

April 2019

Celebration Magazine

A publication celebrating what Jesus is doing at Clear Creek



"I guess the lesson for all of us is that God gives us talents and it's up to us to use them or ignore them."

from Never Too Young to Start

The Cost of NOT...

Everything costs something. From buying a bottle of ketchup to getting married, every action has a cost.

But, have you considered the cost of not?

Decide not to exercise? There's a cost. Choose not to do your homework? Cost. Opt not to pay your taxes? High cost. Wise Christians count the cost of doing and the cost of not doing. So how do you know when it's wise to do and not to do? That's the question.

Below are five filters for evaluating if you should do or not to do something.



1 Will it contradict God's command? Always obey God's clear commands from the Bible. Align your actions, because He knows how life works best and He loves you. If you can't find a command, then see if God has provided a principle. King David wrote that God's word was a lamp for his feet lighting his path not because it commanded every decision he should make, but because its practical principles gave him guidance (Psalm 119:105). Chances are someone else in Scripture has faced a similar situation. See how God led them and follow suit.

2 Is it the best time? Proverbs 27:14 says, "If you wake your friend in the early morning by shouting 'Rise and shine!' it will sound to him more like a curse than a blessing." Solomon is saying, even the right action at the wrong time makes it the wrong action. So, before you begin, ask yourself if now is the best time to proceed?

3 Will it help or hurt others? Our actions impact others. An entire generation of Israelites missed out on entering the Promised Land because 10 men did not trust God (Numbers 13). Before choosing not to do, consider if it will help or hurt others. God often guides us by the impact to others.

4 Will it multiply your opportunities? Unsure what to do? Follow Paul's example. He multiplied his opportunities even in prison. That decision led to many coming to faith even within Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22). Consider the course of action that leads to more opportunities.

5 Will it help you fulfill God's mission in the world? Jesus commissioned us to make disciples wherever we go (Matthew 28:19-20). That's why we are here. So, before deciding not to do something, ask yourself if your choice will hinder or help you accomplish your God-given, disciple-making mission.



Seniors Choosing to Lead

Clear Creek's High School spring retreat has evolved over the last three years greatly. It has transitioned from being planned and organized by the youth minister and adult volunteers, to the entirety of its success or failure resting solely on the shoulders of our seniors. They got together to plan, laugh, and dream up the theme, guest speaker, location, decor, menu, silly-stupidity, games, activities and even fancily renamed the weekend to match the castle they rented. [The 2019 High School Only Riverless Castle Retreat. haha]

They were hands on throughout the weekend as well, leading our student kitchen crews. Each high schooler cooked, served, and cleaned up after one meal - a task that many hesitated at first on and after they'd done it, traditionally asked for a second turn to continue the fun. Parents are skeptical, no doubt. After each worship and lesson, this group of seniors jumped in and led discussion groups of their younger peers.

They boldly challenged their groups to dream up a list of ways that we as a student group could serve our own community this year. To not wait on Aubrey or Mitchell or small group leaders to organize it for them. But to dream and DO.

CCYM now has a long list of local mission points for the immediate future; ways that they can get out of their comfort zones and serve together. The other gift that this group of seniors gave to CCYM was their presence. They are in the throes of finalizing college decisions, course work, jobs, and commitments. Yet they showed up and were fully present. This will hopefully continue to lead CCYM into deeper waters with a growing tradition of seniors staying engaged throughout their hardest semester. God was glorified through their willingness to lead, serve, love and follow.



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LEAD, SERVE, LOVE and FOLLOW"*

Facing Our Fears

We all, adults and children alike, have fears. Some fears are understandable like the fear of heights, fear of spiders, fear of mice, fear of speaking in public, fear of the dark, and the list is endless. Some fears are overcome with age and experience and some are even developed with age and experience. Fears are not universal but pretty much personal to each individual.

Fears are usually not debilitating but, rather a nuisance for most of us. They are usually things we can avoid. This is not the case for one of Evan Bain's fears, however. You see, Evan is deathly afraid of water. He doesn't like water in his face, doesn't like to be splashed and won't go swimming. You might be thinking, "okay, why be telling everyone this?"

Evan decided he wanted to claim Jesus as his Lord and Savior but knew a big part of that was to be baptized. Being immersed under the water was not something small to him. It was HUGE! He thought long and hard about whether or not his salvation was really worth getting in the water up to his chest and allowing his dad to take him under. And he decided that, YES, a brief time of discomfort and fear was indeed worth a lifetime of relationship with Jesus!

Praise God for Evan and his willingness to look fear in the face and put on Christ! What fears do we need to face in order to be a Christ follower? Let's all determine to be more like Evan.



