



CHARACTER BUILDING MINISTRIES
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EDIFY

The Newsletter of Character Building Ministries

relevant



or reverent

Bill Klees

I recently led some campers in West Virginia mountain biking at the beautiful New River Gorge. As we rode down I was given the opportunity to make a very practical illustration from the trail. We stopped at the upper portion of the gorge. Along one side of the trail was a ravine that, through erosion, was now bare and rocky. On the other side was a steep drop-off into the raging river. For a person who doesn't consider himself to be a biker, this was not the most comfortable place for me. But the illustration to the campers, I pray, was one they will not soon forget. The Christian life is just like that path. We are *in* the world, but we are not to be *of* the world.

Continued inside ...

This free Newsletter is sent to leaders and directors of Christian youth camps who are concerned about the spiritual growth and development of their staff.

SPRING 2005

Character Building Ministries is dedicated to the edification of Christian camp staff by equipping them in the Word of God.

In ministry this analogy also applies. One path that we should be constantly evaluating is our ministry's desire to *relate* to the youth we are serving with the need of not compromising the glory of the gospel message. The decision to add a new program to reach a new group of campers or to rejuvenate a declining outreach should never overlook this crucial area.

For in our need to be relevant we must never cease to be *reverent* to God and His Word. No matter how spiritual our motives may appear, what is of paramount importance is keeping Christ and His gospel central, clear and untainted by the anti-Christian messages of the world.

On one side of this path is the ravine of relevance that seeks to relate to the culture in such a way that any distinction in the ministry is lost—the truth is eroded away, and you are left barren. Christians are called to transform the culture, not to adopt it or become like it. Our ministries must remain distinctly Christian. If we are simply adapting the techniques for youth work from the world, we have underestimated the world's message, which is contrary to Christ. Just like slow erosion, it usually doesn't happen all at once.

It is never one storm that clears the side, but rather the constant storms that wash away the trees. It is never one program or one special event that erodes the core message, but is a process that, if left unchecked, can leave a well-intended ministry bare.

On the other side of the path is the drop-off of tradition. It declares that we shouldn't and we won't change anything. If

youth don't like our program, then they can go somewhere else. At the bottom of this is a raging river that sweeps away any worthwhile

ministry. Although the *message* of Christ can never change, the *methods* we use may. Youth and culture constantly change. The difficulty is determining which fad, program, or method doesn't compromise the reverence of the gospel in order to be relevant.

reverent



There are key questions that must be asked to keep us on the path of reverence. My desire is to inspire critical thinking and prayer within your ministry as you seek to be reverent to the gospel. These questions can be summarized into four key categories—identity, responsibility, authority, and conformity. Within your particular ministry you may add more, however these are key theological questions that must define the message you are communicating.

1. *Identity*—Who am I?

Our Christian message must seek to instill a Biblical worldview that contains a proper perspective on a camper's identity. We are all created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), but we are all fallen in sin (Romans 3:11-18). Therefore, we are not self-determining creatures. We are not good by nature. The worth and identity of every camper derives from being *created* by God, not from clothes or friends. The worth and identity of every camper who is a believer in Jesus Christ is also that of being *redeemed* by God. Apart from God, we have no worth. Self-esteem is really God-esteem. There is a big difference and the goals of our programs must be distinct and clear, lest we wobble from the path of Biblical identity.

2. *Responsibility*—What am I doing?

Our culture has almost lost all notion of responsibility. Whether it be in responsibility to others, responsibility for our actions (“it isn't my fault...”), or in determining our own value. Biblically speaking we are here to seek and to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31; Acts 17:26-27). Christians have a purpose—we are to be

Areas of camp ministry where you might be tempted to compromise the Christian message in an attempt to be relevant—camp songs, chapel services, games and events, promotional materials, chaplains, free time activities, & time-off policies. What questions can you ask your staff to help them evaluate these areas?

How to Lead a Group Discussion

The primary goal of an effective group discussion is to help participants apply God's Word in their own lives. In order for this to occur, they must understand God's Word, see how it relates to their own personal lives, and experience growth by receiving God's grace to change. The key to providing a context for growth to occur is asking good *questions*.

Good questions seek to draw people out and probe into what they truly believe, who they really are, and what is actually happening in their lives right now. Here are some types of questions that you should *avoid*:

- Yes or no questions (Do you think that evangelism is important?)
- Too many right or wrong factual questions (Who led the Israelites out of Egypt?)
- Vague questions (What did you think about last week's chaplain?)

Effective questions require more than superficial, safe responses, and often begin with why, what, or how:

- Why is thankfulness important in your current circumstances?
- What events in your life have been the most significant in shaping your understanding of God as Father?
- How have you specifically responded to the teaching we received this week on prayer?

The result of good questions is honesty, vulnerability, and humility—true Biblical fellowship.

Here are some other suggestions for leading a group discussion:

1. Maximize involvement—don't let a few people dominate the discussion.
2. Redirect tangents—keep the discussion focused and on track by redirecting irrelevant or contentious comments.
3. Affirm participation—you always get more of what you affirm.
4. Relax with silence—sometimes people need time to think.
5. Lead with humility—when asking tough questions, provide your answer first, sharing appropriate examples of personal failure.

like Christ (Romans 8:28-29). We have a responsibility to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:37-40). There is a God who provides objective truth and absolutes. When we are trying to reach campers, we must make sure that we don't slip down the road of tolerance and forsake these key truths.

3. *Authority*—Who am I listening to?

For many youth their authority comes from their peers and the media. Our culture has very few proper role models. The difficult challenge facing ministries today is to instill a notion of Biblical authority. This is never a popular topic, but youth need to know that they are under God's authority, their parents authority (Ephesians 6:1), and others who are over them (Hebrews 13:7). What does your authority structure convey? It is vital that we listen to the real needs of youth and are not so rigid that we fail to properly serve them.



4. *Conformity*— Who am I following?

It is natural for youth to be shaped by contemporary media. Take a look at a current teen magazine or a television show. Look at the latest fads and extreme sports. What message is being conveyed? We cannot allow unbiblical nonverbal statements to overpower the need for youth to conform themselves to Christ (Philippians 2:5) or to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2). We are to be like God (1 Peter 1:16). Are our actions and methods at camp following the world or following Christ?

Everything we do has a message that conveys identity, responsibility, authority, and conformity. It isn't just the words we say; it is also the look of our marketing tools, the clothes staff wear, and the goals we pursue. Each conveys a message. The challenge is to evaluate everything from the desire to be reverent to God and His truth. 

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ORDER YOUR COPY OF CBM'S 2005 DEVOTIONAL BOOK—*WONDERFUL COUNSELOR*.



Here's what fellow camp directors said about last summer's devotional book.

It helped remind us that this camp is God's and the stuff we do is all about Him. I watched staff who never read their Bibles, use this book to spark their quiet time.

~ Whispering Pines (CITRONELLE, AL)

Brought us together as one body.

~ Warner Camp (GRAND JUNCTION, MI)

It was nice to have a devotional that touched upon issues pertinent to those in summer ministry. Also entries were brief, yet still conveyed their message, which was great.

~ Camp Hebron (HALIFAX, PA)

It was always the right words at the right time to bless us.

~ Lake Beauty Bible Camp (LONG PRAIRIE, MN)

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