

### 3 Things Every Church Camp Should Be



I am a big fan of camp! I grew up in youth groups going to summer camps, fall retreats, evangelism conferences—the works. Much of my spiritual growth as a teenager came from the “mountaintop” experiences I had at camp. As a college student, I worked at camps every summer and loved every minute of it.

Now I have the privilege of attending camp as a church staff member or an adult chaperone. The following are challenges to camp directors, camp counselors, pastors, youth ministers, etc. to make their camp experience reach its full potential. These are three things that every camp should be.

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#### 1. Equipping, not just entertaining.

Camp is always a ton of fun. Even the worst camp experiences I have had have been better than staying at home. But, as we all know, fun is not the goal for Christian camps (at least, not the main one).

Often, we set our sights too low when it comes to the success of our camp. We put as much effort as we can to make sure camp attendees have the time of their lives but often lack in the areas that could change their lives. Campers need time to goof off, relax, have some fun, and, if you have youth, go as crazy as possible. But if that is what they remember on the way home, we have fallen short of our goal.

Camp attendees, old and young, should leave camp having been given the opportunity to really meet with their Creator and ready to do His work in their communities. This means that camp planners must discipline themselves to make space for this even when it seems awkward in the schedule. Campers need more teaching, more group discussion, more time to serve, and more quiet time for prayer.

One camp I worked at instructed counselors to relate every activity (even the waterslide) to the gospel. That way, campers were constantly being reminded of why they were there. The waterslide was great! But it never became a distraction from what was important. In the same way, camp planners ought to look to equip their campers first, and then entertain them.

#### 2. Challenging, not just relaxing.

Everyone needs a getaway. Even Jesus took time away from everyday life. And Camp can be a great oasis from the real world. Even camps that are jam-packed with activities allow at least our minds to relax and think of something other than work, bills, school, etc.

Fall retreat was always my favorite event of the year when I was in youth and the retreats I take with my college students are always amazing. But I often find myself leaving these retreats not rejuvenated but longing for more relaxation. Part of this is a simple lack of sleep that comes with camp—even camps designed for rest. But another part is that I am coming back to the “real world” reluctantly with no new purpose other than getting back to the same old grind. But the best retreats, the best camps, are the ones that send us home ready to take the real world by storm for Jesus.

In the Bible, people who go out into the wilderness to “get away” almost always come back with a new challenge from God. Our camps must send us home rejuvenated, renewed, and ready to do God’s work in our communities and around the world. Which means exhortation must be part of every camp experience.

We must challenge our campers to take what they were equipped with at camp and use it in the real world.

### **3. Prayed over, not just stressed about.**

Whether you are a camp director or a youth minister, planning camp can be super stressful. So much so that when it finally happens, we sometimes just want it to be over and behind us. And that is completely understandable. There are so many things to worry about when it comes to camp. And a little stress is good if it motivates us to look at every detail and make sure everything is taken care of as it should be. But worrying is not a thing God often looks at positively.

As Paul says, “Don’t be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6). If we really believe that God is in control and has the ability to change lives, then what is there to worry about? Rather than worry, we should pray... and pray and pray.

Months before camp begins, pray. Thanking God for the opportunity to reach camp attendees with His love and His gospel, pray that God would indeed change lives. After all, even with all your planning, all your work, and all your worry, not much of any significance will happen if God doesn’t choose to move.

So I say again (because I cannot stress it enough), pray!

My prayer is that these three challenges are helpful to you in some way as you think about future camps that you attend or put on. Let’s keep camp awesome! Lord, use us to reach the world for Your glory.