

## Introduction

God in His mercy and grace blessed us with another week of Youth Bible School this past November. We heard many inspiring, challenging, and convicting messages about faith, “What would Jesus do?”, and the kingdom of God. In this article, I have attempted to share some of the highlights of the week. This year I have also included several testimonies from other students.

## David Janzen

*Faith*—one of the most common words in Christianity, but what really does it look like in action? The Bible gives record of many people who had true faith. Many of these are mentioned in Hebrews 11. Faith is closely linked to the

this about several of these people of faith: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (He. 11:13)

Bro. David Janzen challenged us through Old Testament examples to believe God and show our belief by basing our lives on His Word. Noah and Abraham proved that they truly believed God by obeying His seemingly outrageous, staggering commands. How do we know if we have faith? Our faith is evident if we take God seriously enough to obey Him.

Bro. David’s message on Thursday was especially meaningful to me. He talked about how God tests our faith. Test-

# Youth Bible School



unseen. The Israelites “believed” only when they saw—that is not faith. They never trusted God for who He is. They never accepted the fact that He is always faithful, whether the impossible situation is behind or directly ahead.

Real faith rests in the nature and character of God. It believes that God is good and that He will never let us down. It is exemplified in Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his own son, believing that God would still keep His promise and give him descendents. Real faith trusts everything, including the fulfillment of God’s own promises, into the faithfulness and nature of God. The writer of Hebrews tells us

ed faith is precious. Peter tells us this in 1 Peter 1:7: “... that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” There are many examples in God’s Word of people who shine because of their testing. What would we know about Job if God had not allowed him to be tried? Would the prophets have had such a witness without suffering? Would Abraham, the “father of faith,” have been given that name if he had not sacrificed his stability, his sensibility, and his son on the altar of trust? Would we have such

intense, passionate Psalms had David not been through the “valley of the shadow of death”? And perhaps the most radiant example of suffering, tested faith in the Old Testament: Joseph. Could he have saved his family, could he have carried God’s plan forward, could he have proven his integrity, and could he have foreshadowed Christ Himself without experiencing the tremendous injustices that he endured? We look at these people and many others in the Bible and know, beyond a doubt, that their faith was genuine. And God is glorified by their resounding acclamation that He is worthy of trust even in the hottest fire.

I have also watched people in my own life experience trials, injustices, and sorrows and come through them victoriously, shining brighter than ever before. I have seen their

that they obeyed it in the face of cruel deaths. In the accounts of the lions’ den and the fiery furnace, God miraculously delivered them from their otherwise certain fates. However, Hebrews 11:35-38 explains to us that sometimes people of faith are not rescued. Many times, their experience is the following: “... others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

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faith strengthened through those times. And that has had a tremendous effect on my own life and on how I handle the small trials that I face.

Testing can come in the form of hard times, difficulties, and injustices, but Bro. David shared three other important types of tests that God allows in our lives to prove and even increase the genuineness of our faith:

## **Compromise**

Sometimes we are tempted to compromise. Daniel, as well as his three friends, believed God’s Word to the point

## **Identification**

Moses proved his faith in the unseen, the intangible—he chose to identify with the oppressed people of Israel instead of to live a life of ease and affluence in Egypt. He was “... esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” (He. 11:26) He considered the *suffering itself* to be worth far more than Egypt’s riches. That is faith—it is not by natural sight that one values suffering above riches. It was because he trusted God, because he was looking to the reward in the future. Bro. David’s challenge to us was

this: “Identify yourself with the rejected Nazarene.” Whom we identify with makes clear whether we are living by faith or by sight.

### Passion / lust

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” (Ja. 1:13) Our desires and passions often tempt us to do evil. Joseph’s belief in God’s moral absolutes kept him from yielding to Potiphar’s wife. His actions revealed the caliber of his faith.

We can have “strong consolation” (He. 6:18) because God cannot lie and He always keeps His promises. God promises that “he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.” (1 Pe. 2:6) Let us take God at His word and build our lives on His promises. He will be faithful!

Bro. David talked about Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish house builders. (Mt. 7:24-27) Both of their houses were tested to see if they were stable. The people who hear and obey God’s Word that Jesus spoke are those who will pass the test.

Job endured devastating trials: his possessions, his family, and his health all taken from him in the blink of an eye. But Job’s faith was real, and in the end, God could point to Job and say, “*That* is faith.” May He say the same about us.

