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## **Day Camp and Preschool Bible Study**

Nellie Jarvis – Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Canon City, CO

(Printed As A Separate Study)



## **What's Your Call?**

I always marvel at the power of the Holy Spirit in shaping us and our lives. When we chose this theme “What’s Your Call?,” we had envisioned a study on vocation and figuring out your calling. But when we sat down with the Bible study writers this year, the Spirit took us in a whole new direction. This study is for sure about calling. But I think we have taken a different perspective on what that means. Our true calling is to be love in the world in the same immense way that God loves us. That is easy to say and much harder to do. Our humanness gets in the way and so every situation is a choice to either step in and change the situation or to avoid the whole situation all together. Stepping in can be transformational for us and for those we will serve! So, What’s Your Call?

The days of this study take us from a rich understanding of God’s immense and unconditional love for us to a deeper understanding of how we can respond to God’s love, hospitality, forgiveness, service, and justice:

1. **God Loves!** – What’s Your Call?: God is love. God unconditionally loves us more than we can fathom. We are to be that love in the world. This is our calling. But love is a choice. In any given circumstance, how will we respond?
2. **God Welcomes You!** – What’s Your Call?: Through God’s love, we are welcomed fully and unconditionally. There is nothing we can do to separate us from the love of God. God loves us just as we are. Can we do the same? How do we welcome all, especially those that are hard to befriend and or even to be around?
3. **God Forgives!** – What’s Your Call?: God models true forgiveness for us – over and over again. Even with our sinful nature, God forgives us unconditionally through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. How can we forgive in the same way when someone has hurt us deeply?
4. **God Serves!** – What’s Your Call?: Jesus was the ultimate example of a servant. God calls us to humble ourselves to be servants in the world. Service is not a thing we do but rather a way of life. How do we serve in every aspect of our lives?
5. **God Seeks Justice!** – What’s Your Call?: God seeks justice in our world. God’s vision for creation is a wholeness that incorporates a belonging and welcoming nature to all, forgiveness abounding, humble service toward one another, and all of that embraced in God’s rich love. We are sent home from camp, called to be world changers in people’s lives. So, what’s your call?

Morning Watch is an important part of each day at camp. We will begin each Morning Watch with a welcome, some scriptural reading, a current song, and then move to about a half hour of God Time and reflection. We hope that this discipline of quiet time during the day is one that many will take home with them as they seek to grow in their relationship with God.

I am very excited about the content of this study. This is a very practical study. I hope this study can move campers, staff, and congregational leaders to wake each morning, to think about their day ahead, and about how they will answer God’s call to love throughout the day. If this happens, they will transform the lives of others, and in doing so, they will be transformed as well. I also hope this study will help you to continue to grow in your own faith journey. Thank you for the opportunity to be partners with you as we serve the youth, adults, and families of the Rocky Mountain Synod and beyond.



Dave Jarvis - Executive Director



# God Loves! -- What's Your Call?

## Introduction to the Theme

The world has domesticated the word love. I love mac n' cheese. I love Netflix. I love Star Wars. I love my iPhone. I love Colorado. We have over-utilized and under-appreciated a word that has its origins in the One whose breath and power created the earth. Love is more than an emotion. It is a life force. It is the force that gives power to the children of God. Without God's love for us, we wouldn't know how to love each other. Love begins with God; for God so loved the world John 3 suggests.

From the beginning of time, God has loved. In the book of Genesis we read, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." You see, from the void and darkness of the cosmos, God's love fashioned and brought to birth the world as we know it.

Imagine creating and bringing life into the world. Of course you will love what you have made. God created all things and God saw what God made and not only declared it good, but I'm guessing, God loved it, too. And on the sixth day, after God created all things, God created the ultimate...humankind, Adam and Eve. And God saw what God formed from the dust of the earth and declared it good and God loved the first humans who walked this earth. God loves what God creates. From the beginning of time God's love has been THE force pulsating through the universe.

Even after Adam and Eve decided to increase their knowledge of good and evil by snackin' on the tree in the middle of the garden; the tree that God declared off limits, God still loved them. Oh to be sure, God did banish them from living in the lushness of Eden, but God made sure they were clothed and cared for. God always loves what God has made.

Throughout the entire history of God's people, and through all the sacred stories of the Scriptures one can see that love comes to the world and to us by God's initiative. Love rains down on the earth and on us. And to prove that love, God sent Jesus to live, die and rise again to save us from our own devices. You bet...God so loved the world...

We can never get enough of God's love. And frankly, nothing we do can separate us from it. We are so hungry to be loved that when we are, we often think of holding that love tightly; maybe even keeping it all for ourselves. But like the Dead Sea where there is no life, the Dead Sea that has no outlet, the love of God grows stale within us when it is not given away.

God loves. What God calls us to do is to love, as well. In the book of Deuteronomy we read a pretty simple formula for living in God's love and thriving as the people of God: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart." Sounds pretty simple to me but I know, from personal experience, that is hard to do. God loves so we are to love, too.

I have discovered in my life, that to love is a choice. As for me and my house, Joshua says, we will serve the Lord. Substitute the word "love" for "serve" and you will understand the point I am trying to make. We are called by God to love. Having said that, I also realize that to do so is my "call." Whether or not I respond to God's love by loving others or by hoarding and holding all of God's love for myself is my call and no one else's.

Love begins in God and the love of God born in me is meant to be shared. It is this concept that we want our campers to understand. They don't have to love others as God loves them. But frankly, it's the most important way that we thrive in this loveless world. Taking the love of God seriously means that I will want to love, too. It means that my days will pulse with the same life force that has, by the grace of God, been pulsating through the universe since the genesis of time.

This entire week we will focus on two aspects of "call." One aspect is, "what does God call us to" and the other is "what's your call?" How will you respond to God's love, forgiveness, hospitality, service and desire for justice. Will you love, forgive, serve, welcome and work for justice and peace or not? In any given circumstance you and your campers will have decisions to make about how you will live. So, what's your call?

## Objectives For This Day Of The Study

1. Teach campers about the origins of love. That love begins in God.
2. Through the story of Adam and Eve help campers grow in their knowledge of God's first love and first disappointment in love.
3. Help campers grow in their understanding that God's love never ends, the supply is endless and that nothing can separate them from God's love. NOTHING!
4. Help campers understand that love perpetuates love. The more love we give away, the more we have to give.

## **Morning Watch**

**Welcome** *Welcome to this day of call. “May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be confident knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.* - attributed to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Theresa of Avila

### **Scripture Romans 5:6-8** (from The Voice)

<sup>6</sup> *When the time was right, the Anointed One died for all of us who were far from God, powerless, and weak. <sup>7</sup>Now it is rare to find someone willing to die for an upright person, although it’s possible that someone may give up his life for one who is truly good. <sup>8</sup>But think about this: while we were wasting our lives in sin, God revealed His powerful love to us in a tangible display—the Anointed One died for us.”*

### **Short skit or dialogue**

Voice 1: I blew it today. I know I did. I did something that can never be forgiven.

Voice 2: Sounds like you screwed up big time.

Voice 1: I did. There’s no way God can love me after this. When a friend asked me if I loved God I said, “Are you kidding me? I don’t need God. God is for weaklings...anyone that believes in God is stupid. I don’t know why I said this stuff. If I were God, I’d write me off after that.

Voice 2: I don’t know a lot about God but what I do know is that God loves us no matter what. I’m guessin’ that what you did and said isn’t something that will make God turn God’s back on you...not now...not ever!

### **Song His Kind of Love** - by Group 1 Crew

There are no words, no phrase I could create  
There is no melody that I could make  
How do you sing about the love so deep  
Without feeling like you missed something  
I could try but I could not explain  
His kind of love (His kind of love) Is reckless for us  
His kind of love is will never give up  
Til the whole world knows how far He went to show  
His kind of love His kind of love His kind of love His kind of love  
Tell me what kind of God would choose to save  
The bruised, the broken, the sinners, the runaways  
How do you ever try to comprehend this love that knows no limit  
I could try but I could not explain  
His kind of love (His kind of love) Is reckless for us  
His kind of love is will never give up  
Til the whole world knows how far He went to show  
His kind of love His kind of love His kind of love His kind of love  
This is our God He is strong and His mercy is our song  
He won’t stop chasing us  
That’s just His kind of love His kind of love His kind of love  
His kind of love (His kind of love) Is reckless for us  
His kind of love is will never give up  
Til the whole world knows how far He went to show  
His kind of love His kind of love His kind of love, His kind of love  
His kind of love, His kind of love  
This is our God, He is strong and His mercy is our song  
His kind of love, His kind of love

### **Scenarios to consider during your time with God**

1. God loves you so much. When have you doubted God’s love?
2. Is there anything you’ve ever done that’s made you feel like you are out of the reach of God’s love?
3. God calls you “love.” If God looks at you through the eyes of love, how are you to look at those around you?
4. When have you felt God’s love deeply? Where were you? Who were you with?

### **Prayer**

Dear God, there have been times when I’ve done, said or thought terrible things that should keep You from loving me. But the Bible tells me that Your love is greater than my sin and that nothing could ever come between You and me. Help me feel You close to my heart this morning as I learn about how deep your love is. And then help me believe it. I love you God. Thank You for loving me. Amen.

## **Evening Devotion**

Questions for Evening Devotions (based upon the scenarios from Morning Watch)

1. When did you feel loved today? What made you feel that way?
2. How do you act differently when you are feeling loved? What would it be like to live that way all the time?
3. How can you show God's Love this week at camp?
4. How can you be God's Love when you go back home at the end of the week?

## **Scripture Study**

### **Open With Prayer**

Gracious God, it's our first day. You know that some of us are feeling homesick already. You also know that some of us wonder how this week is going to turn out. If we're honest we have to admit that we wonder if we'll fit in...if we'll like our cabin mates...if we will feel the love. Help us to trust you today and believe that you love us. And then teach us to live your love; the love that is in us because you first loved us. This we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

### **Our Highs and Lows Already**

Even though the campers haven't lived through too much of camp already, they surely have a high and a low. You might also ask them what they've left behind to be at camp. And, what are they looking forward to the most this week?

### **Warm Up**

Have each person in the group name the most important person in your life. Who has shown you deep love and respect; love without conditions? It may be helpful to ask everyone to think of that person and give a thumbs up when they have one. Then have people share.

## **Part 1 - Genesis chapters 1-3 The Story of Adam and Eve, their life, their fall, and God's love.**

### **A humorous synopsis of Genesis 2:4 – 3**

At the beginning of chapter 2 we behold a rocky barren place. Nothing grows naturally there, nor are there any human-cultivated plants, as there is no human to do any planting. Although there is no rain it isn't arid. Some kind of water; a stream, some mist or a pool of water regularly rises from below the surface of the earth. Into this setting comes God, the Creator and Loving Life Force to form a human from the dust, an earthling from the earth. Once formed, the breath of life animates the dull earthling and he is called Adam.

Poor guy shows up before there's anything to see, though. God plants a garden, eastward in a land called Eden (so-called for its abundance of water) and places the human there. He causes all kinds of trees to grow in the garden, pleasant both to the eye and tongue. Two are singled out; the Tree of Boundless Life and the Tree of Knowing-Good-and-Evil.

As for the land of Eden itself, a river runs through it into the garden, and then divides into the headwaters of the Tigris, Euphrates, Nile, and another. As we were saying about Adam, God put him in the garden, and assigned him to take care of it. He was allowed to eat from all the trees with the exception of the Tree of Knowing-Good-and-Evil, on pain of death.

God noticed the man was alone. Not good, he said. So God, in love, formed from the ground all the animals and brought them to the human to see what he'd call them. But among all of those he named, there was none to talk to or to love.

So God put Adam into an unnaturally deep sleep, took one of his sides, and closed him up again. God then built that side into a woman and brought her to the human. He was delighted, "THIS time, finally, my kind of thing! We'll call her Woman because she was taken out of Man."

Both of them were naked, but it didn't bother them. Now a snake, sharper than any other animals God had made, said to the woman, "so... you eat from all the trees in the garden?" Eve says back, "Yep, except the one in the middle of the garden. We're not even supposed to touch that one, let alone eat it, on pain of death." "What!" says the snake? "You're not going to die. God knows it will change you; you'll know good and evil, like God does." Now, to be honest, the woman had noticed that the fruit of the tree looked REALLY good and was really pretty to boot. She picked some fruit, ate it, and handed some to her husband who was with her, who followed suit. Then, they knew.

"Um, hello, where are my pants? What are pants, anyway? We can't..." "No we really mustn't..." "I can't walk around like this in public..." So they sewed themselves some really uncomfortable but completely local, organic, biodegradable underwear.

About that time, they heard God coming back through the garden, so they hid, there in the middle of the garden. God called out to the humans, "where are you?" Still in hiding, Adam replied, "well I'm mostly naked, so I hid."

“Who told you that? Wait, did you eat from that tree, the one I specifically told you not to eat from?” Well you know what Adam did...he blamed it on Eve. “It was the woman,” Adam said, “The Woman You gave me! She gave me some, so I ate it.” God said to Eve, “what have you to say about all of this?” “...I blame the snake.”

So God said to the snake, “Here’s what we’re going to do. You shall be worse off than all other animals, living and eating in the dust. I will drive a wedge between you and them. You’ll snap at their heel, but they’ll crush your head.” Turning to the women, he says, “As for you your pregnancies will be unpleasant. Turning to Adam he says, “as for you, since you participated too in eating from the tree, things will be unpleasant for you, too. No more just plucking things off whenever you feel, you’re going to have to work for it, every single day of your life! Thorns, weeds, you’ll encounter all kinds of nasty sweaty unpleasantness in working the ground for your food, until you return to the earth! You \*are\* earth, earthling! Dust, and to dust shall you return.”

Following Adam and Eve’s disobedience they left the garden but God did not abandon them. God made them some decent clothes of comfortable, deerskin, and dressed them. From that day on, childbirth was painful and life was not easy but God never left Adam and Eve’s side even though they didn’t live in the garden anymore. God didn’t leave them because God loved them so much.

### **Some background material on Genesis 1-3**

We see in Genesis 1 how God, when lovingly fashioning the world, speaks from a distance. God brings order out of chaos in a well-planned and careful construction of six days of creation. Each day God sees what God has made and is pleased and loves and affirms creation. Every day God pronounces creation as “good” and at the end of God’s hard work says how “very good” everything is that I have made. Then in love and with a desire for community, God creates human beings, male and female, both fully in the image of God. The scriptures not only give us one creation account, but two. In Genesis 2:4b-25 God gets “down and dirty” (as Dennis Olson suggests) and forms Adam from the earth. Then God, in deep love for Adam, forms Eve from Adam’s side. God performs CPR and breathes life into both Adam and Eve. Like the crazed doctor who brings to life the lifeless Frankenstein in the film *Young Frankenstein*, we can imagine God exclaiming, "He's alive! He's alive!...She's Alive! She's Alive!"

One can just imagine God rubbing God’s hands together in sheer delight at bringing life to the world and into the world God made. God’s delight is God’s creation of humankind; the crowning glory of all creation. Creation is all God’s doing. Life is a gift from God alone. And that life was born out of love and God’s desire to partner with a people God could grow and love forever.

The bubble of God’s delight in creation unfortunately burst not long after Adam and Eve were created. Of course you know the story. Eve fell into the temptation to eat from the one tree God said they couldn’t indulge in. “The snake made me do it,” Eve said. And Adam, well, Adam blamed his weakness on Eve. And from that point on, creation has been scarred by sin. Sin, as we know it, is separation from God. To be sure, Adam and Eve were dismissed from the garden forever. But the good news is, that even though the garden was off limits, God’s love was not. God continued to be in relationship with them and with subsequent generations of people in the Old Testament. God loved and continued to forgive, forget and start over with God’s people again and again. God loved the people into being. God loved the people throughout their lives. God loved them even when they were not so lovable. And in loving them, God called them to love and taught them to love. God didn’t ask much of the people except to love as God loved them.

### **Read the humorous story of Adam and Eve and then discuss the following questions:**

1. What motivated God to create humankind?
2. God wanted stewards to care for God’s creation. God also desired to be in relationship with creation.
3. Why create two humans instead of only one?
4. God created Adam and Eve to be in relationship with each other and with God. Their relationships were based on love. God’s generosity is immense and God’s love for creation and God’s creatures is passionate and deep.
5. What was God’s relationship with Adam and Eve based on? (Of course...pure love)
6. What did Adam and Eve do to burst God’s joy bubble of love? (They decided to follow their own desires rather than honor God’s wishes)
7. What was their punishment? (They were banished from the garden, they were ashamed, they would now and forever experience pain in childbirth and hardship and pain when working the land.)
8. What happened to God’s wonderful love toward Adam and Eve? (just as strong as it was before they sinned)



## Part 2 Deuteronomy 6:4

*“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.”*

And in Matthew 22 Jesus expands this commandment when he responds to the Pharisees who try to entrap him.

### Matthew 22:34-40

*“But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”*

God loves God’s creation and humankind and calls humankind to be love and to love. In these sections of scripture from both the Old and New Testaments we see that God expects only one thing in return for God’s love. But Jesus takes Moses’ understanding of the law to another level.

1. What does Moses say in Deuteronomy that the people must do who are in relationship with God?
2. And how does Jesus take Moses’ commandment to another level? What does Jesus say are the two most important commandments of all?
3. Even though these are commandments, you do have a choice. The call is to love. What’s your call? How will you respond to the love of God?
4. What does responding to the love of God look like?
5. What happens if you fail God or decide you don’t want to respond to God’s call to love others with the love God has poured out onto you and your life?

One of the most important and famous sections of Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome is from the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter. It is a powerful word about how strong God’s love is for us.

### Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

*“What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Love starts with God. God’s love never ends and nothing we do can make God love us less or more for that matter. But you still have a choice. God’s call is to love. One question might be whether or not you believe that there’s enough of God’s love to go around; that God’s love is not only deep and real, but enough for you. You can give it away and love as God loves you or you can “keep it all to yourself.”

Let me tell you about the Dead Sea and how that might relate to your “call to love” as God loves you. Sometimes it feels like we can never get enough of God’s love. And even though we know that nothing can separate us from God’s love, we are so hungry to be loved that we might think of hoarding it like the Israelites hoarded Manna in the wilderness. You might remember the story. They didn’t trust God that God would provide food for them every day so they took more Manna than God told them to. The excess Manna that they took against God’s will rotted.

I think we fear that there won’t be enough of God’s love to go around and we keep it all to ourselves. But like the Dead Sea that has no outlet, no life and no water flowing out of it, the love from God that we hoard grows stale within us when it is not given away. Understand this, love perpetuates love. The more love you give away, the more love you have to give away. When God’s love flows from you, God replenishes the supply and you are filled up beyond your wildest imagination. You do have a choice...to love or not to love. So, what’s your call?

## Related stories

### A thought from the Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected. In the wilderness God gave Israel the manna every day, and they had no need to worry about food and drink. Indeed, if they kept any of the manna over until the next day, it went bad. In the same way, the disciple must receive his portion from God every day. If he stores it up as a permanent possession, he spoils not only the gift, but himself as well, for he sets his heart on accumulated wealth, and makes it a barrier between himself and God. Where our treasure is, there is our trust, our security, our consolation and our God. Hoarding is idolatry.”

While Bonhoeffer is referring to material possessions, I might suggest this relates to the love of God as well. God gives love lavishly. How we respond, especially if positively and generously, will not only bless God and the world but us as well.

### A Story from Max Lucado

Amy Wells knew her bridal shop would be busy. Brides-to-be took full advantage of the days right after Thanksgiving. It was common for families to spend the better part of the holiday weekend looking at wedding dresses in her San Antonio, Texas, store. Amy was prepared to give service to shoppers. She never expected to give grace to a dying man.

