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Does Your Camp Reflect His Priorities?

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How can we create programs that effectively reach the complicated needs that today's youth face? How can we reach teens that have little desire to be out in God's creation away from cell phones, computers, and the internet? What is the goal of our camps anyhow? Jesus presents six priorities in His prayer in John seventeen that serve as an excellent guide for our priorities at camp.

When people are seeking a camp to send their child to or a retreat center for their church gathering, these are the characteristics of the staff that should be prominently seen. When they look at the program, these are the elements that should be driving the philosophy. When parents evaluate your ministry and staff, these are the marks that you should want them to see and notice.

1. Joy

The Christian, and hence any Christian ministry, is to be full of the joy of Jesus Christ (John 17:13). After all we are redeemed! We are a saved people. We are a people holy unto our Lord. This should drive us to be a people of joy. In a culture, obsessed with pleasure and happiness, one of the things you notice the most is a real lack of joy I'm not talking about happiness, but rather a deep-down-in-your-soul joy—a joy that permeates both the good and the bad circumstances. When Paul told the Philippians to rejoice, it was with a specific focus: "Rejoice in the Lord" (4:4). In the ministry if we allow issues and finances to sway too much influence, then it will lead to discouragement, depression, and burnout. I've known too many directors who allow the burdens and frustration of camp ministry to totally wipe out their Christian joy. But if our joy is constantly focused on Christ and what we have in Christ, then even the worst things pale in comparison to the all surpassing glory of being in Christ. Is joy seen in the eyes of your staff as they serve guest groups? Are they *happy* to be working at your camp? Do you create an environment conducive to producing joy or does your attitude create negativity, pessimism and frustration?

2. Holiness

The second quality Jesus prayed for was our holiness (John 17:14-19). Just as holiness is the essence of God's being, so too must it be the essence of our ministry. What that means in a nutshell is that our

ministries need to be *set apart* from this world. Our focus is different. We are to be above reproach when dealing with finances and laws. All that we have (staff, property, money) is from the Lord. It is His. As stewards we merely care for it. Do you see your ministry as belonging to God? Do you pray, “This camp isn’t mine, O God, but Yours?” Do you see yourself as distinct from the world in your motives and goals or do you easily allow the worldly standards to creep in? Pray for a purity of motive that is holy unto the Lord.

3. Truth

The third priority is truth (John 17:17)—we must be grounded in the truth, we must be defined by the truth, we must proclaim the truth. Otherwise, we have nothing to offer the world of any lasting value. Any camp can offer good programs and energetic staff, but only Christian camps offer the truth of Christ. It is a worldview that will not go unnoticed by seeking teens. We cannot shy away from declaring the truth of Christ. This doesn’t mean that every activity is evangelistic, but it does mean that the staff and overall purpose of the camp is to live as if there is truth and that truth has a radical effect on our lives. How is the truth of Christ displayed at your camp? Do people know where you stand? Does your literature declare God’s truth clearly? Do you live by His principles?

4. Mission-minded

The fourth element is that we are mission-minded (John 17:18). We aren’t just seeking to live inwardly—self-absorbed—but rather we seek to reach out with our joy, holiness, and truth. Possessing the light of the world, we go out into the darkness. The other side of this is that we also can help equip the missionaries. For a church group there may be nothing more important than having a place of solitude to refocus and refresh them for the daily ministry that all Christians face. Just by being in the ministry, this will happen; the question is whether you do purposefully. Do you see yourself as a missionary organization? How is this reflected in your programs and attitudes?

5. Unity

The fifth quality Jesus prayed for was our unity (John 17:20-23). We are one in faith and hope and purpose. As such our attitudes must reflect that. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:3 that we are to make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. We are all in ministry together, and we are each seeking the same higher goal. That needs to be seen by your clientele. How do you demonstrate your staff unity? What do you do to promote unity among your staff? Do all your staff members know the camp’s mission and purpose? Do you provide times for staff to be unified in their faith through prayer or devotions? How can you be more conscious of promoting unity?

6. Love

Finally, Jesus prayed that we would be a people defined by love (John 17:24-26). As the old campfire song goes, “They will know we are Christians by our love.” John tells us that the only reason we know love is because God demonstrated His love in Christ (1 John 3:16). Our very standard of love is Christ. That means our love is a serving and sacrificial love, and we should strive to serve others out of joy and truth. Grumbling and complaining cannot live in the presence of love. How do you demonstrate love to your staff? Is love reflected in the attitudes and actions of your staff? Would your

guests describe your place as filled with love? How can you help increase this essential mark of a ministry?

These are the six things that Jesus prayed for His followers to possess. They first must be present in our lives as directors and leaders. Then we, like the apostle Paul can say, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." As your camp pursues these priorities, your campers and guest groups will likewise experience a radical change. You can't help but be relevant and focused when you and your staff are constantly looking to Christ and being obedient to His desires for your life and ministry. May He grant you the grace to see His prayer answered at your His camp.