

A Powerful Movement Is Changing Kids' Lives in the Toughest Cities

Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a city once thriving as a booming steel town, now faces significant economic challenges, including one of the nation's highest poverty rates. Yet, in the midst of hardship, faith-based programs are stepping in to inspire the next generation, offering truth, purpose and hope for the future.

The view here in Johnstown is excellent—it's a city with a rich past, but it has fallen on some difficult times. That includes a series of devastating floods, beginning with the infamous 1889 disaster. Then the economy took a serious downturn after Bethlehem Steel pulled out, and now, in its wake, there's a lingering sense of hopelessness.

But even a city in a dark valley can shine a light. Programs like Bible2School are bringing faith to the next generation, teaching children about Jesus and instilling a sense of purpose.

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"People kind of expect bad things," says Pastor Doug Black of Liberty Grace Church. "They've grown up in this generational expectation that nothing good's going to happen in Johnstown. So, it's hard to give them hope because it's not what they've experienced."

Local pastors are meeting weekly for prayer, seeking spiritual renewal for their city. This week, they gather on a rooftop, standing in the gap for Johnstown. "God, the gospel is good news, Lord," prays Pastor Terry Knipple. "The city of

Johnstown is struggling, and they need good news.”

Their prayers may be finding an answer in the next generation. While student engagement can be a challenge for public schools, children in Johnstown are eagerly skipping lunch and recess to learn about the Bible through Bible2School.

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“And who or what is the rock? That firm foundation? What does that rock represent?” asks a teacher in one of the classes.

“Jesus! The Bible!” the students respond enthusiastically.

“So many of the kids have never been told that Jesus loves them,” says Stacy Novak, Executive Director of Bible2School Laurel Highlands. “We have conversations with them, ‘Do you know that you are valued, and do you know you are loved?’ It’s like they’re hearing this for the very first time.”

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