

Focusing on the Foundations of Christian Camping

On an average weekday, Gary hops up at dawn, downs two cups of coffee, clips a beeper to his belt, and races off to a demanding job with a communications firm.

At noon, he slams a Big Mac and fries, then charges through several p.m. appointments. On the way home, he picks up his shirts from the cleaners and his son, Sean, from karate class.

Meanwhile, his wife, Lynn, is already home, retrieving phone messages and shoving leftovers into the microwave. After a rushed dinner, she scoots out to a parent-teacher conference, on the way dropping daughter Katie off for her flute lesson.

Gary heads to his computer, first to pay bills, then to draft an overdue business proposal that he e-mails to an associate halfway across the country. If he finishes early, he catches some of the late news and Letterman.

Somewhere about midnight, Gary unplugs Sean's Sega, arms the alarm system and shuts off the lights, and falls into bed. Six hours later, the whole scenario starts again.

What's wrong with this picture? Most people would say there's nothing wrong with it. Sounds pretty typical.

And therein lies the problem. We live in a such a hurried, harried world that overextension and enervation are the norm. Somebody needs to run into Gary's life—and maybe yours—and call time out!

Millions of people have found a Christian camp, conference center, or retreat center the ideal place for a change of pace. Unparalleled emotional, physical, and

TIME OUT FOR RENEWAL

Spending a week or weekend at a Christian camp, conference center, or retreat center can benefit your entire family.

by John Ashmen

spiritual revival can be realized. The testimonies of prominent Christian leaders printed on these pages affirm the value of such an experience. In fact, some of them made their most significant spiritual decisions in such settings.

Read the testimonies, then consider the impact that a week or weekend at a Christian camp, conference center, or retreat center might have on your child, your family, or your church or group.

Peruse the following timely reminders and consider also how you, as an adult, would benefit from a Christian camping encounter.

You Need Time Out for Relaxation

I recently called a friend in Denver to learn the results of his EKG. He said the doctor couldn't

find anything wrong with his heart and suggested his chest pains were related to stress. Not surprising in this day. In fact, some doctors estimate that up to 60 percent of all hospital patients are there because of stress-related problems.

Our society does not know how to relax. We take domestic problems to the office and bring work problems home. Even children are no strangers to stress. Pushed by parents or peers to perform beyond their years, and rushed into maturity by the educational system and exposure to mass media, many kids emerge from their teens totally frustrated and confused.

Spending a week or weekend at a Christian camp or conference does not immediately empty out years of bottled-up tension, but prolonged exposure to peace and quiet, in a Christ-centered atmosphere, can definitely mellow all that's inside.



Dr. Anthony "Tony" Evans

Author and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, Dallas, Texas. Tony is known for his direct, "no more excuses" challenges, in particular, to men.



Since our children were young, we have spent at least one week a year at a Christian camp. In these natural settings, the values we have sought to teach as a family have been reinforced in my children in an exciting, accountable, and fun-filled way.

My son works each summer and on weekends at Pine Cove Conference Center in Tyler, Texas. Recently, he came home and told me he was going to change the music he listens to because of the spiritual values he had gained at camp.

I have also seen God use Christian camps to transform lives and marriages. People are able to be confronted by God in a non-distracting atmosphere.

Michael W. Smith

Singer, songwriter, and Dove award-winning artist. Through his albums and live concerts, Michael especially speaks to the hearts of young America.



One of my favorite things to do in the summer is load up my family and head to camp. I've been going to Kanakuk-Kanakomo Kamps for years, and it has radically changed my life.

Camp, by its very nature, is a place apart from the everyday routines of our lives. It's a place to think, grow up, meet new friends, and discover more of who we really are. Through camps in which God is honored in all activities, I've seen thousands of kids radically touched by the Lord and their lives changed forever!

I've seen the excited faces of young kids at camp for the first time, and I've seen those returning for the tenth time, and in both, there is a bond that lasts a lifetime.

Joni Eareckson-Tada

Author and founder of JAF Ministries, a national outreach to the disabled. Joni hosts a syndicated radio program and is an advocate for persons with disabilities.



I so much appreciate the value of Christian camping. For one thing, I came to the Lord Jesus Christ at a Young Life camp. And shortly after that, a lot of discipleship went on in my life as a young teenager [at camp].

Christian camping is such a place of fellowship, such a marvelous opportunity for friendship. Where would we be without the Lord Jesus and the Christian friends we connect with in His body?

(Recorded at a CCI/USA national convention.)

