

***"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it" - John 1:5
"God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." - John 3:17***

It's been some time since I communicated with all of you and for that I apologize. But I want to celebrate with you some of the few things which have happened and been accomplished in just the past few months. I want to show you how much the light of Jesus shines in the world and pierces the darkness and response from so many when they realize Jesus came not judge, but to save.

Over the past year, the Casey committee (Communities Against the Sexual Exploitation of Youth) has been on hold because of some internal changes. This past December though the committee returned and began with gusto. One of the first things done when the committee returned was to contact me and ask me to continue to be a part of it and the work it does. The reason? The work YFC PG does and the efforts we have put in to help youth who have been abused and exploited have not been unnoticed. Though we are some of the only Christians present in this committee, they value us greatly and our input. They have also asked for the upcoming conference we are helping plan on the topic of sexual exploitation and abuse if I would consider being one of the main presenters. This is an honor in many ways; first because until a few years ago, Christians were not viewed in the best light by the committee and because of our faith. Second, because YFC PG is being recognized as an authority and organization of expertise in helping youth who have been abused and exploited. Thirdly, because the committee is not ashamed to support us or acknowledge us for the work we do and the work we have put in to the committee and our community. This is a rare honor and I am honored and humbled by this opportunity to represent Jesus and the Church in this facet.

Drop In has seen a few changes. Typically, the way it runs is to 6pm on Wednesdays and ends when the youth group of Fort George Baptist Church begins. This has been fairly successful for we provide a safe place for youth to be and spend time, and then we are able to connect them with a church youth group which provides them with a free meal. With the start of the new year, the church youth group has moved to a different evening of the week. This has meant the Drop In, instead of ending at 6pm, now ends at 5pm allowing youth time to get home for a meal. But with this change, we have added two new elements to the Drop In. One is a listening, small group, which works to teach the youth resiliency for life and processing difficulties. The other is the introduction of devotional. Both have been successful and have had positive feedback with the youth. Because we have youth from many different backgrounds and walks of life come to the Drop In, these two new elements can be tricky to navigate as no two youth have the same values, and thus this presents a whole host of potential difficulties when talking about or introducing things to the group. But our experiences thus far with both new aspects have been positive and ones which the youth enjoy and appreciate. Some have told us they look forward to both new aspects as they have learned much from them. Because of our limited interaction with the youth, this is an enormous win. The Drop In has already seen many youth respond to Jesus and believe in him. Seeing them wanting more and to go further with these two things are deeply encouraging, for many youth today, as mentioned earlier, do not have the same values many Christians do. Thus teaching and talking of these things which teach values are often a challenge when done in a group setting. This has been so exciting to see.

March 16-17 of this year will see YFC PG do its first suicide first aid training event in Mackenzie. I am very excited about this as the issue of suicide is one affecting not only youth in Northern Canada, but all people. But often the knowledge and resources to support those with thoughts of suicide are little and few. This event will see the start of a new chapter for YFC PG as we will now be able to travel to communities and train local people in how to save lives, literally. I am so excited for this because, as I said, we will be helping to save lives. But a greater implication of this is like the saying, "People don't know how much you care until they know how much you care." What I have found in my experience is when you meet an immediate need of a person, afterward they often want to know why you care. This then provides an opportunity to meet the greater need, which is Jesus. There was a time when people went to church in far greater numbers than they do now. A great part of that was they knew they could find help in the church. Could you imagine what would happen throughout Northern BC if people knew every church was trained in suicide first aid and they could seek aid and support from their local churches when dealing with suicide? How great a response might there be from communities if such a thing were in place? How many people would find themselves going to churches for immediate needs and then discover greater needs after? My excitement for this new chapter is immense and I encourage you, if you would like this training to be in your community and church, please do not hesitate to contact me. We will be more than happy to help make this happen.

Feb 28-Mar 1, myself and several of my coworkers will be travelling with several of our youth to PRBI for their Eview event. Eview is a youth conference where youth are also able to come and check out what being a student at a bible college is like. They attend classes, talk with the faculty, and go to fun events. I am excited for this because most of our youth who want to come are youth who did not grow up in the church. These are youth from broken homes, difficult backgrounds, painful experiences, and hard lives. These are youth who self-harm, have significant mental health challenges, youth who have lived through traumatic experiences, and youth who have only recently heard about Jesus. Yet, they want to come. They want to see what being a bible college student is like. They want to know about places where they could go to learn more about Jesus and about the Bible. They want to learn more. They want to experience what Christian community is like and what life could look like living for Jesus. Now it's important to note, I am not saying they cannot do these things if they do not attend bible college and I am clear when I communicate with my youth. But this is something they want to experience. A youth I was talking to recently who has been through the meat grinder said, "I'm thinking of being a student at PRBI. I want to learn more about what attending a bible college looks like and I want to know more about Jesus and following him." It is for this reason I am excited for this because it is something they want and wanted to have happen.

A personal story I want to share with you happened two weeks ago. I was talking to a youth who comes regularly to the Drop In. Over the course of the time I've known this youth, I've encouraged them to find out for themselves if Jesus is real. I've prayed for them and the following week asked them how Jesus showed up in their life. It's been an interesting dynamic we've had. During the summer they had told me they had decided they wanted to follow Jesus, which for them was an incredible experience. "He showed up for me" they said. Two weeks ago though as we were talking they said they'd been going through a lot, which they had been and what they were going through was not easy. "I've been asking God to show up and help me, and aside from that one time in the summer, he hasn't. He's been silent and disappeared. I have faith he can help me, but he's not talking to me or helping me. I'm angry. I don't want anything to do with him. Why doesn't he help? Does he not care?"

Their questions were more than valid. What they have been having to deal with are not light things but very difficult and very painful. I had no answers for them. But over the course of the week I was praying for them. Last week when they showed up at Drop In, I sat down next to them and asked the usual question, "I've been praying for you both this week. How's Jesus being showing up?" Immediately, my youth looks a little uncomfortable and responds nothing has happened. Their friend, who came to Drop In with them, immediately responds by urging them to tell me the truth. "Shut up! Nothing has happened...But if you were praying what were you asking Jesus to help me with?" I replied I had been praying things in life would be easier for them and they would have comfort and peace. Eventually, after more back and forth, my youth tells me things have improved a lot, and though there is still a lot of difficult things in their life, they've had a really good week. They asked me what day it was I started praying for them. I told them it was on Thursday or Friday. They in response told me this was when things began to turn around for them.

"How do you think I knew to start praying for you? What do you think this means?" I asked. My youth responded in a joking way, "Yes, Josiah. It means Jesus does care and God is helping me. I know you knew to start praying for me because Jesus told you to and that it happened on the very day things began to change and asked God to make things change shows me Jesus cares." Now, this is a funny story, but it's also a common one, not just with this youth, but with several of the youth who come to Drop In and youth I interact with in general. These youth are discovering for themselves the truth of Jesus and discovering, though things are difficult, he is there, he helps, and he cares. This is happening more and more in the work YFC PG does. Jesus is on the move and I want to thank all of you who read this because you are a part of this. Your prayers, your support, your encouragement, everything you do, makes things like this possible. Thank you for all you do.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this is and allowing me to share these things with you.
Sincerely,
Josiah