

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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April 13, 2016

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL: jeff.eakins@sdhc.k12.fl.us

Jeff Eakins, Superintendent
Hillsborough County Public Schools
901 E Kennedy Blvd
P.O. Box 3408
Tampa, FL 33601

Re: Unconstitutional Team Prayers

Dear Mr. Eakins:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding constitutional violations in Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS). FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 23,500 members across the country, including nearly 1,200 members in Florida and a state chapter, the Central Florida Freethought Community. We protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

We understand that HCPS allows a Fellowship of Christian Athletes representative, David Gaskill, to interact and proselytize the students in HCPS' school without restriction. We understand that Gaskill has been involved with HCPS' sports programs for multiple years and appears to be the schools' sports chaplain—he is allowed to visit and pray with or evangelize HCPS sports teams whenever he pleases. Gaskill documents these prayers, his proselytizing, and other problematic interactions with HCPS' students as the enclosed photos show.

Unconstitutional Access

It is clear that Gaskill has unlimited access to preach, pray, and proselytize to student-athletes whenever he desires. He is involved with every sport at multiple schools within HCPS. He shows up, sometimes invited by coaches but often on his own, at team events, including practices and games, and he is allowed to be in the dugout or on the field with the players at these events. He has the same level of access as a coach even though he has no affiliation with the school.

Public school sports teams cannot employ, even on a voluntary basis, a spiritual leader or chaplain for their teams because public schools may not advance or promote religion. Furthermore, it is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead or allow someone to lead their teams in prayer. HCPS cannot allow an outside adult like Mr. Gaskill access to the children in its charge so that he can promote his personal religious beliefs to those students. The Supreme Court has long held that “the ‘preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2000) (quoting *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. at 589). The District violates parental trust when it permits outside adults to proselytize its students.

HCPS cannot allow a preacher access to other people's children so that he can force his religion upon that captive audience. Gaskill is behaving like a religious predator seeking out vulnerable prey.

Coaches Unconstitutional Conduct

It is also clear that HCPS coaches and staff are complicit in allowing Gaskill access to the players. He could not attend practices and games if coaches were not allowing him to be there. The enclosed photos also show that several coaches have been personally praying with their teams or inviting Gaskill to pray with the team on their behalf.

The conduct of the coaches involved is unconstitutional because they are endorsing and promoting their religion when acting in their official capacity as school district employees. Certainly, they represent the school and their teams when they act in their official roles as head coaches of their respective teams. Therefore, they cannot lead their teams in prayer and they cannot allow Mr. Gaskill to lead their team prayer either. When a public school employee acting in an official capacity organizes and advocates for team prayer, he effectively endorses religion on the district's behalf.

Public school coaches must refrain not only from leading prayers themselves, but also from participating in students' prayers. It is unconstitutional for public school employees to participate in the religious activities of their students. *See, e.g., Bd. of Educ. of the Westside Cmty. Sch. v. Mergens*, 496 U.S. 226, 253 (1990) (holding that public school faculty may only be at student-led religious meetings in a "nonparticipatory capacity."). Federal courts have held that even a public school coach's silent participation in student prayer circles is unconstitutional. *See, e.g., Borden v. Sch. Dist. of the Twp. of East Brunswick*, 523 F.3d 153 (3d Cir. 2008), *cert. denied*, 129 S.Ct. 1524 (2009) (declaring the coach's organization, participation and leading of prayers before football games unconstitutional); *Doe v. Duncanville Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 70 F.3d 402 (5th Cir. 1995) (holding a basketball coach's participation in student prayer circles an unconstitutional endorsement of religion).

In *Borden*, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals held the high school football coach's extensive history of organizing, leading and participating in prayers before games was unconstitutional because it violated the Establishment Clause. *Borden*, 523 F.3d at 174. In that case, the court stated that the coach's involvement in the prayer by "taking a knee" and "bowing his head" during the prayers, even when student-led, "would lead a reasonable observer to conclude he was endorsing religion." *Id.* at 176. The court continued, " 'if while acting in their official capacities, [school district] employees join hands in a prayer circle or otherwise manifest approval and solidarity with the student religious exercises, they cross the line between respect for religion and the endorsement of religion.' " *Id.* at 178 (quoting *Duncanville*, 70 F.3d at 406).

The court in *Borden* also rejected the coach's argument that the school district's policy of prohibiting its employees from engaging in prayer with students violated the employees' right to free speech. *Id.* at 174. In fact, the court found that the school district had a right to adopt guidelines restricting this activity because of its concern about potential Establishment Clause violations. *Id.*

None of these events seem to be taking place at an FCA meeting. As an FCA representative, Gaskill could be invited by students to occasionally participate in genuine, student-led FCA meetings or events, but Gaskill has gone beyond what would be allowed.

In addition to the constitutional issues, there are issues of safety, propriety, and privacy. He manipulates the children, using peer pressure to deliberately force children to “commit their lives to Christ” (photo 27) or talk to them about “God’s rules on sex” (photo 54). There are serious privacy issues when schools allow outside adults to pose for “selfies” and pictures with students, including with their arms draped around shirtless students (photo 31, 55, 56). These issues are exacerbated because Gaskill posts these photos online. The schools also allow Gaskill to meet with students in “intimate locker room” settings with no other adults present. (Photo 33, 21).

Gaskill brags about this and his *carte blanche* access:

- He was “shocked” as he “walked around campus during a school day” to see “teenage girls so seductively dressed” and was “watching kids ‘making out’” (photo 47).
- He roams school parking lots in his car for students (photo 53), which calls this “parking lot evangelism” (photo 48).
- At least one coach gave Gaskill personal information about a student (a death in the family) that Gaskill shared online (photo 46).

Gaskill also follows students’ lives on social media, commenting on their lives on his own: “one of my players was living with his girlfriend in his girlfriend’s mother’s house...” (Photo 47).

Finally, given Gaskill’s own admissions about his criminal history, we wonder how this unlimited, unsupervised access to other people’s children can possibly comport with HCPS procedure and law?¹

Given the long litany of violations and serious concerns, Gaskill should be banned from HCPS property and events permanently. HCPS must also investigate and halt coach and other staff from participating in, organizing, promoting, or sponsoring religious activity for the students. (See appended list of involved coaches)

Full List of Violations (See enclosed photos)

2015

- January 9—Gaskill shared a “Gospel message” and a pregame prayer with the Middleton girls’ soccer team (Photo 2).
- January 16—Gaskill gave a devotional and a pregame prayer to the Tampa Bay Tech basketball team (Photo 3).

¹ Gaskill gives a sermon on his prior criminal history here: <https://vimeo.com/133192998>. No doubt HCPS can pull his records from FLDE too. Possible conflicts with District policy 1121.01 and Fl. Stat. 1012.32 prohibiting any person convicted of a crime of moral turpitude from “serv[ing] in any position that requires direct contact with students.”

