

Texting With Hope

Connecting That Counts

In two booklets

Texting With Hope might be seen as an adventure of 'Kitchen Table Missions'.

It follows a thread of communication technology – smartphones and texting.

There are meaningful connections made here on several levels:

- (1) a retired couple wanting to connect with their responsibility to missions. (2) A connection of understanding is made between two generations – silver haired seniors and students. (3) Texting With Hope connects responsible student use of God-given technology to be a blessing to one's peers. (4) Connect the Bible's minitruths (proverbs) with needed online content that builds character.

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by which teens can minister to tweens.

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= 1 = Table Tweeting

Deep down tears – we all have them – some folks more often than others. Some deep tears are joy tears – but often they are not. Sad tears seem to stick around longer.

Ross walked into the kitchen and was about to tell Hope, his wife of 40+ years about whom he met at the hardware store a little bit ago. Before he got the first syllable out, he saw his silver-haired sweetheart seated at the table - head in hands weeping next to a box of Kleenex already in use.

He leaned slightly over his precious wife, placing one hand softly on her back and the other on her clasped hands on the table, about to fetch another tissue. In soft tones he asked, "Is your arthritis acting up again?" not really expecting a definite answer.

Hope's shaky tone didn't really tell whether her tears were joy tears or sad ones. Ross was about to learn they were both. She seemed to want to get it out and on the table, so to speak. Her husband had definite convictions about things and wasn't afraid to boldly make them known, when the time was right. Hope cherished Ross' ability to listen; really listen. She described it as 'bone-deep listening with both ears.' Well, this was a time she needed a good dose of that, as she explained through tears.

Ross learned that while he was at the store, Tamara, the 14-year old teen who lived on the next street over, knocked at the back door. Her eyes were red and her hair a jumble. Hope had met her before but they weren't exactly 'friends'... yet. Mrs. Tappin (that's Hope) invited her in and to take a seat at the table, with a promise of a cup of cocoa to come soon from the microwave.

Hope listened to the teen relate her bad choice of

placing her heart and hopes in a boy that treated girls like a toy. Hope then reached out and touched Tamara's arm with one finger that signaled, "Wait a minute. Slow down." The teen wasn't what you'd call "boy crazy", but she was headed that way. It was also easy to notice her cell phone never left the teen's hand, like maybe it was her security blanket in some unfulfilled way.

The older woman began with, "Before we go further, how about you turning that thing off. We'll talk about it maybe later." Maturity in the faith, had, in times like these, always popped a particular verse into her mind. For instance, from Matthew 6:33a; "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness..." But just this moment, she needed to learn about teen ladies and how God was molding this one, who continued sipping cocoa with shaky hands.

In the quiet moments between Tamara's sad tears and statements, Hope's thoughts raced around her kitchen filled with appliances and utensils. Here she was right in the very center of the proof that her kitchen table was the tool most useful to God. Her thoughts worked at reaching down into Tamara's hurt and confusion to discover a fertile spot where she could begin planting heaven-sent seeds. There'd be one row of joy, another of peace, and a long row of seeds with God's purpose.

It was really tough, I mean really tough, for Hope to hold back her own tears. She couldn't count the number of times she'd asked God to use her; to use her heart and hugs to make an eternal difference in someone's life. At this moment, she silently asked, "God will you allow me the high privilege of showing Tamara your love; real love that almost defies description?"

Coincidence certainly wasn't the reason that Hope's Bible was still on the table, from her morning feeding on God's words of life. The worn ragged pages were open like a clear compassionate invitation to a time and place of green

pastures and still waters; just the right healing place for hurting hearts; young and old.

Mrs. Tappin slid her open Bible closer to the teen so both could read the words. But instead of quoting phrases that would likely sound strange to Tamara, Hope asked, “I want you to place your cell phone right next to my Bible without turning it on. Will you do that?” Wondering what was going to happen next, the cell phone was hesitantly placed next to a Bible that looked like it had weathered many a storm; many on this very table.

