



How To Make 5th Grade Boys Fall Asleep

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September 25, 2022

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 16:19-31

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

On Tuesday, in order to break the ice on a story about heaven, hell, and the great chasm between, I asked the Bible study groups:

If you could go back in time and have someone warn you about something, what would it be?

The guys immediately rehashed a litany of injuries or scares of their youth—events that they wish they'd received warning about so they wouldn't encounter that pain and needed recovery.

But the women went in a completely different direction... they lamented lost memories of loved ones who've died.

One member said, "I wish I would've documented the stories of my father before he died... now, they're just lost. It's heartbreaking."

After she shared this, I asked, "so, are you recording YOUR memories for the generations that follow you?"

We talked about ideas for recording video and writing memories for kids and grandkids to have for years to come.

Because of this conversation, I had a different mindset about how to approach the next activity I participated in the rest of the week.

On Wednesday morning, I joined my son Phin as a chaperone on a school trip.

The entire 5th grade at his school takes a three day class trip to Deep Portage Learning Center in Hackensack, MN. (slide).

I recognized that one of my unspoken responsibilities as a chaperone would be to document the trip. I tried to take pictures of all of the kids in his group doing all the activities so their families could see what they did.



And they truly did a lot of really cool stuff. Phin went rock-climbing (SLIDE), tried archery for the first time (SLIDE)... and loved it, he got three bullseyes! Phin also spent time hunting for invertebrates in the mud (SLIDE), and lots of hiking, including this hike which ended with a 55 foot observation tower (SLIDE).

One of the best parts of the trip was that all the kids electronics were taken after the bus ride. They thrived without them—they engaged with the material and each activity.

You would think, by the end of the day, they'd be SO exhausted that they would fall right to sleep.

You would think so.

The dads in the room, we were beat. Dog tired. All we wanted to do was sleep.

The boys wanted to tell jokes and make farting sounds. One boy in particular was naughtier than the rest.

We tried a few tactics. One of the teachers knocked on our door and told them to be quiet. That didn't work.

Then, I tried to bribe the loud one. "If you go to bed in the next five minutes, I'll give you \$5 bucks in the morning." He wasn't even close to collecting on that.

I played another card—the threat. If you don't go to bed, we'll have to call your mom to come and pick you up.

"Oh, my mom wouldn't mind. She'll want to see me." I think he was overselling his hand, honestly—a three and half hour drive to pick him up, just to turn around and go home wasn't going to go as well as he thought it would.

It didn't matter. That empty threat didn't work either.

As a last ditch hail Mary, I tried something that sometimes works for my younger boys. I turned on the lullaby station on Pandora (SLIDE of lullaby).

The loudest boy in the group tried to protest—but was quickly shushed by the other boys. The sound of the music was just loud enough that they couldn't talk in whispers anymore. Within minutes, it was as if they were all in a trance. I couldn't believe it. It worked. They fell asleep.

The second night, I tried this much sooner. They were asleep 20 minutes earlier!

It was a great trip... and I would guess that I might go back at least once or four times with the rest of my kids in years to come.



I loved seeing Phin challenge himself and do things that I couldn't even imagine doing at his age. If I could give him some advice, it would be to keep trying new things and spend less time on electronics, and more time outside or doing stuff that challenges him.

I also know that advice given to my kids isn't always welcomed. Even if I KNOW that I KNOW better, I can't make my kids do what I know best.

It's kinda like this parable that Jesus shares.

There's an obvious "you know this is what you're supposed to do" element to it, but how often do we really go outside our gates, the walls of comfort we've built around us, to help out someone that might cause us to get a little dirty?

On the surface, this would appear to be Jesus giving us instruction on what heaven and hell are like, further study of the text makes it clear that the bigger detail to focus on is how we treat others.

Jesus is teaching us what it means to repent—to turn to Jesus. To be in relationship with God is our goal.

We aren't getting measured by how much we do the right thing and there's not a scoreboard in heaven that docks us points when we fail.

But that's not what WE do. That's not what we focus on. We Americans just can't get out of our own way. We are consumed with knowing the secrets of heaven and hell.

British theologian NT Wright wonders "why are Americans SO fixated on hell?"

I really want to know, why is it that the most prosperous affluent nation on earth is really determined to be sure that they know precisely who is going to be frying in hell and what the temperature will be and so on. There's something quite disturbing about that.

Jesus wants our focus on the present. How can our relationship with Christ lead us to take care of the neighbor in our world?

Pastor Kendra Mohn writes "The parable serves to refocus the hearer on what we do with what we have, how our vocations serve our neighbors. Virtue is not determined by wealth, type of employment, gender, immigration status, or body type. Virtue is borne out in deeds.

We aren't doing stuff in order to secure a place in heaven. Our faith in Jesus Christ secures that. It's already done, there's nothing we can do to make sure Jesus sees us. Jesus already did it!



Is it possible we're missing the most important detail in the whole story?

Are we so caught up in who is on the Stairway to Heaven or the Highway to Hell that we don't realize Jesus is telling us everything we need to know?

Father Abraham; but if someone goes [to my family] from the dead, they will repent.'

31 He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

We have a story to tell. We have something to share that is a deal-breaker. It's a game changer.

Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus rose so there is something to hope for.

If you could go back in time and have someone warn you about something, what would it be?

Jesus did it. He has a message! But it's not fear-based.

Maybe a bunch of ten year old boys can teach us something here... threats, bribery, consequences, fear... those tactics don't yield the best long-term results.

What does work? Peace. A message of goodness. Trust. Relationship. A promise of hope.

We believe in God, who loves our world. Who cheers for us to do the right thing AND forgives us when we don't. That's the God that Jesus invites us to turn to. The God who blesses us, cares for us, and created us to care for others.

What if THAT was part of our message?

How would you include faith in your memories? How is God with you throughout the joys of life, but also the struggles and challenges?

The Spirit that gave me patience when putting 5th graders to bed was also the Spirit that was present at the last campfire when memories were being forged and bonds strengthened, even if that Holy Spirit wasn't outright named.

That's the message I can document and share for generations to come. It sounds like heaven on earth to me. How about you? Amen.