- February 2—Gaskill gave a devotional to the Tampa Bay Tech baseball team, which he claims prompted the entire team to “make the decision to accept Christ as their savior” (Photo 4). Gaskill also got the Tampa Bay Tech basketball team “prayed up” for an upcoming game (Photo 5).
- February 12—Gaskill also shared Gatorade and a devotional with the baseball team (Photo 6).
- February 27—Gaskill gave a devotional and shared a prayer with the Middleton High School track team (Photo 7).
- March 8—Gaskill met with and proselytized to the Lennard High School cheerleaders (Photo 8) and the Freedom High School football team (Photo 9). He also posted a video of him leading the King High School baseball team in the Lord’s Prayer before a game (Photo 10).
- March 21—Gaskill posted a story about how he was just laying on the couch when “He [God] kept tugging at my heart to get up and go visit a local school (King High). He claims his “heart was being convicted so badly” that he got right up and headed over there. When he arrived the softball coach called to him, “Man...God knew just what we needed! Your timing is perfect.” The coach told him that the team needed a good “pick me up” talk and prayer. He shook hands with and hugged the coach before heading over to the players. One of the girls yelled out as he approached, “It’s the pray-er man!” He then prayed with the team (Photo 11).
- April 20—the Middleton High School football team “received David Gaskill’s testimony, some Gatorades and then Jesus Christ as [their] personal lord and Savior (Photo 12).” Gaskill also delivered gospel messages to the team and referred to the team as “my boys (Photo 13).”
- May 23—Gaskill was hanging around a high school football practice when the coach indicated he was discouraged by the team’s lack of effort. Gaskill then proselytized and prayed with the team (Photo 14).
- May 28—Gaskill posted a video of him leading the Middleton High football team in prayer (Photo 32).
- June 15—Gaskill posted a video showing him praying with the Middleton High School football team and Tampa Bay Tech (Photo 15).
- June 29—Gaskill proselytized to 100 football players and a dozen coaches (Photo 28).
- August 23—Gaskill met with King High School, Wharton High School, and Tampa Bay Tech High’s football teams and proselytized and prayed with them (Photo 16).
- August 28—and September 11th, Gaskill got Tampa Bay Tech “prayed up” before a game (Photo 17 and 18).
- October 2—Gaskill gave a pregame prayer to the Wharton High School football team. The next day he posted (Photo 20):

I’d have to say that the most enjoyable part about preaching the Gospel to teenagers is when I come across a kid who is bold and proud and immediately rejects me and what I represent, ‘I don’t believe there is a God.’ Then **after a few months of loving them and serving them and feeding them the truth**, they are the first ones to come over to me and say hi, shake my hand, give me a hug and say, ‘Thanks for coming out to see us.’ It happened at a game last night and just gave me such joy. It’s all about changing hearts by the love of Christ.

- October 16—Gaskill recorded the Wharton High School football team reciting the Lord's Prayer prior to their game (Photo 22).
- October 18—Gaskill held a chapel service with Tampa Bay Tech (Photo 23).
- October 20—Gaskill describes how the entire Middleton High School football team "accepted Christ" at the beginning of the season (Photo 26).
- October 23—Gaskill posted a video of 64 King High School football players and coaches "devoting their lives to Jesus (Photo24)."
- October 28—Freedom High School football coach Todd Donohoe "blessed" Gaskill with a moment to share "a word" with the team. Gaskill talked to the players about "What does it really take to go to heaven (Photos 25 and 35)?" Afterwards, Gaskill says:

Then the words came out before I could stop them haha! 'Does anyone want to make that commitment right now?' One courageous player jumped right up, immediately followed by approximately 40 more. Praise God! When [sic] then got on our knees together and prayed 'the Miracle Prayer' and the angels in heaven rejoiced. But it gets better! Listen to the coach who filmed it praying right along with us hahaha!

- December 3—Gaskill describes how he planned to give a devotional and prayed with the Middleton softball team, lead a pregame prayer with the Middleton girls' soccer team, and then lead a devotional and prayer with the Middleton boys' basketball team (Photo 27). He gave a devotional to the softball team but the soccer team was actually having an away game. He describes how sitting on the bleachers waiting for the basketball team was painful for him he wanted to stay because he had not met with the team yet and the coach had invited him to meet them. He describes how both the basketball teams sat in front of him with "the coaches watching and listening intently as [he] began to give a 10 minute testimony to show them [he] was no ordinary preacher." Gaskill then made the players what he refers to as "the offer":

Does anyone want to make the commitment to God that I made that changed my life? We can do it right now but you gotta mean it in your heart. One kid put his hand up. I asked him to standup [sic] and come forward and I'd pray with him. Then it happened...just as I've witnessed so many times before. As this brave young man stood up, another stood up, then another, and another, until every kid came forward to commit their lives to Christ.

- December 7—Tampa Bay Tech wrestling coach Edward Bayonet introduced Gaskill to some of his "hot and sweaty grapplers." (Photo 29) Gaskill gave the boys Gatorade noting that "kids love Gatorade haha." Gaskill then proselytized to the boys and then they were "instant friends." He bragged, "These kids are running to the Gospel faster than I can bring it! They just want some hope." "Every one of these kids made a commitment to Jesus Christ tonight."
- December 11—Gaskill met with the Wharton High cheerleaders and got them "prayed up" for their big meet.

2016

- January 4—Gaskill went to Freedom High (Photo 31). He sat in on the football team and the boys' basketball team's practices. He spent time with coaches Todd Donohue and Cedric Smith before having a group prayer with both of their teams. Afterwards, he met with the wrestling team and prayed before speaking with some girls' soccer players.
- January 6—Gaskill posted a video of the Tampa Bay Tech Titans praying before their game. He indicates that "there are no coaches around, just the players praying together as a team and I was blessed to witness it tonight."
- January 11—Gaskill got to introduce himself to the Freedom High girls' basketball team and spend some time with head coach Laura Pacholke (Photo 37). He "surprised them with some Gatorades after practice and shared the gospel..." The next day, Gaskill describes how he was present at a JV basketball tournament the weekend before where no player's parents or family members attended. He shares:

Oh well, the parents loss is our gain at the FCA cause we get to enjoy parking lot pizza and Gatorade party's with them, share a few laughs and hugs, pray together and remind them that they will always be loved by Jesus, the FCA, and each other.

- February 2—Gaskill shared a photo of a wrestling team prayer (Photo 40) describing, "Now that's a beautiful picture! A Wharton wrestling team prayer led by FCA sponsor and coach David Mitchell."
- February 12—the Tampa Bay Tech Lady Titans softball coach asked Gaskill if he could say a little something to encourage the kids. He then proselytized and prayed with them. Gaskill also "spoke with the Tampa Bay Tech baseball team about putting God first and having a team prayer leader prior to the game tonight (Photo 43)."
- February 13—Gaskill posted, "Teams that pray together...play together. Almost without exception...the kids love praying together! (Pregame prayer selfie with the Middleton Lady Tigers softball team this morning (Photo 43))."
- March 11—Gaskill posted a video of Middleton High School baseball coach Jim Macaluso leading his team in the Lord's Prayer in their dugout locker room prior to their game.
- March 13—Gaskill posted, "After 3 players in my schools had babies last month I felt a need to have a heart-to-heart talk with the football players at King High school about God's rules on sex." Gaskill has such access to the football players that he knew that he could take it upon himself to proselytize to them about his personal religious beliefs (Photo 54).

