

THE STORY OF JUNIOR MISSIONS OUTREACH WEEK AND HOW IT BEGAN

By Dr. Mike Duffy

The Apostle Paul was writing to encourage the believers in Rome when he made this statement, *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”* Romans 15:4. What he was saying is this; when these believers looked back at the Old Testament and saw how God worked in the lives of the people then, it would help the Romans understand how God was working in their lives today, and that would result in hope.

When one has the benefit of hindsight, it is amazing to look back and see how God orchestrates His work and uses His people. That is what this story is about. In His time, and with His patience, God moves to accomplish His will. Along the way there are many circumstances and happenings that can only be recognized by looking back. Witnessing, remembering, and testifying of one’s experience brings the picture of God’s work into focus. This is the story of the amazing work of God using ordinary people, and the humble context of Christian camping, for more than a quarter century, to transform many lives for His glory. It is the story of how this unique ministry came to be. As the former Director of Camp Chetek, and the founder of Junior Missions Outreach Week, I can now see more clearly how God used some unique experiences in my own life to plant the seed and provide the vision to bring to pass the wonderful ministry known as Junior Missions Outreach Week at Camp Chetek.

PLANTING OF A SEED

The first of these experiences was my family’s first exposure to Camp Chetek. During the summer of 1984, our family attended a week of Family Camp at Camp Chetek. It was a refreshing break following my first year of Bible College. The preaching and fellowship were great that week. Pastors Collins Glen was the keynote speaker, and the missionary was John Raehl, missionary to Brazil. We enjoyed a lot of the activities that were available to the campers, and we were fed well! The accommodations for our family, however, were “less than stellar.” We were split up into two “open-air” rooms above the Dining Hall. My wife Geri and our two girls were in one room, and my son Mick and I were across the hall in another room. We used the shower house in a building next to the Dining Hall. This was quite different from the comforts of our home we were used to. The week did produce some good memories though. We met some new friends and were challenged and encouraged by the preaching and teaching of God’s Word.

One humorous experience we still talk about happened as we got ready for bed one night. As we began to settle into our rooms, there was a bat flying through the rafters of that long, old building, back and forth over each of the fifteen or so “open-air” rooms. Screams would begin at one end of the building and cascade to the other end as the bat flew back and forth. We could hear my wife and daughters as the bat flew over their room. Mick and I thought it was hilarious until the bat took a dive toward Mick’s face. He screamed and quickly pulled his sleeping bag over his head to protect himself! While we were both laughing, something stirred my mischievous nature, and I tossed a rolled-up pair of black socks over the walls into the girl’s room! There was a loud scream, then a thunderous crash as Kelly jumped from the top bunk down to her mother’s bed. To say the least, not everyone was amused! Eventually the bat flew down the staircase and the episode ended.

My first impressions of Camp Chetek from that week were mixed. I thought the concept of Christian Camping was awesome, however, the facilities there were old and not well kept. And when I looked back at our experience, I thought there were a lot of missed opportunities, perhaps because of lack of organization, and a “this is how we’ve always done it” mindset. I found myself thinking or saying, “What if?” over and over. I say this not to be critical, but to point out that little did I realize then, but God was beginning to form a burden in my heart and shaping a vision of what was to come.

God was also using another experience in a camp ministry as He formulated His plan for Junior Missions Outreach Week. In the summer of 1988, I was the speaker for seven consecutive weeks at Camp Assurance in Georgetown, IL. Speaking in camps had already become a regular part of my itinerant ministry. We spent most of each summer at Christian camps. That summer at Camp Assurance we had weeks for both Junior age kids and teens. During a couple of the weeks there was a particular volunteer worker who came from Eagledale Baptist Church in Indianapolis, not only transporting kids, but also serving as a camp counselor. He brought kids from inner-city Indianapolis to camp at his own expense in his big white Cadillac. I came to understand that this man, a single man who was an attorney by profession, did this every summer. What a neat ministry, and what wonderful stewardship of his talents and treasures! His example and story impacted my heart! A seed was clearly planted by this experience.

