



THE *Able* LIFE



SPRING 2019

Stories of ordinary people in the Carmel Family cultivating lives which abide in Christ to build relationships and live the Gospel with everything.

REFLECTIONS:
looking back
looking forward

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REFLECTIONS

Carmel Family,

"You look so much like your Dad."

Many of us have found ourselves saying that after meeting the son of someone that we know. Or maybe it was...*"you're the spitting image of your Dad."* In those moments, we are simply saying that the son reflects his father.

We talk a great deal around here of being the "imago Dei." The reality that all people have value and worth because they reflect the image of God. And those who are followers of Christ are also the "imago Christi"...uniquely the image of Christ. What an amazing honor and joy to consider that we have the opportunity every single day to reflect our Savior to those around us.

Hebrews 1:3 say, *"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."* When we think of reflection we normally think of a mirror reflecting light back. However, in our case, we are reflecting the light of Christ from WITHIN, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Wow.

This edition of *The ABLE Life* is full of stories of Carmel members who have chosen to be available vessels to reflect Him beautifully to those around them. People just like YOU.

Where do we start in this reflective way of life? How do we become a reflection of Christ? It's begins with abiding deeply and daily in Christ. Spending unhurried time in the scriptures and in prayer. Learning to love Him back through meditating on His Word and listening to Him in silence. We also reflect Him well when we live as servant leaders and love others. Mark 10:45 reminds us, *"for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Enjoy reading the great stories that follow - and let God write a great story in you as well.

Love you Carmel. *"You look so much like your Dad."*

Pastor Alex

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

The Carmel team would love to hear your story! How is God at work in your life? Share your story with a member of our team or email it to pastor@carmelbaptist.org.

DISCO BALLS AND DISCIPLESHIP

JOYFUL REFLECTIONS

We are grateful for all God has done in our Joy Ministry and as we begin a new chapter we are filled with anticipation for the new stories we will see Him write among our Special Needs community at Carmel.



Jesus died for Mark, too.
– Linda

There it is, the sacred truth that defines Carmel's Joy Ministry and drives us to embrace special needs families. Linda and Joe's son, Mark, has loved Carmel's annual Joy Prom and the chance to put on his purple velvet sports jacket and dance the night away. Now, they are excited to see our special needs ministry shift to focus more on ongoing discipleship and care efforts. May all be able to know God's love and proclaim, "Our sons and daughters have a place at Carmel".

Joy Prom has been lighting up lives since 2006, welcoming special needs guests to dress to the nines and enjoy the wonder of Prom Night. Attendance in recent years approached 700. Carmel was transformed into a beautiful prom venue - from the red carpet entrance to live music to that familiar disco ball. Mark, 35, who has Down's Syndrome, added his own touch: He'd sing (typically an Elvis classic) to his hostess (typically a Carmel teenager) as they glided across the dance floor. Joy Prom sent a message to the community about Carmel's extraordinary commitment to all God's children. But a new season is ahead for Carmel's Joy Ministry - one that is laser focused on special needs ministry 52 weeks out of the year. And did you hear? Beginning in 2020, Elevation Church will host a prom for special needs families in south Charlotte through the Tim Tebow Night To Shine (Friday, February 7, 2020 - save the date.)



*Oh Lord, give us eyes to see people
the way that you see them.*



*JOY Ministry is not just
helping John, It provides
me time to deepen my
relationship with God.
Carmel gives me peace.*

– Cathy

LOOKING FORWARD

Parents and caregivers tell us how much their children and dependents love coming to church, to draw closer to God, their peers and the hundreds of volunteers who love them. "If Carmel had a church service every single night," Linda says, "Mark would make us go." They also tell us that expanding Joy Ministry beyond the prom gives them a needed respite and allows them to get more involved in the life of Carmel. For example, Cathy cares for her son John, 38, who has a genetic disorder. He is autistic, has ADHD, limited speech, and requires constant supervision. Come Sunday morning, John attends his JOY Discipleship Community at 9:30am while his mom attends worship. Then, when he attends the second JOY DC at 11:00am, she's in her own Discipleship Community, being renewed by their love and fellowship.

Carmel is already at work expanding Joy Ministry. Special Needs Associate, Audrey Scurfield, works to recruit more volunteers and equip them for serving. A growing number of high school students serve as buddies for special needs preschoolers and kids who can prosper in mainstream classes with added support. She also networks with colleagues from other churches with special needs ministries.

