

RLCA
Jr. Hi. Wilderness I
June 18-23, 2006

Missions Campfire Story-time

Sunday:

Jeremy was a normal kid. That is, he was as normal as Jr. Hi. Kids get. He loved to go skateboarding and spent countless hours “thrashing” all over his neighborhood. He rode his 24” diamond cobra stunt bike just about everywhere, and he could do a few really cool stunts. He got good enough to ride a wheelie for over 100 yards before he needed to bring it back down to two wheels. Behind his house was a vacant lot, where he and some of his friends developed a motocross track. At least that is what they called it. Actually the lot dropped off at one end and they built a ramp using some scrap lumber that they borrowed from his dad’s garage. They were able to make a good run at the ramp and get a little “air” as they flew off of the ramp and landed at the bottom of the bank. The trick was to hit the ramp just right, or else one of the boards would come loose and cause you to wipe out every time. Otherwise, the neighborhood kids thought that the BMX track was a blast, even if they often come home with bruises on the outside and wounded pride on the inside from their frequent encounters with mother earth.

One of the neighbor kids was a blond haired, blue-eyed, tomboy, named Leslie. She was full of energy, always in a good mood, and could lick just about any of the boys in a fair wrestling match. Leslie lived two doors down from Jeremy and neither one of them could remember a time when they didn’t know each other. Their parents were friends and they even went to the same church.

Although Jeremy and Leslie were friends, they hardly saw each other. Leslie played volleyball and was on the swim team at school. She also was an active 4-H member and always took her pet rabbits to the county fair. Her favorite rabbit’s name was Samson. He was a black and white, long-haired Dutch, and a grand champion! Some of the kids in her 4-H club would raise their rabbits and sell them in the Market Class. It made Leslie sick at her stomach whenever she thought about what would happen to old Sampson if he ever went to the market.

Neither Jeremy nor Leslie enjoyed their Youth Group at church very much, since their new minister came. When Pastor Dolittle was their minister the youth group was awesome. The church would rent out the gym at the local school and the swimming pool at the community center once every month. The kids could go swimming and play basketball all they wanted, plus invite all of their friends to come too. It was a blast! Jeremy loved those basketball nights. He was one of the best ball handlers at the Franklin Street Middle School, and the coach told him that he would be able to play Junior Varsity his freshman year, if he kept his grades up.

However, that was then, and this is now. Pastor Dolittle moved to another church out of State, and hardly anyone heard from him any more. The new minister didn’t think that it was worth the money to rent the gym anymore, so “youth group” turned into another Sunday School lesson that was as boring as dirt.

Since Jeremy and Leslie didn't really want to go to church, it wasn't hard for their parents to start missing worship services too. It seemed like there was always a ball practice, a meeting, or something else that was "more important" than attending church. Leslie never really felt guilty for not attending church more than what she did, but every once in a while she wondered if something was missing in her life. One evening Leslie was walking home from a 4-H meeting when she suddenly noticed the night sky. The stars were shining so brightly that they seemed like they were close enough to touch. Leslie stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, staring into the sky for the longest time. As she looked into the sky that night a chill ran down her back and the emptiness in her heart overwhelmed her. She didn't know why, but she knew that she had to talk to Jeremy, and she needed to talk to him right away!

Monday:

"How stupid do these people think that we are?" asked Leslie, as the high school graduation monitor asked them to line up "just one more time." It had been a long day, rehearsal was running late, and Leslie lost her characteristic good humor. "We have already been through this three times; it's time to get this show on the road!" she said to no one in particular. The truth is, Leslie was upset about more than just the events of the day.

As far as Leslie was concerned, Jeremy was being a pain in the posterior. Over the past four years both Jeremy and Leslie had grown up a lot. Leslie pursued her love for volleyball and was named to the All-State Girls' High School Volleyball Team. She would receive a full scholarship from their local State College, if she decided to go there. Leslie had also developed in other ways as well. For instance, as girls often do, she went from that awkward tomboy stage to being simply stunning. She was elected as the Homecoming Queen and voted as the "most popular girl" by her graduating class. Her high school Yearbook had at least a dozen different pictures of Leslie.

