



# ARKANSAS: TRANSFORMED

## Stories of Transformed Lives



By Dan Carson, Director

Student ministry doesn't end at high school graduation. While the weekly meetings and activities may be over, our students are trying to navigate their next steps. For many of them, college is what is next. I am thankful for the men and women who invested in me during those pivotal years. I think about Johnnie Hoffman, who served as the Association of Baptist Students (ABS) director in Conway while I was in town, as well as the couples at Antioch Baptist Church of Conway and Eastside Baptist Church of Conway who loved on me and my wife while we were young and didn't know much.

Our ABS ministries are incredibly valuable as a stop-gap, but they are more than that. They help students find their way and are constantly mindful of reaching their campuses for Christ. Stuart Estes is the Ministry Team Leader at the University of Arkansas ABS. They go by "The Hedge" and are working to make an impact on the 30,000 students connected to the U of A. If you have a student in Fayetteville, you should let them know about The Hedge. Read as Stuart shares about their ministry:



By Stuart Estes, Team Leader

If ever there was a place where people seek things, it is an American university campus. Students from all over the globe flock to these institutions seeking many different things—a bright future, a soulmate, a season of coming of age and some even come looking for an education. Among Arkansas' universities, none draws a greater number of these students than the University of Arkansas (U of A) in Fayetteville. With over 32,000 students enrolled, the U of A hosts students from 49 states and more than 100 countries. The university is composed of 10 different colleges and schools that offer more than 265 academic programs. It is indeed a bright, vibrant and lively place.



But it is also a very dark, cold, and dead place.

Many of the students who flock to the University seeking things, find something different. A bright future becomes an all-consuming idol. A soulmate becomes a string of broken and painful relationships. A season of coming of age becomes a spiral of sinful revelry. And they receive an education far more frightening and hopeless than they expected.

Students come seeking an abundant life, yet in seeking that life on their own terms, they find death. *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death"* (Prov. 14:12 ESV).

Jesus was a seeker, but not in the same way students at the U of A are. In Luke 19:10, Jesus said of His own purpose: *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* At the Association of Baptist Students (ABS) at the U of A, we seek what our Lord seeks. We seek the helpless and the harassed. We seek the sheep who have no Shepherd. We seek the lost, and we lead them to the Savior who can save them.

### A Strong Foundation

ABS at the U of A was organized more than 50 years ago by the BMA of the Ozarks. Jim Shine was a director early in the ministry's history, followed by Warren Dugas, who served in that role for 42 years. Brad Harris, pastor of Prairie Oaks Baptist Church in Prairie Grove, served alongside Bro. Warren for more than 15 years as the assistant director. I am a relative newcomer to this work, as I am in my fourth year of serving as the ministry team leader.

One thing that strikes me about this ministry is the deep impact it has had on students who have been a part of it. I often talk with Razorbacks who are older than me, and they recount the stories of how God used ABS to completely transform the trajectory of their lives. God has, indeed, saved many souls, strengthened many disciples and started many

a good work through this ministry.

Another thing that strikes me as I have these conversations is how God has used the simplest of things to do this work—community. Many an ABS alumnus has told me that the community of faith at the ministry was the thing that brought them to the work, and it was also the thing that brought them closer to the Lord. As they share with me, they cannot help but speak of their faithful brothers and sisters who were at the ministry with them. There is no way for them to separate what God has done in them from what He was also doing in their friends. Certainly, there is no need to separate these things.

One final thing that strikes me about this ministry's past is its leaders' allegiance to the Word of God. Often, I sit and talk with Bro. Brad about the things my students are struggling with and the places I am sending them in the Word of God for their answers. It's as if I'm telling him things he already knows—and he does! He offered those precious passages to his struggling students. God uses His Word to transform students, both now and then.

A community of faith centered around the Word of God. That's our basic play, and we run it over and over again. This mentality led a group of students in the 2000s to start calling ABS by another name. What they found at ABS was a place of protection, a refuge of faith from the world around them. So they aptly started calling their Tuesday night gathering "The Hedge." It quickly became the moniker of the ministry house on Clinton Drive in Fayetteville as well, and now my students carry on this tradition. On the U of A campus, we are The Hedge, and we are proud to be known and to know others in this way.

