

# Texas teen heals from anger & abuse after turning to Christ

September 9, 2015

LEAGUE CITY (BP)—Seventeen-year-old Justin Spencer was with a missions team from Magnolia Creek Baptist Church in League City when an unexpected thing happened. Standing on the front porch of a house in Chalmette, La., listening as his teammate Hailey presented the gospel, his heart quickened.

When Hailey asked the resident if he wanted to pray to receive Christ, he said no. But Justin said yes. At lunch break, he talked with his youth pastor, Chris Godby, and they prayed together:

“I know that I’m a sinner. I know that I’m not perfect. I know that my sin separates me from you,” Justin prayed, repeating Godby’s words. “I believe that you sent your Son to die on the cross for me, to give me a way to be united with you. And right now, I place my faith and trust in you and want you to be the boss of my life.”

## **Eager to tell others about Jesus**

As soon as he became a Christian, Justin wanted to introduce others to Jesus.

The youth pastor helped Justin practice sharing his testimony and the gospel, and they went out together door-to-door. That afternoon, Justin led four boys to faith in Christ. A couple of weeks later, he attended a youth retreat at Pineywoods Baptist Camp and led a friend to rededicate her life to God. Now, he regularly talks about Christ with his peers in the skate park.

“I’ll skate and then sit down for a few, and someone will be talking to me about what I did. And then out of nowhere, I’ll say: ‘Do you know Jesus? Let me tell you about him,’” Justin said.

“It’s great that I’m able to relate to some of these guys. Sometimes it can be testy, because some are atheists, agnostics, anti-Christian—a mix of people. But if you let God speak through you, he’ll work, because God’s word never returns void.”

### **History of poverty and abuse**

In his 17 years, Justin has known poverty and abuse, abandonment and violence. He’s never met his real mom. She was incarcerated for child abuse when Justin was 3 months old and, although she’s free now, she won’t pursue a relationship with him.

He lived with his father, who also was physically and emotionally abusive, until he was 14, growing up in anger. He watched his sister become a victim of violence, eventually defending her as well as himself and getting kicked out of the house. He got involved in drugs and alcohol, leading to an arrest.

### **Seeking answers**

He moved in with an aunt who has now adopted him, and in that home, he began to seek answers to his problems.

“I was sitting on the couch one day, and I wanted some drugs. And then I realized that drugs was just a way to run from my problems—that drugs weren’t a stress-reliever but a stress-postponer—and that I needed something to help me carry that burden,” Justin said. “I believe that God was pulling me towards his love.”

He resisted at first because of his upbringing.

“I figured if God was really real, then he wouldn’t have let me grow up and watch my dad break my sister’s nose and beat her to the kitchen floor,” he said. “I grew up believing God wasn’t real, because a god is supposed to be caring and not let his children see things like that.”

### **Changed image of Christians**

But eventually, a friend invited him to Magnolia Creek Baptist Church, where he met Godby, who helped change Justin’s image of Christians and God.

“I always got the impression that Christians were really conservative, rude people,” Justin said. “They wear boots and Wranglers, and I was skinny jeans and skateboards, and so I couldn’t relate to them and couldn’t do anything they would agree with.

“But when Chris walked out of the sanctuary and smacked me on the shoulder and said, ‘Hey man, how ya doin’?’ I was blown away. He was talking to me, hanging out with me, shooting me texts, wanting to know if I wanted to hang out and stuff, and it was super cool.”

### **The love of God**

Little by little, God began to reveal his love to Justin. It really hit home when they were in Chalmette—outside in 100-degree heat, canvassing neighborhoods, working to exhaustion.

“I felt so happy in spite of the conditions,” Justin said. “The thing that kept sticking out to me was that God loves me, and I couldn’t wait to talk about him some more. Realizing God loves me was something that really pulled me towards salvation.”

God continued to work in Justin’s life at the youth camp at Pineywoods, and at that point, some of his past began to make sense.

“I realized that God is very intentional in everything he does, and nothing he does is an accident,” Justin said. “He didn’t step in and prevent me from seeing the things I saw—not because he didn’t love me, but because he did, and he wanted me to grow close to him, and he wanted to use me with other kids that have problems. It was great seeing that God had a plan for me, even though I didn’t love him at the time.”

### **Conversion makes a difference**

Since he made his faith commitment to Christ, Justin sees differences in his outlook and attitude.

“I’ve become more patient and less angry,” he said. “I’m more friendly and can actually talk to people.”

Before his conversion, meeting new people or new situations caused him to stutter, but God has given him fluency now.

### **Called to tell others about Christ**

Justin feels God calling him into urban ministry long-term, maybe with homeless people or low-income youth. He and Godby are brainstorming about what a skate ministry might look like, as well.

Justin studies Scripture with a small group from church and with Godby, who has become a mentor. Godby is teaching Justin to play guitar, and Justin is teaching Godby how to ride a long board.

### **Prayers for family**

Justin’s prayer requests often center on his family. His sister lives nearby but still struggles with issues from childhood. He has just discovered another biological sister and hopes to meet her.

He is praying God will soften his biological mother’s heart and cause them

to be reunited, because he wants to know her.

His father has experienced multiple strokes and is permanently disabled. Justin visits with him and has forgiven him. Their times together have helped Justin heal.

“For the first time, we’ve been able to have a conversation. It gives me something to remember about him that’s not terrible,” he said.

Now that he knows God and knows he is loved, Justin is full of hope for the future.

“My problems don’t seem like big problems any more,” he said.