

Are You A Champion?

Pastor Eric Johns

Anyone who is willing can be a champion for God. Do you believe that? Is it possible that it is really true? Yes.

A champion is a rare breed. They trust God while others ask for answers. They step forward while everyone else prays for volunteers. They see beyond the dangers, the risks, the obstacles, and the hardships – and they just do it!

How do I know that anyone can be a champion? Nehemiah, the builder of Jerusalem's broken walls, was a champion.

We do not know anything about the history or family of Nehemiah. The only thing the Book of Nehemiah reveals about his family is found in Nehemiah 1:1. It tells us that Nehemiah was the son of Hachaliah. We don't know anything about Hachaliah.

Nehemiah was probably from the tribe of Judah. But we are not even sure about that.

We can be almost certain that if there were any great men or champions in Nehemiah's genealogy, we would know it. The Scripture has a way of emphasizing significant details like great things people did.

Nehemiah came from an ordinary family. He had no special talents. He was a servant. Yet God called him to an incredible task!

Why did God choose Nehemiah? I believe the answer was that Nehemiah was an ordinary man with extraordinary character.

To be a champion, or a person who God can use mightily, it doesn't take fame, intellect, magnetism, the ability to communicate, human excellence, or political connections. To be a champion it takes character. Nehemiah succeeded because he was a man of character.

The Biblical account of Nehemiah's life does not reveal any kind of blemish on his character. He had integrity, faithfulness, patriotism, diligence, humility, and many other virtues. He was a man who took initiative. He learned the language of his captors and took advantage of every opportunity that came his way. Nehemiah's zeal for the Lord set a standard for everyone in Judah. This is interesting because he was not a Levite. He was not someone who was "in the ministry". He was an ordinary man.

Nehemiah's ancestors were forced from their homeland when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in 586 B.C. The armies defiled

the Temple, ransacked Jerusalem, destroyed the walls surrounding the city, burned the gates, and marched the people off to captivity in Babylon. The walls and gates lay in ruins for 100 years – a symbol of the broken Jewish nation.

The Persians defeated the Babylonians in 539. Cyrus ascended to the throne and issued a decree that the Jews could return home. About 42,000 Jews returned home. Although they faced opposition and discouragement they managed to rebuild the Temple. In 458 B.C. the second wave of Jews returned to Jerusalem. However, the walls and the gates of the city still lied in ruins.

Nehemiah was one who did not return. Generations of Nehemiah's family had never been to their homeland. They lived in the Persian Empire and worked as servants. Nehemiah had never seen Jerusalem before.

**If you will give your life to a cause
greater than yourself
it will awaken the champion within you!**

The Book of Nehemiah begins nearly one hundred years after the first Jews had returned to their homeland.

Nehemiah was in the royal palace serving as a cupbearer to the king. It was then that he received the terrible news. Hanani came from Jerusalem and told Nehemiah that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates were burned with fire. The news about the broken walls awakened the champion within Nehemiah.

If you will give your life to a cause greater than yourself it will awaken the champion within you! However that cause must involve rebuilding the lives of broken people.

Nehemiah did not sit back and say, "Oh well, that is their problem. I have my own job to do. But I'll pray for you." That would not be the response of a champion! The news not only awakened the champion in him, it began an adventure that set the course of his nation's history until the time of Christ.

His desires changed. He no longer desired to live in the palace. He no longer desired to greet ambassadors of other nations and present gifts to the king. He was ready to lay it all on the line and serve the Lord and his people.

When you catch hold of a cause greater than you it will change your desires too. The problem with many people is they have no cause like this. The cause of rebuilding broken lives is all around them but they are too busy with their own lives to stop and look at it.

I see champions at the Buffalo Dream Center. Tomaine first came to the Buffalo Dream Center when he was nine-years-old. He recently returned from Bible College. He had the opportunity to share his testimony with a youth group. I had heard his testimony before, but this time it was different. Instead of telling his salvation story, he told about what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. Instead of focusing on the past, he spoke about his future. He said, "I discovered what I want to do with the rest of my life. I want to fight for other people. I want to fight for people who are broken and hurting and have no hope."