Across town Jack Autry was in the hospital, struggling to stay alive. He was in the final stages of cancer. He had collapsed two days before and had been rushed to the emergency room. His extended family was in town not just to celebrate Thanksgiving together but to make preparations for his daughter’s wedding. Chrysalis was only months from marriage. The women in the family had planned to spend the day selecting a wedding gown. But now with Jack in the hospital, Chrysalis didn’t want to go.

Jack insisted. After much persuasion Chrysalis, her mother, her future mother-in-law, and her sisters went to the bridal salon. The shop owner noticed the women were a bit subdued, but she assumed this was just a quiet family. She helped Chrysalis try on dress after dress until she found an ivory duchess silk and satin gown that everyone loved. Jack was fond of calling Chrysalis his princess, and the dress, made her look just like one. That’s when Amy heard about Jack.

Because of the cancer, he couldn’t come see his daughter in her dress. And because of the medical bills, the family couldn’t buy the dress yet. It appeared that Jack Autry would die without seeing his daughter dressed as a bride. Amy would hear nothing of it. She told Chrysalis to take the gown and veil to the hospital and wear it for her daddy. Amy says, “I knew it was fine. There was no doubt in my mind to do this. God was talking to me.” No credit card was requested or given. Amy didn’t even get a phone number. She urged the family to go directly to the hospital. Chrysalis didn’t have to be told twice.

When she arrived at her father’s room, he was heavily medicated and asleep. As family members woke him, the doors to the room slowly opened, and there he saw his daughter, engulfed in fifteen yards of layered, billowing silk. He was able to stay alert for about twenty seconds.

“But those twenty seconds were magical,” Chrysalis remembers. “My daddy saw me walk in wearing the most beautiful dress. He was really weak. He smiled and just kept looking at me. I held his hand, and he held mine. I asked him if I looked like a princess... He nodded. He looked at me a little more, and it almost looked like he was about to cry. And then he went to sleep.” Three days later he died. Chrysalis and her family couldn’t afford to give Jack one last vision of his daughter dressed as a princess. Yet thanks to Amy’s generosity, they grew rich in a moment of abundant, cascading grace. God to Amy to Chrysalis to Jack. Isn’t this how grace works?

Isn’t this how God works? God starts the process. God doesn’t just love; God *lavishes* us with love (1 John 3:1). God doesn’t dole out wisdom; God “gives generously to all without finding fault” (James 1:5). God is rich in “kindness, tolerance and patience” (Romans 2:4). God’s grace is “exceedingly abundant” (1 Timothy 1:14) and “indescribable” (2 Corinthians 9:14–15). When God gives, God dances for joy. God loves to give. **God doesn’t just love, God lavishes us with love.** God dispenses God’s goodness not with an eyedropper but a fire hydrant. Your heart is a Dixie cup, and God’s grace is the Mediterranean Sea. You simply can’t contain it all. So let it bubble over. Spill out. Pour forth. And enjoy the flood.

It is the Lord’s unending flow of grace that allows God to give so completely and to keep on giving. When we accept God’s grace, we also link ourselves to God’s everlasting supply. Our reaction should be to give in turn to others—our time, our money, our things, our wisdom, and most importantly, our love.

### Possible Actions that Drive Home the Theme of the Day

1. Give Love Away Today...Cut out paper hearts big enough to write on them. On one side write...God loves you. On the other side say...I Love you, too, because...and affirm them by telling them something you love about them.
2. Supply candy kisses and share the love.
3. Get a big piece of newsprint for your cabin. On that newsprint write...God loves me therefore, I want to love, too. Ask kids to write tangible ways that they will commit to loving others throughout the week and when they go home.

4. Ask campers to thank each other for acts of love; when they either feel the love or see acts of love take place.
5. Adam and Eve Reader's Script (see below)

Written by Neil MacQueen. Permission granted for local congregational use. This is meant to be a humorous reading in character voices. To get a GREAT understanding of how to read this, listen to the Adam & Eve Narration in Sunday Software's Awesome Bible Stories CD, [www.sundaysoftware.com/awesome](http://www.sundaysoftware.com/awesome) Copyright 2004. All rights reserved. May only be used for non-commercial purposes and provided the source is cited as "From Awesome Bible Stories CD, [www.sundaysoftware.com](http://www.sundaysoftware.com)"

- Eve = a man playing Eve with a screeching Miss Piggy style voice.
- Adam = a woman playing a dumb man.
- God = a deep voice speaking calmly and closely into the microphone.
- Narrator = a Yiddish man.

**NARR:** According to Genesis, God made a beautiful garden, with fruits trees and a river running through it full of trout. In that garden he also placed the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then God made a man from the dirt, breathed life into him and put him in that garden, saying, it's all you can eat Adam, except from that tree over there. Do not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Leave it alone.

**Adam:** Okey dokey God. No problem. You can count on me.

**God:** Yeah, right.

**NARR:** Seeing that Adam was lonely, God made him go to sleep. He took a rib from the Adam's side and made a woman named Eve from it to be Adam's companion. They were naked --but not embarrassed because they didn't know feelings of shame or sin yet.

**Eve:** Hello, my name is Eve, what's your name?

**Adam:** Whoa huh hoa! (wolf whistle) Uh, actually, I'm not quite sure.

**NARR:** Some time later, a serpent approached Eve and said,

**Serpent:** You know the Knowledge of Evil tree? It is ok to eat from it.

**NARR:** To which Eve replied,

**Eve:** I don't think so!

**Serpent:** O sure, eat from it and you'll understand good and evil and become just like God.

**Eve:** Well, ok, if you say so. ADAM! (full scream) Where are you? Come here. Here is some tasty new fruit.

**NARR:** And as they both ate the forbidden fruit, they suddenly became aware that they were naked, (Adam and Eve: "yikes) So they dove in the bushes to cover themselves with fig leaves. A little while later, God came walking through the garden in the cool evening breeze.

**God:** Adam, Eve, where are you?...Adam! Eve?

**NARR:** Of course, God, being all-knowing, knew EXACTLY where they were, AND what they had done!

**Adam:** We're here God. But we were afraid to show our faces.

**God:** Afraid? Afraid of what? You didn't eat from the tree of good and evil did you?

**Adam:** Uh, yeah, but it was Eve, ...SHE gave it to me!

**Eve:** Uh, it was the serpent, HE tricked me! waaahhh hoo hoo

**NARR:** But God was not so easily fooled. First God got mad at the serpent.

**God:** ...and furthermore you shall crawl on your belly forever more.

**NARR:** And then God got mad at Adam and Eve,

**God:** and as for you two, it's thorns, thistles, and labor pains for you from here on out.

**NARR:** And God threw them out of the Garden of Eden to live difficult lives. And he placed an angel with a flaming sword at the garden entrance to keep them from coming back. Hoo boy that must have been some sight! Now, you might think that was a rather harsh thing for God to do, --getting mad and throwing them out. But just before he did it, God made some fur clothes for them. God made sure, even though God was really disappointed in them that they would be taken care of. God was mad, but God didn't stop loving them...EVER!

And about a thousand pages later, God sent Jesus to die on the cross in love for God's people. Every living descendant of Adam and Eve benefited from Jesus' death. John 3 says: "For God so loved the world that God send God's only Son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Before Jesus died he promised them a new Garden called the Kingdom of God...a Garden of love and forgiveness...BUT, that's another story....

**Or, act out the story of Manna in the Wilderness from Exodus 16** and emphasize the lack of trust that there would be enough. Sometimes we fear there isn't love to go around either.

### **Additional Study Ideas**

1. You might look at the lived characteristics of someone who loves. Check out I Corinthians 13:4-8
2. A more difficult twist might be to look at what it means to love your enemies not just people easy to love. Check out Matthew 5:43-45. Ask them to think about someone who has hurt them, bullied them or hurt a family member. What would it take to love them and am I really called to?
3. See the brief quote from Bonhoeffer's book, the Cost of Discipleship

### **Ideas To Incorporate Theme Throughout The Day**

1. Massage circles before evening worship or as a part of worship...taking care of each other in love
2. Affirmation bombardment during parish time – telling how they feel about each other
3. The Eucharist should be celebrated at Evening Worship. It is the greatest sign and reminder of God's love for us in Jesus. In the Eucharist we are given God's grace; God's unconditional and abundant love. And it is through the body and blood of Jesus that we are strengthened to love each other as God loves us.
4. Sing as many songs about love as possible.
5. Hold hands during the Lord's prayer.
6. Any way we can safely, physically show each other we love each other would be good.
7. How about taking a risk and share the peace?

### **Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, and Suggestions**

Songs from the camp song sheet

1. Pass It On
2. I Love You x 12
3. I'll Do My Best
4. They'll Know We Are Christians
5. Love Round
6. Jesus, Lover of My Soul
7. Come Thou Fount
8. Psalm 121

Other new songs

1. I Love to Tell the Story ELW – 661
2. We Are Called ELW – 720
3. What Wondrous Love is This ELW – 666
4. You Are Mine ELW – 581

### **Ideas To Adjust Study Down For Juniors**

The story starts out where she, Beth, is sitting at an airport terminal, waiting to board a plane. She was sitting there with several other people who were also waiting, whom she did not know. As she waited, she pulled out her Bible and started reading. All of a sudden she felt as if the people sitting there around her, were looking at her. She looked up, but realized that they were looking just over her head, in the direction right behind her.

She turned around to see what everyone was looking at, and when she did, she saw a stewardess pushing a wheelchair, with the ugliest old man sitting in it, that she had ever seen before. She said he had this long white hair that was all tangled and such a mess. His face was really, really wrinkled, and he didn't look friendly at all. She said she didn't know why, but she felt drawn to the man, and thought at first that God wanted her to witness to him. In her mind she said she was thinking, "Oh, God, please, not now, not here."

No matter what she did, she couldn't get the man off of her mind, and all of a sudden she knew what God wanted her to do. She was supposed to brush this old man's hair. She went and knelt down in front of the old man, and said "Sir, may I have the honor of brushing your hair for you?" He said "What?"

She thought, “Oh great, he’s hard of hearing.” Again, a little louder, she said, “Sir, may I have the honor of brushing your hair for you?” He answered, “If you are going to talk to me, you are going to have to speak up, I am practically deaf.” So this time, she was almost yelling, “Sir may I please have the honor of brushing your hair for you?”

Everyone was watching to see what his response would be. The old man just looked at her confused, and said “Well, I guess if you really want to.” She said, “I don’t even have a brush, but I thought I would ask anyway.” He said, “Look in the bag hanging on the back of my chair, there is a brush in there.” So she got the brush out and started brushing his hair. She has a little girl with long hair, so she has had lots of practice getting tangles out, and knew how to be gentle with him. She worked for a long time, until every last tangle was out.

Just as she was finishing up, she heard the old man crying, and she went and put her hands on his knees, kneeling in front of him again looking directly into his eyes, and said “Sir, do you know Jesus?” He answered, “Yes, of course I know Jesus. You see, my bride told me she couldn’t marry me unless I knew Jesus, so I learned all about Jesus, and asked Him to come into my heart many years ago, before I married my bride.”

He continued, “You know, I am on my way home to go and see my wife. I have been in the hospital for a long time, and had to have a special surgery in this town far from my home. My wife couldn’t come with me, because she is so frail herself.” He said, “I was so worried about how terrible my hair looked, and I didn’t want her to see me looking so awful, but I couldn’t brush my hair, all by myself.”

Tears were rolling down his cheeks, as he thanked Beth for brushing his hair. He thanked her over and over again. She was crying, people all around witnessing this were crying, and as they were all boarding the plane, the stewardess, who was also crying, stopped her, and asked, “Why did you do that?”

And right there was the opportunity, the door that had been opened to share with someone else, the love of God. We don’t always understand God’s ways, but be ready, He may use us to meet the need of someone else, like He met the need of this old man, and in that moment, also calling out to a lost soul who needed to know about God’s love.

## **Ideas To Adjust Study Up For Seniors**

1. Discuss when they have denied God’s love or their love for God in order to fit in...
2. Struggling to love oneself makes it hard to love others...Galatians 5:13-14 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Simple discussion questions for high schoolers...

1. Under what circumstance have you denied your faith in God?
2. Why do you think you did it? What did you gain or lose by doing it?
3. Have you experienced doubt that God loves you? Why?
4. Do you love yourself? Why or Why not?
5. Does loving yourself make it easier for you to love others?

## **Parent Devotional** Day 1: God Loves...What's Your Call?

### **Scripture** Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

*<sup>31-39</sup> So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture: They kill us in cold blood because they hate you. We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one. None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.*

### **Reflection**

This is your child's first day of camp. Seems every year we start with God's love. And why not? It's where life begins and where our faith is born. God comes to us in Creation. God comes to us in the wilderness. God comes to us at the cross. In all those places we see abundance; love beyond measure; more love than we can ever imagine.

Not sure about you, but I can guess that your child has wondered once in awhile or over and over again whether or not they can lose God's love. Is it real? Is it eternal? Is it as rich and abundant as their parents and Pastor say it is? Will it really, always be with me? And so we turn to an incredibly familiar section of Scripture that is a great assurance in the midst of life's questions about God's love and our love for each other and our love for self.

In this day and age, it is difficult to believe that nothing can separate us from God's love. There is violence, abuse, political wrangling and disrespect everywhere we turn. And yes, even trouble in our families. What do we have to hold on to but the love of God? What can we rest in but the love of Christ? That love is our hope and our security when the world seems to be crumbling around us.

If God is love and God has called us to be love and live love, your question and your kid's question today is "what's my call" in response to the love of God? Do I trust it? Can I commit myself to love above all else and trust the abundance of God's love or will I/we go my/our own way? We are hoping that your children will choose to love all people including the enemy in response to the grace and love of a generous God. We are hoping and praying you will, too.

### **Family Activity**

If you have a cross handy (hanging on a wall or laying somewhere in your home) take that cross and lay it on the table in front of you. It is the most powerful reminder of God's love for you. Lay your hands on that cross and make a commitment to love God more and love someone in your life unconditionally. It may, ironically be, the child you sent to camp. Or, it could be your spouse or even your own parent. That cross is the clearest symbol of God's unconditional and steadfast love for you. With your hands on the cross, I invite you or another family member to pray this closing prayer...

### **Prayer**

Take a moment to center yourselves before you begin...

Most Holy God, thank you for loving me with an everlasting and unconditional love. Often I don't love as I know you hope I will. As I lay my hands on this cross today, remind me of your most amazing sacrifice. I offer you my life and all that I am and have and I make a commitment to you and to my family and friends. I know they seek my love. I promise to love them as you love me. Make me more faithful to you every day I live. This I pray in the name of Jesus, your powerful gift of grace and hope. Amen.

# God Welcomes You! -- What's Your Call?

## Introduction to the Theme

At the heart of the Christian faith is a God who loves us profoundly, and who welcomes us fully and unconditionally. Because God loves us so deeply, we can be certain that we have a place in God's heart, and among God's people. Today's study will focus on how we are welcomed by God, just as we are. We will also explore how this experience calls us to welcome others as we ourselves have been welcomed.

Knowing what it means to be welcomed by a God who is sometimes difficult to experience or understand is not always easy. So God has given us the gift of the church, where we are invited to experience being welcomed, and where we are called to practice welcoming others. As our faith communities become places where people are profoundly welcomed, we grow in our capacity to realize what it means to be welcomed into God's heart. As we develop our ability to welcome others into our faith communities, we grow in our ability to welcome others into the love of God.

It is a natural human desire to want to be welcomed. But it is a natural human tendency to create divisions that exclude others. Because we have been loved so fully and unconditionally by God, we don't need to feel good about ourselves at the expense of others. So we are called to welcome all people — even those we may be inclined to exclude.

We will consider the story of Saul of Tarsus (who also became known as the Apostle Paul – see below): a faithful and passionate leader among the Jewish people in the months immediately following the resurrection of Christ. Initially a fierce opponent of the Christian movement, Saul met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and eventually became a Christian himself. At first the church was reluctant to welcome someone who had so vigorously opposed them. But God inspired them to open their hearts and their community to him, and it proved to be a blessing both to Saul and to them.

To experience welcome and to extend welcome is what Jesus wants for us. When the Scribes and Pharisees opposed Jesus, they leveled this accusation at him: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." [St. Matthew 15:2b] Their accusation, of course, was true. And what they saw in him is a reality that lies very close to the heart of the Gospel: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with us."

This study will address two questions: How have we experienced the welcome of the church; the welcome of our faith? *and* How will we answer the call of God by welcoming others; all others?

## Objectives For This Day Of The Study

1. Each camper will be reminded that they are fully and unconditionally welcomed into the heart of God and into the community of God's people.
2. Each camper will be assured that there is nothing that can separate them from the love of God. (Romans 8:38-39)
3. Each camper will explore what it might look like for them to invite others into their own faith community, and into the love of God.
4. Each camper will consider several concrete examples of opportunities to be a welcoming force on behalf of God.
5. Counselors: as you plan this day's study, you might consider adopting the following two goals: (1) to help each camper plan to welcome one other camper this week – to a game; to sit together at dinner; to go for a walk; to a conversation... and (2) to help each camper lift up one life experience from back home where they can continue to do this.

## **Morning Watch**

**Welcome** *Welcome to this day of call. “May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be confident knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.* - attributed to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Theresa of Avila

### **Scripture Acts 9:11-14 (The Message)**

<sup>11-12</sup> *Get up and go over to Straight Avenue. Ask at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus. His name is Saul. He’s there praying. He has just had a dream in which he saw a man named Ananias enter the house and lay hands on him so he could see again.* <sup>13-14</sup> *Ananias protested, “Master, you can’t be serious. Everybody’s talking about this man and the terrible things he’s been doing, his reign of terror against your people in Jerusalem! And now he’s shown up here with papers from the Chief Priest that give him license to do the same to us.*

### **Short skit or dialogue:**

**NARR** “A schoolyard in a typical [elementary school – middle school – high school represented by campers this week].”

Three school friends are standing in a circle, excitedly talking with one another. A fourth student stands nearby, watching, obviously wishing to be included in the group. Periodically the fourth student moves closer to the circle, clearly wanting to be invited in. Each time the group shifts, so the fourth is directly behind one of them (not in between them, and able to step into the circle). Occasionally one of the three looks over his/her shoulder at the fourth, but immediately turns attention back to the circle. The one left out looks distressed, but appears to be trying to hide it.

**NARR** “God has welcomed you. God calls you to welcome others. What’s your call in this situation?”

### **Song Come to the Table - by the Sidewalk Prophets**

We all start on the outside; the outside looking in  
This is where grace begins  
We were hungry, we were thirsty, with nothing left to give  
Oh the shape that we were in,  
Just when all hope seemed lost love opened the door for us  
    He said come to the table; come join the sinners who have been redeemed  
    Take your place beside the Savior  
    Sit down and be set free. Come to the table  
Come meet this mighty crew of misfits, these liars and these thieves  
There's no one unwelcome here  
So that sin and shame that you brought with you, you can leave it at the door  
Let mercy draw you near  
    To the thief and to the doubter, to the hero and the coward  
    To the prisoner and the soldier, to the young and to the older  
    All who hunger, all who thirst, all the last and all the first  
    All the poppers and the princess, all who fail you've been forgiven  
    All who dream and all who suffer, all who loved and lost another  
    All the chained and all the free, all who follow, all who lead  
    Anyone who's been let down, all the lost you have been found  
    All who have been labeled right or wrong, to everyone who hears this song

### **Scenarios to consider during your time with God**

1. You are walking into the main entrance of your school. Down the hall to your left you see a group of your friends standing, talking and laughing. It’s been a long weekend and you haven’t seen them. You can’t wait to get down the hall and start catching up. As you make your way inside the building, you notice someone to your right that you have never seen before. Obviously a new student – looking a little nervous and confused, standing completely alone while groups of friends stand nearby or walk past without even saying hello. You remember when your family first moved to this town, and how scared you were on your first day of school. (Will anyone like me? Will I miss my old friends forever? Will I ever figure this building out?) You want to go be with your friends, but something is tugging at your heart. God has welcomed you. God calls you to welcome others. What’s your call?



