

snapshot.

a glimpse of Life!



February 2009

Through Victory And Tragedy

Wautoma High School • Wautoma, WI



Bob Lenz

VICTORY

The Wautoma High School football team became state champions in 2008 for the first time ever. It took lots of hard work, dedication and good coaching. The entire school and town were on cloud nine with an electric excitement over their success.

The team captain is a student who is a strong Christian and is very vocal about his faith, both with his actions and words. He actually says prayers in the huddle and encourages teammates with scriptures like Joshua 1:9 “Be strong & courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you.” Articles were even written in the local paper sharing about his strong faith and how he believed God was blessing the football team, and through that, blessing the town. People of faith were like Reggie White in his hay day, pointing one finger to the sky saying, “We’re number one,” and “All glory to God,” simultaneously in one breath.

TRAGEDY STRIKES

In early December a fire destroyed a home, taking the lives of a mom, dad and their son, Charlie – a seventeen year old student from Wautoma High School. A younger sister was burned so badly that she had to be rushed to Children’s Hospital in Milwaukee.

The town was asking, “Where is God now?” Young faith was shaken and others were wrestling with tough questions. The school pulled in counselors and the town rallied around other family survivors and the students. Some concerned Christian parents who wanted to support their students through the grieving process were asking, “What do we do with this crisis of faith?”

They called Life Promotions to see if I could come and speak to the youth to comfort the hurting, but also to try and deal with the questions. But they also wanted youth to be given an opportunity to commit their lives to Christ. Knowing quite a bit about the grieving process, I felt uneasy. I thought to myself, “It would be a miracle if these youth still believed there even was an all-powerful God after something like this happened. I’ll have a hard enough time convincing them that God’s not an unloving and uninvolved jerk, let alone expect them to respond to the message of God’s grace and commit their lives to follow Him.”

I always want to speak. Not this time. I was physically sick for two days and I had more questions than answers myself. I didn’t want to come across insensitive to the grief of family and friends, yet I wanted to be true to scripture and offer the hope and comfort of the gospel. I wrestled to find the balance.

Driving to Wautoma I was still unsettled about what I would say and I called a few friends for prayer. Even after speaking with them I wasn’t sure what I would share. What’s hard is that so much of my normal presentations use humor, which felt strangely out of place in this circumstance. I do prevention work, but this was dealing with the aftermath of a crisis.

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GOD IS WITH US

When I got there one of the first people I spoke with was Charlie's older sister. "Bob, make sure you tell them that they still need to laugh," she said. "Tell them to remember the good times and the stories about Charlie." Even though Charlie wasn't a football player himself, the head football coach opened the evening with prayer, affirming with his words, "God is with us in victory, and he is still with us in our tragedy."

The whole side of the school bleachers was filled. They had a worship team open with songs of comfort and reflection. I got up to speak and I can't even tell you all that I said. But I know I probably offered more questions than answers, and more comfort than challenge. Earlier I had learned that the night before Charlie died he was at a CCD class at the Catholic Church where they played and discussed the song, "I Can Only Imagine." It's a song about what heaven's going to be like. (This youth group comes to Power of One and Lifest every year and was introduced to Mercy Me and this song at one of our events). So it was only the night before the tragedy that took his life, that Charlie imagined what heaven would be like.

I shared the scripture from Matthew 11 that says, "I played a song for you and you didn't dance." So I encouraged them, "Don't forget the victory. Don't forget the stories and memories of Charlie. It's okay to still have enjoyment in life." But I went on to share the rest of the scripture from Jesus, saying, "I played a dirge (a funeral song) for you and you didn't cry." Again, I continued, "God is telling us that it's okay to grieve. Life contains ups and downs. And He is the God that is with you in both." I got to encourage them to not do life without Jesus. As I invited young people to respond, I stood stunned as 150 youth received Christ.

As hands went up everywhere I continued sharing about how we are not meant to do life alone, and how there isn't any one person on the football team who could have won state by themselves. They were together in victory as a team and they need each other in this tragedy as well. So I encouraged the youth who received Christ to come down to the middle of the gymnasium to grieve together and to acknowledge that Christ is still there in the midst. As more than a hundred students flooded the gymnasium floor, I then invited the parents and friends and others to gather around them just like they did for victory in the football championship. The bleachers emptied and everyone was on the gymnasium floor.

It was one of the most moving experiences I've had in 27 years of ministry. We ended by saying the Lord's Prayer together. As a perfect cap to the evening, the worship team led us in the song, "I Can Only Imagine." You could feel the presence of Jesus in the midst of the pain, yet bringing hope through one another. I encouraged them to share hugs and stories and pray with each other, and an hour and a half later people were still there.

What a God. What a community.

Remember... "Be strong & courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you."

Through both victory and tragedy.

For the Kingdom,

Bob Lenz

International Speaker

You can be a part of reaching young people with messages of hope and the love of Christ!

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