

# Captive Free West Coast 2006-07 Journal

**Date:** 10/4/2006

**Submitted by:** Sarah White

**Journal Entry:**

God is so good to us. There have been many experiences that God has made things work when we were stressed about getting things done on time or arriving at a church on time, but He has always made it work well.

Yesterday two of us spent a few hours at the hospital. Our host home and church were so flexible with us, opening her home and allowing us to come back to the house whenever we needed to. We were able to put teammates and health above business, and be more prepared for the ministry ahead.

All this happened on a day where we only had a 45 minute drive (not seven hours), no programming during the day or in the evening, and another flexible host awaiting our arrival. I am in awe of how God has worked through our experiences so that we are in the best possible position to minister to people as they need it.

We are now in Phoenix, AZ. This morning we led chapel for an elementary school, and enjoyed every minute of it. The kids were very energized, and sang their hearts out. I enjoy seeing how schools are ministering to children through every day education. Keep it up, Christian schools!!

Thank you to everyone who is supporting us along the way. We are working hard and enjoying the ministry that God is continuously calling us to. Blessings to you all!

Sarah



**Sarah White**

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**Date:** 10/11/2006

**Submitted by:** Alex Schatz

**Journal Entry:**

It's amazing how fast energy moves one object to another. Think about that, and then visualize a worship leader's energy upfront move like lightning through the whole sanctuary; running electric ripples throughout the heart of worship. I had the privilege to witness this today as we were leading a chapel. Anthony (a man with an unbelievable amount of energy) decided to move into the middle of the sanctuary and performed the actions of sing alongs we had chosen to teach today. There was an obvious change in the atmosphere; I could see what the Spirit was doing, and I have and will continue to praise God for that.



**Alex Schatz**

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**Date:** 10/13/2006

**Submitted by:** Michelle Meulemans

**Journal Entry:**

I have been home for five days now because I have to take care of some medical issues. Separating from my team in order to do this was probably one of the most difficult decisions I've ever had to make in life! Difficult because it's hard to leave them (who knew that one month on the road could turn six strangers into a family?), but it was also easy because I knew God would NOT, NOPE, NEVER, UH-UHN, lead me astray so long as I listen to Him. So I did. And I was right.



Throughout this experience and journey home, God has shown me sooooo many things that would most likely not have otherwise been seen. One important one that I would like to share with you is... that we are BLESSED! It says in Deut. 28:2 "When you hearken to the voice of the Lord, your God, all these blessings will come upon you and overwhelm you." How often do we forget all of the amazing and abundant blessings that the Lord pours down on us every day? For me, it was realizing what a gift I had truly been given to spend this time on the road, however long it ended up being, to share with

**Michelle Meulemans**

the world what an AWESOME and GRACIOUS and LOVING God we have! I had the opportunity to reach so many people each and every day (as do we all) just by talking to them, or listening to their story and hearing what they have to say. Go be the love of Jesus to the world. I had a friend once that said, "Be Christ to everyone you meet, for you might be the only Bible they ever read." Scary but true. So, as we go forth living our daily lives, let us not forget all that Lord has given to us, be it friends, family, health, food, warmth from the cold or shade from the sun, or even a chance to talk with a stranger along the way!

Blessings,  
Michelle

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**Date:** 10/14/2006  
**Submitted by:** Naomi Nelson  
**Journal Entry:**

Week five of our journey has just begun. It seems like we've been gone so much longer! God has been working through us so much already. I look back to when we first began our journey and when I compare it to now, I can see so many improvements...our general attitude about things, relationships with each other, flexibility, and how we handle any changes. We finished our Team Creed about a week ago...that was good for us, to find common ground to be able to stand on as the year goes on. We went to the beach and we had so much fun!!! The water was cold, but we didn't care. It's not every day we get to be smashed by the waves of the Pacific! We had a great time making ourselves into sand art as well. The first of many good times to come. I'm excited! God is amazing. I had no idea I would see the things that I do now inside myself, and about other people. I've learned so much already...things I definitely need to work on. And I am excited for the opportunity to improve myself! I think we all are. I really love my team. We may not always get along, but it doesn't last long, and we're all here for one main reason: to serve. We are all called to a year of ministry.



**Naomi Nelson**

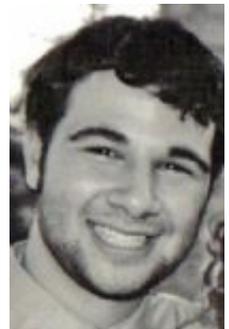
I miss home... but I'm happy to be here serving God in this ministry! More to come from Naomi...

Naomi Nelson

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**Date:** 10/27/2006  
**Submitted by:** Anthony Eder  
**Journal Entry:**

Michelle is back, and we are family again. The night before some of us "Wookies" had went to the dollar store to go shopping. We have a lot of fun shopping. So we had saw the costume section, and were thinking all the same thing. DRESS UP!! We wanted to make Michelle's welcoming at the airport very interesting. So we got costumes for everyone. Sarah: fairy godmother; Naomi: a buzzing bee; Anthony: a guy with a huge fro with sunglasses; Dave: a cowboy sheriff; and Alex: purple hair. We couldn't leave Michelle out, so we got her a purple witch hat with metallic silver fuzzies and a purple boa. We couldn't stop laughing!! We also made signs that said: WEL/COME/HOME/MICH/ELLE. So we walked in the terminal with costumes ready. We felt like a circus parade walking in about to do a show. We got in our positions with costumes, posters, and noise makers. People were taking pictures of us, too. It was great to see reactions from everyone. We gathered a crowd, and they were excited to see Michelle come home. So we were all sweating, well basically Anthony, but we were all very anxious for her returning!!! So we see this short, smily, curly hair girl walk down the stairs, and.....THE CELEBRATION STARTED!! WE WERE LOUD!! It was a great feeling to see her smiley face, and to give her a hug. We rejoiced, and we were back to being weird again. God has been blessing us abundantly. He is AWESOME and AMAZES us every day. Thank you for your prayers, and continue to pray for health for our team. We have a pic of the airport on our team photo page, check it out [here](#).



**Anthony Eder**

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**Date:** 10/28/2006

**Submitted by:** Michelle Meulemans

**Journal Entry:**

Hey guys, I know it's been awhile since I've written. In fact, I am now back with the team. It has been sooooo WONDERFUL to be back with them. Every day is a blessing, and it is true that you don't know what you have until it's gone. Since I got back, I've just be able to really share in ministry with, and love, and appreciate all of my teammates at such a greater level. Now I am not saying that life has been a cake walk after I returned. It never is. But when you find out things like you need to learn 20 or more sing-alongs in less than two weeks, or your bass breaks during the middle of a performance and you can't fix it, that you have to remember what it says in James 1:2-3.



**Michelle Meulemans**

"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow."

However difficult it may be at the time, we need to remember that even through our struggles the Lord is using us. He takes those opportunities to truly shape our character. It might be in our weakest moments that He helps us to grow. It is at times like that we may feel more static than ever before, but He may be making changes in us that we cannot even see ourselves. I just encourage you to be strong be brave and put your trust in the Lord.

"Cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7

Many blessings,

Michelle

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**Date:** 11/14/2006

**Submitted by:** Dave Minster

**Journal Entry:**

Hey! This past weekend we had our second Quake, the Northern California Quake. It was a blast! It was really great for me to meet Peder Eide and see Bob Lenz again (he was at the Seattle Quake the previous weekend). I was also very excited when I could meet so many of the kids at the Quake. I remember how exciting Quakes were for me several years ago when I was in junior high, and now my team and I are able to share that same excitement with a whole new bunch of kids. I thank God that I was given the opportunity to actually sit down and get in depth with a couple of the youth. I listened to where they were in their life and their walk with God, and I loved sharing with them my faith journey. I am sure God led me to them because I was able to relate to how they felt and I was also able to give them guidance because I had been through similar obstacles. I pray that God gives me more opportunities like these and puts the right words of encouragement into my mouth. On a side note, my team and I are having a great time seeing all of God's beautiful creation on the West Coast!