Jeremy played varsity basketball for three years, and was offered a college scholarship by a university in a neighboring state. Although Jeremy had been dating Leslie for the past two years, he was actually thinking about going away to college. "After all," Jeremy said, "it is a good opportunity." Leslie was so upset, she was beside herself. It was as if each scene of Jeremy telling Leslie that he loved her was running on a loop through her mind. No matter how hard she tried, she just couldn't get it out of her head. She was beginning to seriously question whether Jeremy even knew what real love meant.

Leslie sat silent and motionless in the doctor's office the next day. "Are you going to be alright Miss?" asked the doctor through a thick accent. "The reason that you feel like you have the flu is because your test is positive," repeated the doctor. "Your due date will be soon after the first of the year," he said matter-of-factly. "Please start taking these vitamins . . ." Leslie felt like she was having an out-of-the-body experience. She could see herself in the room with the doctor, but it was like she wasn't there. It was weird! Her whole life changed with those few words, "the test is positive." How would she tell her parents? What would happen to her college scholarship? Jeremy! Oh, Jeremy!

Jeremy's friends in high school were the "wild ones." Even though Jeremy got good grades, he didn't really earn them. Studies came easy to him. He had a natural talent in

basketball too. The only thing that he applied himself to was parties on the weekends, after the game. Since his parents divorced his freshman year of high school, Jeremy didn't really try to excel at anything. It was as if the only thing that mattered to Jeremy was his friends.

The party last month was a hum-dinger. Everyone was there, the party of the year, the end of school blow-out. Jeremy convinced Leslie to have a "harmless little glass of wine." "Everyone else was drinking something, so why not us" thought Leslie, "after all, what can come of one little taste?"

After several "little tastes" Leslie and Jeremy followed the crowd once again. Only this time, it wasn't about drinking or drugs. It was about saying "goodbye to high school" and "if you really loved me, you would show me." They fell for that old line which has ruined thousands of lives, along with about half of the people at the party. That night, Leslie and Jeremy found a private place and discovered secrets that only married people should know.

The funny thing is, that big empty place that they both felt whenever they looked at the stars, now seemed like it was being filled with darkness. In the quiet moments, they both felt terribly alone, and just now, for some reason, Leslie felt dirty, actually filthy, and ugly, and dirty. She knew that she had done something, and no matter how sorry she was, it could never be undone.

As Leslie reached for the bottle of her mothers' sleeping pills, she wondered what it would feel like to be dead.

Tuesday:

The walls of the Planned Parenthood waiting room felt like they had collapsed and crushed Jeremy as he was waiting for Leslie to finish her appointment. Jeremy felt like he couldn't breathe. His mind was whirling, when suddenly, as if he were being awakened from a coma; he finally realized that a nice matronly woman was standing right in front of him calling his name.

The nice lady led Jeremy to a room where Leslie and another woman were waiting. The other woman introduced herself as Mrs. Kovorian, a counselor with the crisis pregnancy unit. She very politely pointed out that since the pregnancy was this early, the fetal tissue could easily be removed, and it didn't need to interfere with their college plans at all. As a matter of fact, their parents didn't even need to know about their decision. "Quick, simple, and 100% effective" is what the counselor said. "No problems, only a slight inconvenience," she continued. The best part echoed Mrs. Kovorian, "is that since you are both under 18, the procedure is absolutely free!"

It should have been the happiest weekend of his life, but for Jeremy the thought of being a teenage father plunged him into the deepest darkness he had ever known. He didn't even realize that he had buried such bad feelings about his own father deep in his heart. Tears ran down Jeremy's cheeks as feelings of abandonment, isolation, rejection, and guilt washed over him. He thought that getting a girl pregnant would make him feel like a real man; instead it made him feel like the loser of the century. If he would have known then, how he was going to feel now, he would have never drank that beer and would have left that stupid party early.

The ring of Jeremy's cell phone called him back to reality. It was Leslie. She was in tears too. When she got home from Planned Parenthood the mail was waiting for her in the mailbox. On top of the stack of mail was an invitation to a new church. She excitedly read the text to Jeremy. It said it was a "church that met the needs of real people." It went on to say that they offered "contemporary worship" and "relevant messages from the Bible that applied to everyday life." "I don't know why, but I think that we should talk to these people before we make any other decisions," said Leslie. Jeremy didn't like the idea of running to a priest to ask for help cleaning up his own messes. However, he reluctantly agreed because Leslie was so insistent.

