

Getting Old... Er, Growing Up

Wednesday November 9 is the 2011 Country Music Awards – an event once so important to me that I would put my schedule on hold so I could enjoy watching this annual awards show on tv. For a few years now, I have committed my Wednesday nights to leading a small group for church's student ministries. The past 2 years, one of my kids happened to be sick on the same Wednesday nights as the awards show, so I volunteered to be the parent to stay home with the sick kid and I didn't have to miss the show nor play hooky from youth group – I had a legitimate reason for calling in sick. This year, there is again a virus circulating through our family, and I think I have a mild case... but things have changed. Even if one of my kids was ill tonight, I would be the one to go to youth group and let Hubby stay home with the sick kid(s). Luckily, I think we'll both be able to make it to youth group tonight, and I am so excited! The new series we started last week is about demons, and it gave me a great connecting point with my girls – we had a great group time last week! Now that I'm back from maternity leave and free from the distractions of pregnancy, I am stoked to build relationships with my youth group girls and help them build their spiritual relationships with Jesus Christ. I am so excited about youth group tonight that the country awards show hardly matters to me – I might try to set up a recording device so I can watch it later, but watching it live doesn't matter to me at all when once it was dire for my entertainment.

Maybe I'm getting old... no, I think I'm growing up! It's so cool to me that God is teaching me about prioritizing and also about using my free time and leading me toward hobbies that glorify Him. How amazing is it that I can be entertained, relaxed, refreshed, and feel fulfilled, not by doing something that only **I** enjoy but by doing something that affects others in a positive way as well?

Class of 2015

We are winding down our first year of teaching youth group, and it's been an interesting experience, to say the least. Last week, my "small group" consisted of 17 girls, and it was totally crazy. We couldn't get much accomplished, but luckily they weeded themselves out – those who didn't want to participate (their choice) went to play in the gym, leaving quiet for those who did want to participate. It's not like that every week though; last week for some reason the other two 7th-grade-girls teachers were missing, so I had to have ALL the 7th grade girls PLUS my 5th graders. Yeah, you read that right – I have 7th graders AND fifth graders, and it's been a challenge to bridge the gap between the two ages groups. It happened innocently enough – a new 7th grader brought her 5th grade sister. At our church, our student ministries typically don't usually start until 6th grade, but we didn't want to turn her away either. She liked youth group and started bringing friends, all of which are great things, but next thing I knew, I was getting a call from the office manager who handles attendance and things like that, wondering why I had all these 5th graders in my group. I explained to her what had happened, and she acted like she felt sorry for me rather than being upset – I was a bit anxious to know why I was getting called by my "boss". But no problem – the more the merrier! I just wonder what will happen next year – I cannot move up to 8th grade and 6th grade at the same time! I would think the now-5th graders would get a new group with other 6th graders, and I would stay with the 2015 group as the 7th graders are called for their graduation year. We'll see.

But anyway, it's been a fun year, and I've learned A LOT. Tonight is the final youth group of the year, and we're having

a pizza party, plus another party in regular small group time. That will be interesting – I have a feeling that my girls will forget the snacks they pledged to bring as they've done in the past, so they'll probably just run around crazy doing gymnastics, cheerleading moves and whatnot as usual. Except tonight I don't have to interrupt them since we are supposed to be having a end of the year party! And, I'm bravely bringing my two youngest kids – my youth group girls have always wanted to meet my little ones, so I figured tonight is a good opportunity. I just hope I'm not going to overwhelm myself, but there's only one way to find out...

But anyway, a fun year that makes me look forward to the next one, despite the time commitment involved. Here is a typical schedule, in case you're wondering – especially since a friend suggested oh-so-nicely: "You should make more posts about your youth group." ☐

6:30 – students have arrived and assemble in the Linc – a sort of clubhouse-type room. We watch a short video or two that's related to the message, usually 2-3 minute clips from movies. We'll play 2 audience participation games, and these are always really fun to watch. One had 2 teams of 2 kids each wearing pantyhose on their heads. They put bananas in the feet of the pantyhose, and their goal was to swing their pantyhose around until their pantyhose was wrapped around their partners – hilarious to watch. Another game involved speed-eating of baby food and another one had pies-in-the-face. Of course my girls were chosen for that one, and after they were late to small group after having to wash the pie off their face and out of their hair, that one wound them up all night!

Around 7pm, the worship band (not the same one we have on Sunday mornings) begins their set, and the leaders leave for a leaders' group prayer in another room. After this, the kids and leaders move to the Wherehouse, a room with a small stage where they'll sometimes watch another very short video and

hear the youth pastor's talk for the week for about 40 minutes. We get to small group around 7:40 and have until 8:18 if we need it to talk amongst our small group. We leaders get a paper with discussion questions on it, but we are allowed much freedom with this – we adjust the questions as they apply to the conversation we have.

I love all my girls, but of course some are better behaved than others. And some are much more interested in developing spiritually and bettering their relationship with God than others. The 7th graders are much more mature about this than the 5th graders – they just don't get it yet. Probably why our student ministries start at 6th grade, but they're worth a try! I wish that all my girls are on the same page, but they're not. There is one girl in particular who causes a lot of drama amongst the other girls (they're all friends in the same social group), so if there is drama going on that day or that week, it's difficult to get anything done. I now understand the process a little better from when I was a new leader – the other leaders "cherry-picked" their students and left me with the clique. Not that they're bad girls at all or anything like that, but I can see where it would be so much more fun if I had a group of girls who were all there for the sole purpose of improving their relationships with Christ.

Well, that's it in a nutshell. I'm really hoping to have more leaders next year so that our groups aren't so large, but it's been difficult to find leaders that have the 3+ hours per week this volunteer job requires. It's a shame, but then again, for a job like this, you only want people who really want to be there – the kids can sniff out reluctant and moody adults like bloodhounds!