

Mirroring God's Grace to Teens

Story by Ellen Gaston
Photos by Clarence Paul



Andy Deane, right, junior high pastor at Calvary Chapel Old Bridge (CCOB), NJ, makes Alan Kahn laugh while leading a group game in the youth center.

*“Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.”
“Indeed we do come to You, for You are the LORD our God.”*

Jeremiah 3:22

Andy Deane, the junior high pastor at CC Old Bridge, NJ, was humbled as he read a letter from one of his former students. Again the Lord had redeemed his backslidden years and mirrored that grace in the lives of his students. Remembering how far he had drifted from God's truth and mercy during his turbulent teen years, Andy could only praise and thank the Lord that he had been used in a small way for the furtherance of the kingdom.

In the letter, the student thanked Andy for a blank prayer journal he'd sent when her close friend died. She testified that, a year later, after leafing through her entries, she noticed how her faith had faded with each passing day. Her college life reflected less of her commitment to God. Sinking to her knees, she begged the Lord for forgiveness and rededicated her life to Jesus. In tears, she wrote to Andy, “Once again, without having known it, you've been a part of my life.”

Early on in college, Andy had experienced a similar succumbing to faithlessness and religious pretense. His pretending had stopped on September 11th, 2001. As he was cowering in a chocolate shop to escape the heavy dust clouds created by the falling twin towers down the street, Andy thought he was going to die. Unable to breathe, he realized that he only had minutes to get right with God. Even then, as a New York University sophomore who felt like “a little punk kid,” Andy knew that God would hear him.

“I knew the Gospel; and even though I had so much regret, I knew immediately that God was going to accept me because He's just that merciful and forgiving. So I asked God, ‘Lord, forgive me for my filth, for my sin, and I pray that You would accept me into heaven based on my belief in Jesus Christ. I apologize for not being the example that I needed to be for You.’”

When Andy finally called on God for help, God reminded him that the office building he worked at was across the street. After smashing a locked glass door, Andy was



Students enjoy hanging out with Andy. He feels that reaching this age group is critically important because it's often during junior high that youth's faith in Christ becomes their own.

able to lead the others from the chocolate shop through the dark dust clouds to safety and clear air. He continued to help firemen that day through the aftermath.

As the towers fell around him, Andy realized that God had spared his life. In awe of such sovereignty and intimacy, he asked himself, “Why would God be that involved with me? Why would He answer my prayer even though I've been living a sinful life for years?” He felt God was saying, “Your upbringing is 100 percent true; your Christianity is 100 percent true. You can be miserable the rest of your life and keep sinning, or you can choose and turn and follow Me.”

In the following days, shaken by the events of 9/11, Andy was determined to live as if it were the end times. Having met Pastor Lloyd Pulley of CC Old Bridge, NJ, Andy was in Union Square with him as he shared the Gospel. To Andy's surprise, Lloyd called on him to share his experiences of 9/11 in front of the crowd of 500 people. Andy was nervous and shaking. He had just failed a speech class that semester. Yet as he prepared to speak, calmness washed over him. “All of a sudden I was fine,” Andy remembered. “I began to preach and talk about the power of prayer, about God's protection, and about what He wanted to do for everyone listening.” It was the first sermon he ever gave.

In 2004, Lloyd, having kept in touch with Andy throughout college, saw a pastoral call on his life and invited him to intern with the church staff. Step-by-step, Andy was prepared for pastoral ministry. He went to

staff meetings, counseling sessions, and eventually was asked to pray about leading the junior high ministry.

Six years later, Andy still serves God alongside his wife, Shannon, teaching junior high students at CC Old Bridge. He's never lost the aspect of feeling like a kid. Michael Krauszer, a former junior high student, said, “At heart, Andy is just a really tall middle-schooler who loves Jesus immensely.” And that childlike faith, reasons Patrick Farrell, the assistant pastor at CC Old Bridge, is why the youth group has grown not only in number but in spiritual depth.

“The youth never know what to expect from Andy's teachings,” Patrick said. “He does outrageous things, like using seemingly viable props that unexpectedly burst into flames, to eating chocolate-covered bugs for truth and dare games. I've seen him covered in duct tape, Velcroed to a wall, wired up like a Christmas tree, and drenched in green slime. It's never the same thing twice. But he always brings it back to the Word of God.” And that is both his passion and his gifting.

Patrick concluded, “Andy has a great ability to channel energy into a godly direction.” He does this by simply being a kid himself and focusing his passion on studying and teaching the Scriptures. He encourages kids to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, not expecting their parent's faith to somehow create the relationship for them. Raised in a Christian household and backslidden in college, Andy knows the danger of borrowed faith. In his experience, a life of partying, humanism, and the do-good spirit too often corrode the Scripture-less heart.

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12

Andy Deane



Young teens relate to a teacher who enjoys playing games as much as they do.



Andy answers an array of questions posed by the young teens.

Andy recently finished writing a book inspired by his passion to teach people to love the Scriptures. It contains 40 different Bible study methods. The book's key verse is Psalm 119:162, “I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure.” That's how he wants youth to cherish God's Word. Andy's vision is that youth would be drawn to Jesus and never turn back.

Thinking of God's plan for his life, Andy said, “I'm grateful the Lord called me to youth ministry. ... If I'm a lifer, I'll be the happiest man alive.”

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