### Compel Them to Come

Jesus' final words to His disciples before His ascension were: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:19-20). This command is at the heart of the work at The Hedge, but what is increasingly driving our pursuit of this cause is another thing Jesus said during His earthly ministry.

In Luke 14, Jesus told a parable about a man who threw a great banquet and invited all his friends. Once preparations had been made, the man sent a servant to tell his invitees that the feast was ready. One by one, those he invited made excuses about why they could not attend—one had to inspect a field, one had to go look at a team of oxen, one had to be with his newlywed wife. So, the man sent his servant to gather the poor, crippled, blind and lame to come to the feast. And even at that, there was still room for more attendees. So, the man said to his servant, *"Go out to the highways and the hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled."*

That parable is shaping our approach to making disciples at the U of A in two particular ways:

• **We are looking to the highways and hedges.** It's very easy for a campus ministry funded through the support of

BMA churches to fall into a line of thinking that essentially makes the campus ministry the "next level" youth group for BMA students. But that's not what we want to be at The Hedge, and we are looking to the highways and hedges of the U of A to find anyone the Father is drawing unto Himself. We are seeing the fields that are ripe for harvest, and we are praying for laborers to be sent.

• **We are prioritizing compelling.** At the start of the semester, we started a new weekly meeting. Every Friday, my wife and I and a group of 5-7 students have been meeting in the Arkansas Union for a time devoted to the work of evangelism. We eat, drink and breathe evangelism at these meetings. We've talked about the necessity and importance of sharing the gospel. We've shared tips for how to share the gospel and how to prepare to share the gospel and, most importantly, we have shared the gospel. I have sat with many of my students as they shared the gospel for the first time. As we have walked away from those gospel conversations, we've debriefed the experiences. Most did not end with someone coming to Christ, but I'm reminded over and over again that as we are prioritizing compelling, we are prioritizing obedience, and my students are finding deep and satisfying joy in that obedience. I know that, given time and effort, we will see the house filled as we continue to compel them to come.

The Lord has positioned us in a unique reality. People from all nations come to the U of A seeking things. The ministry has a strong foundation as a community centered around the Word of God. We feel a growing sense of the magnitude of compelling others to come to the Lord. The only thing more exciting than to be in this work in this moment is to eagerly await what the Lord will do next. He has commanded us to go into the highways and hedges to compel them to come to His house. He will see it done, and we, at The Hedge, will continue to marvel as He does it.



U of A students, and even some ABS alumni share a night of fun and festivities at the annual Welcome Back to School Event at The Hedge.

- Plan to attend SMWR 2024 on Sept. 14, 2024
- Check out the Student Ministry Matters podcast at [studentministrymatters.podbean.com](http://studentministrymatters.podbean.com) or through most major podcasting platforms.
- Join the Student Ministry Matters Community on Facebook at [Facebook.com/groups/StudentMinistryMattersCommunity](https://www.facebook.com/groups/StudentMinistryMattersCommunity).



72 years (1951-2023) of sharing the gospel across ARkansas and beyond.  
Our heARtbeat is to see lives changed for the glory of God as we  
spread the gospel by planting new churches in AREas where  
people need to be connected to Jesus through a community of faith.



## Working on a Building!

By Johnny Shew • Faith Chapel, Flippin

Hi, everyone. I just wanted to update you and share a few pictures of the new building you are helping us build. We have a steeple, and the outside is complete! Praise God!

When I put in my weekly report that the steeple had come in, I got a lot of interest and advice from people and churches that had experience with putting them up and maintaining them over the years, and we appreciated that so much! It helped us plan and execute the installation so that it went 100% according to plan, and we should avoid any unexpected issues going forward! Thanks to all who helped us with that.

As I said, the outside is complete except for setting the heat pumps on the pads that we poured, and all the pre-drywall work inside is also done! Praise God for that too! We are waiting for the drywall contractor now, but that shouldn't take too long, and we have a lot of little details to work on in the meantime.

It will be so good to be in there finally. We still don't have a firm date, but we are patient, knowing that God will have us in there in His timing, and we trust in Him completely. We also know that building this building is not our primary mission. Sharing Christ with this community is, so any time we are not working on the building, we can focus more on that. We have to be careful that the building does not become a distraction. So far, it hasn't, though; it has actually generated a lot of interest in our mission, opened a lot of doors, and made us a more permanent part of the community. Praise God again!

