



# LIVE IT OUT

**LEADER  
DEVOTIONALS**



There's no place like camp!

Have you been before? Perhaps, preserved in the treasure box of your core memories, are fond portraits of summer weeks spent at a beloved hidden gem, tucked away among trees, rustic cabins, a lake, and most importantly, sweet independence.

Do you remember that growing anticipation as your car bounced up the gravel road and approached the large sign that probably read something like . . .

*Welcome to Camp Kikiwaka . . . or Anawanna . . . or Washunga!*

Regardless of what your camp was called, they all sound similar, right? They even smell the same. Ah, the smells . . .

Crisp, pine trees

A musty bunkhouse with old mattresses that have held far too many campers

And that infamous toiletry bag, oozing the distinct combination of bug spray, toothpaste, and Dial® soap

Maybe not all of us have memories of camp. And even among those who do, everyone's experiences vary. This will also be true of VBS. I can assure you everyone's highlight reel from this week will be different. Each kid will claim unique moments as their favorite. They will form connections with their own people. And chances are, they may even have heated debates on which snack was best.

We hope, however, that no matter what, this will be the Very Best Summer for every single kid because they will discover how they can love like Jesus.

The truth is, while summer weeks spent at camp or VBS help shape us, it's our every day that calls us to LIVE IT OUT. After this week, kids will inevitably face the reality that people around them are in need of God's love. And you are playing an enormous role in helping them understand their ability to change the world when they choose to

***love one another,  
be kind to one another,  
forgive one another,  
pray for one another,  
and serve one another.***

Can I let you in on one more thing? This week may change you, too.

Sure, each day has been carefully and purposely planned for the kids that show up. But VBS would not happen without the adults who say, "Yes!" to showing up for them. We see you. We thank you. And we have something just for you.

Before you begin each day, check out your leader devotional. Consider it your daily Camp Mail Call, if you will, to remind you that what you're doing matters. Because even though we may not be able to provide you with that fresh aroma of pine trees this week, we can assure you of the lasting impact you'll make on the lives of kids.

Chances are, this week may even find its way into that treasure box of your core memories and leave you ready for more when it's all said and done.



## LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

### READ JOHN 13:1-17

As a young twenty something, starry-eyed and deep in the honeymoon phase of volunteering with kids at our church, I enthusiastically signed up to chaperone camp that first summer. With flawless optimism (and a convincing picture painted by our kids' pastor who was grasping for anyone willing to oblige), I was eager to join the cause.

There are a few things that particularly stand out in my memories of that camp experience:

- I did not read the book I had packed. (*How adorable that I thought I'd have free time!*)
- Even in my twenties, I felt too old to be eating late night pizza with 5th graders at midnight.
- And Caleb.

I'll never forget Caleb.

He was the kid who challenged every rule, pushed every button, and crossed every single boundary. He wandered away from our group to sneak extra swim time with another group we didn't even know. He kept leaving his belongings everywhere. And on the bus ride home at the end of the week, we discovered him eating a sandwich from the depths of his backpack that his mom packed for the bus ride TO camp. (Insert vomit emoji.)

There's no sugar coating it. Caleb was that kid. And you'll inevitably find yourself encountering your own version of that kid this week. Or maybe more than one. Or if you're super lucky, you may even end up with an entire group of them— unruly, distracted troublemakers that you simply cannot convince to listen and do the right thing.

But I feel like you probably know where I'm headed next.

We are here to love that kid. In fact, we're here to love every other human. Because when Jesus chose to wash the feet of His disciples, He was showing us that everyone is deserving of love. And that same Jesus who willingly removed dirty sandals from the feet of His friends to scrub away their gnarly layers of grime and debris would still choose to do the very same thing for you and me. And the kids in your group. And Caleb, too.

This week, you'll have a unique opportunity to live out the very thing Jesus did. You probably won't be washing dirty feet. But you will get to set an example for kids, showing them how to love one another by the way you choose to love those around you; especially the most challenging ones. Thankfully, we're not expected to do this on our own. Before Day 1 gets started, take a moment to talk to God. Ask Him to prepare you for the adventures ahead and equip you with all you need to love like Jesus.



## BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER.

### READ MARK 10:13-16

As a kid, I went to the same camp every single summer: Camp Washunga in Junction City, Kansas. It was, as it might sound, smack dab in the middle of nowhere. But that felt irrelevant to a girl who only cared about reuniting in Cabin 4 with her group of friends who traveled in from various pockets of the Midwest region of the US year after year.

Our little crew was thick as thieves. We'd pen-pal through the long non-summer months, keeping each other updated on our lives, so when we finally saw each other in person, it was as if no time had passed.

But every once in a while, a new face would appear in Cabin 4 on check-in day, and our close-knit girl squad would be tasked with making sure she felt welcome. Typically, it didn't take long for the new one to open up and fit right in . . . except for the year we met Adrienne.

Adrienne was not excited at all about being at camp. She was extremely shy. And while I was oblivious at age 10, looking back on it now, I'm certain she was navigating some difficult dynamics in her life back home. So when she arrived at camp, not only did she feel like an outsider, but her heart was also in dire need of tender care.

After multiple attempts at inviting Adrienne in, she was still reserving her right to remain closed. Finally, four days in, another girl in the group, Sarah, vowed to crack the code, and she came up with a creative idea. She rallied the troops and recruited us all to participate in a puppet show she had put together to break the ice. The show she drummed up was quite sparse on resources. We were at camp, after all. But it was chock full of charm and humor, and it was a relentless effort to draw Adrienne in.

That, it did. And for the first time all week, not only did Adrienne smile, but she let her guard down and finally felt like one of us. For her, that was enough to wash away all the worries of whatever else was going on and provide her with the freedom to belong.

Perhaps you've noticed an "Adrienne" at VBS this week, and you're not quite sure how to reach them. I have good news for you! You don't need to squeeze in time to write a puppet show script, like Sarah did. Today's story of Jesus speaks for itself. Because when Jesus invited the children to come see Him, He was caring for each of us and inviting us all to feel welcome and seen. When Jesus showed kindness to the children that the rest of society cast aside, He was merely scratching the surface of all that was to come. And He was setting an example for how humans should treat others for the rest of time.

As you take time to consider today and the next few days, ask God to help you know the right things to say that will draw kids in and help them feel like they belong. You never know how that kindness can change someone for the long haul.



## **FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER.**

### **READ 1 JOHN 4:9-12**

I don't know about you, but I'm often guilty of taking for granted the story of God's forgiveness through Jesus. So when I think about the power of it all, it's not uncommon for me to resort to another precious camp memory of mine. It doesn't even have anything to do with my own forgiveness, but rather the observing of a kid who suddenly understood forgiveness for the first time, and it made a lifelong impact on me.

Much like VBS, church camp always strategically places the life-changing message of Jesus at a certain moment during the week. It's positioned at that point during the week where kids and adults have had a couple days to acclimate to the rhythm and develop trust and connection with each other. But it's early enough to provide kids time to process what they've heard and allow plenty of opportunities to pull someone aside to answer their questions and walk them through a decision before the week ends.

So on that typical third night of camp one of the years I went as a chaperone, a boy named Quay responded in a way I never expected. After the story of Jesus' matchless love and forgiveness was shared from the stage, Quay got up from his seat. He didn't walk to the front, as some kids choose to do, as a public profession of their new faith. Instead, he looked to the back of the room and began searching for Logan, a leader from our group that he trusted. He frantically scanned the dark room and rows of people. The second Quay spotted Logan, he ran to him and threw himself into the biggest bear hug, and sobbed.

You see, in Quay's nine years of life, he had navigated more heartbreak and disappointment than any child should have to endure. His dad left when he was a baby, and his mom was caught up in far too many hard circumstances to be able to adequately care for her son. He had spent time in and out of foster care and was currently living with an aunt. The house where he lived with his aunt was just down the street from an older couple from our church, who formed a friendship with Quay and his cousins and began bringing them to church on Sundays.

If you can believe it, that's the short version. The point is, Quay understood forgiveness through a lens I've never had. And watching him put together the pieces and understand that every bit of it comes from God's sacrificial, unconditional, and never-ending love for him and his family was a moment I will never forget. This is, indeed, how God showed His love among us—in the forgiveness provided through sacrifice, in His unfailing love, and in His call for us to love each other.

