

Jesus With Skin | Herb Miller

The thunderstorm was fierce and the noise woke up a frightened 5-year-old Sara. She cried out for her mother who quickly arrived to comfort her. Her mother reminded her that she doesn't need to be scared, because Jesus is always with her. Sara responded, "I know that, but right now I need a Jesus with skin on!" Did you ever stop to see yourself as "Jesus with skin on"?

I visit the Juvenile Jail every week. Sadly, most every boy I meet comes from a broken home. Some tell of living with one parent, or grandparent. Many have never met their dad. It got me to wondering about my life. Over fifty years ago, my parents divorced. It was traumatic for me. Why didn't I end up in jail – or worse? I had a loving mom and four siblings. To this day, I don't know how mom did it. Divorce was not yet a common or an accepted event back in the early 60's. I certainly did enough stupid things to get in trouble. Mom told one of my brothers that she was relieved that none of her kids ever ended up in jail.

I think the non-spiritual answer to my question is that there was a social "safety net" in place. I had teachers that genuinely cared about me. I had friends whose parents treated me in such a way that I felt valued. There were neighbors who asked me how I was doing – and listened to my answer. Most of these people didn't know the impact their kindness or interest had on me. I'm not sure that I knew at the time. I certainly gave people many reasons to write me off.

I write this to encourage you to be aware of the power you have to favorably impact the youth God puts into your life. You don't have to be a certified youth leader, SS teacher or ministry leader. The kids I meet are open to what's real. They need to see Jesus with skin on. They may not respond as you would like. But they notice!

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Best Seat in the House | Steve Pausch

A single courtside seat at the recent NBA finals sold for over \$3,000 per ticket. One ticket to the upcoming baseball All Star game can cost up to \$2,000 and triple in cost the day of the game. The games are exciting and the reason the ticket costs so much is because of the value of the game. But, within a very short amount of time, most of the world forgets who won the game and life goes on as before.

I recently had some unbelievable seats to some very important, life changing events and the outcome will not be quickly forgotten. The players were not the big names in the headlines, they don't make millions of dollars, and I haven't seen any of them driving expensive cars. On our recent annual white-water rafting trip, I had the privilege of watching some superstars interact with teens, deal with drama, and share a life-changing message. Here are just a few stories of what I saw...


Several staff were spending time with young people and were talking about tough times the teens were facing at home. Divorce, drug use, adultery, were just a few of the things on the minds of teens. Our staff listened with compassion and sharing answers when applicable. It was a special time to see how the weight that these teens were carrying was lifted by finding a listening ear to share with.

The best part was stopping by each of the 4 small groups that were meeting each evening after the group program. Matt Mountjoy did a great job of getting teens ready for discussions as he shared at the program. The small groups created more opportunities for teens to open up and share about their lives and struggles. I was blessed to listen as adult leaders shared scripture and prayed for kids over the first two nights. The last night teens were given an opportunity to choose to follow Christ, and nine made that first time commitment, while others indicated they would like to talk more with a staff about following Jesus.

Please pray for those who indicated they wanted to make a life change on this trip and for those we will be meeting with this summer at different venues. Thank you for making this ministry possible with your prayers and financial support.

Rafting a New Twist | Matt Mountjoy

We had an incredible time on this year's rafting trip. A lot of fun was had, relationships were built, and I can confidently say many kids drew closer to God and one in particular very excitedly made the choice to give her life to Christ! In many ways the trip was like past years. We went to the same campgrounds, rafted the same river, and even had the same wild guy with long hair as our videographer on the river.



However, we did have some major twists this year to the trip that I feel God really used for some great good. The first major change was the decision to add an extra day. This allowed for less stress rushing from one thing into the next, and created more casual time to spend in community and building relationships. It also allowed for significant increase in programming. Fortunately for the students, that doesn't mean they had to listen to me give more talks. Instead, we were able to break them into small groups combined with kids from the different towns that went (Wadsworth, Brunswick, Fremont) and really have time to discuss the topics that were held in the lessons. We also had a fun assignment for those small groups as they were each responsible for putting on skits on the last night. Each group performed a silly skit with no value other than fun, but they also did skits reenacting various sections from scripture pulled from Jesus' ministry in His time on earth. This began with His baptism, went through the temptations, His miracles, parables, lessons, The Transfiguration, and ended with the Triumphal Entry. All of this was followed by a final presentation of The Gospel. While I'm not sure that we discovered any future Tony or Oscar Award winners, I am confident that the students learned more about Jesus' character. It also put them in a situation where they weren't just hearing scripture, but actively engaging with it.



Thank you so much for all of you who were praying for this trip, and for all of those whose support allowed this trip to happen! I feel incredibly blessed to be a part of this trip, and ministry being able to see what God is doing in these young lives.

God Moments | Laurie Beal

Our recent West Virginia rafting trip had so many “God moments” and layers of stories woven in that its honestly a hard task trying to choose what to share in the newsletter!

I'll go with what evolved from a rock I found. For years I have searched for heart-shaped rocks when on vacations and out adventuring and have quite a collection. I found a good sized one, again this year, while on the rafting trip for everyone to sign! I decided to do something different for the signing this time. I'm the honorary "mom" when we go to the water park—stationed at a lounge chair, being lifeguard and sunscreen-reminder person and belongings-holder. So I told each teen to find me at some point during the day to check in and sign my souvenir rock. When they each stopped in, I asked them two questions—What was their favorite thing about the trip, so far, and after all the lessons and small groups and experiences to that point, did they view God or their relationship with Him any differently.

The popular answers for favorite thing about the trip were not a surprise...rafting, waterpark and making new friends!

The replies regarding God were thoughtful, inspiring, and some pretty deep. One gal who has struggled for a while with self-esteem issues shared that Matt's "Who am I?" talk and him sharing the fact that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and created on purpose really hit home with her for some reason. Now, she sees herself in a completely different way and it's like a weight was lifted. She was pleasantly baffled at the simpleness of it.

A young man shared that the lesson on fear really made him think and realize that he needs to start giving some stuff to God instead of carrying it around all by himself.

One teen was pretty frank, “I’m thinking so many things right now. Its kinda heavy. I can’t really answer right now.”

Many other teens shared that they were so thankful for the experience, and that they feel much closer to God, and realized that they need to start seeking God on purpose! Good stuff!

What a blessing to be part of this life-changing trip for these teens. What a gift it was to talk to teens about new ways of seeing Truth, talking through steps with a teenager making a decision for Christ and watching young people ask questions about God and ponder answers as they seek their own relationship with our Amazing Creator. We are all so thankful to each and everyone of you that made this trip possible.