Jeremy and Leslie had such a busy day ahead of them it was unbelievable. They were going to Discover Christian Church for the 9:00 AM service. Then they would grab a quick brunch and run down to the high school to get ready for graduation. Then, after the Commencement, they would have an open house at Leslie's house. It was there that they planned to make their big announcement.

Discover Christian Church took them totally by surprise! When they pulled into the parking lot there were people there to help them with directions. Leslie especially noticed that one of the parking attendants helped a new mother with her baby, and stroller, and diaper bags. A shiver went up her spine thinking that the new mother might be her in a few months.

When they entered the building, they were expecting to see the same old, tired, dollar Cinema that they had been to thousands of times. They couldn't believe how the place was transformed. There was a huge banner with the name of the church spanning the lobby. In one corner was a book display. There were several booths set up throughout the lobby, inviting people to be a part of a small group for both friendship and service. Jeremy thought that the best part so far was the fresh donuts and Starbucks coffee being served, *for free*, by some of the kindest people he had ever met.

Neither Jeremy nor Leslie remembered much about the sermon that morning. They just knew that the music rocked and it seemed like the preacher was talking directly to them. He spoke so very clearly about the love of God and forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ that Jesus seemed to come to life before their very eyes. It seemed crazy to Jeremy that he could go to church all of those years and never remember hearing a message about having a personal relationship with God. The thought that God would be his Father, and that he would gladly adopt him as his very own child, captured Jeremy's heart. He would, he must have a relationship with this awesome God.

After church, Jeremy and Leslie found the preacher. They talked for a long time. He told them about a way that they could have their mistakes and disobedience to God washed away. At the same time, God would come to live in their hearts and, best of all, God would give them a new life. Leslie thought that if anyone needed a do-over, it was her. However, Jeremy spoke first, "Dude, hook me up with God!"

Wednesday:

Leslie's hair was still damp from her baptism as she lined up for the graduation ceremony. The tickets for seating were limited, so her parents were the only ones who were there to cheer for her from her immediate family. As she marched past them her

mind was on the conversation that she would soon have with them. How could she possibly explain everything that she had been through these past two days? From the corner of her eyes, she saw how proud they looked. They were video taping the entire ceremony, so that they could show it to everyone at the reception later. Even though it was supposed to be a surprise, they were planning to give Leslie an all-inclusive trip to Cancun as a graduation present. (Leslie knew this because she accidentally saw the tickets one day when she got the mail.) She loved her parents so much; she prayed that they would somehow be able to understand and forgive her.

Leslie's mind was definitely not on the speeches of the class valedictorian and state congressman who came to address their class that day. Instead, she felt a little strange, and distracted. In her mind she was still rejoicing about her decision to become a Christian that morning. Something filled her heart and warmed her inside in a way that she had never known before. For the first time in her life, she felt completely loved and fully alive. Leslie later said that she "would have called you a liar, if you would have told her two months ago that she would have become a Christian and graduated from high school, both on the same day."

Jeremy and Leslie both realized at the same time how much they knew, and how little they knew. The State Board of Education was certifying that they knew enough to go to college and live on their own. They were grown up now; they could make their own decisions. The United States Government was telling them that they knew enough to vote and be responsible citizens. However, they knew deep inside that they didn't know Jesus very well at all. Sure they had accepted His forgiveness and were baptized, but who was this God-man? How would He change their lives? What did He really expect from them? They were going to receive a Bible next Sunday at Discover church. On their way to graduation they both decided that they were going to study it so that, if nothing else, they could discover what it meant to have Jesus as their best friend.

Jeremy heard his name announced, and then he walked across the stage to get his diploma. He shook hands with Principal Myers, then Superintendent Glover gave him his diploma, and then the chairman of the School Board shook his hand. He was actually pretty proud that he was able to finish high school and get a full scholarship to college. He would have been the first one in his family to get a college education. A sense of dread came over him as he saw his mom sitting with Leslie's parents. On the far side of the auditorium he saw his dad and his brand new step-mom applauding as he slowly made his way down the stairs and back to his seat. He thought that if he could only turn himself into a worm, he would crawl into a hole somewhere until this was all over.