**Dave Minster**

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**Date:** 11/23/2006

**Submitted by:** Naomi Nelson

**Journal Entry:**

So... MY turn to write in our Team Journal. Things are great! We are in Carlin, Nevada, until Saturday morning. I couldn't have picked a better place to spend Thanksgiving away from home. While

I miss my family, the host family that the six of us are staying with are going to great lengths to make it a good Thanksgiving away from our families. They said that they would make anything that we wanted, if there happens to be a dish that our family always makes at Thanksgiving. Sarah and Anthony are sitting at the kitchen table to my right crying as they chop the onions they will be adding to Anthony's special salsa. Alex is watching Cars with our host brother, Bradley, in his room. They've really bonded the last few days. And Dave and Michelle are playing a game called Imaginiff with our host sister, Jordan. It's fun watching/listening to them play. They sound like they are having a lot of fun. As I said, things are going well. We just had an Experiential Worship program about a block away at Carlin United Methodist Church. It was slightly funny at the end. I forgot that we weren't at a Lutheran church, and so when Dave said, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord..." and there was silence with the exception of one member saying 'Amen', I thought for a moment about how different one Lutheran church can be from another. I had to laugh when I remembered we were at a Methodist church and I heard Anthony explain to them that when we say "'Go in peace...'...you say, 'ok, we will!'" It was a fun night. We switched up the glues and sharings in the program tonight. I had asked Alex a few weeks ago to be ready to share his testimony tonight. I could tell he was pretty uptight and unsure about it at the time. But you must know that his sharing tonight was incredible. He hit all the right points, being funny, but to the point, knowing where he was going with it. He even included sound effects. He knew what he was doing up there. Apparently his sharing really spoke to a young man, age 16, tonight. After the program, I saw him in a corner talking with the boy. I'm sure it was a good experience for him. I'm excited to see how God uses us this year. He is so good to us! I've had so many opportunities to share my testimony with people on the road. It amazes me how many other people in this world have been or are currently going through almost exactly what I have been through. I'm loving it...touching people...making a difference.



**Naomi Nelson**

My eyes were opened to a few things a couple of days ago. We were walking on the streets of Sacramento on our day off. I wrote this on my blog when I got back that evening:

Homelessness is thriving in abundance here. When we left the mall tonight, the streets outside the mall suddenly were filled with homeless people walking around. As we were walking back to the church we were staying, a man came up to us and asked us if we would help him in some way. The look on his face brought tears to my eyes. As he stood in front of us, another man stepped in front of him from behind, and began pulling at his clothes, as he said something like "This is the look of homelessness...I'm the one who needs the help." I didn't know what to say or do. I was glued to the spot for a few seconds as I watched the first man look up from the ground and tell the other man to back off and stay away from him, starting an argument between the two about which of them needs the help more. Then I felt one of my teammates nudge me to keep walking. Right after that, I saw a lady walking away from the entrance of the mall, mumbling as a police officer followed her out saying, "Those are for sick children; you're not a sick child." As we continued walking down the street, we passed all kinds of people with unwashed, stringy-looking hair, dressed in scrappy clothes, standing along the side, up and down the street. As the amount of homeless people lessened, my shock began to go away and was immediately replaced with an inability to hold in my tears. Even though I haven't had much experience dealing with homeless people, it wasn't fear that brought the tears. It was the look of defeat in some of their faces, their eyes full of fear, some unable to even look at me in the eye. The look of the man that came up to me and asked me to help him in some way, the look in his eyes... He looked so sad, and so hopeless. I wanted to do something. I wanted to tell him that God doesn't want that for him, and that God loves him. But instead, I felt so empty as I walked away from him, and past all the other souls most likely in the same state. As I walked the rest of the way to the church, my mind filled with questions of how they came to live that way, and how they go through each day not giving into the temptation to end their seemingly worthless lives. It would be a horrible thing for one of them to do, but I can't

imagine living my life that way, full of fear and uncertainty. Maybe that's the only life they've ever known. That tears me up inside. It tears me up to think of people that walk these streets everyday to and from their homes and jobs, hardened to each and every homeless person that walks up to them or that they walk past. I see it often lately. I see people, so used to these human beings reduced to begging, just shooing them away as if they are dogs. But they aren't dogs! They are people. They are God's creation as human beings, loved by their creator just as much as the people that walk by them everyday. It really dug deep, seeing what I saw today. I had never encountered people like that in person. I had never been asked so directly for help. I'd never truly put myself in their perspective...until tonight. It was so real! All I can think of to do, and continue doing...is pray for them.

It was definitely an experience I've never encountered before. It inspires me in many ways. I look forward to meeting people that need to see the love of God. I look forward to being used to show that love. I've come a long way from the time that I said goodbye to my family in Oklahoma. I've come to love my teammates. I may not love everything about each of them, but I have learned to love them regardless of those things. I'm extremely psyched to see my family again at Christmas! That's all I have for this journal. Yes, I know...you're sorry to see me go. Thanks for taking the time...

Naomi

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**Date:** 11/28/2006

**Submitted by:** Sarah White

**Journal Entry:**

The last few days we've met some amazing people and churches and experienced mass generosity. Since Thanksgiving, we've been through Idaho and now we're in Utah, where the snow and the mountains are absolutely amazing. When we were in Twin Falls, Idaho, Dave, Michelle and I stayed with an awesome family who was very welcoming. The youth in this family are musically gifted, and Graham even taught us a few things, especially on bass for Michelle. Great people... makes me want to go back to Twin Falls!!

Since Idaho, we've had housing ministry in two churches in Utah. It's still amazing to me how people and churches open up their homes and youth rooms to us as we are travelling through. As a team we've gotten to spend some good quality time with one another, welcoming in the Christmas season with a little van decor, thanks to Dave, looking at Christmas lights, and a beautiful light layer of snow, thanks to God.

In the coming week we will get to do more housing ministry, where we spend time with families in their homes and with one another at churches, in Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska. Our first lock-in is this week as well, in Wyoming, and we look forward to meeting new youth and celebrating Christmas with them.

God continues to bless us on our travels, especially during the ministry opportunities when we stop. Thank you for all your support and prayers!

Sarah



**Sarah White**

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**Date:** 12/4/2006

**Submitted by:** Sarah White

**Journal Entry:**

So last night we led a Family Night Program in a small town called Wolbach, NE. We were totally acoustic... the only thing plugged in was Michelle's bass. No keys, no electric guitar, no drum set, no mics...just God, us, and the congregation... and the program

was so much fun! We did a variety of songs... some XP songs, several sing-alongs, a puppet show, an interactive Bible story (IBS), and prayer papers.

One of the singalongs we did was the Hippo song, of course, and I think it was the most fun I've ever had doing that song. As I was teaching it to the congregation, there were these two little girls in the front who were totally into it--it was adorable, so I started laughing a little while teaching... then, I glanced up, and saw these two ladies in the back who were probably in their mid-forties, hopping around for the "Hip, hip, hippopotamus" (in a really deep voice) part. It was awesome. But then I was laughing too hard and my voice started to crack during the next line, that's supposed to be really high pitched. We all had a really good time with the song, and that fun continued with the IBS.



