

God With Us

By Dave Armstrong

They will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us"). These famous words found in Matthew's gospel have been said and sung during Christmas celebrations down through the years. And, I imagine, they will be heard often again this year. But, have you ever paused to consider them deeply? God. With. Us. What do these words really mean? Do they have any relevance "on the ground" in our homes, communities, and in each of our lives today? Do they represent a factual statement upon which we take action or are they simply a warm Christmas-time sentiment evoking images of Christmas trees, crackling fires in the fireplace, and families gathering together in holiday celebration?

Let's go back to the original context of the verse. Matthew was quoting from Isaiah's prophecy found in Isa 7:14. Israel and Syria had allied themselves against King Ahaz of Judah "so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind." (v.2). God instructed Isaiah to deliver this message to Ahaz: "Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart...' (v.4) but 'If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.' (v.9)

Rather than trust God to save him, Ahaz chose to ally himself with the Assyrians. But our God - long suffering and ever so gracious - challenged Ahaz to seek a sign that God could be taken at his word: "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." (v.11). Instead, as one

commentator put it, Ahaz "hid behind piety". Responding to God, Ahaz, quoting from the Law said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." (v.12) To which God responded, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (v.14). The "sign" at that moment in history predicted difficult times ahead. Rather than signaling salvation, it signaled God's judgment against Ahaz and Judah. Through the Spirit's leading, Matthew declared that very sign had another, deeper and more profound meaning: it was a predictor of blessings ahead for those who would ultimately put their trust in God through his son Jesus.

There's a saying: "desperate times call for desperate measures". For Ahaz, the desperate measures meant an ultimately disastrous alliance with Assyria. What about our "desperate times? Will we too find ourselves guilty of resorting to desperate measures? Will we trust in our own wisdom and strategies or will we trust God? News feeds, social media feeds, and the experiences of people around us are full of stories of "desperate times". But friends, our God is a Good God and he can, contrary to Ahaz's belief, be fully trusted. We hope this edition of Making Connections will help you embrace the truth that God really is **Immanuel, God with us.**

From all of our staff and volunteers, we wish you a wonder-filled Christmas and a hope-filled New Year!



2025 Events

•Winter Gala Feb 21

•Restart Project Serve Spring.

•YFC Golf Tournament June

From Mocking to Exploring

By Jeremy Brydges

We see God with us and at work in our Alternative Education class (Alt Ed) which we hold twice a week at our Orangeville drop-in centre. As part of the program, we host a Bible study. Bibles are left out and available for anyone to read. In October last year, one of the youth picked up a Bible and proceeded to openly mock it. But, behind the mocking, he had a couple of sincere questions. Over the course of the year, this same youth worked his way through Genesis during class. As the school year

ended, he once again had the Bible open and some of the other classmates began to ask questions. Before long the whole class was engaged in a conversation about Bible stories asking insightful, inquisitive questions and seeking further insights from our ministry staff.

In all the programs we offer, we aim to provide a safe place to explore questions about life, who God is and who we are in light of the teachings of scripture. Lovingly embracing a mocker led to a full class eager to learn about God. **God with us.**

I am the Alpha and Omega

By Ryan Campese

We run a Monday Drop-In from 7:00 to 9:00 each week out of the Novar Community Centre. This fall, using a video series called "Switch Youth", we explored cultural issues among today's youth. It spoke loudly to them, generating lots of thoughtful questions, and ultimately leading to an interest in the Bible and who Jesus is.

Because of the impact of Alpha in my own life, I chose Youth Alpha for our next video series. The series introduces who Jesus is and then gets into the "big questions" of life for today's youth. We started October 14th and will finish just after Christmas. There are currently 19 kids attending, aged 11 to 15 years. About one quarter of

the kids are Christians, half of them are homeschooled non-Christians, and the balance are the "rough kids" who are asking really honest questions.

Since starting the Alpha program, we have not lost one single kid! The questions are deep, intense, and theologically challenging. Many of the kids are considering inviting a friend. One youth is interested in baptism. In Revelation we read: "He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.'" [Rev 21:6 NIV]. God is clearly on the move in Novar and I couldn't be more excited! Please pray for us. The youth are truly thirsty for the Truth that only comes from knowing Jesus. **God with us.**

The Power of Story

by Kelly Culp

CampFire, our yearly camping trip, takes teens to the Pitman's Bay campground on Mary Lake near Huntsville. Here, they experience a week away from day-to-day life, are surrounded by God and have opportunities to step outside of their comfort zones. Each year is an amazing experience and this year was no different.

One of the most impactful aspects of CampFire are staff testimonies. Each night after our group activities, a staff member shares their story with the campers. This year I was invited to share my walk with Christ, choosing to specifically share about the challenges experienced when I first accepted Christ into my life. At that time, I struggled to accept that even though Jesus had introduced Himself to me, that He actually meant it when He said that He loved me.