Two new JOY Ministry offerings have recently been launched: **Midweek JOY** - a Wednesday night discipleship experience for middle school through adult special needs friends - has begun on Wednesday nights so that parents and caregivers can attend regularly scheduled church activities. And **EPEC** (Exceptional Parents of Exceptional Children) - a Sunday morning meetup for parents and caregivers, meets monthly for encouragement and fellowship.

*We are always looking for new ways to best serve our special needs families.
If you have any suggestions or would like to volunteer, contact Audrey
at 704.847.8575 or audreys@carmelbaptist.org.*

BLESSED BY BLESSING

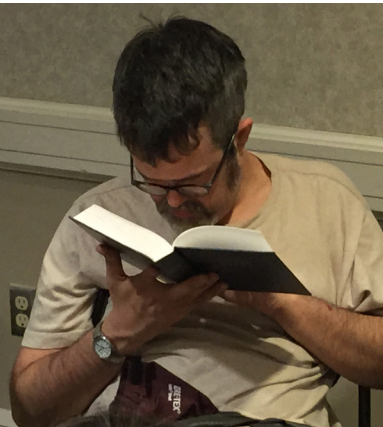
The best way to appreciate Joy Ministry, now and as it grows, is to appreciate the stories of those who are blessed by it:



Having found Carmel and Joy Ministry after moving here from Fayetteville, Joe and Linda will never forget Mark’s first Joy Prom. Linda cried through the whole thing. Mark danced through the whole thing. There are other poignant memories of life at Carmel, like when Mark was hospitalized with a serious illness and Joy volunteer Robin Neal barely left the family’s side. Now they eagerly await what’s to come, including the Wednesday evening gathering and other activities. All of it sends a message: *“For us as a family,”* Linda says, *“Mark has a place.”* May we all have the privilege of knowing Mark, and feeling his gentle spirit. Linda says he’s the kind of son that if she fixed him a PB&J for supper, he’d say, *“Mom, that was the best dinner ever!”*



Cathy says her son, John, loves Carmel so much that she gave him a choice one Sunday morning when she overslept: Shower, dress, eat and rush to church, or stay home and watch TV. It was no contest. *“He loves learning about God,”* she says. Cathy is excited about coming with John on Wednesday nights, especially with the launch of the new Midweek JOY class that allows special needs parents and caregivers the time and capacity to attend church activities. EPEC – Exceptional Parents of Exceptional Children – currently meets one Sunday a month, and she is excited to see that grown in the future. She’d love to see more students trained as buddies, joining the hundreds of volunteers who do a beautiful thing: *“These volunteers run toward our children every Sunday and never away.”*



Arthur and Kathleen, retired missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators, discovered Carmel and the Joy Ministry 1½ years ago. Their son, Titus, 35, has autism and ADHD. But that didn’t stop him from enjoying everything about Joy Prom. Titus loves how Joy Ministry makes him feel closer to God, putting it into words fit for a sermon: *“It feels like you’re redeemed.”* These parents would love to see the expanded Joy Ministry give Titus and others in this group opportunities to serve at church, whether it’s as greeters, pushing children’s buggies or leading in prayer. *“Give as well as receive,”* Arthur says. *“Titus will pray for someone at the drop of a hat. He is a blessing to other people.”*

There it is again, the sacred truth that defines Joy Ministry. Together, we can be a blessing to those with special needs as they are a blessing to us. As Arthur says,

We truly believe these guys are made in the image of God as much as we are.

ABLE AT ANY AGE
A PLACE CALLED HEAVEN

From 1976 - 1989, Dr. Don Bouldin faithfully led our church as Senior Pastor at our original Carmel Road campus, and then served as Global Outreach Pastor from 2004-2012. Following his “retirement,” Don continued to call Carmel home. Today, Don leads the Friendship Discipleship Community (DC), and this winter began a special teaching series on Heaven. Below, a few participants share their reflections.

“I’ve been impressed with the fact that Don lives out his call from God to preach and teach the Word even after a career in full time ministry. He spends as much time in preparation for DC lessons as he did on his sermons when he was a senior pastor. He is so driven to ‘finish well.’”

