

CCFH Ministries Supplemental Topics

Corey, Faith and Asperger's Autism

By Jim Pierson



Jim looks on as Corey prepares to cut his birthday cake.

Corey carried his Bible in a cloth cover with handles. He never came to church without it. Recently, I noticed he had a new one with a leather cover. When I asked what happened to the old cover, he responded that it was getting worn and it needed to be changed.

As I reflected on Corey's spiritual journey, I made a similar comparison. The old Corey is now in a beautiful new cover. The change in his walk with the Lord has been impressive. He is on a track that will continue to allow him to grow.

The result of including people with disabilities in the life of the Church is the same as it is for people without disabilities. Simply stated, a person is taught about Jesus, accepts Him as Lord, and serves through the congregation with his/her unique ability.

When Corey moved to Knoxville, he started coming to Woodlawn Christian Church's special Sunday school program. He is a faithful attendee. When he is not coming, he tells us the reason the Sunday before. It is obvious that he enjoys the lessons. He already had a lot of Bible information and our lessons have added to his store of knowledge. When he lived with his family, Corey attended a good church, but there was not a program that met his needs.

After several weeks of being in the class, he told us that he was ready to become a Christian. After being in class, he was aware of what he had should do. He handled the details of talking with the minister on his own, even though I offered to go with him. The Sunday he was baptized will be a memorable day at Woodlawn. The standing ovation for a new brother in Christ was electrifying.

Corey is a proud member of Woodlawn. He often reminds us how long he has been a member — December 14, 2003. He is involved. He volunteers for church related events—the Buddy Walk is a favorite. He often asks for prayer for family and friends. He gives money to the church. On Sunday he sits with the senior minister. The minister reports the sincerity of Corey's worship and participation in the service. The worship leader is inspired by him. She noted, "While some are bored or asleep, Corey is engaged, he sings out, lifts his hands, and shows what worship is all about."

His giving to the church further illustrates his spiritual growth. He always gave money. Once, he gave five dollars in change. He enjoyed the fact that I had to count it. Then, one Sunday there was a check in the basket—there were more checks. It hit me, "He is tithing." His mother confirmed it in an email, "He has been tithing. I usually try and make sure he has enough money in his pocket. When I noticed he seemed to be spending more than usual, I asked him what he was buying and he informed me that he was giving it to his church. When he didn't have the cash, he wrote a check. Recently

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P. O. Box 9869, Knoxville, TN 37940

Telephone - 865-546-5921 Fax - 865-525-2282 Email - info@ccfh.org Website - www.ccfh.org

when he was unemployed for several weeks, I told him he should not write the checks to the church until he went back to work and had a few extra dollars. I have now been convicted of that as I realize this is a matter of Corey's faith and I have a lot to learn regarding the most basic biblical principle of tithing."

The church people especially members of the class enjoy Corey. He is a nice guy. He is pleasant, friendly, and caring. Sunday mornings are special times for him. He hugs his teachers and exchanges pleasantries with his classmates. He is a faithful reader of the church paper and the bulletin. He keeps up with the details of births, weddings, and illnesses of members. He told us he was saddened by the death of an elder in the church and a relocation of a recent college graduate.



Corey enjoys time with two other class members.

His mother is elated that her son has found a church, in her words, "that just doesn't accept him, he is embraced."

Corey moved to Knoxville to have a place of his own. His family—mom, dad, sister and brother—lives in a town close to Knoxville. When he graduated from high school, his parents wanted him to be as independent as possible. So, they looked for an independent living program. Corey moved in and did a good job with being independent.



Now, Corey lives in his own condo. He has a job with a food service vendor at the University of Tennessee. He uses public transportation, and enjoys being a part of the community. He likes communicating with his friends by email. He is an avid University of Tennessee Volunteer fan. During football season, he wears his orange sweat shirt. He is elated when the team wins; down-hearted when they lose. Looking in the Sunday paper's sports section before I go to church will let me know Corey's mood for the day.

In addition to tithing, another milestone of Corey's spiritual development is his willingness to teach the class. One Sunday a few months ago, he asked to teach the Sunday school lesson. I still remember it and keep the bookmark on my desk that he gave as a take-home gift. It reads: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4: 13). During the lesson he gave several examples of people in the Bible who were strengthened by Jesus' love. I was moved when he concluded, "I know the verse is true because Christ gives me strength."

Corey gave me his notes. Following are some of his excellent points.

- ⇒ *Many times I think that everything is difficult and challenging. And so I pray for God to help me do better.*
- ⇒ *God uses all kinds of people.*
- ⇒ *Saul who became Paul was the Christians' worst enemy. He was converted and God used him.*

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He is scheduled to teach again. I am looking forward to his lesson. It will not be long, but it will be to the point and will bless the lives of his fellow students and his teachers.

Corey has a new cover for his Bible. But he has a lot more. He is a member of a congregation. He is surrounded by fellow Christians who want him to be there. He has a growing faith in God. He is defined by who he is, a 24-year-old Christian gentleman; not his diagnosis, Asperger's autism.



Corey's family sees the joy in his life.

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