During the winter of 1989 I had been on a mission trip to what was then the USSR, Russia, and Ukraine specifically. Perestroika (restructuring) and Glastnost (openness) were in full swing bringing major change to that nation. It was an amazing time! We transported nearly 20,000 Bibles into those countries and had wonderful opportunities to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ multiple times every day. Our trip included ministry in four major cities, Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Kyiv, Lvov, and Moscow. Thrilling times for sure. We preached in the streets, the town squares, the subways, some universities and schools and some government buildings. The hunger for the Truth was incredible! Upon returning to America, we immediately began planning to return in the summer of 1991. However, God’s plans were different than ours.

As we approached our expected departure date in mid-August of 1991, we got news that the Russian travel agency had “made an error” in scheduling our group. We were told we were not scheduled for 1991, but rather a year later in the summer of 1992. At least that was the story they told us. How that impacted us was my family and I now had a large void on our travel calendar. Our next scheduled meeting was not until late September at Greendale, Wisconsin. My wife and I decided that since the calendar had opened up, we would take advantage of the time for some spiritual refreshing, and so, we decided to attend the annual meetings of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Baptist Churches, which was being held in Viroqua, WI that fall. It would be a good time to hear some preaching and to fellowship with friends in the ministry we had served and served with.

As the first session of that meeting was about to start, Pastor Glen Teasdale, who was seated directly in front of us with his wife, turned around and asked me if I would consider directing the ministry of Camp Chetek while basing our ministry of itinerant evangelism out of Chetek. Although this came as a complete surprise to me, the ministry at Camp Chetek had been on my mind often since our initial experience there. All the “what if” questions came back to my mind occasionally. We spoke later that day and agreed to meet with the Board of Directors of Camp Chetek in just a few weeks while we were holding evangelistic meetings at First Baptist Church in Hillsdale, WI. This was just a few miles from Chetek. The week following the WFBC meeting in Viroqua we had a series of revival/evangelistic

meetings in Greendale, Wisconsin, not too far from Waukesha, WI where Pastor Teasdale pastored a church, and so we met during the week to discuss the possibility further in preparation for the Board Meeting. At the Board Meeting the leadership extended a call to me to serve as the director of the camp, and I accepted the call. I was now the Camp Director of Camp Chetek. God's plan was taking shape!

When news of the leadership change at Camp Chetek got out, one of the men that had been on the trip to Russia and Ukraine, Evangelist Tom Farrell, called me and invited me to attend the staff training in May at The Wilds, a large Christian camping ministry in South Carolina. Tom participated in this camp and their staff training regularly. This would prove to be a big boost to our ministry at Camp Chetek. I used what I learned at the Wilds to create a staff training program for Camp Chetek. Learning how to assemble a summer staff and prepare them for summer camp ministry was a critical element in preparing us to launch Junior Missions Outreach Week the next year.

THE VISION AND THE MEANING OF THE NAME

My experiences with other camps, and now the new opportunity as the Camp Director to shape and expand the ministry at Camp Chetek, created and supported the vision God was developing in my mind. We would call this new ministry *Junior Missions Outreach Week*. The name was quite intentional, and it was in line with our newly defined mission statement, which read, *"Camp Chetek's purpose, as a fundamental Baptist ministry, is to glorify God by using the controlled environment of Christian camping to help churches of like faith and practice fulfill the great commission to evangelize the lost and make disciples of those who believe."* We regularly promoted the camp by offering every camper HELP – Hope, Encouragement, Leadership, and Purpose. So here is a deeper dive into our thinking regarding the name, which simply described the vision:

- **Junior** - Our effort would be toward Junior-age kids, typically 3rd through 6th grades. This seemed like the most logical age group on which to focus as camp would likely be very interesting to them and they are young enough that we might make a significant life-impact by providing an intensive dose of love and some solid, Biblical instruction. We described this target crowd as *"inner-city, under-privileged, unchurched boys and girls ages 9-12."* Planting and watering are important Bible principles when it comes to Gospel work and this looked like the perfect opportunity to do it. The interest and demand would make this age a "flexible guideline" as brothers and sisters of kids in this age group who were beyond these boundaries often wanted to participate, too. It would prove to be a delicate balance!
- **Missions** – This would truly be characterized as "mission" work, Great Commission work. We would engage others in accomplishing the work. We would need people with financial resources to provide the scholarship money so the ministry of Camp Chetek could sustain this effort. We would need volunteers to labor with us to minister to these kids and operate the program. It would take a good number of people to pull this off. The work would be "labor intensive" for sure! It would take an army of prayer-warriors holding this effort up before the throne of God. We anticipated spiritual warfare as this initiative certainly was invading some of the devil's strongholds!
- **Outreach** – We would engage inner-city church ministries to locate the kids who would receive the scholarships and then transport them to camp. These local churches would also follow-up with the campers after the week was over to continue ministering to them, and to reach the rest

of their families. The camp was doing outreach by helping the local churches with their outreach. This was truly a representation of our mission statement.