Leslie's mom interrupted Leslie and Jeremy as they sat quietly talking in the backyard of Leslie's house during the reception. "There's a phone call for you, they said it was urgent and confidential. What's going on?"

Leslie wanted to burst and spill out every thought that came to her mind. However, when she opened her mouth to speak, nothing came out! If you knew Leslie, you would know just how unusual that was. Since she couldn't speak at the moment, she just trotted off to answer the phone. "Hello, is this Miss. Leslie Hale?" The voice on the other end of the phone asked in such a strange way that Leslie was taken back by it. "Yes, yes this is Leslie, who is this?" "This is Doctor Noel, from the Community Health Clinic." The woman, with an apologetic voice, began to explain something. All Leslie heard was "mix-up. . . new lab technician . . . sorry for the inconvenience . . . you are definitely not

pregnant at this time . . . drink lots of fluid for flu symptoms . . . if any questions see your family doctor.”

Leslie almost fainted as she hung up the phone. She hadn't noticed that Jeremy was standing right behind her. He instinctively put his arms out to catch her, but she didn't actually faint. However, she did fall into his arms and began sobbing.

Leslie's mom interrupted them a second time. “Alright! You guys you have been alone long enough,” she said. “Some of the people are leaving and your aunts and uncles would like to see you before they leave.” As they went out into the back yard, Jeremy called everyone together and asked them to sit down for an important announcement. Leslie moved to stand beside Jeremy. They joined hands, took a deep breath, and Leslie finally told them what was on her heart.

Thursday:

Leslie just stared at the postcard in disbelief. She couldn't believe that it had been five years since that wonderful/awful graduation weekend. As she contemplated attending the five year reunion of her graduating class, her thoughts were interrupted by the phone ringing. The caller I.D. let her know that it was Jeremy. He was calling her from the church office. He just wanted to say “hi” and see if they were still hosting their small group on Thursday evening. Jeremy wanted to invite a couple of unchurched guys that he met at the health club while they were playing basketball.

Basketball was still one of Jeremy's great passions. He made the varsity team at their local state college. Although he wasn't able to use his scholarship, he was still able to play ball and get a good education at the same time. But most of all, Jeremy was able to pursue his “first love.” If you spent any time at all with Jeremy, you would know that he loved Jesus more than anything. Ever since he found out about the love and forgiveness that can be found in Jesus, his life would never be the same again. Some people may have thought that he was a fanatic, but he simply trusted Jesus to lead him and show him the way to live.

For instance, after Preacher Dan hooked him up with God, Jeremy felt called to be a part of Discover Christian Church. After a lot of prayer, he decided to go to a local college so that he could serve on the launch team to build a growing church. Jeremy received a spiritual gift that helped him to be exceptionally excellent at working with computer software, including developing awesome web sites and outstanding PowerPoint presentations. Even though he was younger than any of the staff, he was the church's go-to IT guy. That is probably why he was called to be a full-time staff member for the Momentum Christian Church, which was the first daughter church of Discover.

Besides his computer skill, Jeremy was known for sharing his testimony. He would tell them that God not only gave him a new life, but He also gave him Leslie, the most wonderful wife in the world. God, in His wisdom, had picked out the perfect mate for Jeremy to share God's perfect life with. Even though they nearly blew it their senior year of High School, God allowed them to have a place in His Kingdom. Because of what Jeremy went through with Leslie, he knew that God saves sinners, and he would tell that to anyone who would listen.

The air of their apartment was filled with such excitement that everyone just knew that God was about to do something awesome. Jeremy had everyone go around the room and introduce themselves. After a short time of prayer and Bible study, Jeremy told everyone that he hoped that they would feel called by God to be on the launch team for Momentum. This new church would be about awesome worship, loving people, and helping them to find and follow God. Leslie served some of her famous peanut butter pie for dessert, but everyone was too excited to eat. The meeting ended too soon, because everyone wanted to stay longer. Everyone agreed to at least pray about following Jesus as He used their group to help plant a new church. It was obvious that God was working!

