

July 7, 2007

Dear Wendy & the James Gang Friends,

I hope you and your families are having a great summer! It's been a while since we've sent out an update, and I want to bring you up to date.

First of all, THANK YOU for your prayer and financial support down through the years. When God called us to this ministry in 1998, we had no idea how far he would take us (even to South Africa) and all of the wonderful people like you that we would meet. Seeing over 13,000 kids accept Jesus in their hearts and touching hundreds of thousands more with the music and shows was more than we could ask or imagine. We praise God and thank Him and you for making it all possible.

This winter, we were at a crossroads. I had been very honored to be offered a great job with great people that is bringing stability to our family finances. After 10 years without a steady paycheck, it's a real blessing. I did so with the understanding that we would still have the flexibility to do WJG shows.

Our family was still willing. But we wanted to what was God's will. We didn't want to keep pushing if He was moving us in another direction.

We prayed and decided that we would make our best booking effort and see what God would do. We already had three shows booked for the fall of 2007, so we asked for clear direction: Either open the doors for a lot of shows or close it. We prayed for either 15 more or no more. Nothing vague or wishy-washy in between. We were seeking God's clear direction.

We then conducted the largest and most extensive marketing effort in our history. We hired an outstanding booking person with a huge passion for WJG and reaching kids for Christ. We mailed several thousand postcards to a purchased, targeted church mailing list, had direct discussions with almost 500 of these churches and sent several email blasts to our database of several thousand churches. I thought it would be a slam dunk.

The result?

Zero. None. Zilch.

That's a clear answer.

Why was God obviously closing the door? We discovered that churches no longer had the funds for special events. In the vast majority of cases, it was due to budget constraints. In order to try and understand what was going on in the market, we conducted an email survey of several hundred qualified churches with active children's ministries. The response to the survey was very good. A high majority loved the ministry and would book us under normal circumstances, but not now, nor in the foreseeable future. They are not allocating any money for special events – even for adults.

We asked the question of “Even if it was free, could you book it?” Amazingly, almost half of the respondents said that they are so strapped for human resources, volunteers and time, that they could not get permission to bring us in, even at no cost to them.

As a result, we have been forced to part ways with the production company who provides the video, sound and lights for the events and have cancelled the three scheduled events.

Now what?

It's clear that in the current market, "pushing" large theatrical children and family events to churches is not going to work as it has in the past. The only way to "pull" churches into booking us is to have a ministry structure where we can offer the shows cheaply (for under \$1,000) or for travel expenses. Ideally, we need to be part of a ministry of a church, or affiliated with another ministry organization where we can have equipment available and a team of volunteers who believe in reaching kids for Christ.

After a great run, we are assuming that the WJG road shows are over.

To be honest, we all have had mixed emotions. There is major disappointment, and we wondered why a family who is ready to serve would have the doors slammed shut so clearly. However, we now see God moving us in other directions, which is very exciting. In many other personal ways, we see God's hand in each of our lives, especially in Zac's and Ben's. We don't know the future, but God does, and perhaps it is best for them to not be on the road full-time. They are both doing great, and Zac is preparing for his Senior year. We're in college mode, and he's looking to be a worship leader or pastor. Ben is very excited about his high school career. Wendy and I are so proud of them and the sacrifices they made.

One thing we do know is this: In order for new doors to open, even if you don't know for sure what they are, sometimes previous doors have to be closed in order for it to happen.

GOING FORWARD

No matter what happens, we don't ever see ourselves as not being in ministry somehow. In the short run, all four of us will continue being very active in our home church's music ministry. Wendy and Zac are regulars in the worship band and vocal team. Ben does a great job with video and media and I try not to turn up the guitars too loud when it's my turn to run sound. Wendy, Zac & Ben (and some friends) just completed an awesome five days of providing the music for VBS. Wendy is excited to get back into writing and producing children and adult music, publishing, recording and her art. She's also preparing for a possible return to adult concert ministry, including women's retreats and recording. We both enjoy speaking and teaching, so who knows?