Wyatt Sieber, a Carmel member for 49 years and has known Don since 1976

“Even though Don has ‘retired,’ he has not retired from sharing the gospel and studying the Word. He is a great example! God continues to bless his ministry. He is a faithful servant. I do believe the greatest impact of this series thus far is the reminder that those who are not in Christ will not be in Heaven and we are called to share Him with them.”

Donna Kizer, a Carmel member for over 40 years

“Don Bouldin is such a treasure for Carmel Baptist Church. His mind is keen and he loves the Lord and loves to share God’s Word for the benefit and encouragement of all. His many stories and examples add great understanding to God’s Word and God’s promise to each of us that there is a wonderful place called Heaven that awaits all those who know and accept Christ as their Savior.”

George Satterfield, a Carmel member who has known Don since the 1970s and was baptized by him at age 27



Oh Lord, give us an enduring heart of servanthood and a love for Your Word.

OF EARTH AND WATER

REFLECTIONS ON CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

Since 1972, Carmel has been active in church multiplication. A formal church planting residency was established in 2017 to intentionally develop spiritual leaders to start new congregations as we seek to expand His kingdom through church multiplication.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul says he has “become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.” It is with this spirit of reaching diverse peoples for the sake of the gospel that Carmel has been investing time, effort, and resources (including people, finances, and facilities) to multiply churches across our city and around the world. People from a variety of communities speaking a variety of languages are increasingly experiencing the gospel, and we are thrilled to see the Apostle Paul’s vision playing out in our lifetime. Here is a taste of the fruit that we have seen God produce through recent plants:



Multiply Church launched in the summer of 2018 in our Choir Room. Casey Crimmins and Stephen Knopp lead this growing congregation that currently meets at the Brace Family YMCA on Sunday mornings and has multiple small groups meeting in homes. Their emphasis on introducing the lost to Jesus is infectious and they are seeing God move in mighty ways.



Impacto Church is a growing Spanish-speaking church meeting on Sunday afternoons at Carmel led by Keith Moore. This church was created with the North Carolina Baptist Association to reach the growing Spanish-speaking population of Charlotte. They meet at Carmel on Sundays at 1pm in the Choir Room, on the lower level.



Disciples of Jesus is a church in Tirana, Albania led by Pastor Roland Sula that seeks to plant more churches throughout the Albanian speaking world, an area of the world which is largely resistant to the gospel. Carmel is planning multiple trips to send people to come alongside them in this exciting season.



DID YOU KNOW?

These churches are part of Carmel’s history of church multiplication.

- 1972 - Sharon Baptist Church
- 1981 - Living Hope at Ballantyne (formerly Covenant Baptist Church)
- 1981 - Candlewyck Baptist Church
- 1991 - First Baptist Church Weddington
- 2005 - McKee Road Baptist Church
- 2009 - Five Stones
- 2015 - Mercy Church (formerly Candlewyck Baptist Church)
- 2015 - Oakhurst
- 2016 - Grace One
- 2016 - Family Church (Russian Congregation)
- 2018 - Multiply Church
- 2018 - Impacto Charlotte
- 2019 - Redeemer Church Charlotte



OUR NEXT CHURCH PLANT

Church multiplication efforts are commonly known as "church planting." This fall, Carmel will "plant" Redeemer Church in South Charlotte with Pastors Josh Fairbaugh, our Connections Pastor and Lem LeRoy, our Worship Pastor. Josh reflects on the preparation that is underway for this new body of believers and why "plant" is such an accurate term.

Gardening is slow, nervous, messy work. Dirt under your fingernails; mud caked on your shoes. Gratification comes slowly, if at all. The first few weeks may be the hardest. Watching, watering, waiting. Each earthen crack a hopeful promise. Each green sprout a precious life. Romantic at a distance, the daily work of gardening reeks of earth and water. The fragrance of the fruit to come. And patience.

Redeemer Church is a seed, gently covered in the fresh-tilled dirt of Carmel’s generosity. The plot is marked, weeds cleared, fertilizer spread, ground furrowed. Now begins the patient work of watching and praying, waiting on the God who raises the dead. “Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:7) The daily work of church planting is the thorny business of attending to this activity of God at the intersection of people, place, and time. Tending to the seed, waiting for God.

A church is a gathering of particular people around Word and table. A people who preach and eat of Christ, together. A people who share their daily burdens of work and play, joy and sorrow, life and death. A people whose common-unity is a taste of the coming life of the Kingdom. A people who seek to extend that life throughout the places they live, work, and play.