I know some wonderful, not-so-far-off places—Christian camps and conferences—where you can sit back and watch the western sky turn from dusty rose to deep indigo. You can lay on the dock in the moonlight and listen to loons on the lake. You can inhale the freshness of a mid-morning rain in the meadow. It's difficult to experience such sensations and not meet Monday morning relaxed and renewed.

You Need Time Out for Reflection

Few of us wash dishes at the sink and ponder the world through the kitchen window. Instead, we throw the plates and silverware in the Whirlpool and rush to the next task. By end of day, rather than sit on the front porch in a rocking chair, we flip on the tube and "process." It's great to have modern conveniences, but it's a shame they keep us from giving our brains a break.

Where were you when you came up with that million-dollar idea? Or worked through that major issue in your life? You probably weren't in front of your computer terminal or at a meeting. More likely, you were walking through the woods or driving by yourself late at night. All of us need such time-outs for reflection.

At a Christian camp or conference, you'll be challenged from the Bible, God's Word. Walking back to your bungalow or drifting in a canoe the next day—without things to do, places to go, people to see—you'll have time to contemplate . . . and maybe make a choice that will change your life.

You Need Time Out for Physical Renewal

Look at yourself. When was the last time you ate a balanced meal? Worked your heart rate up to maximum? Got enough sleep? No wonder you feel fatigued!

Check into a Christian camp,

conference center, or retreat center for some professional pampering and the motivation to live well.

When somebody says "camp food," do you think back to hot dogs and beans and shepherd's pie? The fare you'll find these days, especially in a conference or retreat center, reflects the dietary concerns we all have. Believing that a Christian's body is the temple of God's Holy Spirit, these places specialize in healthy home-cooked meals . . . and, okay, maybe a special treat now and then (because you're worth it).

There are a myriad of recreation options at a Christian camp or conference. On the more casual side, there's no better place to take long walks (maybe hand-in-hand with your spouse or close friend). Swimming, biking, tennis, and traditional sports are always popular. And the daring can experience everything from rock climbing to parasailing. (Have you ever been on a ropes course?!) But if you'd rather, you can also sneak a nap and no one will tell.

There's a direct correlation between how you take care of yourself and how fit you feel. Consider a Christian camp, conference center, or retreat center for the physical renewal. The exercise alone will rejuvenate you.



You Need Time Out for Fun

Did you know there's a strong link between laughter and longevity?

Seriously! People with a good sense of humor are likely to live longer than those who are stern or sour. Sadly, the pursuit of success has stolen years of cheer from many men and women.

Fun is not just for the frivolous, nor is it reserved for the retired. It's for everyone who wants a balanced life. If you're not regularly enjoying an activity—a game, sport, hobby, art—that brings excitement, laughter, and a sense of fulfillment, you're probably not as healthy as you could be.

Christian camps, conference centers, and retreat centers are incredible outlets for fun. Find one where you can play often and play hard. Don't be a spectator in the game of life. If that's where you are, you might end up leaving before the final quarter.



You Need Time Out to Rediscover Your Family and Make New Friends

Chuck Swindoll, author, pastor, and president of Dallas Theological Seminary, has long been a supporter of Christian camping for the entire family. In an interview with CCI/USA, he spoke about the value of total family involvement.

"All the Swindolls have enjoyed and benefited from Christian camping for many, many years," he said. "In fact, I can't recall an unhappy or unrewarding experience that we've ever had."

He went on to talk about some of the positive things that happen when families get together in a camping environment:

- ♥ They relate eye-to-eye, sometimes for the first time in months, without the distraction of TV, radio, phone, and so forth.
- ♥ Families have time to think through some of their values and their priorities. And parents have an opportunity to reinforce what they teach in their homes.

♥ Christian camping provides a perfect opportunity to meet new friends and deepen friendships.

♥ Christian camping has a way of "clearing away the fog," the routine, of our walk with Jesus Christ. And it refreshes our time with Him.

"If home is a place where life makes up its mind," concluded Swindoll, "then Christian camping is a place where those things can be lived out day to day."

You Need Time Out to Hear God Speak

Scripture frequently tells of people who went off to the wilderness, away from the maddening crowd, to hear God's special message for their lives.

Moses got marching orders for the Israelites while camping out in the desert. David, on a hillside, learned the skills he needed to win and retain his job as king. The apostle Paul, after his conversion, had an extensive retreat in the wilderness to reflect on his past and on how he might turn all of that around for the cause of Christ.

When He really wanted their undivided attention, Jesus Himself took His disciples to the mountain as well as to many other places away from the rush of "suburban" Jerusalem life.

