

Down from the Mountaintop: Sustaining the church camp experience at home.

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Western District Conference
August, 2014**

Ahhh, the camp “after-glow.” There may be sand in the suitcase and bug-bites on the leg, but the glow your campers catch may be akin to what Moses experienced when he returned from the mountain top in Exodus 34, vs. 29. (And I am not talking about a sunburn). Moses had an experience with God! The summer Christian camp experience invites children and youth to also experience God, it is a faith formation laboratory.

What is so amazing about the camp experience? From dawn to dusk, campers are reminded that God is creator, that God is present and relational and that God is love. From morning praise to campfire embers, they sing songs about Jesus and are invited to embrace and own the Christian life. At camp, there is a saturation of intentional religious language, a pausing for prayer and day-long examples of a lived faith. At camp, the staff is energetic, positive and lovingly goofy. At camp, music can be both crazy and contemplative, there is often movement and lots of smiles.

It would serve us well as parents, grandparents, pastors, mentors of children and youth to **remember and replicate** that which happens so naturally at camp in our homes and congregations. There are a myriad of reasons why camp feels like a mountain top experience. But there are also reasons why the “after-camp glow” is hard to maintain. With no additional nurture, “this little light of mine” may become a stubby candle with a faulty wick.

Here are some “campy” ideas to keep the fire burning and to continue faith formation in the home and community:

Build Community:

- **Host a campfire in your back yard or around your grill. Toast marshmallows and ask your kids to lead you in "camp songs." Invite other family members and neighbors.**
- **Host a neighborhood talent or skit night. Serve popcorn!**
- **Take a risk and invite other families over for Bible Study or Prayer. Since it is intergenerational, it will be relaxed and even fun!**
- **Together, write a (real paper) letter to your kid's camp director, cooks, bible study leader or counselors. Express appreciation for the time they spent with your kids and fill them in on what is happening in your family today.**
- **Invite friends from camp (from other churches / towns) to a get-together. Support these friendships – they may be life-long!**

Simple Fun:

- **Cook a favorite meal from camp.**

- Have family announcements after a meal. (Crazy is optional).
- Sleep in a camper, tent or under the stars!
- Discover the wildlife in your yard or a nearby park. Look up the critters in a book (think library!) or go to the web to read about what they need to thrive.
- Have a backyard water fight!
- Go fishing!
- Find a river, lake or waterpark and play together!
- Ask your child to teach you a craft they made at camp.
- Ask your child to teach you some songs and actions they learned at camp.
- Turn off your home air conditioning and live like they do at camp!
- Wake them up with a crazy good mornin' song!
- Do a technology free day (no phone / internet / tv / computer / electronic games) – just like at camp!

Faith Builders:

- Sing a “camp” grace before your meal. The kids know the words! Have fun at your meals! Invite kids to plan a meal-time activity.
- Talk about the best thing that happened at camp and the worst thing that happened at camp.
- Ask your child about their life with God. Was their faith changed or challenged during camp? How did they experience God’s love in a new way? Was a significant decision made?
- Continue or begin to do daily or weekly family devotions together. Take turns with all members of the family leading, reading, praying. Use the scripture that was studied at camp.
- Ask only a few questions every day. Allow them to share experiences with you over time.
- Pray together as a family, thanking God for the experience of Christian camp, the friendships and the challenges.
- Share with your children your own Faith Story. Be honest about your questions and challenges.
- Attend a Family Camp together.
- Have a quiet time outdoors before bed, star-gazing, listening to nature sounds or a short walk.