That is a champion. He discovered the broken lives of people that need to be rebuilt and his champion was awakened!

Are you a champion? Do you think Nehemiah realized he would be a champion? No. I don't think so. I don't think he thought he was special in any way. Most champions I know are that way. They are serving God and do not even realize the great person they truly are.

Nehemiah didn't see the enormous wall that had to be rebuilt. He saw a bigger God. He saw a God who was greater than all of the stones and mortar ever made.

He was like David. David did not see an unconquerable giant. He saw an uncircumcised Philistine. David did not see himself as better equipped than anyone else to kill the giant. He just could not understand why everyone else just stood by and watched Goliath challenge the armies of God.

God delights in using ordinary people. Nehemiah knew he wasn't the man with the qualifications. He never worked in construction, but God used him to build. He had never been a ruler, but God used him govern Israel. He had never been a pastor, but God used him to touch the heart of a nation and lift them to new spiritual heights they had not known for centuries.

It is amazing what God can do through one person. God can use anyone who will leave position, prestige, and status and consecrate their life entirely to rebuilding the lives of others.

Four Hundred Children Attend Camp Adventure



Pastors Eric and Michelle Johns were disappointed. Every summer the Buffalo Dream Center had held Camp Adventure. Last year the church held the summer camp at the Belle Center, a community center on the west side of Buffalo, in the heart of the poorest neighborhood in the city. For four days children were bused in from all over the city. More than three hundred children enjoyed swimming, crafts, and sports at the Belle Center. The highlight of each day was exciting chapel services under a big tent. Nester Hernandez, the director of the Belle Center, enjoyed Camp Adventure so much that he invited the Buffalo Dream Center to hold Camp Adventure again in August of 2009. He even went out and purchased a tent for the Belle Center. It was set up and ready to go!

There was only one problem. For the first time ever there were not enough volunteers to run camp. It looked like it was going to be impossible to run a camp for hundreds of inner city children.

Pastor Eric was walking into the Belle Center to break the news to Nester. He didn't want to do it, but it seemed like camp would not go on. Little did Pastor Eric know that Michelle, his wife, had

just received a phone call from a suburban local church. They organized a team of people and wanted to come to the inner city for one week to serve the Buffalo Dream Center.

As Pastor Eric entered the offices of the Belle Center, Michelle whispered in his ear, "Don't cancel camp. I just got a phone call. I will tell you later."

"I didn't know what Michelle was talking about," said Pastor Eric. "So I went ahead and planned Camp Adventure."

It was a step of faith. Even with the promise of assistance from local youth groups, there were still not enough volunteers to make Camp Adventure a possibility. A call for help went across the country by emails and text messages.

Congregations from the Buffalo area responded including Amherst Church of the Nazarene, Whitehaven Road Baptist, Kenmore Alliance, Amherst Alliance, and Faith Word Fellowship. Rob and Chris Ellis, children's pastors from



Tennessee, assembled a team of people from their church and drove to Buffalo in a terrible rain storm. They had just been in Buffalo a couple of weeks previous with another mission team! A teenage boy from New Hampshire got permission

from his mother and drove her car to Buffalo. Many people pulled together to make camp a reality for hundreds of children.

Camp Adventure ran Monday, August 10 through Thursday, August 13. Every morning began with buses picking up children in four locations around the city. Children living in the area surrounding the Belle Center were awakened each morning with clowns and excited people walking the streets of their neighborhood. When the buses pulled up and the children entered the gate of the Belle Center they were greeted with a crowd of volunteers cheering and giving them high fives.



All of the children first gathered under a tent in the yard behind the Belle Center. The energy and excitement of hundreds of children under the tent is unexplainable in words. Music and singing could be heard throughout the neighborhood. The Dream Team performed dramas and dances. Crazy games and special prizes kept the attention of every child. At the end of the hour, Pastor Michelle shared a powerful object lesson that demonstrated the truth of the Gospel to all of the children. Every day many children decided to give their lives to Jesus.

Camp counselors rotated through the various activities during the day with their children. The week was full of activities such as Wacky Water Games, Olympic Relay Races, the Great Scavenger Hunt, crafts, sports, and face painting. Of course there was also lunch which was provided by Erie County. Imagine hundreds of children waiting their turn for lunch every day in the gymnasium. Pastor Rob Ellis entertained the crowd with games and relay races while they waited for the different age groups to be called.