**Sarah White**

Naomi led the story of Daniel and the lion's den, with many, many helpers. It was her first time leading an IBS, and she asked us to help out where we could, so I got down there to help direct traffic. SO, I was hanging out with the lions, provoking them to roar, and these two little kids about four years old were roaring and growling extremely loud, then they would laugh really hard afterward. One of the ladies from the Hippo song was also a lion, and she was helping provoke the lions to go at it... the group actually scared King Darius away!! I'm really liking the effect IBSes have on a group of people. I can picture God seeing all this, and just delighting in how much fun we all were having while we were learning about His rescuing power.

It's funny how small towns can surprise me and create some of the best stories. Love it.

Sarah

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**Date:** 12/6/2006

**Submitted by:** Dave Minster

**Journal Entry:**

Today we had an opportunity for ministry practically all day here in Fort Dodge, Iowa. We went from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m. hanging out and playing lots of games with youth, singing, and doing puppet shows. I made a serious effort to pray and let God work through me, and as a result, I was so filled up with the Spirit all day. That made the games we played and the music we sang and the puppets we puppeted so much more fun. God was there at that church through us, I am sure of it. In the evening, Captive Free South Central even surprised us and showed up at the church to encourage us. It was such a great thing and so uplifting to see another team with whom we are great friends. We had fun fellowship with each other and with the adults and youth from the congregation who were there tonight.



**Dave Minster**

At the end of the senior high youth group, I was able to lead a "campfire" of sorts to close out the devotion and meditate on God. One of the songs I chose is called "Madly in Love" and we sing about how madly we are in love with Christ and how we want to take "what we do in here and fill the streets out there" and dance in joy for God. I did a very short sharing before the song, telling about when I felt the presence of God. When all the Captive Free and International Teams were at training at Camp Luther Dell in northern Minnesota, there was one time when we were all gathered around the campfire on a chilly night. We were singing this song, "Madly in Love" and all of the sudden there was a light breeze that swept through our campfire circle. My friend Brice from Captive Free North East looked over at me and said, "That's God." At that moment I knew who I was singing to, who I was madly in love with. Having a spiritual insight as such makes the meaning of the song that much more intimate.

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**Date:** 1/3/2007

**Submitted by:** Alex Schatz

**Journal Entry:**



**Alex Schatz**

We were somewhere in Nebraska, and God gave us a glimpse of beauty in His creation. Everything was frozen, from trees, to grass from corn to gates, from road to rocks. Everything had been enveloped by 1/2 inch ice. Beauty in everything. I have never seen anything like that; I probably never will again. Who knew a place so cold would be so beautiful? Through the dangerous drive, God has shown me and has given to me an angle that creation, like himself, is always good.

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**Date:** 1/10/2007

**Submitted by:** Michelle Meulemans

**Journal Entry:**

This past weekend we had our very first Zone. It was our team's first week back on the road after Christmas break. We had never really played through the Zone theme song, and just as we were starting to set up for the Event, our team leader, Sarah, said she didn't feel well. It ended up she was wiped out for the whole weekend with a fever and the flu. All of these things led me to be not so optimistic going into the Event. But for as many times as the Lord has taken all the crud we've gotten ourselves into and turned it into something glorious, I should've known he'd do it again.



**Michelle Meulemans**

The Event ended up going really well! I know hearts were changed in Phoenix this weekend. And the thing is, it really had nothing to do with how well we played, or how many youth we prayed with, or how many showed up for our Pathway, or how funny we were during Second Stage. None of that truly matters. What matters is that one person might have been brought closer to Jesus because of something that occurred at the Zone, and just to be there and be a part of that is pretty amazing to me.

Also another opportunity I had this weekend was actually to minister to one of my own teammates. It was kind of neat to be able to care for Sarah while she was sick. Not that I was excited that she was sick, by any means! It's just that Sarah is always the one that gives me such loving care whenever I am ill and to be able to at least try to do the same for her made me happy. Even if it was things as small as bringing her "dinner" (Saltines and 7-Up), or just hanging out even though she was all pukey, I hope that I was able to bring her some of the comfort that she so often brings me. It's definitely hard being sick and on the road and far from home and knowing that your teammates are pulling your weight. There's nothing we can do about it though except drink lots of orange juice and get as much rest as possible. In fact, sleep sounds good. I think I'll do that now,

actually.  
Peace Out Dudes,  
Michelle

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**Date:** 1/11/2007

**Submitted by:** Anthony Eder

**Journal Entry:**

Today we had rehearsal for some songs we wanted to go through as a team. It went really good, and I had a great time playing my drums. I have been feeling much better about playing my drums lately. I am trying new things and have a better attitude about what I am doing. In the beginning of the year, I was really nervous about drums. Thoughts in my head were, "I am good enough, do I look good, I can't do that, wow I wish I was him or I wish I was her." But I am not them, I am me. I do what I want. I have more JOY to play, and I am different from everyone else. It helps to watch other drummers, and learn from them. No, I won't be them, but I can try. God has been using me and my gifts to serve him. Since coming back on team, attitude of ministry has changed for the good. I pray that God will work through me to make a difference. I also pray that God will use all of you so you can serve him with JOY and LOVE.



**Anthony Eder**

Another thing that sticks in my head is grace, patience, and forgiveness. It is so important to have these being on team. Today I had a bad day and I was really frustrated, and God was telling me, I love you, forgive one another just as I forgave you. We are a team, and if one falls down, we all fall down. If someone fails, we all fail. If someone is having a bad day, it affects everybody, my team is great, and we look out for each other. They are my family, and we ALL ARE EQUAL. God blessed me with five AMAZING people.

I pray that you will find a community where you can feel like a team, even better like one big family.

God is GOOD, and he is always providing....

Blessings to you all!!

God's Peace,

Anthony

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**Date:** 1/15/2007

**Submitted by:** Dave Minster

**Journal Entry:**

Today was such an awesome day in the ministry! Being Sunday and all, we led Sunday worship this morning at Esperanza Lutheran Church in Phoenix. First we started out with a Sunday school program that was similar to our chapel programs. That went really well, and we just had a lot of fun with the good bunch of kids that were there. Then we did the actual Sunday worship service. That worship went so well, and God was definitely there in that sanctuary, moving the hearts of everyone. God has blessed us by surrounding us with such awesome communities wherever we go!



**Dave Minster**

This evening, we went to an event called Tirosh. It's a very in-depth three-day weekend retreat for high schoolers. I was super-excited to go and play music for them because I had attended a very similar event when I was in high school called TEC (Teens Encounter Christ; shout out to Show Me TEC 90!). So I knew how special it was that they invited us to play some songs for them. At first, everyone including parents and siblings and friends of the participants, sang songs in the sanctuary. Then we all lit our Silent-Night-esque candles and sang as the 35-ish participants and the volunteer helpers paraded through the sanctuary holding hands forming a big long chain. It was really cool for me because I remember doing pretty much the exact same thing at TEC. After that was all done though, there came the most amazing part of the evening.

My team and I had an acoustic set-up going on, and we were on a raised stage in the gymnasium at the church. Once all the participants finally arrived, we started our music. About halfway through our set, all the kids came up to the stage and really started to get into the worship. That just made me want to give the worship everything I had. We didn't have mics set up, so I was already singing as loud as I could (practically yelling), and I was physically getting into it through playing my guitar and going up and down and jumping all around. My whole being was showing God how much he is worth to me. Oddly enough, a good friend of mine very recently asked me what my most spiritual moment has been, and now I think the answer to that question would be tonight.

To top off the celebration, the staff at Tirosh gave us all hand-made cross necklaces and "warm fuzzies," which are pieces of yarn twirled up in a little ball. The objective of the yarn is to give individual pieces to others and give them a hug along with the piece. I felt so included in their community, in their family, in the family of Christ.

