
“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.” - Isaiah 55:8

Before camp this past June, this verse from Isaiah became more real than ever to me. We held our first-ever matching gift campaign — the “Hey, Dad” campaign to raise money for camp — and God blessed our ministry financially so that we could take at-risk boys to the Ocala National Forest for a week of camping, as well as two different weeks of basketball camp at a local church.

God had provided the funding, so I thought our part was simply to find the kids for our summer ministry programs. My plan was to fill our camps with at-risk teens who would not have the opportunity to experience camp without ministries like Leverage.

One young man I really wanted to come to camp was named Michael. I knew it would be a long shot because he was in a state program and would have to be granted a release from the state attorney, the judge, the program and his mother. I worked for more than two months. I met with each party, shared about Leverage Ministries and talked about our summer camp program. One by one, they agreed to let Michael be released and attend our first week of camp.

Everything was in place. We would pick Michael up from the center on Monday morning. The plan was to take him to Target to get his camp clothes and supplies, and then we would pick up the rest of the boys. Before we got to the center, Michael’s mother had picked him up and took off. We looked for them all morning but could not find them. I was so discouraged thinking about all of that work over the past months. I felt like I had failed. But God was in control.

The night before we were set to leave, I got a call from a kid named Ray. He really wanted to go to camp, but I had to tell him that we were full. As I arrived at the first kid’s house the following morning, Ray showed up and tried again. He said he could be ready to go right away. Once again, I apologized but told him we were full.

Three hours later, both vans were full. We had all our boys except Michael. I went by his house one more time; his mother was home but said he would not be going to camp. I drove away so discouraged and disappointed that all the effort from the past few months had been a waste.

But as I drove, I passed Ray’s house again, and I saw him sitting outside. I stopped and asked him how quickly he could be ready to go. Within minutes, he was jumping in the van with the rest of the kids, and we were on our way to

camp.

It didn't take long for me to regret my decision to bring Ray. He had begged to go, but by the time we got to camp, I think it was his goal to break every rule so he could go home. He was a challenge all week long. But after our Friday at Fun Spot in Orlando, we were headed home, and Ray sat in the front seat next to me. We were stuck in traffic for a couple of hours, and while the rest of the boys slept, Ray shared with me that he trusted Christ the evening before at camp.

I had shared the story about my father dying this past winter, and about how my father-in-law died two days later. Ray said, "The story about your dad's really hit me because my father died two weeks ago. I really never knew my dad. I only met him maybe twice, but he was still my dad. I loved him and hated God for letting him die. The day he passed, a preacher came by our house to tell me that my dad had died. He wanted me to know that my dad accepted Jesus as his Savior and wanted me to as well. I told the preacher that was not for me and that I hated God for taking my dad before I ever knew him. The preacher said that he understood but would pray that someone would come into my life and so share Christ with me."

As we were stuck in traffic and everyone else slept behind us, Ray looked at me and said, "Pastor Scott, I believe you are that someone. I prayed and said yes to Jesus last night and just now realized that you are the someone who that preacher prayed for. God really does answer prayer."

Yes...God does answer prayers. He also takes things that feel like discouragement and failure to us but turn out to be divine opportunities for boys like Ray. Thanks to each of you for praying and for your financial gifts to our summer camp programs. Seventeen boys said yes to Jesus for the first time this summer, and I am sure that each one has a story just like Ray did.

Please continue to pray as we start our fall programs and as we disciple each of the young men who accepted Christ this summer.

In His Service,

Scott Hirdes
Executive Director, Leverage Ministries

Your financial contributions are essential to Leverage Ministries as we work with at-risk teenagers in the Lakeland community. If you'd like to give online, please click the button below.

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Our mailing address is: PO Box 1533, Auburndale, FL 33823