candy, baseball cards and a small booklet that explains the Easter story and gives several scripture passages regarding Jesus inside each basket. I gave them to the players after a game. I just thought we were doing for them what we did for our kids. It was fun way to celebrate Easter and the resurrection of Jesus.

While at dinner, I was very surprised to find that 4 of the 5 guys had never gotten an Easter basket before and that Easter was not even talked about in their families. I was even more surprised to find that one by one they each shared that they still have the baseball basket in their room and read the book frequently. We continued talking and even though we have talked many, many times about faith in Christ, none of them have chosen to become followers yet.

That night reminded me that the things we say and do matter and that God's Word does not return void. I will be having that same group over to the house this summer for a cookout and bonfire like we did so many times when they were in high school. I will once again be talking about following Jesus. Please pray with me that they will begin that relationship with Him.



Unpacking Suitcases | Laurie Beal

We recently had a long overdue girl's overnighter at our lakehouse! Covid has impacted so many things and although we adapted and made things work in new and innovative ways, we are glad to be able to start back to some of our normal favorite activities.

The evening was full of fun, laughter, tears ... and of course drama! I did say it was an overnighter for teen girls, right?! So, we were settled back into normal pretty quickly. Lol

Besides the food and the walks to the lake and the games and the facial masks and the cool gifts (thanks to some generous friends/supporters,) we had good chunks of time to really talk to the girls about what's going on in their lives, with their decision making, with school, family, boyfriends, etc. Our big lesson/talk of the night was a conversation about the "lies" we are told and how we often just take them at face value. We discussed how we hear "lies" all the time from social media, from society, from our peers, and sadly sometimes even from family or friends. Many of the lies are telling us we aren't pretty enough, smart enough, skinny enough...etc! Some are straight out lies we have been told by people we love...making the sting hurt even worse. We talked about WHY we believe those lies and what types of lies we are told. Then, with a fresh understanding of identifying falsehoods, we asked each gal and leader to write down 10 of the lies that we have been told in our life so far.

Wow! Wow is actually an understatement of what was shared in our circle. We talked right away about it being a safe and confidential space so i will not share details. But, i will say that the girls had no trouble writing out full pages as soon as the question "what lies have you been told?" came out of my mouth. And the things they shared were heartbreaking and the word that best describes the loads they are carrying around in this messed up world...is HEAVY! It was an emotional gathering in that sunroom, yet also one filled with LIGHT. Not sunshine ...it was 10pm. But light from the other girls jumping in to offer words of encouragement or love and support. Light from the leaders holding the gals up and praying for them. LIGHT from God's word that was shared that offered HOPE like only Jesus can! The HOPE and future of Jeremiah 29:11, the reminder from Ephesians 2:10 that we are a masterpiece and have purpose, the encouragement from 2 Corinthians 5:17 that we are anew in Christ and our past does not define us!!

It was a night that took a few days to process and unpack and absorb. And it was a night that, praise God, happened. It is a true privilege that God allows us to be on the frontlines WITH these young people, doing life with them and helping them unpack and repack their "suitcases that we all carry...with some HOPE tucked inside. Thank you to each and every supporter that chooses to jump in with us and ensure that there are people there that care for these amazing teens!

In the Summertime | Matt Mountjoy

It's that time of year again. The time where we transition from our regular weekly school year programming to our special summertime events. With this transition, I wanted to share with you some of what we wrapped up the school year with and some exciting things we have coming for the kids this summer season.

Tonight we wrapped up our final Thursday Night Garage of the School year and finished our series on "Let God Speak For Himself." None of us like being judged off of preconceived notions, hearsay, or rumors. The kids can definitely relate to that. We had a guest speaker, Jon Wertz, come in and share with the kids about how we as individuals can do that very same thing with God, and we can go into situations like church or anywhere else having already made up our minds about who we think God is. In the weeks following that talk, we had the kids make a pretty extensive list about what they **thought** they knew about God. The list included things all over the place including: God has a beard, God is male, God is strict, God hates sinners, God loves everyone. The list goes on and on, then we put question marks next to all of them and broke them up into groups and each week I would take a related group of questions and see what scripture had to say about all these things. They literally got to hear God's own words on Himself and some of the things they thought they knew were totally wrong. Some things are misunderstood, and others they completely were right on. It was an exciting opportunity in a world where opinions are flying, prominent people who claim to have been Christians are now claiming to be "exvangelicals" or have "deconstructed their faith," and others on different sides of many different beliefs have been using God and Jesus' name to win arguments and say Jesus would think this, or God is like this. The cool thing is we don't have to guess, God's word on Himself and real truth is written for us all to read. So over the past four weeks, our kids got to really just hear scripture on who God is and what He is like, and not from a second hand source, but straight from God Himself.

Now moving forward into the summer, we have several exciting things on the horizon. We start off with our annual Water Wars event, which is basically just a MASSIVE water fight. Following that, we have our big rafting trip to West Virginia. Other events that will be planned include: overnighters at Laurie's lake house, bonfires at my house, trips to the drive-in theater, and much more! We are excited for this change of pace and look forward to sharing with you how God moves in the student's lives over the summer.