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**Date:** 1/19/2007

**Submitted by:** Sarah White

**Journal Entry:**

So, we as a team have decided that we really like leading school chapels. Yesterday we led one at a school in Gilbert, AZ, where the whole auditorium was filled! I think just about everyone was involved in the music and puppet show, which is so nice to have. It helps us remember how effective music and worship can be with kids and youth. We even had several teachers who "volunteered" to come forward and sing/lead "Making Melodies" with us.

Afterward, we hung out near the entrance to the school as parents were coming to pick up their children, and we were able to have a few good conversations with some of the older students, as well. God really does work well through conversations and quality time with children, youth, and adults, and I'm so thankful that I'm able to be part of His ministry, especially through chapels.

This weekend we get to be part of the Phoenix Quake, then head up north through Utah and Idaho to be in Montana by the 26<sup>th</sup>! Lots of driving and cold weather ahead. We appreciate all of the prayers that people have given for our team and our travels, but especially for the ministry and the people we meet. Thank you!!

God's peace,  
Sarah  
2 Timothy 1:7



**Sarah White**

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**Date:** 1/22/2007

**Submitted by:** Naomi Nelson

**Journal Entry:**

It's journal time! This means I get to write about the Quake we got to be a part of in Phoenix. It was amazing! With 450 people there, it was definitely the biggest group we had ever performed in front of. For me, being on stage in front of that crowd, seeing them all jumping, every single one of them with their hands raised to God...was incredible. At times they were singing so loud that I could barely even hear myself in my monitor...so most of the time I just took the microphone away from my mouth and continued singing with them. I could almost see God smiling in the midst of it all; it was powerful.

I'm learning so much each day here on the road. My confidence level is getting higher and higher.



**Naomi Nelson**

I've been learning more about myself. I've come to appreciate the strength of my beliefs, and the way that I see things as someone who comes from a very different background than many of my teammates. I know now that a lot of the things that I believe are truly what I believe with all my heart, and no one else's opinion, or the way that they may look at those very same things, can sway them. This realization has brought me to a new level of confidence in who I am. I am my own person. It's okay to see things from a different angle, just as long as we're all seeing the same thing.

The relational areas of our ministry as a team are great! I think we are a good blend of personalities. At times, it may not seem that way, but there will always be those times. Captive Free has been used by God to reach out to so many hearts and souls all over the world. Now that it's our turn as Captive Free, I want to be used in ways that we could never have imagined. Ubers of thanks out to all of you in support and prayer for us! This ministry would NOT be possible without you. God's work through you to bless this ministry is changing the lives of all kinds of people that we meet as we travel. **Thank you!**

P.S. Kudos to whoever invented Mad Libs! Lots of laughs, new inside jokes, boredom-zapping, and making time go by faster in the van are the wonderful results.

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**Date:** 2/3/2007

**Submitted by:** Sarah White

**Journal Entry:**

Holy Cow... Butte Quake. So Anthony and I lead something called the Jr. Guide Trek at each Quake we are at, where we get to be the ones who are spending the most time with the high school students who come as leaders for the Quake. Here we had ten Jr. Guides, and they were all unique. In this group, there were two foreign exchange students, one from Germany, Friedrich, and the other from Finland, Riika. Both are awesome people with interesting stories about their lives and families. I even got to learn a little Finnish! (Tervetuloa = "welcome" in Finnish) These two could really relate to some of the things we experience on team, as they are living in a foreign country for a whole school year. I was amazed at how willing these two were to participate in leadership pieces for the Quake. Both took part in being readers for celebrations, which requires them to be in front of about 100 jr. high youth and speak, reading from the Bible and praying. I was impressed at how the whole group planned out a very intense, meaningful skit for the Variety Show as well. They included everyone, and definitely got their point across...

One of the things we do during a Jr. Guide Trek is dropping pennies to show how one small action of love can ripple out to reach places and people we may not even know. The pennies make a splash, and send the ripple effect throughout the whole dish, and sometimes over the edge of the dish. This is what those Jr. Guides do, and that is what I saw them doing this weekend. The things they learned and did at this Quake can be tools for them to take home, and for some, it will reach all the way to Europe. I praise God for bringing this group of young adults to the Quake so that we can be in ministry together, even if it is for a short weekend.

Thank you to everyone who is praying for the ministry that we are part of, and for those who are praying directly for our team. You are a blessing.

God's peace!

Sarah



**Sarah White**

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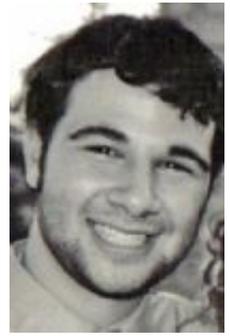
**Date:** 2/21/2007

**Submitted by:** Anthony Eder

**Journal Entry:**

HELLO!! God is good!! This past weekend we had our Seattle Zone. It was AMAZING!! God was present, he opened my eyes, he was working through me, and I was able to share my faith with others. During Zones, on Saturday night there is a time where Rahfah (a worship band that weekend) lead a "Lectio Divina". Later, members of Captive Free come up front and scatter around the ballroom with candles. This is a time where the youth participants or anyone can come to a Captive Free member and be

prayed over. I remember at our Phoenix Zone how special and memorable for me it was. So this time, I was excited and in the mindset to pray. So I sat in a corner near the screen. My attitude was, if people come, GREAT, if not, OKAY. So, I saw this group of people that I pre-judged in the beginning of the weekend, thinking they were too cool, and not here for the right reasons. Boy, was I wrong. God was thinking something else. Two youth came to me, one girl and one boy. They sat there, saying nothing at first, then I asked, "Do you any prayer requests?"



**Anthony Eder**

The one boy, who was a sophomore, said right away he didn't know his purpose was in his life, and the girl, who was a junior, said the same. It started a conversation that I was kind of not prepared for, but God was speaking through me, and was ready to use me in any way possible. Along came another youth, and he was a senior. He had the same question, where he needed to be for next year, and life in general. I asked if there were any more prayer requests, and the younger boy said fighting temptations in life. So I prayed for them to find their purpose, which was to serve God, and I prayed that God will give them the strength they need to stay strong in their faith, and fight the distractions and temptations that draw them away from God. It was an AMAZING experience I will never forget. I was able to share my personal stories, and they were easy to relate to. One of the boys said I was his only "light" in his life, and he and I talked about more stuff too, and I could see in his face he wanted to change. His eyes became teary. I just wanted to give him the biggest hug, which I did. I WAS JUST SO HAPPY!! We talked about so much that I don't even think I can even put words to. I was glad they were willing to open their hearts, and they showed me that they really wanted to change. I wrote them a letter of encouragement, hope, and gave them some advice. I even gave them some Bible references. God was telling me to keep on working on them, and show his love.

Also in my letter, I told them to keep in touch. I truly wanted to know how they were doing. So a couple days later, I get some emails. They are doing great, and I pray for them every day!! I give thanks and praise to God for giving me this opportunity for ministry!!

The team and I are doing great!! We are now in Portland, OR at Concordia College doing some recruiting, and some chapels. It's a good time, and I love it. I thank you all for praying for us, and I ask you to continue to pray for strength, safety, joy, unity, and an attitude for ministry.

God's peace,  
Anthony

P.S.

CHOOSE JOY!!

**Date:** 2/28/2007

**Submitted by:** Dave Minster

**Journal Entry:**

Today started out like any other business day: devotion, team check-in to see how everyone was feeling, and some prayer. But today in our devotion, we were asked a question on differences in spirituality types and if we felt there was respect for those differences. Within those differences, our conversation seemed to find its way purposefully into the topic of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Discussing the differences in this area of belief and practice really made more confident in my own beliefs and practices when partaking in this sacrament. The discussion covered many different areas of communion from how it should be taken to what it represented and so forth. After about an hour of discussion, we reached a point where one of my teammates felt disheartened at the differences in individual beliefs and practices of Holy Communion. He then went on to describe the image of communion that he has when he partakes in the sacrament.



