

*Post-It Notes From God: What I Learned At Summer Work Camp*

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*Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Ephesians 2:12-22 (NLT); 1 Timothy 4:12-16 (NLT)*

Friends, our final Scripture reading comes from 1 Timothy 4:12-16, tonight read from the New Living Translation. Let's listen to the Word of God. "Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them. Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecies spoken to you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you. Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right, and God will save you and those who hear you."

Post-It notes from God. Wouldn't that be nice? Our refrigerator isn't covered with post-its, but it is covered with pictures and letters from friends. There's the to-do list paper on the side, but the majority of fridge is all about the people who have encouraged and befriended us throughout the years. A magnet or memo with a Bible verse might show up there too, to remind us who God is and what He is up to. But so often, we aren't looking for the post-it notes from God, those encouragements and instructions that would help us in everyday life. Sometimes, it takes getting out of our usual routines and comfort zones to notice that God has been trying to get our attention all along.

Sometimes we go on vacation – camping or boating or a day trip to the beach – and we think that will help us out. I was talking to a pastor friend the other day, and we both talked about how church attendance goes down so dramatically in the summer. His comment was, "It's really sad when people think one more weekend camping going to help things." Especially when that one more weekend is one more weekend away from God's people and the worship of God. The truth is, to see God's handwriting, it's not just about getting away. It's about intentionally making room for God and doing what He would have us do.

The four young men who went to the Week of Hope Workcamp in Pittsburgh and I had that opportunity recently. Quite frankly, I wasn't looking for "God sightings". I wasn't looking for God to reveal Himself to me. I have been so busy with the startup of CrossWay that the trip was one more thing to get done, at least at first. But God was gracious to us, and in the midst of my hurry and busy, God showed up in unexpected ways. He left behind some post-it notes of love for us. I want to share a few of those with you today.

The first one reminded me of our verse from Ecclesiastes today – "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." What brought this to mind was a simple pile of bricks. We arrived on a Sunday, and Monday they put us to work at the Burning Bush House of Prayer. Our job was to create two brick parking spots for them, since parking is at a premium in that part of the city, and people couldn't find places to easily park and come pray – which is a central part of their ministry.

We had a lot of work to do to get those parking spots together. A local pastor drove a skid that plowed out the dirt. Then we had to take tons of bricks from the backyard and move them around to the front. After we laid down rocks as a foundation, then we had to position the bricks into place. But our first job was to take the bricks off of huge piles and hand them down to the first level, where we could put them in a wheelbarrow and take them where they needed to go.

The first ten layers of bricks or so were no problem. It was all brick as far as the eye could see. Then came the discoveries. First came this guy...a slug. (See that nice trail of slime he's leaving on Ethan's glove?) Then more slugs. Then this beauty...a blue salamander. Then another. Then still more stuff...spiders, millipedes, hundreds of ants. It was a hive of activity all hidden below the surface. Some of it was beautiful. Some of it was scary. Some of us were so creeped out that we stopped working with the brick pile altogether. Others were so fascinated that they stopped working to take care of all the "creature features" they found. It took a while to get everyone back on track.

Now we were fortunate. It was always perfectly safe because the critters in that part of Pittsburgh were mild. But then I talked to Scott, one of the leaders from the church in Delaware that joined us on the trip. He said that up in Delaware, they always have to be very careful with their brick piles because that's the favorite nesting place of black widow spiders. It's nothing that some bug spray and the bottom of a steel-toed boot can't take care of, but they something you want to mess around with, either.

That made me think of this verse – every hidden deed will be brought to the light for judgment. Our lives are a lot like those piles of bricks. We like to appear strong and sturdy on the outside. Most of us can keep up that façade for an hour on Saturday nights, maybe even longer. But what's on the inside? What is it that's hidden beneath the surface? Not everything that's hidden is bad. Sometimes you comes across something absolutely beautiful, like one of those salamanders. Sometimes you come across something gross but harmless, like a slug. But there are also dangerous things lurking, sins that are deadly to our souls.

What's in your brick pile? John Wooden, a strong Christian known for his thirty years of coaching college basketball at UCLA, was known for this quote: "The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching. Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are." What are the hidden gifts in your character you are afraid to let out, those ways you could share Christ if you would just be willing? What are the slugs, those things that aren't sinful but are just distracting you from your purpose? What are the dangers? What sins tempt you and are hanging around hoping to make a permanent nest? What is your true character?

The good news is, whatever's hidden in your brick pile doesn't need to stay hidden, and the dangerous things don't need to stay. God is going to reveal all those hidden places. Best to get them unhidden now. Best to get them out in the light, into the fresh air, to deal with them now. Best to let the Holy Spirit do the house cleaning, even to the point of dismantling your brick pile and making it into a new creation that holds no secrets.

The next God sighting I had on our trip, the next post-it note, reminded me of our passage from Ephesians 2. The passage talks about how Jesus made it possible for the Jews – the descendants of Abraham, to whom God made His promises – and for all other ethnic groups, the Gentiles, to be made into one people. There was once great hostility amongst them. Yet through Jesus, these people from very different backgrounds and beliefs and practices could be brought together. Jesus' love of them all brought them together through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now how does that relate to us? Our trip was a small one in that, at our particular location, only one other church group came – Laurel Wesleyan Church from Delaware. Their group was eight girls and two guys. Their church bus broke down at a travel plaza on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, so they arrived very late on Sunday night and weren't able to go to our worksite on Monday because they were busy arranging new transportation. On our first day working on our parking spots, we got several rows done on the first one. Did we really need their help – especially from a bunch of girls?

