

KU Seminar and Outreach Reflection

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My seminar and outreach experience with Justice for All had many unique variables. Since I've been working in the office for the last three months doing data entry, I had read what other people were saying about their experience in learning to dialogue. I knew what people liked; what people didn't like; where people thought the seminar was strong; where people thought the seminar was weak; I knew that sometimes it was really hard; and I knew sometimes people used millions of exclamation points because they were so excited (!!!!!!!!!). Overall, I saw that so many people thought that Justice for All was greatly equipping them to dialogue about abortion and they felt like they had really learned and done something valuable. Going into the seminar and outreach, I had high expectations because I had read comment after comment on how much people appreciated this work.

Another unique variable was the fact that not only had I been getting to know the JFA staff and volunteers because I had been working with them, but I also traveled with the team. Because of this I saw many thought provoking things. I saw people who truly loved Jesus and each other, so much so that I felt like I was with a family that welcomed me in right away. I saw a Biblical community that was built upon that love of Jesus, the Gospel, people, and a passion to save the unborn. I saw people who took seriously what we say we believe when it came to making disciples, defending the defenseless, and evangelizing. These realities caused me to start wondering, "These people seem to really be serious about their faith, and about loving others. What kind of ministry is behind this?" This thought also caused me to have those same high expectations.

Another benefit I had in traveling with the team was the number of opportunities I had to learn and grow from those around me. Whether my questions had to do about God, personal stories, or "what do you say when..." questions, I was answered honestly. I was also constantly pointed back to the Gospel. I cannot begin to express how greatly I was blessed by the JFA team. I felt like they were all very willing to mentor me and help me grow.

The seminar totally met my expectations. I learned so, so much going through it. I definitely agree with all of those response cards when they say how helpful the practice dialogue was. I felt like it really helped me wrap my mind around what a dialogue should look like. My seminar mentors, Clinton and Tammy, did a wonderful job of leading and teaching. I also got to go through the seminar twice, which I think greatly aided in helping me feeling equipped for outreach.

On the day of outreach I expected to feel nervous, but I honestly wasn't. I think since all of my life I have been faced with controversy it gave me the perspective that "things will be okay...just keep a level head and carry on". I also knew that my dialogue wasn't going to be perfect. I knew that things take practice and that I was going to make mistakes. I also knew that God was bigger than my mistakes. I firmly believed that there was no way that I could ever make a mistake big enough to thwart His plans. I definitely felt a sense of peace.

I had planned to spend a good amount of time observing the mentors having conversations. Upon coming back from the briefing, I started listening to a conversation Steve Wagner was having with a man who was pro-life, but seemed slightly apathetic and unsure he wanted to get involved. It was at this point that Steve pulled me into the conversation, informing me that I was going to be pro-life, he was going to be pro-choice, and we were going to do a model dialogue for this student. I'm pretty sure Steve went easy on me, but it definitely gave me an idea of what I was about to encounter. And, yes, it's pretty intimidating dialoguing with the Director of Training when he's taking the pro-choice view point ☺. After that conversation was over, I went in search of another conversation to observe. However,

God had different ideas because as soon as I left Steve, a young woman bee-lined to me overflowing with questions. Thus my day of outreach began.

The day had some really great conversations. I didn't necessarily see a lot of change, but I knew that people had started the process of re-evaluating what they believe and why. That soon became my goal: help people to see what they believe, why they believe it, and get them to wonder, "What if I'm wrong?" There was one Biology major where the conversation turned from abortion to death to the Bible. I had the opportunity to share the Gospel with this young man. He seemed so thankful and told me that I had given him a lot to think about. It was one of the most exciting and cool conversations I had ever had! On the flip side of that, I met a young woman who came at me with claws and shoved me into the typical "pro-life" box. There was also a young man who pressured me to tell him whether or not I was a Christian. Once I confirmed his question, he was pre-disposed to disagree with whatever I said. The conversations were difficult, but in the end we parted on good terms and I pray I left a "pebble in their shoe".

I started the second day of outreach very aware that I needed God and His strength. I was feeling a little drained, but I knew that God was able to work in me through that. The conversations that day were very difficult. There were so many times that I would work through the biology and value of human life with someone, and I knew that they could see it. I knew the truth was written on their hearts. But time and time again, they would revert back to their original argument. It was so hard for me to see these people hurt so desperately and want the truth so deeply, yet they were willingly letting themselves remain blind. Not to mention the atmosphere that day was pretty crazy around campus. I talked to one young lady who was a self proclaimed humanistic pro-choice, pro-gay, liberal, socialist, moral relativist, atheist, evolutionist whose parents never parented and her father committed suicide. Her whole life philosophy was "it's your choice" and "what-ev". I was like, **"God, what am I supposed to do with this?" All I knew to do was ask her questions and listen. I tried to gently point her to truth and to love her. Once again, my prayer became a "pebble in their shoe".**

By the end of my last conversation, I was pretty worn out emotionally, spiritually, and physically. The tears came. I so much wanted these people to see the truth and love that comes from Jesus. I wanted them to see the value of the unborn baby and the life they were taking away. I wanted them to find healing when they were so obviously in pain. My heart felt like it was breaking for those people. It was at this point that Brenda, another JFA mentor, reached out to me. She grabbed me by the hand and held me while I cried. I knew she understood my hurt. I don't think I'll ever be able to forget what she told me. She asked me if remembered how at the end of her presentation she had said that there were people standing outside the abortion clinic praying for her after her second abortion. She then asked me if I thought their prayers had been answered looking at her now. She said that though they didn't save her baby, through their prayers they had saved many others. She also told me that every conversation that I had that day took people one step closer to truth. Brenda loved me and felt my hurt, but pointed me back to the truth. Yes, the day was hard, but, no, the day was not a failure. God is bigger than me and He works in ways that I may not always see.

Prior to my seminar and outreach experience, I felt my heart leaning more and more towards this pro-life ministry. However, I didn't want to rush into anything. I did want to be wise. I wanted to see what the seminar was like and what outreach was like before I allowed myself to get really excited. I can honestly say that with each next step I took I felt more and more passionate that this is what I feel like God has made me for. I'm so excited that I'm equipped to engage in dialogue and love people while pointing them to the truth. I can't go back to the way life was before I went on this missions trip. **I know it sounds cliché, but I'm serious when I say that this last weekend changed my life. I feel God growing and stretching me in big ways and I feel like I'm falling more and more in love with Him because of this experience. I'm crazy excited for the future...crazy excited.**

To God alone be the glory!