**Dave Minster**

The image was of all believers who had ever communed in the sacrament as Jesus laid out at the Last Supper. Everyone was gathered in the same room as Jesus and His disciples, and everyone was partaking in the bread and the wine, Christ's body and blood, "which is poured out for many for the

forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The image was also of each member of this team being there around the table, communing as one body of Christ. This image stuck in my mind so much that I couldn't even concentrate on the conversation to follow. I loved this image of communion. I think it will be in my mind every time I have communion in the future.

The complete God-moment happened later this evening, however. Our host church requested two songs of us for their midweek Lenten service, which we were happy to do. And so the service began; we did one song, and then two songs, and then it came time for communion. The gathering inside the sanctuary was a smaller group, maybe about 30 all said and done. Being a smaller group, the pastor invited everyone present to form a semi-circle around the altar and we all took communion at once. It was in the moment where I physically realized the image that my friend had manifested only in my head before. We were all gathered as one body around the table (altar) and being served Jesus' body and blood. Then we all sang a beautiful song of thanks for the sacred meal. I knew then that God was present and He had a great big smile on His face. He loves to be around us, His kids.

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**Date:** 3/4/2007

**Submitted by:** Alex Schatz

**Journal Entry:**



**Alex Schatz**

So, we were in Yakima, Washington. I was beginning to get very frustrated with some things in the middle of the second service we were doing. I was tired at 10:17 am, and I hadn't done too much yet. While I was making my way out to the front of the sanctuary, I saw the acolyte come out of the pew he was sitting in and make his way out of the sanctuary. As we crossed paths, I looked into his eyes and he was very upset, he was about to cry. I couldn't do anything about it because I was going up to do my usual routine up front. It was troubling me all the way through the reading I do and the confession and absolution. On my way out, I was looking for the young man in the pew, thinking he might have come back. I didn't see him. I was making my way out to the stairs to the loftish place where the soundboard and computer were. I saw him still quite upset over by one of the tables in the hall. I first asked him if he was ok. He told me straight up without hesitation, that the song "Here Is Our King" upset him, that he somehow didn't believe God was there for him.

How can this be? I hang out with people that go to church every day, but somehow we don't get it. We miss that God has always been there for us. He is all around us, he can't resist us. We still miss that notion of love; when this kid said to me what he did, I was so terribly sorry that he didn't know this about God sooner. He was crying like something so wonderful has been given to him, and why not? I still can't cry about it. I wonder sometimes if I get it. Do I know what this kid knows?

I asked him if he wanted a hug, and he wanted one, and I told him that God will always be there; at the same time, I was absolutely dumbfounded.."Here Is Our King" He got that message; how do we do that again?

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**Date:** 3/4/2007

**Submitted by:** Michelle Meulemans

**Journal Entry:**

We recently visited a place in Washington near Vancouver, nearer to La Center, but far enough away from anything that I was truly able to relax. The home I stayed in was surrounded by forest and woods and creeks, etc., but all around this area, and in fact right next door, was a Christmas tree farm! I had never been to one before since we had always chopped down our trees from the National Forest, but

it brought back good memories of my childhood. I absolutely love the smell of fresh pine needles and just love being outdoors in general, so when I had some free time on Sunday, I decided to go exploring. I took along a camera, my phone, and my iPod and took off on an adventure to stretch my legs and clear my mind.

As I headed out, I could not believe how absolutely gorgeous my surroundings were. If I looked one direction, I could see three peaks (Mt. St. Helen's, Mt. Hood, and Mt. Jefferson) and a whole range of mountains (the Cascades)! The other direction, though, is where I was heading. There was a long stretch of hilly winding road that after a long while leads into town. As I started walking, I did not do the usual routine of popping in my headphones and rocking out to some tunes. Instead I decided to call my sister (luv ya Bec, if you're reading this) back at home in WI and try to tell her what she was missing. We had a nice long chat (until my phone died), and then I resorted to totally immersing myself in my surroundings. I listened to nature's playlist of birds, and streams, and all sorts of things one would expect to hear in the woods, and it was beautiful! If I saw something cool, I stopped to look at it or take pictures of it. I took tons of pics and I tried to capture things the same way as I was seeing them. From the smallest rocks and flowers, to the great big beautiful sky, to plain ol' me, God created all of these things. He loves them all and he loves us the most because he created us in his own image! That's pretty cool and sometimes I think we all need a reminder of how awesome our God truly is and how dearly he loves us. God gave me that reminder, so I thought I'd share it with all of you.



**Michelle Meulemans**

Many blessings,

Michelle

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**Date:** 4/18/2007

**Submitted by:** Anthony Eder

**Journal Entry:**

So, lately I have been praying to God about where I needed to be next year. A lot was going through my head and I was torn. I have been talking to my teammates about it, some YE staff, friends, and a lot with God. I wanted to serve God in a ministry that was right for me. I had thoughts on doing another year of team; either an International team or Community Based team. With more prayer and thought, my heart was for a Community Based team.



**Anthony Eder**

I love to build relationships on a 1x1 level, and really get to know people and really make a difference. I did not like how I was coming and going to different churches and meeting people than leaving them. I wanted more!! I would get to know a person, then oh wait, I leave tomorrow!! NO THANKS!! So my heart was really focused on a Community Based team. I wanted to stay at one place more than a day or two. So I knew this ministry was right for me.

I was still asking for guidance from God because a lot of options were still coming my way. Then it finally comes.....

A couple of days ago I recieved a mail packet from the office. I was really excited to open and see what was in it. I saw an envelope that said Anthony, West Coast, VERY IMPORTANT!! I was a little nervous to open it. I thought maybe I was in trouble or something serious was wrong. I opened it, and it was a letter of call to serve on a Community Based team in Racine, WI. WOW!! My heart dropped, I was shaking, I could barely speak!! The funny/weird thing is I didn't even finish my application for team. They FELT CALLED to send me this LETTER OF CALL!! They still would like to have my app for file stuff. But to hear this was an AMAZING feeling. With the encouragement from my teammates, YE staff, friends, and God, I knew I was being called to this. So I signed my letter of call today, and I will serving God in a Community Based team in Racine, WI called Mosaic Racine.

A good part from all of this is, I AM CLOSE TO HOME!!

I give THANKS and PRAISE to God for answering my prayer by showing me what direction I need to be on. THANKS GOD!! Also I give my thanks to you all for praying for me too!! YOU ALL ROCK!!

There are times when we feel like, God, are you listening?? God, I need a sign NOW!! Hey God, WHAT ARE YOU THINKING!! God, are you there?? We have to be patient and just trust that God will take care of us, and HE will lead us on the right path. God provides!! My advice to you is PRAY, BE PATIENT, LISTEN, AND TRUST. God will speak to you. JUST LISTEN!!

I can't wait for next year to see what it will bring!! They ways God will use me, the challenges I will go through, and all the AWESOME God moments. I still have three and a half months to go with Captive Free West Coast. I am excited to see what will happen and what it will bring. I just need to keep my focus, and keep doing what I love, SERVING!!

God's Peace,

Anthony

P.S.

GOD IS GOOD!!

