

My name is Jon Churan and I am currently a junior at Sun Prairie High school.

I am a kid who has grown up around the church. My first church family was in my old town Carol Stream. I went to a church called St. Andrews from the day I was born. I could recite the Lord's Prayer and Jesus Loves me by the time I was four. My parent's circle of friends were all connected to the church and were all much like my family having grade school kids. This made all of the children I hung out with connected to the church as well. I was surrounded by religion at a very early age.

My family moved to Sun Prairie and discovered the congregation here. Once again, my parents created many friends in the church and I was always around them. I became more involved with the church here and I was always willing to help whenever I could.

Once my family and I were settled down my mother got a job at the United Methodist Conference Center down the street. I was introduced to so many church things and people. Now a days my mom works for Bishop Linda Lee and I have met even more people within the United Methodist Church.

What I am trying to get at is that, being that I had all this background and being around all these Godly people I felt as though I should automatically have this connection with God, but I did not. People would say that had these conversations with God and I would go home and talk out loud staring up to the sky. I would pray and not get an automatic return that all these other people seemed to be getting. It was kind of like my relationship with basketball. I know

all of the mechanics, but when I get the ball in my hands not too many points are going on the board.

So I had to figure out God on my own. One of the major ways I did this was a few years ago when I went to Youth 2003. This was the global youth gathering of United Methodist that took place in Tennessee. Our church group was at giant worship service inside the University of Tennessee's Basketball arena. Everyone in the place was singing the song "Waves of Mercy." I felt this presence of something, but I did not know what. Later I realized that it was one of my first encounters with God. Ever since that, whenever I am in a large worship at a place like that or convo and we sing, I get the same sort of feeling that someone is there.

The other thing that assured my faith was this book that I read last year. It was not the whole book but four pages that brought the plot to its climactic end. The book was *Angels & Demons* written by Dan Brown. This highly controversial author somehow made me realize how awesome God is. I read this section that I am going to read to you and it all jumped out at me. This segment of the story compares science and religion after science has overtaken the religious world.

"The complexities of the universe have been shredded into mathematical equations. Even our self worth as human beings has been destroyed. Science proclaims that Planet Earth and its inhabitants are a meaningless speck in the grand scheme. A Cosmic Accident. ... It shatters God's world into smaller and smaller pieces in

quest of meaning and all it finds is more questions ... Religion cannot keep up. Scientific growth is exponential. ... Now we measure scientific progress in weeks. We are spinning ourselves out of control. ... Your world moves so fast that if you stop even for an instant to consider implications of your actions, someone more efficient will whip past you in a blur. So you move on. ... And all the while, you proclaim the church is ignorant. But who is more ignorant? The man who cannot define lightning, or the man who does not respect its awesome power? ... You proclaim that even the slightest change in the force of gravity or the weight of an atom would have rendered our universe a lifeless mist rather than our magnificent sea of heavenly bodies, and yet you fail to see God's hand in this? Is it really so much easier to believe that we simply chose the right card from a deck of billions? Have we become so spiritually bankrupt that we would rather believe in mathematical impossibility than in a power greater than us? ... Whether or not you believe in God, you must believe this. When we as a species abandon our trust in the power greater than us, we abandon our sense of accountability. Faith, all faiths are admonitions that there is something we cannot understand, something to which we are accountable. ... Religion is flawed only because man is flawed."

I read this and thought wow. God is really amazing and to think that I ever doubt it.

Those are the two biggest things that have affected my faith journey and brought to where I am today. I am sure that there is much more to come.