

University 2018 Reflections

By Matt Rooney

Hello everyone, I'm Matt Rooney, a rising junior at Glen Allen High School and I am so excited to talk to you about my experience at University. It was a dark and rainy morning on the Monday when we were scheduled to leave. The group, after waking up at around 4:30 in the morning, were tired, unusually quiet, and a bit ticked off as our bus had yet to show up and it was already 6 o'clock. As the bus finally showed up at around 6:15, that unhappiness immediately vanished, and the group was already beginning to bristle with excitement for the coming week. When we finally arrived at camp, we were all so ready to reconnect with our old friends, leaders, and even make new friendships along the way. At the first night's opening celebration, our proclaimer read to us the passage for the week, Matthew 11: 28-30, the Message version, which reads, "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace." This immediately struck a chord with me. My entire summer I had been running from one thing to next, tournament to tournament, youth event to youth event, family vacation to family vacation and I never got a chance to just stop and realize how tired and worn out I was. So, as I sat there on that first night, I mentally answered the questions as the reader spoke them out loud. Are you tired? Yep. Worn Out? Absolutely. And the third one, well I'll get back to that later.

So, after that first night, each day our proclaimer gave us a new "rhythm" to focus on throughout the day, based off our theme, "The Rhythms of Grace." As we focused on these different rhythms each day, we were also participating in Bible Study, Seminars (classes of our choosing to take for the week), Electives (fun activities that we chose, such as basketball or volleyball), and UNites (nightly events that the entire camp participate in). For some, this jam-packed schedule might be counterproductive in resting and learning these, "unforced rhythms of grace." However, for me, I have never been more at rest and free from stress than at University this past year. These activities allowed myself to empty my mind of all the daily stresses and worries of my life and instead focus on the fun times we were having with each other.

Now, back to the last question, Burned out on Religion. While I sat and listened to the verse that night, I must admit I was ashamed to truthfully answer the question at the time. That night, I wasn't ready to admit that so many changes in my youth group, the church, and in my friend group here at the church, had left my religion burnt out. I have gone through a lot of changes during my time in the youth group and it had begun to wear me down, to the point that for a stretch of time, I only came to youth group because I felt obligated to as one of the only high school boys. I felt that I needed to make an appearance for the younger youth, hoping that by me showing up every Sunday, that they would all continue to do so when they become my age and thereby create an even larger and stronger youth group in the process. Although my intentions were good, this was a low point for me in the youth group, as I had always gone because I enjoyed and felt connected to God and the people here during Sunday nights and I was ashamed that I had lost that connection.

However, relationships that I formed with my youth group that week are the most important takeaway from a trip in my entire youth experience. From daily basketball games with the boys, to building friendships with the middle schoolers, sharing unforgettable experiences such as getting locked out of my room with Spencer while shirtless and with no shoes on and having to ask Pastor Glaze to go all the way downstairs and get a key for us, (that was an interesting event) and finally, regrowing my friendships with Spencer, Chloe, Lindsey, Julia, Elizabeth, and Ella, who I now all count as some of my best friends. I am happy to say that Unidiversity 2018 has rekindled my religion, strengthened my love of the youth group and the people within, and truly gave me rest in a time when I so desperately needed it. Amen.

By Eleanor Roberts

Rhythms. What do you think of when you hear the word rhythms? A musical instrument? A song? Something musical is what used to come to mind for me. But what about the rhythms of grace? Have you ever thought about rhythms being related to God? I certainly hadn't before Unidiversity this year. Our theme this year was the Rhythms of grace. The Rhythms of grace are the ways that God is working periodically in our world. Like a rhythm has a constant beat, God works in our world to a constant beat. If you tune in to the Rhythms of grace just right, you can feel it beating in you too. I learned about the Rhythms of grace through many different aspects of the camp. Not only through the enriching worship services and meaningful bible studies, but also through the people I met. I'm a person that loves making new friends at camp, I think it's so nice to have friends from all over whom you can stay in contact with and look forward to seeing at camp each year. I always try to be really outgoing and friendly to the people I meet, in the hopes that I can make some new friends. At Unidiversity, everyone there is the same way. Everyone you meet is so kind and outgoing. The atmosphere is so welcoming, it feels like a second home as soon as you step off the bus. So it's very easy to make lots of new friends in just one short week. I also particularly enjoyed one of the seminars I chose to take this year. Every year you choose two seminars and one elective, the first two days you have one seminar, the last two days you have the other seminar, and you have your elective each day. One of the seminars I chose to take was called Praying in Color. You can probably infer from the name of the seminar what the seminar was about. We would walk in, and have a few minutes to chat with our friends before the seminar began. The first day of the seminar, we had a quick conversation before beginning our prayer on how we all pray. We found that we all had different names we called God or Jesus by. We found that we all prayed for different things on a regular basis, meaning some people would be praying for guidance as they chose a college, some would pray for a family member or a friend, some would even just pray for our whole world. After our discussion, Woody, the man leading the seminar, gave us all a piece of paper and some colored pencils. He told us to put our verbal prayers into color on the paper, drawing symbols to represent the prayers or just writing them out. There wasn't a specific way we had to do it, there were no guidelines to tell us how to do it. We just sat in silence, and colored away. The time flew by, and the seminar was always over all too soon. It was such a meaningful experience, and I will definitely continue to pray on

paper. I strongly encourage all of you to try it as well. Just find a quiet moment in your day, sit down with some paper and whatever art supplies you want to pray with, and let yourself freely open up and pray. If you are like me, and find it hard to keep your mind from wandering during the prayer in the Sunday service, or while praying on your own, I think you will find that when you are drawing out your prayers, it is much easier to stay focused and engaged. But we didn't spend the whole week praying and in worship, there were many other activities throughout the week. One of my favorite activities at Unidiversity was tubing. On Thursday of the week we spend at camp, there is a free afternoon. You leave campus with your church to go do an activity of your group's choosing. It is tradition that our youth group spends the free afternoon river tubing. If you have never been river tubing, I definitely recommend it. It is so much fun and it's also a great bonding experience. We also had recreation each night after worship, at Unidiversity, recreation is called Unite. Every night there is a different bunch of activities set up at Unite. For example, one night there were lots of inflatables set up and we got to freely roam around and jump on the different inflatables. Unite was such a great time to hang out with and get closer with friends from other churches. There was one girl in my bible study that I had never even gotten a chance to meet before one Unite, where we did a scavenger hunt with our bible studies, and to this day we are still in contact. Unidiversity is such an incredible experience in so many ways. I think that both years that I attended Unidiversity I grew not only in my faith, but as a person as well. Being surrounded by so many amazing people for a whole week helped me to see the world in new ways, and to feel connected with God in new ways. Chester Phelps likes to call places that we feel very connected with God "thin places", and I know that Unidiversity is a very thin place for me. Even after my first year of attending Unidiversity, I knew that there would always be a special place in my heart for it. I will never forget any of the memories, or friendships that have been made in the two short weeks I spent there. Rocky Top will always be, home sweet home to me.