The Gatorade Ministry

Gaskill often brings Gatorades to sports practices and offers them to the thirsty students in return for listening to his preaching. Gaskill has acknowledged that "kids love Gatorade" (Photos 29 and 48). It appears that Gaskill is using Gatorade to get students to allow him to evangelize to them. On February 27, 2016, an FCA Tampa Bay post (Photo 48) reads, "Parking lot evangelism with some random Middleton high school kids. Kids love Gatorade and the truth." This post seems to indicate that Gaskill is stopping random students in school parking lots and

evangelizing to them in exchange for giving them something to drink. It is alarming that HCPS allows someone not officially affiliated with the school to roam the parking lot looking for students to evangelize.

In another instance of “parking lot evangelism,” on January 7th, 2016, Gaskill described how he “left the house with a cooler of Gatorade hoping to bless a team.” He headed to King High School with no invitation but on the way he prayed, “Please give me the opportunity to share the ‘good news’ with someone.” He visited the softball field and met with the coaches and a couple players but they were holding tryouts. He then went on to the gym looking for some basketball players when a group of girls’ soccer players walked past his car. He offered them Gatorade and prayed with them. He admits that as he walked away someone said, “that was really nice” and he wasn’t sure whether she was referring to the prayer or the Gatorades (Photo 53).

We ask that HCPS commence an immediate investigation into the complaints alleged, and immediately bar Mr. Gaskill from HCPS property without a proper reason to be there. Mr. Gaskill’s relationship with HCPS schools and employees needs to be completely severed and the coaches that allowed him to proselytize and pray to their teams ought to be reprimanded for violating such clear constitutional strictures and informed of their constitutional obligations. Given past violations and access he should be banned from HCPS property. Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to remedy this serious and flagrant violation of the First Amendment.

Sincerely,



Andrew L. Seidel
Staff Attorney

ALS:cal

Enclosures

- (1) List of coaches and schools giving Gaskill access and/or praying with teams
- (2) Photos 1 through 56.

Photo 1



dream_chaser_09, lms_business, cxsxy, _mamagayle_, angelakyoung, julianicole523, ugh_jus_stop, stevethepops and awkward_central like this

fcatampabay David Gaskill does the pregame prayer with Tampa Bay Tech before their game with Wharton tonight. #fca #titans #tigers #Helives

♡ Add a comment...



Photo 2



Sharing the Gospel message, "He is with us always" (Mt28:20) and a pregame prayer with the Middleton girls soccer team tonight. They are truly a wonderful group of young ladies to be around. #fca



👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5

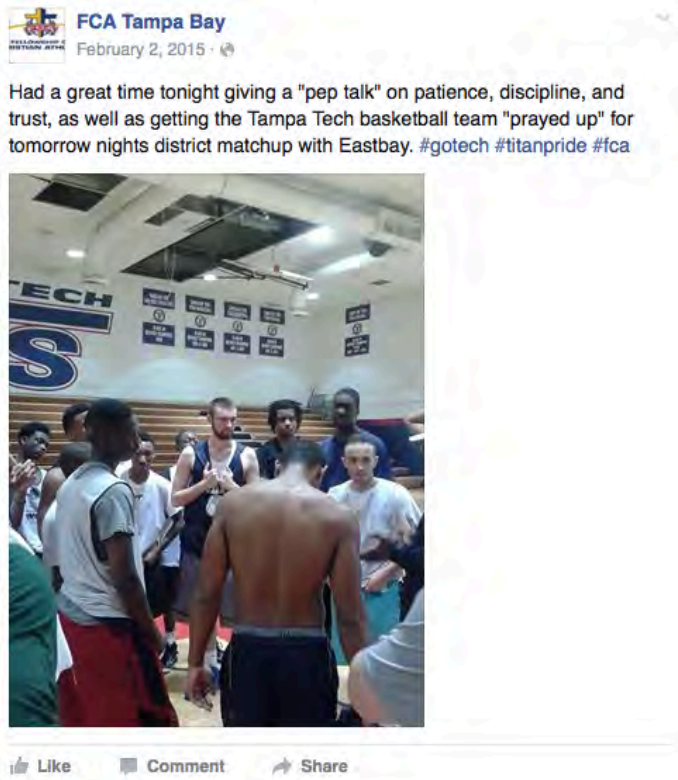


Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11



FCA Tampa Bay added 4 new photos.

March 21, 2015 · 🌐

It is absolutely amazing how God works. He is completely in control even though we have no idea what He's doing most of the time 😊. I was laying on the couch this morning getting ready to fall into a nice long Saturday morning nap when He kept tugging at my heart to get up and go visit a local school (King high) who I was led to believe was having softball and baseball games this morning. The school was close by and it was an opportunity to speak to both teams prior to their games. My heart was being convicted so badly (thats God) that I got right up and headed over there. When I got to the baseball field I was surprised to find no one there, but when I walked over to the nearby softball field the coach yelled over to me "Man...God knew just what we needed! Your timing is perfect 😊 (thats God)." He explained that his team had suffered a tough loss last night and could really use a good "pick me up" talk and prayer. We shook hands and hugged then he directed me to the dugout where the players were all sitting. Come to find out their game was an "away" game and the bus just happened to be late (thats God). As I approached the dugout one of the girls yelled out, "It's the pray-er man!" "Pray-er man" she said...not "prayer man" haha! We had a nice talk about "putting all our faith in Jesus because He is the only one that we can count on to always be there for us", then we all got together and had a team prayer. Just as I was leaving the field three young girls walked over to me and humbly said, "We want to give our lives to Jesus." Praise the Lord! I asked them if they really meant it, and they said yes, so I told them to repeat the words of the "Miracle prayer" with me and to mean every word of it in their hearts and they would be changed forever. So they did...and so they are 😊. Just then the bus pulled up. If God had not yanked at me so hard to get off that couch I'd probably still be sleeping hahaha... and if that bus driver had been on time I would have just missed the team and an opportunity... but that's God, and that's how He works... absolutely amazing and always in control 😊. #Hispertictiming #for #Helives #theangelsarerejoicing



Photo 12



FCA Tampa Bay

April 20, 2015 · 🌐

The "Middleton High School Tigers football team" received David Gaskills testimony, some Gatorades and then Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior tonight. #fca #Helives



72 Views

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Photo 13



FCA Tampa Bay

May 8, 2015 · 🌐

The best part of my week is always spending time with my boys (Middleton high's football). Tonight's gospel message was, "Find a time and a place each day to be alone with God." Mt6:6 #Helives #fca #quiettime



👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Photo 14



FCA Tampa Bay added 3 new photos.

May 23, 2015 · 📷

I was standing on a High School football field the other night at the end of a practice when an exhausted and somewhat discouraged coach looked over at me and said, "Do you see that?" Knowing that he was referring to a lack of effort by a group of players, I responded, "Yea, I need to have a talk with them."

You see, I got involved with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes to not only tell kids about the Gospel of Christ, but to also help them reach their potential as athletes, students, and people, via the Gospel. Although it's the coaches job to coach them, I won't hesitate for a second to put on my coaches hat as needed haha, for the purpose of encouraging and inspiring all who are involved (Eph6:4).