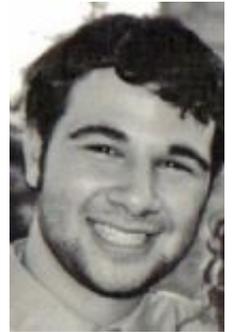
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**Date:** 4/25/2007

**Submitted by:** Anthony Eder

**Journal Entry:**

We are in Visalia, CA and the weather is BEAUTIFUL!! The last time we were here was October 10, 2006 (So long ago, I KNOW!!) So being the "Ministries Liasion" for my team, I call all of our contacts and dicuss our stay. Sandy is our contact for this church, and pretty much she is AMAZING!! She has such excitement, energy, JOY, and a heart for God. She invited us to a worship service called Good Shepherd. The service is geared for the mentally and physically disabled. I was extremely excited because I have a HUGE interest in Special Ed. So I walk in the sanctuary, wondering where I should sit, then I see my seat. I sat in the front pew next to a lady named, Paula, who had Down Syndrome. I had asked here if I could sit next to her, and she gladly said, "YES." I met some others around me, too. They were so happy to meet me, and I was just as happy to meet them. The service started with two people lighting the candles. Watching their faces was BEAUTIFUL!! Throughout the service I learned a lot and was given a lot of JOY. All who attended knew so much about the love that God has for us, and they shared stories about themselves. One moment that brought me to tears was when we first began to sing songs to God. What I was hearing wasn't the best singing, but it was JOYOUS to God!! He doesn't care how we sound or how we do it, it is praises to him, and it is always a JOYFUL noise. I closed my eyes and just listen to them worshipping. IT WAS AMAZING!! This one lady who was so adorable I called her my "Little Miss Sunshine." She was always smiling, and giving me thumbs up. Out of nowhere, she gives up a prayer to God and says, "THANK YOU, LORD." I am not sure for what, but she was just pouring out love, JOY, and smiles. This service was an experiance that lifted me up. We were singing, dancing, clapping, and giving praises to God. With this service I knew that when we worship God, we can be ourselves. God loves us all, and we are HIS children.



**Anthony Eder**

Our God is an AWESOME, AMAZING, GREAT, LOVING God. He blesses us soooooo much, and thank him for that!!

God's Peace and JOY,  
Anthony

P.S.  
Find JOY in JESUS

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**Date:** 5/2/2007

**Submitted by:** Sarah White

**Journal Entry:**

Family.

As part of this ministry, my teammates and I get to stay in many different people's homes, experiencing or observing many different family dynamics. Some of my teammates tease me because I often stay with more mature ladies because of my allergies. This does happen often, but I am continually amazed by how much life these wonderful women have shared with me. Last Sunday I stayed with Helen in Lompoc, CA. She shared stories with me about her husband, showed me his garden, and shared her memories connected to the antique dishes and tableware she has, some from her childhood. Later that evening, we both stayed up late watching *Fiddler on the Roof* together. I had so much fun spending time with Helen. She's almost 93 years old and lives each day with respect and fondness for the past, while enjoying the life God gives her each day. Our Father used Helen to express His love and generosity to me. I only pray that He has used me to share some of that love with her.

Now we are in Medford, Oregon, and I'm staying with a family that is very different from my experience in Lompoc, but just as inspiring. The Scotts are a family of four and are one of those families that enjoy simply spending time together. There are so many families that either hardly see one another, or when they are together, it seems obligatory. The Scotts inspire me to enjoy life as God provides it, but they also enjoy each other's lives. The boys listen to one another's stories, play games together, and joke around with one another. I know they aren't perfect, but in this family, it's okay not to be.

I've realized that the reasons these two families are so appealing is because they give examples of what it's like to be in God's family. He is generous, gracious, and doesn't require any of us to be perfect in order to be loved. Most of all, He is overflowing with life... a life that He wants each of us to experience to the fullest, and to share with one another.

To the teamers who are reading this, enjoy your team family. Continue to share your life with them. Soon we won't be able to share life with them like we do now. Respect and remember the past, but enjoy the life God has given you today in this unique ministry God has called us to.

To CFWC's family and friends, thank you for being part of this ministry in the many different ways you have. The six of us would not be the same team if it weren't for all of you who have supported, encouraged, and challenged us throughout our lives and even now.

I pray for God's peace for you and your family, big or small, near and far. Live with joy in your hearts and share it with everyone you can. It's one small way we can share the love of Christ with the world.

Together with you in ministry,  
Sarah



**Sarah White**

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**Date:** 5/22/2007

**Submitted by:** Naomi Nelson

**Journal Entry:**

The latest...

My sister not only graduated from high school with honors recently, but I got to go! And she made all-state in soccer! And her knee that had a 98% chance to have a torn ligament recently turned out, with prayer I might add, to be nothing but a sprain! We were so thankful to God for that because she received a full scholarship to play soccer at



**Naomi Nelson**

a college here in Oklahoma!! I'm so excited and proud.

Our team van got broken into last night. My guitar, Dave's electric and acoustic, the bass guitar, keyboard, keyboard amp, and four monitors were stolen...oh, and Alex's sleeping bag. Today was our day off...but it didn't turn to be much of one. We all had to complete an inventory of our equipment to check for any other missing pieces. It wasn't a bad day, though. Does that surprise you? It wasn't. We actually laughed a lot today. I'm sure it was something that surprised and angered the source of our loss...Satan. Which is good. We have a good team. We didn't let this get us down, nor did we take it out on each other, which could have easily happened. Ofcourse, we're not happy about what happened. But God will provide what we need to continue in our ministry here in the west. Fortunately, we don't have anything else booked with music for the next couple weeks. So we have some time to collect a few new items that we've lost. I told my team a story today about an experience my pastor likes to tell to the congregation once in a while, a similar experience. When he was younger, he had a vehicle stolen. This vehicle was by no means in its best shape. The paint was faded, the body had a few dents here and there, and the engine hadn't been running in its best condition. He filed a report to the police...and immediately began to pray.

He rebuked Satan, thanked God for the blessings he already had, and began trusting and believing that God would provide. About one week later, the police called and told him that they had found his vehicle, and asked if he would come down to claim it. He was very happy to hear that, and he left immediately. When he got there, they showed him the vehicle. He took one look at it, and surprised them by saying, "This isn't it." "This is your license plate isn't it?" they asked. And sure enough, it was his. But the vehicle had received a complete make-over. There were no dents, there was a brand new coat of paint, and they had even repaired the engine. Apparently, the people that stole it fixed it up so they could sell it, and they got caught before they could!

God is good, and He will provide.

I miss my family. I miss Ryan. I miss being in the same church every week. I miss the familiarity of the church I grew up in. I miss taking lots of notes in church. I miss closets. I miss drawers. I miss playing my flute. I miss my guitar. I don't want to see another suitcase for at least six months after I get back.

But I'm here. I love my teammates. I might not always think I do. But I do. My relationship with each of them means a lot to me. What really surprises me is that we have less than three months left as a team. I'm going to miss them...a lot. Again, I don't always think that. But I truly will miss them. I think that's enough of talking about the end, though. It's not over yet. We still have important things to do. We are still God's little West Coast team!

A mother told us recently that her son told her with enthusiasm that "they are a cool rock band, AND they love Jesus!" It really tugged at all of our hearts when she told us that her son said that. It assured us that if anything came of our stay there, that little boy learned that you can be cool, have fun, even be loud and still love Jesus, and Jesus will love you! It's little things like that that are encouragment for me to continue on this journey, even when it's at its toughest. God sends us little gifts of encouragement like that once in a while.

"I am peace that shatters all your secret fears." -Jill Phillips - "I Am"

Naomi

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**Date:** 5/25/2007

**Submitted by:** Sarah White

**Journal Entry:**

The Break-in

Some of you may have heard about the recent break-in to our trailer and how we no longer have multiple guitars, some monitors, a drum and a keyboard. It's weird to think about it even now, knowing in my head that our team has been violated by robbery, but I still don't think it has hit my heart yet. Yes, all these things that were taken can be replaced, but the thing that hurts us the most is the fact that some stranger was in our trailer...some stranger went through suitcases...some stranger has possession of our instruments.