“Tamara. I want to tell you about love; real love. But first I want to ask Jesus to help me say the right words to you, to mend that awful hurting inside you. Can I do that? Let's bow our heads and I'll pray.” Even before Hope said the final amen, the teen felt like the rocks banging in her heart were softening. But the soil of the soul must be prepared before seeds could be planted.

Mrs. Tappin spent the next few moments comparing the communication device and its batteries, phone number codes, and all the technical nuances required for texting. The girls didn't always trust the advice and privacy of other teens.

Hope then picked up Tamara's hand and softly placed it on an open page of the Bible. She began the comparison. She spoke quietly, begging with all her heart that seeds would find welcome ground to take root and grow. “Tamara, this book is a tried and true communication device requiring none of the requirements of your cell phone. But more importantly, these words to be devoured and trusted in, change lives. I mean it. Reading the Bible turned my life around and into joy and purpose.”

More rocks were softening. Seeds would soon find a spot to grow. She continued, “the words from this Bible; this communication device can't even be compared with texting and linking up with others. The one who inspired these words loves you so much; each and every day; whether you are

'good' and even when you are not.

Tamara, the shortest verse in this Bible is, 'Jesus Wept'. Even though He made the worlds and stars and us; He wept. He wept because people didn't want to love and trust Him. He shed real tears because of all the people like the teenage Tamaras that try to fill their hearts with electronic stuff, when our hearts are really designed just for Him."

The conversation finished about the time the cocoa did. Hope got to use a couple of her best hugs and her best 'come back soon' invite.

Well,

Ross now understood Hope's tears. They had to be tears of expectation; tears of a burden – a bone-deep burden for young lives lost among the buttons, batteries, and broken hearts.

The lesson to learn is that texting, teens, truth, and tears, all find their rightful place at a kitchen table like yours and mine. Be ready always with scripture open and cocoa in supply. But first always let scripture plant its seeds in your own heart; just for this day. [~]

= 2 = Sugar Tears

God's up to something! Mrs. Tappin repeated several times out loud, as she drove home from her monthly Quilts for Christ fellowship on the other side of town. She knew it'd take the better part of tomorrow to decipher all her notes, until she got the fellowship's tape recording in the mail, in about two weeks.

That evening Hope and Ross Tappin, climbed into bed and Ross opened his old Bible of ragged pages, yellowed by time, and stained by Tappin tears; both his and hers. Ross read the inspired text while Hope kept caressing the page closest to her as though some of that inspiration, was still alive today, flowing in through her finger tips.

No sooner had Ross closed the blessed pages, than Hope almost shouted to her husband of 48 years. "Ross! God's up to something! I mean He's really up to something, and right here in me! I gotta tell you or I won't sleep a wink all night, or maybe ever!"

"This afternoon at the fellowship, we had a speaker who is a registered nurse. She spoke about several ailments of older folks, and especially about dehydration and really zeroed in on dry eyes. She didn't get too technical but she had a couple of slides showing us what an incredible design God has fashioned our eyes with." Ross had to calm Hope down twice or neither of them would get any sleep tonight.

"Well, anyway, Dede, that's the nurse, told us about human tears. There's actually 3 different kinds of tears each of us use. And our tears clean, lubricate, and medicate our eyes. Ross, did you know our tears have oil and water, and even sugar in them? That's right. It's called glucose or Grape Sugar. Honey, right after breakfast tomorrow, I'm gonna call Fran and tell her our Creator is even more fantastic than we already know."

“Ross. I want to pray for us tonight. I want my heart to be wide open to all God has in store for us, whatever that might be.” She began to grab God's throne of love with her heart and words. She wanted divine direction in mentoring Tamara, the teenager from the next street over. Hope almost begged God for his leading to reach into Tamara and show her that tears and, yes, texting, are both gifts from God and therefore must be used per His directions and for His purposes. She thanked God for showing her and Ross that God is up to something. But even more, He's given us tools like tear drops that are meant to cleanse, make things work smoothly, and protect against the elements and evil in this world.