As a former player and coach (as are all FCA staff members), now turned preacher, I'm always very thankful for the opportunities to speak afforded me by the coaches, as well as the respect given me by the players. I always do my best to correlate a team's particular needs with a corresponding passage of scripture. This particular situation required several passages in order to get across the message...which was, "Up the intensity!"

This particular team is loaded with potential but missed the state playoffs last year because of one play that resulted in an overtime loss that effectively eliminated them. The message wasn't as much about winning and losing as it was about "being disciplined in every aspect of your lives" and "honor God by ALWAYS doing your best and He'll honor you (1Cor10:31)."

"Championships are won right here, right now, in the months leading up to the season. Once this practice is over you can never get it back again so make the most out of every snap at every practice. I'm not judging you, I have nothing to gain by that. I'm merely challenging you to be your best out of my love for you. If you want to be better than the other kids then work harder than the other kids...it's as simple as that."

We then all got on our knees together and prayed...very enthusiastically I may add 😊. #fca #mykids #gopatrits go #freedomhigh #helives



Photo 15

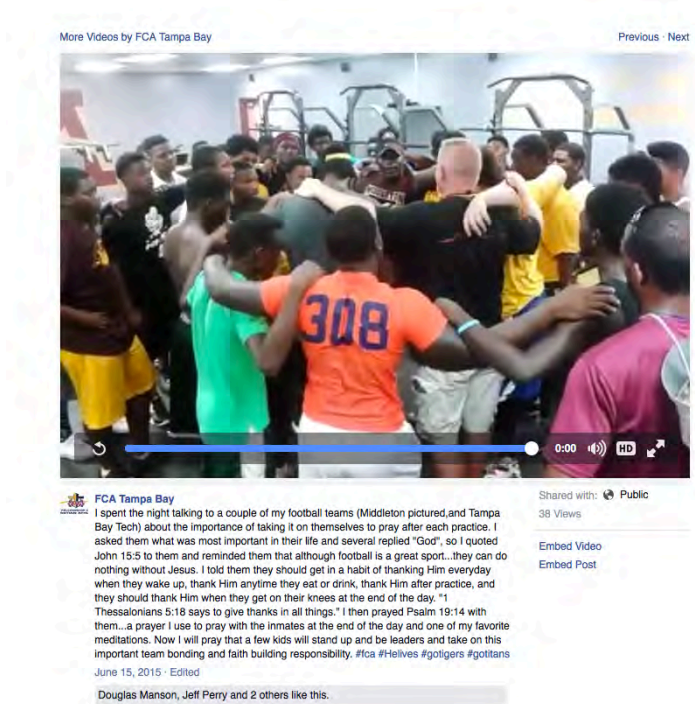


Photo 16



Photo 17

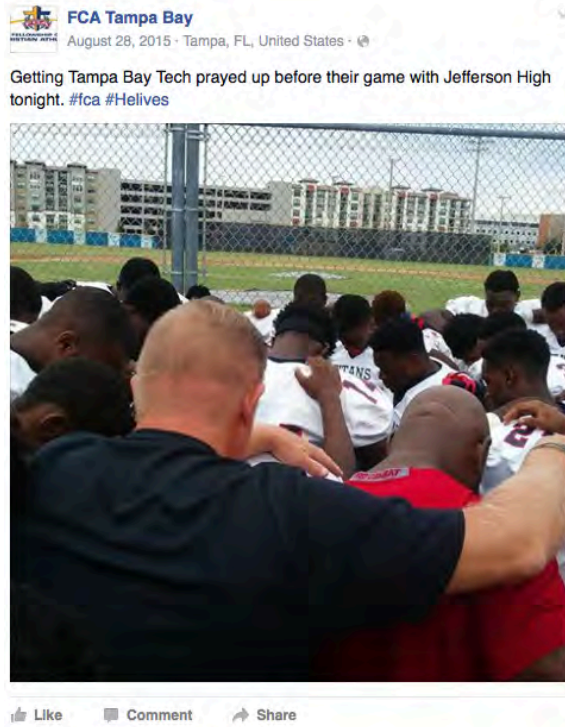


Photo 18

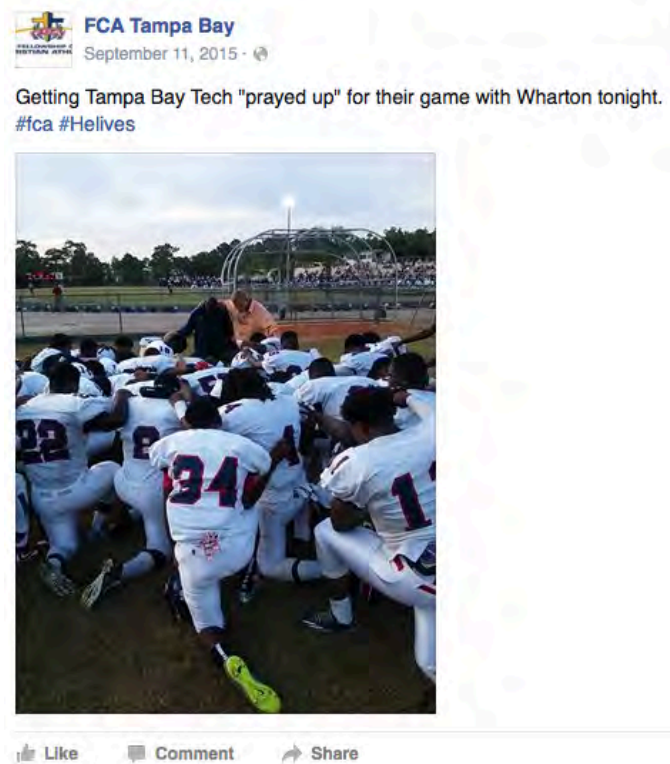


Photo 19

FCA Tampa Bay
October 3, 2015 · 🌐

I was blessed to give the pregame prayer to the Wharton football team last night. (coach Mitchell pictured addressing the team).



👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Photo 20

FCA Tampa Bay
October 3, 2015 · 🌐

I'd have to say that the most enjoyable part about preaching the Gospel to teenagers is when I come across a kid who is bold and proud and immediately rejects me and what I represent, "I don't believe there is a God". Then after a few months of loving them and serving them and feeding them the truth, they are the first ones to come over to me and say hi, shake my hand, give me a hug and say, "Thanks for coming out to see us." It happened at a game last night and just gave me such joy 😊. It's all about changing hearts by the love of Christ. #fca #Heives #butGod #leaveittotheSpirit

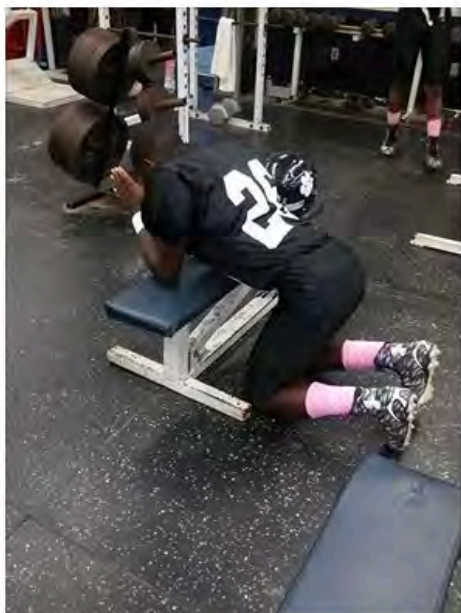


👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Photo 21



I was blessed to find a Wharton high school football player alone in the weight room praying before the game tonight. #fca #Helives