2. You are at a family gathering, with a half dozen cousins. There has been a lot of laughter and a lot of fun – there always is when you are together. But early in the evening, you notice that everyone is looking your way and giggling. You become very nervous. Why are they looking at me? Did I do something wrong? Did I say something stupid? Then one of the cousins says something, and you realize they are laughing at your little brother. You glance at him, and see a tear starting to form in his right eye. You look back at them, and want to feel like you're one of them; like you're in the group, but you find yourself feeling sorry for your brother (even though he has been kind of a brat to you this week). God has welcomed you. God calls you to welcome others. What's your call?

### **Prayer**

God, thank you for welcoming me unconditionally into your family. It's so great to know that I'm accepted and loved. Help me to always remember that feeling and make the call to be the welcoming person to others. Amen

## **Evening Devotion**

Questions for Evening Devotions (based upon the scenarios from Morning Watch)

1. Have you ever been in the situation of being the new person? Who were the people that welcomed you?
2. Are you "new" at camp, here with friends, here by yourself? How have you been welcomed?
3. Are there people at camp this week that still need to be welcomed? How can you make them feel welcome?
4. How does it feel to be the one singled out in a group? Has anyone ever stood up for you?
5. What would it take for you to be the person to jump into a group and stop it from happening to others?

## **Scripture Study**

Tuesday is always a hard day for Bible study. Due to the hike schedule there is less time available for villages to use. The kids are tired from their hike – some are exhausted from working harder than they have for a long time. They have been separated most of the day from friends who participated in other hikes, and might be thinking more about how to connect with those friends than how to connect with this Bible study. It will be important to start strong, if you want to capture their attention and help them into this theme. Some suggestions:

1. If the same space is available for Bible study that you used yesterday, choose it. The familiarity of the setting might help to get them into the right frame of mind a bit more quickly.
2. Starting out with a quick round of "highs and lows from the day" might help. Sometimes they are just dying to say something about what they've seen or experienced, and once it is said they might be better able to focus and participate.
3. Be sure to include them in the conversation. This may be a day that calls for less explaining and more asking questions. It might also be an important day to draw out responses. Don't go on to the next camper right away because one is somewhat slow to answer. Give them time to think it through and offer a response. And be sure to encourage the rest of the group to encourage them, even if their responses aren't the most articulate or insightful.
4. When turning to Bible passages have them do the readings from their own Bibles. Those who haven't looked up many passages in the Bible will need a little extra time to find the verses.

The primary passage for today's study features the Apostle Paul. Formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, Paul was a young, accomplished leader in the Jewish faith. (in Paul's own words: Acts 26:4-11 and Philippians 3:4b-6) An Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin; a trained Pharisee; a strict adherent of the Jewish faith; first a persecutor of the early Christian movement and eventually one of its greatest proponents; Paul is featured prominently in the Acts of the Apostles (written by the same author who wrote the Gospel According to Luke), in the letters most likely written by him (Romans, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, Philemon) and in the additional ones sometimes attributed to him (Ephesians, Colossians, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, and Titus).

It would be reasonable to think that his name changed at the time of his conversion, but it doesn't seem so. When Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, he called to him: "Saul, Saul." (Acts 9:4) In the vision of Ananias he is described as "a man of Tarsus named Saul." (Acts 9:11). It is later, on the Island of Cyprus, that he is first referred to as "Saul, also known as Paul." (Acts 13:9) Nothing is known about Paul's death. The Acts of the Apostles reports that he spent his last two years in Rome, awaiting trial, and meeting with those who wanted to learn from him about Christian faith. (Acts 28:16-31)

Saul is first introduced to us at St. Stephen's execution. Acts reports that the witnesses to this execution, "laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul." (Acts 7:58) After Stephen's death it is reported that "Saul approved of their killing

him.” (Acts 8:1) As the persecution began against the Christian church, Saul was heavily involved, detaining, arresting and contributing to the deaths of numerous early followers of Jesus.

Given his opposition to the Christian movement, it is no surprise that many Christians were frightened of him, and at first unwilling to welcome him into their community of faith after his reported conversion. But the power in this story includes the faithfulness of Ananias (Acts 9:17), and the welcome he received from the Christians in Damascus. (Acts 9:19-20)

As you begin the study, you will want to make your campers aware of this background – it is essential to the story. You may have them begin by sharing what they know about Saul / Paul. Once they have contributed what they have to offer, you can fill in the blanks from your own study of his life. (More on that later...) Be sure to point out that the early church had many reasons to be afraid of him.

To help you in relating to this theme, and to prepare you to share it with others, you might spend some time reflecting on those experiences you have had of being welcomed, and of being excluded. Take a moment and reflect on these questions:

1. When have you been surrounded by people but felt completely alone?
2. When have you struggled to keep up a conversation, never sure what to say or what to expect?
3. When have you sensed that there was an energy between others that didn't include you?

Chances are, some of the situations or places you have just imagined are instances when you have been excluded. On the other hand, in what situations or places have you felt completely at home; completely at ease? With whom are you entirely comfortable; able to be yourself without pretending to be something you're not, or putting on airs? If you could choose one place in the world to be right now, where would it be? Chances are, some of the situations or places you have just imagined are instances when you have been fully welcomed.

Your campers will have had similar experiences. As they think about what it means to be welcomed into God's heart, and into their community of faith, it might be helpful for them to think about some of these experiences.

To be welcomed into God's heart, or to be welcomed into a community of faith, is a more profound experience than to just show up and be allowed to stay. In either case we are welcomed into God's presence, and the experience of God's presence can have a significant impact. From this perspective we understand that we have been welcomed:

1. just as we are – with no need to prove ourselves or earn God's love (and with no fear of being judged by others).
2. into an experience of God's life-changing love.
3. into a living and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.
4. into a world-wide community of brothers and sisters in faith.
5. into an understanding of ourselves as both sinners and saints.
6. into the journey of discovering God, and discerning God's call.
7. into the peace that comes from knowing God in Christ.
8. into the particular family of faith to which we belong.

The welcome which God offers is a life-changing welcome. It is intended to have an impact on us. One of the impacts that God's welcome has on us is that we find ourselves both called and inspired to welcome others.

Yesterday we reflected on the nature of God's love. It was observed that some think about holding on to God's love tightly, as if we can never get enough of it. But the love of God grows stale within us when it is not given away. The same is true with God's welcome. There is a temptation to be relieved that we are welcomed, and even to take some measure of delight in the fact that we have been welcomed and others haven't been. After all, if there are going to be insiders and outsiders, who wouldn't want to be one of the insiders? Thinking this way is a natural, human (if sinful) tendency. But the reality is: those of us who have been welcomed by God are called to welcome others in the same way that God first welcomed us. It is, in part, why God has welcomed us so fully and unconditionally: so that we, shaped by this experience, will become children of God; called to share with the world what has been shared with us.

The trick is: we are called to be as loving and gracious and radical in welcoming others as God has been in welcoming us. Loved fully and unconditionally by God, we are put at ease and no longer need to prove ourselves. Our well being is not established by what groups have welcomed us, or who our group has chosen not to welcome. The result of this is that we are freed to not worry about this; freed to welcome others — even those we may at first have been inclined to exclude. Who are these? We are called to welcome:

1. the awkward classmate with few social skills.
2. the hyperactive neighbor kid who irritates us.
3. the friend who disagrees with us in matters of politics or social agenda.
4. the refugee who looks and acts differently than we do.
5. the individual whose religious beliefs differ from ours.
6. the individual who has no religious beliefs at all.

It is one thing to welcome those who are easily welcomed (the good-looking, the smart, the athletic, the popular, the successful, the powerful, the prosperous...). It is an entirely different thing to welcome the unwelcome; to welcome those who don't easily fit in; to welcome those who make us uncomfortable; to welcome when we don't have anything to gain from those we've welcomed.

This is what Jesus had in mind in the sixth chapter of St. Luke:

<sup>32</sup> [Jesus said,] "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." [St. Luke 6:32-36]

The value in reflecting on those times when we have felt unwelcome is that it helps us to realize how important it is that we reach out to others who are having a similar experience. There are few instances in this world when people feel warmly and graciously and genuinely welcomed. We are called, as children of a welcoming God, to provide this for others.

The local congregation is one place where we practice this. The church is an assembly of broken, sinful human beings, so there will be times when we ourselves are not fully welcomed at church. There will also be times when we fail to be as welcoming to others as God calls us to be. But we commit ourselves to this practice, and pray that God will strengthen us for the task. To the extent that our congregations can offer a radical, gracious welcome to all newcomers, we can provide them with a glimpse of the character of our God. In congregational life, this means welcoming all people, without exception. The early church struggled with this. Some believed that only those who were Jewish – who had accepted and who practiced Jewish laws and customs – were welcome to faith in Christ. But Peter disagreed. Responding to a vision from God, Peter addressed an assembly of believers in Joppa:

<sup>10:34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.

<sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, <sup>46</sup> for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup> "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" <sup>48</sup> So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days. [Acts 10:34-36, 43-48]

Ultimately the leaders of the early church came to agree with Peter, and it was established that newcomers were just as welcome in the Christian church (without preconditions) as were long-time members.

The purpose of this study is to help campers be aware that they are welcomed into the heart of God and into the community of faith just as they are, and this can never be taken from them. We also want them to see themselves as a critical resource for today's church in welcoming others. They have a particular role to play in their world that nobody else can play. Hopefully this study will assist them as they seek to understand exactly what that means for them.

### **A Proposed Structure for the Study**

**Gathering** Find a suitable place for the group to gather; a place where they are least likely to be distracted, and where they can talk with each other confidentially without being heard by others. As they take their seats, make sure they have a Bible, a pen or pencil to write with, and some note paper if they don't care to write in their Bibles. (They might want to use their Morning Watch Booklet.)

**Highs and Lows** Have each camper share one of the best or worst things that happened today, on their hike or in the camp.

**Opening Prayer** If campers share items of significance in their highs or lows, include this in your opening prayer. Thank God for this place, and for this opportunity to learn about our faith. Ask that we might be able to trust in the good news that we are fully and unconditionally welcomed into the heart of God, and into the community of faith, just as we are – with no exceptions. Invite the Holy Spirit to open their hearts and minds to what will be shared during this time together. Ask God to help them be attentive, respectful of one another, eager to learn, and open to the growth God wants us all to experience.

**Summary of Yesterday's Study** Invite one or more of the campers to summarize what they learned on Sunday night (during the sermon at opening worship) and yesterday (as we explored the notion that God's love for us is profound, and our choice is to respond to God's love not by hoarding love, but by sharing love). Ask each camper to share one thing they learned from this, or one commitment they made to love someone else, either here at camp or back home.

**Brief Summary of Today's Study** Yesterday's theme was "God loves, and our call is to share God's love in the world." Today's theme is "God welcomes, and our call is to welcome others." We want to talk about what it is like to be welcomed by God just as we are, and about what it would look like for us to be as welcoming towards others as God is to us. In fact, God doesn't simply ask us to consider this. God calls us to do this, and it is an important aspect of being a follower of Jesus. There are many times in our lives when people are left out, or don't feel welcomed and included. As people who have been welcomed by God, it is our responsibility to help all people feel welcomed into God's heart, and into our communities of faith.

**Today's Key Bible Story** Have the campers read Acts 9:1-22. If it is a group of older campers, you might ask them to read it in parts. Assign someone to be each of the following characters: narrator, The Lord, Saul and Ananias. You might ask the rest of the group to speak together on behalf of "all who heard Saul" in verse 21. Once the passage has been read in its entirety, bring the group back to the beginning and look at it section by section.

Acts 9:1-2 – Saul as a Persecutor of the Christian Church

1. Why is Saul so opposed to the early Christian movement?
2. What does he do to try to stop the spread of this news about Jesus?
3. What do you suppose the people of his day think about him?

Acts 9:3-9 – Saul's Transformation

1. What happens when Jesus, after being raised from death, appears to Saul?
2. Why does Jesus appear to be light and voice, instead of flesh and blood? (*Answer: in Acts 1:9 we read that his physical body was taken up to be with God in heaven.*)
3. What impact does this experience have on Saul and his traveling companions?

Acts 9:10-18a – The Courage and Faithfulness of Ananias

1. What is the first response of Ananias when God calls him to go and meet with Saul?
2. Why does he resist doing what God wants him to do?
3. What happens when Ananias agrees to do what God is asking him to do?
4. How does this change both Saul and Ananias?

Acts 9:18b-2 – The Ministry of the Church in Damascus

1. Regarding the Christians in Damascus: what were their options? (*Answers could include: refusing to meet with Saul altogether; demanding that Saul prove to them that he had changed; welcoming Saul unconditionally.*)
2. How did their courage and faithfulness help the church? (*Answer: it allowed Saul to begin his journey as a faithful Christian, and prepared him to be a tremendous asset to the church.*)
3. What might have happened if the Christians of Damascus refused to let Paul spend some time with them? (*The church may never have benefited from the strong, faithful leadership of Paul.*)

Acts 9:21-22 – The Ministry of Saul / Paul

1. What impact does Saul have on Christians of his day, after the church embraces him and helps him to grow in Christian faith?
2. How do his listeners respond to him?
3. What influence does Saul have on the life of the early church?

After working through the story, invite campers to share the one most important thing to remember about this story. You might even go around the circle and have each one of them share something. If they don't do so, you'll want to make sure it is mentioned that the church could easily have kept their distance from Paul, but took a risk and welcomed him. It turned out to be a very important step to take, and in the long run it made them much stronger as a community than they ever would have been without Paul.

**Inclusion / Exclusion Exercise** I'd like each of you to close your eyes for a minute and turn on your imagination. When have you been surrounded by people but felt completely alone? When have you struggled to keep up a conversation, never sure what to say or what to expect? When have you sensed that there was an energy between others that didn't include you? (Provide a minute or two for campers to think about this.) Chances are, some of the situations or places you have just imagined are instances when you have been excluded.

On the other hand, in what situations or places have you felt completely at home; completely at ease? With whom are you entirely comfortable; able to be yourself without pretending to be something you're not, or putting on airs? If you could choose one place in the world to be right now, where would it be? (Provide a minute or two for campers to think about this.) Chances are, some of the situations or places you have just imagined are instances when you have been fully welcomed.

**God Welcomes You** The first thing we want you to remember today is that because God loves us (remember: we talked about that yesterday), we are fully and unconditionally welcomed into God's heart, and into the community of faith that we share. What was true for Saul in the first century is true for us today. There is nothing about us that could make God not want us. Just like the early church embraced Saul, even though it seemed like a dangerous thing to do, God welcomes each and every one of us just as we are.

1. We don't have to be the smartest person.
2. We don't have to be the strongest person.
3. We don't have to be the most faithful person.
4. We don't have to be the best looking person.
5. We don't have to be the richest person.

We are – each one of us – the person God has created, and has loved, and has welcomed into the promise of our faith. And here is what God promises us: there is nothing that can ever change that. Have everyone turn to Romans 8:38-39 in their Bibles. Have one camper read it. Invite them all to write “never separated from God” in the margin next to this passage. God will always love us. We will always be welcome. There will never be any doubt about this, because God promises is to us.

**We Are Called to Welcome** The Christian faith is, at its heart, a welcoming faith. Paul would later write to the Galatians, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.” [Galatians 3:27-29] A core commitment we all share is the responsibility to welcome others into the unity we share in Christ. You and I play an important role in this. You don't have to be a pastor or an elected leader or an elder in the community. Every one of us who has been welcomed by God is also called by God. Called to welcome others, just like we ourselves have been welcomed.

**Welcoming Circle** Let's try something: I'd like you all to stand in a circle and join hands. (*Typically, they will stand in a circle facing one another.*) Now: let go of your hands. Take a step back. Do the same thing again, but this time make a different kind of circle. (*Don't give them any more instruction than this. Have them keep trying, until they make circle with every member in the circle facing out instead of in. Each time they try, encourage them: “That was a good idea. But I'm thinking of something else. Try again.”*) Once they are standing in a circle, facing out, ask them: Does this circle feel different from the other circle? It is natural, sometimes, to focus inward. When we are in a group, sometimes all we can think about is being in the group. But God calls us to stand in a circle, hand-to-hand, facing out. As I walk up to your circle, what happens? (*Answer: we are looking at you, making eye contact with you, easily inviting you to join us in our circle.*)

**A Welcoming Church** This is what the church is supposed to be. Every congregation is called by God to be a laboratory of welcome – a place where we can practice welcoming others. We won't always get it right. But that is the point: we are not called to be perfect. We are called to practice over and over again. Every time a new person shows up at worship, God has provided another opportunity for us to learn a bit more about how to welcome others; another opportunity to get just a bit better at this core responsibility of ours. If there is time, invite some conversation about how each camper's home church does at this. When has it worked? When have you struggled? What have you learned? What works well? What would your church like to share with other churches?

**Welcoming Exercise** Take out your Morning Watch booklet, and turn to one of the blank pages. Think about someone you've seen this week who isn't necessarily at the center of activity. Maybe someone who is a little bit shy, or maybe just tends to stand back a little bit. Write down their first name, and think of an activity in the next two days they might enjoy.

Your assignment is to find a way to welcome them to join you. Maybe you might welcome them to sit with you at dinner, or be on your team for Elimination, or ride in your raft on Thursday. God calls us to be a welcoming people, and this is what it looks like.

Now think about someone back home. Again, someone who a little bit shy, or maybe just tends to stand back a little bit. Write down their first name on the same page, and think of something you can welcome them to do when you get home. Maybe you might welcome them to hang out at your house some afternoon. Maybe some of your friends have plans and they could join you.

**Closing Prayer** Take a minute to pray together before leaving the Bible study circle. Thank God for welcoming each of us into the family of faith that nourishes us, inspires us, and gives us hope and peace. Ask God to help us be bold and creative in the ways we welcome others. May we all be as welcoming to others as God has been to us.

### **Additional Study Ideas**

1. What do churches do, intentionally or unintentionally, that make people feel more or less welcomed? Have campers make a list of what they have experienced and what they have heard. What strategies or behaviors are most successful at making newcomers feel welcomed? How could our home churches (or our families, or our circle of friends) put these ideas into action?
2. What other groups are successful at helping newcomers to feel welcomed and appreciated? Have you participated in clubs or sporting teams or other organizations that were especially good at helping you feel welcomed and comfortable with them? When that seems to happen easily and naturally, it is probably because one of the core values of the organizations is caring for and welcoming newcomers. (Counselors: you have had more experience with this than most of the campers. You might be prepared to share some of your experiences with groups that have welcomed you or not.)
3. What groups or individuals are the hardest for me to welcome? How might I commit myself to offering a genuine welcome to those I might not be inclined to enjoy? How might this be an appropriate response to the God who has welcomed me fully and unconditionally?

### **Ideas To Incorporate Theme Throughout The Day**

As mentioned above ("Objectives for This Study"), campers might be encouraged to welcome others into groups. With most of the day given to the hike, particular attention could be given to hikers who are making their way alone. Welcome them to join your group, and then make sure to include them in your conversations. This could also happen as hikers sit down for a break, or a bite to eat.