Never Too Young to Start



The beauty of the discipleship path is that anyone of any age can begin at any time. Ideally, the discipleship path starts early in life. Such is the case with one of our 4th graders. Typically our 5th graders take the "up front" lead of songs, prayers, and coordinating younger kids for group activities. However, as soon as the last class of 5th graders moved up to 6th grade leaving a worship leader spot vacated, Luke Lusk jumped at the chance to lead worship.

He not only knew all the songs, he was unafraid to sing in front of a crowd. How many adults hesitate to even stand in front of an audience much less sing with confidence? Of course, the old saying, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" may come in to play. If you know his dad or his grandfather, then his willingness to be a leader is not surprising.

I guess the lesson for all of us is that God gives us talents and it's up to us to use them or ignore them. I know He is pleased when the gifts He has put in one of His children are used for the purpose He intended. Way to teach us all, Luke!

Students Become Teachers



When the UCM went on a mission trip to Chicago last month, it was a different kind of trip. Rather than going to wear themselves out physically or serve as many needy people as possible, the main goal of this trip was to learn and be inspired. We went to learn first hand about world religions so that we would be better equipped to share the Gospel with all kinds of people. During our time in Chicago we visited places of worship and learned from local Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim and Bahai leaders. We listened a lot.

At the end of each day we had long conversations together about these religions. As we examined their claims about life and truth, we were forced to re-examine what we really knew and believed about our faith in Jesus. As our discussions progressed, we asked ourselves how to talk more effectively with people of other faiths. What was good about these religions? What was strange? How can we clearly present the Good News of Jesus to people like this? We exchanged lots of good ideas, but God kept bringing us back to one core, distinct truth: the historical reality of a man named Jesus who lived, died and came back to life.

“It’s amazing how God is using the lessons we learned on our mission trip to make us more effective workers back home.”



Before we even left on our Chicago trip, UCM students were building relationships with international students on campus in Chattanooga. We wanted to share Jesus with them and we knew that we first had to show them genuine love and hospitality. We spent time together, watched movies and shared stories. And we listened a lot.

God used these relationships and the lessons learned on our Chicago trip to open an exciting door. In the final month of the school year we were able to start our first Let’s Start Talking Friendspeak classes on campus. Using the same material that Clear Creek’s Sunday morning ESL classes use, we began teaching our international friends English using the Bible. We practiced grammar while discussing the birth of Jesus. We studied new vocabulary while talking about his miracles. And we stressed the truth that Jesus - a man, God, and our Savior - really lived in history.

The first international students to join these classes have been from Japan, Cambodia and Pakistan—countries where most of the population follows religions like Buddhism and Islam. It’s amazing how God is using the lessons we learned on our mission trip to make us more effective workers back home.



A New Wave of Leadership

Several months ago, we had the privilege of writing about the newly formed youth ministry praise team, which has allowed many students the opportunity to experience a particular form of student leadership. That effort, however, was only the beginning step towards promoting and encouraging a new wave of student leadership within the ministry. As we've learned from experience, it's important to be developing the next group of leaders BEFORE the current ones graduate. With that in mind, we have made it a priority to give some of our younger students opportunities to practice significant leadership roles right now, so that as they age and mature, they will grow into their potential.

If we fail to engage students in leadership opportunities when they enter the youth group as Middle Schoolers, we have no one to blame but ourselves if they get to be upperclassmen and feel completely unprepared when we ask them to "step up and set the example." There's no reason at all for gap years when it comes to serving in the church. This training and equipping process can begin much earlier and I deeply appreciate the way the Children's Ministry works to give elementary students opportunities to practice leadership skills.

Increasingly, we have been using younger students to take lead, not only during worship, but in other aspects of our meeting time, as well. We've recently seen ninth graders Patrick Russell and Hannah Window - following the example set by senior Briggs Braswell - lead our praise team on Wednesdays, and several of the Middle School singers rotate through song-leading duties on Sunday mornings when our group is split. We are increasingly using students to lead games during both combined and separated gatherings. High School students have led Bible studies with their peers, and of course, February's Martin Boyd Service provided an opportunity for many of our young men to gain experience leading an entire worship service.



Perhaps most significant to me, though, is what was recently asked of two of our 8th graders, Matt Stone and Andrew Reynolds. On two recent Sundays, rather than ask one of our more-than-capable adult volunteers to conduct our Middle School class, we decided to have students lead all aspects of the large-group gathering: game, worship, and teaching. It can be an intimidating thing to present a spiritual lesson in front of one's peers, but both Matt and Andrew rose to the occasion and did wonderful jobs presenting their messages. They were thoughtful, well-prepared, and intent on delivering a quality speech. All the adults in the room were so proud, and it was encouraging to witness the cheers from their friends when they completed their lessons.