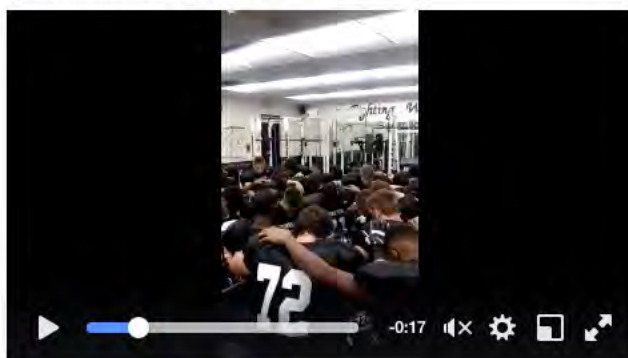


Like Comment Share

Photo 22



The Wharton high school football team pray the Lord's Prayer prior to the game with Sickles tonight. #fca #Helives



55 Views

Like Comment Share

Photo 23



Chapel service with Tampa Bay Tech.

"If you're a follower of Christ it's time to start making some changes in your lives, and it starts with your mouth. If you can control what you say then you can control what you do (Jm3:2). It's time to stop following Satan and the 'sway of the world' and 'remove filthy language from our lips (Col3:8)'. That's a command from God by the way.

"There is no place for the 'N' word! I don't care what color you are and I don't care if it's with the 'A' or with the 'R'! It's offensive! It's stupid and shows a lack of discipline and self-control.

"We need to get rid of the 'F' word all together, and all the abbreviations of it. You know what I'm talking about; 'af' and 'asf' on your tweets. It aint funny or cool, it's childish!

"And stop using the 'B' and 'H' words when you're referring to woman! I don't care what the rappers are saying or doing! You're to be different, be examples! You're the 'head and not the tail (Deu28:13)!'

"You can lift people and encourage people with your words. As people and as athletes we should always be looking to 'speak life and not death' (Pv18:21). It's time to become leaders and stop being followers! It's time to make a difference on your campus and on your teams!

"Your children of the light. Bring 'light' into the world (1Thess5:5); you have the power to do that."

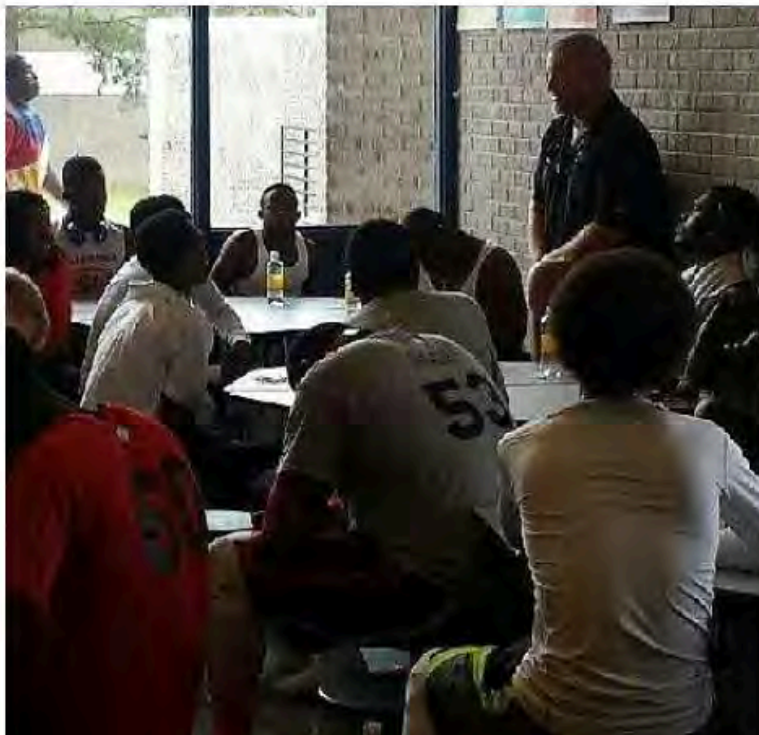


Photo 24



Photo 25

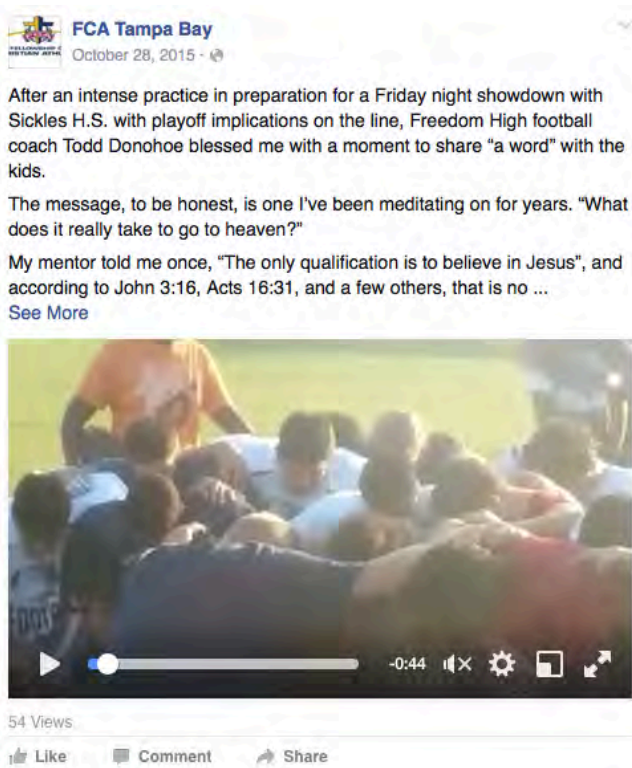


Photo 26



As I drove to Middleton H.S. tonight to speak with the football team, the good Lord reminded me of the struggle that these kids face. Most of them will be heading into the world in the next year or so with the deck already severely stacked against them, and knowing that I may never have the opportunity to speak with them again after their final game tomorrow night, I knew I had to give them "a word" that they wouldn't soon forget.

The entire team had accepted Christ at the beginning of the season, so I first briefly reminded them of the importance of continuing to dedicate their life to Him in order to prosper and have success and enjoy the good life that God has planned for them (Josh 1:8, Jer29:11).

Then I got into a subject that far too many of these kids are familiar with... incarceration. "You do not want to go to jail! Ever! I don't care what some people will tell you, there is nothing cool about having a criminal record! Being in 'the system' can destroy your life forever! I know...I'm in the system! Only Jesus Christ has turned my life around and He is the one that can keep you out of there!

"Do the right thing! Keep the words of this book (Bible) close to your heart. Avoid taking short cuts or the easy way out, and when people try to talk you into doing things that you know aint right, just tell them 'no...I don't do that' and go the other way. They will respect you for it.

"I do not ever want to visit even one of you in prison...that would break my heart. Do the right thing guys...no matter how hard it may be at times, and God will reward you ok?"