### Dean Taylor

“What if Jesus really meant every word that He said?” This question reverberated throughout Bro. Dean Taylor’s messages for the entire week. Every day, he had on the platform a large board with these words spray-painted on them. Bro. Dean used many illustrations and object lessons throughout the week to make his teaching clear and memorable.

God’s Word is meant to be performed as a whole, like a symphony. We should not apply various commandments to our lives as disjointed bits. Bro. Dean said that instead of “applying God’s Word to our lives,” we should “apply our lives to God’s Word.” When applied in this way, as a whole, the symphony of our lives will be a testimony to the Great Composer.

Jesus began a revolution. Some of His followers were even accused of turning the world “upside down.” This revolution, unlike most others, was a revolution based on love. We, as Jesus’ followers, should be passionately loyal to Jesus Christ and we should be strongly committed to the

principles of His revolution. But, as this is a revolution of love, our passion must be motivated by love.

Bro. Dean stressed the importance of practically living out the teachings of Jesus: in simple obedience, not explaining away principles that we do not like. Christianity is not simply a mental issue; it must be lived out and obeyed in real life.

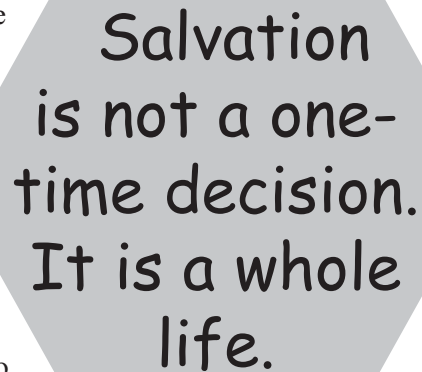
Salvation is not a one-time decision. It is a whole life. It’s not real if there is no life of obedience to back up the profession. Bro. Dean gave the analogy of a broken clock.

It reads the correct time twice every twenty-four hours, but it is useless. It cannot be depended on. In a similar way, a person may have made a profession of faith, but if their life is not constantly “ticking” in obedience to God, the profession is empty. In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus uses trees instead of clocks to discuss our lives: “For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”

How can we be “followers of Christ” if we do not follow Christ? Is our relationship with Christ a set of answers to a “theological test” or is it *real*? Judgment Day will not be a theology test. It will instead reveal the reality of our faith, as evidenced by our entire life, including our actions. Are we walking by the grace of God? Will our lives pass the test? Are we pretending? God cannot change the person you or I are pretending to be. We must be honest about who we really are.

The holiness of God is the cornerstone of the Christian life. God calls us to be holy as He is holy. We as Christians are to be “set apart” from the world and to God. Out of our understanding of the holiness of God should flow our behavior and views on a whole range of practical issues—including thoughts, clothing, money, and the poor. (Bro. Dean expounded on this wonderfully in his series from YBS 2007.) Therefore it is imperative that we have a right view of God!

Bro. Dean actually spent much of Wednesday’s session talking about the importance of helping the poor. Loving our neighbors as ourselves is the second greatest command, and caring for poor people is a practical way of showing that our love is real. Jesus makes this clear when He tells us how He will recognize us as His followers: “For I was an



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hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” (Mt. 25:35-36)

On Friday, Bro. Dean had a special demonstration to emphasize that the main thing in the Christian life is to have *reality*, not to be able to explain and understand every aspect of theology totally perfectly. He had two of his daughters come up, gave each of them a genuine pearl, and asked them to look at it and describe it as best they could. Then he had one of the students come up, gave him a stack of reference books, and asked him to create a pearl based on all the scientific knowledge about pearls that we have. The little girls were not able to give very much information about the pearls when Bro. Dean had them speak into the microphone, but they had in their possession the real thing. The student (Ryan Grice) produced three objects that each had a few of the characteristics of real pearls but all fell short of being genuine pearls. He tried to rationalize the lack of results with statements such as, “We have to remember that we are in a different dispensation,” and “We walk by faith, not by sight.” But these excuses did not change the fact that he did not have a real pearl. Bro. Dean’s point in all of this was that having a practical, living, vibrant reality is the primary concern of Christianity.

