

My Story

By Melissa Russell

This is not normally something that is within my comfort zone to do, but when Mark asked if I could give a testimony about how Peake youth has touched my life, I just couldn't say no. My family started our "Journey", here at Chesapeake thru Rainbowland Week. But it wasn't until we began with Peake youth that my whole family started to grow spiritually and really change the way we were living our lives.

My daughter Laurel has always struggled with school. Because of her struggles she was often pulled out of class and away from her classmates. So she always felt like she was an outcast or that something was wrong with her. Making true friendships was really tough.

When she began with Journey as a sixth grader she slowly began to change. At first, she sat in a small group and it was just her and her group leader Tammy, because there were no other 6th grade girls attending journey at the time. But she still enjoyed the full group experience in a place where she felt safe and felt like this was a place that she finally belonged.

Watching my beautiful daughter finally feel like she fit in somewhere and realizing that it was because of her growing relationship with Christ, I started my own journey to grow closer in my relationship with HIM.

One of her favorite passages from scripture is Psalm 45:11 "The King is enthralled by your beauty; honor Him for he is your Lord." This verse really helped her to know that God, her heavenly father created her for his purposes and in his eyes she is beautiful and loved always. It is not the things or the opinions of the world that matter. As her mother, how could I not be inspired to seek Him myself. Laurel had such a passion for Christ it was infectious. She started to come out of that shell that she thought was protecting her and became bold for Christ. You know, it was really cool to see her small group leader, Tammy, at Summer Chill this past Wed. night. (Tammy and her family are moving to England and she was giving going away gifts to the girls.) Oh, I mentioned that when Laurel started with her that it was just the two of them, but now that group has grown. These girls are growing in Christ together and building strong and healthy friendships where they encourage each other and hold each other accountable. It's amazing to see how staying committed and being patient can make such a difference. Anyway, Tammy gave each of the girls a small canvas bag with a picture and a verse painted on it. She explained to those of us that were there, why she chose the picture and the verse.... For Laurel, she painted a butterfly with the verse "Let God transform you into a new person" Romans 12:2. She told us that as she has watched Laurel grow and mature in her faith, that she was so happy to see her transform into this wonderful young Christian woman. I thought the verse was just perfect, because she really has been transformed.

These are the types of things you find here with Peake youth. You find wonderful leaders who are dedicated to our teens. Of course everyone knows all about the cool trips and events that Mark plans. And Wednesday night Journey is just Awesome. But the best part of it all is watching your child develop

a relationship with Christ. What an amazing gift we can give them by just driving them here. Now because I am such a big fan of Journey and anyone that knows me will tell you I don't like change, I was really skeptical about the format change last year. Well, I'm here to tell you Change Is Good! Now not only do the kids get to still hang out, play games and eat cookies on Wednesday night Journey, they also get powerful relevant teaching that they can apply to their life. As well as an amazing worship time. This change also allowed those that wanted to dig deeper to attend Home groups on Monday nights. This is where strong Christian relationships are built and real growth happens.

At the same time that Laurel was starting to grow in her relationship with Christ my husband was growing too. 6 Years ago, he agreed to lead the 6th grade boys, with the understanding that he could "keep an eye" on his little girl at the same time. Unknowingly at the time, that experience with those boys (who are now 11th graders), has changed not only their lives but his life as well. While during his small group time, he was challenging the boys with tough questions and biblical teachings, he too was being challenged. He will tell you, that his relationship with Christ has grown as it has, due to his involvement with Peake Youth and that it has been the best investment that our family has ever made.

Last year, our son Hayden started with Journey. We hope that his experience will be just as fulfilling and that he too will build strong Christian relationships and mature in his faith.

Thru our experiences with Peake youth my family has been transformed into a family that desires to please God in everything we do. Although Peake Youth is Awesome, we have learned that it is really there to "assist" us as parents in raising healthy Christian children. We know that God expects us, as parents, to be the spiritual leaders and role models in our children's lives. Realizing this, is one of the biggest things that changed for my husband and me. Our children need us to live the kind of life that we are asking them to lead and we can do that by making the effort to grow spiritually ourselves.

Peake youth has been such a blessing to my family. I really can't imagine where we'd be without it!