God means for us to see His good gifts; in provision, protection, and purpose. How does He want us to view stressful times? By looking through His tears; through sweet tears that are burdened for broken hearts, like Tamara's, and others we see each day.

The verse that Hope cherished, with its promise, for so many years is Psalms 126:6

He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

Why not put a bowl of ready-to-eat grapes on your table alongside an open Bible and invite a friend over? If God has His way in your heart and conversation, you both might be smiling through Grape Sugar tears. [~]

= 3 = Baby Tweets Please God

It was a strange sight; an open Bible on the kitchen table, surrounded by a half dozen cell phones, smart phones, and other hand held communicators. But silver-haired, Hope Tappin, a.k.a. "Gram" knew the best way to shut out lots of distractions was to have each of the teen girls turn off their gadgets and place them on the table. She rather liked the arrangement. God's Word surrounded by communication tools of today's generation. It was like the gadgets were all putting scripture center stage. Now that's a great way to start any gathering or adventure.

To make today's adventure the best, Hope led the six young ladies in prayer. After the amen, Gram made good eye contact with each fidgeting girl in the group. This discipler with knuckles that knew arthritis first hand, so to speak, silently begged God to lead her actions and words in these precious moments; to make an eternal difference in these hearts around her.

Gram began with, "Girls, I want to teach you about Baby Tweets." Before any of the girls could raise the question, Gram gave a smile and repeated, "yes. I said Baby Tweets. Let me explain before you all think I've lost my mind. I've been learning from you girls that sending short messages to each other is called 'Tweeting'. And as I heard Tamara and Candy begin describing it all to me, a while back, I could see some great resemblance to some verses in my precious Bible." Hope's fingers again slid across the open Bible's pages slowly, like caressing the cheek of a dear friend.

She continued with her unusual Baby Tweets lesson for the girls. "God's Word; our Bible, is jam-packed with promises. And tons of them are for you and I, right now; right where we live and learn. One of them I really love. Turning a couple pages she had one of the girls read, 2nd Timothy 3:16.

“The Bible says all of it is perfect for rules, testing, correcting, and learning. And the next verse I think is super. The next verse includes the phrase 'unto all good work'. Girls. This Bible; God's Word, is the perfect 'how-to manual' for all the things we do, that honor God. We'll learn more about that as we get together more.”

“So because you all love to tweet, the Bible tells us what to tweet and how. Now in the Bible, tweets are called 'proverbs'. Now these proverbs or tweets are packed with powerful lessons for life; here and now, and throughout our future; full of families and all. We need to read them each day to strengthen ourselves but also share them with schoolmates and others. If we don't, evil thoughts and evil attitudes will take root and grow in us.”

Gram was on a roll with, “now let's take this tweeting to another level. In God's Word there is something wonderful that happened between two soon-to-be mothers, who were cousins. Elizabeth's baby would be called, 'John The Baptist'. The other mother would soon give birth to Jesus our Lord. Well, in Luke 1:41, the Bible tells us that Elizabeth's baby leaped inside her when Mary came in near Elizabeth. Now, girls, the point here is that unborn babies hear the outside words that their mother speak and hear. So then, when we read these Bible Tweets; these Bible Proverbs out loud, the unborn babies are actually hearing and learning God's unsurpassed directions for their lives, even before they cry their first cry.”

