

Teens, triumph, tragedy

Dan Nelson – pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

It's been a summer of adventure in worshipping and serving Jesus and this week was no exception. For me, the week began with a carload of teenagers and the end of a three-day music festival in Monterey, Calif.; six stages, thousands of people, tent camping, extreme music, lifesaving messages, and a sea of sunglasses jumping to the deafening sounds used by God that produced a mixture of adrenaline rush and spiritual renewal. Throw in an all-night drive to get to Sunday morning services back here in the Ojai Valley, an incredible interaction with the spirit of God at church, afternoon at the beach with surfboards, volleyball, food, singing, and a message from our newest friends.

During one of the concerts at Spirit West Coast, the band performing began talking about a group called [Team Self Destruct](#) and encouraged everyone to check them out and discover what they are about. We had seen them at their booth previously but didn't really have time to stop and see what all the craziness was about. I don't have space to explain, except to say it seemed like a wild party at their place. After hearing the exhortation, we made a point to talk to these guys and learned that they are extreme skaters from Arkansas on tour at various scenes hitting skate parks and reaching out to kids with the message of love and hope. Their logo and name seemed a bit sketchy, or maybe just edgy, so I asked what it meant. After explaining that they loved it when people asked this, they were quick to show me the verses that call us to die to ourselves, our selfish indulgences and foolish arrogance, in order to pursue the calling of God in living abundantly for the benefit of others. I knew I liked them and told them about our own plans for our surf and skate outreach and recruited their help regarding the skate part. It turns out they needed our assistance on the surfing side since none of these super skilled land boarders knew how. Oh yeah! Sunday afternoon it came together for all of us at Bates Beach and it was awesome! And these teens with tattoos and face piercings are a succinct reminder that Jesus changes the inside — not necessarily the outside — and they have something worthwhile to say.


In the midst of these wonderful weekend exploits, some were encountering great pain. One local teen lost her dad after having already lost her mom not long ago. She is dealing with real tragedy. Because she is greatly loved by her friends, many of

them gathered to pray for her at my house. It was beautiful to see such genuine care that so many from various spiritual backgrounds would stop their world from spinning to halt everything for a time to love their friend enough to pray for her. We talked about the dumb things people say about death sometimes, trying to be helpful. In the end, there is only one who actually knows what he is talking about. He is the same one that has the credibility to understand our pain. He is the only one that is honest enough to deal with death head on and omnipotent to proclaim victory over its ultimate effects. It's so sad that so many people refuse the message of Jesus to wrangle with mysticism, philosophies, and unhelpful facades. Recently I read a remark that we should embrace the darkness. What does that mean? It sounds like a badly written line from "Star Wars." This illusion to profundity breeds confusion and will not help a grieving teen any more than placing hope in a charismatic politician, new legislation, or even future science and medical advancements. How will all of that help her right now? It doesn't. Jesus' simple call continues to beckon: come to me.

Another day, a different group of teens; this time at Hurricane Harbor at Six Flags yesterday; lots of water and loads of fun. Here the biggest painful experience was a sore stomach after lunch or the fear factor of plummeting down a slide that leaves everything you just ate a hundred feet above. The same message that carries one through the most difficult times imaginable also escorts another to joys in friendship and a hope-filled life. What is so difficult? Can't we just give them Jesus?

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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.


CALVARY CHAPEL
CHRISTIAN CHURCH
of the Ojai Valley
P.O. Box 1443
Ojai, CA 93024
(805) 640-9498
www.calvaryojai.org

Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:30am

Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave, Oak View

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195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

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