

CCFH Ministries Supplemental Topics

Corey, More Growth, and Asperger's Autism

By Jim Pierson



Since the first blog item (May 28, 2008) about my friend, Corey, he has made some nice strides. At the end of the article, I reported that he was going to teach the Sunday school lesson again. He did and it was good. For almost five years the class had been a safe haven for Corey. The class was a real part of his church life. However, it was becoming obvious to me that the instructional level was below what Corey was capable of comprehending.

Over lunch one day, I asked him if he had thought about being a member of another class. He had not. I suggested that doing so would allow him to meet more people his age and hear lessons that would add to his Biblical knowledge. As we talked, he became more excited about the possibilities. After some discussion, he decided that the college class would be the best one for him.

The teachers of the class were open to his coming and after the first Sunday, he felt right at home. He was especially impressed with the breakfast served to class members. It was a good fit. Corey's spiritual life took a major leap when he decided to move to a regular, adult Sunday school class. He would continue to grow spiritually in a more stimulating environment.

Leaving the comfort of the special class, his attachment to teachers, and his friendships with class members were not easy for him. He said he wanted to stay a part of the class and started suggesting ways he could. First, he asked if he could come back on his birthday to get a cake (a long-held tradition). I said that the special birthday celebration was just for class members. He understood, but tried another approach--could he teach the class occasionally? He had found the connection. He was a teacher and could teach.

At the Christmas luncheon for the church's disability ministry—students, family members, volunteers, and church staff, everyone was being recognized by category. Corey sat with his parents. When the students from Corey's old class stood, Corey did not. When teachers and volunteers were called on, Corey stood. He had grown and understood it. He asked me later if I noticed he stood up when the teachers were recognized. I did and I was proud.

Every fall, a local church sponsors Prom of the Stars for people with disabilities. There is no charge for a wonderful evening of dancing, music, good food, and plenty of fellowship. Corey had gone before but told me that he did not want to go without a date. I asked him if he had someone in mind. He did. The music intern at our church had caught his eye. He wondered if this attractive, talented young lady would go with him. He even asked me if I would ask her. I told him that I would not; he would have to do that. I told him I was going with my wife and we could double date. Doing so took care of transportation. He asked her and she accepted.

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Corey came to our house on the evening of the Prom. He was nervous, very nervous. He was excited, very excited. With the aid of his parents, he had donned a tie and bought his date a wrist corsage. When we arrived at her dorm, I told him I would go in with him to see how the system worked, to let her know he was there and then he was on his own. When I felt he was as comfortable as he could be, I returned to the car.

On the way to the dance, I learned that my friend was becoming accepting of his disability. He had mentioned to me earlier that he had not told his date what kind of event it was. As we approached the parking area of the convention center, he said, "This party is for people with disabilities and most of them are worse off than I am." What growth! Having autism does not define who he is.

It was a wonderful evening. The memories will be with Corey forever. He brings it up in every conversation we have.

As I thought about the evening, it occurred to me that if Corey could drive, he would add to his independence. I have talked to him about the possibility and am ready to follow through if he decides to do so. It is his decision. From the list of negatives he presented—flat tires, price of gasoline, insurance—it might be a while before he decides. I will let you know the next saga of Corey's remarkable journey.

There is a special joy in my relationship with Corey. He is a warm, appreciative friend and I enjoy being with him. For his 25th birthday he invited several of the people who had made a difference in his life to a lunch at a popular restaurant. When my wife and I walked in and were greeted with a hug from Corey, I saw the progress. He had moved quickly from wanting a birthday cake in a Sunday school class to the being host of a luncheon in his honor.

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