

Summer Break Update

Hey guys! It's good to be back in touch after a couple months off from school. I'm officially back in the Denver area with classes starting Monday, August 7. It means so much to me to continue to have your personal support that plays such a vital role for my attendance at Bear Valley – I wouldn't trade it for anything else. I know that last part sounds a bit cliché, and it probably is (ha!), yet even during these summer months I want to tell you just how much you continue to be on my heart and mind as facilitators of God's powerful love. While the world uses money to definitively assign value and worth to anything it can, y'all are using it to facilitate the Lord's love that we know and understand is the true measure of value and worth in life (John 1:1-5; 1 Chronicles 29). It is a privilege and a blessing to have this opportunity with the desire to use what I am given to continue alongside you in work of our God's Kingdom. Thank you!

A Quick Recap! I had an opportunity to travel to the area just east of Louisville, Kentucky and spend time with the North Point Church of Christ. The NP congregation is relatively new and budding; just a few years prior it was established as the Taylorsville Church of Christ. God's love that is being displayed through those who are willing to live in it and share it to the world around them is all the reason He needs to provide His increase! The congregation is a mix of those who have known about God and His Word before coming to North Point and others who are being introduced to the story of His love that has been around since the beginning.

As there will always be room for spiritual growth in the lives of those in every church setting, it was a wonderful church experience for me this summer. It is my prayer that what continues to happen during the assembly (corporate worship) will be pleasing to God and that the light of His Word will guide everyone involved in His Kingdom. And that is a prayer I have been encouraged by God to consider bringing to Him on behalf of everyone throughout the world so that we all may grow closer together in the unity all are called to have in Christ Jesus... (:

While visiting Kentucky I stayed with one of the elders of the congregation. Ricky Drawbaugh and his wife Nancy opened their home and family to me and treated me like one of their own. They have three children and seven grandchildren. Their kindness, hospitality, love, and laughter made my time in Kentucky that much more of a blessing with a wonderful new family friendship that I am grateful to have!

During my time working with the North Point church there were two main aspects of ministry that I was able to continue learning about: 1) outreach for the sake of everyone's spiritual salvation, and 2) unity in Christ Jesus for the sake of everyone's salvation. As my viewpoint was learning how to be focused on these two variables in meaningful ways – also in relation to God's perspective – I was brought to consider how our relational experiences both affect and effect the decisive conclusions we rest upon for guidance and comfort. While our ability to understand God's purpose to *how* things play out in life is limited, we can always take comfort in the fact that His love is limitless. In other words, as we learn how to live with ourselves and with others through imperfect relational experiences, God's

love is stable and unchanging. And what God's love calls sin is that which separates us from Him and the love we are purposed to be defined by and to share with everyone (1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 1:1-5; Genesis 1:26a, 27; John 3:17, 34-36; 1 Peter 3:8-11). While we are not alone in practicing imperfect relationships, we are also not alone in being affected by the very thing, that is sin, that causes us to love imperfectly. There is hope. And always so! God's love is stable and unchanging and is available for us in His Son Jesus through the promise and covenant He first established with Abraham (Genesis 17:1-7; Numbers 23:19; Isaiah 40:28; Matthew 1:1ff; 2 Timothy 2:13 Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17).

As we learn more about who God is, we learn more about who we are (Romans 15:4-7)!

Part of who we are in Christ, with God, includes the weight of joy in bearing the responsibility of helping others to learn about their relational connection to God. We do this by preaching and teaching His Word alongside the efforts to disciple just as Jesus did with His chosen apostles; the very ones who continue that tradition with us through their written accounts of God's love and the life that Jesus lives (Luke 14:25-33; John 3:1-14; John 14:15-26; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Corinthians 5:5-10)!

Speaking of discipleship, the Lord blessed me with a few introductory opportunities by means of personal Bible study! Some in person, some over the phone, with different people not all of whom were in Kentucky. It can be often expressed, and you may have heard the saying before, that the Lord works in mysterious ways. I don't believe that is fundamentally true as it seems to be presented when mentioned in passing conversation. We know that the mystery of God has been fully revealed to us through His Son Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:24-26, 2:2-4). When our knowledge of who God is and who we are because of Him increases, we can rightly consider the opportunities to be with God in His Kingdom to come in different ways than how we might otherwise expect in accordance with our own wisdom. How much more can we be in a right relationship with God when we do not limit Him to our perspective that is looking up to Him?!

For example, in these past few years of my life I have seen God from different perspectives based on my experiences with different circumstances and the emotions that tag along. In part, dependent upon several things, how we make the effort to deal with (or respond to) our circumstances thus determine their outcome. Things like emotional intelligence, and for those of us who are Christians, things like our knowledge of the Scriptures play a role alongside His love-filled grace that surpasses our understanding.

One of the perspectives I've experienced God from is how He has filled my life with people whose hearts are truly open to Him and His Word – people that have helped me actualize the potential I have to be with Him. Maybe that's something you can relate to! And one thing from my end that has helped to make that possible is the pursuit of healing my own heart from past relational hurt – both in the church and away from it. That has only been possible as the most important lesson in my life continues to be learned from...

Whatever you go through in life, whether by your account or because of someone else, as long as you make the effort to keep your heart open to God and His Word, even in ways that seem small or feel insignificant, the beauty of His ways, love, and wisdom will unfold before you and you will be protected and cared for...

This doesn't mean there won't be consequences. There will always be consequences. Some good. Some bad. Some wanted. Some unwanted. The point being, as we learn about what it means to be someone after God's own heart, like David, while we experience the natural ebb and flow of bringing our relational imperfections to the table of life, when we include God we then see, feel, and learn that the stability God brings to the table is what we've been longing for in every aspect of our lives. And when we say yest to God we get to say yes to having the benefits of His stability in every aspect of our lives!

I'm probably rambling at this point, but I just want to share with you a glimpse of the things on my heart and mind spurred on by the love and support and encouragement I've been able to receive from God through the people He has filled my life with and through His Word. Whether in Kentucky. Whether in Colorado. Whether in Georgia, Texas, Alabama, Tennessee, or anywhere else throughout the world where people abide in God and He in them. I am grateful that His Word has the power to affect the human heart and I am thankful that we get to share in the results of that love together. There is so much more to be said and it has been challenging to figure out how to summarize everything I had the opportunity to experience this summer. Perhaps I'll close with this thought... Something that has been on my heart and mind since I was a teenager... in relation to the power of Christ being made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12)...

To the extent we are willing to, 1) have our humility before God, and 2) share it with others, as is our Christian duty, we will see the beautiful effects of God's ways in the relationships we have that we might just say, "I can't believe this is real." God's love is real! And if we make the effort to create space for God and share it with everyone in our lives, both past and present, before the sun of our final day on earth sets, we can rest with the assurance and confidence Jesus promises. Love you!