The theme of Camp Adventure this year was "Welcome to Hollywood Week". Every day also had a special theme. On Tuesday it was "Favorite Cartoon Character





Day”. Children came to camp dressed like their favorite cartoon characters. Wednesday was “Day at the Museum”. The final day of camp was “Academy Awards Day”. During the final gathering under the tent awards were given by counselors to different children who displayed extraordinary character. Some of the awards were funny. They were given to the child who talked the most or the one who was always wandering away from the group.

Throughout the week volunteers built relationships with the children. A fifteen-year-old counselor held the hand of one of the seven-year-old boys in his group. They made the final walk to the bus together at the end of camp on Thursday. The little boys looked up at his

counselor. With tears in his eyes he said, “I don’t want to go home.”

Camp Adventure was an escape for many children. It was an oasis of fun. It was a place where they could get away from the crime, violence, and abuse they face every day as a child in the city. Most importantly, Camp Adventure introduced hundreds of children to someone who will never leave them – Jesus Christ.



Joseph Project Mobile Food Pantry

The Joseph Project Mobile Food Pantry is the only mobile food pantry in Western New York. Food is transported to six neighborhoods every month and distributed to families in need.

This ministry relies on donations of non-perishable food items from businesses, churches, and individuals.

July

Total Number of Households Served
308

Total Number of Meals Provided
6,489

August

Total Number of Households Served
340

Total Number of Meals Provided
7,479

Adopt-A-Block Tackles the Poorest Neighborhood in Buffalo



Every Wednesday evening residents of the lower west side of Buffalo see people from the Buffalo Dream Center walking through their streets. It is an army of people. But this army is not armed with guns and bullets. Their weapons are rakes, garbage bags, and work gloves.

“Adopt-A-Block is reaching people with the love of Christ though serving them,” said Pastor Eric Johns. “I always tell people that Adopt-A-Block is two things: building relationships and serving. We are meeting the needs of people. Through that we are building relationships. Eventually we are able to pray with people and lead them into a relationship with Jesus.”

When volunteers knock on someone’s door, and the door is opened, the resident of the home can see people on their street cleaning, giving away candy, mowing lawns, and playing with children. There is always an offer to pray for any needs that person may have.

The strength of Adopt-A-Block is the consistency of the visitations. Every week the door of that person will be knocked on. A relationship will be built. The neighborhood gets used to seeing the people from the Buffalo Dream Center.

“We were picking up trash near a corner store,” said Tomaine Jordan, a block leader. “A lady came up to us and mentioned that she sees us cleaning up every week. She went in the store and told the owner that he should give us all a free pop. He did!”



There are many testimonies of people being healed and receiving employment as answers to prayers.

“We were talking with a lady at her house,” said Pastor Tom, youth pastor of the Buffalo Dream Center. “She told us about a drive-by shooting that took place. Her house was full of bullet holes! It was then that we realized that it was the house of a little boy who always comes to Kidz Club. His older brother

had to jump on top of him to save his life when the shooting took place.”

Adopt-A-Block is not always just cleaning the garbage off of a street. One week nearly five hundred hot dogs were cooked for the community. Another week volunteers gave away stuffed animals. All of this is being done in the poorest neighborhood in the entire city.

During the summer Adopt-A-Block also took place every Thursday in an east side neighborhood. Mark Roberson, the pastor of Faith Word Fellowship International Church, approached Pastor Eric and asked if the Buffalo Dream Center would help pioneer Adopt-A-Block and Kidz Club for his church. Every Thursday was dedicated to running Kidz Club and Adopt-A-Block in the neighborhood of Faith Word Fellowship.

Countless homes were visited. People were impacted by the servant attitudes of those who adopted blocks. Adopt-A-Block continues making an impact!



Kidz Club Reaches Hundreds of Children Each Week



Kidz Club took the Gospel to empty lots and street corners throughout the city of Buffalo. The Buffalo Dream Center has been reaching children this way for thirteen years.

streets inviting children to go with them to Kidz Club. Volunteers even help children cross streets, leading them by the hand to the program.

