

Focusing on the Foundations of Christian Camping

Christian camping demands the investment of time, energy, and physical resources. Is it worth it? What benefits do participants—children and adults—receive from the experience?

Why are so many groups—churches, missions agencies, youth organizations, schools, colleges, social agencies—involved in Christian camping? Because it's where five significant values are realized.

1. genuine community is experienced;
 2. ministry to the whole person takes place;
 3. relationships are built—with God and with others;
 4. memories and major life commitments are made;
 5. tomorrow's leaders are developed today.
- These values drive the Christian camping movement as a vital instrument of change for individuals and groups.

1. Genuine Community

Separation from home removes the familiar physical and social supports that provide comfort and security. Campers are forced to transfer trust to others or depend on someone more secure and mature.

Because we live in a secularized culture, most campers have not experienced genuine Christian community. Camp contrasts with the familiar. Labels, expectations of others, mindless daily routines, influences of parents, teachers, peers, colleagues, media, and friends are all left behind in favor of a special temporary community with focused purpose: presenting Christ and nurturing those in the faith toward maturity and Christian leadership. It uses the entire camp

VALUES OF CHRISTIAN CAMPING

By Dr. George "Bud" Williams

community of people and environment to accomplish this purpose.

Physically separated from the powerful influences of the home (permanent) community, campers are immersed in a contrasting Christ-centered, loving community free to embrace the values and lifestyle of that community. A Christian camp can be a clear model demonstrating how Christians should live.

Camp is a place to try new things, meet new people, and have new adventures. The "newism"

works wonders in that it opens campers to change in many ways and, most significantly, spiritually. Freed from the negative and constraining power often existing in the permanent community, caught up with the expectation of trying new things, campers are excited about personal change and growth.

Jesus knew this when He called His disciples from their permanent communities where they were known as mere fishermen, tax collectors, carpenters, and so forth, to a temporary community experience where they would be more free to change. Jesus taught His disciples as He walked with them "in the way" and traveled beyond their homes. He withdrew from His hometown where He had little power to minister because of their long-held expectations of Him (see Luke 13:52-56).

One of the longest camps in recorded history was the Hebrews' 40-year trek through the wilderness. God used what was meant to be a temporary camp experience to free His chosen people from the physical and spiritual slavery of Egypt. The Jewish descendants have been monotheistic to this day.

Separation from home removes the familiar physical and social supports that provide comfort and security. Campers are forced to transfer trust to others or depend on someone more secure and mature. Some

THE VALUES OF CHRISTIAN CAMPING: IN THE UNITED STATES

Ask about the values of Christian camping, and you'll get a host of responses.

The following are just a sampling of responses received from campers, parents, pastors, and Christian camping leaders from across the United States:

Dr. Dick Turner, coordinator of a camp outdoor education program:

- Appreciation for God's creative work in nature.
- Unhurried time to contemplate the truth of God's Word.
- Relaxation and renewal in a pleasant and supportive environment.

Barb Anderson, parent of campers and third-generation camper:

- Christian community is lived.
- Campers learn independence, how to manage their lives away from home.
- A thankful spirit is fostered where the essentials of life are in different supply.

Lizzie Gosden, wilderness leader, United States and South Africa:

- Chance to move out of the comfort zone—to be stretched, to be challenged, and to develop a deeper trust in God.
- Solitude and community—a balance that reveals the value and necessity of both.
- Opportunity for action and reflection—learning how to balance the two and reflect on our lives to learn from experience.

Dr. David Klopfenstein, vice-president of ministry, World Impact, Inc., with responsibility for an extensive camping ministry for inner-city youth:

- Commitment to a biblical lifestyle.
- Respect for other minority cultures.
- The value of the learning process.

Sam Gray, former president of Christian Service Brigade, with 50 years' involvement in Christian camping:

- Environment and structure to learn and live out Christian values with an anchor in God's Word.

- Opportunity to learn about and enjoy God's created world, to understand how God's creation fits into His plan.
- Helps build a foundation for life in experiences, relationships, and memories on which to build.

Timber-lee Christian Center (East Troy, Wis.) staff:

- A wholesome, interactive learning environment away from daily hassles, struggles, and worldly influences for reflection, listening to God, refreshment, and much, much more.
- An experience that integrates real living and godly encouragement to be Christlike in an affirming Christ-centered community that lives the Gospel in day-to-day situations.
- Allows people to experience a non-status, accepting environment where they are not distinguished by profession, money, and so forth.

Hannah Gentry, high school student and multi-year camper:

- Deepening our relationship with God.
- Testing and strengthening our Christian walk and faith.
- Learning how to work together as a team to get something done.

Harry Agabedis, superintendent of schools:

- Establishment of devotions and prayer life.
- Setting, attempting, and achieving goals that might not have been accomplished elsewhere.
- Developing an appreciation for the environment and natural beauty of God's creation.

Rev. John Casey, pastor, Christian and Missionary Alliance Church:

- In God's creation, we see our problems against the backdrop of His might.
- Learning things about ourselves through the stress of wilderness experiences.
- Developing new, practical skills that we can use for a lifetime.

camps remove more of this familiarity by introducing wilderness travel, adventure activities, or diversity in social or ethnic grouping.