- **Week** – This would be a dedicated week in the Camp’s schedule, usually the first week after staff training so the team was “fresh and excited.” We would use a regular “camp week” on the calendar with kids coming in on Monday and leaving Saturday morning. And as our counselors and staff would come to find out, a week was quite enough! The work was exhausting in every way, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

SHARING THE VISION

Vision casting is an important responsibility of leadership. On April 12, 1992, I began a week of Evangelistic/revival meetings in Gibraltar, MI with Pastor Mark Buhr. We had been at this church two years earlier and had a good week of evangelistic/revival meetings. After the Sunday morning service, my wife, our daughters, and I were invited to have dinner with the Buhr family. As we enjoyed dinner and fellowship, Pastor Buhr asked about our new ministry at Camp Chetek. One of the things I shared with him was our vision to help reach inner-city kids. Pastoring just a short drive down-river from Detroit, he understood the vision and was quite interested in the concept. He asked if I would share it with his congregation in the Sunday evening service that night, and so I did.

You never know who is in a crowd of people when you are speaking or preaching. And as any experienced preacher would know, you never know what God is going to accomplish in a service or with a message. That Sunday evening there was a dear lady present listening intently as we shared the vision. She came to us later that week and shared her own story with us. She had lost her husband several months earlier, a godly man who loved the Lord. She told us how there were many gifts of money given at the funeral and that she had been praying regularly for God to show her how to use that money. It was \$2,750! Sharing our vision provided the answer. This elderly widow handed us a check and said that God had answered her prayer and she wanted to use the money to help us initiate the Junior Missions Outreach Week. It was enough to fund twenty-five kids that first year, and the inner-city churches had no problem finding the willing souls to be part of that first week of camp. It has always amazed me that God would take the life of one of His servants using the occasion to provide the resources and to save many souls! That is how I viewed His provision, God taking the life of one to bring eternal life to many.

In the early years of Junior Missions Outreach Week, we raised money by sharing the opportunity in a brochure that was widely distributed. In that brochure there was a section *“From the Camp Director and Founder of Junior Missions Outreach Week.”* It read as follows:

“I cannot think of a better way to invest God’s money than by sponsoring a child to come to this week of camp. To get the Gospel to a child at an early age is very important. It does not take long for the “cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in” to “choke the Word,” so that, “it becometh unfruitful.”
Mark 4:19

There are so many distractions in life that keep people from dealing honestly with God about the salvation of their soul. It seems like the older one gets, the more distractions there are.

Please consider helping us sow the seed to a child in need!”

THE INITIAL OUTREACH

Our first year we reached out to several churches in inner-city Minneapolis and Milwaukee. Three churches responded to our invitation to participate. Two of the churches expressed the great value it was to their ministry and continued to bring campers every year. They were Gospel Light Baptist Church and Family Baptist Church, both in Minneapolis, both just a couple hour drive from the camp.

BREAKING THE MOLD OF TRADITION – THE DEVELOPMENT/ADAPTION OF SPECIAL CURRICULUM

The first year of Junior Missions Outreach Week we operated on a “traditional” Christian camp schedule for each day, including a chapel program in the morning and an evening service. We invited an itinerant evangelist, Stan Harris, to do the preaching. It was a learning experience for sure. Expecting to have kids with no church experience, and many with no personal discipline to speak of, and very little appetite for Bible preaching or teaching, to embrace this schedule proved to be a bad expectation. We had more occasions of chaos than I care to mention. A 40-minute sermon to kids of this background and this age just was not going to be the best approach.

A year or so earlier I had been gathering all kinds of discipleship material from publishers and ministries so I could share these resources with pastors as we traveled and encourage them in the difficult work of disciple-making. One of the books I obtained was a discipleship curriculum from New Tribes Mission. It was called Firm Foundations by Trevor McIlwain. There were approximately fifty short lessons taking a person with no Bible experience from creation to Christ and the resurrection. I loved the concept, and we began a process to develop a curriculum that might prove more effective with these kids than our traditional camp schedule.

