

Why Church Should Be Like Youth Camp

Once again, our youth have returned from Triple "S" Christian Ranch. I have preached at this blessed camp for forty-nine years. We have seen some decisions through the years and, God willing, in this past week, that will last a lifetime, yea, even for eternity. God has blessed and we give Him praise; truly we can say with Moses, "And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it" (Psalm 90:16). Youth camp is beautiful! Here are some beautiful characteristics of youth camp that should and could be at church:

1. THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

"With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2, 3). In our youth group we have home school, public, and Christian private school educated children. It is normal for grouping to take place according to those we most often associate with. I give God thanks that I see our kids, who don't always see much of each other, getting along amicably. What we have at camp is an absence of cliques. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). It may do all of us good to go out for coffee or some time of fellowship with those whom we often don't associate. God has designed us to be humble and forbear (hold up) one another in the unity of the spirit. Years ago a tuba player injured his lip, which required some special stitching to repair. He was under doctor's orders not to play his tuba for one month. Not being able to play discouraged him at first because he had not missed a practice or a concert for twenty years. His friends were anxious to see his response after sitting in the audience rather than playing for the first time in two decades. After the last note was played, he was the first to stand to his feet and wildly applaud. His friends rushed to his side and asked surprisingly, "Did you enjoy the concert?" He answered, "I thoroughly enjoyed it. You see," he continued, "this is the first time in a long time I have heard the delicate sound of the piccolo and some of the lovely strains of the violins, flutes and cellos. For twenty years all I have been hearing is umpah-pah,umpah-pah." How precious to have witnessed the unity of the spirit this week, seeing the Body of Christ play together in spiritual harmony.

2. THE LACK OF OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE

The youth have been away from smart phones, tablets, all manner of screens, televisions, radios, video games, and perhaps an influence that is non-conducive to holiness. One of the most needful things in the life of the believer is to draw near to God. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). One of the goals for this past week has been to remove all that stands between the youth and God. It is not to say that these other things create a bad influence, but in the same way they can be

conduits of blessing, they can also be carriers of interference that sometime muffle what God wants to say. This leads us into the next characteristic of youth camp that should be in church.

3. THE STRONG VOICE OF GOD

When there is a lack of outside interference, there will most naturally be the strong voice of God. "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:1). The blessing follows when we hearken diligently to hear God's voice in this world. "...To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7).

4. THE CONCENTRATION OF THE WORD

Have you ever missed something because you had a hard time concentrating? As the youth have been away from the world, they have heard the preaching and teaching of the Word of God for four consecutive days, morning and evening. Usually every day, someone will come up to me expressing to me what God has said to them. As the week goes on, the number of testimonies of this kind, as a rule, will increase. A great lesson awaits all of us who can draw far enough away from the world and its allurements and listen intently for God's voice in God's Word. "In the house of the righteous is much treasure..." (Proverbs 15:6). "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Psalm 119:9).

5. THE OPENNESS TO CORRECTION

After we have left the world and heard the strong voice of God through His Word, the most natural follow-up will occur, as we are now open to correction. We begin to see things the way God sees them. Now is the time to open up to God's direction. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6). The heart cry of our youth has sounded like Moses' prayer: "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee..." (Exodus 33:13).

6. WE RETURN BETTER THAN WHEN WE BEGAN

There is a song that says something to the effect, "I'm tired of being moved, but never changed." I have a real sense that this has been one of the best weeks of camp ever for our kids. I believe a change for good has taken place. By the same token, when true revival touches us at church, we leave being different than when we came. My prayer is that this Sunday we will all leave better than when we came. "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Psalm 85:6).

- Pastor Pope -