

God Transforms Drug-Abusing 'Goth' Into AG Pastor

It was as if Satan himself had just entered the youth room of that Nampa, Idaho, church. Dark and foreboding, dressed in Goth attire, evil seemed to emanate from him, and the word "intimidating" didn't do his presence justice.

Standing at 6-foot-6, the young man's blue-spiked hair, challenging eyes and spiked dog collar brought wide-eyed shock and sent chills running down spines.

No one said a word to him, even though every person in the room was keenly aware of his presence—it was as if they could feel his eyes upon them. Furtive glances were stolen at this embodiment of evil and sin. Frightening. Confusing. Unsettling. Dangerous.

The service ended. As quietly as the evil had drifted into the room, he left—and never returned.

When Jordan Hodges was nearly 13 years old, his parents' marriage crumbled. His father had slowly become increasingly abusive and then adultery spelled the finish. Already dealing with some emotional extremes that required medication as a youngster, Hodges' world was thrown into further turmoil when what became a vicious divorce also revealed that his "father" really wasn't his father. Reeling, and desperately needing a positive male role model in his life, Hodges sought out his real father, only to find he was an alcoholic.

Searching for acceptance and some type of stability, Hodges soon found himself with friends who had similar problems, and who dealt with their problems by escaping through drugs. By the time he was 15, Hodges had moved from pot to crank to meth—and deep into the occult—searching for something real, something powerful. As lost as he seemed, he was only at a crossroads in his young life.

High on meth, dressed in his routine Goth garb and sporting his blue spiked hair, Hodges attended an Easter service at a church with his mother. He was struggling with the idea of God being real and if so, could He really care about him? It all seemed so impossible. But something pulled him back, and he decided to attend the foretold youth service, giving God "one last chance."

"The rejection I felt [from the youth group], like I wasn't accepted and didn't belong, made it easy for me," Hodges recalls. "It was like it gave me permission to continue on in the life I was leading. And although I know I looked a sight, I was really desperate for someone, anyone, just to say 'Hi' or 'Glad you're here' or anything ... but it never happened."

Only later would Hodges come to realize the depth of evil that truly did encompass him, and how it intimidated the youth, who never before had been confronted by such a presence. However, Hodges also recognizes that a "meth head who's into occult" doesn't just "happen" to show up at church one day. God was at work, and it's up to the church to be prepared for challenging opportunities.

But now, embracing the "permission" the rejection granted, Hodges dove deep into the drug culture and the occult. By the time he was 16, he was using meth heavily and dealing to kids in his school. At the beginning of his junior year, school officials told him to leave or they would make him leave. After dropping out of high school, Hodges moved in with a couple who cooked their own meth. With this new and endless supply of drugs, Hodges began dealing to local gangs. At the same time, looking to maintain his high, Hodges began shooting meth and other drugs intravenously.

"I would be awake for weeks," he said. "I never slept. I was into a very dark, dark world—seeing and doing some of the darkest things imaginable."

When Hodges finally hit bottom, it came with his chest covered

by the red lasers of police officers' guns targeting him. He ended up first in the hospital, where doctors were amazed—they had never seen so many drugs in a person's system—at least not a living person's system. After five days of recovery, he was sent to jail.

Bored with being confined in a jail cell, Jordan decided to sit in on a Bible study being held by a group of local Christians. Despite his best efforts, the power and presence of God surrounded Hodges, and the next day, when Assemblies of God Biker Chaplain Rick Rigenhagen visited him, he gave his life to Christ. For Hodges, this marked the beginning of a life transformation.

For everyday "church folk," Jordan knows this is where most people think the story ends: God intervenes, the nastiest of sinners is miraculously transformed and voila, out pops Christian perfection.

"There is a whole generation of kids who are seeking some kind of spirituality," Hodges explains, "but these kids, just like I was, are carrying a whole lot of baggage—hard things, horrible things, dark things that are pulling and grasping at them as they begin their journey down the hallway of Christianity."

And while they're in the hallway, Hodges says, it's a lonely and sometimes terrifying place to be. Hodges knows what he's talking about.

About a month after his conversion in jail, where he became a dedicated Bible reader and even led Bible studies, Hodges was released, but within a day, he was already doing meth. This time, though, something was wrong. The high wasn't there, only fear.

