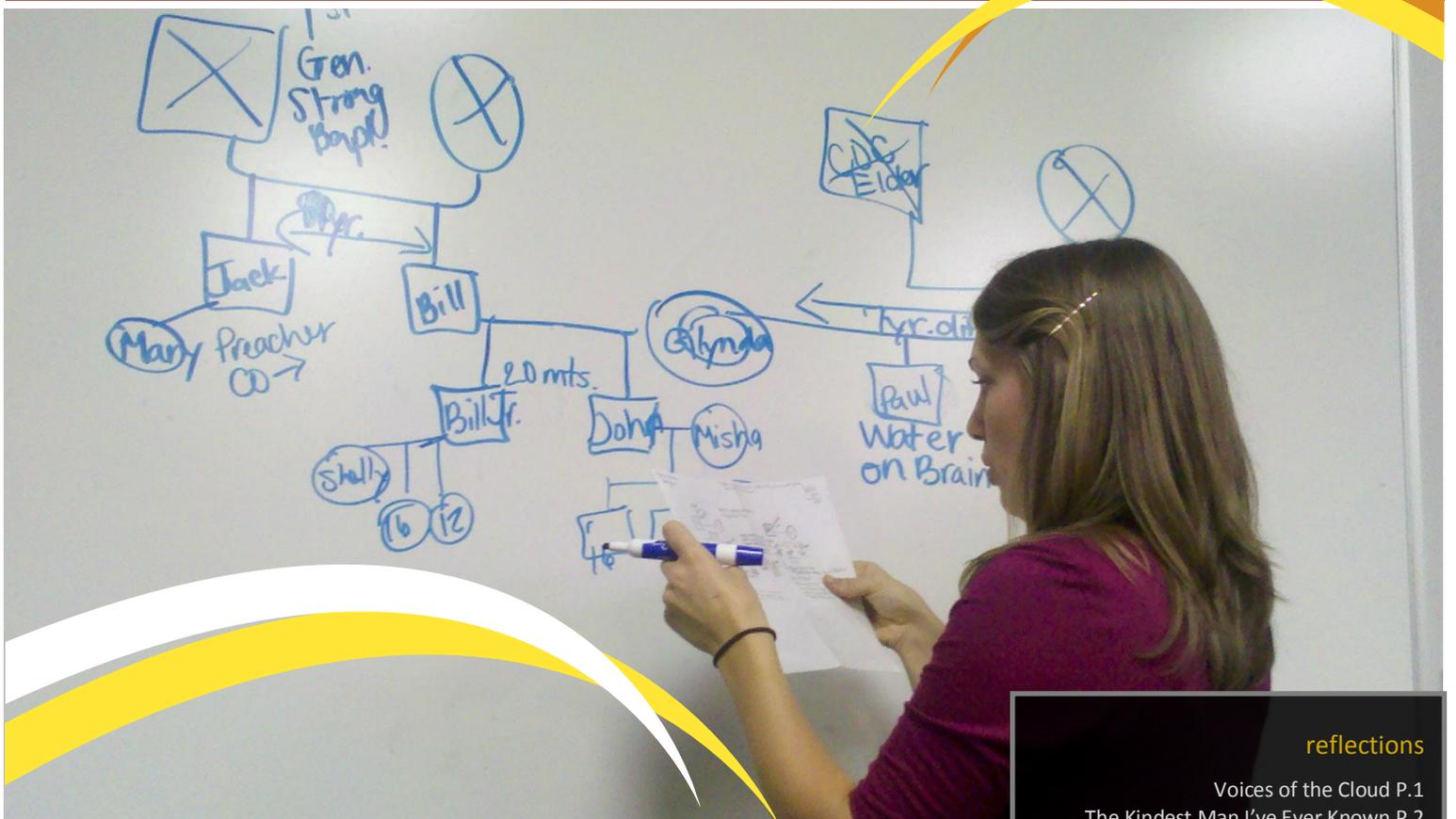


Pure Heart Vision Mentorships

Thanksgiving Cloud

November 2010



reflections

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Voices of the Cloud (Hebrews 11 & 12)

The writer of Hebrews 11 knew that those who die in faith still speak AND WE NEED to hear what they say! Why didn't he just explain what to do without highlighting these people? Didn't he risk a focus on imperfect people over the perfect Christ? Should he, rather, have written, "offer sacrifices that please God rather than yourself, diligently seek God, warn the lost - in fear of God rather than others - even if you must stand alone, let go of (and perhaps leave) your home to embrace God's purpose, accept what God promises even if you don't understand how it works, look beyond your own life to the generations beyond you," and so forth? Why did he give stories of people's lives rather than straight concepts or admonitions? He gave his reasons (12:1).

Surrounding believers with stories of others who have finished the race is a way to help us 1) escape hindrances to our faith journey (including sin), 2) endure a journey long enough to make us weary, and 3) focus us on Jesus Christ. It is so interesting that remembering these lives of people who have died is a way our biblical writer focuses us on Christ! I just wonder if we do not live for Christ as we should because we do NOT properly remember others who have gone before us. Those who have completed the journey still speak. And, we should listen.

