

Joe & Annie Shea  
[joe@AGenerationInNeed.com](mailto:joe@AGenerationInNeed.com)  
 508-873-2838

# A GENERATION IN NEED!

[www.agenerationinneed.com](http://www.agenerationinneed.com)  
[joe@agenerationinneed.com](mailto:joe@agenerationinneed.com)

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## Graduation Shattered!

While May is still a ways off, lately, my mind has been drawn to commencement time, a time that is always bitter sweet to me. Names are called and students dressed in graduation robes, proudly walk across the platform to receive their degree. It's a day of accomplishment, celebration, joy and... for me, mixed emotions.

## Pride:

As I watch some students walking the walk, there is a sense of joy and pride welling up within me that I can't fully describe, because I've been there, as they faced struggles, made decisions, sorted out life's problems, and came to know and learn more than just academics, they also came to know my God. They'll soon enter into business, technology, education, politics, health services, medical and teaching professions with a resolve to follow Christ, and see His kingdom come! They will be serving in local churches in roles of leadership, worship, and teaching, eventually, even raising their own families in those churches. And I feel so privileged to be part of this ministry that brings the light of the gospel to campus. This coming May I will experience that same pride for Stacey, who while I am writing this letter, is likely studying for her last final exam, and will in a few days have all the required credits to graduate. As a freshmen, Stacey struggled with many things most parents hope their children never experience. But then she began to hang out with students in Campus Ambassadors and she saw something in

our lives that she wanted. Soon after, the "Passion of the Christ" film was released and my home church rented out a theater for a private showing. I was asked to give an evangelistic message when the movie was over and they reserved one hundred tickets for me to invite students to come. We found a student for every ticket and one of those



tickets went to Stacey. She sat toward the front, and watched with a stunning realization of what this Jesus we were following had done, and for the first time understood... that He did it for her too! As I addressed the crowded theater and brought closure to an almost numb audience, Stacey hung on every word, and when I asked for people ready to make a commitment, to raise their hand, Stacey's shot up first, tears running down her face, she came forward to pray, and soon after I baptized her. The following day she felt God leading her to become a staff intern, and she followed that call. While on staff she helped a number of single moms on campus by watching their children and serving them, one mom became a daughter of Christ, and Stacey was there in the waters of baptism again, this time standing beside me leading us

in prayer. She also helped some other students, who were devastated over a friend's suicide, put some of the pieces back together, causing another student to rekindle her faith. Continuously, she would not let go of friends who needed a friend, and even more needed Jesus.

## Sorrow:

(back to graduation thoughts)

And then there's the sorrow I feel for each name called that I don't recognize, for each student I've never connected with, and have no idea where they are spiritually... But that sorrow is a paper cut, compared to the heartache I feel seeing a student whom I have shared the gospel with, and know their struggles make their way across the platform to receive their diploma without a saviour, and I cry inside at the finality of graduation. I know God is sovereign, and I am not the only one God can use to reach them, but I still cry inside wishing I had more time and opportunity. This was the case with Jill, a student that from our first meeting, I saw a beautiful diamond in the rough. I saw someone searching for life but looking in all the places that were only causing more pain, hurt and regret. Stacey convinced her to come on one of our retreats called "infusion", and we had more time to talk throughout the week. Then one of the worst things that could happen happened. One of the students on the retreat from another state began acting inappropriately toward her, and would not stop, I went into Dad mode, and had him put on a bus and sent home. Jill was relieved and perhaps for the first time experienced a group of people that saw her as worth protecting,

but she was still not ready to accept what Jesus was offering. The following year she came on the retreat again and with tears we talked, I explained the gospel to her, but again it was not the right time and we patiently waited for other opportunities. And then... she was one of the names called out at graduation walking across the platform and she was gone, once again coming up against the finality of graduation and I cried inside...