2. Whole-Person Ministry
Camp powerfully communicates spiritual truths and spurs spiritual growth among campers—in the midst of God's creation, participating in Bible studies, experiencing teachable moments, worship, relaxation, and reflection times . . .

While many institutions focus on a certain dimension of the person, camp is designed to minister to the whole person. A church ministers spiritually, a school educates mentally, the home and peers influence socially, and athletic programs develop physically. Jesus grew in all ways—in wisdom (mentally), stature (physically), favor with God (spiritually) and men (socially) (see Luke 2:52). When He entered our existence, Jesus experienced human development and grew in all dimensions.

Jesus is the Creator of the universe, and He pronounced it good. Through His incarnation, He confirmed the goodness of the physical world and life as it was created. Jesus traveled with His disciples and physically ate, slept, blessed little children, turned water into wine, boated on a lake, encouraged fishermen by showing them where to fish, cooked for His disciples, rode on a donkey, restored the sick to wellness . . . He gave many talks using nature to demonstrate eternal truths.

So also the physical elements of camp are "good." The Lord has given this world for us to enjoy (1 Cor. 10:26). He takes pleasure when we enjoy His creation and praise Him for it. His creation is a source of continuous study and investigation. We can never uncover all of its mysteries. It is here for us to behold and recognize the infinite wisdom behind each element He has created. God's creation reveals His existence and eternal power by which we will be judged if we do

not respond to this knowledge. Camp immerses us in His creation.

The activities at camp also provide many opportunities to teach spiritual truths. When we are engaged in games—in skills such as archery, swimming, canoeing, and crafts—we have the opportunity to learn how to treat others fairly, to exercise control over our bodies, to create, to play. And through such activities, while showing respect for the bodies God has created, we grow physically strong, skilled, and healthy.

Camp engages the mind. The stimulation of a new environment, unfamiliar people, different activities, changed schedule, all facilitate mental growth. Camp powerfully communicates spiritual truths and spurs spiritual growth among campers—in the midst of God's creation, participating in Bible studies, experiencing teachable moments, worship, relaxation, and reflection times . . .

3. Relationship Building

The influence for change is great at camp, where relationships are valued. Jesus is our model for ministry, and He disciplined His 12 by living and traveling with them in a relational ministry.

The activities of daily camp life teach social skills. Camp is foremost a highly relational experience. At camp, spiritual mentors are always present.

They are visual examples of how to live when tired, how to be kind when others are unkind, how to control anger, how to discipline with love, how to ask for forgiveness, how to grow spiritually, how to deal with temptation, and how to live in community. Among all of these relationships, Christ is held as the most significant relationship to cultivate, and the relationship that brings meaning and healing to all other relationships.

Youth campers often return home talking about their counselors and what they did with their new friends. Counselors are their heroes, models, friends. The 24-hour living relationship with campers allows

counselors in a typical week of camp to have more time to minister to campers than youth pastors have in a year, and as much quality time as parents have in six months. The bonding that occurs by living, playing, worshipping, struggling, and learning together internalizes values taught and translates experience into character formation. Whereas parents are seen as a generation removed, counselors are seen as contemporaries who understand their needs. Youth and adults aspire to be like those slightly older who model success to them. When these models take an interest in them and share their lives, their behaviors are emulated. Parents wonder at changes that occur in behavior and appearance of their children upon their return from camp, only to recognize those same features when they meet their kids' counselors. The influence for change is great at camp, where relationships are valued. Jesus is our model for ministry, and He disciplined His 12 by living and traveling with them in a relational ministry.

4. Memory Making

The product of heightened senses, total engagement, and readiness to learn—combined with spiritual truths attached to these memory-making experiences—equals life-shaping memories.

Temporariness makes camp a unique experience and a memory-making opportunity. Because camp is a contrast to everyday life, and because this

contrast causes the camper's senses to be heightened, time takes on new meaning. Campers live more in the psychological present. Events at camp become more engaging, alive, vivid; they are filled with energy and totally absorb campers. Because most camp experiences are beyond the traditional and familiar, they also provide moments that render campers ready for learning.

Struggling with new games, adventure activities, wilderness trips, difficult peers, wetness, cold, heat, darkness, disappointments, camp

THE VALUES OF CHRISTIAN CAMPING: AROUND THE WORLD

Christian camping is a global movement, through which God has chosen to extend His kingdom into every part of the world. Christian camps exist in more than 60 countries . . . Christian Camping International connects many countries through an alliance of organized national and regional associations.

Here international leaders address the key values of Christian camping:

Bob McKemey, director of Okutama Bible Camp in Japan, says camping is currently the greatest tool of the church for doing evangelism in the pagan culture of Japan.

Janet Hardie, director of Rocklands Camp in South Africa, says camping has been a major tool for reconciliation of racial tensions for the youth and adults of South Africa.