The Kingdom of God is something that starts out very small, as in Jesus’ parable where it was represented by yeast. But it permeates every part of the dough and has a huge effect on the final product. As we live the way God wants us to live, we should permeate the world and have an influence in it. We start out small and weak, but we grow and spread. Bro. Dean gave this quote: “No one can do everything, but everyone can do something, and together we can change the world.”

Let us obey Christ’s simple command: “Follow me.”

## **John D. Martin**

Bro. John D. Martin shared with us the centrality of the concept of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ teaching. God’s heart from the very beginning, in the Garden with Adam and Eve, was to create a world in which to share His benevolence, peace, love, and joy with His creation through His rule. Ever since sin ruined humanity, God has had a passion to have a people who would display to the world what He originally wanted. God’s kingdom now should still be a testimony to the beautiful, harmonious, benevolent, and holy character of God and of those who follow His ways. In the

New Testament era, the church is intended to be a unified testimony to the world of God’s character.

Bro. John D. taught on various characteristics and attributes relating to the kingdom of God and how we as Christians (citizens of God’s kingdom) are to live. He spent two sessions dealing with how the concept of the kingdom of God relates to the practical issues of money/possessions and peace/nonresistance.

On Wednesday, Bro. John D.’s message was titled, “The Kingdom in Practice.” He talked about three evidences of a renewed mind. A renewed mind is the “mind of Christ,” which means it conforms to the character of Jesus.

Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” How do we renew our minds? Bro. John pointed us to the very next verse for the first step: “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” The first evidence of a renewed mind is having the humility of Christ.

Jesus’ great emptying of Himself in Philippians 2 is the supreme demonstration of humility. The Bible tells us that even though Jesus was in “the form of God,” He did not consider equality with God something to be retained. Instead, He “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ...” (vv. 6-7) Jesus was willing to relinquish His glory and His privileges as God, all of which He deserved. Why are we so reluctant to relinquish all of our rights, prestige, and reputation—none of which we deserve—instead of taking the example of Christ and not counting them things to be grasped? Bro. John D. believes that if everyone in the kingdom of God would be willing to go all the way to the “bottom,” virtually all the Church’s problems would disappear. Pride is a major problem among us as professing Christians.

The Bible promises us that “he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” (Mt. 23:12) Indeed, this is what happened to Jesus at the end of the passage in Philippians 2: “Wherefore [because of His humility and obedience] God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name ...” We can definitely afford to humble ourselves. God will take care of us. But our humility must be sincere—humbling ourselves for the purpose of being exalted later is not true humility.

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The second evidence of a renewed mind is displaying the character of the Beatitudes—which again is the character of Christ. Bro. John discussed each one and showed how Jesus demonstrated them.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit”—Someone who is poor in spirit has the attitude of a learner. Jesus, being God, is all-knowing, but the Bible says that even He learned obedience through what He suffered. (He. 5:8) He learned what it feels like to be obedient as a man in a sin-cursed world.

“Blessed are they that mourn”—As we look at ourselves, we should mourn over our sinfulness. When we look at the world around us, we should mourn over their sin and the suffering and needs that abound. Jesus was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” (Is. 53:3)

“Blessed are the meek”—To be meek is to be kind, gentle, and patient; not assertive or harsh. Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Mt. 11:29)

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness”—If we strongly desire to do what is right, to obey God’s Word, and to treat other people rightly, we “shall be filled.” It was said of Jesus that He “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” (He. 1:9)

“Blessed are the merciful”—God has been and continues to be so merciful to us, and He wants us to follow that example. Jesus commands us to be “merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” (Lu. 6:36) The greatest demonstration of Jesus’ mercy was His Incarnation and His redemptive death for His sinful creation. But throughout His life, we often read in the Gospels that He “had compassion” on an individual or on a crowd. And think of the mercy He showed to His disciples time and time again!