Once a crowd has been gathered, the fun really begins. Boys and girls are separated, sitting on tarps. Sometimes more than one hundred children gathered on the ground. In one west side Kidz Club location there were one hundred thirty five children and parents crowded on a small empty lot.



The program has crazy games that involve everything from water balloons to shaving cream. There are fun songs, free draws, and lots of candy. The climax of every Kidz Club program is the presentation of the Gospel with an opportunity for children to make personal decisions to live for Jesus.



Last summer two Kidz Club sites took place every week. This year the Buffalo Dream Center dramatically expanded and took on the task of running five Kidz Club sites! Four sites took place in Buffalo – one on the west side, two on the east side, and one in the Black Rock area of the city. The fifth site took place in Niagara Falls. More than four hundred children were reached with the love of Jesus every week through Kidz Club.



What is Kidz Club? Kidz Club is fun on a street corner. It begins with crafts, contests, face painting, bubble blowing, sports, and other fun activities. The portable sound system can be heard throughout the neighborhood announcing Kidz Club. Children and their parents are invited to have the time of their lives! Clowns run through the

This summer in Buffalo was filled with rainy days. However, Kidz Club was only canceled once due to the weather.

“My favorite Kidz Club this summer was on the west side,” said Pastor Michelle. “We had finished most of Kidz Club and then we saw the dark clouds begin to role in. I presented the Gospel and then asked the children to respond by lifting their hands. Many children raised their hands and wanted to pray. The rain began to come down. The children had their heads bowed. More than one hundred children were praying and receiving Jesus as their Savior. The rain came down harder and harder. Not one child moved! They all stayed sitting on the tarps, praying, and giving their lives to Jesus. It was incredible.”

Many children in the inner city discover a relationship with Jesus at Kidz Club. It is amazing what God does every summer on empty lots in broken neighborhoods. He invades the lives of people.



Missions Teams, Interns, and Volunteers Invade Buffalo

When most people think of going on a mission trip they imagine a far away place in Africa. Many churches and youth groups are realizing that there is a mission field in the inner cities of America. The Buffalo Dream Center hosts mission teams every summer. The teams experience many different aspects of inner city ministry including programs for children, teenagers, and senior citizens.

This summer churches and youth groups sent teams of people representing many different states including North Carolina, Tennessee, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York. Mission teams took part in Adopt-A-Block, fed the homeless, and distributed groceries. They cleaned the

homes of refugee families in collaboration with the Priscilla Project. Teams helped distribute more than six hundred Bibles, cooked hundreds of hot dogs, worked in soup kitchens, gave away free bottles of water at Random Acts of Kindness, and ran carnival games on street corners. The list goes on and on. God's love was made known to the city of Buffalo!

The Buffalo Dream Center also had the pleasure of hosting interns. Sara Berkemeier, a senior at Elim Bible College, near Rochester, New York, spent almost the entire summer working with Adopt-A-Block, the Magdalene Project, and youth discipleship. Amy Boucher traveled all the way from her hometown in Bristol, England. She spent three

weeks at the Dream Center. She worked at Kidz Club and was a counselor at Camp Adventure. She taught the Junior Dream Team a dance that they performed on a Sunday morning.

Volunteers from local churches also came to the Buffalo Dream Center to be a part of Camp Adventure and Adopt-A-Block. Both of these ministries would not have been successful if it had not been for people coming for a day to reach people in need. The Buffalo Dream Center appreciates those who set aside time to serve those who are often overlooked by others. Thank you!

What People Are Saying About Their Time at the Buffalo Dream Center

The following are testimonies of people who were members of mission teams this summer at the Buffalo Dream Center. Their quotes show how reaching out to people of the inner city made an impact on their lives.