As we step out in obedience as Carmel’s next church plant, our primary prayer is that we would be attentive to the work of God in the hearts of people. In our own hearts. In the hearts of those He is drawing to be part of the Launch Team. In the hearts of those that who, through this new work, will come to experience, for the first time, the redemptive power of the gospel.



Oh Lord, we pray collectively for the growth that only You can give.

THIS IS HOW WE DO IT

REFLECTIONS ON PRESCHOOL LARGE GROUP

While parents are in worship service or in Discipleship Communities at Carmel, our Preschoolers are busy traveling back to Bible times to learn about God's story and singing fun, interactive worship songs that help ignite their childlike wonder.



ON THE STAGE, BEHIND THE BIBLE

For 12 years, Nicole has made the Bible come alive on Sunday mornings in Carmel's Preschool Ministry. As Large Group Worship Coordinator, Nicole reflects on her approach and heart for teaching biblical truth to our youngest.

One of the things I am most passionate about is teaching our Preschoolers the grand story of Scripture. Even at an early age, they can begin to understand that each "little story" is really just part of One Big Story - God's Story!

From the moment our Preschoolers enter our Large Group room, they are excited! Our fun, themed stage ties to each story unit. Sometimes we venture into the wilderness with Moses, other times we set sail with the Apostle Paul. We've been detectives looking for Good News Clues about the coming Messiah, and we've been to the 'Tis So Sweet Bake Shoppe and learned an old hymn to remind us "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus."

One of our greatest desires is that Carmel Preschoolers will come to love the Story of God and the God of the Story.

Each week we invite our Preschoolers to praise God through song and movement. We sing songs that remind us of who God is and what He has done. Sometimes we even make up our own songs to help us remember hard things! And we bring Bible stories to life in funny, creative, and age-appropriate ways. Sometimes children shriek with laughter, while other times they are completely quiet, eager to find out what happens next.

As we teach our Preschoolers to think deeply about the Word of God, we get to watch as their eyes light up and they are filled up with wonder at who Jesus is! What a holy privilege it is to see God at work in the hearts of our youngest!

ON THE FLOOR, AMONG THE CHILDREN

Faith has taught "Sunday School" for 50 years! The past 10 years she has served in Preschool Ministry at Carmel alongside her husband Mick. The reflections of this former educator on Preschool Large Group bear witness to the level of quality teaching and impact on Carmel's youngest.

A cleverly decorated stage invites wide-eyed anticipation. Motion-filled songs focus attention and energy. A contemporary vignette which parallels the Bible story follows. Each week's Preschool Large Group experience is filled with adventure, surprise, and most importantly, Biblical truth. As Nicole teaches, the Children's Bible is always in hand.

Nicole brings such creativity to each thematic unit. A few of my favorite memories include:

- Miss Sondra - Nicole's trusty side-kick, who may play the role of the fractured fairy-tale princess, the cowgirl ranch hand, or the fictional superhero. She helps guide our "travels." One week we're at the K-EYE radio station. Another week we're at a castle and still another in the desert.*
- This past December, Nicole used a cozy fireplace, rocker and Christmas tree - complete with wrapped presents - as a reminder to the kids that the best gift was Jesus - God's presence here on earth with us!*
- The giggles and memories created from the story of the Passover trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve. Miss Sondra appeared in bathrobe and curlers awakened from sleep as news spread of a young boy missing from the caravan returning to Nazareth. The lesson had impact!*

Our twenty minutes in large group goes quickly. We file back to our classrooms for story review, crafts, and snack, all designed to reinforce what we've learned in Large Group.

*Adults and children alike benefit from the laughs,
the love and the learning in Large Group.*

There is no question. Our Preschoolers are studying God's Word - that He love us, wants to be our special friend. The creativity and versatility in Large Group confirms we are impacting our youngest with the gospel. The rapt attention of most of the children, their laughter, and their calling out of answers they are proud to know, confirms it!



*Oh Lord, we pray that you would
bring your story to life in our lives.*

BEAUTY OUTSIDE OUR COMFORT ZONE

LESSONS ON LIMITS VS. LIMITLESSNESS

Carmel's Home Educators families faithfully serve together at Carrington Place - a local ministry partner a mile down the road that provides living and rehabilitation care to more than 150 residents. Parents and students of all ages have built relationships with residents and staff while serving in the ice cream parlor, facilitating BINGO and fellowshiping over monthly crafts. Below, Amy reflects on the impact serving at Carrington Place has had on her three children.