In a world of technology, the Internet and various other channels to deliver media, we would love to capture the WJG shows onto DVD's, in order to reach exponentially more kids than we could in person. We also could take some of the existing WJG songs, turn them into videos with choreography and graphics that would make it easy for children's worship leaders to use.

In short, many options are presenting themselves. God is moving in many unexpected ways, but that's how He works, isn't it? That's how WJG was formed in the first place!

Living Rock Family Outreach is still ongoing. We are still helping one ministry and may be enabling another one shortly. Personally, I believe Wendy is going to be freed up to turn into a prolific writer, producer and performer.

FINANCES

Financially, we still have bills to pay. As you may recall, producing three major theatrical shows and getting it all on the road was very expensive. Thanks to the generosity of our faithful donor friends, we have made great progress in paying down debt incurred to bring the shows to life. At this point, we are down to about \$115,000 in remaining ministry debt that will not be covered by the sale of assets, such as the RV.

All we are praying for is that WJG can get debt free and that we not have to incur this debt personally.

Please consider making a donation to allow this to happen. If you have donated previously or are currently giving, thank you. We understand if you feel that you need to stop, but I am specifically asking you to continue to help pay off the above ministry costs. Thank you.

CONCLUSION

Tonight, Wendy and I were discussing this letter while the Ferris Wheel we were riding at our little town's 4th of July celebration slowly loaded and unloaded passengers. We were the first car loaded at the beginning and somehow were the last car unloaded at the end of the ride, so we had a lot of time.

Memories of so many people and experiences flooded our minds.

We remembered all the people who traveled with us, served on staff, volunteered their time and talents, selflessly helped set up and tear down at hundreds of shows, made sure we had food and power while parked in church parking lots, signed the work box with words of humor and encouragement, and taught us how to stock and live in an RV, hook up hitches and handle and pack trailers.

We remember people who helped build and repair sound systems, made costumes, taught us how to act, brought scripts to life, developed and taught choreography, showed us the magic of lighting and theatre tricks, built sets, watched our home on the long tours, made us a driveway for the RV, built us a ministry office out of a garage, started Awesome Auctions, served on and led the Board, kept fixing the RV, our old vehicles and our home.

We especially remembered Pat, Michelle, Reinhard and Pete in South Africa. What an adventure and what productive ministry! How I wish we could have gone back with these new shows.

Darn these allergies, they're making me tear up...that's my story and I'm sticking to it...

Then there were those who have been faithful from the start. Connie, the "sister" I never had, who has kept the books all these years from 2,000 miles away. Ron and Hap, whose exploits and contributions would fill a book. God used them to give us the courage and means at the start to act on our vision, traveled, drove, sewed, served, prayed and persevered even to this day, through thick and thin. God knows what you two have given. Each of our parents have been solid rocks, and even when I'm sure from time to time they thought we had lost our marbles, they didn't stop supporting us, loving us and helping every way they could. Same with the churches in our lives that have been so supportive and given beyond their means – my home church in Decatur, Indiana, Wendy's home church in Caro, Michigan and our current church in Granville, OH.

We could have gone on, but the Ferris Wheel stopped and our ride came to an end. It struck me that another ride was ending, and for the first time, I felt peace about it. God said that he will take care of the remaining debt, provide the means to pay for Zac's college and not to worry about the lack of a retirement fund. My fear of what people would perceive if we said we were done touring went away. As a family, we can stop pushing and start watching to see what new (or remodeled) doors God will open next. It's a new beginning.

If you are receiving this email, in some way our lives have touched and you have helped make WJG possible. More specifically, together we brought God's love and message of salvation to kids and families all across the USA and South Africa. This would not have happened without your prayers, support and encouragement.

In my case, wearing those hot wool red checked pants, seeing the world from out of a Lion's mouth or driving until the wee hours was nothing compared to seeing the joy and excitement on the faces of the kids and parents as they came forward to receive Christ. What a privilege!

Thank you once again for your friendship and prayers. We treasure the relationships we have with each of you.

It's been a great ride. We hope you will join us on the next one.

Until next time, God bless you and your family!

In Christ's love and service,

Dave

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