After sharing my own experience, I had the privilege of spending some time with a few different youth and LIT's (Leader is Training - past campers interested in continuing with us while learning leadership skills). They were inspired to share their own stories with me. I heard about the lives they led, the struggles they faced,

and the ways they were seeking the love of Christ, whether they realized it yet or not. It was a humbling moment.

Each of these teens/LIT's are in different places in their journey with Christ, but each of them was willing to share their unique stories and allowed me to share the story of Jesus with them. At the end of the night, I was able to pray over them.

I wasn't the only staff who was given the opportunity to connect with youth in this way. Many of our staff experienced similar moments throughout the week where teens shared their stories, whether 1:1 or during our small group time. A number of our staff were invited to continue the conversations about Christ after the end of CampFire. For my part, I am currently in regular contact with five of the campers and Leaders in Training from this year's CampFire.

For 28 years, CampFire has been challenging kids to share their own stories, hear the story of Jesus, and consider writing a new story of Jesus in their lives. As a result of this year's CampFire, we are starting two new Bible Studies across the chapter for any youth and LIT's who are either new to Christ or still searching. Please pray! We need **Go**

Nothing is Wasted at the Altar

By Marcy Hill

Fifteen Toronto youth - twelve girls and three boys - traveled to Huntsville recently to attend Change Conference. Six adult leaders and one former young adult volunteer leader joined us. The concert on Friday night was fantastic and even though the majority of our kids are unchurched youth, they very quickly captivated by the praise and worship. The car rides together allowed for amazing conversation and relationship building as did our conversations around the dinner table. The breakout sessions on Saturday were impactful. I heard stories of youth witnessing to each other and some of our youth asking questions to not only the adults in the room but to other Christian youth that were sharing.

Leading up to the Change Conference, we had experienced some deep conversations about God during

our regular programming, carrying over from this summer's CampFire. In addition, many youth had shown interest in church. The Holy Spirit was clearly at work! He used exactly where they were in their hearts at that moment and built on the foundation of truth that these young people were experiencing.

So, when the altar call came after a day of worshiping, they were so ready to ask God into their hearts. The two who already knew the Lord, readily walked to the front and gave all their hurts and failures to God right there. We all sang "Nothing is Wasted at the Altar" with tears streaming down our faces. More youth followed. By the end, twelve youth either came to Christ for the first time or as repentant believers. Upon returning from the conference one parent emailed me and said "the conference was transformational for her daughter. She is asking to be baptized. Thank you again for your dedication to the mission of Jesus."

My heart is full! **God with us.**



Evidence of God in Answered Prayer

By Kelly Culp

God is with us everyday in more ways than we realize. He made this so very clear to me during a particular week recently as He prompted me to **1)** pray over each need that has arisen and **2)** trust Him with the result.

Below are three of the miracles we witnessed God perform in our midst over the span of just seven days:

1) We hosted a fundraiser and were short in sales by roughly 60 tickets. I prayed that God would somehow help us reach our goal in just one week. Later that day I received an email from a local pastor asking if he could buy a large number of tickets. "Of course!" I said. He ended up buying 83 tickets! We exceeded our goal!

2) This fall we've seen fewer youth in the centre. I prayed that God would show us the youth to whom He is specifically calling us to minister. The very next day, I

received a call from a mom new to the area who was desperate for a safe place she could bring her son who needed positive community around him. After a visit to our centre, the mom said she truly felt that God was using us as an answer to her prayers.

3) We recently reviewed our financials in conjunction with the preparation of next year's budget. To my great dismay, our projections showed that we were going to end the year in the red. So I prayed and asked God to somehow help us end the year without a deficit. Shortly afterwards, a gentleman stopped by our centre and asked what our biggest need is currently. When I told him about our financial deficit, he wrote a cheque right then and there for \$1,000!

These are just a few recent examples of how God has performed miracle after miracle in our midst and I have no other response than to Praise him and Thank him! **God with us.**

Year End Appeal

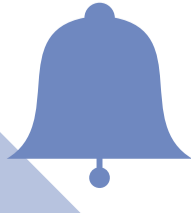
The Highlands Team has been called and commissioned by God to introduce the youth of Central Ontario and Muskoka to Jesus. We trust him daily to guide us and provide for us.

Will you consider a year-end gift to one of our compassionate staff? Or maybe a gift to our general fund to help cover the rising costs of achieving our mission in today's economy.

God with us. Of this we are sure. May he be with you in this season and beyond.

Prayer Corner

- Rest, rejuvenation and special family time over Christmas
- Increased regional support for the team
- Eastern Regional Staff Gathering event Jan 27-30 in Peterborough.
- Praise God for new volunteer & placement students.
- Vibrant winter ministries
- New programs Superwoman, Inspiring Possibilities



Nothing is Wasted at the Altar

Change Conference 2024

Twelve youth either came to Christ for the first time or as repentant believers. One asked to be baptized