After hearing some "yes sirs" and seeing their heads nodding, we got together in prayer, and then as we walked to my car to enjoy some Gatorades one of the players walked alongside me and said, "I pray every night sir and go to church every Sunday". I couldn't do anything but give him a big smile of approval 😊.

There is hope even for those who we wrongly assume to be hopeless. That hope is the "good news."



Photo 27

"A man's heart plans his way but it's Gods counsel that stands (Pv19:21)"
Hahaha! Boy if that aint the truth!

I had my night planned. A 5:30 pm devotional and prayer with the Middleton softball team, a 6:00 pm pregame prayer with the Middleton girls soccer team, and then a 7:00 pm devotional and prayer with the Middleton boys basketball team.

It started out great, right on time. I introduced myself to the softball team, gave the devo, and then we prayed.

Then as I was walking over towards the soccer field I noticed no one was there. It was drizzling so maybe they were waiting inside a few minutes I thought. However, when I got to the field a couple kids I knew informed me that it was an away game. Wow! Apparently an internet schedule snafu.

So now my schedule is amiss so I walk over towards the gym to hangout until my talk with the basketball team a solid hour and 10 mins. away. Luckily I ran into the football coach, the track coach, the AD, and a bunch of girls basketball players that I chatted with for a few but I still had a solid hour to go before the boys b-ball team would be done.

As I sat patiently on the hardwood gym bleachers watching the kids practice my back begins screaming and the devil begins talking. "It's your night off...why sit here in agony for an hour? Call it a day and head to Cracker Barrel for a good Turkey dinner. Talk to the kids another night."

If there's one thing I know for sure it's that the devil is a procrastinator.

The team has already played 3 games and I haven't met them yet plus they have a new coach who was nice enough to invite me out to meet them. Man oh man what do I do?

Well the clincher was not just that I knew I was being tested, and tested hard, and God wouldn't let me leave, but also that the JV team was there as well so I could kill 2 birds with one stone, so to speak.

So I sat there squirming in the bleachers for about a half hour before the new coach came over and chatted with me. He said, "Can you say something to motivate these kids? They're struggling in every way, not just basketball, but with school and life in general."

I told him I believed I could and a couple minutes later he called the team over to meet me, a solid 20 minutes early...praise God! Hahaha!

Both teams sat on the floor in front of me with the coaches watching and listening intently as I began to give a 10 minute testimony to show them I was no ordinary preacher lol, and then was moved to encourage and motivate them.

"Do you know each of you was created to be great? You each have greatness in you! You each have your own gifts and talents. God has created you to be successful and to prosper (their eyes were piercing me).

"You may ask, 'But how do I know what they are?' By doing the right thing! Always do your best! Live knowing that God sees and knows everything you do. He even knows what you're thinking. Make a commitment to live your life in a way that pleases Him. Do that...and He will show you your gifts and how to use them."

I knew I had them at this point, so I made them "the offer". "Does anyone want to make the commitment to God that I made that changed my life? We can do it right now but you gotta mean it in your heart."

One kid put his hand up. I asked him to standup and come forward and I'd pray with him.

Then it happened...just as I've witnessed so many times before. As this brave young man stood up, another stood up, then another, and another, until every kid came forward to commit their lives to Christ.

Yup..."It is Gods counsel that stands."

And I still had plenty of time to get my turkey dinner at Cracker Barrel, but I assure you the turkey was oh so much sweeter lol.



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Photo 28

God put a message on my heart tonight and led me to the perfect team to delivery it to...the Tampa Bay Tech football team.

There were close to 100 football players and a dozen coaches on hand as I began by telling them that I knew there were guys there that didn't believe in Jesus, or God, or anything at all, but that didn't matter to me as much as letting them know that I love them and will always be there if any of them ever need me.

I told them they were on my heart because things in this world are so much more confusing now then when I was their age. Some of the things kids are doing we wouldn't have thought twice about doing, but even so, I became addicted to sex, drugs, and alcohol at 19 and allowed them to run my life for 26 yrs. until I was locked up in the jail (Orient Rd) right down the street from where we were standing, and Christ saved me.

I told them that everybody is talking about gay marriage right now, but the problem isn't gay marriage, or drugs, or alcohol; the problem is sin, it's accepted now.

We accept it, because just like I did when I was "ripping and racing" all those years, God never punished me and I continued to prosper...you know, the good job, the big house, new cars, etc., so I just figured that how I was living must be ok. Maybe He didn't care that much about what I was doing, or maybe He just wasn't watching.

I had mistaken Gods mercy and longsuffering, for tolerance and forbearance. Man was I wrong. God is not to be played with, and I was playing with Him. And out of love He had to step in and do something before I destroyed myself completely.

I told them not to make the same mistake that I made, a mistake that cost me everything that meant anything to me. I told them that I will never give them anything but truth, that I'd never lie to them, and if any of them care about what's right or wrong to God but aren't really sure, to please take me aside and ask. Several heads nodded in agreement as others snickered amongst themselves.

I invited whoever wanted to pray to come and join me, and the entire team gathered together with me with our arms wrapped around each other as we bowed our heads.

Were they really listening? Did they understand the importance of the message? As is always the case...only God knows. #fca #titans #Helives



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Photo 29



FCA Tampa Bay added 3 new photos.

December 7, 2015 · Nowatney, FL, United States ·

I was blessed to have Tampa Bay Tech wrestling coach Edward Bayonet introduce me to some of his hot and sweaty grapplers tonight. After their mile run I handed them some ice cold Gatorades (kids love Gatorade haha) then shared a bit of my testimony, a few good words from the "word", and we were all instant friends. I keep telling people, "These kids are running to the Gospel faster than I can bring it! They just want some hope." Look at the picture on the left...they are all eyes and ears, but more importantly, they are all heart and "all in" for Jesus. By the grace of God, everyone of these kids made a commitment to Jesus Christ tonight. The number 7 stands for "completeness"...and on December 7, 2015 everyone of these boys became "complete." #fca #Helives #toGodbethelglory



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Photo 30



FCA Tampa Bay

December 11, 2015 ·

I had a nice talk with this wonderful group of Wharton High cheerleaders prior to getting them prayed up for their big meet at Steinbrenner last night.



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Photo 31

FCA Tampa Bay added 5 new photos.
January 4 · 🌐


It was a wonderful night at Freedom High. I got to sit in on a football team "skull session" and a boys basketball practice, spend some time with the football (Todd Donohoe) and basketball (Cedric Smith) coaches as well as talk with their teams and have a group prayer. I also met and prayed with the wrestling team, and spoke to some girls soccer players, but the highlight was a 20 minute talk with a freshman named Zack who is recovering from an ACL injury. I spotted the beautiful cross he was sporting and that was all it took to strike up a conversation about our Savior. We prayed together and as I was leaving he said, "Thank you I needed that!" I needed it more than you Zach 😊. God is so good! #fca #Helives



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Photo 32

More Videos by FCA Tampa Bay Previous · Next




FCA Tampa Bay
A young lady who is about 4' tall and the manager for the Middleton High football team climbed up on the table to record our prayer tonight. I did not know we were being spied on haha, but I figured I'd share it with you anyway. #fca #Helives #gotigers #myguys
May 28, 2015 · Edited

Overhead Door Company of Tampa Bay, Dee Bryant, Jessica Lynn and 7 others like this.


