

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Second Chances

Making Them Worthwhile

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

Anthony Stokes, 17, was killed in a car crash last month, his stolen car slamming into a pole in Roswell, Ga., while he tried to escape police. It was a tragedy, but the incident was more tragic given that two years before Stokes was the controversial recipient of a new heart.

Stokes was 15 when he received his heart transplant—an operation that almost didn't happen. Doctors said he had a history of noncompliance, which means they doubted he'd be reliable enough to take his medicine or go to follow-up appointments.

Stokes' family said the boy was being docked for his low grades and juvenile detention record. "The doctor made the decision that he wasn't a good candidate because of that," Mark Bell, a family spokesman said to CNN at the time of the 2013 operation. "I guess he didn't think Anthony was going to be a productive citizen." It was estimated that Stokes had, at most, six months to live.

Stokes' plight received a great deal of media attention, and doctors relented. A couple of months after the operation, the 15-year-old told Georgia's Channel 2 Action News that he forgave the doctors' initial decision, "Because God, he like, said forgive." He was grateful and believed he deserved the opportunity to make good on his young life. "A second chance," he called it. "Get a second chance and do, do things I want to do."

By 2015, Stokes was getting in trouble with the law. The last picture he posted on Facebook was of himself pointing a gun.

On March 30, Stokes kicked in the door of an elderly woman's house and shot at her. When she ran away and called police, the teen fled the house, carjacked a black Honda Accord and raced away, police in quick pursuit. He lost control of the car, clipped another vehicle, ran into a pedestrian and crashed into the pole. Police said he died shortly after he was cut free of the vehicle. Everyone else involved survived and is doing fine.

Talk About It:

Do you think the doctors were right to give Stokes a new heart? Do you think his previous record—his bad grades and history—should've been a factor in deciding whether he was a good candidate for a heart transplant? Should it matter how productive someone might be in determining whether they should receive a life-saving operation?

The truth is, all of us are similar to Anthony Stokes. The Bible says we're all sinners, and if not for Jesus, we'd all be destined for spiritual death. We've all been given second chances. We've all been offered new life, if we choose to take it. It's a gift; no one *makes* us use our lives wisely. Although, it's better when we do.

Do you believe God has forgiven you and offered you a second chance? How are you using that chance? Do you think your life has been pleasing to God? Have you disappointed Him? Some of both?

Many of us have been told about God's grace and are saved if we trust in Christ. However, it's easy to forget what that really means. If we were shown grace as Anthony Stokes was—if we could see we truly, undeniably were given a second chance—would that change our behavior? How we treat other people? The way we feel about ourselves? How we use our time?

What the Bible Says:

“Then Peter came up and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven’” (Matt. 18:21-22).

“But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:21-23).

Paul Asay has written for *Time*, *The Washington Post* and *Christianity Today*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and has published several books, including his newest, *Burning Bush 2.0* (Abingdon), released April 2015. He lives in Colorado Springs. Check out his entertainment blog at Patheos.com/blogs/WatchingGod or follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.