"My grandmother saw me and knew something was wrong," Hodges recalls. "She asked me if it was OK if she took me to church, for the pastor to pray for me. I don't remember, but

apparently I told her it was OK.”

For Hodges, the battleground had moved from the physical and emotional addiction and fully into the spiritual realm. He explained that when God “cleaned house” during his conversion it was real, the emptiness was filled with Christ. But when he chose to turn his back on God and embrace the drug culture again, it was as if the demonic forces in his life—a life that had been filled with the occult—returned seven times (as the Bible indicates will happen) more powerfully.

“When I got to Nampa First Assembly, I trashed the pastor’s office—I just went off,” Hodges says. “Pastor Barry Osteen (former Southern Idaho assistant district superintendent) and Pastor Jim Stevens (former Southern Idaho district treasurer) were there. They started to pray over me and demons began to manifest themselves. One moment I would be begging them to help me, the next it was a demonic voice, screaming in torment, fighting.”

As the prayers continued, Pastor Osteen phoned Chaplain Rigenhagen, as Jordan was uncontrollable.

“Immediately when I walked in, Hodges sat down,” Rigenhagen recalls. “I walked over to him and began to plead the blood of Jesus. I could tell what was going on with Jordan was extremely demonic.”

Rigenhagen says they continued to pray for at least another half hour before Hodges suddenly dropped to his knees and they prayed the sinner’s prayer together.

“He was still quite intoxicated due to the meth,” Rigenhagen says, “but now he was determined to go out and find a police officer and turn himself in for an outstanding warrant. He’s a big guy, so there’s no way we could have stopped him, even if we wanted to. I followed him in my car and that’s exactly what he did.”

On the advice of Chaplain Rigenhagen, Pastor Monty Sears of Christian Faith Center (AG) visited Hodges in jail. After visiting with Hodges, Sears believed God was telling him that

Hodges was to somehow play a key role in reaching the community of Nampa for Christ.

There was potential in the young man, and once Hodges was released from jail several months later, Sears offered him a job in the church, providing an opportunity for ongoing biblical training and mentoring by godly men. Hodges' life continued to evolve and grow in Christ as he walked down his "hallway." He admits it wasn't easy, as temptation was really never more than an encounter or phone call away.

"What many in today's church don't understand is that a lot of kids don't experience instantaneous transformation and freedom from the baggage they're carrying," Hodges explains. "They are going to have setbacks, they're going to disappear for weeks or even months at a time, but they need a church family who's willing to continue to believe in them, call them, encourage them." He says people in the "hallway" need someone to come alongside of them and patiently and lovingly walk with them until they can stand on their own.

Hodges' soon-to-be wife, Amanda, was also deep into the drug culture buying from and selling with Hodges. She says that through the help of godly men who stood by Hodges even when he messed up, his life has been transformed.

Now, a little more than five years after his conversion, Jordan and Amanda are drug-free and happily married. Both have become credentialed Assemblies of God ministers and are lead pastors in a new extension of Christian Faith Center that has grown to more than 250 members, many of the members in the midst of making their way down their own lonely hallways.

"A big part of the hallway is that people are caught between 'belonging,'" Jordan explains. "They're no longer a part of the drug culture, but they don't feel like they're in anyway connected with the whole 'Christian' thing, so they feel like the don't belong anywhere. Christians also have preconceived ideas of what a new Christian should look like, but guess what, they may not look right, smell right, act

right—because they're not—but God wants us to embrace them anyway."

And what God told Pastor Sears about Hodges being key to reaching the community for Christ has come to pass.

"God has us ministering in the very part of Nampa that Amanda and I used to sell drugs in," Hodges says. "Many of the people we used to deal drugs to are now Christians and attending our church."

He says that whatever the issues people are dealing with, whether meth addicts, homosexuals, prostitutes, whatever, he understands the power of acceptance.

"You have to understand, no matter how steeped in sin we are, God still loves us and He is still with us at every step. It's not like you can ever really 'get away' from God," Hodges says.

Hodges also underscores the vital importance of seeing God's potential in people who are in pain, sticking with people for the long ride, as the length of the hallway can vary from person to person, and demonstrating unconditional love, where the mess and pain is hated, but the person is loved.

"We want people to know they're okay to be here. We have a culture of acceptance in that we love you, wherever you're at," Hodges says. "We don't embrace the lifestyle; we embrace the person."