

What I Learned at Summer Camp

Good Afternoon.....

I had been trying to think up an introduction for that would be witty, funny or profound but I couldn't think of any.

So I'll just give you a brief history of how I came to be in front of you, unaccustomed to public speaking that I am. (I've always wanted to say that.)

The first time I gave my talk; "What I Learned at Summer Camp" was almost exactly one year ago and I gave to our CMF group at 1st Christian Church in Noblesville. This summer I gave another one to a Men's Area Dinner in Alexandria, IN and who besides God would have guessed I would be in front of you giving it again.

Anyway,

"What I learned at summer camp" started a few months before I attended my 1st ever Men's Retreat the late summer of 2005. I remember sitting at my desk and was feeling that there should be more to life than just getting up, going to work, coming home, kicking the dog, yelling at the kids and ignoring the wife.

A little bit after those thoughts I was reading the Indiana Christian Newspaper and in it was an article about the Men's Retreat in Bedford, IN and Camp Barbee. Almost immediately I decided to go, but I choose the Camp Barbee retreat because I knew the area and if I had second thoughts about attending this retreat or wanted to bug during the retreat I could at least make a weekend of it at one of the lakes in the area with some friends.

One of my overwhelming reasons that prompted me to attend this retreat was to see how Christian Men have fun when they are together without all the drinking, smoking and making jerks of ourselves that goes on with other men.

I was looking forward to the weekend, however, for reasons only God and I know, I didn't tell my wife; except that I put on our calendar for that weekend "BYRON GONE". I figured in this age of electronics I could be half way around the world and still kick the dog, yell at the kids and ignore my wife. However, I did tell a few members of my church so I still had some accountability and my wife found out it anyway.

I do want to mention that I started this journey with an open mind and heart and a willingness to make the best of this experience. Something I had not done in many years.

As I drove in to Pierceton, which is about 10 minutes from the golf outing I signed up to play in, I started getting that feeling in your gut that makes you a little uncomfortable but then I thought about other times I had those feelings: my first Wednesday night bible study, my first attendance at our men's breakfast and about 3 – 4 minutes ago, prior to this talk and I am still alive.

So we played golf. Had fun, met a couple of guys and enjoyed ourselves.

After golf, one of the men led the caravan to the camp and he held my hand during the registration, showing me where we bunk and a little lay of the land.

One thing I noticed, and as you see on my head, were a lot of men wearing the red Men's Disciples hats. If anything, these hats represented a unity of the men at that camp in Christ and in Christian fellowship. I didn't start wearing my hat until Saturday afternoon.

After I checked in I was sitting around and waiting to have dinner, I had the opportunity to introduce myself to a lot of the men and my common answer to their questions was, "I'm from 1st Christian Church, Noblesville and this is my first camp." This helped me open up a little and at least give a hint of really wanting to be there but, "to a man", they all told me that this weekend would be one that I would remember for a lifetime and one that would change my life.

In my mind, I kept those walls up and said to myself, "Ya right, this I gotta see". But in my heart so wanted something like that to happen.

Briefly, there were 65 men at this camp with 19 newbie's of which I was one.

As each one of us introduced ourselves, I just happened to be very near the end, every one of the newbie's were invited by someone in their church who had attended previous retreats. When it was my turn I mentioned that I read about this retreat in the Indiana Christian newspaper and said, "Here I am", I got a round of applause and became a minor celebrity.

We then had singing, and I really hate to sing, but I sang.

After singing we had the first of three sessions of "Building Bridges Between Brothers" and I will close with a brief summary of these sessions at the end of my talk.

After our session we had vespers by a huge campfire next to the dinning hall followed by guitar playing and singing. And I sang and really tried to have fun. Which to my amazement, I did. After this we all went back to the dinning area and played games till midnight and some of these games went well past that time. And again, I had fun, and without all the junk that sometimes goes on when you're out "having fun with the guys" on the weekends.

Got to my bunk, which was surprisingly comfortable but I had a little trouble going to sleep. Not only was I starting to think about what I was doing at this camp and how it had already starting affecting me, but , if you haven't bunked in a cabin with about 20 or 30 other men in a while; well, I'll tell you it is very melodious and somewhat odoriferous.

Next morning we had "Morning Watch" lead by our Regional Pastor, Rick Spleth. Here we were lead in a devotional with 10 – 15 minutes of required silence in the woods with our God before breakfast (good and plenty).

Breakfast was followed by singing, I sang, our final two sessions of "Building Bridges Between Brothers" with a coffee break in between and more singing, (I sang) then lunch (good and plenty).

The afternoon activities consisted of a canoe race, which I signed up for, a bible study, which I attended, hiking and history of the camp and a ping-pong tournament, I couldn't do everything, as I said a few minutes ago, I went with an open mind and a willingness to participate in all the weekend activities.