What do 10, 8, and 6 year old eyes remember about their first visit to Carrington Place? They didn't hesitate with their answer - they remember fear. "I was scared, Mama." "I was really nervous." I get it, because honestly I felt it too. This was out of our comfort zone, and way out of their familiarity of how folks live daily. Yet, an hour later as we left I remember thinking, "That was one of the absolute greatest opportunities our family has ever experienced."



Oh Lord, help us to be eager to build up the hearts of others.

We've prioritized monthly visits to Carrington Place ever since. The time we spend leaning in over a table of crafts with image bearers of the Father, has shown the Father's love to us and proved His Words true in so many facets. "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45); "whoever loses his life for Me, finds life" (Matthew 10:39); "whatever you do for the least of these, you do for Me." (Matthew 25:40).

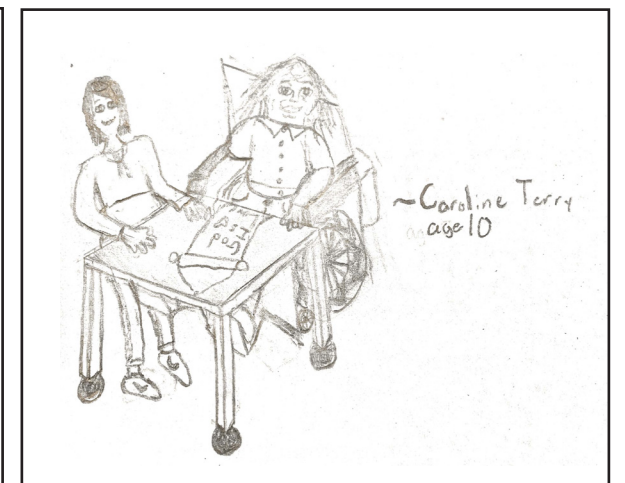
When my kids experience the self-denial of an afternoon playing outside to go to Carrington Place to be a little uncomfortable and see a lot of need, they are "proving" these Scriptures to be true for themselves. Even my 8 year old talks about how fun it is to serve, and my 6 year old recognized it this way:

*God is the one who lets me give that kindness to people.
I am trying to build up their hearts, but they always end up building up mine.*

So we keep showing up, learning new names, beginning new friendships, hoping those we are falling in love with will still be up for a visit next month when we return. And with each visit looking for windows to point our new friends to Jesus, to ask them how we can pray for them, to pray over them when they okay it, and to try to "make the most of every opportunity" we have, for the Carrington Place residents are fully aware that the days are short, and eternity is near.

My kids are learning to rightly see their own limits and God's limitlessness. They get to funnel all their youthful rambunctious energy and give it away. As they hold and work the crafts, they use their able hands to work tenderly and patiently alongside hands that no longer work, or their sharp eyes to see the detail and beauty and find their voice in communicating it to friends who can no longer see for themselves. Or their feet...or their ears...or their smiles. My children (and myself included) are getting to be the hands and feet of Christ, going to Carrington Place each month. My kids are learning that life isn't defined by the age of your body, but rather by the heart and soul inside. And it never fails that as we show up to give, they give us more. His perfect love has driven out our fear (1 John 4:18), and has compelled us to commit to those relationships here forward.

Come join what God is doing through folks from Carmel at Carrington Place! Visit carmelbaptist.org/serve to learn more or email neighbors@carmelbaptist.org.



LIFE OR DEATH IN A WEEK

REFLECTIONS ON CHOOSING LIFE

Debbie lives in New Hampshire but frequently watches Carmel's Sunday morning worship online. Several promptings, including Pastor Alex's February 10 message on life, stirred her to publicly share her story on choosing life. Carmel member Kelsey and her birth mom reflect on the beauty and heartbreak of adoption.

DEBBIE'S REFLECTIONS:

On a Tuesday in 1981 I found myself pregnant and alone. I was 22, living and working in D.C.

On Wednesday I went to work. My manager told me not to worry, that my medical insurance covered abortions..."No financial burden of paying for it," she said.