There is a song that the International Teams play called "Beautiful Stranger." The bridge of that song goes like this:

There's beauty that lies deep within  
Waiting to be discovered  
God, help me see what You see  
The diamond in the stone

Over the last few days we, Captive Free West Coast, have been looking for that diamond. We keep saying, "at least they didn't take everything," or, "at least they left the van alone." Where is the precious stone that lies within these people that God created, and why isn't it exposed for everyone to see and experience, instead of the hard, thief exterior? All we can do is pray that the items that they took bring someone joy, and hopefully may continue to be used for God's glory, no matter where they are. There is beauty in this circumstance, and God will reveal it to us at just the right time.

Today Naomi reminded me of something I've learned before. These instruments are not our own. We are not our own. We were bought at a price. Just like we belong to God, the tools He loans us for ministry also belong to Him. What a privilege to have been able to use them with His kingdom in mind.

Another thing that came to mind is that the instruments themselves do not show God's love...but it's the people using them that God uses to share His love. The six of us are safe, and God is still using us, even without most of our instruments. Please join us in praying for that to continue, and that we may find peace and safety with our equipment once again.

Peace to you all...  
Sarah

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**Date:** 6/20/2007

**Submitted by:** Michelle Meulemans

**Journal Entry:**

So one of the things I learned this year is the true meaning of "Godsmack." (Not the band.) Definition: when we silly humans doubt the love and the power of our awesome and merciful God, He then sees the need to remind us in a radical way in which we will see Him and respond. Thus resulting in said Godsmack.

There have been several times over the course of the past month or so that I have doubted my abilities, or God's love for me, or His plans for me, or any variety of different things. I doubted. I shouldn't have. Each time I refused to put my faith in him, he responded by loving me even more, embracing me in ways I couldn't have imagined. He revealed to me gifts that he's given me and ways that he wishes for me to use them. I have seen so many of my prayers, things I've been praying about for years, being answered lately, and it makes me ashamed that I ever doubted. I've been Godsmacked over and over again. But we are only human. All we can do is try, try, and try again.

Still Trying,  
Michelle



**Michelle Meulemans**

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**Date:** 7/7/2007

**Submitted by:** Sarah White

**Journal Entry:**

This week our team experienced the hottest weather of the year... 113 degrees in Mojave and Palmdale. California felt like a sauna as soon as you entered the outdoors. This was our second visit to the church in Palmdale. The climate was different, but the hospitality was just as good.

After we arrived in Palmdale, Laurie (our contact) asked, "So who wants to go in the pool?" Most of us jumped at the chance, so after Anthony and I finished business with Laurie, we joined some of our teammates outside.

Now, there is something about jumping into a cool pool on a hot, summer day that brings me back to



**Sarah White**

being a kid again. We played Marco Polo and King of the Raft, dove for pennies, catch with the Nerf football, and just relaxed in the water. While we were there, someone mentioned how it felt like we were all family—cousins together for some random weekend at a family vacation... ironic as we are together much longer than a weekend. This was a time where we could just relax and simply play together. It was good.

Often, the free playtime is something that gets easily overlooked with busy schedules and multiple commitments. Even during the summer, where most people have more free time, days are packed with "to do lists," and endless choices of activities to keep us busy. I'm not saying that list or schedules are bad. I love using schedules and lists! (Just ask my teammates.) Even when we are making good choices and filling our time with ministry opportunities, we still need to have playtime.

Take the time to play with your family, coworkers, teammates, friends, children...something simple that doesn't require gadgets or tons of rules, and you will feel refreshed. God didn't create us to live by ourselves, putting off fun stuff until "next week" (which can sometimes never come). He gave you the people around you to love you. So go love! Go play!

God's peace and joy,  
Sarah

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**Date:** 7/13/2007

**Submitted by:** Dave Minster

**Journal Entry:**

It's the little surprises in life that are sometimes the best blessings. This morning was the last day of our VBS here in beautiful Dana Point, California. The previous days had varied because some went real fast and fun, and some crawled on by, draining all my energy. This day got off on the right foot though, because not only was it Water Day (woohoo!), but Alex and Anthony also stopped by Starbucks and Jamba Juice to provide all of us with some deliciousness. It was such a cool thing to have them show up just out of the blue and do such a kind act, and it makes me think about God's love for us again. Neither Alex nor Anthony did anything wrong to any of us for which they were making up to us; they did this simple act of kindness out of brotherly, Christian love. Jesus did the same for us, as he was not making up for anything he had done wrong but rather making up for everything that we were doing and had done and will do wrong. What an amazing blessing! And my Strawberry Surf Rider was fantastic! Thanks, guys!



**Dave Minster**

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**Date:** 8/2/2007

**Submitted by:** Alex Schatz

**Journal Entry:**

This year was more than a "learning experience." It was more than something you'd put on a resume. It was definitely more than playing music, and unquestionably more than making friends. This year bore its joys and tribulations, both types of experiences leaving their mark on me. Team life is, in my opinion, "life accelerated." Very few experiences such as mine on team could bring forth such transformations that I have gone through (physically, mentally, spiritually). I couldn't be happier with the fruits of this year.



**Alex Schatz**

One of the things I learned on team was to be able to trust in God most totally. It's funny how it's easier to rely on God when there is nothing or nobody else to rely upon.

One of the things that has been a challenge, and will continue to be a challenge, is to own up to the consequences of the choices I have made. I find that my stipend usually does not find its use in the things needed in life on team; instead I found its use in DVDs, games, gadgets, other stuff...etc.

I want to thank all our host homes that have generously let us stay in their houses and play with their kids and their kids' toys...and by letting us stay with you, you yourselves have done ministry

to us--that's a good thing.

Much love to all y'all, and God bless you for everything you have done for us and will continue to do for God.

Peace,

Alex Schatz

Psalm 23 v 4

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**Date:** 8/17/2007

**Submitted by:** Naomi Nelson

**Journal Entry:**

I had a conversation with a small boy at our last Vacation Bible School in Reedley, CA. He was no more than 6 years old. It was the last day of the week, and he and some of the other kids had been playing on the playground between activities. Soon it was time to go inside for our last closing set of sing-a-longs with the children. Reluctant to leave what he was doing, he was the last one to make his way inside. I waited for him, and when he came closer he asked me if he was going to get to play on the playground tomorrow. When I told him that today was the last day, he showed much disappointment. Then he asked when he could come back. I told him that I didn't know and suggested that he ask his mother. There was a pause, and then he said, "My mother doesn't believe in God"...as if to say "she would never bring me here". He explained to me that his parents weren't together, that he was staying with his dad this week, and next week would be with mom. I was suddenly very sad for him. I tried to imagine for a moment what it would be like as a child to not have a single house he could call "home", to have to be raised by two different people in separate places, probably not being disciplined the same way...and to grow up not really knowing what to believe because the two people that are raising me don't believe the same thing. I felt for him. My heart went out to him. Then I was suddenly overwhelmed with a desire to know if we had made a difference in his life this week at Vacation Bible School. So I asked him, "Do you believe in God, Mason?" He nodded his head slowly. Then I felt like I needed to assure him, "Just don't forget that God loves you...no matter what, God will always love you." He was silent for a few seconds, then he asked, "What about people that are in jail that do bad things, does God love them too?" I was amazed and surprised at his question. I told him, "Yes, God loves everyone, no matter what they've done" .... and that was it...we walked inside, and we sang a few sing-a-longs with the children to end our fun week of VBS. Mason has been on my mind and in my prayers since that day, as well as other children in his same situation that I haven't had a chance to talk to. It is so sad to me that there are so many broken families. Sure, they may be nice people, but they don't see how hard they are making it for their child. I was reminded that day that every day we see, sometimes even talk to, people that have a story to tell. We have no idea. We need to be showing God's love to everyone we meet. You never know who it will be.



