



The 4th Focus

“The Quest”

Royston, Georgia is known for being the home of Ty Cobb (baseball player, not lawyer), and chicken farms. It's not a family vacation destination, and there are no great routes to it, but it's a place where I encountered God in ways I never expected.

As many of you know, I disappeared for a week to go on Quest, a spiritual retreat designed to help men grow in their love for God the Father, soak in the loving sacrifice of Jesus, and learn to hear the Holy Spirit. I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but I decided to go because of the prompting of Brian Tubergen, and his testimony of how God used Quest to change his life. One of the key aspects of Quest is that you go into the week blind. I was told over and over again to “trust the process,” never really knowing what was coming next.

There were thirty guys questing together, and in no time we got to know each other, and began a journey that would transform each of us. Within a few minutes of arriving at Camp Little Light I could tell the Holy Spirit was present.

I'm not sure how my face and demeanor changed over the week, but I can tell you what I saw on other guys. When the week started, there were at least three guys who seemed so overcome with despair that I wondered if a week was enough time. But after five days of being in the presence of the Father, these guys were alive with joy, love, peace, and every other fruit of the Spirit.

A few of you have already heard me say that I've never been in a safer place, and experienced such unconditional love in all of my life. It's incredibly hard to explain that kind of love. It's also hard to explain what I experienced that week, because I need to keep the details secret for you, so you can have a similar experience!

That being said, I'll let you in on a piece of my experience. Some of you know that I've struggled with fear and anxiety most of my life. I've accepted this as part of my story, but God wants me to have freedom from it, so he began working me over right away during Quest. Tuesday morning, I was headed into the woods for some time alone, and when I was about fifty yards from the bunk house, God told me to sit down. I looked around and said “no way” mostly because I feared that people would think I was fearful of going into the woods alone. Yup, you read that right. I went further in, and had a great day, but also knew I hadn't obeyed God.

Wednesday afternoon, I was feeling very convicted about that decision, and during some free time, I grabbed a chair and headed back to the spot, fifty yards from the bunk house. I wrote in my journal, “Okay Father, I'm here. Sorry I didn't listen to you yesterday, I felt foolish sitting on the edge of the woods. I'm here now, and ready to listen. Your son, Eric. P.S. I only have 30 minutes until I need to be back to the group, not trying to rush you, but...”

I sat back in my chair ready to listen, and a bird flew over my head and pooped on my foot. Laughing, I scraped the poop off my foot, and leaned back in the chair again, soaking in the beauty of creation. Suddenly, a large hawk flew out of the tree in front of me and soared through the woods, gracefully weaving between trees. It was incredible to see. Suddenly I realized that God was saying to me, “Eric, I want you to be free of fear and soar like this hawk, but you are content standing in poop.”

There was multiple ways God was speaking freedom and life over me on Quest. Wrestling with fear was only part of it, and in time there will be more to share. I came back from Quest with a profound sense of God's love and presence, and I feel renewed in ways I didn't think possible. God is so good!

Thank you for praying over me while I was on Quest. It was clear many people were praying for the week. You should know I'm now praying that God would lead each of you to Quest. It just may be that God is saying to you, what he said to me, “I want you to soar and be free...” God is offering each of us freedom and joy, it just takes a step of courage to join the quest.

- Pastor Eric

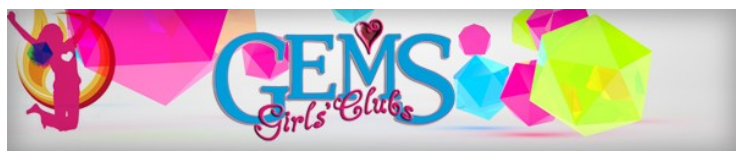


GEMS has wrapped up for the year and we have had a blast! Many times this season we talked about what it means to be "In His Steps" and we talked about walking through deep snow and how we always try to step in the tracks of the person in front of us - that is how we should follow Jesus. So naturally, I could not help but laugh when our original date for "In His Steps" Sunday was cancelled because of a snow storm! One of those fun reminders he likes to give us I guess!

At our end-of-year celebration we were able to have a badge ceremony where the girls earned badges for their small group lessons, group activities, verse memorization, and attendance. Abbie and Erin were the star leaders who were AMAZING at making many, many badge-buttons. Master Arts Theater's Street Theater Team came to perform - with the help of our GEMS girls (along with family and Special Friends of course!). They had a series of skits that taught us about many things: how the walls of Jericho fell (a big-tall-can't-get-over-it-wall!), how Rahab was a part of that story, how God saved Daniel from the Lions (ROAR!), and how being on the train tracks doesn't make you a train - just like going to church doesn't make you a Christian. We had a wonderful time and I appreciated everyone who came out and made it a great night!

