

FOUR KEY CONCEPTS IN CAMPING

Dick Robey

Beyond a doubt, when Christian Camping is properly carried out, it can be one of the most dynamic forces for good in the world today. A well executed camp program is the great commission being carried out--making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching all things. Christianity in action in camping has proven the value of its impact for good upon youth.

The introductory paragraph above includes "when properly carried out" and "well executed" for good reason. Perhaps we need to emphasize that mere "camping" is not sufficient to justify the expenditure of our time and energy, but the right kind of camping experience is worth many times what we put into it.

Four Key Principles

There are at least four very good key concepts that should affect every phase of our camp planning and program -- these in addition to the fact that, of course, all must be centered around God, Christ and the Word. Here are the principles:

- (1) the degree of individual, personal involvement of the camper will determine the value of his experiences;
- (2) Learning tends to be intensified when a pleasant, enjoyable learning situation exists;
- (3) Variety or diversity will usually promote interest and favorable response;
- (4) The realness of God's presence can be seen and felt through contact with nature.

Don't pass over these principles lightly. Think carefully how they can affect each activity at camp.

(1). Each Camper Needs Personal Attention

Consideration of the need for individual, personal involvement will result in more small-group activities, fewer mass assemblies and games. Dormitory sleeping arrangements should, where possible, give way to cabin or tent groups or not more than 8-10 per unit. Classes should be small enough for individual attention. The whole program must be arranged so that each campers will have personal attention and guidance. The camper must not be permitted to get lost in the crowd. Don't allow a tight schedule to push a camper constantly. Let him have time to "soak up" some of the impressions for good.

(2) Have A Happy Learning Processes

A sound principle of education states, "***facts are learned most easily and are retained most permanently when the learner is happy in the learning process.***" This should constantly be kept in mind as camp plans are made and carried out. The often used expression "camper centered" means that the camper's needs, interests, likes and dislikes are taken into consideration. There is often a tendency for the administration to plan activities that adults want campers to participate in rather than those the campers would choose. The more responsibility young people can have in the planning and executing of the program, the more likely it will succeed with proper guidance. A harsh, militaristic atmosphere may seemingly keep problems to a minimum, but sadly missed will be the deep impressions that result when friendly give and take, confessing of faults one to another and a close feeling of brotherly love is the atmosphere at camp. This atmosphere makes various activities from Bible Class to sports an enjoyable and meaningful experience---and even keeps rules and regulations from chaffing too much.

(3). Let's Have No Monotony at Camp

Variety is one ingredient that will give camp vitality and zest. As much as practical, it is good to get away from home, school, and playground activities that are "old hat". Take advantage of the setting to come up with fresh, challenging activities. The campers may get all excited about a softball tournament, but the impact will not remain as will the memory of the midnight hike through the woods-with its unique smells and sounds and the stars overhead. Can the campers at your camp always predict from one hour to the next just where they will be and what will happen? It's a bad sign if they can, as monotony is almost sure to result. Vary your technique of lesson presentation. Change from one meeting place to another from time to time. Use some imagination to get variety into the program. One of the great values of camping is that it takes religion out of the sometimes artificial and formal "church" setting and demonstrates that Christianity is a way of life for all of life.

(4). The Handiwork of God

One of the tragedies of our "affluent" society is that people so seldom see the handiwork of God in its first stage. Water is from a faucet, not from a bubbling spring. Our chairs are factory made, not a tree stump or flat rock at the base of a tree. Most of our food we get from a can, not directly from "Mother Earth." As a result of our advanced culture we miss so much because we do not have the time or the inclination to listen to the voice of God or see His hand so obviously present in nature. A campsite should be "under-developed" enough that all of nature has not been scraped away or covered up. Hikes to still more primitive areas may prove to be invaluable. Preferably these should be in small groups and at a leisurely pace. Counselors might well "bone-up" on nature lore. It is intriguing and can yield some of life's most potent object lessons. Sowing and reaping, use of talents and other fundamental precepts virtually shout at us from the trees, rocks and streams-if we will stop long enough to listen and tune them in. The impact of a lesson from nature is usually a soft one, without much noise, but the impact is deep and lasting.

God is sure to be honored and faith in Him and His Son deepened in a camping situation where the staff realizes:

- (1) the need for personal attention for each of the campers,
- (2) that the learning situation should be enjoyable, if possible,
- (3) that variety will stimulate interest, and
- (4) that nature speaks an eloquent testimony of God's greatness and love.