**Naomi Nelson**

We've come to the end of our year. There is no experience like it. Things have happened this year that will forever remain with me. I've learned so much more than I ever imagined I would. The past year contains things that only those of us that have been through it truly know what it was like. Only we know the amount of effort that has been put into this year of ministry. We've seen changes happen, in ourselves, and in those that we've met along the way. We've seen God work through us to touch people in ways we never expected. I'm proud of us for making it through. It's been a tough, yet thoroughly enjoyable year.

I'm so thankful to God for the person that I've become. I've learned simple things, like the best way to start a conversation, asking open-ended questions, being truly interested in what the person is saying. I also learned to push irrelevant things aside so that they didn't get in the way of our ministry. My communication skills have improved enormously. I've learned just how important finding common ground in our beliefs has been. Without having done so, we wouldn't have been able to reach out to so many people. I've also learned how to love my teammates unconditionally. No matter what happened, there was always forgiveness...among all of us.

I think one of my toughest struggles has been to have confidence in myself. I really struggled with that in the beginning of the year. And because I struggled with it, I have grown so much in that area. Other struggles have also caused me to grow, such as the beginning struggle with my singing ability. I had never considered myself a public singer before, let alone able to be in charge of rehearsals and programs. I also had trouble pushing myself to keep going even when at times I didn't think I could, relying on God as the source of my strength, relying on God to help me with everything really, missing my family, needing alone time to just get away and not being able to do so. The list could go on, but each struggle has made me the person that I am today. I am so much stronger in my faith in God than I was when I started. I began my journey not having ever been to a Lutheran church service. I've grown up in a non-denominational church. At times this year, I was overwhelmed by the difference in the order of service, the worship, the different ways of thinking and even saying things. The first real Lutheran service that I attended was one that we led. I learned to see worship in the church from a whole new perspective. I've missed my home church a lot. I've missed the more contemporary type of worship I had there. I miss being filled up as much as I would from hearing a message from my pastor at home. I had to rely a lot on the people around me, my teammates, to be spiritually filled up, through conversations and our own team devotion times. And I've had to push myself harder than ever before to read my Bible. We've had some tough conversations about our differences. I believe it was in those times that I learned and grew the most, from talking about my faith to those around me, and also having to listen to their beliefs and try to understand them as well. I have gained many new perspectives, about church, people in the church, people outside of the church, worship, the Bible, God. I've also gained more questions about God that I will be searching answers for until I find them. I've never wanted to know God more than I have this year, more than I do now. I actually ache to know who God really is, what He's thinking, how he feels. I do know that He loves me. I've discovered a certain amount of that love this year by seeing the amount of beauty in His creation. There were times when I was driving down the road talking to Him, and all of a sudden I saw something in the scenery that took my breath away, and I knew He had created that just for me, for that moment in which I would be completely amazed by its beauty. I could almost hear Him saying, "I love you, I want to make you happy, see what I've made for you?" There were times when I felt that love all around me, and it was incredible. There were also times when I didn't feel that love. There were times when I would feel like God was very far away from me. As hard as it was, in those times my faith in God and knowing that He never leaves my side was what got me through. Satan had his way with me often throughout the year. There were times when I would cry for hours, knowing that he was attacking me for a specific reason, because he wanted to keep me from serving God, from reaching out to people on the road. My testimony touched so many lives this year. It made the devil angry, and I believe there were times when he tried everything to tear me down. Because of God, and my knowledge that Satan could be beat...he was. He was beat up a lot this year. And it felt good in those times that I realized it. It feels good now, looking back, to remember those times when I would just fall into God's arms, truly feeling them around me, after another one of Satan's attacks.

We actually came into contact with a man that was possessed by a demon. It was in church on Sunday morning. He held a glass dragon in his hands, and he had tattoos all over his body. The first time I saw him was after the first service that we led. I was walking out into the lobby, and I saw him sitting in a chair staring at me. The look on his face, I will never forget. His eyes were wide and he wore a wicked-looking grin on his face. His first words to me were, "You are very beautiful." I was suddenly very uncomfortable. I told him thank you, and went quickly to stand over by some of my teammates that were talking to people. At first I thought maybe he was mentally ill, it seemed that way. A little later, while I was talking to some people, he came up to me and shoved his glass dragon into my hand and said, "Hold this while I get some coffee." He said this with a big grin that showed almost shark-looking teeth. They looked as if they had been filed to look like that. So there I was, holding this glass dragon that he had put into my hand, having no idea what to do next. I sat down with a couple of the guys on my team and explained what the guy had just done. When he came back with his cup of coffee, he grabbed the dragon from me saying, "Give it back," laughing as he said it. He sat down near us, only he sat on the floor. And the next thing he did surprised me even more. He lifted up his shirt to his chest and began talking to me about his tattoos. He said something about Adam and Eve. I didn't understand, and I didn't want to look, so I looked away. A little later, we left the man to go greet people at the door for the next service. While we were standing at the door, I noticed him sit in the back pew near the doors. He grabbed an offering envelope from the back of the pew and began to write something on it. The next thing I knew he was getting up, walking toward me, and handing me a piece of paper. As he handed it to me, he said, "It's signed, read it, it's signed...it's signed. Read it." He walked away, still saying those words. I

opened up the folded piece of paper and saw tins of, at first, unrecognizable signs written all over the paper. When I looked closer, I noticed a Nazi symbol that is apparently called a Swastica, and another symbol that contained the numbers 666, both very well-known symbols that represent Satanic works! I showed it to a few of my teammates and then I handed it to our contact, telling her about what had been going on. She said she'd have the ushers keep an eye on him. When it was time to start the service, I saw the man come up and sit in the front row, grinning. When we began to introduce ourselves, he came up with his dragon and set it behind us...on the altar! My team and I didn't know what to do. It wasn't really our call to do anything. So we kept on with the service. The dragon stayed on the altar throughout the entire service. I can't really describe the feeling I had. Right after the service ended, he came up to grab the dragon off of the altar, and walked over to me. He started saying wild things about arms and legs being cut off. Then suddenly, he seemed to lose control of himself, saying things that I couldn't understand. He walked away, still saying those things. My heart was beating so hard. I couldn't think of anything to do but pray. Most of the sanctuary had cleared out by now, and I was standing near some of my teammates and other people. I watched him as he walked out. He walked very slowly, turning around once in a while to look at me, and then turning back around. Soon, he was out of the sanctuary. And my heart was still beating hard. If I hadn't realize it before, in that moment I knew that this man was being controlled by a demon. I believe Satan was using this man to try to scare me. But God was doing wonderful works through us, and the devil was scared. Satan can't stand God's house, or the people in it, worshiping God all the time in it...why would he show up there? He wanted so bad to stop our ministry. Guess what? It didn't work. God gives us power over the evil one. When we use that power, Satan has no control. And it's nice.

I have so many more stories from this year's journey. I hope I have opportunities to share my experiences in the future as a ministry tool. It's been an incredible, surprising, tough, worthwhile adventure. God is good...all the time. We may have our doubts, our views of God may change...but God himself...He never changes! One particularly important thing that doesn't change about Him is his unconditional love for us and how often he enjoys showing us that love. Sometimes it's through big things, and sometimes it's in the little things. The more I learn about God, the more I want to learn about God... Thanks for following our journals here and there along the road. Thank you for your prayers and your support. You've been true blessings to God.

**Naomi Nelson**

**2006-2007 Captive Free West Coast Team Member**

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