### **Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, and Suggestions**

Songs to use from the camp song sheet:

1. We Are the Family of God
2. Jesus, Lover of My Soul
3. Big House

Other new songs:

1. All are Welcome (Marty Haugen)
2. We're Family (Jay Beech)

Additional scriptures:

1. The Visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)
2. Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)
3. Welcoming Angels Unawares (Hebrews 13:1-2)
4. The Mission of the Twelve (Matthew 10:5-15)
5. The Great Judgment Parable (Matthew 25:31-46)
6. Hospitality in the Early Church (Acts 2:43-47)
7. Jesus Blesses the Children (Luke 18:15-17)
8. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-21)
9. Simon Peter: "Kill and Eat" (Acts 10:9)
10. The Parable of the Great Dinner (Luke 14:15-24)

## **Ideas To Adjust Study Down For Juniors**

1. What groups have excluded you? How did you feel when you weren't included? These experiences, though painful, can be opportunities to help us have compassion for others who are experiencing something similar.
2. What groups, families or individuals have made you feel welcome? What group leaders have been instrumental in helping groups to be more welcoming? What does their welcoming attitude say about their purpose as a group? Their awareness and interest in people other than themselves? What can we learn from groups, families or individuals who have welcomed us?
3. Is your family one where friends and neighbors are welcome? If so, why do you think it is important to be open to other people being part of the activities your family enjoys? What does that say about your family?

## **Ideas To Adjust Study Up For Seniors**

1. Our nation is currently in the midst of an intense conversation about how to respond to the existence of refugees in our world. Some believe that we who live in relative peace are responsible to be generous in giving them a safe place among us. Others believe that it would be unwise to welcome refugees from troubled countries into our communities, because some of them might be dangerous. What does our faith have to say about this? Does the fact that we have been fully and unconditionally welcomed by God influence the way we evaluate who should be welcome in our country?
2. Is a Christian church that is not profoundly welcoming truly a Christian church? Many churches have a "turned in on themselves" demeanor. (This is as true of churches in our tradition as it is of churches in other traditions... ) What does this say about the values of the congregation? Other churches go out of their way to make newcomers feel completely welcome, no matter who they are. What does this say about the values of the congregation?
3. How does this call to be welcoming influence the way we will befriend others? Do we reach out only to people who seem like they might make our own life richer and better? Or are we willing to befriend those who seem like they might take more from us than they give to us? Does God's call to welcome shape the way we make and keep friends?

## **Parent Devotional** Day 2: God Welcomes...What's Your Call?

**Scripture** The Acts of the Apostles 9:1-22

<sup>11-12</sup> "Get up and go over to Straight Avenue. Ask at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus. His name is Saul. He's there praying. He has just had a dream in which he saw a man named Ananias enter the house and lay hands on him so he could see again." <sup>13-14</sup> Ananias protested, "Master, you can't be serious. Everybody's talking about this man and the terrible things he's been doing, his reign of terror against your people in Jerusalem! And now he's shown up here with papers from the Chief Priest that give him license to do the same to us."

### **Reflection**

Today at Rainbow Trail campers will be considering the story of the Apostle Paul. Once a fierce opponent of the church, he had an experience with the Risen Christ, and became a Christian himself. Through this he was welcomed fully and unconditionally into God's love, despite his past sins. Even more, although they were frightened at first (because of how he had persecuted them in the past), he was warmly and genuinely welcomed into the church at Damascus. He went on to dedicate his life to welcoming others into God's love and grace.

We too, through the promise of the Gospel, have been welcomed fully and unconditionally into God's love, and into Christ's church. Having been so welcomed, our call is to welcome others as we ourselves have been welcomed.

To experience welcome and to extend welcome is what Jesus wants for us. When the Scribes and Pharisees opposed Jesus, they leveled this accusation at him: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." [St. Matthew 15:2b] Their accusation, of course, was true. And what they saw in him is a reality that lies very close to the heart of the Gospel: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with us."

Today's study will address two questions: How have we experienced the welcome of the church; the welcome of our faith? and How will we answer the call of God by welcoming others; all others?

### **Family Activity**

As a family, make a list of those places and situations where you have felt warmly and genuinely welcomed. Talk about how you might learn from these experiences to make your own family a more welcoming experience for others. What would welcoming others say to your guests about how much your family cares for them?

### **Prayer**

Lord God, you have welcomed us fully and unconditionally into your love. We thank you for your grace and generosity, and we ask you to be as welcoming to others as you have been to us, that they, like us, may enjoy a glimpse of your presence in our lives. We ask this in the name of the one who gave his life for us, and who welcomes us into your eternal kingdom, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



# God Forgives! -- What's Your Call?

## Introduction to the Theme

The theme for day 3 this week is “God Forgives! -- What's Your Call?” As we are discovering this week, the word “call” is being used in two senses. First, in the sense of God's call upon our lives, what God is calling us to do. If it's true that God forgives, then a consequence of that forgiveness is that God asks God's people to be a forgiving people. In one way or another, nearly every Christian community has communal prayer each week. Each day many Christians pray the Lord's Prayer, the prayer Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray. “Forgive us our sins,” Jesus prays, “as we forgive those who sin against us” (or the more traditional “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”). Likewise, the apostle counsels, “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Colossians 3:13). It seems built into the fabric of Christian faith that as God forgives, so also Christian people are called to forgive.

At the same time, each opportunity to forgive presents a concrete challenge. This leads to the second sense of “call.” What call will we make when the possibility to forgive or not forgive confronts us? Life is real and hurts are deep. We betray and are betrayed. We say and do things we regret that hurt the lives and wellbeing of others and ourselves. Sometimes our offenses are intentional and very often they are unintended, but just as real and felt just as sharply. Every single instance in which we are hurt or offended gives us an opportunity to make a call. What will we do in this instance? Will we let it go? Or hold a grudge against the offender?

British theologian and priest Andrew Pinsent writes, “Forgiveness is regarded as something wholesome and laudable, but also something that is rare: the natural response to being sinned against is, at best, to seek to balance the books, to render an “eye for an eye.” The response of Christ from the cross, however, is very different, “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.” If we are disciples of Christ, how then can we be forgiven and learn to forgive?

Or, to put it in the words of this week, how can we “make the call” to forgive?

Today's Bible study will explore one of the great, primal stories in all Scripture, the story of the twin brothers Jacob and Esau. It is a profound story of forgiveness, with all the real-life, deep-hurt dynamics that any human being can experience. Jacob, above all, is remembered as one of the great patriarchs of ancient Israel, as the third of the trio “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” In fact, his name, Jacob, is synonymous with Israel. God changes Jacob's name to Israel and says, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you...” (Genesis 35:11). The destiny of all humanity is somehow found in Jacob.

And yet, Jacob has been a schemer and a deceiver. And because of this, that's how we remember *Esau*, as the one tricked out of his birthright by Jacob, as the victim who had his father's blessing stolen out from underneath him by his conniving brother, leaving him devastated, bitter, and hell-bent on revenge.

But as we will see, at the end of the story, Esau forgives the brother he once vowed to kill for his despicable behavior. Here's the description of the moment of reconciliation: “But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.” What was it that allowed Esau to forgive Jacob? Exploring that question will be one of the goals of the Bible study.

Stories have the power to rope us in, to let us imagine ourselves in them and their characters in us. Stories open us to alternative paths that we might undertake and new ways to imagine our own outcomes. The power and drama of the struggle between Jacob and Esau and its resolution in forgiveness and reconciliation is one that draws us in through its basic humanness. Rivalry, scheming, broken promises, lying, impulsive actions, regret, fear, seeking, searching, bargaining, letting go of anger and bitterness, embracing and weeping, freedom and life renewed: these and whatever other features you and your Bible study participants discover will be elements of your own lives and this story will give you opportunity to face these things together.

Our lesson today will also explore the passionate counsel of the apostle Paul to the struggling church community in ancient Corinth, a city of Greece. This was one of the earliest Christian communities, one that was filled with factions and quarrels and dissent. They struggled with Paul and most especially with one another. Paul taught them that what happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus was the opening of new life for all. Those who are in Christ are a new creation. In Christ, quite literally, everything has started over. “So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). It's not just that “there” is a new creation. The person in Christ her- or himself *is* the new creation. In Christ, there is a fresh start for us all. All of this is from God. And, a chief consequence of this, if not *the* most incredible outcome, according to Paul, is that *we* have been given the ministry of

reconciliation. We are called to be reconcilers and healers, called to mend human brokenness, called to be like Esau and like Christ himself.

In this Bible study, you will have the chance not only to explore these biblical texts, but the “texts” of the lives of the campers. They will have, as we all do, brokenness in their lives. They will have been betrayed and have betrayed. They stand in need of forgiveness, as we all do. They have opportunities to forgive and initiate reconciliation.

Dear counselor, please do this: teach your campers, model for them, demonstrate to them, share stories with them (perhaps most importantly, from your own experience) that God forgives them – that the God who made them redeems them, that nothing in all creation can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Teach them that God’s forgiveness opens them to new life and in that new life, they are graced by God with mercy, so that they are free to make the Christ-like call when the opportunity arises.

## **Objectives For This Day Of The Study**

1. Learn that God’s forgiveness comes from God’s love.
2. Realize that forgiveness is a gift: undeserved, unexpected, surprising.
3. See that forgiveness enables broken relationships to be mended; that forgiveness allows life to begin anew when we cannot forget what has happened in the past.
4. See that God entrusts to us a ministry of reconciliation: the work of mending, restoring, reuniting.
5. Explore the question: “What’s Your Call?” How are we, who are forgiven by God, free to act towards others who have hurt us?

## **Morning Watch**

**Welcome** *Welcome to this day of call. “May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be confident knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.*

- attributed to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Theresa of Avila

**Scripture** Matthew 18:21-22 (from *The Message*)

*At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, "Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven? Jesus replied, "Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven."*

### **Short skit or dialogue**

Counselor 1: *Knocks on imaginary bedroom door, shouts, (Name of Counselor 2)!*

Counselor 2: *Playing on imaginary computer tablet, ignores Counselor 1*

Counselor 1: *Knocks more emphatically, shouts louder, (Name)!*

Counselor 2: *Keeps playing without looking up. Sounding bothered, says, “What?”*

Counselor 1: *Did you take my iPad again?*

Counselor 2: *Ignores Counselor 1*

Counselor 1: *You better not have it! If you do, that’s the fourth time this week you’ve taken it without asking!*

Counselor 2: *Looks up, shoves tablet under bed. Opens door.*

Counselor 1: *Immediately looks around room, finds tablet under bed. Name! You did it again! You said you wouldn’t! You’re such a liar! Sometimes I just want to.....*

*Both Counselors freeze for a moment. Then, they simultaneously turn to campers and, now out of character, say, “What’s your call?”*

### **Song Forgiveness** - by Matthew West

It’s the hardest thing to give away

And the last thing on your mind today

It always goes to those that don’t deserve

It’s the opposite of how you feel

When the pain they caused is just too real

It takes everything you have just to say the word...

Forgiveness

Forgiveness

It flies in the face of all your pride  
It moves away the mad inside  
It's always anger's own worst enemy  
Even when the jury and the judge  
Say you gotta right to hold a grudge  
It's the whisper in your ear saying 'Set It Free'

Forgiveness, Forgiveness

Forgiveness, Forgiveness

Show me how to love the unlovable  
Show me how to reach the unreachable  
Help me now to do the impossible

Forgiveness, Forgiveness

Help me now to do the impossible

Forgiveness

It'll clear the bitterness away

It can even set a prisoner free

There is no end to what it's power can do

So, let it go and be amazed

By what you see through eyes of grace

The prisoner that it really frees is you

Forgiveness, Forgiveness

Forgiveness, Forgiveness

Show me how to love the unlovable

Show me how to reach the unreachable

Help me now to do the impossible

Forgiveness

I want to finally set it free

So show me how to see what Your mercy sees

Help me now to give what You gave to me

Forgiveness, Forgiveness

### **Scenarios to consider during your time with God**

1. A Scenario of...forgiveness? - A mom and her teenage daughter, Holly, are riding in a car, and Holly's mom says, "I know you're going out with your friends tonight. Don't do like you did that one time and come home an hour late without letting me know where you are and why you're late." Holly says, "Mom, I apologized for that. I was really stupid and I'm still sorry. I thought you forgave me! Why do you have to keep reminding me of what I did wrong?" What's your call?
2. An Unexpected Lie... - You and your best friend planned to get together on Saturday and spend several hours together in the afternoon. Your friend texted you on Saturday morning saying they felt sick and thought it best to stay home all day. Around noon, you go to the mall with your parents, and you see your friend with another friend in the food court, eating pizza and laughing and obviously having a good time. You realize your best friend probably lied to you. What's your call?

**Prayer** - God of love and mercy, you reach out to me as your beloved child. You love me so much that you let nothing stand in the way. You want nothing more than to love me and make me whole. You love me so much that you forgive me when I turn away from you. When you forgive me, you free me to forgive those who have wronged me. Sometimes, maybe even most of the time, that's hard to do, because it hurts so much. Help me to do the impossible. Help me clear the bitterness away. Amen.

## **Evening Devotion**

Questions for Evening Devotions (based upon the scenarios from Morning Watch)

1. People say, “Forgive and forget.” How can you move forward when you just can’t forget?
2. What’s the difference between “forgetting” and “not reminding?”
3. How does it feel to be reminded of the things you’ve done wrong, things you’ve worked on changing?
4. Why would your friend lie to you about not wanting to get together? How would you deal with this betrayal of trust?
5. How might you forgive someone who’s not even sorry for what they did?
6. What does forgiveness depend upon? Your attitude or the other person’s? Or, something else?
7. If someone has hurt you, how do you decide what to hope for?

## **Scripture Study**

### **A Story of Forgiveness and a Call to Be Forgiving**

This Bible study is less of a “scholarly” study and more of a process of wondering. It is an experience of letting questions and impulses arise from the hearing of the story. It is about engaging the text itself, being immersed in the story, and being attentive to what pops up in the minds and hearts of the campers.

The first story, from Genesis’ account of Jacob, is quite long – about 8 chapters. Within this longer section, about 4 chapters tell the story of Jacob and his twin brother Esau. Missing from our study is the long account of Jacob’s escape from Esau, which takes him to live with his uncle Laban in the land of Haran. During this time, Jacob married the two daughters of Laban, Rachel and Leah; Jacob prospered at Laban’s expense and eventually broke with Laban and moved back to the Promised Land. You would do well to read the *entire* story to get the wider context and overall feel. But, our study will focus specifically on the story of Jacob and Esau.

As I wrote in the introduction to the day, “Stories have the power to rope us in, to let us imagine ourselves in them and their characters in us. Stories open us to alternative paths that we might undertake and new ways to imagine our own outcomes.” Our goal with this study is to be drawn into the story of Jacob and Esau, to see ourselves and our conundrums in them and their drama.

I suggest two possibilities for engaging this story (*for younger campers, there is a shorter, condensed version of the story available in the Ideas to Adjust Down for Juniors*). The first is that you would take a moment of quiet to calm the hearts and minds of the Bible study participants, and then read the story slowly to them. It is divided into four sections, so I suggest stopping after each section and engage the campers in what they noticed.

A second possibility is to have campers share in the reading. While this is fine, the main point is to make sure everyone hears the story out loud and pays attention to it. If you wish for campers to share in the reading, perhaps limit it to one voice per section. By Wednesday, you’ll have a better grasp on how your campers interact. You’ll be able to choose a good way forward.

The questions offered below are intended to help draw out the campers’ observations about the story. Stop at the end of each section and invite the campers to share what stood out to them. Solicit and be attentive to the campers’ own questions and observations.

*A great way* for campers to capture what they have noticed without speaking is for them to draw or write what pops out to them. Provide sheets of paper and markers and pens and simply ask, “What stood out to you from the story?” Invite them to sketch or write what they saw or sensed.

Also, some creative drawing ideas would be for them to draw character portraits. On paper, draw variously design picture frames – maybe 4 per sheet of paper. Invite them to imagine and draw portraits of Jacob, Esau, Isaac, and Rebekah in the frames.

Another idea is to engage them in creative writing as a form of noticing and responding. Have them write a Haiku. Can they tell the story in 17 syllables? 5-7-5 syllables per unit.

Another idea is for them to take on one character of the story and write a letter to another. Maybe they could imagine being Jacob and writing a letter to Esau in anticipation of meeting him years later. Maybe Esau could write to Jacob, telling him of his anger. Or, Rebekah could write to Isaac. Whatever they want, whatever strikes them is perfect!

Another idea is to draw a story timeline. Have them draw a timeline by placing key events in the story along the timeline. Then, have them draw a quick picture that represents that part of the story.

Another imaginative way to engage the story is to have them draw a smartphone app. Imagine if the ancient Hebrews had smartphones. What apps would help them in their lives? An app that keeps the inventory of all their livestock? An app that helps huge families manage their daily tasks? What would Jacob and Esau tweet about their lives? What pics would they post on Instagram?

Maybe *you* can think of some more creative ways for your campers to draw, write, and otherwise engage the story – in addition to sharing their observations with spoken words. Have fun letting the story create the thoughts, reactions, emotions, questions and concerns that arise from the hearing of the text.

### **The Story of Jacob and Esau** (Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-45; 32:3-32; 33:1-17)

#### The Birth and Youth of Jacob and Esau – Genesis 25:19-34

Let the text be heard. Invite campers to share in the reading. At the end of the section, pause and engage the campers in questions and wonderings.

1. What is the nature of the relationship between Jacob and Esau from the very beginning?
2. What is Esau like when he is born?
3. Why do you think Jacob grabbed Esau's ankle at birth?
4. What was Esau like when he grew up? What was Jacob like?
5. Jacob offered to give Esau a bowl of stew in exchange for his birthright (the right to be recognized as firstborn) and Esau agreed. Why did Esau do this?
6. Jacob and Esau's parents each had a favored child: "Now Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Genesis 25:28). How do you think this favoritism might play into the conflict between the sons?

#### Isaac Blesses Jacob – Genesis 27:1-45

Again, stop at the end of this section. How has the story developed? What things in the first section signaled what is happening here? Be attentive to the very human, universal feelings and emotions of Jacob and Esau.

1. What stands out to you about Jacob in this part of the story?
2. Who did Jacob deceive?
3. What role did their mother Rebekah play in the deception?
4. What risk did Jacob take in dressing like Esau?
5. How was his father, Isaac, suspicious?
6. Describe Esau's feelings upon realizing he lost his father's blessing?
7. What did Esau pledge to do to Jacob?
8. How did Rebekah help Jacob escape Esau's fury?

#### Jacob Sends Presents to Appease Esau – Genesis 32:3-32

Stop after reading this section and ask the campers what is going on here. Get them into the story. Let the natural drama of the story drive the discussion.

1. Jacob had developed great wealth while he lived with his uncle Laban. When he left Laban, he headed toward the land where Esau was. What did Jacob do to prepare to meet his brother?
2. What were Jacob's emotions and feelings as he prepared to meet Esau?
3. What did Jacob say to God in his prayer?
4. Jacob spends a night alone before meeting his brother. What happens in that night?
5. Who is the man who wrestled with Jacob all night?
6. Why is Jacob renamed Israel?
7. Who did Jacob think he had seen in the wrestling match?

#### Jacob and Esau Meet – Genesis 33:1-17

This is the climax of the story. This section is key.

1. What did Jacob do as he and Esau approached each other?
2. What did Jacob expect?
3. What happened when they met?
4. Did Esau say, "I forgive you?"
5. What action of Esau showed forgiveness?
6. Why do you think Esau forgave Jacob and didn't kill him, as he once planned?
7. What happened between Jacob and Esau after they reconciled?
8. What might we learn about God from this story?
9. What part does love play in this story?
10. What happens to our fears when we are forgiven?