Loss of Tangibles

The church of Hebrews was weary of the journey, persecuted, struggling with their consciences, and considering a return to former ways. Christianity was costly, unpopular, and seen as possibly dangerous by the government.

Before Jesus, they could deal with the government's demand for patriotic allegiance without losing their conscience by making a sacrifice in **behalf of** the emperor rather than **to** him. Families were united at the synagogue rather than divided over Jesus, and they "experienced" God's forgiveness as they heard a sacrificed animal cry for its life, saw it killed, and smelled the blood. (continued ...)

The Kindest Man I've Ever Known Cared

Eva's Earthly Father Now Joins the Cloud of Witnesses on the Other Side

No person has ever received a better inheritance than what I've already received. A few days ago, Eva and I had our 28th anniversary. One of the gifts I've received is that of a wife who had a healthy, loving, and godly relationship with the primary male of her formative years. He has now passed to the other side.

Bill Wagner was the kindest man I've ever known. I remember my earliest experiences of him that remained consistent throughout his life. He cared. He cared for others genuinely, deeply, and consistently. When visiting with him, you always felt you were the most important person in the world . . . unless a child walked into the room! At the entrance of a child, you clearly understood that you were secondary. And, rightfully, you were invited to care for someone other than yourself. His sweet spirit was a multi-generational gift passed on from his mother to him, his children, and grandchildren.

Billy was known for his kindness and care even though he could be a ferocious protector of any one of his four daughters. I love hearing the story of how he dealt with some foolish boys who were window peeping. He put up an electric fence with a powerful current that would give them a charge beyond what they wanted. There was, also, the option of one of his many guns if the fence didn't take care of the problem! He was also known for being a great shot even after his eye sight began to decline. He loved to have plenty of wild game to feed his family. But, those ornery boys knew he wasn't playing around! By the way, I was NOT one of those boys☺

Billy was truly emptied of arrogance and pride but he had an enormous positive kind of pride in his family and friends. He was truly a servant for others and was more concerned about building others up than proving anything about himself.

He and Marcella were married 54 years. I remember conversations with him when I was first married about purity, faithfulness, grace, and commitment. Some of his reflections still echo in my heart and have shaped the kind of husband I hope to be.

Billy died at 75 years old on October 6. At the grave site we noticed that his father also died on October 6.



Eva and her mom, Marcella

Billy was one of the first (and one of the few) who reached out to me, spiritually, when I was not the most receptive person on earth. For that, I will always be grateful.

Billy will be greatly missed for now . . . but not unheard!



...Loss of Tangibles

They felt confident about God being appeased after they surrendered something significant and experiencing the tangible reality of a sacrifice.

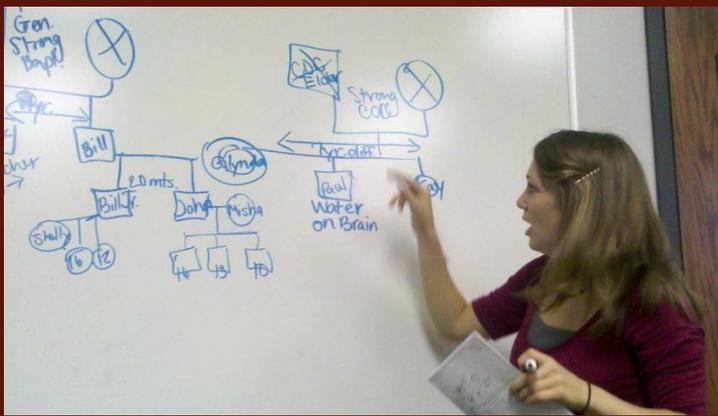
After Jesus as sacrifice, however, it seemed less and less appropriate to offer God a bull or a goat. Synagogue conflicts over Jesus led to unrest that concerned the government and made those seeing Jesus as the final sacrifice vulnerable. A lack of tangible sacrifice mixed with failures of weakness led to a sense of guilt and fear.

Abel Still Speaks

The difference in physically hearing Abel speak and hearing him, after his life, is huge! Nothing replaces the hearing, seeing, touching, and smelling of a physical presence. Nothing replaces what we can "hear" after they die. They still speak though differently.

The Old Testament sacrifices pointed to ("spoke" about) a greater reality that embodied their inner essence. To hold onto the physicality of that experience was to become deaf to a present voice offering their real meaning.

Some have pointed out what we know by experience. Children, struggling with the death of a loved person often take the characteristics of that person. We do too. (continued...)



Our Interns

Our interns have been working hard at school, understanding the stories of J.Joe, Glenda, Walt, and T.J. and Vauda. I have personally enjoyed hearing again about these individuals, their families, and the spiritual dimensions of their lives. I may be benefiting more than the interns!

