

Chapter 16

Change in the Play Book

Two and a half years ago when we first met Chris Zauner, a former Willamette University football player, I spoke about the vision of the Courtyard and Relevance affecting change for Christ using athletic terms and euphemisms. Once on staff, Chris learned that my knowledge of sports was closer akin to someone from the chess club than track and field. However, the vision has remained and daily God is doing a mighty work in Corvallis. He, our mighty Lord and Savior, is calling the plays and training us up to meet the opponent head on.

Before I leave our star quarterback, Chris, I want to encourage you, as you read, the great impact for Jesus that he has on this community. On and off the field, Chris is working to refine his “package”. In a ministry like this, God always uses everything we have and then some, so Chris continues to seek the Lord, praying, fasting, taking advanced Christian education courses and seeking the Lord. Chris is seeing the fruit that God has grown around him, both at the Courtyard and as he leads the Young Life work at Crescent Valley High School on the edge of town. One of Chris’ passions is the use of music and events to reach out to the world. Let me share not so much now about what Chris or Relevance or anyone person is doing at the Courtyard, but what God is doing in our “Play Book”.

Halloween is a dark night similar to the visual of the dense forest that crowds out the light to the forest floor; but this year, God’s full moon sent shards of light through every crack of leaves and branches to paint a black and white kaleidoscope of wonder. What makes dark seem so dark is not more dark, but when it contrasts to the Light; God’s Light, Jesus. As a social function to reach out, the residents of the Courtyard held a Halloween party where, over the course of the evening, over 600 college students attended. Their alcohol left outside, they came from all over Greek Row and beyond to hear the tunes of crossover, Christian rap, and clean music. They came to the party of the evening on campus. Our residents played the hosts and the participants and presented living a joyous life without the need of the world’s masks. Special thanks go to the volunteer security team that looks like the front five of OSU’s football team. God was also there and we are thankful for His protection. One girl came as “Mother Nature” in a costume closer to a birthday suit and our Women’s Director helped her with a blanket and some private encouraging conversation. There were a host of folks, some pressing the line of our sensibility, but even through adversity, God still wins. People who came saw Jesus living in the real world.

Many of these people had also come to the outdoor concert in the Courtyard parking lot on the Friday before OSU classes were started. Four different bands and an evening of free hotdogs, music, and connections were established; residents helped build a stage, served the food, and listened to Paul Wright and other talented musicians. Hundreds came and hundreds stayed for the 4-hour connection for Christ. God is totally in control as He is orchestrating these first rate artists to come and play at the Courtyard.

Forty-eight men and women (25/23) residents are daily being impacted by the Lord. They live, sleep, study, eat, (thanks to our great chef, Stephanie Volbeda) laugh, play and worship together forging closer relationships with each other and with Jesus. They are **all** mentoring high school students, loving kids that need extra at Southside Youth Outreach, leading Bible studies, connecting with international students and so much more. Jesus is using each person and their gifts to impact the world. These are not your pew sitting future generation; these are the front line, Christ following disciples. They see their actions as demonstrations of worship to our Lord rather than just hearing words on the weekend or even saying them as a mantra.

God is using the Courtyard as He sees fit. We had a door close on the Alpha course for this fall, but that has not stopped the outreach. We have witnessed that when doors close, they seem to blast open in other areas. Halloween eve over 90 international students met and carved pumpkins in the Courtyard. Every Friday night international students are meeting to connect with followers of Christ (I'm liking the term more than "Christian" these days which has gotten really diluted); from all around the globe they come to laugh and play in an atmosphere that is God honoring, Christ followed. No sermons, no judgment, no condemnation on these nights, just friendships. Berena Woods is an amazing mix of Mary and Martha, hostess/director of this growing ministry. God is reaching the world as they come to our door. Pray for these international students and their families/nations as they see Christ often for the first time for themselves through true living rather than tarnished reputations or national/religious propaganda.

The Navigators meet on Wednesday nights reaching out to Greek Row with their Greekside study and Thursdays the Courtyard is filled with college-age to retired-age persons who seek the City-wide Bible Study. From Saturdays of outreach functions to Sundays when the doors open for church use by Servant's Fellowship, the Courtyard is God's house doing God's business.

Relevance has been blessed this year to have Jessica Erhardt come to our staff as our Women's Director. Jessica is attending the Cornerstone School of Ministry along with two other full time Courtyard residents. God is using each of our directors to mentor residents through the traps that are in their world; avoiding them if possible. Chris and Jessica team together listening to God's voice for the Courtyard life that permeates the house. The Spirit of God is so amazing at the Courtyard that outsiders feel it, experience it and most enjoy the embrace of God's reaching hand.

Thank you for praying for the Courtyard and the on-going turf that is being fought over. In this "game" we are watching the fundamentals that we use, the plays we make and we are trusting God for the scoreboard. We celebrate together the successes with you; we learn from our fumbles and broken plays, but very most of all we are here to play for the team that we all know wins in the end. Come and see Courtyard life and be a member of the team for Christ. He is faster than the wind, stronger than the mountain, enduring beyond time, and He knows victory.