On Thursday I scheduled my abortion. As the day progressed, I began to contemplate my options and decided to call my brother to get his thoughts. Tim, a believer, graciously spent the next few hours explaining not his thoughts, but rather God's perspective on life. He read scripture to me. He assured me that Jesus would take me through the storm I was facing.

On Friday I cancelled my appointment. I had decided to give my child life.

I left D.C. and moved back home (my mother took the news better than I anticipated). While there I learned from my mom that 22 years earlier my aunt - her sister - had given up a son for adoption. I had never considered adoption as an option. But it is what I decided to pursue.

After 9 months and 9 hours of labor I gave birth to a beautiful, perfect, baby girl. And I named her Rebecca, which means "a servant of God". Adoption is beautiful and heartbreaking all in one.

Rebecca was born on a Friday and I had until Tuesday to finalize my decision with a signature. I struggled with the irrevocable decision to never see my daughter's face again. Never hold her. Never watch her marry or grow old. On Monday, May 11 - one day after Mother's Day and just 3 days after her birth - I made that decision and began a long journey of physical, spiritual and emotional recovery.



KELSEY AND HER BIRTH MOM, DEBBIE

The next 22 springs would come and go and I would never forget the little child that changed my life forever. I thought of her often and missed her intensely.

But I never regretted my decision to give her life and I had great peace about the decision.

In 2004, the adoption agency informed me that my daughter wanted to contact me. When I answered the phone I heard a voice on the other end (that sounded just like mine) say, "Hi! My name is Kelsey and you're my mother!" We talked for 2 hours and made plans to meet in person. My joy was complete and my family now included Kelsey.

I am grateful to have held her in my arms again, to have watched her get married, and am delighted to be growing old with her. Most of all, I thank God for the "servant of God" she has become in my life and in so many others.

Choose life... you won't live to regret it!



Oh Lord, help us to make choices that honor you and that transform our lives.

KELSEY'S REFLECTIONS:

For two decades I had no answers. Who did I look like? Where did I come from, and where did I get my specific talents and strengths? Did I have any siblings? After 22 years, the journey came to an end while ushering in a new beginning.

I finally had answers! A real birth certificate. An official first baby picture (after not having any record of the first 6 weeks of life). And 22 years of journal entries written for me by my birth mom as she worked through her grief. Looking through a picture book of 2 decades of memories of everything I had missed was incredibly tough.

But I was loved. I was chosen. That decision was a selfless act of love. I was overwhelmed with peace.

Now having birthed a child of my own I understand this more completely and how hard that decision must have been. To go through a traumatic birth, and give your all... just to say goodbye.

But I had no idea that I almost wasn't here at all. She had a choice. That had never crossed my mind. A choice to make the problem go away or a choice to walk through what would be one of the darkest and toughest seasons of her life. And she chose the latter - the hard one. She chose to put me first and her second. She chose life for me, which many days felt like death for her. While I've always been a pretty driven person, learning of this difficult decision sparked a whole new level of drive in my life. She sacrificed for me and gave me life and I need to steward that well.

I also learned the answer to my question about siblings was YES. In the 20 months we had together, my brother Adam unrelentlessly shared the Gospel with me. It wasn't until saying goodbye to him on Mother's Day in 2006 (due to a fatal traffic accident) that I saw God really show up, pursuing me hard. Now I would walk through the darkest and toughest season of my life but someone else had sacrificed a heck of a lot for me too, providing a rebirth and a path to use bad for good.

On what would have been Adam's 21st birthday weekend, I decided to try church for the first time, so I googled "non-denominational church Baltimore" and tried the first one on the list, Grace Fellowship. I showed up alone, snagged a bulletin and sat down to listen to a Pastor by the name Adam and the topic of the day was "Adoption". I know we're not supposed to look for signs but I couldn't ignore that confirmation of where I felt I was supposed to be. Later that week I found out "Grace Fellowship" was also the name of the church Adam attended growing up. Even further confirmation.

This is when I came to know the Lord and when my driven life became a purposeful driven life. Life is short, and for some (like Adam) it seems it is shorter than it should be. Don't waste your life being of the world. Find out what special gift God has given you and use it to help serve others. Use your life as a platform for sharing the Gospel and as a reflection of the Gospel. As Christians, we're really given life twice. Live it with EVERYTHING fervently.

