

## Yes, God Knows Your Name!

What an awesome truth that God knows each of us by name! As our gracious Heavenly Father, He also longs to bless us each in so many ways. Salvation, faith, hope, love, peace and joy are just a few of the gifts He desires to give. Unfortunately, we don't always accept His abundant blessings and live life short of all He desires for us. People living with disabilities are no different, but they often miss out on the encouragement and support others have received that make living a life in the daily presence of the Lord an obvious opportunity. Many may not even realize God knows their name or that He has created them with special gifts and talents that He wants them to use for His kingdom.

This year in East Tennessee we saw this lack of acknowledgement, affirmation and value flipped upside down as so many great volunteers poured out God's love on people living with disabilities who attended the Expo on August 20<sup>th</sup>. In fact, here is how Stephanie, a mother of a gal with Down Syndrome, put it.

**What a blessing it was to see so many people come together and be willing to serve with such humbleness, patience, while**

**exhibiting Christ-like nature one to another. This Expo was indeed a blessing and tremendous outpouring of love to those who face life challenges and their families within our communities. I heard many stories firsthand about how much this day was appreciated, and all that Access Life had done to ensure that "...the day was just perfect".**

While this day was so very special to the special folks in our community and their families, it was just as important for those who either do not have a disability nor know someone personally who does. Individuals who do not have a disability, or even those who became disabled a little later in life, may not fully understand what it is like to be an individual who by far has been invisible to the rest of society their entire life.

If I may, I can make it even a little more personal. Catrina is thirty years old, and until very recently she has never had a real friend. She has never been invited to a birthday party, been to a sleep-over, gone to a game, been included in social events, been invited to the movies, had a date, or even had anyone other than her brother or myself call or text her. Sadly, this has even been the case with our own faith family. Until God led us to Hidden Treasures Academy, then Camp Celebrate and now Access-Life, the amount of people who knew Catrina by name could be counted on her two hands. She was largely invisible to most.

While people were free to offer smiles, they didn't take the time to recognize her as a person, a unique individual created by the very hand of God. Until Catrina went to Camp Celebrate, she had never heard her name announced out loud, nor acknowledged. I cannot say I remember anyone really addressing her by her name other than her immediate family. When we arrived at Camp Celebrate and she received such a kind warm 'named' individualized welcome and the genuine outpouring of God's love, it made up for thirty years of never being included, invited, recognized, acknowledged or appreciated for who she is.

I saw the same thing happening yesterday. I saw it in the faces of so many who came through the welcoming line. I heard several stories from buddies who had never been around a person with a disability. I witnessed these same individuals being at total ease, as they address the participant by name, and showed such compassion and care for those they were assigned to. It blessed them as much, if not more, than those they were serving.

I just wanted to thank you for not only reaching out to those who are living life with circumstances which may seem less than ideal on the surface; but also to those who are the future trendsetters when it comes to embracing, including, and engaging with those who appear somewhat different. I was overcome with joy, and a few tears... when I saw so many of these special folks experience acceptance, unconditional love, attention, and God's love released. I realized that with each of these events- Catrina's story and experience will become less and less, and we can and will, with the Lord's help and dedicated servants such as you all, move forward into a place where each person has value, acceptance, and a name. Thank you for all you do. It was amazing.