Dinho Pereira, veteran camping leader in Brazil, says Christian camps attract youth who are not permitted by their religious background to attend evangelical churches.

Bessy Maccuta, CCI/Latin America camping instructor in Honduras, sees camping as a special tool for the church to heal wounds inflicted by broken families and society.

Tim Long, president of CCI/New Zealand and director of Carey Park Camp, sees camping as a means of producing strong moral leaders for a rapidly decaying society.

Dr. Alexander Kharitonov, president of CCI/Russia, desires that camping help reclaim for Christ people who have lived under an atheistic philosophy for 80 years.

duties, and separation from home and friends, all add to the variety and intensity of these experiences. These teachable moments open doors of opportunity where spiritual truth can be presented.

Spiritual truth comes from many sources—modeling by counselors and other staff or campers; recall of past truths learned; songs heard; intentional reflection on the experience led by counselors or other staff; regular spiritual input at Bible studies, chapel, and so forth. A sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's prompting and a heart to see campers learn through each special experience are key to intentionally using these ideal moments to teach.

Jesus taught in this manner. He used special events and situations that prepared His disciples for learning—the hungry 5,000, the storm on Galilee, the demon-possessed man, those in need of healing, the barren fig tree, a vista of Jerusalem, the 10 lepers, the death of a friend, a beggar, and so forth. His messages usually flowed out of the life experiences and accompanying felt needs of His students, and then He carefully addressed deeper needs.

The product of heightened senses, total engagement, and readiness to learn—combined with spiritual truths attached to these memory-making experiences—equals life-shaping memories. God used this process with the Old Testament Hebrews. They never forgot the crossing of the Red Sea, the water from the rock, the military battles won and lost, and the spiritual truths presented on these and other occasions. Their memories were assisted through yearly feasts or ceremonies, tassels sewn in garments, stones of remembrance, and so forth.

Jesus used this process with His disciples. They never forgot the miraculous experiences He shared with them, nor the truths He attached to such experiences so often related through parables.

Camp is a distinct and intense experience that will forever stand out from other life experiences in one's memory. It offers the oppor-

tunity to attach spiritual truths to memory-making experiences. After they have long since returned home, when memories of camp return, campers also remember the spiritual truths and are moved to respond to those truths.

5. Leadership Development

Very few opportunities exist for young people to be given significant responsibility for others, especially responsibility to minister to others.

A camp counselor is a leader in the making. Camps are ideal nurturing environments for developing leaders for

church and society.

Where else are young people given the opportunity for leadership development? To build leadership skills, people must be given responsibility for others and be mentored in the process of ministering and leading. Very few opportunities exist for young people to be given significant responsibility for others, especially responsibility to minister to others. If structured properly, with focused training present, a camp can provide that ideal opportunity.

A camp cabin unit of 6-to-10 campers provides an ideal group through which the cabin leader/counselor can learn leadership skills. But the cabin leader/counselor must be given the opportunity to lead—to make decisions, and to succeed or fail in those decisions.

Cabin leaders/counselors need to be given as much responsibility as they can handle to stretch them and provide a chance for them to try out their leadership styles. They also need support when they fail, and continuous feedback from peers and mentors to learn from their mistakes.


Emerging leaders need to discover three proofs—proof of self, proof of learning, and proof of God. Camp can provide an ideal crucible to test one's capabilities and expose weaknesses, to sort out and prove what learnings are consistent with reality and actually work. It's a chance to discover God

in a deeper way, and to see His faithfulness to His promises realized in tough situations. Jesus' three-year "travel camp" experience with His disciples did just that.

A survey commissioned by CCI/USA noted that more than half the people in full-time Christian ministry today had made life-changing decisions at camp. Many not only gave their lives to Jesus Christ at camp, but they also learned their leadership or ministry skills. Is that investment worthwhile?

(If you're interested in learning more about serving at a Christian camp/conference, contact CCI and ask about *How to Get a Job in Christian Camping*, Focus Series 3; and *Five Good Reasons to Work a Summer at a Christian Camp*, Focus Series 14. For more information on the value of Christian camping, ask about *Camping and the Church*, Focus Series 13; and *Time Out for Renewal*, Focus Series 22.)



Camp is a powerful tool for ministry and leadership development because it closely follows a pattern of ministry used by our Lord and embraces these five closely held values consistent with His ministry. 

To Order

Five Values of Christian Camping (CCI/USA Focus Series 6); copyright © 1995, 2001 by CCI/USA. Focus Series monographs may not be reproduced without permission.

The nearly 30 titles in the Focus Series may be combined to give you the best possible price. CCI/USA member quantity discounts are as follows:

1-10 copies – current unit price
11-25 copies – 10 percent discount
26-99 copies – 20 percent discount
100 or more – 30 percent discount

Prices subject to change without notice. For more information, a current list of CCI/USA resources and prices, and/or non-member rates, please contact us:

P.O. Box 62189
Colorado Springs,
CO 80962-2189
Phone: (719) 260-9400
Fax: (719) 260-6398
E-mail: cciusa@cciusa.org
Web: www.cciusa.org

