

Editorial: One reason we need summer camp

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I loved summer camp. Specifically, I loved Royal Ambassador camp. Maybe not at the time, but looking back, I sure love the memories.

Everybody needs a good summer camp experience, but not just for the camp experience.

Royal Ambassador camp

I attended two different RA camps while growing up in New Mexico. One was at Inlow in the Manzano Mountains, just southeast of Albuquerque. The other was at Sivells, south of Cloudcroft in southern New Mexico. Sivells was my favorite.

Inlow was fine. They had cabins, a chow hall, a newly enclosed tabernacle, leather craft and riflery. The day hike was the best part. The Army-surplus canteen wearing a blister on my waist during that eight-hour hike was the worst part.

Sivells, however. Sivells had tents, real Army-surplus tents. And the tents were up on the mountainside. Sivells also had stone craft, the Klopfers, and “Indian tacos” and homemade cinnamon rolls.

The Klopfers ran Sivells. Paul Klopfer was (is) a wonder. He speaks fluent Spanish, Navajo and pretty good English, and quotes Karl Barth. His wife Sally and daughters Sheila and Lorene kept everyone laughing.

RA camp is where I shot a rifle and a bow and arrow for the first time. It’s where I learned how quickly and painlessly a sharp knife can cut you.

Sivells is where we were awoken each morning with reveille and the crack of the camp director's M1 Garand rifle.

Sivells is where I spent the night out in the wilderness for the first time. By wilderness, I mean we weren't even in one of those Army-surplus tents. We were a lot farther out than that. We were where we had to dig our own latrine and the fire pit where we cooked our own dinner.

Sivells is where I was sent down the mountain in the middle of the night with my ailing friend to his uncle's A-frame. I thought I would get to stay, too, but his uncle sent me right back up the mountain—just me and my flashlight to face the bears.

Youth and children's camp

Youth camp was different than RA camp. Youth camp was more posh. And there were girls.

We traveled by charter bus, spent a week on a college campus and were entertained by the Christian hit maker of the moment. I don't remember as many activities at youth camp as there were at RA camp. I also don't remember any of the Bible studies or what any of the speakers said. But then, the same goes for RA camp.

As a pastor, I took our church's children to summer camp as an adult sponsor. Our favorite was Next Level Kids Camp at Latham Springs Camp and Retreat Center south of Hillsboro.

There isn't much down time or quiet time between sunup and about 10 p.m. at Next Level Kids Camp. However, there is paintball, a giant swing, a zipline and a lake. We didn't have any of that at RA camp in New Mexico.

Next Level Kids Camp also had [Jesse Joyner](#) as the camp pastor. Joyner is a multi-talented performer specializing in juggling and is serious about

teaching kids the Bible. With the help of his mnemonic devices, we memorized several Bible verses during each camp.

There's a good chance your church's children or youth recently returned from camp or are about to go. There's also a good chance they got or will get sunburned, tired, bug bit and probably at least one injury. It's all part of a good camp experience.

But what makes summer camp a good experience takes more than a week away from home.

Breaking camp

We make the serious investment to send our kids to summer camp because camp is usually fun. We send them to a "church camp," in particular, in the hope they will give their lives to Jesus during camp or, if they've already done that, will get closer to Jesus during camp.

Camp may not be where most people start to follow Jesus, but enough people have given their lives to Jesus at camp that we've made camp part of our church year—Christmas, Disciple Now, Easter, VBS/camp.

Summer camp can be a mountaintop Transfiguration-type experience where we get rid of the distractions and forget about the worries of "the real world" enough to be more ready to see Jesus more clearly. The experience can lead us to make all kinds of promises to God. As good a reason for camp as that may be, the reason we need summer camp goes a step further.

We need summer camp, because eventually we have to come back down the mountain. We have to return to "the real world" and face the hard issues. Camp didn't tell me what to do about those hard issues, but it did give me a better idea of who and whose I am in the midst of them.

I belong to God, who made me, loves me and sent his Son to save me. Of all the things I learned at camp, that matters most.

We need summer camp because life in the real world is hard. Knowing who and whose we are matters supremely in the real world.

When the camp high wears off—usually within two weeks—and our promises to God are forgotten, somewhere down the road, when it matters, we'll likely remember one thing we learned at camp—who and whose we are. And it will make all the difference.

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