

Jennifer in North Macedonia

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Winter youth event 2023



***“In the middle of pain, disappointment, and suffering it is faith that whispers:
This isn’t permanent.” ~ author unknown***

“Well, actually, I love my gift, but I am disappointed that I didn’t get a bar of chocolate like my friend did,” one participant in our gift exchange game finally shared. This January, the Commission for Work with Children and Youth broke with tradition and held a winter youth event instead of the usual New Year’s event. Attendance at the New Year’s events had been declining for a while, so we decided to try hosting an event during the winter school break after New Year’s and Orthodox Christmas. Only three teenagers and two youths came to our New Year’s event last year, but this year, nineteen teenagers and ten youths attended our event on January 14th and 15th!

The theme we chose for this year’s event was „Справување со разочарувања“ (Dealing with disappointment). We played games, sang together, ate together, hung out, attended church together, and listened to two messages on the topic of disappointment - something even Jesus experienced and had to deal with.

Attendees were invited to bring a wrapped gift so they could participate in a gift exchange lottery. If you have ever played in a white elephant or dirty Santa gift exchange game, then you know the potential these games have for creating feelings of disappointment. I was in charge of the messages so I thought I would segway into the lesson by asking if anyone had experienced disappointment with the gift they ended up with in the gift lottery game. I asked, and to my surprise, no one said a word. I asked again and waited. Nothing.



Playing Ligretto into the wee hours

Had I committed a cultural faux pas? In American culture, it is typically not a big deal for us to express personal opinions including our dislikes and disappointments. It had not occurred to me that this might be extremely uncomfortable in the Macedonian culture. Finally, a brave young man saved me by expressing his disappointment that he didn't receive a chocolate bar, but only after first insisting he really loved his gift of Christmas socks.



In my first message, I outlined the very different ways Peter and Judas responded to their disappointment that Jesus was not becoming the earthly, warrior-like savior they (and many others) were thinking He would. Peter confronted Jesus and later tried to push the issue by cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest, but eventually Peter submitted to God's plan. Conversely, Judas went behind Jesus' back and enlisted the help of worldly men to enact his plan. In the end, Judas' plan went through, but he regretted it.

In the second message, I compared Peter's and Judas' responses to their disappointment with themselves. Peter regretted denying Christ and not being able to stand with Him during His trial. Judas regretted betraying innocent blood and tried to give the money back to the priests. In response, Peter wept bitterly, but Judas took matters into his own hands and took his own life.

I encouraged the participants to follow Peter's example when facing disappointment:

- talk openly and honestly with Jesus about disappointments – even if you get rebuked!
- submit to God's plans rather than seek help from worldly people to push your plans
- allow yourself to weep if necessary, and
- humbly wait on the Lord.

So what happened to the young man who openly expressed disappointment with his gift? I had brought three extra gifts to offer in exchange for anyone who expressed disappointment. One of the gifts I brought happened to be a large bar of chocolate, so I just gave it to him. It was my joy to be able to address and alleviate his disappointment and I think it is our Father's joy as well. Peter eventually got his Savior and the chance to die for Him. Can you imagine how different Judas' story could have ended if he had just waited three days?

I don't know what disappointments you are facing, but I encourage you to be like Peter. Tell Jesus about them, weep if necessary, and then wait.

In Him,

Jennifer Moore

Unexpected disappointments

I won a puzzle from the gift lottery, which is a perfect gift for me! Unfortunately, somewhere from the time I opened it and the time a group of us finished it around 1 a.m. three pieces went missing. I didn't weep, but I was sad. I told God about it and He helped me be thankful for the pleasant time I had spent with the teens even though it ended with an unpleasant surprise.