Before today, pray for each of the kids you've spent time with this week. Maybe there's someone like Quay. Maybe there's a kid in your group who will be hearing and understanding God's forgiveness for the first time. Ask God to help them understand His forgiveness through their own lens of whatever they're going through. And ask Him to use you in a way God used Logan in Quay's life, providing a safe space for questions, conversations, or even tear-filled bear hugs.



## PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER.

### READ MATTHEW 6:9-13

I think I was born with a restlessness to wander. I guess it worked out in my favor that I grew up with a dad whose job moved our family around every few years. By the time I settled down and got married, there were seven different states I could call “home.” But I married a man who had lived in the same city his entire life, so finding a happy medium was a journey we had to learn to navigate.

Early on in our marriage, I found my restlessness rising again to the point where it festered into discontentment that affected everything in my world. I was unhappy with where we were living, and our jobs at the time were not the kind that came along with the prospect of mobility. Thankfully, I had folks in my life who recognized what was happening and were willing to call me out on my negative vibes. In addition to that, they encouraged me to pray and ask God to give me contentment, regardless of where I was. I’m pretty certain they were praying for me behind the scenes, too.

I share this specific story with you for two reasons.

First of all, this was a time in my life where I can see very clear evidence that God does, in fact, hear our prayers. After several months of focused time spent in prayer, asking God to provide me with contentment, I found my heart shifting, and I gradually became filled with peace that far exceeded my own understanding. That period of my life was one I’ve looked back on countless times as a tangible reminder that God listens and cares for me, and that He always wants what is best for me.

Not only did God want what was best for me, but it just so happened that He was actually planning to prepare me for the next adventure all along. He was simply waiting for me to be ready. Many months later, at a kids’ camp, of all places, God made it crystal clear to me and my husband that a move was, in fact, on the horizon. At a worship service one night, watching hundreds of kids with hands raised as they sang to their Savior is a picture forever etched in my memory. That week, we felt a call to full time kids’ ministry. Eventually, we moved to Kentucky for our first position on staff at a church, and the rest is history.

It was through prayer where I felt God’s presence.  
And it was at camp where I heard His voice.  
What a power duo!

I am so grateful for the many people who also prayed and played a role in my journey. And I hope this encourages you today to consider the vital role you play in the lives of the kids you’re with this week. You can make an impact on the way they see prayer and the power it can have in their own lives. You can pray for them, asking God to speak to each of their hearts in a way only He can. And while you’re at it, ask God to show you what He’s preparing you for. You never know what adventure He may already have in store.



**SERVE ONE ANOTHER.**

**READ ACTS 2:42-47**

There’s no place like home after a week of camp! Perhaps you can remember climbing into your own familiar bed as a welcomed change from that stiff bunk mattress you endured for too many nights. Whether as a camp attendee or counselor, crashing for a long nap always feels necessary after concluding the exhilarating, yet exhausting adventure.

How you feel on the final day of VBS may closely resemble that end-of-camp feeling. I’m certain you’re utterly wiped out. And yet the reason I’m writing today’s devotional is to lovingly remind you to serve one another. To be honest, it feels funny to be writing to you about serving, when that’s exactly what you’ve done all week long. Chances are, you’ve had plenty of opportunities to serve through studying lessons . . .

- . . . and memorizing names . . .
- . . . and divvying out snacks . . .
- . . . and tying shoelaces . . .
- . . . and settling disputes . . .
- . . . and cleaning spills . . .
- . . . and offering countless hugs and kind words . . .
- . . .and far more other things than I have space to mention here.

But perhaps you’ve been able to catch small glimpses throughout each act of service that remind you why you chose to be here this week. Just like the believers in Acts 2 were filled with awe as they witnessed all that God was doing, I hope you feel fueled by the fact that you played a role in helping kids discover how they can change the world by how they live and love like Jesus.

Before you begin Day 5, I encourage you to take a few minutes to reflect on the week you’ve had. Consider the difference you’ve made. Point out the truths you may have learned for yourself. (These stories and lessons aren’t only for the kids, after all!) And then ask God how He wants you to live it out from here. Sometimes our initial “yeses” are merely a stepping stone to something so much bigger.

Thank you for all you’ve done this week. You have made a life-changing impact on the lives of kids. And you absolutely deserve a nice, long, uninterrupted nap in your soft, comfy bed. But first, fill your canteen with any remaining ounces of energy you have left, and forge forward for the final day.