They meet with me as a group once a week to discuss the individuals/families they represent and the work they do as they develop their work ethic. You know that Tess seeks to bring Glenda's story to the table, Tiffany brings TJ and Vauda's, Caleb brings J.Joe's, and Kristy brings Walt's.

They are also developing their work ethic by doing a massive scanning project in preparation for a possible move for the CSL, continuing to transcribe professor lectures/materials into written form, doing data entry for church surveys/research, assisting Flavil Yeakley as needed, hosting our faculty for working lunches, assisting with churches (more under "To the Field"), and seeking jobs within their jobs that contribute to a good working environment for all of us.

Each intern also coordinates their work under Ryan's care throughout the week. And, each intern meets one on one with me on a weekly basis. We talk about their spiritual development, their work with PHV and the CSL, their families represented, and

ways in which I would be able to HIGHLY recommend them for jobs . . . under a commitment to speak the truth!

You can email the interns by going to the Pure Heart Vision web page and clicking on "Identity." Scroll down and click on their picture.



Caleb



Kristy



Tiffany

Abel Still Speaks (continued)

Losing the tangible experience of our loved ones forces us to consider their inner essence beyond physicality. Their absence confronts us with what they say for our lives that we did and did not realize (or, perhaps, fully appreciate).

Like cleaning out and reorganizing our houses, we must make choices on what to keep, pass on, and what to discard. In doing so, we adopt parts of their being and find ourselves more deeply influenced by them than when they were physically available.

The memories – when we listen – form collections into a larger story. They call us to our deepest story and provide needed endurance for a very long journey. The story is not about them. Death itself serves to underscore that truth. The story is one beyond their individual lives to a collective story of God in Christ.

Why Don't We Listen?

The biblical writer puts the focus on Jesus Christ BY highlighting those who have died. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses' parents, Moses, Israel, and Rahab were all mentioned as his way of focusing Christ. He wanted to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, women who received miracles, and others who endured persecution. Why are we uneasy about highlighting people?

Tess is Transitioning



Tess graduates this December and will be leaving (probably for Colorado). She is rightly called our "inspirer." She has been diligent, faithful, and hardworking. She embodies the sacrificial love for others over preoccupation with herself that PHV advocates. She has been a gift from God to the interns, to me, to Ryan, Bryan, Nancy, and others who have experienced her. She was immediately loved by the Cushing church members who came to Searcy for a workshop.

She will now be going with us to serve them in their own context (see "To the Field"). She has served faithfully as a caregiver for the Glenda Johnson story and will be working with me to transition the care of that story to another who will be chosen to adopt that role . . . without being expected to "replace" Tess. Tess will take the Glenda story with her as a lifetime gift and she hopes to keep and deepen those relationships. She will continue to contribute to extending Glenda's story. We are proud of you as our first intern to enter the field as a living light.

We love you, Tess! And, we hope we transition into a new relationship with you that never ever loses you as one of us! You do inspire us!



To the Field

We will make a trip to Cushing, Oklahoma to serve the Cushing Church of Christ where John Loftis is an elder. We will seek to encourage them, boost their morale, heighten their hope, offer a model for churches in small communities making a big difference, provide useful insights on how to achieve meaningful ministry, gather and provide relevant information for moving the church forward, and connect them with resources beyond their own community.

The effort is a combined work of Pure Heart Vision, Anchor Point Recovery Center, the Remell Church of Christ, and the Cushing Church of Christ. Shane Goings, director of the Anchor Point Recovery Center, will join his wife, Cheyenne, elder Dave Bowman, and minister, Dr. Lou Butterfield to share a journey traveling from life sentence in prison to life giving hope. God has delivered Shane and Cheyenne (who was addicted to drugs the day she was born) from prison to the truest freedom.

The Cushing Church of Christ is in a community that has a prison and a treatment center. Vauda Golson worked at the treatment center, called Valley Hope, and TJ served the Cushing Church of Christ as an elder. Tiffany will, therefore, be able to deepen the care of TJ and Vauda's story as we deepen and extend our shared lives.

Why Don't We Listen (continued)

First, we have some legitimate reasons. We want the focus to be on Christ not others. We do not tolerate "calling up the dead" in some sort of bizarre séance. We do not see our loved ones as intermediaries between us and God. And, yet, these can be excuses for not focusing them appropriately and hearing what they still have to say ...we need to hear

Second, it hurts to think about people we've lost. Who likes to be sad? We tend to avoid people who seem to enjoy sadness! Our pain drives our focus beyond this life to the next, attaches our hearts to treasure in heaven, and makes our pain meaningful.

Finally, we are challenged when we think of the continued voice of those who have gone before. The Hebrews writer uses these stories to challenge us in a supportive way. We are called to hear, to change, to grow, and to travel a long journey with endurance . . . of eternal consequences.

Pain can be destructive or constructive. As one said, it can make us "bitter or better." It will not leave us the same. We need to stay with these stories until they have shaped us to their full value. No pain should ever be wasted!