“It's another one of many blessings of becoming married to the man God chooses and then expecting. You can teach others, especially mothers, how crucial Baby Tweeting is. Because it truly pleases God, and sets a new life off right.
[~]

= 4 = Tea, Teens, 'n Tweets

I love God's surprises! The phone rang and Mrs. Tappin promptly answered. "Mrs. Tappin, this is Tamara. I'm not in any trouble or anything, but we don't have school today. I'd love to visit with you a few minutes at your kitchen table. My mom made some cookies and I could bring a few over. Would that be OK? Oh. Another thing -- my girlfriend Candy. Could I bring her along too? She won't be any trouble..." Hope put away the cereal box and deposited the breakfast dishes in the sink with a quick rinse. That special feeling just swept through her whole body and shouted, "God's Up to Something!"

Hope glanced in the mirror to make sure her silver hair didn't look like some weird rocket scientist. Her Bible was laid open on the kitchen table, ready for a battle or building a joy bridge. As fresh cups, spoons, and saucers were placed on the table Hope's heart prayer was that God would use her mightily today, in her kitchen.

Mrs. Tappin's thoughts flashed past several stressful events in her own teen years. She imagined it was doubly difficult for Tamara and her friend Candy, in these days packed with tests, temptations, and, yes, texting. But silver hair or not, Hope just put the coming events in God's hands, trusting in His many promises.

A knock at the back door had Hope hurrying to invite the two teens inside. With her best smile, Tamara said, "Mrs. Tappin, this is Candy, my best friend. Everyone at school calls her Candy Cane. She lives down a couple blocks from where I live. Oh, we parked our bikes away from the driveway." Candy leaned her cane against the kitchen table. With words that didn't flow easily, Candy said, "Mrs. Tappin, thanks for letting me come. I wanted to, since Tam told me how you say things which make inside hurts better."

“Well, Candy... my name's Hope, but I much prefer being called Grandma or even better – Gram. You girls call me Gram and I'll fix us some tea to go with the cookies Tamara brought.”

Just as the three sat down, Gram said, “Girls, I love to have fun. And there's no better way than to ask Jesus to help us do that. Before we test the tea, I'll ask Jesus to teach us about His 'nothing-better' love.” The three held hands in sort of a circle with a gap. That vacant space was meant for Jesus to join the circle.

Hope listened intently as Candy Cane told a little bit about herself and the long unpleasant therapy sessions to treat her back problems, these last two years. Candy noticed as she spoke that Gram lightly rested her fingers on the open Bible. The teens wouldn't learn till days later it was Hope's heart-call on God to tell her what to say to the teens, and what not.

Gram slid the open Bible over in front of the three of them and moved to a page in 1st Thessalonians 4. “Girls, I've been told many times over the years to 'shhhhhhhhhh'. I'm sure you have too. Most of the time it was to be quiet so I could study my best or someone nearby could study too. I guess it's a sort-of be quiet to study. But know what? I found a strange verse in my Bible, that I love so much. Yes, not only that verse, but actually the whole Bible. It's just crammed with good stuff that teaches me about joy, love, and beauty.”

“Tamara, could you read verse 11?” Tamara did a really good job of reading it: *“And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.”*

Both girls displayed expressions that said, “Huh?”

Hope began with, “Girls, I only want us to look at four words, 'study to be quiet'. I want you to notice it doesn't say 'be quiet to study'.” Gram paused a few seconds to let the words begin to sink in. “The Bible always means what it says and doesn't contain any mistakes.”

The lesson continued. “Candy, Tamara, being quiet on the outside is really important. Sometimes we're all stirred up and stressed simply because we aren't doing a good job of shutting our lips, or switching them off, or shooing them away, or even standing still. Yes I know this 'shutting', 'switching', 'shooing', and 'standing' are not easy. But God wants desperately to help you. Let me show you how.”

“Candy, spread the fingers of your right hand on the table.” The teen did as asked. “Now we need to begin our part of getting this joy; that's the 'shutting', 'switching', 'shooing', and 'standing'; that outside work, right? But we also need to SEEK 'quiet on the inside'; first outside, now inside. You with me?” Both girls nodded with a soft 'uh-huh'.”