I would like to thank everyone who helped make GEMS able to serve our girls for another year. This year we will be again searching for leaders, so please search yourself to see if you have time to commit to help this program to continue and be able to serve more girls than our current capacity allows! There are many ways to plug in and we are always open to any new (or old!) ideas that might not currently be a part of the program! June 11 at 5:30pm will be a leaders meeting where anyone considering volunteering is welcome to attend!

- Kristi Dennis



May

2 - Amy Baragar
 7 - Tyler Berthiaume
 7 - Kara Berrevoets
 7 - Jaidyn Ann Bolt
 9 - Tim Randall
 14 - Sam Wammack
 16 - Liam Baragar
 19 - Jean Stadt
 21 - Grace Wammack
 22 - Jeff Boehm
 23 - Jeremiah Parks
 24 - Bill Pyper
 24 - Beka McDowell
 26 - Norma Boehm
 27 - Greg Hawkins
 28 - Mike Berrevoets
 29 - Aaron Wetzell
 30 - Ralph Simone
 30 - Levi Dobkowski

June

2 - Julie Schalk
 3 - Caren Bills
 5 - Lorraine Smith
 8 - Dawn Faasse
 13 - Laura O'Brock
 14 - Eric O'Brock
 14 - Sam Tubergen
 16 - Violet Meendering
 16 - Ephraim Parler
 23 - Betsy Coutchie
 24 - Marty Pyper
 24 - Leslie Hawkins
 28 - Becky Berrevoets
 28 - Linda Randall



Finding Our More

Have you ever wondered if you matter? If *this* is all there is to your life? Whether you have a purpose? A group of women at Fourth have been exploring these questions through a study by Jennie Allen. In her book *Restless: Because You Were Made for More*, Jennie uses the story of Joseph to show how all the pieces of his life - from his heartache to his passions to his talents to his relationships - came together to bring him to the purpose God had for his life: the saving of lives. She also helps us to see the same is true for us.

Our group is small, but we're women committed to finding the *more* God has for us. And we're working through our sufferings, our gifts, our passions, our relationships, and our places to find that *more*. Our hearts are restless for a greater purpose . . . and we know God has called us to one. Over the next two months we'll tie together all the threads we have found in our lives this year and challenge each other to step into the unique purpose we were created to live.

- Beka McDowell

Praying Parents



The Power of a Praying Parent

God has given parents a crucial role in the lives of our kids. Being a parent isn't just about being in charge; you are on the front lines of the Great Commission in the lives of your kids - to make disciples of Jesus Christ, teaching them everything that Jesus has called us to.

I don't know about you, but this often seems overwhelming to us. It seems like something we're constantly failing at, something that we can't do on our own. Which is exactly right - we need the presence and power of God in the lives of our kids and in our own lives, which is why prayer is so crucial, for parents and for the whole church alike. Here are a few things to keep in mind about prayer.

Why pray? In part, we pray because we are not in control. As parents, we recognize that there is a mystery to our children; they are people made in the image of God with freedom and responsibility. As such, no matter what kind of input we have in their lives, it's not a simple cause-and-effect outcome. They respond, interact, and engage with the world and with Jesus in a way that is ultimately beyond our control. Failure to pray means failure to recognize the mystery of who our kids are as God's image-bearers.

We also pray because there is enormous power in prayer. Prayer acknowledges our constant need for God's presence and calls upon God's overwhelming power (John 16:23). Often, we don't experience this presence or power because we do not pray. We assume that God is going to do what he's going to do, regardless of whether we engage in prayer or not. But that's an unbiblical idea. Scripture, in contrast, holds up a life of prayer as the path we're called to follow.

What should I pray? Maybe you struggle to know exactly what or how to pray with your kids. That's normal and natural. Here are a few suggestions. First, pray the words of Scripture for them. You have to saturate your own heart and mind in Scripture so that you can know how to pray. Don't try to come up with your own words; use God's Word. Second, a good resource along these lines is *The Power of a Praying Parent* by Stormie Omartian. The book draws on Scripture that address numerous common struggles in the life of a child and parents. Third, pray *with* your kids and pray *over* your kids. Your kids need to hear you pray in general and pray for them specifically. And don't be afraid to be very direct and specific. If they are struggling with worry, with lying, with self-control, with relationships, then take the time to stop, lay hands on them, and pray the words of Scripture over them.