Without my birth Mom choosing life, I wouldn't be ABLE to live out the mission that He knit for me in my mother's womb. Remember, Psalm 139 doesn't say 'knit me in my mother's arms'. It clearly states "womb." Life starts there. His plans and design for each life are created then. **So thank you, birth Mom, for choosing life and thank you Jesus for pursuing me and giving me the chance to find new life in You!**



KELSEY WITH DEBBIE AND SIBLINGS

A THING CALLED J-TERM

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WEEK MAKES

Carmel Christian School's J-Term (January Term) is a unique week of serving, learning and building relationships where high school students are challenged through local, national and international opportunities.

Living the gospel "outside" the classroom enhances the spiritual, physical and intellectual growth of each student and is an important part of the disciple-making process. "CCS is about investing in the next generation," says Head of School, Dr. Jay Hancock. "We want our students to excel in the classroom, but more importantly, learn to truly abide in Christ, to build relationships that matter for eternity, to live the gospel in word and deed and to invest everything they have in the mission of Christ."

J-Term experiences stretch students physically, intellectually, and spiritually and are varied in terms of location and task. Some students travel abroad to teach children, lead a sports camp or build a building. Some students travel out of state to Texas and Virginia. Others students stay close to home to intern or serve with local ministry partners. The goal is for each student to get outside their comfort zone.

One 12th Grader returned home from the Dominican Republic "more in touch with Jesus than ever and I know it is not just a 'worship trip high' because I still feel it weeks after! All I want to do is talk about how much God impacted me during the trip and through the children at Freedom School." The trips were "filled with prayer and worship and everything we did, we did for the glory of God and that helped me grow closer with Him."



BEYOND J-TERM

J-term experiences often ignite a passion for missions in CCS students.

Since January 2013, a group of high schoolers from CCS have traveled to Freedom International Ministries in the Dominican Republic (DR) as part of J-Term. This particular trip affords students a unique opportunity to share their faith as they lead children in the classroom and engage with them in afternoon camps and construction projects.

Twelve Carmel students who first experienced Freedom International Ministries through J-Term were called to return on their own. Selwyn Knupp ('18) is among them. After serving there throughout her high school years, Selwyn felt God calling her to pause her college plans and go to the DR for a gap semester. The impact of her experience was so profound that while there the Lord led her to change colleges to pursue Elementary Education at a school that would also provide a biblical studies option.

God is in the business of changing hearts and lives. And He continues to work in and through our J-Term students to fulfill His mission of impacting our world for Jesus Christ and making disciples.



STUDENT REFLECTIONS:

Gaylen Allen ('19) - My first time there I fell in love with Freedom and will use every opportunity I have to go back! While serving there, the Lord showed me that my calling is in teaching - by showing God's love for each and every child.

Tyler Caldwell ('19) - I think about missions and my future differently now. Going on this trip really opened my mind to a whole new pathway for my life.

Mary Thomas Queen ('19) - My first trip to Freedom was honestly the best week of my life! Every time I've gone, I've left there feeling loved and needed by the students. I just want to pour that into the people at home when I come back!

J-TERM EXPERIENCES

- Dominican Republic (missions)
- Puerto Rico (educational/missions)
- Costa Rica (missions)
- Lumberton, NC (disaster relief)
- Camp Lurecrest (missions)
- Local Missions (JAARS, Bed for Kids, Carrington Place, Merry Oaks Elementary, Mosaic, Harvest Center, Charlotte Rescue Mission)
- San Antonio, TX (educational)
- Internships (about 50 - examples: accounting, veterinarian, parks and recreation, marketing, engineering, etc.)
- Snowshoe, VA (educational)



Oh Lord, show us how to be Jesus with skin on, no matter where we are.

DIVORCE CARE

FACING THE STRUGGLES TOGETHER

50% of marriages end in divorce and sadly the church is not immune to this statistic. We have people in our church family who are facing the real struggles that come with broken marriages. However, we as a body of believers are uniquely positioned to be a people & place of support.

JOE'S REFLECTIONS:

In 2005, Joe's wife left him with 3 kids to raise, alone. His struggles were real and overwhelming - finances, childcare and parenting - and at the church he attended, he felt like an outcast.

I had no one to talk to - I had to keep my game face on for my kids - but inside I was falling apart.