Gram touched one of Candy's fingers and said, “Now to seek quiet on the inside, we need to put our phones away and see God doing powerful and beautiful things around us. That's number one. We are to recognize the things God is already doing things; most often right near us.” The silver haired teacher touched another of the handicapped girl's fingers and said, “Second, we need to store; we need to save all the important things we hear our church leaders teach us. We need to chew on them and see how God wants to use them in our lives; yours and mine. I'll tell you the truth, I don't see how teenagers today can ever hope to have any peace and joy, when the only things they want to 'feed on' are the words of other teens, who often don't know or care about God and His intense love for us.”

Before going on to the third finger, Gram reviewed the first two by quizzing the girls.

The third finger was touched as Gram said, “the third finger is for searching the precious scriptures. This is terribly important if we ever expect to have lasting peace and joy. Did you girls ever look at the ‘tweets’ in the Bible?” Tamara rubbed her forehead and said, “Gram, you wanna say that again, 'cuz I thought I heard you say there were ‘tweets’ in the

Bible... tell me that again.”

With a smile and the beginning of a chuckle, “Yes. You heard me right. Not using any trick words, there definitely are ‘tweets’ in God’s precious word, our Bible. Long, long before Twitter and Facebook God was writing out ‘tweets’ we call ‘Proverbs’. Now God’s tweets, His ‘Proverbs’, are each very, very important to everyone. So much so, that we need to include them in our own lives each day, and also share them with others.” Another smile from Gram, with the silver hair, “Now that’s REAL networking; tweets from God that teach us about having/keeping peace and joy; down deep.”

“Candy, you and I have just met for the first time today and I want very much for you and Tamara to come back whenever you can, and I want you to know about so many things God has given us. The fourth finger is to savor God’s provisions for every area in each of our lives; at home, at school, at church, and even at my kitchen table. We must think about His goodness and we must thank Him for it all.”

“Girls, the greatest gift Jesus Christ paid for, was sacrificing His own life and blood. Just like an old testament animal sacrifice, Jesus became our sacrifice to pay for our sins.” The three girls again made their prayer circle as Gram closed in prayer. Her prayer included the Gospel and asked God to help these two girls and their friends learn how to study to be quiet. Before the girls headed for their bikes, Hope invited the girls back just as often as they wished to come. “Bring some others with you! Then we’ll look at some of those juicy Bible tweets! OK?” [~]

= 5 = Shoo-Fly Pie Mission Station

A “Shoo-Fly Pie Mission Station”, were the words that came to mind as Hope Tappin scanned her kitchen to make sure all was in place for her precious tribe of teen girls, soon to arrive. She tested, one more time, to see that all of her silver hair was in place, and no dirty fingernails were present.

Taking a deep breath for a few calm moments she sat at her kitchen table and smoothed the tablecloth for the umpteenth time. But most important of all, she made sure her favorite recipe book was open and easy to see. This recipe book was different than other recipe books you've seen. This one started out with, “In the beginning God...” It doesn't matter what you're cookin' up. The first and foremost ingredient is always God... with no close seconds.

Now just so you'll know – a Shoo-Fly Pie is a dry variation of a Molasses pie that is baked.

Oh yes. It should be mentioned that Hope is most partial to being called, “Gram”; especially by those who want to hear the life-changing recipe that starts here and reaches the depths of eternity. Hope, I mean, “Gram” would remind you of that irreplaceable first Ingredient; God. More than once, Gram has flipped those yellow ragged Bible pages over to Matthew 6 and verse 33 and would boldly proclaim, “See here! Plain as day it says, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

If you wanna really get Gram lit up, simply ask her WHAT things that verse is talking about. With tones and words sweeter than any pie, Gram will speak the richness of the previous verse, in ways you'll itch to share it with others you know.

Hope's Shoo-Fly pie was hardly out of the oven, when

the eight girls all knocked at the back door, and were enthusiastically invited in. As was the custom, each of the teens turned off their cell phones and pocket gadgets and placed them on the kitchen table near Gram's special recipe book.