**Joy:**

But Stacey would not give up on Jill, they remained friends. While Jill and I maintained communication over facebook and email, it was Stacey that really held on. Jill began to read the Bible, and in a short time read it cover to cover. Our summer retreat was coming up again and I sent Jill a message asking her if she would like to come, and told her I was praying for her. This was her reply, *"Awww thanks Joe!!! I cannot come this year because work wont let me take anymore days off!... I wish I could attend, I was planning on being baptized this year!!!!"* I replied back, *"Jill that is great news. We certainly will miss you at infusion. As for being baptized if you would like, we could talk about setting a weekend for all of us to go camping and all the people from CA could come. How does the saying go.... If Jill cannot come to infusion, then infusion will come to Jill... Anyway that is up to you, I continue to pray that God will continue to reveal himself to you, and that you are able to rest in Him."* Jill was thrilled with the idea, but we were not able to find a weekend that would work for everyone, so I suggested she come on our fall retreat in PA and she said yes! She came up to Worcester over the summer to visit Stacey. The three of us met for a few hours to talk, so I could make sure she understood what baptism was and that she had accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour. After we talked and I answered

some of her questions, I was convinced that Jill had encountered Christ and now possessed a saving faith! When she was getting ready to leave she reached in her purse and slid a card across the picnic table to me, I opened it to find a beautiful thank you card with a hand written poem, that read-

You helped me understand  
 What I did not know was there to learn.  
 You helped me see you're born with God's love,  
 It's not something you earn.  
 You pushed me to do better,  
 When I did nothing but push you away.  
 I was lost, thought you'd give up on me,  
 but you were there to stay.  
 Your eyes forgave me,  
 before I knew what I had done wrong  
 I had no idea  
 that you would stick by me this long  
 I realized that God never abandoned me,  
 he also persisted the way you did.  
 And now its in my soul,  
 can never be pushed away, will never be rid.  
 Thank you for having patience and persistence  
 You've changed my life.

And so, at the end of October, on a beautiful sun drenched day, with friends crowding around the shore. The finality of graduation was forever shattered as Jill shared her testimony before everyone and Stacey and I once again entered the water holding Jill's hand to publicly proclaim Christ's death, resurrection and saving power that even graduation and a four year time frame could not hold back!

Thank you for your prayers and support that enables us to be there!

==== JOE ====

**Annie's Place:**

*Christmas is here and there is so much to be thankful for! Joe's surgery went well but he is still experiencing some pain in his knee. He has also been going through a Crohn's flare-up, but it seems to be coming back under control. Joe has also started writing a book (in his spare time)!*

*I still work at the bookstore on campus always meeting new students. Our sons are all doing so well: Jeremiah hopes to transfer to Worc State in January. He has decided to work with Joe as an intern! He really is growing in his relationship with God. Joey is at a crucial point in his schooling being a junior in high school, he is trying to decide what he would like to do concerning college. He is very funny and enjoys playing the guitar. David is very compassionate and caring, he was a big help caring for Joe while he recovered from his surgery. He is also getting good at playing the guitar. Sam is learning to play the trumpet and will be in the holiday concert at his school this month, he is very excited about it. Aunt Gert is getting over a bad cold, but everyday she is more herself. She is such a blessing to the whole family.*

*Joe and I realize the economy has placed extra burdens on everyone, and we are so grateful for the support that many of our readers continue to provide. Our medical expenses this year have been high, along with the cost of ministry expenses. We are currently \$1,288/month short in committed support, causing us to rely heavily on one time gifts and end of year giving. If your not already supporting us would you consider supporting us on a committed level or even with a one time gift? Perhaps you know of someone who would be able to provide an end of year tax donation? It would be so appreciated. The address is at the bottom of the page or you can go to our website.*

*We wish all of you and your families a Blessed Merry Christmas and New Year. Please continue to pray: for the college students we are reaching, for Joe's health, and for the financial support we need to remain on campus!*

==== ANNIE ====