Picture the smoke rising from a crackling campfire on Galilee Beach. The stars are sparkling overhead. Thirteen close friends, having rowed across the whitecaps earlier in the evening, are savoring a fish dinner and soaking up the warmth from the flickering orange flames. The conversations are light and sprinkled with laughter.

In a momentary lull, the Master looks up with a smile and says, "I want to tell you something very important." All eyes are on Him as He continues . . . The Master still speaks today. He wants to tell you something very important. Take time out and come hear what He has to say. He doesn't speak any louder in the outdoors; it's just easier to hear Him.

Dawson McAllister

Host of the nationally syndicated radio talk show for teens, "Dawson McAllister Live." Dawson speaks to 100,000 kids each year through weekend conferences.



I grew up in a Christian home, but I received a real wake-up call at a Christian camp in Indiana when I was 16. That's when I made a firm commitment of my life to God and to be a leader for Him.

I'm a huge believer in camp ministry today. For my money, there's nothing like having five days to pull kids out of their environment to concentrate on Christ. Camp allows them to slow down and see who God really is. It also gives them enough time to develop a trust with their counselors and open up about deeper life issues.

Mike Holmgren

Head coach of the Seattle Seahawks, Mike and his wife, Kathy, are loyal supporters of Mission Springs, a CCI/USA member camp/conference, in Scotts Valley, California.



The foundation of Bible teachings that were laid through Christian camping at Mission Springs, before and after our marriage, were solid and prepared us well for our Christian walk. Each summer, as we rest from a busy school year and prepare for the "season," we come to Mission Springs for renewal.

We believe in the ministry of Christian camping so much that we've sent all four of our daughters to Frontier Ranch. Our two oldest daughters have worked on the staff. (Used with permission from Mission Springs.)

Bill Hybels

Author and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Ill. Willow Creek, the largest Protestant church in North America, is targeted toward reaching non-Christians.



I was shipped off to a two-week Bible camp when I was eight years old. I had a riot with the athletics and water sports. Twice a day we met to discuss spiritual matters. For the first time, I heard about salvation as a free gift if I chose to accept it. I couldn't wait to come back, and camp was always the highlight as I returned summer after summer.

Years later, I became a youth pastor in Park Ridge, Illinois, and began to love and work with 25 kids. I knew I had to get them out of suburbia if they were truly to follow Christ, so I started taking them on weekend retreats.

Today, Willow Creek sends a thousand kids annually to camp. It's a key part of our ministry, and has played a major role in the lives of our elders, board, and many families. (Recorded at a CCI/USA national convention.)

Dr. Joseph Aldrich

Former president of Multnomah School of the Bible, in Portland, Oregon. He is a prominent speaker on lifestyle evangelism.



I have spent eight full summers in camp and conference ministry. As far as I'm concerned, [it] is the most strategic way you can invest your dollars. I saw more lives changed—and research indicates that more happens in the life of a child in one week of camp than 52 Sundays in Sunday school.

(Recorded at Forest Home, in Forest Falls, Calif.)

Luis Palau

Beloved international evangelist. Luis has preached to more than 11 million people in 62 countries.



On the last night of camp, my counselor and I went outside and sat on a fallen tree. Using Romans 10:9-10, he explained the Gospel to me, and I opened my heart to Christ. I gave him a big hug and we ran back to the tent. I crawled under my blanket with my flashlight and wrote in my Bible, "On February 12, 1947, I received Jesus Christ as my Savior."

A Christian camp generally refers to a youth facility that capitalizes on the outdoor setting; many camps also offer comfortable, year-round accommodations for families and various adult groups.

A Christian conference center or retreat center is typically a facility for education and training that benefits from aesthetically pleasing surroundings and provides a variety of recreation and lodging options.

Most Christian camps, conference centers, and retreat centers offer programmed events, as well as rent their facilities.

The ministry of Christian camping also includes day camps, wilderness camps, trip camps, travel camps, work/mission camps, rental-only camps, program-only camps, and outdoor centers.

Every year, more than five-and-a-half million people participate in programs at CCI/USA

member camps/conferences, and every year tens of thousands come to faith in Jesus Christ through that experience.

Additionally, 107,000 churches in America are served by CCI/USA member camps and conferences.

Many CCI/USA members are ADA-approved and offer programs for the physically challenged. Others work with special populations, such as troubled youth and the economically disadvantaged.

For information on camps and conferences across the country, you may wish to contact CCI/USA and ask about our annual membership directory, available for purchase. Or, if you have access to the Internet, you'll find a wealth of additional information on Christian camping plus a list of CCI/USA's more than 1,000 camp and conference members on our web site at www.cciusa.org.



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