



Writing Life Faith



The Staff Handbook: Community

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common." (Acts 2:42-44)

Life at Camp, Part 5.

Quote of the Week

"There is great potential when a group of people set their eyes on the same prize."

These past four weeks, I've written about the 'nurture' side of life at camp, focusing on our development as servants of Christ and godly leaders. This week, we need to do camp justice by looking at it from the 'nature' lens. Some things are present at camp whether you ask for them or not, and one of the biggest is community.

Community can be awesome. It can also be challenging. Yet it's a natural part of camp. All the Staff share the same lodgings. The girls have two rooms to themselves, as do the guys. Meaning you're with the same people for two months on end. Whether you think that's awful or awesome probably says something about whether you're an intro/extrovert.

So, today, we'll touch on...

Community

Sadly, there aren't any Bible camps in Scripture, but there's a ton of community living. This way of life is still the norm in many parts of the world. Only in our hyper-individualized West is this an abnormality.

Let's start by looking at examples of community in Scripture. But we won't stop there. The Bible doesn't endorse everything it describes. That's why we'll also examine the reason behind community in Scripture.

Community in the Bible.

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble."
(Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

To start, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's families lived in community, sharing the same tents, living spaces, and pasture land. The Israelites lived in one region of Egypt for hundreds of

years, then travelled as a group for forty years. Their time in the conquered promised land was a massive example of community.

Once we reach the New Testament, we're introduced to Jesus and His band of disciples. They lived in community for three years. Once the Holy Spirit came, the believers lived in Jerusalem until persecution forced them to spread out.

That's the *what* behind community. Now we need the *why*. Here are three reasons I found:

1. **Dependency.** In the Old Testament, living alone would have been foolish. There were robbers, wild animals, and all sorts of threats. Plus, you couldn't go out and buy your own tent and food. You needed to make tents by hand and grow your own food. Living in groups was practical and served a purpose; everyone was protected and could easily do their work.
2. **Discipleship.** When Jesus was training His disciples, they needed to be with Him at all times. Their job was to learn the ways of Jesus. They lived in community so they could continually learn from Him. This went beyond practical to purposeful.
3. **Direction.** The early church stuck together because they were waiting on God's Spirit. Shortly after the Holy Spirit's arrival, persecution began. Many believers weren't rich, which is why community living made the most sense. The believers also planned on leaving the city to evangelize in new lands, so having a centred home base was the perfect option.

This all makes sense, only, how does it tie into camp? How is it relevant in your home or workplace?

Community at Camp.

"Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part... And if the ear says, 'I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,' would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where He wants it." (1 Corinthians 12:14-18)

Camp community spawns from a strange blend of the three previously listed reasons. Our camp is almost two hours from home, so unless we drive back every night at 10pm, we're dependent on the Staff lodge and the kitchen's food. We're also at camp for discipleship. It's the primary goal of a Bible camp, after all. Finally, we're at camp seeking guidance. For some of us, it's direction on how to run our skills, build new strengths, or be better cabin leaders. For others, camp is an in-between, linking the previous school/work year with God's plans for Fall.

The communities that worked best in the Bible were based on one or more of the three characteristics we just looked at: **Dependency, Discipleship, Direction.** It's no wonder that camp community is a blessing to so many people. Here are a few things I appreciate about each aspect of the community at camp.

1. **Dependency.** We are entirely reliant on God while at camp. We know we can't do this by ourselves. We trust that God will provide the finances, food, equipment, volunteers, leaders, and everything else. It very quickly levels the playing field. I also love knowing that the same people will show up consistently. I get to work with them during the day, eat meals with them, then hang out in the evenings. It allows us to build far stronger ties than in an ordinary 9-5.
2. **Discipleship.** The purpose of camp is ministry for campers of all ages, especially youth. Yet the messages aren't only for the campers; they often hit home for us Staff too. We regularly incorporate Staff prayer times, devotions, and team-building exercises into our week. It's one thing to know that other believers are growing in their relationship with Jesus. It's another thing to see them growing in person. You watch as they surrender to the LORD in worship, read their Bibles at 6am, pray for you, and support one another. They do these things when they're at home, of course, but at camp you see it firsthand. It's similar to watching your sports teammates getting better alongside you as you spur one another on.
3. **Direction.** At church we like to say, "Direction instead of perfection." Going into camp expecting everyone to do everything perfectly and exactly as you want is a losing strategy. When I shift my mindset and begin looking instead at the direction everyone is travelling, I'm filled with hope. We're not perfect, but we're seeking the same goal. Everyone wants to become more like Christ while at camp. I see people developing every day as they serve campers, their ministry leaders, and those around them. Some come into camp with the mindset that it's just a transition season, between what God was doing during the school year and what He wants them to do in Fall. They'll regularly leave camp with a much greater sense of God's purpose for their life. Camp is transformational.

I'll finish with the untold side of community. Last night, I was talking with one of the older Staff members. He reminded me that camp is only possible because of the greater community of believers.

First, camp costs a lot of money. Without the generosity of believers at our church, we couldn't run camp. Second, camp needs volunteers. You can have unlimited money, but that won't make a difference unless you have volunteers who are willing to serve. You may not have money, but maybe you have time to give. Third, camp needs leadership. We need specific people whom God has blessed with gifts to do their roles. At camp, we live in community. For those who aren't at camp, you can be part of the larger community of believers. We need loads of prayer, every single day. Everyone has a role to play, and we need everybody.

Practical Application.

I won't deny the challenges of living in community. Interpersonal conflict is real, yet God's grace is greater still. I will remind us that there are challenges in everything worth doing. Today we'll finish by taking the three 'D's of camp and making them practical.

1. Dependency.

At camp, I'm forced to surrender my will and trust God. Everything at camp is in His hands, and in the hands of the people He's placed in their corresponding roles. I need to rely on the work of other believers for everything I do. Not to mention relying on God for my physical and spiritual health. Are you willing to surrender your schedule and plans before Him?

2. Discipleship.

Are you currently being disciplined by Christ? Are you letting Him work in your life? Are you committed to reading God's Word and praying to know Him better? We all need the right *actions* and the right *intentions*.

3. Direction.

Based on where your life is right now, what direction are you heading? If you're heading towards Christ, keep going! If your life is moving away from Him, I beg you to reconsider your choices.

I could go on with more examples and stories from camp. If you'd like to hear them, please let me know, and I'll do my best to work them into future posts. Next week, we'll take a step further as we look at the intentional side of building community and pouring into individual Staff members.

Until then, for His glory, always. God bless! I'll finish with Galatians 6:2-3... *"Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important."*



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