We wanted the teaching times to seem to the campers to be more impromptu. This prevented kids from anticipating the preaching and resisting or rebelling to distract from our program. We wanted to use many different venues as contexts for teaching. For example, we found a nice spot by the obstacle course in the woods, a great spot near the horse corrals, the waterfront steps, and many others where we would have the kids just stop, be seated, and listen to an 8–12-minute message. It worked well for the groups we had! We could communicate effectively in a short period of time and keep the kid’s attention.

We wanted to use as much illustration as we could to help drive home the messages. Many of these kids struggle to learn academically but learn well through visuals and experience. One illustration of particular impact was the crucifixion. We had a staff member hanging from a large cross on the platform in the chapel, depicting the crucifixion of Jesus. We simply marched the kids past it in silence. A short time later we would share with them the story of the crucifixion. It was powerful, and it made a significant impact on the kids.

Our intent with the curriculum and the program was to start with a “clean slate” and introduce the kids to the God of Heaven and His creation, then build their understanding sequentially, line upon line, precept upon precept. We learned a lot from our ministry to these kids that challenged our traditional molds. For example, just the concept of “God the Father” was a challenge to kids who came from a primarily matriarchal society where the concept of a father carried a negative connotation. How could the Father help me and meet my needs when a father has never been part of my life experience?

As we developed this twenty-three-message chronological curriculum of Bible preaching and teaching, our hope was that by the end of the week they had a good glimpse into the big picture of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God, that they understood their condition and position as a lost sinner, and they understood the hope of salvation that was only found in the forgiveness of sin by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Our staff and counseling team was on constant watch to help those under conviction invite Jesus into their lives as Lord and Savior.

TEACHING TEACHERS

Prior to bringing campers in for this special week, we spent a week of intensive training with our program and counseling staff. Many of them came from solid Christian homes and good churches. Their lives could be characterized as somewhat “sheltered.” They lived with structure and accountability most of the time. However, it seemed no amount of training would be sufficient to prepare the young men and women for what was about to come as they spent their first week of summer camp with the campers of Junior Missions Outreach Week. It was culture shock for sure! One could truly characterize experience for them this as eye-opening and heart-breaking. Many of the deep, life-changing spiritual decisions that would be made during Junior Missions Week would be by our staff, adults, and college kids alike. It is interesting to look back now and see how, as we were hoping to impact them, they impacted us!

This past fall, more than 28 years since the beginning of Junior Missions Outreach Week, Randy Tanis sent a video message to my son and me. It was a video of testimony from Randy’s office by a man who had attended Junior Missions Week in one of the early years of this ministry. He shared how camp had changed his life. He is known to us affectionately as “JK” or “Big John.”

When JK arrived at Camp Chetek for the first time, the pastor that brought him shared with me how his mother had sold everything they had that week, including JK’s clothes, to get money to support her drug habit. All JK had to his name was the clothes he was wearing. He had on a pair of shorts, and a t-shirt that was in great need of laundering. He was wearing size 11 gym shoes on his size 16 feet. JK was a very large young man!

My son’s heart was broken for JK when he saw him, and so Mick headed for Farm and Fleet in Rice Lake to get JK some clothes. He knew they had a “big & tall” clothing section. He was able to find some “multiple” X’s t-shirts, and sweatpants there. Shoes, however, would be a bigger challenge. F&F did not carry shoes that large. Mick remembered that there was a Play-It-Again sports shop in Rice Lake, and they often carried gym shoes they acquired from NBA players who had shoe contracts with manufacturers. He arrived at the store and was able to find a pair of Nike basketball shoes, size 16, with the Nike swish! They were orange and white! Back at camp Mick gave the clothes and shoes to JK. He was overwhelmed with this act of love and kindness. It made a huge impact on his life. And he was especially happy with the shoes! Today, JK is serving the Lord and regularly brings kids to Camp Chetek. He loves the camp, and those who continue to make an impact on kids.

When I consider how God planted the seeds in my heart, and arranged circumstance after circumstance, using many of His people in many locations I can only say, “What an amazing plan!” God’s ways are not our ways! He is the master orchestrator! And Junior Missions Outreach Week at Camp Chetek is one shining example of His masterful work! Praise the Lord! And thank you Lord for allowing us to have a part in your wonderful work.