

snapshot.

a glimpse of Life!



December 2007

"Tyler... New From the Inside Out"



Bob Lenz

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! May the Lord bless you as you seek Him in 2008.

I am reminded that God's mercy is new each morning, and in each new heart that turns toward Him. Throughout the coming year, we expect to be in front of more than 300,000 youth, and we are praying that more than 6,500 young people will receive Christ through our ministry – 18 a day.

Sometimes I think I'm spoiled. God really has given us favor to speak in the public schools and to impact youth with messages of respect and dignity -- and He's used some unconventional methods along the way. I've mentioned before that sometimes principals and administrators are hesitant to have an opening act before the speaker. Bands with tattoos, comedy acts, and illusionists aren't exactly "educational material."

But those same school leaders continue to tell us afterwards that the combination has proven to be an incredibly effective way to build bridges across chasms of defensiveness and reach their students. It's really humbling and satisfying to see how God uses us together. That's why I am so pleased to team up with opening artists. They are one of the reasons we feel confident going into almost any situation.

But there are still times when I take it for granted -- which brings me to Tyler. This October we were in Green Bay, Wisconsin, where we had six school assembly programs and a rally scheduled. And things were going really well. The students were enjoying the band, laughing hard at the jokes, and sometimes even crying during the serious moments about consequences of bad choices. It's just such an awesome feeling when the message or truth penetrates hearts and people change.

Then we came to a school that was quite large. The gym couldn't accommodate all the students at once, so they gave us their freshman class. In walked 600 squirrely 14- and 15-year-olds.

Pockets of kids in the crowd seemed almost completely uninterested -- and that attitude can spread quickly in a high school gym. I battled for their attention and worked hard to reel them back in over and over again. The band, [NoonDaySun](#) had been seeing great responses from students all week long. But at this school, a few students decided to make it tough for them. The kids turned to one of their friends and urged him to "start head banging." And it wasn't hard to see why they chose this guy.

Tyler looked exactly like the kind of kid who would start trouble. He wore black clothing from head to toe. His long, dyed-black hair covered half his face and hung well below his shoulders. He began head banging to the music, bouncing his head back and forth. Hair was flying everywhere, and kids started laughing. Eventually Tyler and a couple of his pals were kicked out of the auditorium and put in a room where they still had to listen to my talk.

It was definitely one of the hardest school programs I had been through in years. Our team felt like the day had gone badly, but teachers told us they couldn't believe how well the students listened compared to the way they treated previous speakers. They told us ours was one of the best assemblies they had ever had. We even got a recommendation from the Vice Principal! (See, I am spoiled.)

As we prepared for the rally that Wednesday night we talked about our rough day, and we honestly wondered if anyone would come back for more. The auditorium looked almost empty up until just before we were scheduled to start, seeming to confirm our fears. But in the last ten minutes, more than 500 more youth poured in and we ended up with more than 600 in attendance. The bleachers were packed, except for an area off to the side where a guy was sitting all by himself. I later found out that people actually got up and moved when this person sat down.

It was Tyler.

Apparently the same friends who were all around that afternoon weren't there for him that night. The guy in black, the joker, the kid who was kicked out of the assembly, sat there alone and listened, longing for purpose and meaning. How could he know that I would speak about how it doesn't matter if you are the football captain, a cheerleader, or a student who wears black and is into the Goth scene?

God knew. And He moved in Tyler's heart that night.

I can't write fast enough right now because I suspect you know where this is leading. When I asked the audience if they wanted to trust Jesus with their lives, more than 160 hands went up -- and Tyler's was among them. And it gets better -- out of that 160, Tyler was one of the 80 people who indicated on follow-up cards that this was their first time responding to the Gospel -- new converts for Christ.

Every one of those hands is cause for celebration, but Tyler holds a special place in my heart, because of that first impression he made on me. He was a kink in my day, a distraction, a troublemaker who thoroughly looked the part. And now, by God's grace, I see him in a new light. He's a real person with real hurts, real wounds, and real needs. And, praise God, he's found a real Hope.

He also found a lot of love that night. Someone traveling with NoonDaySun gave him a free copy of their CD. The follow-up team handed him a free bible. Then I spoke with Tyler and he told me he wanted to be baptized. I introduced him to a local pastor and gave him one of our Life Survival Guide bible studies to help him grow in his faith. We prayed together, after which the youth pastor looked at him and said, "If you don't have a church, you're sure welcome at our youth group." What a sweet sound that must have been to Tyler's ears. After being shunned only an hour earlier and left to sit alone, now he was being warmly invited to connect with others who wanted to spend time with him.

Tyler's story is a wake-up call to all of us who want to reach youth for Jesus! Let's stop judging based on what we see on the surface, let's stop judging by appearance and even behavior. On the inside Tyler was a young man longing for a savior, longing to be healed and made new. Let's view people the way God does -- from the inside out.

This is what it's all about, and I am so thrilled that God allows me to see these stories unfold. Please pray for Tyler and the thousands of young people just like him who are looking for a reason to live. And please consider helping this ministry by donating your time or resources in 2008. We are so grateful for all your support.

For the Kingdom,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. J.', written in a cursive style.

P.S. I was encouraged to read this excerpt from a newsletter that went to parents, written by a student at one of the schools we visited. I hope it blesses you as well.

Parent Newsletter – Ashwaubenon Middle School

"Courage! And respect! ...rang through the gym during the anti-bullying assembly at Parkview middle school. It was much more than just a regular assembly. It was a message sent out to all the kids that have ever been bullied. 'No one deserves to be bullied,' said comedian and speaker, Bob Lenz. The band, NoonDaySun, kicked off the presentation with some awesome songs. And it was most likely the best assembly ever. Story after story; laugh after laugh; the precious hour seemed to go by so quickly. Each one of those stories, each one of those laughs, had a meaning that was 100% true. First there were funny stories where laughs were heard throughout the whole school. Then came the sad stories, such as one about his handicapped brother and his best friend, where nothing but silence was heard. The sad stories touched your heart in a way that you couldn't explain. That's what made it truly a message to remember."
--McKenzie V.



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