Summary questions:

1. What did you notice from the story?
2. What questions do you have about the story?
3. What do you wonder about?
4. How did the story challenge or encourage you?
5. Why do you think God uses people to bless others?
6. Why do you think God allows things to happen that do not make sense to us?

### **The Ministry of Reconciliation** (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Background: This is not a text of abstract theology. Paul and the church in Corinth have had a difficult history with one another. Reconciliation is on Paul's mind as what God makes possible and also as something needed between him and the Corinthian congregation.

Holly Hearon, professor of New Testament at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN, writes: "At the time Paul writes 2 Corinthians, he apparently felt that he was being viewed from a "human point of view." One issue that emerges later in the letter is his standing as an apostle: he just does not have the powerful presence and demeanor that the Corinthians expect (chapters 10-11). They are frustrated also because Paul says he is going to visit, and then he doesn't come; thus Paul appears to be a man who does not keep his word (1:15-2:4). In the ancient world (and no less so today), a person's character is revealed by what they say and what they do. The Corinthians are trying to match Paul's status as an apostle with their experience of the man and finding it difficult.

Paul, on the other hand, views the Corinthians as his very own. He is pained that they are drawn to apostles other than him, and he desperately desires to achieve reconciliation with the community. Five times in three verses he introduces the word "reconciliation." A careful reading of verses 18-19 reveals that Paul is driving home a point by having the one verse simply repeat what is said in the other: namely that God, through Christ, reconciles the world to God's self, and that God has entrusted the ministry and message of reconciliation to Paul. Paul repeats this final point one more time in verse 20 when he asserts that "We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us." This leaves the Corinthians in no doubt that Paul sees himself as speaking for God; this is, after all, what ambassadors do. Therefore, Paul goes on to urge the Corinthians, be reconciled to God. Yet one wonders if what Paul really means to say is "be reconciled to me."

With your campers, read the text from the Bible. This is a much shorter text than the story of Jacob and Esau. It's not a story; it's an appeal made in the middle of a letter. Perhaps one reader will do. Perhaps, depending upon the reactions of the listeners, a second reading from a different voice (even different gender the second time) will be helpful.

As before, be ask and be attentive to the reactions driven by the text. Engage the campers in conversation about key words. Two in particular are "reconciliation" and "ministry" or "ministering."

Here are some re-phrasings of these words. See if these words or a combination of them help bring out understanding and insight.

1. What does "reconciliation" mean? Some possibilities:
  - a. Restoring friendly relations
  - b. Making peace
  - c. Mending something torn
  - d. Settling differences
  - e. Resolving conflicts
  - f. Remediating a difficult situation
  - g. Reuniting divided people
2. What does "ministry" or "ministering" mean? Some possibilities:
  - a. Attend to the needs of someone
  - b. Provide something helpful
  - c. Tend to...
  - d. Care for
  - e. Look after
  - f. Treat
  - g. See to
  - h. Help
  - i. Assist
  - j. Aid

After engaging the campers in these two wider sections of Scripture, dig into questions that arise from *our* lives. You may want to ask:

1. How have you experienced these stories in your own life?
2. If you have brothers and/or sisters, how do you relate to one another? Is there conflict? How do you feel about that?
3. How has it felt when people have wronged you?
4. How has it felt when you have wronged someone else?
5. Have you wanted to seek revenge?
6. Have you been afraid of others who may want to seek revenge upon you? What have you done when you felt this way?
7. Has someone ever forgiven you? What changed when that happened?
8. Have you ever forgiven someone? How did that change your relationship?
9. If you feel there are people you could never forgive, how would it change things if you know that God forgives them?
10. How might you live out a “ministry of reconciliation?”
11. Where are the places in your life where reconciliation is needed and desired?
12. Where are the stuck places in your life?
13. If we really lived as if it were true that we live in new creation, how would life be different?
14. How can we begin to view others as God views them: as beloved children?
15. How might it be possible to take God’s viewpoint of ourselves and others?

Close your time together in prayer, prayer whose thoughts and feelings, thanksgivings and wonders arise from this study and from all that is going on at camp.

## **Additional Study Ideas**

### **The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa**

Forgiveness and reconciliation is possible not only on a personal level, say, between two people who have experienced a broken friendship. It can be experienced by groups of people, even nations. An example is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, established after the abolishment of apartheid. Apartheid, an Afrikaans word meaning “separateness” or the “state of being apart” was an official, government sanctioned system of racial segregation in the country of South Africa between 1948-1994.

### **From Wikipedia**

“Under apartheid, the rights, associations, and movements of the majority black inhabitants and other ethnic groups were curtailed, and white minority rule was maintained. Apartheid was developed after World War II by the Afrikaner-dominated National Party and Broederbond organizations.

Racial segregation in South Africa began in colonial times under the Dutch Empire, and continued when the British took over the Cape of Good Hope in 1795. Apartheid as an officially structured policy was introduced after the general election of 1948. Legislation classified inhabitants into four racial groups—“black”, “white”, “coloured”, and “Indian”, the last two of which were divided into several sub-classifications – and residential areas were segregated. From 1960 to 1983, 3.5 million non-white South Africans were removed from their homes, and forced into segregated neighborhoods, in one of the largest mass removals in modern history. Non-white political representation was abolished in 1970, and starting in that year black people were deprived of their citizenship, legally becoming citizens of one of ten tribally based self-governing homelands called bantustans, four of which became nominally independent states. The government segregated education, medical care, beaches, and other public services, and provided black people with services that were inferior to those of white people.”

After decades of anguish, pain, injustice, resistance, and finally international condemnation of this system of racial segregation, apartheid as an official system of government was abolished in South Africa. Democratic elections were held for the first time in 1994.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a court-like restorative justice body assembled in South Africa after the abolition of apartheid. Witnesses who were identified as victims of gross human rights violations were invited to give statements about their experiences, and some were selected for public hearings. Perpetrators of violence could also give testimony and request amnesty from both civil and criminal prosecution.

The TRC, the first of the nineteen held internationally to stage public hearings, was seen by many as a crucial component of the transition to full and free democracy in South Africa. Despite some flaws, it is generally thought to have been successful. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation was established in 2000 as the successor organization of the TRC.

### **Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC, and Forgiveness**

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the chairman of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC was created by Nelson Mandela's Government of National Unity in 1995 to help South Africans come to terms with their extremely troubled past. It was established to investigate the violations that took place between 1960 and 1994, to provide support and reparation to victims and their families, and to compile a full and objective record of the effects of apartheid on South African society.

*To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. It is also a process that does not exclude hatred and anger. These emotions are all part of being human. You should never hate yourself for hating others who do terrible things: the depth of your love is shown by the extent of your anger.*

*However, when I talk of forgiveness I mean the belief that you can come out the other side a better person. A better person than the one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood, making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. If you can find it in yourself to forgive then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a better person too.*

*But the process of forgiveness also requires acknowledgement on the part of the perpetrator that they have committed an offense. I don't like to talk about my own personal experience of forgiveness, although some of the things people have tried to do to my family are close to what I'd consider unforgivable. I don't talk about these things because I have witnessed so many incredible people who, despite experiencing atrocity and tragedy, have come to a point in their lives where they are able to forgive. Take the Craddock Four, for example. The police ambushed their car, killed them in the most gruesome manner, set their car alight. When, at a TRC hearing, the teenage daughter of one of the victims was asked: would you be able to forgive the people who did this to you and your family? She answered, "We would like to forgive, but we would just like to know who to forgive." How fantastic to see this young girl, still human despite all efforts to dehumanize her.*

### **The Story of Forgiveness in Charleston, SC**

On June 17, 2015, a gunman opened fire during a Bible study at Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Nine people died and five survived. Several family members of the victims quickly offered words and gestures of forgiveness. Here are two resources to engage what happened.

1. Too long to print in its entirety here, a compelling account is found in Time Magazine, which featured a cover article called "How Do You Forgive a Murder?" The article can be found at this link: <http://time.com/time-magazine-charleston-shooting-cover-story/>. Take the time before camp to investigate this article and have some of its stories in mind this summer.
2. The following opinion piece was published in the Washington Post on June 22, 2015. The author is Michael Gerson.

### **The Power of Forgiveness in Charleston** - By Michael Gerson, opinion writer, June 22, 2015

When many relatives of those cruelly murdered in Charleston — by a man who talked and prayed with his victims for an hour before systematically gunning them down — publicly offered their forgiveness, it was stunning and admirable in many ways. Not least of which, it provided a contrast to our political culture. So many are engaged in a search for evidence of their victimization in order to justify their anger. Here, genuine victims of a horrible crime responded with mercy.

The killer chose a historic African American church for a reason. For centuries, black churches have been a place of refuge, a voice for social justice and a target of racist violence. The alleged gunman, Dylann Roof, drove two hours to Charleston, S.C., because he undoubtedly wanted a symbol — and he got one. Against all his intentions, it is now the symbol of a living faith. The killer set out to defile a sacred place and ended up showing why it is sacred.

At the heart of the Christian faith is an impossible demand: to "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." This teaching was demonstrated by its author. The Christian novelist George MacDonald wrote: " 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,' said the Divine, making excuse for his murderers, not after it was all over, but at the very moment when he was dying by their hands." When we see this type of extreme grace reenacted — as in Charleston — it has a tremendous power and appeal.

The killer was welcomed by the ones he murdered, and then forgiven by the people he deeply harmed. These victims and their families have shown what it means to be followers of Christ. And many of us now feel awed and honored to share the same faith as these remarkable Christians.

The victims were the faithful among the faithful. They were the kind who do much of the praying and working in a church, and who lift the sights and standards of people around them. You can see their legacy in those who survived them, striving so hard to be worthy of their example. A pastor friend in Baltimore, Frank Reid, wrote me: "In the midst of all this talk about security, didn't the Pastor of Emanuel and those eight people exemplify the real strength and security of the Gospel? In the words of one of Dr. King's first books of sermons, they exemplified the 'strength to love.' "



That is the right phrase to summarize what we have seen in Charleston: the strength to love. Forgiveness is not something soft or passive. It demonstrates spiritual maturity, strength of character, depth, discipline and steadiness. It is the sign of a determined faith, fighting against every natural human inclination. “I acknowledge that I am very angry,” said Bethane Middleton-Brown, the sister of one of the victims. But “she taught me that we are the family that love built. We have no room for hating.”

A daughter of one victim told an interviewer that everyone, including the killer, deserves a “second chance.” She made her point confidently and without bitterness. Forgiveness is also a form of freedom — a refusal to be ruled by anger or resentment. It is like laying a burden down.

Public lessons will need to be drawn from the Charleston murders — though I cringe when the first response to tragedy is any pet policy project. It should, maybe, be the third response, made a few respectful days later.

The United States clearly has two problems. The first is a problem with racism. These Americans were killed because they were African Americans. How does a long history of hate jump to the next generation? Reflecting on that question should lead us to root out racism in our laws and lives, in the myths we perpetuate and the flags we fly. Second, the United States has a problem with angry young men, radicalized by the Internet. When these two problems are combined, the result is domestic terrorism. There is often no web of conspiracy to track, just signs of murderous intent, which our society must somehow be more alert to confront.

When the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. preached over the coffins of the children killed in the Birmingham church bombing, he said, “History has proven over and over again that unmerited suffering is redemptive.” That is already true in the examples of the lost; now it needs to be reflected in the conduct of the living.

## **Ideas To Incorporate Theme Throughout The Day**

1. Have the campers write down sins, problems, things they may feel guilt or shame about on flash paper or water soluble paper. When the paper burns up or dissolves in water, the symbolism of the sins being consumed or washed away can help us let them go in God.
2. Share a group Confession and Forgiveness ritua

*The leader begins:*

I confess to God almighty,  
Before the whole company of heaven,  
And to you, my brothers and sisters,  
That I have sinned by my own fault  
In thought, word, and deed.  
I pray God almighty to have mercy on me,  
Forgive me all my sins,  
And bring me to everlasting life.

*The group responds:*

**Almighty and merciful God  
Grant you healing, pardon, and  
Forgiveness of all your sins. Amen.**

*Then, the roles are reversed. The group says:*

**I confess to God almighty,  
Before the whole company of heaven,  
And to you, my brothers and sisters,  
That I have sinned by my own fault  
In thought, word, and deed.  
I pray God almighty to have mercy on me,  
Forgive me all my sins,  
And bring me to everlasting life.**

*The leader says:*

Almighty and merciful God  
Grant you healing, pardon, and  
Forgiveness of all your sins. Amen.

*Have everyone turn to a neighbor and, in silence, make the sign of the cross on their neighbor's forehead.*

## **Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, and Suggestions**

Songs from the RTALC songbook

1. Freedom is Coming
2. Create In Me a Clean Heart
3. Jesus, Remember Me
4. Amazing Grace (Grace Like Rain)

Additional Scripture Passages on Forgiveness

1. Romans 5:8 ff. – *But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*
2. 2 Samuel 11- 12 – *The story of David and Bathsheba*
3. John 21:15-9 – *Jesus and Peter after the resurrection*
4. Luke 15:11-32 – *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*
5. John 8:1-11 – *The Woman Caught in Adultery*
6. Isaiah 6:1-13 – *The Call of Isaiah, whom God forgave in commissioning him*
7. Luke 23:34 – *Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing – the word of Jesus from the cross.*
8. John 4:1-42 – *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well*
9. Mark 2:1-12 – *Jesus Heals a Paralytic, claiming the authority to forgive sins*

## **Ideas To Adjust Study Down For Juniors**

1. Junior campers know, in a concrete, intuitive, and fundamental way, when things are not right. They know when they have been at fault, and they are starkly clear about when they have suffered injustice. They care little about the ramifications of calling out those above them who have failed.
2. Tap into this purity, innocence, and inherent honesty. Affirm it. Encourage their truth telling.
3. Rather than reading from the Bible itself, consider using this re-telling of the story for younger campers:

When Isaac was 40 years old, he married Rebekah. Isaac prayed hard for his wife because she could not have a child. God answered his prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant with twins. But the two children fought with each other inside her womb.

She prayed and asked God, “*Why is this happening to me?*” God told her, “*Your sons will become two rival nations. One nation will be stronger than the other and the older son will serve the younger son.*”

When the first son was born he was very red and hairy; he looked like he was already wearing clothing! So they called him Esau, which sounds like the word for “hair”.

Then the other twin was born with his hand grabbing Esau’s heel. So they named him Jacob, which means “grabbing the heel,” but can also mean “deceiver.”

As the boys grew up, Esau became an expert hunter who loved the outdoors. His brother Jacob liked to stay indoors and live quietly in the tents. Isaac loved Esau and all of the wild game he would bring home, but Rebekah favored Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came home exhausted from hunting and said to Jacob, “*I’m starving! Give me some of that red stew you’ve made.*” Jacob replied, “*All right, but trade me your inheritance for it.*” “*Hey—I’m dying of starvation!*” said Esau. “*What good is my inheritance to me if I starve?*”

Jacob demanded, “*Swear to me right now that you will give me your inheritance.*” So Esau gave an oath trading away his inheritance and his rights as the firstborn son.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and stew. Esau quickly ate and drank and went on his way—not thinking about the fact that he had just given up his inheritance.

Years later, when Isaac was old and almost blind, he called for Esau and said, “*I am an old man now and I will die soon. Hunt some wild game for me and prepare it just the way I like it. Then, before I die I will pass on the blessing that belongs to you, my firstborn son.*”

Rebekah overheard this conversation. So when Esau left to go hunting, she said to Jacob, “*Do exactly as I tell you. Go and bring back two of the finest goats from our flocks and I’ll prepare your father’s favorite dish from them. Take the food to your father; then he will eat it and give you the blessing instead of Esau.*”

Jacob replied, “*Mother—he won’t be fooled that easily. Esau is hairy and my skin is smooth! What if he touches me? He’ll see that I’m trying to trick him, and then he’ll curse me instead of blessing me.*” “*Just do as I say!*” Rebekah demanded.

So Jacob brought back two of their best goats, and Rebekah made Isaac’s favorite meal. Then she put Esau’s best clothes on Jacob and made him a pair of long hairy gloves from the skin of the goats.

Then Jacob took the meal to his father pretending he was Esau. *“The voice is Jacob’s, but the hands are Esau’s,”* Isaac said to himself. *“Are you really my son, Esau?”* Isaac asked.

*“Yes of course!”* Jacob answered.

*“If you are, come here and kiss your father,”* Isaac said.

So Jacob went and kissed Isaac. When he did this Isaac smelled his clothes and was finally convinced he was really Esau. So Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob saying, *“May God pass on to you the blessing he promised to Abraham. Your family will grow large and become a great nation and other nations will become your servants. God will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.”*

As soon as Isaac had blessed Jacob, Esau returned from his hunting trip. When he learned that Isaac had given his blessing to his brother he wept out loud, *“Father, bless me, too!”*

But Isaac said, *“Your brother was here and tricked me. He has carried away your blessing.”* Esau hated Jacob and said to himself, *“After my father is dead, I will kill Jacob.”*

Rebekah found out that Jacob was in danger and sent him far away to live with his uncle.

On his journey God appeared to Jacob saying, *“I am the God of your grandfather and father. I am giving you and your descendants this land. Your family will grow large and be a blessing to the entire earth! I will be with you and protect you wherever you go—giving you everything I have promised.”*

And God blessed Jacob with great wealth and 12 sons! Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, which means “struggler with God”. The Hebrews would later be called the people of Israel, named after Jacob.

Many years later Jacob and Esau met. Jacob was very worried that his brother would remember his trick and kill him. Jacob prepared gifts for Esau to make him less angry. His gift included hundreds of goats, rams, camels, cows and bulls. He had his servants go ahead of him to offer these gifts to Esau. When the two brothers approached each other, Jacob was afraid. Esau had an army of 400 men with him. Jacob bowed down to the ground to show that he was sorry.

When Esau saw Jacob, he ran up to him. Rather than kill him, Esau wrapped his arms around Jacob and hugged him. The two brothers kissed each other on the cheek and both began to cry. They didn’t let go of each other for a long time.

When Esau saw all the animals Jacob wanted to give him as a gift, he said, *“I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”*

But Jacob said, *“No, please. Accept this gift from me. Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God – since you have received me with such favor. Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me.”* So Jacob urged Esau to accept his gift, and Esau did.

The two brothers parted ways. Esau went back to his home, and Jacob and his growing family moved back to the Promised Land of Canaan.

*This story is adapted and expanded from echothestory.com, copyright 2003-2006, Michael Novelli & Caesar Kalinowski.*

## **Ideas To Adjust Study Up For Seniors**

1. High School students will have way more life experience than the junior campers: more experience with brokenness, betrayal, disappointment, perplexity. More consciousness of guilt. More sophistication at hiding their guilt. They have experienced life less as black and white, and as gray. They have been hurt and have hurt others. So have the junior campers, but the seniors are more aware, and more skilled at avoiding their awareness.
2. Senior high campers are not adults. Their masks of maturity belie their child-like innocence. They are adults in the making.
3. Gently probe and explore stories of hurt. Create a safe place of trust and confidentiality. Above all, demonstrate the love and acceptance of God. Lead them to the possibilities of forgiveness.

## **Parent Devotional** Day 3: God Forgives! -- What's Your Call?

### **Scripture** Genesis 33:4

*<sup>1-4</sup> Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his four hundred men. He divided the children between Leah and Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the maidservants out in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. He led the way and, as he approached his brother, bowed seven times, honoring his brother. But Esau ran up and embraced him, held him tight and kissed him. And they both wept.*

### **Reflection**

*But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept.* This is the climax of a long story of two brothers. Jacob was a scheming deceiver who convinced his older twin brother to give up his birthright for a bowl of soup and tricked his father into giving him, not Esau, his dying blessing. Esau vowed to kill his wretched little brother. After many years apart, Jacob approached Esau, expecting the very worst. But something completely unexpected, undeserved, and surprising took place: running, embracing, kissing and weeping, forgiveness and reconciliation. *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.* 2 Corinthians 5:18

God overcomes our sin. We wed ourselves to false dreams, commit to allegiances that fail, but, God remains steadfast. In Christ, God runs to meet us, embraces us, kisses us and weeps for joy at our return. We who have been forgiven are freed to run to, embrace, fall upon, and weep in joy with those whom we forgive.