Shared with: 🌐 Public
87 Views

Embed Video
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Photo 33


FCA Tampa Bay
 January 8 · 🌐

The intimate locker room fellowship that teammates share are some of the most special moments that they will ever remember from high school, even more so than the games sometimes. Our youth has gotten a bad wrap at times but I'm here to tell you that there's a lot of good things going on behind the scenes. These are my Tampa Bay Tech Titans praying "The Lords Prayer" before their game tonight. It's a tradition that they started on their own and continue before every game. There no coaches around, just the players praying together as a team and I was blessed to witness it tonight.



35 Views
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Photo 34

More Videos by FCA Tampa Bay
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FCA Tampa Bay
 Great night! The Son was shining on us, and even the band was playing for us hahaha, as 64 King H.S. football players and coaches devote their lives to Jesus. Wish I had a better filmographer 😊 #fca #Heilives
 October 23, 2015

Shared with:  Public
 43 Views
 Embed Video
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Photo 35



FCA Tampa Bay

After an intense practice in preparation for a Friday night showdown with Sickles H.S. with playoff implications on the line, Freedom High football coach Todd Donohoe blessed me with a moment to share "a word" with the kids.

The message, to be honest, is one I've been meditating on for years. "What does it really take to go to heaven?"

My mentor told me once, "The only qualification is to believe in Jesus", and according to John 3:16, Acts 16:31, and a few others, that is no doubt true. However, since pretty much everyone believes in Jesus, or believes there was a man named Jesus I should say, and since Jesus Himself said that "few will be entering through the narrow gate into heaven (Lk13:23-24)", the requirement of "believing" required more clarification for me personally.

So I started digging in my Concordance. The word "believe" in that context means to "commit" (as well as entrust), and the word commit means "to dedicate to." Now that made much more sense to me. Salvation in Jesus Christ comes from making a commitment to dedicate our life to Him.

Shared with: Public

54 Views

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I explained this to the players and coaches at the "huddle" tonight, as well as the fact that I myself "hesitated to make that commitment at your age, because quite frankly, I felt it would be too hard. Too many rules to follow, and I just wanted to have fun. I wasn't ready for that, and I was 46 before I realized I was wrong!

"God doesn't want to take away our fun! He wants to make our life more enjoyable. He wants to bless us, but that is only possible by living our life for Him. God can't be around sin or even look at it, which is why it's so important to be dedicated to Him so that we may remain in His presence and receive the blessings and benefits of a personal relationship with Him. And it's not that hard! He's not asking you to be perfect! Just love God and love everybody else, that's it!"

The kids hearts were open and they were absorbing what I was trying to get across to them.

"I want you guys to think about that tonight."

Then the words came out before I could stop them haha! "Does anyone want to make that commitment right now?" One courageous player jumped right up, immediately followed by approximately 40 more. Praise God!

When then got on our knees together and prayed "The Miracle Prayer" and the angels in heaven rejoiced.

But it gets better! Listen to the coach who filmed it praying right along with us hahaha! God is so good...and so is this group of fine young men.

October 28, 2015 · Edited

Steve Hopper and Genesis Zschocher Pastor like this.

Photo 36

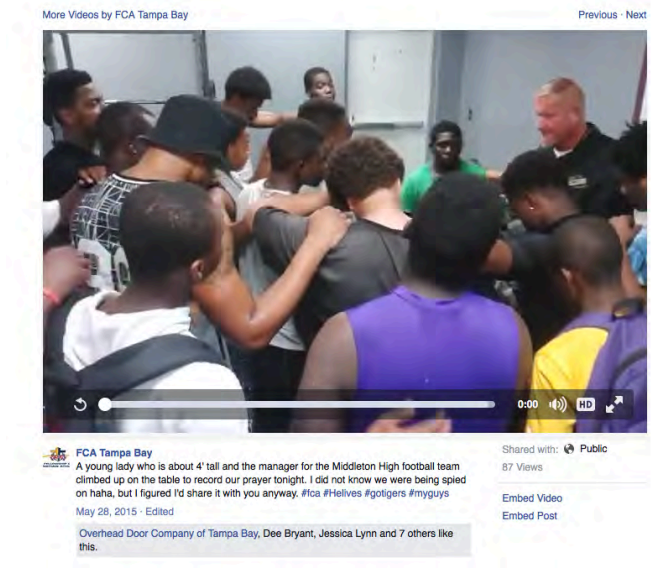


Photo 37



Photo 38



FCA Tampa Bay added 3 new photos.

January 12 · 🌐

How do you "win over" people for Christ who may or may not believe? By loving, supporting, encouraging, and serving them.

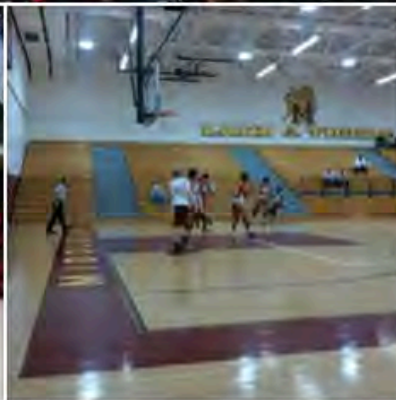
That is first and foremost what the Fellowship of Christian Athletes is all about. We just wanta "love on them"...that's all.

I was present at a Saturday morning JV tournament last weekend in which there were NO parents or family members in attendance for my squad, the Middleton Tigers! None...nada!

It just goes beyond my comprehension how parents can show absolutely no interest in their kids activities and then wonder why they are having problems and end up going astray.

Dont people understand that they can't get these days back once they are gone?

Oh well, the parents loss is our gain at the FCA cause we get to enjoy parking lot pizza and Gatorade party's with them, share a few laughs and hugs, pray together and remind them that they will always be loved by Jesus, the FCA, and each other.



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Photo 39



Photo 40



Photo 41



Photo 42



Photo 43



FCA Tampa Bay added 2 new photos — at Tampa Bay Technical High School.

February 12 · Tampa, FL, United States ·

The boys teams are always more serious than the girls teams and to be honest... I am also probably more serious with the boys teams than the girls. Tonight I spoke with the Tampa Bay Tech baseball team about putting God first and having a team prayer leader prior to the game tonight. #fca #Helives



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Photo 44



FCA Tampa Bay

February 13 · Nowatney, FL, United States ·

Teams that pray together...play together. Almost without exception...the kids love praying together! (Pregame prayer selfie with the Middleton Lady Tigers softball team this morning. Note:the preacher isn't a morning selfie kinda guy :/). These young ladies all love talking about the Lord! #fca #Helives



Photo 45



Photo 46



Photo 47

FCA Tampa Bay

February 25 at 8:14pm · Nowatney, FL, United States ·

Like Page

It was only recently that I was feeling a tad discouraged at some of the things I've witnessed on today's High School campuses.

I was looking back on the 1st day that I actually walked around a campus during a school day a couple years ago, and shocked would be the best description I could use. Teenage girls so seductively dressed and made-up that they could pass for 25-30 year olds headed to a club. Boy after boy "swagging" their pants. As I walked around I saw this to be the norm, so was the music that many were blasting...I mean completely obscene vulgar stuff that would make Tupac sound like Glenn Campbell! But possibly the worst was watching kids "making out" with each other against the school walls between classes with faculty walking by as if they were invisible. It almost felt like I was in another world, certainly a much different world than I grew up in anyway.

