



the gillespies and the Good News

October 13, 2012

FAITHFULNESS AND SPECTACULAR FAILURE

This fall began our most ambitious outreach efforts to date – an attempt to connect with every freshman on campus. A dozen courageous, enthusiastic, inexperienced students met with us for a retreat before school started to hear our crazy plan – 5 different Bible studies and 30 focus groups in the first three weeks of school. To our surprise, and certainly due to the gracious work of God, they didn't balk at the idea, but rather began strategizing with us about how to make this a reality. We talked about how seeking to reach out to the whole campus requires taking big risks, which sometimes won't work out, and decided that when this happened we would deem them "spectacular failures" and celebrate those steps taken in faith rather than being disappointed at the lack of results.

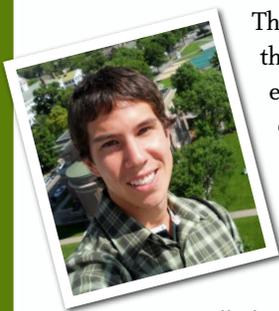


Since the first week of school, five teams of 2-4 upperclass students have been faithfully leading Bible studies in each of the five freshman dorm clusters, all studying the Person of Jesus from the Gospel of John. Most of these upperclassmen have never led a Bible study before, so it has been wonderful to watch their courage, and their growth, as they've sacrificed their time and sought to love the class of 2016.

THE FOCUS GROUPS, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN A SPECTACULAR FAILURE!

Why, you ask? Because no one has been coming to them!

Here's one story of a spectacular focus group failure (and how God came to the rescue!):



The aim of our focus groups was to engage non-Christian students (especially freshmen) over spiritual questions, to get them thinking about spiritual realities, and to potentially open the door to future conversations with them (if they expressed interest). Drew, a 5th year engineering student, volunteered to lead the first one of these groups. He contacted dozens of freshmen in the chosen dorm, bought pizza, and waited. And waited. No one came.

We've coached Drew over the years that evangelism is successful if we depend on God's Spirit and take the initiative to engage others – that results aren't anything that we can control. So we would have been so proud of Drew if he had called it a night right then – he'd sought students out; it wasn't his fault that no one had chosen to come. *You could call it a failure, but a faith-filled one.*

But tenacious, courageous Drew would not be stopped! In the kitchen next to the lounge where he was waiting for students to show up were ... some students. Drew decided to see if they'd be willing to answer his focus group questions. They were, and over the next hour multiple rounds of students came into the kitchen and engaged with one another and with Drew about their spiritual backgrounds, the difference between religion and spirituality, and their opinions of Jesus and of Christians. They had a great conversation, and paved the way for them to think about college as a time to wrestle through the big questions of life.

We've been so grateful to the Lord that Drew attempted the first focus group, for his example has inspired many of our other students to be patient and trust the Lord in their efforts to reach out to others this fall. God is at work! Please pray with us that He would open hearts and guide our staff and Christian students toward opportunities that He wants to use to draw people toward Himself.

ISAIAH UPDATE

Isaiah turned six months old a week ago, and is totally delightful. He loves people, being tickled, eating, looking out the window, and standing up (with help). We take him with us to meet students a lot, and it has been such a joy to us to see how our students love him, and how he loves them. The three of us went to our fall retreat at the end of September and Isaiah not only stole the show, but spent hours hanging out with our students without us. It has been so cool to see the blessing he is to our students who rarely get to spend time with people who aren't their own age, and of course the blessing they are to him, playing with him and loving on him. It's a sweet symbiotic relationship!



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