After the canoe race, (I so lost it wasn't funny) there was a lakeside devotional, which touched everyman around the huge campfire down by the lake.

We then had a couple of hours to meditate, play ping pong, fish, swim, canoe, hike, play games in the dinning hall, pray, fellowship, make friends, share, love, care or just take a nap. There were no TV's, computers, radios or other distractions of that kind so these activities took a slightly non-rushed meaning.

Pretty soon it was time for dinner (good and plenty), singing (I sang) and then "Caring and Sharing" around another fire, in another building, where everyone had the opportunity to share their struggles, their cares, their testimonies, their happiness... followed by communion.

All this was followed by vespers with singing (I sang), guitar playing and fellowship. Followed by more card playing, dominoes and other games in the dining hall.

Around 10pm I decided to go fishing on the docks, I fished for about 2 hours and I didn't have nibble, but by that time, I really wasn't fishing.

Finally went to bed, we had another Morning Watch, ate breakfast which was good and plenty, packed up our belongings, cleaned the camp and went to our Sunday closing worship.

Our closing worship was filled with singing, (I sang) prayer, a sermon and communion.

We then closed the camp with one huge circle with prayer and verbal commitments to each other; looking directly into another man's eye's, without blinking, looking away or trying to fake it. I forget what we said, but I remember looking in that man's eyes (heart) and meaning what I said and loving what I was saying.

We all said goodbye and I drove home.

The reason I want to share this experience with you is not to invite you to this camp, because I will not invite you. The Spirit of God sent me and if you go, the Spirit will send you; however, I will make it as easy as possible to help you make your own decision.

The reason I am sharing this with you is I pray that this group of men in this congregation becomes as tight nit as those 65 men were during that weekend and as tight nit as Christ's and his apostles. If we can become a strong, masculine, yet compassionate group of men, with Christ like willingness, our churches will grow in ways we can't even comprehend. I would love to see every one of you (and the men that are not here) all wearing red hats like this one to show Christ we are one in Him, one in His church and one in His mission: Love God, Love your neighbor and get the Word out.

Before Closing:

Building Bridges Between Brothers

Our 3 sessions on "Building Bridges Between Brothers" was nothing like I expected. I envisioned a bunch of men learning how to relate to each other on a more deeper level than just "How are you and what do you think of them Colts?" Which is what we were doing in our Saturday Morning men's group at our church at that time and I do recommend your mens' group doing a session like that.

Ron Zorn, Pastor of Meadlawn Christian Church in Indianapolis, started with the definition of compassion. At that time, my definition of compassion was more the definition of sympathy.

His broad definitions of compassion are the following:

Hebrew language: What a mother feels for her unborn child. The protection and nurturing that is required of her because the unborn child has absolutely no way to defend itself and has no say in how the mother uses her body.

Greek language: Compassion is the feeling or tearing of your guts or insides when you see an injustice or suffering of some kind.

The Latin definition is Clintonesque in that it is “I feel your pain”. This is more a definition of sympathy than compassion. I think that this is America’s (and most Christian’s) definition of compassion.

The Oxford Dictionary defines compassion as a feeling of pity that makes one want to help or show mercy.

But what really is compassion other than just a feeling? True compassion requires action; for example, justice. What is justice? We American’s define justice as a monetary or physical payment for breaking the law.

But the real definition of justice is the righting of some wrong, the ease of someone’s suffering, making good from bad or an act of deliverance from oppression and this type of justice **reflects the will of God.**

Which is the order God seeks to establish His creation where all people receive the benefits of life with Him

In the first chapter of Mark vs. 40 – 42 Jesus was confronted by a leper and was asked by the leper “If You are willing, You can make me clean” and Jesus replied, filled with compassion; reached out and touched the man and said, “I am willing,” .. and the leprosy left him and he was cured.

We as Christian men don’t have to go to New Orleans or other places hard hit by disasters or some injustice, however, we do have a responsibility to help these people by monetary donations or other means.

We can start in our own backyards, in our churches and in our communities.

Remember when I started this talk I said that “I was trying to figure out if there is more to life than just going to work, coming home, kicking the dog, yelling at the kids and ignoring the wife.”

Our families, our churches and our communities are crying out to us, “If you are willing, you can help us.”

We as Christian men, filled with compassion with Christ like willingness can come home and not kick the dog, not yell at the kids and we can stop ignoring our wives. We as Christian men can do this for our families, our churches and our communities.

But what are we really trying to accomplish with this Christian compassion and this Christ like willingness?..... We are bringing the Kingdom of God to earth; in our homes, in our churches and in our communities

And that is what I learned at summer camp.