Oh, but then came the worst of all, the revelation that one of my players was living with his girlfriend in his girlfriend's mothers house, and sleeping in the same bed! How did I learn this? They were boasting about it on social media!

I know these kids man! And they're good kids! It's almost as if they wanted me to see their posts (they both are followers of mine as are many of the students), possibly so I could stand up and correct them, I don't know.

If I have learned anything these past 2-1/2 yrs. it is that kids want discipline and direction and they want someone to give it to them from the heart...out of love. They can tell if someone truly cares...they can sense it and they will listen to advice as long as they are hearing the "truth".

I've been preaching for years now that the devils chief weapon is discouragement. Well maybe I should have been preaching that to myself, because the moment a sweet young lady approached me tonight with tears in her eyes after flag football practice, my faith in our youth was mysteriously restored. Funny how God works huh?

This wonderful young girl had just heard me talking about "Being different. Being a 'light' on campus. Dressing differently, talking differently, and not giving in to doing what we know is wrong. Being a reflection of God", to the King high flag football team.

She was discouraged because she had been allowing other kids to talk her into doing what she knew was wrong and she had even deceived her own mother, which is what upset her the most. She said that she wants to be different and be a leader, but felt like she "was always being tested and always failing." And that "life was so hard."

Oh we had such a wonderfully encouraging talk for what seemed like an hour as kids kept interrupting us to get Gatorades out of my trunk haha, but she stood there shivering in the cold because she wanted "truth" and wasn't about to leave without it.

Oh she got the truth alright haha! She's probably dizzy from all the scriptures I hit her with lol.

I told her about the devils chief weapon lol, but also told her what a blessing it was that God was convicting her heart and teaching her righteousness and to believe it when He says "that He will complete the good work that He has started in you (Phil 1:6)."

We talked about giving our battles to God and begging for His help to win them, and although we will fail, sometimes over and over, when we win it is so much sweeter.

She then praised a girl at the school who leads our FCA club as an angel from God, who continually feeds her encouraging scriptures. I later contacted the girl from the club, who I know well, to see if she'd like to start having a Bible study after school. She was so excited and told me to just let her know when and she'll gather up the students and athletes.

Yup, discouragement gone, faith and hope in our youth restored. The devil loses and God wins...as always!

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Photo 48

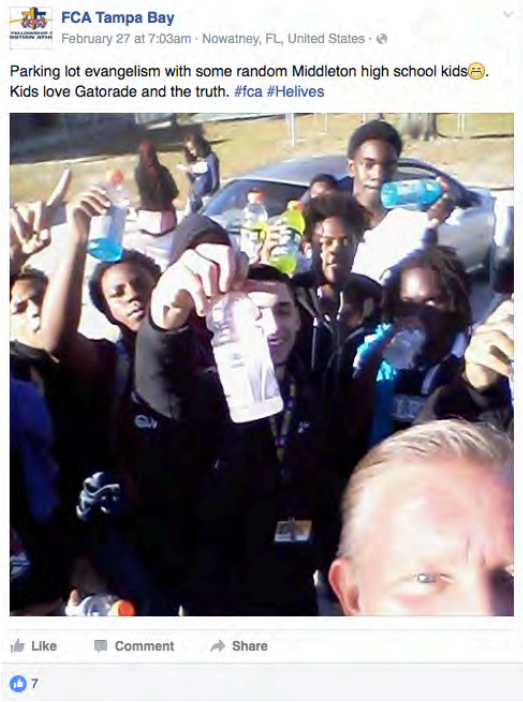


Photo 49



Photo 50

Obviously not every school is the same and not every kid's situation is the same, but there is always one common denominator between them all... and that is that they all need the love of Christ.

It seems like every single time we meet with a group of young people this fact becomes more and more evident, although there are times like the other night at Middleton High when this reality became overwhelmingly clear.

When God wants to make a point sometimes He'll give subtle hints and hope we catch on, and then there's times when He'll hit you with a sledge hammer to drive home a need that needs to be addressed, and changes that need to be made. This was a sledge hammer kinda night, so much so that it touched my heart in such a way that I will never forget.

The baseball team and I gathered together in left field prior to their game for a talk about "choices and consequences", then as we circled for prayer I asked them if there were any specific needs that needed prayer. "Does anyone have a family member that's sick, or any parents that are out of work", and there was no response.

"How bout does anyone have a family member in prison that we can pray for?"

All of a sudden the team leader who was standing in the middle of the circle gazes around the group and boldly says, "Yea, that would be all of us." As I watched several of these innocent young boys heads hang and nod in agreement all I could do was softly say, "Wow...lets bow our heads". We then prayed for their family members.

They then broke off and began warming up as I went over to have a talk with the head coach.

When I told him about the prayer circle he said that at the beginning of the season he handed out an "information form" that each player had to fill out; their address, their moms name and cell number, and their dads name and cell number.

When he received the forms back from the kids they all had either their mom or grandmoms information, but only one player had filled in their dads name and number. He said that the answers were, "Never met him. Don't have one. He's in prison." Much like myself, all the coach could do was shake his head and say "Wow!" "Next year I'm just going to ask for their guardians information", he said.

It's been nearly a week and my heart is still aching.

The "cycle" has to be broken and there is only one way to break it...Jesus, we ALL need Him.

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Photo 51



Photo 52



Photo 53



FCA Tampa Bay

January 7 · Tampa, FL, United States · 🌐

God is just soooo good! And He never makes a mistake...did I ever tell you that?

I left the house with a cooler of Gatorades hoping to bless a team tonight.

My first stop was King High School and on the way there I began praying, "Please give me the opportunity to share the "good news" with someone."

I visited the softball field and got reacquainted with the coaches and a couple players but they were in the middle of tryouts so I moved onto the boys soccer field.

I also got reacquainted with their coach but they had way too many players unfortunately for a "Gatorade Party" and were also in the middle of practice.

I'll admit I was getting a tad discouraged as I headed towards the gym to see if any basketball players were still hanging around, and then it happened.

Just as I parked my car by the gym a group of girls soccer players came around the corner out of nowhere. I walked over to them and asked one of the girls, "How many players do you have?" "I think 15...why?" "I need to know exactly how many you have because I have a cooler of Gatorades but if I don't have enough for everybody I'll have to come back some another time."

The excited young lady began running around asking the others, "How many players are here? How many players are left? This guy's got Gatorades!" Hahaha! Then she quickly answered "15!"

"Well I guess it's your lucky day then cause I have 16 Gatorades if you girls want um."

One girl yells, "Thank you thank you! I'm so thirsty!"

They chugged their Gatorades, we got together and prayed, and as this adorable group of new friends were leaving I heard one say, "That was really nice!"

I'm not sure if she was referring to the prayer or the Gatorades lol.



Photo 54



FCA Tampa Bay added 2 new photos.

March 13 at 4:00pm · 🌐

After 3 players in my schools had babies last month I felt a need to have a heart-to-heart talk with the football players at King High School about God's rules on sex. #fca #Helives



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