

God Still Uses Church Camp to Transform Lives

By Dan Carson, Director • Student Ministry Matters

When we think back to our days as teenagers and being involved in a church, there is a good chance we have some memories of church camp. Sand volleyball pits, silly songs, camp crushes, Bible quizzes and temperatures that made us all sweat are just a few of them. However, some of the really exciting memories are based around our spiritual lives. It was at camp where my good friend, Wade Allen, surrendered his life to the gospel ministry. It was at camp during different years that my children began their relationships with Jesus. It has been at church camps where I have seen young men and women hear God's direction more clearly because the distractions of this world were set aside for a few minutes.

Church camp may seem like an outdated notion, but I believe there is still a great place for it in our ministry to students. In this issue, we want to highlight two of the church camps that operate around our state and the work that they do for the kingdom. If you don't take your students to camp, you need to at least consider how it could change their lives.



Ozarks Baptist Encampment

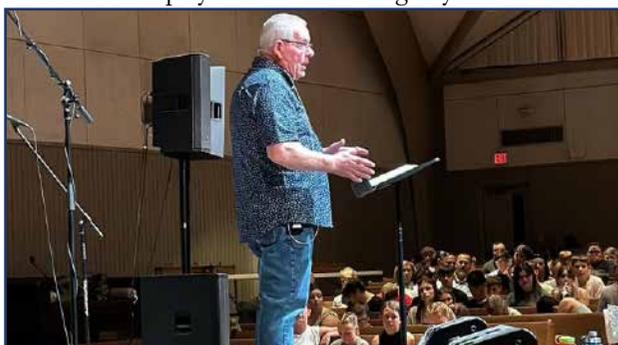
By Joel P. Young, Youth Pastor • Summers Baptist Church

Ozarks Baptist Encampment (OBE) began in the early 1970s as a joint venture between the Benton County and Fayetteville Local Associations of the BMA of Arkansas. In the mid 1990s, those two associations merged to create the BMA of the Ozarks, and OBE continues to be a ministry of that association. Currently, we have churches from Arkansas, Kansas and Missouri who participate in camp every summer!



Over the years, they have met at Camp Eagan near Tahlequah, Okla., Baptist Vista near Cass, Ark., Grand Lake Baptist Assembly (GLBA) near Grove, Okla., and Camp Siloam, near Siloam Springs. We will be returning to GLBA for camp this summer, and we are excited to see what God is going to do at and through OBE2024. Most of our camp staff is made up of volunteers from the churches who participate in the camp, which truly makes OBE a family experience.

While some might say that camp is a thing of past generations, that is certainly not the case with OBE. Last summer, 57 souls came to a saving knowledge of Jesus and 1 young man surrendered to the ministry during the 4 nights we were together. There is just something special about getting away from the world for a few days and being able to focus our attention on God. Please pray that He works mightily at OBE2024



BMA Camp (at Budd Creek)

By Jeff Herring, Camp Director!

I have been going to church camp since before I was born. My dad believed strongly in the ministry of church camp and did his best to take children to camp every year. I was born Aug. 5, 1974, and my parents were at camp a few weeks before that (so I've been told, my memory is a little foggy from that time). I can honestly say there has not been a year since I was born that I have not been to church camp, even during the busy college years of working around my job.

In 1978, my dad was part of a group of pastors (mostly in the Greenbrier Association) that saw the need for a youth camp in Central Arkansas, so they formed the BMA Youth Camp Board and started having church camp in the summer. Over the next 10 years, the camp outgrew the local campgrounds and divided. A few years later, while my dad served as the camp director, BMA Camp began meeting at Budd Creek Baptist Campground in Greers Ferry, and we have been meeting there ever since during the same week in June.

The heart for reaching students through camp ministry was passed down from my dad. After I surrendered to the ministry and began working with students, I was elected to serve on the camp board. I served in a variety of roles over the next few years, including board president, assistant camp director and then I was elected to serve as camp director, a position I have held for over 20 years.

I have personally taken hundreds of students to camp over my years of ministry and have seen God work at camp in some very special ways. There is just something special about getting away from the everyday things that can be a distraction in our walk with the Lord. Students often come to camp with a group and they may have never even been to church, but God uses their time at camp to change their life for eternity. It is there that students surrender to ministry, confess sin and rededicate their lives to the Lord.

If you have never been to church camp, I invite you to bring a group and see for yourself how God is using this ministry to reach the next generation with the good news of the gospel. If you are not ready to bring a group, come visit for a day or evening service. I know I am biased because I have not known life without church camp, but I strongly believe God uses the

intentional time away from everyday life to do special things in the lives of those who go to camp, both students and adults.

BMA Camp this year will be June 17-20 (Monday-Thursday) at Budd Creek Campground in Greers Ferry. Our speaker will be Chris Vines, family and youth pastor at Garrett Memorial Baptist Church in Hope. Doug Mickan, associate pastor of music & worship at Faith Baptist Church in Festus, Mo., will be leading the worship during the week. Information packets will be available soon, and you can follow and find out more information by joining the **BMA Camp @ Budd Creek Campground** group on Facebook. I will post all of the latest information there regarding this year's camp.