While it can be tempting to assume young people aren't ready to take on some of the more demanding leadership roles within our church, the fact is, our kids are more capable than we often give them credit for, and more than that, the only way to improve is by doing. May we all come to an understanding that every investment we make in the spiritual leadership capabilities of our young people serves to bless the church today and far beyond. Today we invest in maturity for tomorrow.

Celebrating Celebrations

When we first started the “Celebration Magazine,” the idea was simple: we wanted an outlet to celebrate and make people aware of the great things that are happening in and around our church family. We didn’t want to focus on how many people came to an activity or even how much fun everyone had. It’s not that either of those things are bad, it is just

that what we want to celebrate exceeds any numerical benchmark or subjective opinion. Simply put, we want to celebrate a person or group of people who have the courage and determination to become more like Jesus.

What gets really exciting, though, is when others begin to celebrate these things on their own. It is one thing to recognize the importance of someone taking a step to live and look more like Christ, but it is an entirely different thing when we stop and actually take time to celebrate it. And we aren’t talking about a pat on the back or a phone call, we mean a full blown party!

On January 6, one of our small groups made a commitment to read through the Bible over the next year. More than that, they wanted to take this journey together. They wanted to provide accountability for one another. They wanted an outlet to reflect on, question, and discuss what they were reading, not in a vacuum but as part of a community. So, they found an app that mapped out their reading plan for the next 365 days which allowed them to share thoughts and comments back and forth. They have spent every Wednesday since then doing just that.

For the next few months, these ladies have read, talked about, and lived God’s word together. It was so impactful that Aimee Germ, one of the ladies in the group, said, “This is a really big deal. We should celebrate this!” And so they did... with a party. A party because they had spent 99 days in the word together. When is the last time you’ve heard of someone taking the time to plan, organize, and throw a party all because they are getting closer to Jesus? If that isn’t worth a party, what is?

Sometimes it is easy for us to lose sight of what is worth celebrating. Honestly, our culture has made it feel very natural to celebrate a job promotion or a school championship. And that’s not to say we shouldn’t celebrate those things. But imagine what life would look like if we started to celebrate the things that matter eternally? How cool would it be if when someone started a Bible study with a co-worker or spent an hour with God every day for a month straight, our first inclination was to find some way to celebrate with them the fact that they were becoming more like Jesus? If when someone decided to commit their life to Christ or came back to God after a long time away, the first thing we wanted to do was literally throw a party (if that doesn’t sound familiar, checkout Luke 15)? Our challenge, then, is to always be looking for the opportunity to celebrate when someone takes their next step in becoming more like Jesus.



Finding Familiarity

There are so many things unique to a small group that you cannot find anywhere else in church. Among other things, a small group can provide a completely non-threatening atmosphere for those who may not be familiar or comfortable with the idea of walking into a large church full of 800 people. Small groups can meet in homes, coffee shops, parks, etc. These are places that all people, regardless of their familiarity with Jesus, can relate to. The more familiarity you can add to the group, the better chance you have for someone to accept an invitation.

One recent example that is just beginning to get off the ground is a group comprised of families who have been involved in Upward Football here at Clear Creek. The idea was to create an easy invitation point and potential landing spot for any of the over 100 families that spend most Saturdays in the fall playing football behind our building.

Like we said before, the more elements of familiarity we can add to an environment, the more likely someone is to visit that environment. So for this new group, the conversation would go something like, "Hey, you know the Birches and the Longs, right? Their kids play on our football team. They and a few other families from Upward hangout at our house every Sunday evening. The kids mostly play the whole time which gives us a chance to have some actual adult interaction. Would you guys want to come?"

Where might you be able to use this approach in your life? Think about those who are in your circle of influence and what connections you share outside of church. Do you run or workout with the same people regularly? Are there families you spend lots of time with because of your kid's recreational activities? Is there a group of people at work that you consistently eat lunch with? Leverage these connections whenever you can to invite others into relationship with us, and ultimately, with Jesus.



OVERSEAS MISSIONS

The Haiti Construction Team went to Cap Haitian on April 16-20 to do a construction project in that community, serving as the hands and feet of Jesus. When asked, Todd Zumbrun's quote was, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

A group of four went on April 12-19 to visit our long term team in Asia. They went to experience a day in the life of our mission families, encourage their work there, and share their stories of faith within their communities. While they were there, God blessed them with a divinely appointed coincidence. A young man riding a bicycle stopped to ask if they were from America, then asked the group, "Ja' eat yet?" He had been a student of Thomas and Callie Mitchell nine years ago and now just happens to be teaching at a school where one of our missionary families lives. All in a city of six million people!