"I felt like I really made an impact on some of the children just by being their friend and holding their hand."
Gabi

"Unlike service projects, good relationships can't be finished in a week. The other trips had a beginning and an end; this trip was just the beginning."
Hannah

"I grew in boldness, passion, and confidence for what God has called me to do."
Rachel

"God opened our hearts and eyes to what ministry really should be about instead of what it can be when you are in a church routine. Something about this church ignites a fire to go and not just sit."
Rob & Chris Ellis
Children's Pastors from Tennessee

"The biggest thing that really hit me hard on this trip was how self-centered and careless we are to what's going on outside of our comfort zone. The people from the Dream

Center were not like this. They were actually getting out in their community and doing something, which is really what all of us should be doing. I have a whole new mind set for doing ministry in the community."
Jessica

"I had my heart and compassion for people rekindled. I want things to change back home and people to get the heart that our group has!"
Rachel

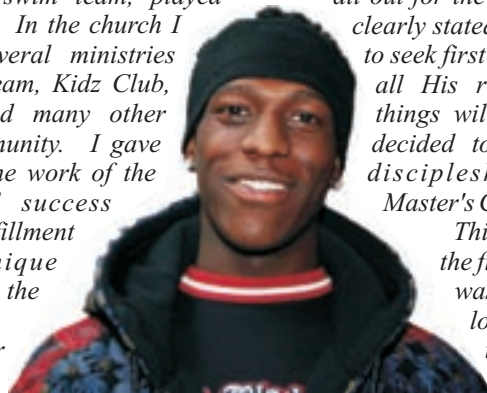
What Happens When A Child Grows Up?

The Buffalo Dream Center has been reaching out to children of the inner city for fifteen years. Many of those children attended Kidz Club and have become teenagers and young adults. The following is a testimony from Dominique Davis, who first came to the Buffalo Dream Center when he was seven-years-old. He was mentored as a part of the Dream Team. He is now nineteen and attending Master's Commission, an intense Bible training program, in Fort Myers, Florida.

"At the age of twelve I made the easiest decision I have ever had to make. I decided to commit my entire life to Jesus Christ. By the time I was thirteen I knew that God had a special calling on my life.

Throughout my high school years, my life was centered on sports and the church. In school I was on the swim team, played football, and ran track. In the church I was involved with several ministries including the Dream Team, Kidz Club, the worship team, and many other outreaches in the community. I gave hundreds of hours to the work of the Lord. I experienced success athletically and had fulfillment spiritually. This unique combination structured the rest of my life.

My senior year was coming to a close



and I had some big decisions ahead of me. Do I pursue and continue my athletic career or go all out for the Kingdom of God? It is clearly stated in the Bible that we are to seek first the Kingdom of God and all His righteous and all these things will be added unto us. I decided to enroll in a two-year discipleship program called Master's Commission.

This past year I completed the first half of the program. It was the best year of my life. I look forward to completing the second half of the program this year."

www.buffalodreamcenter.org

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✓ sponsor an orphan through Project Hope

✓ access children's ministry tools

AND MUCH MORE!

Young People Have Summer Jobs at the Buffalo Dream Center

Twenty-four teenagers and young adults received a paycheck throughout the summer for their work at the Buffalo Dream Center.

Every summer the city of Buffalo operates a program called Mayor's Summer Youth. The program connects with local businesses and charities, providing funds to pay part-time employees for the months of July and August. This summer was the Buffalo Dream Center's second year as a part of Mayor's Summer Youth.

Teenagers and young adults who were a part of the Buffalo Dream Center were chosen to be a part of the program. Each young person assisted with many ministries that take place at the Buffalo Dream Center. They became the work force behind all five Kidz Club sites, Adopt-A-Block, the Joseph Project Mobile Food Pantry, and Camp Adventure. They also assisted out-of-town mission teams with work projects.

Every Dream Team member was a part of the Mayor's Summer Youth Team.



Not only did Dream Team members assist with ministries and work projects, they also ran much of the Kidz Club programs and chapel services at Camp Adventure. The Dream Team also performed at homeless shelters and distributed school supplies to more than two hundred children.

The Mayor's Summer Youth program allowed young people at the Buffalo Dream Center to work all summer long at something they enjoyed doing. They literally touched hundreds of lives every week and received a paycheck for doing it!

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Dream Center Information
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Tuesdays at 7:00 PM
Kidz Club After School Program
Thursdays at 4:30 PM
Urban Impact Youth Service
Fridays at 7:00 PM

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