This week we speak of "call" in two ways: God's calling upon our lives and the call we can make when given an opportunity to forgive. When hurt, when offended, when betrayed, what call will we make?

How do you practice forgiveness in your home? Parents, can you risk being vulnerable before your children? Experiencing God's forgiveness, can you be strong enough to admit your faults, your failings, the times you have not lived up to your own expectations and dreams of parenting? Can you say to your child, "I blew it. I'm so sorry."

### **Family Activity**

Think about ways you might run to meet your children, even your sometimes wayward children, and embrace them, kiss them and weep with them for sheer joy. What's *your* call?

### **Prayer**

God of all grace, you run to meet us and fall upon us in love even before we can utter "I'm sorry." Help us to be like you. Make us vulnerable to one another in love, ready to receive and to share forgiveness. Amen.

# God Serves! -- What's Your Call?

## Supplies you need for this study

1. an envelope for each camper marked "secret agent – classified info"
2. blank pieces of paper for campers to write their secret agent serving ideas on
3. blindfolds for half your group
4. sign that says "Be the change you wish to see in the World"
5. bowl
6. water
7. towel

## Introduction to the Theme

What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you want to do when you're older? Seemingly innocent questions, yet early on they can set kids up for expectations of what are the "good jobs" and which ones are flights of fancy for a child. As children grow older, the questions pick up more pressure. And the "need" to excel – to be the best, to earn a lot of money, to be seen as successful by the world's standards grows stronger and stronger.

In the midst of this, Jesus calls us...not to positions of power and title...but rather to the role of a servant. One who is willing to care about others enough to serve them. To take on a humbleness of heart and see other people not just as objects, but as people whom God loves and calls us to serve. A call that can be lived out anywhere, doing just about anything. A summons that calls each of us to truly be the body of Christ in today's world, instead of being people who simply show up for "church" (or camp!).

Whether we like it or not, there is truth in this statement: you will serve something/someone. The good news is we each get to pick what/who it is! Jesus' call to "come and serve" is clear throughout scripture. It's not a "this would be a nice thing for you to do" or a "if you want to feel better do this". Rather, Jesus' call is heard quite distinctly throughout the gospels including when James and John come asking for places of power and position to the last night Jesus spent with his followers washing their feet. If we are going to be followers of Jesus, we are called to serve.

The beauty of this part of our call is that it really has the power to change the world around us. For how we act/react to people can define how they react to us. When we walk with a heart of a servant, our relationships change, our perspectives can change; others' lives will be changed. And maybe, just maybe, even our own lives will be changed. As a common slogan these days says: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." And we don't have to wait! Anyone, anywhere, any age can serve!

When we choose to live out the call of service to others we can be said to be "agents of blessing" in our world. We can be people who bring the light and love of Jesus into the lives of others. Whether they are people in our families, our schools, our neighborhoods, communities or the world, each of us has the ability to shine the love of Jesus into their lives. Every camper here this summer has HUGE potential to be a world changer for people by being an agent of blessing...one who answers Jesus' call to serve the loveable, the fun, the nice as well as the least, the lonely, the unlikely... knowing when we serve others we serve Jesus. What's your call?

## Objectives For This Day Of The Study

1. Campers will discover serving others isn't just something nice to do, but it's part of what it means to follow Jesus
2. Cast a vision to campers of what it means to be deployed as "blessing agents" in the world
3. Empower campers with the truth that they can truly change someone's world, including their own, by serving others...and they don't have to wait until they're "older" – it begins now!
4. Empower your campers to be "blessing agents" in the world...starting right now here at camp!

## Morning Watch

**Welcome** *Welcome to this day of call. “May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be confident knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.*  
- attributed to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Theresa of Avila

### **Scripture** Mark 10:41-45

<sup>41-45</sup> *When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down. “You’ve observed how godless rulers throw their weight around,” he said, “and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage.”*

### **Short skit or dialogue**

*Child walking home from school picks up trash they see and throws away. Waving to someone invisible across the street...(all cheery)...*

Child: Hi Ms. Miller! What? Sure I can help watch Tabby your cat this weekend!”

*Turns and walks into house where mother is cooking...*

Mom: Hi Honey! How was your day?

Child: Fine. (no emotion)

Mom: Do you have any homework?

Child: Some. (rolls eyes)

Mom: Could you help me out? I need someone to fold the laundry while I finish making supper.  
What’s your call?

### **Song** Do Something - by Matthew West

I woke up this morning  
Saw a world full of trouble now  
Thought, how’d we ever get so far down  
How’s it ever gonna turn around  
So I turned my eyes to Heaven  
I thought, “God why don’t You do something?”  
Well, I just couldn’t bear the thought of  
People living in poverty  
Children sold into slavery  
The thought disgusted me  
So I shook my fist at Heaven  
Said, “God, why don’t You do something?”  
He said, “I did, I created you”  
If not us, then who  
If not me and you  
Right now, it’s time for us to do something  
If not now, then when  
Will we see an end  
To all this pain  
It’s not enough to do nothing  
It’s time for us to do something  
I’m so tired of talking  
About how we are God’s hands and feet  
But it’s easier to say than to be  
Like angels of apathy who tell ourselves

It's alright,  
 "somebody else will do something"  
 Well, I don't know about you  
 But I'm sick and tired of life with no desire  
 I don't want a flame, I want a fire  
 I wanna be the one who stands up and says,  
 I'm gonna do something  
     If not us, then who  
     If not me and you  
     Right now, it's time for us to do something  
     If not now, then when  
     Will we see an end  
     To all this pain  
     It's not enough to do nothing  
     It's time for us to do something

We are the salt of the earth  
 We are a city on a hill (shine shine shine shine)  
 But we're never gonna change the world  
 By standing still  
 No we won't stand still  
 No we won't stand still  
 No we won't stand still

    If not us, then who  
     If not me and you  
     Right now, it's time for us to do something  
     If not now, then when  
     Will we see an end  
     To all this pain  
     It's not enough to do nothing  
     It's time for us to do something (x3)

### **Scenarios to consider during your time with God**

1. Your neighbor is elderly and lonely. What's your call?
2. You walk into your classroom and as you do, you see someone walk by and knock a whole stack of papers off your teacher's desk. What's your call?
3. You and your friends are at the mall. As you are walking around, you're by Target and see a lady's bag break and all the things in the bag start rolling around the floor. Your friends start laughing and making fun. What's your call?

### **Prayer**

Dear Jesus, I know you call me to serve, but sometimes, when I just want to be served – that's really hard. Help me today, to answer your call to live my life as a servant to others – bringing joy and love into their lives. Give me the chance to serve and the courage to do it! In your name I pray, Jesus. Amen

### **Evening Devotions**

Questions for Evening Devotions (based upon the scenarios from Morning Watch)

1. How do you feel when people do something nice for you?
2. Why is it easier to serve some people and not others?
3. Who are the hardest people for you to serve? (often it's those closest to us) What makes it hard to serve them?
4. What in your life might change if you chose to have an attitude of service – looking for opportunities to serve others, rather than just wanting people to serve you?
5. What about this statement do you think is true/not true?: *The way we interact with and react to people defines how they interact with us.*

6. Look back at the scenarios from today. What's your call?

## **Scripture Study**

### **Mark 10:35-45**

*<sup>35</sup> James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." <sup>36</sup> And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" <sup>37</sup> And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." <sup>38</sup> But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" <sup>39</sup> They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; <sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

*<sup>41</sup> When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. <sup>42</sup> So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

I think what grabs me first and foremost in this text is the audacity of James and John. First to want Jesus to do what they want, second to think they could live on the same playing field as Jesus and finally to be given the places of honor. It's easy to look at that and say, "What the heck? Who do they think they are?" But before we too quickly get down on James and John...how many times have you gone to Jesus and wanted him to do exactly what you want? Yeah...we all have done that. We want Jesus to serve us – to do good things for us, to love us, to make us feel special and loved. And yet, way too often, when we are asked to serve Jesus, we suddenly start coming up with all kinds of excuses of why we can't. "I've got school/homework/work," "I'm just so busy I can't add anything else to my schedule," "You don't understand I'm under such pressure, I don't need one more thing I have to do". Sound familiar? Yeah, me too. But here's the thing – serving doesn't have to add more things to our schedule – we have so many opportunities given to us right where we are every day. In the midst of the life we're living – they're right there. We simply have to choose it.

Right before this passage Jesus has blessed children, telling everyone we must receive the kingdom of God like a child. Ever sit at the kid's table? Sure you have! Not really a place of prestige and honor. Then Jesus is faced with a rich young man, who it sounds like has been faithful in his following of the Law, yet he comes to Jesus wanting to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' reply? Sell all you have and serve the poor. What happens? The young man walks away shocked and grieving because he had many possessions. Not really a place of prestige and honor.

Then Jesus foretells for a third time that he is going to have to die and then three days later rise. Not really a place of power...well, except for that rising from the dead thing! ☺ But the disciples just don't get it. And so we find ourselves with James and John wanting a place of honor – power, prestige. And bold enough to ask Jesus for what they want. Jesus doesn't scold them. He simply asks if they can really walk the road he, Jesus is walking and foolishly, James and John are like, "Yeah! Of course we can!" Having no idea what they're talking about, really. (And...in the process they really piss off the other disciples!)

Again, Jesus doesn't berate them or chastise them...he simply acknowledges that yes, in fact they will – though they have no idea what that really means at this point. But then, Jesus gets down to business. And he's like, OK...here you go – this you should be able to understand. And he goes on to put into terms of everyday life – the truth of following him.

That truth is if you want to be great in the kingdom of God...you have to be willing to humbly serve. What? Wait! Jesus is the popular guy! He's the one who's going to free Israel from Rome! He doesn't have to serve people- they should be serving him! You can hear the disciples' minds whirling. But Jesus is insistent. Look – you know among the people – those who are seen as rulers lord it over the people. But the kingdom, following me isn't like that. It's actually the exact opposite.

And I wonder if anything clicked into place for anyone. Jesus' kingdom – you have to be like a child to enter, the wealthy have to give it all away, and you have to be willing to serve. It's ALL upside down! But this is Jesus. And he's always doing things different than the world.

And in case any of them missed the point (which they did and we do), on the night Jesus showed his greatest love for us, as he entered an upper room to have supper with his friends one last time...he strips down and serves them all.



### **John 13:2a-5, 12-17**

*And during supper <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> got up from the table,<sup>[d]</sup> took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him... After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"<sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, servants<sup>[d]</sup> are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

And therein lies the crux of it all...if you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. So often when it comes to serving others, we think of what we stand to lose: our time, maybe some of our resources...we feel put out and put upon. Why should I serve him? Her? Them? What have they done for me? And that beautiful selfishness that is so a part of all of us comes galloping to the top. But Jesus calls, and reminds us that if we do this, we too will be blessed. Think about it.

At my church, we live an emphasis of being on mission with God. Serving others. We help people discover what they are passionate about and how they might serve others and God using their passions. It is so rewarding! Dorothy serves by making Christmas stockings all year long, so children in care of the state have stockings at Christmas. Bob helps out the homeless through a local agency. Lou helps homeless families get food and necessities at another local organization. Wanda moved to Mexico to set up a dental clinic in an area of the poorest of the poor. Over 100 children and their community are sponsored in Bolivia and people travel there every year to work with the community through Food for the Hungry. Our Kids Camp (VBS) cut out shoes for kids and raised money for clean water in Africa. I could go on and on...but the point is not how great these people are, but to a one – they will tell you how much they receive back when they serve.

God serves us all the time. His love never ends – ever. We can't be separated from it no matter what. He provides for our needs. He goes before us and comes behind us. God walks with us, and gives us strength and courage. And what he asks of us – is that we would do the same for others.

It's that crazy simple and that crazy hard. And...It's our call.

## **Actual Possible Study**

### **Quick review**

Start with a quick review. Ask campers:

1. What have you learned so far? (God loves, welcomes, forgives).
2. Do you remember any of the details?
3. Has anyone tried loving, welcoming, forgiving so far? If so, what have you done? What's happened as a result?

### **Check-in**

Tell the group today you're going to do a check-in. Each person gets to answer each question and when they are done, they say, "I'm in" and the group responds with, "Bless you!" It helps kids pay attention but also helps everyone know when the person speaking is done.

1<sup>st</sup> round: Tell us what's been your favorite part about camp so far.

2<sup>nd</sup> round: Tell us what's been the hardest thing for you at camp so far.

3<sup>rd</sup> round: If you could ask Jesus anything you wanted – what would you ask him?

If you have a group that has a hard time paying attention or needs distractions while they talk...here are some ideas to help:

1. Have a talking stone – when you hold the rock that's your time to talk
2. Have everyone turn to a partner and share their answer with their partner...then have the partner's share each other's answers with the group or simple each person share what they shared with their partner
3. Have everyone stand up and once they have spoken have them sit down (or vice versa)
4. While you're walking to your bible study spot, walk for a short way then stop and ask a question. After everyone has answered, walk a short way further, stop ask another questions. Repeat until you get to your bible study spot.

## **Intro Today's Theme**

**Being served**...ask campers to make a list of all the places they are served by someone else. See how many you can list in 90 seconds. (school by teachers, school lunchroom, custodians, coaches, at restaurants, in stores (check-out people), movies (ticket takers, snack bar servers, people who clean up the theater after the movie), doctors, dentists, parents etc.

**Say to your campers:** *That's a lot of people who serve us! How does it feel to be served? What do you like about it?*

## **Serving One Another** (you need a blindfold for ½ of your group)

Tell your campers we're going to take turns serving one another now. But this is a special way of serving. Have a blindfold each, for ½ of your group. Have ½ the group put the blindfolds on. (Let everyone know that everyone will get a chance to be blindfolded.) Pair them up with the other half of the group. (An interesting twist is not letting the blindfolded person know who their partner is going to be...and then see if before they take the blindfold off they can pick who their partner has been.)

Take your group on a walk/hike making sure people are safe, but also making sure there are real obstacles partners have to get their partner through (ie over the creek, around bushes, up a hill, down stairs, etc). After a time, switch out who has blindfolds and then mix them up again with new partners.

When you get to a place to sit down again, ask your campers:

1. What is it like to put that blindfold on?
2. What was it like when you were given a partner?
3. How did your partner serve you?

When everyone has shared...wrap it up with: *While we're not called to help someone who can't see every day, we are called to serve others. Let's take a look at what Jesus has to say about serving.*

## **Scripture**

Have everyone turn in their Bible to **Mark 10:35-45**. Once there introduce the passage something like this: *So Jesus and his disciples had been hanging out for quite a while – years. And Jesus kept telling and showing them that to follow him meant they had to be willing to serve others. And they just weren't getting it. They thought Jesus was going to be this big super-star savior and free them from the Roman Empire. They couldn't wrap their heads around the fact that Jesus was going to die.*

Then have someone read verses 35-37 Ask:

1. What do you think about James and John's request? (Was it fine? Does it seem a little bold?)
2. Why do you think they might have wanted to ask Jesus this?
3. It seems a little crazy to us perhaps, but have you ever asked Jesus for something "crazy"?
4. What have you asked for? What was the response?

OK...let's keep reading – ask someone to read verses 38-40 Ask:

1. Do you understand what Jesus was saying to James and John? (if not – explain that Jesus asked them if they thought they could walk the same walk as Jesus – do the same things that Jesus was going to have to do (be crucified/die). Even though James and John said yes – they really had no idea what Jesus was asking.)

Let's keep going – ask someone to read verse 41-45 Ask:

1. Who got mad? Do you think they had a right to be mad?
2. What did Jesus tell all the disciples? (Whoever wishes to be 1<sup>st</sup> must be slave, to become great one must be willing to be a servant, Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for many)
3. Who did Jesus come to ransom? (everyone)

So Jesus is pretty clear that if we're going to follow him – we have to be willing to serve others. Ask:

1. What does it mean to you to serve others?

2. Can you give some examples of ways you serve others? Or ways you could serve others?
3. How about here at camp?
4. How about at home?
5. What about at your school? Sports teams? Activities you're involved in?

Sometimes the hardest people to serve are in one of two groups: 1) those closest to us (our families) or 2) people we don't like or are scared of.

1. Why is it hard to serve in our families at times? What are ways you can serve your mom/dad/guardian/step-parent, etc?
2. How about siblings? How could you serve siblings?
3. Are there people in your life that you're nervous around or don't like? Who might they be?
4. How could you serve them? (help campers understand that sometimes, especially with people we don't get along with if we can't do something nice, or say something nice, the best thing to do is stay away from them. You could also refer back to the forgiving conversations or talk about turning the other cheek)

### **Becoming "Agents of Blessing"**

*(need an envelope marked "secret agent – classified info" and pieces of blank paper for each camper, also sign that says "Be the Change you Wish to See in the World")*

Jesus calls us to be people who serve. While we often balk at serving others, the amazing thing is when we do it, we often feel really good about doing it and about ourselves. This challenge is designed to help campers experience what it can be like to be people who not only are willing to serve, but who look for opportunities to serve.

**Make sure** you have an envelope for each camper marked "secret agent – classified info!"

- Have the following saying written out in large letters on a sheet of paper. (and no, it's not really a Gandhi quote as is so often told – the closest Gandhi said to this is: If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do.)

**"BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD"**

Show the slogan to your campers, then ask:

1. What does this have to do with serving others? (if we change and are nicer, look out for others, they could start to change as well and serve others, too or something like this)
2. Pick a person in your life – maybe someone hard to serve, or someone who you could easily serve but often choose not to (like a parent/family member, etc). Think of some way you could serve them. When you have your person and a way you could serve them, hold your thumb up.

Once everyone's thumb is up, choose a camper to start. Have them share their person and what they've thought of that they could do to serve. Affirm their choice and idea (if it's honest and sincere). Then ask:

1. What keeps you from serving this person in this way?
2. How might you move around that and serve them?

Talk with your campers about how when we change our attitude and actions towards people, it often changes the way they interact with us. See if you can come up with some personal stories from your life that illustrates this. (An example from my own life: when I was in high school, once I quit fighting my mom about keeping my room clean and just did it – we didn't fight near as much anymore and so our relationship got better. And I felt better knowing I was pleasing my mom. )

Then hand each camper an envelope with the words "secret agent: classified info". Tell them:

"In today's world, being a person who looks for opportunities to serve others is kind of like being a secret agent of blessing. Others don't have to know you're serving them (though sometimes that's nice too). We're simply called to be people who serve. So here's what we're going to do as secret agents. We're going to brainstorm ways you could serve people once you go home. Then, I'm going to give you a piece of paper and you get to write down acts of blessing you want to do for someone at home (family member, friend, neighbor, teacher, people you don't know, etc.). Imagine what you could

really do...and write it down. Don't let anyone see. (Unless you're here with a friend and the two of you want to join together on your mission of blessing, then just make sure you both write down the same thing.) Once you've written down, put your paper in the envelope. Put your name (or a secret agent name of your choosing) and address on the envelope and hand it to me."

**Encourage your campers** They are really able to do WAY more than they think or imagine sometimes. If you want, there are EXTRA STORIES of kids their ages who have done amazing things in the extra materials at the end. You could share some of those to inspire them.

