

Tarleton State: Burned by the church

November 12, 2015

During our weekly evangelism training on the Tarleton State University campus, my fellow intern, Megg, and I encountered a student named Chris. This particular day, we were using Soularium cards to initiate spiritual conversation.

☒ Warren Ethridge Soularium cards are a series of pictures on cards that prompt people to connect to images to explain their answers to spiritual questions. The pictures can be anything from a little girl running with balloons to a broken bicycle. The beautiful thing about these pictures is that people can make them say whatever they want.

Typically, we will ask five questions: What are three images that depict your life now? What are three images that depict what you want your life to look like? What's an image that describes God to you? What are three images that describe what your relationship with God is like? What are three images that describe what you want your relationship with God to be like?

Chris was our first encounter of the day. He was casually sitting outside the humanities building when we asked him if he had a few minutes for us to ask him about his spiritual background and if he was up to describing his life in pictures. There's something disarming about pictures, so he readily agreed. In the course of conversation, Megg and I discovered Chris was recently in jail for some bad decisions he made when he was 19 and was in his third year at Tarleton after attending on and off due to grades and jail time.

Free from the past

Chris answered the first two questions quickly, expressing the need to be free from his past and living up to the expectations he had for himself. When asked to describe God, Chris chose a picture of a mountain range, describing God as the Creator of the universe. He had grown up in Boy Scouts and felt a connection to the Creator best when he was in the woods among God's creation.

The next few answers were confusing, though. When asked about his spiritual background, Chris talked about growing up in several different denominations, and he mentioned one in particular he didn't feel really cared about him. As he talked, you could feel the sense of abandonment that he felt from the churches of his past that ultimately stopped pursuing him when he went to jail.

As we answered the questions with him with pictures of our own, we laid out the gospel, highlighting the redemption of God's people through the cross, hoping to help Chris understand that even though he felt burned by the church, God never had given up on him.

As we got to the last question, Chris answered by saying that he wanted to grow closer to God, but he really didn't want to have anything to do with people in churches. We pointed Chris to James 4:8, which says to "draw near to God and he will draw near to you." But ultimately, we told him, that would best be done with a group of believers who can encourage him and hold him accountable.

'Real Christians'

We clearly communicated in a nonabrasive way, that even though Christians in his past has burned him, not all believers were like that. Chris told us how much he appreciated us talking to him and being "real Christians" on campus, but he wasn't ready to give God's people a second

chance yet.

We then asked to pray for Chris and prayed for his relationship with God to grow. We prayed he would find a group of believers he could walk alongside and connect to God again.

Even though Chris didn't have the response we would have hoped for, the questions we asked gave him something to think about and mull over—to consider what God said in the Bible about the church and about forgiveness. I haven't seen Chris since that day, but I hope our paths will cross again sometime soon. Please pray for Chris and other students like him at Tarleton to encounter Christ. Pray that we get more opportunities to be a positive influence.

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