We thank God for you, your support and your prayers. Please continue because God is answering them!





## Playground at ICC

By Juan Carlos Posadas • Misión Creciendo en Cristo, NLR

We at Iglesia Creciendo en Cristo (ICC) wholeheartedly wish to send a clear and strong message to the children and their families that we love them and are willing to dedicate the necessary resources to ensure they have what they need to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This determination leads us to aim for well-trained teachers who instruct them in Sunday School. We take advantage of every opportunity to teach them the Word, including Vacation Bible School, the Christmas season and every Wednesday during discipleship meetings.

With 50% of attendees under 12 years old and no playground in our building, chaos ensues when children seek places to play after meals during communion meetings, often ending up in the halls and nursery. Identifying the need for a safe place for children to play under adult supervision was easy. In August, we enthusiastically began the construction of a playground on the east side of the temple. As of Dec. 9, with 250 volunteer hours and 80 hours contracted, the equipment and its safety surface are installed. We have the pending task of installing a chain-link fence for the children's safety.

The acquisition, construction and installation process has taken longer than expected. The children eagerly await the moment when the park is ready for use. Little Julito looked joyfully at the installed equipment one afternoon and asked his mom if he could go play. Cindy explained that it wasn't safe yet and that they needed to wait for the fence to be installed. With sadness, Julito lowered his head and asked when it would be finished. Thankfully, we only need a couple more weekends to have it ready for the children to start enjoying. It will be a lovely Christmas gift for our children.

We are very grateful to the Missions Office and the Revolving Fund, as through these funds, we have been able to access financing to develop the playground project.



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# Mustang Message

## Jeff Riddle: “I Have Seen God’s Hand” By Mason Crymes

Jeff Riddle is currently in his 39<sup>th</sup> year at Central Baptist College. After entering as a student in 1985, he has held numerous roles, being involved in every academic year since. He began as the basketball team manager when he was recruited to the position by Coach Robert Stewart. He then worked as assistant coach and intramural director as he finished his education at the University of Central Arkansas.

After this, Riddle began working as a full-time employee, starting as an Admissions counselor in 1991. He continued working in the Admissions office until becoming Director of Admission in 1994. After this, from 1996 to 2003, Riddle served as dean of Students and vice president for Student Services.

After working in these administration capacities, Riddle transitioned back into the gym and began working as chair of the Physical Education Department and Athletic director. Not long after this, he transitioned out of the role of Athletic Director, becoming a full-time instructor in 2006. Since then, he has continued working as the PE Department Chair and Division Chair.

Riddle has played a big part in many students’ lives over the years, always being available and willing to help them along their academic journey. Almost any student since 1996 probably has memories of Fall Hay Day at the Riddle Farm, which has become an enduring tradition. Hay Day began when Riddle was dean of Students after the Student Government Association developed the idea as a CBC alternative to a Halloween Party. “We have enjoyed having so many students at our home through the years. Our favorite part is watching students interact with each other who would normally not have a chance to hang out together,” Riddle said.

Riddle’s family has been very involved at CBC over the years. His sons, Blake and Landon, and his wife, Julie, attended CBC. “We are a CBC family! Julie and I met at CBC. Blake met his wife, Chelsea, and Landon met his wife, Hannah, at CBC. It’s hard to imagine how our lives would be if not for CBC!” Riddle says.

Through all his years here, Riddle gives God the glory and credit for sustaining and guiding him. “I have no doubt that God placed me here in 1985 and has opened numerous doors to allow me to serve Him in this place,” he says. His biggest highlight over the years has been simply watching God work in the students’ lives and being able to play a part in their experience here. “CBC is still a place where God changes people’s lives by giving them a foundation for spiritual growth,” Riddle said.

Riddle has filled many roles over the years and has been faithful to the mission of CBC. Looking back, Riddle is confident that God has worked through the school, impacting people’s lives. “I have been at CBC for over half of its existence. I have seen God’s hand on so many things,” Riddle says, “It has been incredible to see His faithfulness in this place.”



*CBC is committed to transforming lives by providing an education that integrates Christian faith and academic excellence in a Christ-centered environment.*