“Blessed are the pure in heart”—Those who have a single focus, who are completely committed to God, who turn away from sin—they “shall see God.” Jesus said that He “always [does] those things that please him.” (Jn. 8:29)

“Blessed are the peacemakers”—Reconciliation is very

near to God’s heart. Peacemakers, Jesus said, will be known as God’s children. They reflect the heart of reconciliation that is so important to God that He sent Jesus to die in order to be reconciled to us. II Corinthians 5:19 says, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” Continuing on, the next words are these: “and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” Ephesians chapters 1-4 speak of how Jesus’ redemptive work allows us to be reconciled both to God and to each other. It is tragic that we are more often piece-makers than peace-makers.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake”—If we are truly following Christ and advancing His kingdom, we can expect opposition. Jesus experienced it; He told us in John 15:18, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”

The third evidence of a renewed mind is showing the forgiveness of Christ. In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to forgive us the same way we forgive other people. That is a frightening thing to pray! Jesus for-

gives us and lets us go free, treating us as if we had never sinned against Him. He holds no grudges against us. In fact, He no longer remembers our sins. (He. 8:12, 10:17) We are also called to release those who have wronged us. It is painful, because we have to “absorb” the pain and the hurt instead of taking it out on them. But God is telling us to follow His example and do what He did for us! (See the parable where Jesus teaches about forgiveness in Matthew 18. I have found it very convicting in my life.)

Joseph exemplified true forgiveness. He totally released his brothers; he allowed no bitterness to remain in his life. In fact, the name he gave to his first son means, “God has made me to forget.” I’m sure he still remembered everything that had happened to him, but as Bro. John said, “he could have recounted it all without a tinge of bitterness or unforgiveness.”

If we, by the continual workings of God’s grace in our lives, demonstrate these three evidences, we can rejoice that God is renewing our minds. And this is a very important

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part of what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom—to think like the King Himself!

~ Paul Lamicela

## Testimonies from Students

Following are several testimonies from other students who were blessed by YBS 2009.

### Bethany Esh:

David Janzen's messages on faith were life-changing to me. His thorough and creative approach to this age-old topic awoke a deep longing in my heart to possess true, living faith. Bro. David presented the fact that our perfect example of faithfulness is Jesus. He never gives up on me because He is living with expectation that He will see me face to face. It was this that motivated Him to endure the agony of Calvary. He deserves my absolute trust because He has proven Himself faithful.



The wonderful clearing of burdens as the Lord directed different ones to give up or lay aside various things!

### Jennifer Chapman:

I loved Dean Taylor's theme of W.W.J.D. and the way he tied it in to every aspect of life. I was especially challenged by the simple yet profound question spray-painted on his easel—"What if Jesus really meant every word that He said?" It has truly changed the way I read the Bible, and given me greater faith as I approach God in prayer. I want my life to be different, as I take each Scripture literally, and, in turn, do what Jesus did.

### Andrew Lamicela:

I really enjoyed my first year of chorus practice at Bible School. Brother Earl did a great job organizing and directing such a large group. I especially appreciated "O Thou in Whose Presence" and "If Ye Then with Christ Be Risen." After watching for several years, it was wonderful to be able to participate. I look forward to next year!

### Jessica Stamper:

I was especially blessed this year of Bible School by the practical, heart-to-heart messages that we were given. Spe-

cifically, John D. Martin's messages challenged my walk with God in a real way. He stated that salvation is not an end; rather, it is a means to an end—the kingdom of God. Salvation is an expression of the kingdom. I went away from this Bible School challenged, but also longing to have a heart of love and zeal for the glory of God on this earth.

### Jeffery Chapman (a prayer group leader this year):

Prayer and sharing time was a real blessing this year! God

moved in the hearts of every one that was present. It was a blessed time of sharing personal testimonies, where God has brought us from, and the wonderful clearing of burdens as the Lord directed different ones to give up or lay aside various things. It was a time where various different cultural backgrounds were present and sweetly blended their hearts to seek the face of God, and His will for each of their lives. Truly, the prayer and sharing time was a blessing in many ways, and hearts were changed by the power of God.

### Michelle Ramer

Probably the most outstanding day to me was the last day, Sunday. Bro. Tanner Leibee preached a message called *Ye Are Not Your Own*.

We so easily get the idea that we are our own person, that we have rights and deserve to be treated the best. Don't we remember that we are bought property? Let the fact that you are not your own and were bought with a price govern and motivate all your life. We treat someone else's property with special care because it isn't ours. Oh the carefulness we should take with someone else's possession! Did He buy you so you could do with yourself what you want?

Now we are possessed ... possessed by God. Because of what Jesus did, you're His. The trials that come our way were filtered by God. If you're your own, you have to fill your own dreams and desires. You work out your own things. But when you're run by Him, you're connected to the right power source! What an honor to be owned by Him!~