Once everyone has given you an envelope, tell them:

"OK, after you go home, we're going to send these secret missions to you...as a reminder of one of the ways you can serve at home. What I'd love is if you did whatever you wrote, then took pictures and/or sent me a letter/email telling me what you've been doing and how it went...how people reacted. And we'll share what you're doing back here with the staff! And then just keep going – being agents of blessings again and again and again!"

## **One Last Thing**

*(you need a bowl, water and towel)*

Say to your campers:

"On the very last night Jesus was with his disciples, before he was taken away and crucified, he had a special meal with them. And once everyone was there, Jesus did this extraordinary thing. He took off his coat, wrapped a towel around his waist, got a bowl out (take bowl and put it in the center of the circle) and put water in it (pour water into the bowl from a bottle or get it from the stream) and then he went around and washed the feet of all his friends. Think about that! They wore sandals all the time and the ground was dusty and dirty. Think about what their feet would be like! And Jesus – their master, their teacher, their leader, knelt down and washed their feet."

After he did that he reminded his friends that our call in life is to not try to be better than everyone, or lord it over them that we're greater or better at something, but rather we are to serve each other. No one is greater than anyone else. In Jesus' eyes we're all the same and we're all deeply loved. We're loved so much, Jesus calls us to share that love and serve each other and the world around us.

Today to close our Bible study time, I'm going to do what Jesus did. I'm going to ask you to take off your shoes and let me wash your feet. It might seem a little strange, but think of it as my way of helping you know that you are special in my eyes and in God's eyes and that we are all called to serve each other."

Take time then, to wash the feet of each of your campers. You might bless them by telling them things you've noticed over the week about them. Build them up, make them feel special. Remind them they are loved...and called.

After everyone's feet have been washed and shoes are back on, have the group circle up and invite each person to add a prayer to today's closing prayer. They could pray for each other, or for the way they've chosen to bless others when they get home. They might want to pray for God to give them opportunities while they are still at camp to serve each other and others.

## **Additional Study Ideas**

1. Agents of Blessing at Camp ...if your group wants something to do at camp or you need to make the lesson more visual/active...talk about being Agents of Blessings and brainstorm ways your group could bless support staff, kitchen staff, other villages, etc. Make plans and then carry them out!
2. If the study isn't going well...help your campers learn by doing. Talk about Jesus' call is to love God and love others. And one way we do that is by serving others. Talk about being Agents of Blessing at camp and together have your group choose some ways they could bless folks around camp today. Then go and do. At the end of your time, you might ask some/all of the following:
  - a. How'd it feel to serve others?
  - b. Do you think you could serve others at home? What could you do?
  - c. Then jump to the Secret Agents envelopes and help them get those ready to send. End by reminding them that serving is something we're each called to do and they can do it anywhere, anytime. It just means choosing to think of someone else before ourselves.

## **Ideas To Incorporate Theme Throughout The Day**

1. Any theme using Secret Agents, Mission Impossible
  - a. worship could start with something like “Your mission if you choose to accept it...”
  - b. all camp could be anything where you have to figure out clues or end up helping each other do things
  - c. Play Mission Impossible: The setup of the game is a big open space with an elevated platform where a leader or two can stand upon and people can ideally walk underneath of. Typically, if we play outside, we try and find two trees fairly close to each other and have 2 leaders climb up them. If we play inside in our sanctuary, we go into the balcony we have. The object of the game is for students on two separate teams to make it from a starting point to under the leaders without getting spotted by the leaders atop the platform who are armed with spotlights. When they make it under the leaders, a third leader will be waiting to sign a slip of paper as a ticket for the students, who then have to make it back safely to the starting point without getting spotted as well.
2. Day of Service
  - a. people dress like people who serve: nurse, doctor, waitress, custodian, etc
  - b. all camp could be involve different stations where you get to do acts of service: make cards for a nursing home in Canon City, clean an area up, paint something, write letters to service people, etc
  - c. VOD could serve people at meal times
3. Random Acts of Kindness Day

## **Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, and Suggestions**

Songs from the camp song sheet

1. Here I Am Lord, #23
2. I’ll Do My Best, #24
3. They’ll Know We Are Christians, #29
4. You Are the Light of the World, #53
5. History Maker, #69
6. Aye-Aye-aye, #88

Other new songs

1. Joy of the Lord by Rend Collective <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3gLeCiMJqI>
2. Chords/lyrics: <http://www.worshiptogether.com/songs/joy-of-the-lord-rend-collective/>

Additional scriptures

1. Greatest Commandments: Luke 10:25-29,
2. Parable of the Good Samaritan: Luke 10:29-37
3. Galatians 5:14 – For the law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”
4. 1 Peter:4-7-10 - as a steward of God’s grace serve one another with the gifts you have been given
5. Matthew 25:31-46 - if you’ve done it to the least of these you’ve done it to me

Any supporting stories Agents of Blessings stories you can share:

1. **Cayden and Conner Long** – Sports Illustrated Kids of the Year 2012 - When he was 6 years old, Conner began helping his little brother Cayden compete in triathlon events. . .even though Cayden was stricken with cerebral palsy at birth. Because of his tremendous handicap, Cayden is unable to do very much for himself and totally relies on those around him. Competing in the rigorous events would be out of the question were it not for a brother who loves him deeply. But several times each year, Conner straps his little brother Cayden in behind him in a cart or a boat and off they go. They never win, of course, but they compete together in perfect love. For his efforts of love and athleticism, Sports Illustrated awarded Conner with their 2012 Sportskid of the Year award. If you want to see learn more of their story check out: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9J5UqYRXY48>
2. **Abigail Lupi , Age 10, Stockholm, NJ** - Lots of children like to put on shows. Few are as enterprising as Abigail. She performed her first musical revue three years ago at an assisted-living center, in honor of her great-grandmother’s 100th birthday. “That’s when I discovered many of the elderly didn’t have visitors,” she says. Abigail figured she could remedy that by inviting friends to perform with her at assisted-living residences, nursing homes, and children’s hospitals throughout the state. Today, [CareGirlz](http://caregirlz.org), Abigail’s ensemble of 13 girls ages 6 to 13, has a repertoire of more than 90 Broadway and pop songs, and they’ve performed in 20 different locales so far. “I like to brighten up people’s days and help them have a fun time,” says Abigail. “If I do my best, they’ll have a smile on their faces by the end.” [http://caregirlz.org/images/NJ\\_Herald\\_22511\\_CareGirlzArticle.pdf](http://caregirlz.org/images/NJ_Herald_22511_CareGirlzArticle.pdf)

3. **Blare Gooch , age 13, Grand Rapids, MI** - Two days after the devastating January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Blare saw a little boy crying in a pile of rubble on a newscast. The story brought him to tears. The next day, still thinking about what he'd seen, Blare remembered the teddy bear that always comforted him. "Then I thought, 'We could start a drive for Haiti,'" says Blare. At school, his teachers let him announce his plan over the PA system and ask other kids to donate bears. Soon a local TV and radio station got wind, and, via Facebook, other schools joined in. The result? [Blare's Bears for Haiti](#) gave 25,000 teddy bears to the island nation and about 22,000 more to nonprofits. This year Blare's group will collect toys and school supplies, too. Blare's advice to other kids is simple. "It doesn't really matter how small or old you are," he says. "If you're young and think you can't make a big difference in the world, well, you actually can." <http://www.parenting.com/gallery/kids-who-make-difference?page=2>
4. **Alexandra "Alex" Scott** was born in Connecticut in 1996, and was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a type of childhood cancer, shortly before she turned 1. In 2000, just after turning 4 years old, she informed her mother she wanted to start a lemonade stand to raise money for doctors to "help other kids, like they helped me." Her first lemonade stand raised \$2,000 and led to the creation of the Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation. Alex continued her lemonade stands throughout her life, ultimately raising over \$1 million toward cancer research. She passed away in August 2004 at the age of 8. Today, Alex's Lemonade Stand sponsors a national fundraising weekend every June called [Lemonade Days](#). Each year, as many as 10,000 volunteers at more than 2,000 Alex's Lemonade Stands around the nation make a difference for children with cancer. <http://www.alexlemonade.org/about/meet-alex>
5. **Robbie (age 15) and Brittani (age 16) Bergquist Norwell, Mass** - The siblings founded Cell Phones for Soldiers based on three ideas: Most people have an old, inactive cellphone lying around; they'd probably donate it to the right cause; and they'd agree that, as Brittany puts it, "Everyone has a right to call home. In three years, an effort that began with a piggybank raid and a car wash has turned into a booming home front charity — one that has turned its founders' lives upside down and won them devoted friends throughout the military and beyond. Cell Phones for Soldiers solicits unwanted cellphones, sells them to a recycler for about \$5 each and uses the money to buy pre-paid phone cards that are shipped to the war zone. "We take for granted our ability to call home and speak to our families," says Brittany, 16. "The troops don't do that. They appreciate what we're doing. That's what sparks us to do more." [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-11-26-phone-home\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-11-26-phone-home_N.htm)
6. **Julien Leitner, 14, from Portland, Oregon** - Founded the Archimedes Alliance, an organization that asks one million people to donate \$2 for a worthy cause. Leitner launched his initiative with a 100-second video describing the logic behind his lofty goal. He points to the ancient Greek mathematician, Archimedes, who said, "Give me a lever long enough, and a place to stand, and I can move the Earth." [http://thestir.cafemom.com/tweens\\_teens/161674/7\\_inspiring\\_teens\\_who\\_are](http://thestir.cafemom.com/tweens_teens/161674/7_inspiring_teens_who_are)
7. **Twinkies and Root Beer** --There once was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer, and he started on his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park, staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase.
 

He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie. She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him.

Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again, she smiled at him. The boy was delighted. They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, yet they never said a word.

As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave. Before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old woman and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own home a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her neighbor was stunned by the look of peace on her face, and she asked, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." But before her neighbor responded, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

Will someone see God in your smile or kind deeds? Maybe they're not even looking for God, but may see Him in the kindness you show. Isn't that what we're here for? It might be a stranger, someone you work with, a family member or friend. Let them see God in you. Show His love in all you do today."

## **Ideas To Adjust Study Down For Juniors**

1. With elementary campers you might want to skip verses 38-40 in Mark 10 and focus on James and John's question, the other disciples getting mad and then Jesus' response to them all. They'll get all that.

2. You also might want to simplify the exercise around “be the change you wish to see” and simply talk about being agents of blessing and what that could look like. Help them see they really have the power to do LOTS of great stuff for people! Kids at this age have heard so often – “when you get older” this is a GREAT chance to help them see they don’t have to wait!
3. It’s still important to do the special agent envelopes and the foot washing with them – especially the building them up part of it. This will probably be the first time many if not all of these campers have ever done anything like this. You have the power to make it really, really special.

## **Ideas To Adjust Study Up For Seniors**

1. Do the actual text study Lectio Divina style. (Don’t be afraid of this with high schoolers – they have amazing abilities to do this style of Bible Study) Let them wrestle with the text a bit more. Don’t give them answers. This is an ancient practice involving letting scripture speak to you. It empowers people and helps them realize that the Spirit speaks to us all – not just counselors or pastors or youth directors. But, the Spirit speaks to them as well. Here’s how it works:
  - a. Make sure each person in the group has something to write with and write on.
  - b. Tell your group you are going to read a passage from scripture. They are to listen. Notice what jumps out at them – what words or phrases catch their interest.
  - c. After you have read through the passage there will be a time of silence for people to think about what they just heard and to write down what caught their attention, if they had any questions, write those down too.
  - d. Then you will read the scripture again and they will listen again. In the silence that follows they can write down anything else that caught their attention/came to mind. Ask if there are any questions now.
  - e. After everyone is ready – do exactly what you said you would. Read the text, leave some silence (like at least a minute or two – it’s ok if no one is writing, let them think about, swirl around their hearts and heads. Then read the text again and then again the minute or two of silence.
  - f. Next have group members share what caught their attention, what did they hear? What questions or thoughts did they have? You don’t have to be able to answer questions, but you can mull them over as a group. Be prepared for some profound thoughts and ideas!
2. When it comes to the foot washing...especially if your group has gotten close, you could have campers wash each other’s feet – and they could do the words of encouragement to each other as well.
3. You could also...do the foot washing and encouragement yourself, but then have the group lay hands on and pray for each person, letting everyone say a prayer for the person being prayed for. This too, is a profound experience for many. \*\*A Note: if you chose to do laying on of hands – be sure to ask the person if it’s OK for everyone to touch them. If they aren’t comfortable with that, just have everyone stand around the person in a circle.

## **Parent Devotional Day 4: God Forgives...What's Your Call?**

### **Scripture Mark 10:42-45**

*<sup>42</sup> So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

### **Reflection**

Today we looked at the reality that in the midst of daily life Jesus calls us...not to positions of power and title...but rather to the role of a servant. One who is willing to care about others enough to serve them. To take on a humbleness of heart and see other people not just as objects, but as people whom God loves and calls us to serve. A call that can be lived out anywhere, doing just about anything. A summons that calls each of us to truly be the body of Christ in today's world, instead of being people who simply show up for "church" (or camp!).

The beauty of this part of our call is that it really has the power to change the world around us. For how we act/react to people can define how they react to us. When we walk with a heart of a servant, our relationships change, our perspectives can change; others' lives will be changed. And maybe, just maybe even our own lives will be changed. As a common slogan these days says: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." And we don't have to wait! Anyone, anywhere, any age can serve!

When we choose to live out the call of service to others we can be said to be "agents of blessing" in our world. We can be people who bring the light and love of Jesus into the lives of others. Whether they are people in our families, our schools, our neighborhoods, communities or the world, each of us has the ability to shine the love of Jesus into their lives. Every person has HUGE potential to be a world changer for people by being an agent of blessing...one who answers Jesus' call to serve the loveable, the fun, the nice as well as the least, the lonely, the unlikely...knowing when we serve others we serve Jesus.

### **Family Activity**

As a family, check out opportunities through your place of worship, or online, in your community where you can serve together as a family. Make a day of it or better yet, make a habit of serving others together as a family. If you need some ideas there are great ideas on Pinterest or a couple of good websites are:

<http://www.familyshare.com/family/25-service-ideas-for-families-with-kids>

<http://wearethatfamily.com/2011/06/100-ways-for-your-family-to-make-a-difference/>

<http://www.familieswithpurpose.com/community-service-ideas-families/>

### **Prayer**

God of potential and possibilities, your love for us is so great and I thank you for that unchanging force in my life and the life of my child(ren). Your love is also great for all the people in this world from the most influential to the least of the least. Give us hearts to see and courage to follow you out into a world that desperately needs your love shone into it. Then give us the strength to serve those we see. Give us joy in our serving and teach us to serve each other in love and with grace. Thank you for the opportunity to shine your love into our world. In your name and power, Jesus, I pray. Amen.



# God Seeks Justice! -- What's Your Call?

## Introduction to the Theme

Fair play is a very strong instinct in most of us. We tend to become upset when things are not fair and we or others get a bad deal. This is not simply an intellectual exercise or a simple judgment of not following the rules. When we feel that something is wrong, when we sense injustice, we have a deep emotional response within our bodies.

Justice is obtained in most democratic societies through a system of laws, which are there to make sure that people are not hurt or exploited by others. These laws are made by people to protect them from their own worst behavior. There are times, however, when these very laws are shown to be unfair and they need to be challenged and changed. The emotional responses we have can either assist us in moving forward to find an avenue for justice or if we are inconvenienced, these emotions can give the potential to create a barrier in helping us seek justice.

Seeking justice is an important distinction from seeking revenge and it allows people to join together and create groups that aim to change things for the better. For Christians this can mean supporting ethical working conditions, supporting the buying and selling of fair trade goods, assessing how much is enough in a capitalistic society, and involvement in reconciliation formats. Jesus often called forth for assistance to be given to those on the margin.

We have various biblical texts that support our call to respond to God's loving presence in our lives in the area of justice: Micah calls forth to "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God", Amos calls forth for "justice to roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream", Jesus calls us to "do to others what you would have them do to you." The word of God is clear, so what is our call?

An additional challenge for many of us is identifying and admitting how we can often be part of injustice. This partnership with injustice may be unknown to us in the things we buy, it may be created when we do not speak up for those in need, and it may lie in trying to justify why we have so much privilege when others have so little.

Justice is a term used for what is right or "as it should be." Justice is one of God's attributes and flows out of God's holiness. God's vision for creation is a wholeness that incorporates a belonging and welcoming nature to all, forgiveness that does not require a checklist, serving from a humble place, and most importantly from an unconditional love that never runs out, that is never is taken away.

## Objectives For This Day Of The Study

1. There is an understanding in our Christian walk that we can respond to who God is in our lives in many ways. Our response may depend on how we see God's call coming into our lives. So far this week we have explored that our call will be in relationship to God's love, God's welcome, God's forgiveness, and God's service. Today we explore God's justice.
2. We will explore the definition of justice and the ways in which the Bible speaks about justice.
3. Our response to injustice is often spoken in the phrase of: "It's not fair!" Many of us have heard from our parents, grandparents, teachers and other adults the response to "it's not fair" with: "Well, life is not fair!" We however, being grounded in the presence of God, know that God's love is beyond fair and equitable for all!
4. We will focus on God's call of justice in Micah 6:8 and gain an understanding of what God desires for us: "to seek justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." We will explore if and when campers have been treated unjustly and ask: what is their call in response to this?
5. We will explore doing "justice" in the context of Amos 5:24 : "Let justice and fairness flow like a river that never runs dry." We will explore how contemporary people answered the call to address the need for justice and how the collective response to injustice can change things for good.
6. We will ask the question of how we hold the tension of justice as people of privilege with many resources and what we have materially at the expense of others. How do we hold this tension in the context of the Golden Rule from Matthew 7:12: "Treat others as you would want to be treated"?
7. We will explore the tough question of "how we are a part of injustice? What is our call when we see injustice?"

## **Morning Watch**

**Welcome** *Welcome to this day of call. "May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be confident knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us."*  
- attributed to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Theresa of Avila

### **Scripture Micah 6:8**

*"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

### **Short skit or dialogue**

Counselor #1: Good morning (*insert name of counselor #2*)

Counselor #2: Uh...good morning??? You really are a morning person aren't you? I haven't even had a cup of hot chocolate yet.

Counselor #1: You betcha! (*Looking at the campers with an energetic cheesy grin*) So how are you today?

Counselor #2: Besides sleepy, I am okay. I am feeling pretty lucky because I found a \$20.00 bill yesterday by the great I Am.

Counselor #1: Really? Did you turn it in to lost and found?

Counselor #2: Uh...no...(*looking around to see if anyone is hearing this conversation*) I have not heard that anyone was missing any money. And you know the old saying: Finders keepers, losers weepers....

*Both freeze and look at the campers.*

Leader: *This morning as you enter into your God time, we ask you to think about what you would do in this situation. What's your call?*

### **Song If Not Now, Tell Me When** - Carrie Newcomer

If not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
We may never see this moment  
Or place in time again  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
I see sorrow and trouble in this land  
I see sorrow and trouble in this land  
Although there will be struggle  
We'll make the change we can  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
We may never see this moment  
Or place in time again  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
I may never see the Promised Land  
I may never see the Promised Land  
And yet we'll take the journey  
And we'll walk it hand in hand  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
We may never see this moment  
Or place in time again  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
We'll work it 'til it's done

Every daughter, every son  
 Every soul that ever longed for something better  
 Something brighter  
 And it will take a change of heart for this to mend  
 It will take a change of heart for this to mend  
 But miracles do happen every shining now and then  
 If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
     If not now, tell me when?  
     If not now, tell me when?  
     We may never see this moment  
     Or place in time again  
     If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
 And miracles do happen every shining now and then  
 If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
 If not now, if not now, tell me when?