Tears ran down Leslie's cheek as she reminisced with her classmate, Jennifer, about their classmates. Several of the ones who were at that stupid "end of school party" were killed in an automobile accident, because Caleb insisted that he was not too drunk to drive. Carrie, who never seemed to fit in, got so depressed that she started cutting herself to deal with the pain in her heart. One night she cut her wrists too deep and ended up dying in a pool of her own blood. Trevor, the class clown, got wasted on drugs and has bounced in and out of rehab centers like a yoyo. MaryAnn and Ashley both ended up getting abortions. Kyle, who got Shannon pregnant in the 9th grade, died of AIDS on his 21st birthday. A few of the lucky kids were able to escape, go to college, and start a new life somewhere else.

Leslie knew that she was one of the blessed ones. At that moment, Leslie realized in a dramatic way that the life that Jesus offers and the life that Satan gives are two different lives indeed!

"What is your secret Leslie?" asked Jen. "You certainly have something. I'm not sure what it is, but I want it in my life too." Leslie knew that she had to share Jesus with Jen. "Well, it all started when I finally realized that real life . . .

Epilogue:

Leslie and Jen talked a lot over the next couple of weeks. They set apart several special times just to study the Scripture together. Finally, on a bright, sunny Sunday morning, Jen gave her heart to Jesus too. After the worship service at Momentum Christian Church, Leslie and Jeremy took Jen out to the swimming pool of the Community Center where the church was meeting, to immerse Jen into Christ.

Almost two hundred people crowded around the edge of the pool and encouraged Jen as she repeated the words, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." As Jeremy and Leslie lowered Jen into the water, Jeremy said that she was being baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." When she came out of the water a change came over Jen. She had always been a good person, but she knew that she wasn't perfect. As a matter of fact, almost every day of her life, Jen wrestled with depression. She almost never smiled, because she seldom felt any joy. However, the water of baptism seemed to wash that away. Standing there in that swimming pool, soaking wet, a new person appeared. Jen smiled the biggest, most radiant smile that anyone had ever seen! After her baptism, it was hard to find Jen not smiling, with a heart filled with the joy of the Lord!

That very afternoon Leslie received a phone call from Jen. She had two friends that she was telling about how she had become a believer, and a part of Momentum Christian Church, and why she was so changed. The three of them were wondering if they could get together to study the Bible with Leslie and learn more about Jesus.

Jeremy was already meeting one of his basketball friends for breakfast every week to study the Bible. They met at a restaurant that was convenient for both of them. Little did they know when they started meeting, that they would have so much impact for God and the Kingdom. They always tried to be nice to the waitress and the other people, but they never expected them to start asking them about where they went to church. It wasn't long before two of the regulars and one of the waitresses began showing up at Momentum.

It had been a long day for Jeremy. One of the computers at church had crashed for some reason. He ended up completely reformatting the hard drive and reconfiguring it. The PowerPoint for the Sunday service was late. Jack, one of the members of the church was in the hospital in critical condition and Jeremy was the only staff member available to call on him. So on the way home Jeremy stopped by to pray with Jack and minister to him.

As Jeremy drove home through rush hour traffic, he praised God for his ministry. He remembered some of the Bible stories about Jesus being the Light of Life, the bread of life, and the living water. Jeremy felt especially blessed that he could help people find real life in Christ. He prayed that he would always be available to God to both follow the Way, the Truth, and the Life and to show Him to others.

When Jeremy walked through the door of his apartment the aroma of his favorite dinner filled his senses. He smelled ham and scalloped potatoes. As he got a drink of ice water, he noticed a peanut butter pie in the refrigerator. He was thankful again, that God had given him a wife like Leslie.

After dinner Jeremy changed his clothes into something more comfortable. This was one of the only nights this week that Jeremy wasn't busy with meetings. Just as he prepared to relax a little bit, Leslie joined him on the sofa. She had gone to Blockbuster and rented a special movie for them to watch. As she grabbed the remote and turned on the TV and DVD they sat back to see the title, "Baby Talk" scroll across the screen. Suddenly, as if he were struck by a bolt of lightning, Jeremy sat up and excitedly looked into Leslie's eyes . . .