One of Gram's hopes was always that the girls would see their gadgets next to God's Word and store a mental picture that the two should always go together. Maybe that was their first lesson.

Hope tried to keep up with hearing all the neat things the girls had done since last week's visit, but all the silver hair and arthritis must have slowed things down. Gram silently begged God for her words of hope and love to reach the teen's hearts as she reached for a knife to cut and serve this home-made pie with the strange name.

As the last bites of the pie slices disappeared, Hope picked up the pie's recipe and told the girls, "This is the recipe for the pie you've just enjoyed. It looks pretty simple doesn't it? It wouldn't be hard for you to make at home – it's mostly molasses and sweet crumbs. Hey, know what? I'd like to show you girls the absolute strangest recipe known to man. With a big smile, Gram held up a blank sheet of white paper for all the girls to clearly see. Candy was the first to speak up, with, "But Gram, there's nothing on your recipe sheet! I bet you're gonna make something out of nothing, right?! My boyfriend says I'm always making something out of nothing, when we talk about stuff." All the girls chuckled.

"But girls. It's no joke. It's no trick. It actually happened, and we have record of it as a historical fact." Without waiting for any wise cracks from the girls, Hope slid her special recipe book closer to the girls so they could see the words; the recipe with no ingredients, for themselves. Hope told the girls the next word after the Bible's beginning phrase "In the beginning God..." is the word "created". The actual word is "bara". "Now girls, the word "bara" means "to

build starting with nothing.”

With good eye contact, Hope told the teens, “Right here it teaches us that God built all that is, starting with nothing but Himself. That’s what makes Him God. God made all the universe by His own power, for us to live in and learn about Him.

“Now here’s why I’m telling you this,” Gram said as she lightly touched two of the cell phones. “God made us to be social beings. He wants us to help each other, learn from each other and help keep each other safe. Now the neat thing about all the communication we do with technology is that we don’t take time to thank Him for all that we have. Just like a parent, He wants us to tell Him often we thank Him for our life, and all His provisions for us. And it makes it super exciting that we can talk to Him by just bowing our heads in prayer.”

As the little Shoo-Fly Mission station closed in prayer for this week, Hope prayed the Good News of Salvation to the girls. What a way to put God first in the rest of your life.

[~]

= 6 = Beauty With Buttons

I Got One! It’s All Mine!

Exited couldn’t begin to describe Zena as she almost ripped into the packing box. This had to be the absolute best gift she’d ever received.

With that, Hope Tappin began to tell a story to her every Saturday group of teen girls as they investigate all the ins and outs of texting. Her story continued:

First out of the box was the instruction manual that had

to be thicker than a CD case. Next the charger and battery was taken out and placed on her daybed beside the manual. And then there it was – still packed in its plastic wrapper. It was beauty beyond belief. Its candy apple red plastic jacket shouted itself to be more computer than cell phone.

Adrenalin exploded into every cell of Zena's body with the news that she now had her very own cell phone with on-board video camera, text messaging keyboard, and GPS locator.

As her dad followed the directions for installing the battery and getting it on line, he couldn't recall more arms and legs moving since he first saw his beautiful daughter in the hospital's "New Infants" nursery, 15 years ago.

Zena's body finally quit thrashing as she held her beautiful red cell phone in front of a mirror. With her mind still racing she took a picture of her reflection in the mirror and immediately phoned it to her favorite girlfriend.

Like the lungs of a newborn, her cell phone battery was getting a real workout from the very start. Malcolm, Zena's dad, began to notice the excessive cell phone use by Zena. Several times he'd see her hold it to her ear while shopping when he knew she didn't even have it turned on. Her father somehow thought a cell phone held to her ear became some kind of jewelry or a status symbol.

Malcolm discussed his concern more than once with his wife Barb, but no decisions were made. The conclusion was that Zena's phone addiction didn't seem to be breaking any laws and besides, all the rest of her friends were doing it. It was almost like her cell phone was a critical key; a key to acceptance by one's peers.