The challenges he faced then eventually stirred in him a desire to help others deal with the hardships of divorce and single parenting. In 2010, Joe remarried, moved to Charlotte and joined the Carmel family. In 2018 when he heard about the DivorceCare startup, he saw an opportunity to help and was all in. He knew God was prompting him to use what he had been through to help others. He shares the following insights:

Every week we see people's lives being changed because we address the real issues in a relevant way that helps bring healing from a biblically-based foundation. Even 14 years after my divorce, serving as a facilitator for DivorceCare continues to help me understand why I went through what I did and normalizes the trauma.

For those who have or are going through a divorce, Joe offers this encouragement: *We all have been where you are. We know you are hurting, confused, lonely, and scared. Divorce is nothing any of us planned or wanted. Please join us in DivorceCare, even if it's just to listen the first time. We will pray for you, cry with you, and be there to listen when you're ready to share. What you say will be held in strictest confidence with no judgement--because we've all been there.*

Joe also notes: *If you really want to help someone going through a divorce, walk beside them and let them know that they are still loved and wanted. Invite them to lunch or coffee. Have a real conversation about what is going on in their life, look for practical ways to help, and offer to pray for them. Simply telling a person that God loves them no matter what goes a long way in their recovery.*

JULIE'S REFLECTIONS:

Carmel has been Julie's church home since she was a child. In 2014, her marriage of 22 years ended and this now-single mom of 3 boys found coming to Carmel awkward and painful. But Carmel was a place her kids loved, thrived and had deep connections. So she couldn't leave, despite how much of a "fish-out-of-water" she felt.

People did not know what to say, how to act or what to do with me. I was grieving, challenged with so many new things and did not have a safe place.



She candidly recounts: *Divorce can be consuming and you need a safe place to escape and to NOT talk about it if you don't want to. When I was going through it, I felt like I was drowning but God has been faithful to provide so many times! I am on the other side now and I can encourage other women that they will survive! Honestly, I always knew God had a purpose for this happening - I may not be able to explain why God allowed it but I knew He is going to use it to help people.*

In 2018 Carmel began DivorceCare with Joe and Julie as the men's and women's facilitators. Built around scripture and a 13-week video curriculum, DivorceCare support groups meet weekly to help people face the challenges of divorce or separation and then move them toward rebuilding their lives. Julie describes it as a friendly, caring group of people who will walk alongside you through one of life's most difficult experiences.



Getting emotionally healthy was a personal challenge, but becoming a DivorceCare facilitator was something else altogether - it was completely outside of my comfort zone! However, it has taught me so much about myself, and I've learned to give myself LOTS of grace. I've come to realize that I was a control freak, but God showed me that HE will be the one to provide the words I need to connect with this group of women. It's not about me, but about what He wants to say. So every week I surrender myself to Him before I go in with the group to facilitate. It's been a great reminder that God is in control in every situation.

Coming alongside women to love and support them is good. I see myself in them - they are terrified like I was - I understand exactly where they are. It's so easy to be surrounded by friends and family yet feel completely alone, because anyone who hasn't experienced divorce can't possibly know or understand the range or intensity of feelings. DivorceCare reminds people that they are not alone and puts people around them who have been where they are now.

If divorce is part of your story and you seek to find comfort, understanding and healing, DivorceCare meets (most) Wednesday nights at 6:30pm at Carmel.

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." - Isaiah 43:2



Oh Lord, surround us with people who are willing to help us fight through the struggles of life.

LIVING ON MISSION

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

Christopher and Rachael's four youngest children recently took "love your neighbor" to a whole new level...in their school and in the community.



These kids had much bigger dreams than this tiny little box the school provided for their sock drive.

On the way to dinner one night during winter break, Ames, Isaiah Jane, Honor Rose, and Hadassah Lee noticed some homeless residents attempting to warm themselves behind a building and asked their parents to stop for food and water at a nearby grocery store.

After dropping off the items, the kids spent the car ride home brainstorming ways to make a difference in the homeless community this winter. They petitioned their principal with a letter, requesting permission to host a sock drive at their elementary school. Their argument?

We CAN help, so we SHOULD help.

The sock drive quickly caught on and gained support of their school administration and the local community, and was even featured on various news networks. Over the last month, they have collected nearly 500 pairs of socks and begun distribution in the Charlotte area.



Carmel is committed to making disciples of those Nearest, our Neighbors and the Nations.