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MORE THAN FRESH AIR

CAMP IS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

BY DON LOUGH, JR. '87





It was my favorite time of the day in the Adirondacks. In the dusky light, I quietly perched on the still-warm rocks at the north end of Word of Life Island, mesmerized by waves lapping near my feet. I was on the verge of completing a wilderness camping program, and God was clearly tugging on my heart.

Camp challenges us to consider what is most important and what God wants to do in and through us.

Was it the fresh mountain air, the conversations with my counselor, or the morning Bible hours? I couldn't put my finger on it exactly, but it was a season of spiritual growth, unlike anything I had ever experienced before. I was ready to take my relationship with God to the next level.

Today, as I interact with a new generation of campers, I hear the same story again and again. There is something special about attending a Christian summer camp. It's a unique and even sacred place the Lord uses to open the hearts of campers of every age. What is it exactly about a summer camp that pushes us to grow?

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

I love welcoming campers on registration day. I will never forget greeting a high school student from New York City as he eagerly jumped off the bus. It had to be his first time out of the city, and his face was awestruck as he took in the beauty of the mountains and towering white pines. With a huge grin, he looked at me and declared, "This is the greatest day of my life!" When was the last time you said something

like that? Christian camps are much more than the scenery, s'mores, and swimming, but these are powerful tools that give us a fresh perspective and transport us to a place of greater openness to get to know God and His Word.

It concerns me that the typical American teen spends almost 7 ½ hours every day engaged with some form of electronic media, not including homework, according to an October 2019 article in *Newsweek*. The pandemic period of quarantines and lockdown has likely worsened this tendency. But thanks also to this pandemic period, I sense a strong desire for change.

Summer camp offers a needed break from our routines and the endless distraction at our fingertips. It allows space to consider life from a different dimension. Whether it's a stirring campfire service, a late-night cabin conversation, or paddling a canoe with a friend, camp challenges us to consider what is most important and what God wants to do in and through us.

DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS

We are more aware than ever that God designed us for relationship and community (Gen. 2:18). When it comes to relationships, our personal relationship with God is the highest priority. This is why our passion at Word of Life camps remains to see every camper take the "Next step with Jesus." As the Gospel is presented throughout the week, many take their first step in their spiritual journey by placing their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

For others, God uses camp as a catalyst to move them to a new level of relationship and dedication to Him. As I travel around the world, I regularly meet people who reference a specific location at summer camp, like a tree or dock, where God rocked their hearts.

Whether competing for cabin-of-the-week or sharing testimonies by the lake, camp fuels connectedness.

Camp fosters vibrant relationships with others, too. In fact, I met my wife, Darla (Cline) '89, on Word of Life Island, where she served as a camp nurse. Camps have a curious way of bringing us together, no matter our background or where we live and work. Whether competing for cabin-of-the-week or

sharing testimonies by the lake, camp fuels connectedness. It doesn't get any better than watching young people and entire families step forward at a campfire and commit to renewing their relationships with the Lord and each other.

GREATER HEIGHTS

OK, I admit it: I'm scared of heights. You will not find me rappelling down a cliff or scampering up one of our climbing towers. But as a young man, camp nudged me outside of my box and gave me the courage to try new activities. On a spiritual level, I see camp as a unique place that God uses to motivate campers of all ages to dream big and reach greater heights as followers of Jesus Christ.

For me, camp was much more than fresh air and crazy fun. No, it was hallowed ground where I began to get serious about my faith. It's the place where I began to boldly consider new ways I could serve the Lord with my life. Today, it is still that hallowed ground where God meets and moves me to new heights for Him.

As COVID lifts and we approach the summer months, I think we all need camp. No doubt, the fresh air will do us some good! But more importantly, God will use camp to spark a new and needed season of spiritual growth in your heart and mine. We look forward to serving you and seeing you soon. Or you may decide that God is calling you to a season of growth as a fellow servant. Visit us or volunteer at Word of Life camps! Learn more at camps.wol.org.



Don Lough, Jr. '87 is President and CEO of Word of Life Fellowship. He is also a member of the Cedarville University Board of Trustees.

In the spirit of Mark 6:31, consider drawing away with your family and your brothers and sisters in Christ to meet with the Lord at a camp or another place of rest this summer.