Powder and the Squealers

Zena's parents recently had briefly discussed with her the possibility of Zena working as a candy striper at the

nearby hospital. But now seemed the right time to investigate it further. Summer vacation was about to start, and her parents definitely felt their daughter needed some real challenges to fill her time that had been occupied by school.

After further arrangements were made, the daughter with the new cell phone was assigned to the nursery ward of the hospital, which thrilled Zena's mom. The first week of 'hospital helper' orientation had Zena doing more studying and note-taking than she'd done in school. Her dedication was due to her 'little lives are at risk by lazy attitudes and actions' sign she had hung near her dresser mirror. This hospital helper in training, quickly adopted the credo: whether patients are big or small; whether the tasks for me are big or small – I'll do my very best.

'Her very best' meant that she must leave her beautiful cell phone with all its nuances must be left in her nursery ward locker; not to be touched until she headed for home. She loved every second of every day she spent in the nursery learning how to powder, diaper, and care for the newbies in zillions of tiny ways. Baby care in the nursery took on a whole new meaning the third week when she began working the night shift, with Katey, an African born African-American with a stubborn smile that never disappeared even when crying newbies exceeded the noise level of most airports.

But Zena really enjoyed the quiet nights with all the babies sound asleep, their security blankets touching their soft puffy cheeks. How beautiful and quiet they lay there, all the while their bodies inside are working full tilt, creating bigger muscles and bones to take on the world.

Then it hit Zena like a ton of bricks. These beautiful little ones are helpless; powerless to protect or provide for themselves. They can't feed or dress themselves. These little beauties are, every minute, at the mercy of whoever is watching over them; and for the moment, that's Zena and Katey.

Many of Zena's quiet moments on shift were spent staring down at the little faces so perfectly and individually formed. She'd imagine this one would become a powerful president of some company. That one over there would become a laboratory researcher of muscle diseases in humans. And that one over there... well, she might become another Katey with her smile that prods others to keep up the good fight even when life creates noisy overloads.

How Could She Have Done It?

Sitting at the supper table, Zena had a troubled look on her face, that mom and dad took special note of. Their daughter was rather picky about eating her food and cleaning her plate, but the adults decided she'd explain what troubled her heart when she was ready.

"Mom. I did something today that I will always remember, and that it will probably cause me difficulty for the next few days." Zena's mom softly said, "I'll be glad to listen, if you want me to." Well, the only thing is, I left my cell phone locked in my nursery ward locker and I can't get it until I go back in, on Monday evening." We'll not mention her mom's thoughts about the oversight.

For the first few hours that evening, the teen asked herself how she'd possibly live through a whole weekend without her candy red cell phone with which she could communicate with the world. But when she woke up the next morning, she ran her hand over her soft fluffy bed covers and began thinking about those beautiful wiggly people that could do little more than grow new muscles, cry, and give you a smile brighter and bigger than any rainbow or sunset.

Through the remainder of the weekend Zena kept pondering the real meaning of 'beauty.' What is it? Is beauty a gleaming new cell phone, or the finishing touches spent with eye liner and mascara, at her little makeup table?

At church the following Sunday, the youth pastor put the frosting on the cake as he used God's word to show that real beauty can't be manufactured by man. And it can't be created with eye shadow and lipstick. Pastor Dean taught his teen church group with the Bible's explanation of beauty, by starting with a newborn baby. The Bible used the word 'nativity' in showing all the blessings of beauty God has given every person that breathes. (Ezekiel 16) A few verses later scripture explained how mankind was putting those beautiful things on their idols and worshiping them.

Then Zena's tears flowed when she read further and saw where idol worship led the parents to sacrifice (incinerate) their children in their evil worship. It was then and there, Zena decided she now knew what real beauty was, and she wanted to honor God by faithfully gratefully worshiping Him for all the true beauty He has blessed us with.

