NOT THOSE BOYS

"Dear God, please don't send those boys to my van."

God wasn't listening, I concluded. Several times a year the school devoted a day to community service. From my viewpoint, Kenny or Chris were not "service project" material. Plopping into the seats Chris complained, "Where are we going?"

Kenny chimed in, "Why do we have to do this?"

Although I wanted to say something else I calmly replied, "We're going to work at the battered women's shelter."

"Work?" Kenny snorted. "I didn't even sign up for this. I think it is stupid!"

It occurred to me that God was not answering my prayer. We arrived at the shelter and I met the director while the boys waited anxiously in the van.

"We really need help planting flowers and playing with the kids while the women go to a group session." She peered into the van and asked nervously, "Can your team do that for us?"

"Team?" I thought. The two stringy-haired, saggy-dressed teenagers that were half asleep in the van were anything but a team.

"Come on, gentlemen," I exaggerated. "I'm going to paint. Kenny, you are going to play with the kids. And Chris, you are going to plant the flowers."

I prayed one final prayer for God to stop punishing me. When we arrived we met the director who was already wearing an apron.

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"I prayed one final prayer for God to stop punishing me, saying, "God, if you are there, I'm begging you . . ."

My prayer was interrupted by six screaming children running up to the van, chanting, "Duck, duck, goose!" Kenny was being pulled from the van to play a marathon of children's games. He looked back desperately for help as his best friend watched helplessly. I smiled and waved.

Chris looked in horror at the flats of flowers that littered the sidewalk where the fertile ground waited for their arrival. After the shock wore off, he examined the site and soberly began to plant.

As we got ready to leave, children were still clinging to Kenny's arms and legs as he dragged them laughing in the grass. Chris was washing his hands by the side of the house as the women came out of the building to a garden of flowers. I watched his eyes as he accepted their gratitude.

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Tuesday

**REFLECTING**

» Read John 16:33.

The whole idea of a “kingdom” may seem unreal today. But even though God’s kingdom isn’t something you can touch with your hands, it is real. Jesus would even say it is more real than the world you are living in. The freedom you feel when you forgive someone is real. The joy people feel when they devote their whole lives to service is real. That’s what makes the kingdom of God real.

Just look at the “real” world around you. Depression is common. Suicide is on the rise. Consider the music and movies that are popular today. Are people claiming to be happy, fulfilled, full of joy and certainty, meaning and purpose? No, a lot of them are uncertain or disappointed about life.

Citizens of God’s kingdom face many things, but always with certainty of their future. Always with the knowledge that suffering will end. Always with the joy that being of service in a forever kingdom is better than trying to be king of one that is coming to an end. Is it possible that so many people can be misled as to which kingdom is real and which kingdom is temporary? Obviously they are, and it is for that very reason that we should wear our citizenship where everyone can see it.

Wednesday

**BIBLE INSIGHTS**

» Listed below are Bible texts that talk about the lesson. Match the number with the phrase to which the Bible text belongs. You can find the various Bible versions at Biblegateway.com.

1. Psalm 32:1, 2 (NLT)
2. Proverbs 16:25 (NLT)
3. John 16:33 (NIV)
4. John 14:27 (NIV)
5. James 2:5 (NLT)
6. 1 John 2:15-17 (CEV)
7. 1 John 4:4 (NIV)

A. _____ “Don’t love the world or anything that belongs to the world.”
B. _____ “Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven . . .”
C. _____ “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them . . .”
D. _____ “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give . . .”
E. _____ “There is a path before each person that . . .”
F. _____ “Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters . . .”
G. _____ “I have told you these things, so that . . .”

Thursday

**CONNECTING**

» Read 1 John 2:15-17.

Review the memory text

The desire you have for joy and happiness is there because God put it in you. Life in God’s kingdom may seem foreign now, but the more you think about it the more real it will seem. The opposite kingdom is a place where there is never mercy, only a love of power. It’s where everyone looks out for their own interests and never thinks of others. It’s a pretty scary place.

In the Beatitudes God seems to be sneaking us a peek of our future home in heaven. It is almost as if God is reminding us, “Don’t make yourself at home in this world, because your home is somewhere else.” Consider the rewards of being part of that kingdom—hers to the King, children of an awesome Father. God wants us to experience joy more than we know, and while the path of God’s kingdom has challenges, what an adventure to be a part of such a wonderful kingdom!

Friday

**APPLYING**

» Read Matthew 5:3-12.

Organize the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) in order of their relevance to your life. On the chart below, list the three beatitudes that you want most to live by this week. In the second column, focus on a specific arena of your life (example: best friend, teacher, problems with parents, someone who hates you). You might write the name of someone to whom you need to be merciful, or in what arena of your life you want to practice purity, humility, and so on. Be as specific as you can! As you practice the attitude, write in the last column your reflections on what happened and how you might continue to experience the real joy of being an agent of God’s kingdom.