

**From Pain to Hope 2021**

*In this year’s From Pain to Hope we want to look back over this Covid pandemic and highlight both beauty and tragedy. What we learn and process does not stop with our camps and campers but can be taken out into the world. From Pain to Hope is designed for you to reflect on your own life and experiences while considering some specific topics. Our hope is to have you personally filter the material and grow in your awareness.*

This pandemic has been awful, but it has provided some wonderful perspective. Covid has created a unique parallel between our world and our camper’s everyday lives. For example, how many of you have heard campers talk about fear, isolation, an unknown future, missing loved ones and feeling like they have no control? Have you heard them talk about the anger and frustration they experience when strangers tell them what to think, what to believe and how to behave?

How many of you have had some of these same experiences in the past year? The opportunity behind this pandemic is that we are catching a glimpse of what it is like to walk a mile in our campers’ shoes. ***Can you see it?***

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Key in on the word **“ability”**, which is a talent, skill, or proficiency in a particular area. Empathy takes work and it takes time. When did you last spend time trying to understand someone else’s feelings? A better question might be, when did you last spend time understanding your own feelings and the experiences behind those feelings? When we process our own stories, we grow and gain a broader perspective and understanding of who we are. This allows us to better relate to others and expands our ability to empathize.

Please find a partner and share your feelings and experiences about how this pandemic helped you better empathize with foster teens.

* Allow time for some people to share with the entire group.
* Ask for 2 or 3 people to share.
* Make sure to thank those who share.

Over the last year, how do you think we have been doing as a church?

* Wear a mask or don’t wear a mask
* Universal Healthcare or a Capitalist System
* Fake News or Good Journalism
* Mandate the vaccine or allow choice on the vaccine
* Biden or Trump

So, we ask again, as a church, how are we doing? How are you doing as an individual?

Outside of some general overlap, can we agree that all of us have different belief systems with different ways of measuring and validating those beliefs. Why should I agree with all your beliefs? Maybe you should believe in mine. Afterall, I have factual history, feelings and understanding to support my beliefs. How could I possibly be wrong? Why can’t you see things my way?

Think for a moment how divorce (yours, your parents, or otherwise) changed your belief on marriage or how losing a loved one changed your belief on grief? Can we all agree that we change through experiences? But did God’s love for us change over that time?

**It seems God is in the business of loving us right through our changing belief systems.** Can we do the same?

**It seems God’s love and grace is always available, and it is not based on merit.**

Can we do the same?

**It seems God loves us regardless of our feelings and emotions.**

Can we do the same?

We have seen so much love, tenderness, grace, and dignity shown to our campers over the years. We do this while campers are in the throes of changing belief systems. We put our best foot forward regardless of the camper’s feelings and emotions. We do this without expecting anything from them in return. **Can we approach the world with this same heart?**

There has been a lot of research over the past few years to find the reasons why so many young adults are leaving the church and falling away from faith. Most of the studies cite hypocrisy and judgment from “Christians” as leading reasons. This is often in the form of someone trying to force their belief system onto someone else. (Use a personal example or story to drive this point home.)

Can we just admit we are all a mess, and that’s why we need Jesus? The difference Covid made is that now our mess and our campers mess look a little more similar now than ever before.

Are we willing to walk through this mess showing love and grace in our everyday life? As Christ followers, are we striving to avoid hypocrisy and judgement that has wounded so many?

Or are we content to just be a 3 day weekend warrior?

Maybe we just need to go back to the basics. The Son of God was clear on our roll:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:36-40

This past year has been hard. Will you take the time to process what you have experienced, not just for your own personal growth, but to help you relate to our campers and the life they live every day? Please don’t miss the amazing opportunity you have to understand their world just a little more.

***“Live in such a way that those who know you but don’t know God***

***will come to know God because they know you.”***

\*Please note: The anxiety referred to here is caused by things like global pandemics and uncertainty. It does not refer to clinical, diagnosable anxiety. There is no intension to make light of any mental illness.