Still seated at Hope's kitchen 'mission station', she ended her story with the following questions, for the girls, that we should ask ourselves also.

If you were to make a list of beautiful things in your life, what would be on the list? Would your parent's names be there? Would the beauty of a new life be listed? There can be nothing better to put at the top of my list than the beautiful promises that have come with my Salvation that was bought, once and for all, with a blood-red Cross. [~]

= 7 = Kloud Kids

He spelled it wrong, Ross. Look. There's no K in 'cloud,'" Hope Tappin told her silver-haired husband, both seated about 4 rows back in the sizable sanctuary packed with adults. Everyone was starving

for answers on how to successfully reach out to youth.

The youth pastor stepped to the podium, welcomed everyone and invited Sam Henton to lead all hearts in prayer for this terribly needed blending of burdens for the youth and their spiritual and emotional future. Sam finished with an amen that was echoed by all in attendance.

Pointing at the easel and poster on the platform a few steps from him, Pastor Tom began with, “You'll all learn in a little bit, why I spelled it with a K. I assure you, it was intentional,” he said with a touch of a smile.

“I know your time is valuable today as it is every day. So I'll try to be just as brief as possible. I want to talk about a stampede. Yes. A stampede. The Bible talks about one. It begins in Matthew 8:30. The details of that horrible incident in history is repeated in two other gospels. The reason for my sharing this message with you, is that you and I are in a stampede. Or more accurately, on the fringe of one that is gaining intensity even as you and I are in this room.”

“As the youth pastor of this church, I believe many church leaders and parents are turning their heads from the stampede and labeling it as a lost cause. I looked up a fancy word I seldom use, but it seems to be appropriate at this time. The word is AMBIVALENCE. Ambivalence is the force; the energy that drives this stampede to the same terrible destruction as the one in Matthew. The dictionary says that 'ambivalence is a state of uncertainty or fluctuation, especially when caused by inability to make a choice or by a simultaneous desire to say or do two opposite or conflicting things.'”

“Pastor Tom continued, “This uncertainty causes youth to seek the company of other youth throughout each day, in school and everywhere; easily 8 or more hours every day. The challenge of this online community; this online social network, can be visualized as a cloud; a misty group that seems to have no leader and certainly no defined goal or

purpose. For emphasis, I call this a KLOUD OF KIDS.”

“Now do you remember I said that you and I were on the fringe of this growing stampede; this Kloud of Kids? Each of us in this room are likely to be sucked into this kloud and share in the ambivalence unless we declare to Heaven and those around us that God has infinitely more power and love for our future generations, and ours also.”

“Each one of us who truly love the Lord and believe He is All-powerful, must reach into that Kloud of Kids with our heart, to the point of tears, and see no one in the stampede wants to be there. Their only hope is to find someone who truly cares. Can you hear their heart cries above the thundering hoof beats and clouds of dust and confusion? The dictionary word for that is EMPATHY. We must have feelings for each youth as God's creation. Each one is a gift to this church and us as a church family.”

Pastor Tom paused a moment, and took a noticeable swallow that told everyone that what was to follow would be especially important. It was.

“I want to tell you all a big secret. It's certainly no secret that most silver-haired folks are turned off by all this computer toys and gadgetry. These tech tools have me buffaloed quite often too. But the big secret is that silver-haired folks are the best people to reach into that herd of hurting hearts. Did you hear that? The two generations that need each other the most, are separated by all the technology stuff.”

“You can reach into that stampede and rescue one precious soul at a time, by sharing ideas to reach the youth in real love. Partner with other adults that have Heaven-sent ideas too. That partnering; that harmony, turns empathy into sympathy. Do you want to be used mightily by God in the lives of youth today. It takes junk. It takes grownups that use broken pieces of computers as parables to teach God's incredible love and leadership. [~] (go to book 2 #203)