What our guys found out on Wednesday, when we went back to Burning Bush, was that we were far better workers together than separate. Yeah, their group stuck together and our group stuck together for a while...but then we all combined forces on whatever needed to be done. What looked like an impossible project to complete on Monday was totally finished by Wednesday afternoon. Not only were the parking spots ready to go, we had enough time to plant flowers by both of them so they'd look great. We got far more accomplished together than we could ever get done separately.

God has brought us together into a community for a purpose. He has given us each other so that we might accomplish His will. Through us, Macomb Township and the surrounding neighborhoods can be changed. What if, because of caring for one another despite our differences, we showed what love is like to our neighbors? What if one of us sharing God with somebody else who looks different from us brought them into the Kingdom of Christ? What might happen if all of us served together and people said, "There're the people of God in action"?

We can't do it if all we do is meet Saturday nights. We can't do it if we're more interested in what's going on in the world than we are with our brothers and sisters within the church. We can't do it if we'll bail on God for a barbeque or a baseball game. We have got to make God a priority. These young men and the young women from Delaware gave up a part of their summer. That's making a priority.

And out of it, we saw that God's people come from different parts of the country, but we can still work together. They can look and sound a little different, but God unites us. Just like God brought the Jews and Gentiles together through faith in Jesus, He brings us together in faith with others in our communities so that the glory of God might be made manifest right where we are. Let's not assume that the job we can do by ourselves is good enough. We need lots more people for CrossWay to accomplish its purpose to reach those who don't know Christ here and throughout the world.

The last Post-It note from God I noticed this week revolved around our final verse from 1 Timothy: “Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them.”

God put this on my heart a couple of different ways during the week that I'd like to share. The first one was through a place called Sheetz. Sheetz is a series of gas stations across Pennsylvania. But according to our guys, it was more like finding the lost city of gold. You could buy tons of different kinds of snacks. They had their own line of shakes. And each Sheetz had its very own mini-restaurant inside that you could order from. Some even had car chargers and gadgets. Each of the guys had brought a bit of spending money, and the rallying cry each morning was, “When do we get to go to Sheetz?”

Now as an adult, I was not that impressed by Sheetz. They're a glorified 7-11. They were nice and bright and clean, kinda shiny, but I didn't get the big deal. There was something about Sheetz, though, that appealed both to our guys and to the kids from Delaware. I recognized that I needed to look at it through the eyes of a child. I needed to stop looking at it as an adult whose primary purpose was to get gas, a coffee, and back out on the road.

I needed to look at it as a young man who might have money he could spend however he wanted, without any mom or dad saying “yes” or “no,” for the first time in his life. I needed to look at it as a boy who dreamed of having a two pound bag of Cheetos all to myself without having to share with brothers or sisters or anybody else. I needed to look at even some of the dumb purchases made as a step into responsibility, a step into choice, a step into realizing consequences, of having enough money to buy lunch two days later. That helped a lot.

We sometimes come to the Bible with science and philosophy and a dozen other manmade concepts and we try to shove the Bible into what we think we know about the universe. But God wants us to come at it with the openness of a child. He wants us to come to Him first and then to look at science and philosophy and history through His lenses.

We read the newspaper and get discouraged because there's so much junk going on in our world. Children know that too. But children still get the wonder of the world – the wonder of fireflies glowing in the moonlight, like Jackson saw Wednesday. The wonder of finding a friend you can tease and who'll love you even while he threatens to put you in a trash can – as Jacob did. There is wonder in God's creation if we are willing to see through younger eyes.

But there's more to this verse. Paul tells Timothy, “Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.” We don't know how old Timothy was, but he was called upon to be a light to the Christians around him. I can tell you that these four young men started to grow in their love and faith and purity this week. I know they dealt with hard issues. In fact, they even got into a heated discussion together about some of the topics that have been all over the news and how to wrestle with them from a godly perspective. They aren't even teens, but they are working out how they should be Christians in a world that doesn't love Jesus.

So I encourage all those youth who are here this evening – keep growing in the faith. Keep learning. Keep reading your Bible. You are the ones who will take our place. You are the ones who need to know Jesus so you can share Him with the generations to come. You will be called upon to shed His light on a darkening world. Don't be quick to agree with what the world puts out there. Don't even be quick to agree with what the church says.

In Acts 17:11, it says, “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” The Bereans learned as much as they could from Paul, but they always went back to Scripture to see if it was true. Keep praying to God to show you His ways, and read your Bible to stay close to Him. Even though you are young, if you do these things, you will shine God's love to people far older than yourselves.

And to those of us who are older in the church, I issue two challenges. First – listen to the youth around you. Right now, summer is in bloom and not everyone is here, but when all our youth are here, we have over 14 regulars. We pray we're going to see more and more. They are an extremely important part of the church. Make time for them. Honor what they have to say. The more we do that, the more we can speak godly truth into them, and they will hear and appreciate it.

Second – prayerfully consider how you can help these children grow in the love of the LORD. Right now, all our children meet during the second half of our church service together. It means that we have to have material that works for six year olds and twelve year olds, and that's very difficult. We are at a point when we need a couple of people to step forward willing to take on the responsibility of Sunday school with one of our age groups. You don't have to know a lot; you just have to be willing to learn and have a servant's heart to teach it to our children. Our youth need you because they need to grow deeper in the Bible, deeper in faith, deeper in their knowledge of who God is. Be praying for God to provide those people; be praying to see if one of them might be you.

As we finish out the summer, we're going to spend a couple more weeks looking at the wisdom that God gives to us in His holy word. I encourage you to look around you for what God is doing. Keep an eye out for His Post-It notes that say, “I love you. Keep following me.” t God is alive and well and looking forward to meeting you in His Word, in prayer, and in this world He created. Will we be ready to give a report of what we've learned from Him this summer?