

By Jordan Gaither

A 6-foot-three, 17-year-old young man, who looked 20 had a muscular build and must have weighed 180 pounds sat within a few feet of me in a juvenile courtroom.

I soon learned that he had pulverized an innocent bystander as they were watching a school fight. He hurt his victim so badly that the teenager has brain damage and lost mobility on his left side. If that wasn't bad enough, this same 17-year-old ran away after injuring the other kid, knocking a pregnant girl down. The young man showed little remorse and refused to apologize to the people he hurt.

This is a scene from a day I spent with three other Y-Press members at Juvenile Court. My dad, Geoffrey Gaither, is a magistrate in the court, which means he decides cases and gives out sentences to kids and teenagers who have broken the law. He got permission for Y-Press to be in the courtrooms which are usually closed to the public.

Throughout the day, I observed several courts cases of struggling teenagers. They made me wonder if they were ever taught moral boundaries that I was taught as a child. For example, I remember being disruptive in class and disrespectful to my teacher. My parents immediately talked to me about the situation and later spanked me for it. They taught me that it was wrong to disrupt the learning of others, and especially unacceptable to disrespect my teacher.

But even after being disciplined by them, I still knew my parents loved me. I believe that without love a child is nothing. In order for confidence to be instilled in a child, he or she must feel loved and cared for.

The kids we saw in the courtroom did not seem to have this unconditional love or guidance, especially the boy who had inflicted lasting damage on two lives. I knew in an instant that this defendant had a troubled life because his parents were not with him in the courtroom. All he had was his public defender, who claimed that the young man blacks out when he gets angry. I learned that this teen-age boy didn't even live with his mom or dad, but with a female relative.

Good parents show support for their children, no matter what. They also discipline their children when they do wrong.

If this young man had a loving family, I'm convinced that he would not be in the predicament he is in now. With the help of a supportive family, everyday obstacles are easier to overcome.

But without a supportive environment, life is hard. In order to develop a conscience, kids need to learn the difference between right and wrong from loving adults. No teenagers should have to fend for themselves or make life-changing decisions on their own. After spending a day in juvenile, I can appreciate the lessons my parents taught me.

For Y-Press I'm Jordan Gaither