

A Community In Mourning

Dan Nelson – pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

Once again our community is in mourning. We are facing the tragic loss of one of our own and it seems everybody is shaken. A lot of people knew Patrick. Growing up in the Ojai Valley really doesn't allow for anonymity. Through school, church, and sports, relationships are built and his sudden departure has left a gaping hole in many lives. His family and closest friends are cut to the core and even those who knew him casually are grieving.

Walking the Nordhoff campus this week has been a whirlwind of emotion and authentic conversation with those who are attempting to find a way to handle the news. Students and faculty alike are hurting. Tears are prevalent, but so are anger, confusion, denial, and shock. "I am mad", someone announced, "at whoever provided this drug to a high school student." Trying to explain their glazed looks and monotone voices, two conferring teens uttered, "It's like we don't believe it really happened. We are expecting to turn a corner and see him."

Listening to what they had to say disclosed that most of the discussions at the lunch table this week seemed to center on this one overshadowing image, that for most of these youth, it was the first time to lose someone that they knew personally and was their own age. "He was in my class, he was so funny. Pat was always telling stories" one freshman shared. Another laughed as she remembered "He asked me for a dollar almost everyday." "I've known him since I was three" voiced a wounded heart as she wiped tears from her eyes. "We were like best friends", expressed another as he gazed at me through wet, darkened eyes, "We always hung out together."

Among the myriad of feelings, I also am hearing a lot about fear: not only anxiety about his death but of possible future loss. Many students know at least someone else that is dabbling in drug use. They are horrified of what could happen next. They don't want to judge their friends but still wish that this calamity will catapult change. Some are saying there are lessons that could be learned here and are hoping that somehow through this crushing fatality there could be some sense of meaning if another life can be saved.

I have witnessed that a lot of people genuinely care. "How is Pat's family?" his friends want to know. Devastated! Shattered! And the message to those that loved him the most is that Pat's life and death has affected a lot of people, and our hearts break together with you. And, many people are praying for you, and for each other.

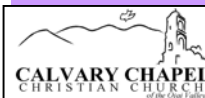
Sometimes it is difficult to make sense of things. Since mortality is a bond that all of us share in our humanity, one might presume that

we would understand death better. Jesus taught about our eminent expiry and eternity beyond this life with authority and then provided testimony with his own public death and subsequent resurrection. Jesus proclaimed victory over death and challenged all of us to come to Him with our hopes, dreams, passions, and pain, and find rest for our souls. Some are doing that this week; finding rest in Jesus.

I am so grateful for the role of Pastor Chad and each of the ministers that have rallied to reinforce support for those that are hardest hit. Together with the wonderful administration at Nordhoff, Matilija, and Ojai Christian Academy, and from friends throughout the valley, there is a throng of condolence and genuine consolation from so many. This is another reminder that we are one community and we impact each other. A service will be held this Sunday afternoon at 3PM, at Ojai Valley Community Church. I am confident that it will be packed with people. One student told me, "I think the whole freshman class will be there to honor Pat and support his family."

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

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