With whom should I pray? Other Christians! There is power when Christians pray in a unified way. There is power when Christians join together, pray from Scripture, and pray *for* something that we know God wants to grant. This is a big reason why we started the parents' prayer group on the first Saturday morning of each month. As parents, it can be hard to find time for anything, but we would encourage you: make time for this! Of all the things you can do for your children, the most important one is to pray!

- Branson & Sarah Parler

Kids Hope Easter Party



We had a great night with our Kids Hope families sharing the Easter message, enjoying a meal together, games, crafts and an Easter Egg Hunt which is always a hit!

Inclusion Column



If you're reading this, you're currently reading the first composition of Fourth's newest addition to the Focus, the Inclusion Column. Welcome!! We are aiming to be a part of each of the upcoming newsletters and wish to keep you up to date on all matters "inclusion." Inclusion according to Webster means "a relation between two classes that exists when all members of the first are also members of the second." The inclusion team at Fourth is a group of people working towards having all people be part of the Fourth family by way of participation and service. Our team holds tightly to 1

Corinthians 12:20-27. Each one of us is good at some things and struggle at others. Barb Newman, an employee at the Christian Learning Center, likes to use a puzzle piece to describe our pinks and greens. Half of each puzzle piece is made up of pink. Pinks are the things that are more difficult for us. And half of the same puzzle piece is made up of green. Greens are the things that come easy. Think about yourself... what's easy for you? What are the things that others look at and wonder at? And what are those things that make you so mad? You try and try, but still not much progress, and certainly it wouldn't be called "success." We each have pinks and greens. I need you where I struggle and vice versa. When we work together, our pieces fit together so your green fits with my pink. I think this is what God had in mind when he called us to be the body of Christ.

I was recently disabled. I even got a placard for a handicap parking space. I had foot surgery and had to remain off my foot for just over 8 weeks. My reds and greens changed dramatically. Suddenly getting to church, which is only across the parking lot, meant needing someone to drive me. The parking lot was sketchy at best on my knee scooter with all the bumps and cracks in the parking lot, and then it snowed. Once inside, I never realized how long the hallways were. Exhaustion set in quickly. I couldn't stand during the services and often couldn't see the words on the screen when I sat. The bathroom door wanted to shut me out but I plowed through, determined to make it to a stall. I celebrated my recent success too quickly as I nearly toppled off the toilet as I went to stand on my one foot, due to the unstable handrail. After washing my hands, I again wrestled the door and wheeled my way down for a cookie. I'd earned it! Alas! No gluten free option to be found. Coffee it is.

Now, this foot disability wasn't permanent for me, but it opened my eyes to struggles that people with permanent disabilities face. And it gave me pause. How are we building up the Body of Christ? How are we including everyone, no matter of their reds? And is everyone using their greens, even though part of their puzzle piece is red? How does one participate in a book study when their eyes don't function to see? How does one hear the sermon when their hearing aide doesn't work well enough to hear? How do parents worship when their high needs child can't make it through the service? How does one participate in communion when eating the bread containing gluten makes their body react with food poisoning type symptoms? How does one pay attention with Attention Deficit Disorder or come "out of their shell" in the midst of deep depression? And how does one use their gifts God has given him/her when their gifts don't fit in in a traditional way? "Now you are the body of Christ, and EACH ONE of you is a part of it (v27)."

As we work as a team to make sure each of the people who enters through these doors is a part, please pray that the Lord would give us His eyes to see. Pray that this Body called Fourth Reformed Church would truly reflect Christ's bride, the church. And please come and be a part of the three week Christian ed classes led by Terry DeBoer (the Coordinator for Disability Concerns in the RCA) to see how faith, hospitality and disability totally intersect! They will be held May 6, 13, and 20. We look forward to seeing you there!

- Julie Schalk on behalf of the Inclusion Team

(Mary Kay Townley, Becky Tubergen, Lynn Simone, Don Coutchie, & Barb Funckes)



In celebration of Easter, the youth group participated in a Seder meal, which was the Passover meal celebrating deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The group read through a script of the Seder meal detailing Christ's faithfulness to us as well and also ate a meal together.

The youth group looks forward to participating in the church's mission trip to Detroit this summer. We hope to have many serve from June 22-25. Some of the costs are already covered from our Murder Mystery Fundraiser! - S & K Dennis