### **Scenarios to consider during your time with God**

1. One day during lunch, your student council sets up a table in the cafeteria and starts to sell student council T-shirts for a fundraiser. You head over to the table to check out a shirt. On the label, you read that the shirt was made by a company that is known for its use of sweatshops where people are not paid good wages for their work and often children are abused in these sweatshops. Concerned, you take a look at the tag on your Basketball State Champions T-shirt that you bought from the school the year before, and find out that it is made by that same company. **What's your call?**
2. In your social studies class one day, your teacher tells you about the poverty that exists across the world. You learn that nearly half of the people in the world live on less than \$2 a day, and that about 30,000 children die each day due to poverty. **What's your call?**

### **Prayer**

Ever loving and Just God, thank you for this day. Thank you for teaching us the way of your justice. Empower us to love you and love our neighbor and remind us to treat everyone in the way we would want to be treated. May "seeking justice" be our response to your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Evening Devotion**

Questions for Evening Devotions (based upon the scenarios from Morning Watch)

1. What do you think about the phrase "finders keepers, losers weepers"?
2. Have you ever had any of the three situations from this morning? What could you do?
3. What would be the just thing to do?
4. How would you feel if you had lost the money or had relatives that worked in the sweatshops or lived in poverty?
5. Are we willing to be just when no one is looking or only when it benefits us?
6. Is justice for a big situation in the future or is justice now?

## **Scripture Study**

### **Context**

Today is Friday! Unbelievable! Some of you will have had a fast week and find yourselves as sad as the campers to end this week. There have been connections in your group and you have been blessed to see the seeds of God's love and presence bloom in your campers. Some of you are doing a happy dance (do not feel guilty - ☺) as your week may have had some challenges to it. You have had help from other counselors or camp hands or pastors or adult leaders. Some of your campers may never have volunteered to read the Bible or lead a prayer. Camper A and Camper B just could not get along. Camper C found every bug possible on the ground and told you the scientific name and species classification it belongs to. It is okay. You have still planted seeds and now God and the Holy Spirit will do the work they do and your presence with that

camper will still have mattered. Your life and your willingness to be present for them has made a difference in the bigger eternal picture that is God's.

This day you will be coached to be fully present for your campers. Today is tough because you are seeing your friends who have returned from day camps or from having a week off and you missed them and have lots of stories for them. Give them big hugs and hellos and remind yourself that you will have time together tomorrow to catch up. Today we want the campers to prepare to leave understanding that God loves them fully, unconditionally, and there is nothing that they can do that will cause that love to diminish.

Today's theme is justice. This really can be a tough concept with our campers and in our world justice usually comes in the form of revenge, fines or imprisonment. We will be discussing what they probably most resonate with and that is the phrase of "It's not fair!" In response to this statement they probably will have heard from their parents and grandparents: "WELL, life is not fair!" With God as our foundation, we have a God who is completely fair, even when God treats people differently in order to treat them fairly. If you have extra time in preparation for this study, read the tiny yet powerful book of Jonah and smile at Jonah's "it's not fair" attitude toward the repenting people of Nineveh. Smile at God's response: "Silly Jonah, judgment is mine."

### **Study**

Welcome your campers to Bible study. I pray that you have had a rhythm to your Bible studies this week as you do a check-in perhaps with thumbs up-thumbs down and stating where you have seen God yesterday or today. Perhaps you can ask a camper to lead the group in prayer or any centering activity that allows them to transition from a camp activity to Bible study. You can also start with popcorn prayers or circle prayers to empower the campers to speak publically in prayer.

This could be one way to start: "Believe it or not, this is our last day together at camp. Some of you may be leaving late tonight, some early tomorrow. Some of you will wait for your folks to get here and worship with them and sleep all the way home in your family car. ☺ This week we have been asking the question: What's your call? We have reviewed that God calls us to be loving, to welcome strangers, to forgive others in the same way that God has forgiven us, and to serve those who are in need. Today we will be talking about justice."

When you hear the word justice what immediately comes to mind? Be prepared to hear about the DC Comics Justice League: Aquaman, Batman, The Flash, Green Lantern, The Martian Manhunter, Superman, and Wonder Woman! ☺ Do I hear a theme of the day? ☺

The definitions that we can find in a dictionary say that justice are:

1. Just behavior or treatment: "a concern for justice, peace, and genuine respect for people". Synonyms include: fairness · justness · fair play · fair-mindedness · equity ·
2. A judge or magistrate, in particular a judge of the supreme court of a country or state. Synonyms include: judge · magistrate · jurist

Ask:

1. How does the world we live in define justice?
2. What is said in your schools about justice?
3. Have you ever said: "IT'S NOT FAIR?"
4. Can you tell about a time when you felt treated unfairly?
5. Can you tell about a time when you treated someone unfairly?

Today we are going to focus on what justice looks like from God's perspective. The word justice is used 28 times in the Bible and we are going to look at a couple of these verses today.

Please open your Bibles to Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Feel free to look at different translations as they often provide good insight. Also please consider asking your campers if a particular book of the Bible is in the Old Testament or New Testament. Many of our campers do not have the opportunity to open a Bible and assisting them in being familiar may spark an interests in learning more!

The focus of Micah 6:1-8 is a broken relationship between God and God's people and the means to restore this relationship. You can almost imagine that Micah is holding up his index finger and shaking it at the people. It appears that they are trying way too hard to make sacrifices to God. God's covenant faithfulness toward Israel is contrasted with Israel's lack of faithfulness toward God in a lawsuit- they have taken this to court! In an attempt to repair this relationship Micah shares what God requires of Israel, thus describing the purpose of life for all people. God has done so much and the Israelites have not chosen to answer God's call. You can almost see the Israelites on trial in a courtroom. Their charge? They are being

convicted of injustice and ingratitude toward God, and the good news is that they express their desire to be at peace with God on any terms.

"Justice" (mishpat in the Hebrew- can everyone say mishpat?) is a word that holds the covenant responsibilities with God, meaning how we step into a call because of the relationship we have with God. We also see in verse 8 that "kindness" (hesed- can you say hesed?) is the way we treat each other and that comes from God's gracious love expressed in the covenant relationship we have. "To walk humbly" with God is to maintain a close relationship with God.

What is important for our walk into the world tomorrow is that how we answer the call to love God and others gives us a lens for making a call about being in relationship with God.

Let's look at a Bible verse that supports this: Will someone please read Isaiah 55:8,9:

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways", declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

When we think about our use of saying: "It's not fair!" Is it helpful to consider that sometimes we may not know all of the circumstances in a situation and yet can we trust that God will work for good in even the toughest situations?

In our world there have been many people who saw injustice and felt very called to respond in a way that would make things right. Many of you may have heard of William Wilberforce. William Wilberforce was born in 1759 in England. His family was wealthy and he studied at Cambridge University. When he was 21 Wilberforce became the youngest member of Parliament. His wealthy, powerful lifestyle changed completely when he became an evangelical Christian and his faith prompted him to become interested in social reform, particularly the improvement of factory conditions in Britain. This need for justice extended to the slave trade. Although it took him 18 years to create the abolition of the slave trade, he continued in seeking justice for persons of color and answered the call to seek change.

Two hundred years after this event in England, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. worked tirelessly as an American Baptist minister, activist, humanitarian, and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement. He answered the call using nonviolent civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs. His work moved equality for persons of color into the daily lives of United States citizens.

Archbishop, Janani Lawum, was murdered in 1977 in Uganda because he answered the call to stand up to the injustices of the country's dictator Idi Amin. Archbishop Lawum showed exceptional and courageous leadership when he opposed Idi Amin's regime of tyranny, gross human rights violations and refusal of allowing the Christian faith to exist in Uganda.

Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa in 1994, serving until 1999. A symbol of global peacemaking, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 after being in prison for 27 years as he worked tirelessly to the opposition of apartheid. His persistence was the force behind changing the culture of South Africa.

Now all of these justice champions may seem overwhelming as you think about how you can answer the call to address injustice in your community. But consider these:

1. After raising \$175,000 to help build 27 concrete homes in Haiti, Rachel Wheeler, age 12, decided to collect funds to replace a school that was destroyed in the 7.2 magnitude 2010 earthquake. "I want to build a school because they need education to make their lives better so they can learn and teach their own children how to have a better life."
2. After spending the summer in Kenya, Montclair twins Taylor and Kennedy Everson decided to dedicate their ninth birthdays to raising money to adopt a village in Africa. The budding activists collected \$2,650 for Free the Children, the most that the organization has ever received from a child's birthday party. The money they raised helps areas in need by improving schools, health clinics and building water facilities.
3. Peter Larson, 17, is celebrating his 12th straight year of sleeping in a cardboard box -- from November 12 through December 31 -- to raise awareness for the homeless population in his hometown of Plymouth, Minn. The teen has collected \$400,000 for the homeless since he was six, and he hopes to raise \$100,000 this year, enough money to house 50 families for an entire year.

So as you can see, seeking out justice, answering God's call can take different forms. So what's your call?

### **The Commissioning**

This is our last full day together. Tomorrow we will go off the mountain and return to our families and our communities. We may enter a world where God's love may not be the focus. We may enter a world where folks do not have a morning watch or a quiet moment with God, they may not encourage one another to do well in activities, and where singing or praying before and after meals may not be the norm. You may feel alone. You may wonder where your encouragement will come

from. You may wonder if you can really bring love into this in the world, can you really do justice for everyone or to say something about every injustice you meet?

As you wrestle with these very good questions, please listen to these words of encouragement from Mother Teresa. As you all remember Mother Teresa was a Catholic nun who was the founder of the Order of the Missionaries of Charity, a Roman Catholic congregation of women dedicated to helping the poor. She felt that there was great injustice for anyone to die alone, to die unknowingly in the streets of Calcutta. She saw this work as the "**call within a call**" that would forever transform her life as well as those in need in Calcutta. Throughout her life she stepped into this call by building an open air school, she established a leper colony, an orphanage, a nursing home, a family clinic and a string of mobile health clinics. Throughout her life she was recognized for doing good work in the world and in 1979, Mother Teresa won her highest honor when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her work "in bringing help to suffering humanity." Despite these amazing awards, Mother Teresa said this about who she was:

"By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. **As to my calling,**  
I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus."

On this your last day of camp, we want you to remember that you belong entirely to God. You are loved by God and called by God. You now have the call to respond to many different situations. It's your call to love as God loves; your call to welcome all as God welcomes, to forgive all as God has forgiven us, to serve as God served the least of us, and to do justice as God seeks justice. As a reminder of this decision you have, we now have a commissioning for you as we prepare to leave camp tomorrow.

This Bible study group has spent the last few days listening to each other, caring for each other, praying for things that are important to each one of us, and honoring that we are all beloved children of God. As we end this time together, we will commission each other into the work of the kingdom:

In the name of the divine God who loves us and calls us let us pray:

God you have called us into being through love.

You have joined us to one another in love.

How good and pleasant it is when your people dwell together in unity.

We pray Lord shine your light upon your people that we can see the glory of eternal life and witness the kingdom as you desire it to be. Grant all of these campers the strength to carry your blessing from this place to the next. May they be at home in any place, for all the earth is yours and you are with them. May the lamp of your word guide their feet on the unsure paths of life.

Grant these campers a deeper fullness of being and spirit, by carrying the memory of this place and this week with them in the upcoming journey. May each camper love as you love, welcome as you welcome, forgive as you forgive, serve as you serve and work for justice as you seek justice. Amen.

The Counselor will place the necklace on/to the camper and say the following: *(name of camper) you are a beloved child of God. Go into the world and live into the call of God.* After everyone has their object considering ending in a circle prayer.

## **Additional Study Ideas**

1. If it seems that your campers are having a hard time visualizing justice think about showing them the "scales of justice" and explore what happens when things are weighted strongly on one side or the other. You can even make note about how "lady justice" is blind and wonder if we still have blind justice in our current world. Is God's justice blind? Or is it simply fair beyond our understanding?
2. Ask your campers about understanding that God is pleased when followers of Jesus are fair and honest in all their dealings with other people. Justice implies doing what is right. Believers are greatly benefited in having God's Word, the Bible, which reveals those things that God desires God's people to do. In addition, Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and guide us in all truth and righteousness. Campers can be encouraged to seek opportunities to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong.
3. Additional scripture
  - a. Isaiah 58:6-12
  - b. Jeremiah 23:5



- c. Isaiah 1:16-17
- d. Isaiah 61:8

## **Ideas To Incorporate Theme Throughout The Day**

1. Although it may be corny: The justice league can be a way to transfer this conversation which is from a text thousands of years ago to our day now and yes the justice league and related characters such as the Avengers may help make this connection. Batman vs. Superman is still fresh in the campers' minds! ☺
2. Perhaps instead of the Superhero position, you can have a theme of everyday heroes? What makes a hero? Christians believe that real heroes are the ones to show us the best way to go in life. They are like signposts. These are the people who make a difference for good and who we remember, even if their lives were short.
3. You could help the campers create a court system with judges and juries with the spin that this court system of God's is held with love and mercy.
4. You could look at having games during all camp where the last or the least points "wins" hoping for consistent cries of "It's not fair!"
5. The Village of the Day could consider having a hunger meal to review the injustice of poverty and how our distribution of good is not fair, nor just.

## **Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, and Suggestions**

Songs from the RTALC Songbook

1. Seek Ye First
2. I'll Do My Best
3. Go!
4. We Lift Up Our Prayer
5. Go Where I Send Thee
6. Here I Am, Lord
7. Courageous

### **Do It Anyway - by Mother Teresa**

Sometimes trying to do justice can be overwhelming. Sometimes you may wonder if you work for justice makes a difference for even one person. Sometimes you may feel discouraged and wondered if your work matters. If that overwhelming sense comes up, especially with the high school students, consider reading this to them:

People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered; Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior motives; Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and true enemies; Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you; Be honest anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight; Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous; Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow; Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God; It was never between you and them anyway.

### **Superpowers by IN-Q**

When I think of superheroes  
 I think of superhuman  
 I think of Superman  
 Wolverine and Wonder Woman  
 Usually they have a cape  
 Or a mask to hide their face  
 Just in case  
 They have X-ray vision and superhuman strength  
 Some can even breathe in outer space  
 They fly around a while but always come back to keep our  
 Cities safe

They're here to save humanity from itself  
 It's a metaphor for how we look outside ourselves for help  
     And while the fantasies are fun  
     I choose to look to me and you  
     We don't need superheroes  
     We have superpowers too  
 It starts with being OPEN to the moment  
 If we do that we can own it  
     Besides it will be gone before we know it so don't blow it  
     We owe it to this second of eternity to show up  
     Embrace the possibilities and slow up  
     Take a breath and look around  
     See the sights and hear the sounds  
     Feel the ground  
     Notice there's a reason that you're in the now  
     You could be anywhere and yet you're here  
     When you accept it as your own you begin to overcome  
     your fears  
 And real COURAGE is looking in the mirror  
 It's deciding what you want to do  
 Then making it appear  
 Innovation out of thin air  
 You must be doing something right if you are scared  
 Otherwise you wouldn't care  
 It's a process to get from here to there  
 You're on the journey and you're learning  
 But building muscle means your gonna feel the burning  
 So SIMPLIFY it  
 Don't deny it, Try it  
 See if it can work for you  
 Change perspective to get a different view  
 And don't forget you gotta laugh at the truth  
     Cause sometimes a sense of HUMOR is the only thing  
     That pulls you through  
     It's medicine when you can let it in  
     An attitude of GRATITUDE is rising up from within  
     So even if the storm clouds block the blue from your sky  
     You'll remember that the sun is waiting for you on the  
     Other side  
 And having FUN is something you must decide  
 From the lows to the highs  
 It's all a part of the ride  
 I can throw my hands up or hold on for dear life  
 But I'd rather live once then make the same mistake twice  
     COMPASSION is my passion  
     Empathy is my gift  
     But my growth is incremental as my consciousness shifts  
     So I CREATE from the abyss  
     Turning pain into gold  
     I'm an alchemist  
     An OPTIMIST and an AUTHENTIC soul  
 I believe that Life is Good  
 Even when it hurts to see  
 I believe in superpowers  
 And I believe in you and me



I believe in superheroes but I don't look for them flying  
above  
Cause they exist inside of us all and WE save the day  
With LOVE.

### **Ideas To Adjust Study Down For Juniors**

The campers in these grades are dealing with the potentially dreaded middle school events. I almost wonder if they will resonate with this day more than any other age group. Allow them space to talk about how tough it is and feel free to share with them any experience from your life during your middle school years. Ask them to consider answering the following questions if you do not have a lot of discussion:

Are You a Fair Person? Please answer True or False

1. I treat people the way I want to be treated.
2. I treat people impartially and without prejudice.
3. I consider the feelings of all people who will be affected by my actions.
4. I am open-minded and reasonable.
5. I play by the rules.
6. I never take advantage of others.
7. I think I am/am not a fair person because: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Ideas To Adjust Study Up For Seniors**

The campers in this age group may have a tendency to focus more on what is fair for them or how they have been treated unfairly. Pay attention to their ability to see how they are a part of the injustice problems we have especially with our privileges in this country. Do they know the working conditions of those who make their ipods or their cell phones? Ask them to also take this quiz:

Are You a Fair Person? Please answer True or False

1. I treat people the way I want to be treated.
2. I treat people impartially and without prejudice.
3. I consider the feelings of all people who will be affected by my actions.
4. I am open-minded and reasonable.
5. I play by the rules.
6. I never take advantage of others.
7. I think I am/am not a fair person because: \_\_\_\_\_

Ask if they can resonate with Gandhi's quote of: "Be the change you want to see in the world."

## **Parent Devotional** Day 5: God Seeks Justice...What's Your Call?

**Scripture** Micah 6:8; Amos 5:24; Matthew 7:12; Isaiah 58:6-12

*Micah 6:8 But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously - take God seriously.*

### **Reflection**

In our study today the theme is justice. This really can be a tough concept with our campers as in our world justice usually comes in the form of revenge or imprisonment. We will be discussing what they may most resonate with and that is the phrase of "It's not fair!" We are guessing that you have heard this a few times in your home! ☺ We are always guessing that your response may have been "WELL, life is not fair!" With God as our foundation, we have a God who is completely fair, even when God treats people differently TO treat them fairly. We will be exploring the definition of justice and what our call will be in the world to the justice that God shows.

### **Family Activity**

Consider what your family thinks about when you heard the word justice. In what circumstances have you heard or said: "It's not fair?" Ask the question: When is the best time to respond to injustice? When do you answer God's call?

**Listen to the song** **If Not Now, Tell Me When** - by Carrie Newcomer

If not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
We may never see this moment  
Or place in time again  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
    I see sorrow and trouble in this land  
    I see sorrow and trouble in this land  
    Although there will be struggle  
    We'll make the change we can  
    If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
We may never see this moment  
Or place in time again  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
    I may never see the Promised Land  
    I may never see the Promised Land  
    And yet we'll take the journey  
    And we'll walk it hand in hand  
    If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
We may never see this moment  
Or place in time again  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
    We'll work it 'til it's done  
    Every daughter, every son  
    Every soul that ever longed for something better  
    Something brighter  
And it will take a change of heart for this to mend  
It will take a change of heart for this to mend  
But miracles do happen every shining now and then  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?

If not now, tell me when?  
If not now, tell me when?  
We may never see this moment  
Or place in time again  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
And miracles do happen every shining now and then  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?  
If not now, if not now, tell me when?

Answering God's call to do justice can be in little ways and in big ways. Think about ways that you as a family can answer God's call to do justice.

**Prayer**

Good and Gracious God, empower us to answer your call to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with you. Open our eyes to see injustice, give us courage to speak for those who cannot, tune our ears to listen for your call. In Jesus' name, Amen.