

*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. —Micah 6:8*

## The Parable of the Abandoned Child

Exciting changes are afoot among the youth group. For quite some time, there has been a palpable sense of disconnect and discontent. Many of us knew something needed to change but we just couldn't put our finger on *what* needed to change. Our oldest youth were absent. Our oldest participating youth were looked upon as leaders well before they were prepared to be. Our younger youth didn't know our older youth. Frankly, things were a mess.

Then we went to Baptist Youth Camp. It was just the right place at just the right time under just the right circumstances for change to begin. Our group members identified something *specific* that was missing from our community, something *specific* that could be addressed: Our group members didn't know one another! Once this was named on Tuesday night, much of the rest of the week was spent getting to know one another. This was a HUGE breakthrough! We went to BYC with at least two Pullen youth groups and returned as one.

The coming months have the potential to be very exciting for our group. Our oldest youth are growing into their leadership roles. Our younger youth are finding ways to respect, learn from, and cooperate with the older youth. Chasms are being bridged within and between individuals, within and between age groups.

We have learned valuable lessons about ourselves and one another. I asked David Wilson to share his story about bridging chasms at BYC and how his story might continue to unfold here at home. This is just one example of the many stories of change from BYC.

—Brooks Godfrey

*Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.*

—Mark 4:3-8

*In Hades where Lazarus was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your*

*good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us."*

—Luke 16:23-26

I feel as though I have postpartum depression. I gave birth at BYC; birth to a new me – a me that is more comfortable and confident in himself. I bore new ways of thinking and created strong bonds with amazing people. However, I feel like I abandoned that child on top of the mountain; I did not bring him back home with me.

Of course I haven't forgotten everything that happened and its significance to my spirituality and growth, but nevertheless, I feel empty. A great chasm has formed within me, growing to a canyon as the reality of city-life smacks me full in the face.

I said in worship one night: "BYC is fertile soil, emanating all of the things necessary for seeds to grow." This is such a powerful truth for me. Never in my life could I imagine a place that harbors such diversity and community as much as BYC. I do not feel nearly as accepted and as raw of a human being any where as I do at BYC. So many great things have flourished from this, but the most important one to me is the realization that the guys in the youth group love me. I have never thought that before. A lot of the time in my life, I feel that I am painted as someone who makes awkward statements and who is really uncomfortable to be around, and any talk of gay things is absolutely out of the question. Up until BYC, I felt that this was the case also with the guys in my youth group. But one night our chaperones were late getting into the cabin because of a meeting, and we got to talking. We were talking about *me*, and my experiences with homosexuality. I could not believe what was happening at that moment. I realized at that moment that I was mistaken all along, that there is such a genuine love between me and the guys that I can say ANYTHING, and it is taken as easily as something any of the other guys would say – no questions asked. This camaraderie and understanding is what I have yearned for for such a long time. The knowledge that the guys are not repulsed by my lifestyle and quite frankly have an actual *love* for me single-handedly defeats every other great aspect of my life. The depth of gratitude I have for this is indescribable. But love does not need description; if it had one it would lose its meaning. There is nothing tangible to compare it to. I think that I have faith in love as some have a faith in God, it is ineffable, yet one of the most emotionally powerful and important things to be experienced in all of life.

(Cont. on next page.)

*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. —Micah 6:8*

## The Parable of the Abandoned Child (cont.)

I feel that it is this love that I am missing and that this is why I feel so low and morose. I am also afraid; afraid that I will lose the feeling that I have at BYC to the stress of everyday life: the sound of cars that block out the sounds of crickets and birds and the wind whistling through the trees, the streetlights that pierce cruelly through the otherwise impermeable darkness of night, and school and work that force people to forget about each other and to focus solely on individual achievement rather than communal.

I miss the community already. I miss the sacred, reverent electricity that I felt crackle in the air during worship. I miss the people that make me feel like I shouldn't put a bullet to my head, that I am not worthless, a faggot, somebody abnormal that scores of people would rather be without. I get to be: David Wilson, a homosexual, who has all the love in the world contained in his heart for people and for the ethereal sound of music. I get to be ME! That's the best gift that I could receive in a million years!

That was the chasm that I expressed during worship: that I have such a difficult time trying to find a place for myself in a world that seems so distant and cold to me. I truly believe that at BYC I leapt that chasm; I demolished the inner wall that was dividing me. I found where I belonged...the problem is that I am not there anymore.

But I am really willing to try and keep my progress going. But it's SO hard. A point I made later in worship was that "Walls can be easily built, and as hard as it is, they can also be broken. What does it take to break a wall so strong? Forgiveness, courage, perseverance, unity, and love, all of which can be found at BYC." At BYC. I'm not there anymore, and being without that place for a year is without a doubt one of the scariest things I have faced in my life.

But a sudden epiphany: I didn't leave the child on the mountain; he went home! He went with every BYC camper that I encountered, sown into their hearts, and he grows and blossoms there in the fertile soil – the good hearts of my friends that possess forever-encompassing love. Maybe knowing this will make it less foreboding and impossible-seeming. That child – that seed – is in my heart as well, and perhaps if I try my best to nurture him, to keep him alive, and to remember the love that emanates at BYC, even when we are all states apart, then maybe I will be able to cultivate who I really am and feed the glorious harvest to the world.

—David Wilson