Church camp is a place God still uses to transform lives, and I encourage you to do your best to help students in your church have an opportunity to attend. One of the most difficult things groups often run into regarding bringing a group to camp is finding sponsors to bring the students. Will you consider being a sponsor so students in your church can attend camp and possibly be changed for eternity? I have talked to many adults that attend camp for the first time and they fall in love with going to camp, not just because of the students' lives that are changed, but because they also benefit from their time at camp.



- Plan to attend SMWR 2024 on Sept. 14, 2024
- Check out the Student Ministry Matters podcast at studentministrymatters.podbean.com or through most major podcasting platforms.
- Join the Student Ministry Matters Community on Facebook at [Facebook.com/groups/StudentMinistryMattersCommunity](https://www.facebook.com/groups/StudentMinistryMattersCommunity).



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Epic Life Impacting Us As Much as Pea Ridge!

By Jake McCandless • Epic Life, Pea Ridge

In our monthly “Preview Night,” where we invite those interested in Epic Life to preview a Discovery Bible Study at our “neutral” space at the rented Room 161, we have been tackling passages in which God reveals Himself to His people. At our January Preview Night, we looked at Exod. 19:1-6. In preparing, I felt led to this passage because of the “plot switch” given in verse 4.

To grasp the plot shift in the verse, we must back up to the beginning of Exodus to the context. The beginning of Exodus finds the Israelites in slavery in Egypt. By the time we get to Exodus 19, God has called and led Moses to face off with Pharaoh. God has gotten the Egyptian ruler’s attention through the plagues. The Israelites have been set free, but are soon boxed in at the Red Sea, where God parts the sea. They have traveled through the desert for three months. God has provided and sustained them, and, in Exodus 19, they’re encamped around Mount Sinai. Moses is about to receive the Law. In this passage, God is giving Moses instruction on how the Law should be received.

If we were “retelling” the first chapters of Exodus (as we do in our Discovery Bible Studies), we’d summarize it by saying God was rescuing Israel and guiding them to the Promised Land. That’s the obvious plot, or is it? As God meets with Moses in this passage, He tells the plot from His point of view. Yes, outwardly God is rescuing His people and bringing them to the Promised Land, but, **ultimately**, God reveals He is bringing Israel to Him — “*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself*” (Exod. 19:4 NIV).

Did you see the plot switch? Or better asked, did you see God’s main goal? For the record, this is **always** God’s goal. Though this passage was for a great discussion with a new family who had attended the worship service the week before and came back to preview a Discovery Bible Study, the Lord used it to help me articulate what is going on in my life, and the lives of my family and the leaders of Epic Life. Outwardly, we’re planting a church, but, **ultimately**, God is bringing us to Himself. I know this is always the case, but I have never experienced it to the level that the method of church planting we’re using leads to.

I have preached and touted, throughout my 26 years of preaching, that we can’t do it in our own strength but must rely on God to do His work. I have preached that, prayed for that and even thought that was how I was doing ministry. But in retrospect, I was still trying to do everything in my own strength. I practiced and thought if I could just produce a great strategy, preach a great sermon, plan or organize the perfect event, then the church could grow. Unfortunately for my own growth, God is gracious and allowed that to often work to some degree.

When I started in Pea Ridge, I felt led to explore the “Movements” model, which focuses for most on becoming a missionary in my own home, neighborhood and network and then help others to also do that. Then, as we’re missionaries in our neighborhood and networks, Bible study groups will form and then these Bible Study groups will gather as a church. It really doesn’t sound that drastic, and it isn’t, except on the missionary. There’s no ministry on and off switch. There’s no event that can be done to make this happen. It completely relies on seeking the Lord constantly and stepping in obedience courageously and letting the peace God gives radiate out into the relationships in your home, neighborhood and network.

This type of ministry also relies heavily on obeying the Scriptures that are studied together and holding each other accountable for doing so. That means you can’t kick the difficult “can” of life change down the road, you must face it. For me, it seems everywhere I go I’m running into a mirror that is forcing me to make sure every part of my life is moving to being obedient to the Lord through His Word. Things in my relationships and interactions that I never considered are being tweaked and transformed. It can be a painful process, but personally and within my family the Lord is bringing me to Himself. Though difficult, I’m beginning to become able to really help others walk in daily transformation by the gospel.

Along with the personal impact, this model of ministry is transforming me in terms of letting God do His Work and not relying on His strength. Results are not coming from any strategy or event; they bubble out of simple obedience and prayer. We had our largest worship service a couple of weeks ago, and it was the only one we did not promote heavily. We did nothing on our own except keep our hands to the plow and pray. We formed a Prayer Team we meet with every two weeks. This team is becoming like those who held Moses’ arms up in the battle. We can tell when that team is praying.

I have worked and worked and been in turmoil on how to train our leaders. I’ve been frustrated that it has taken over a year to start formal training; but, in what seemed like a snap of fingers, we have now launched a regular leader meeting. I have our main leaders in the middle of an eight-week training course. I’m also meeting with those main leaders one-on-one weekly. God did more in a second than I labored to do in over a year. This method of ministry is forcing me to completely rely on God. I’m so thankful for that. I’m thankful for the life-giving transformation that is happening in my life and home. I’m thankful that it turns out I’m not just up here planting a church, but that God is bringing me to Him. I’m so thankful I’ve been as impacted by this church plant as Pea Ridge has been.





A Light in the Midst of Darkness

By Ruben J Isturiz, Missionary • Misión Ebenezer, West Little Rock

We are called to minister in a broken world. Not only do we carry the message of the gospel, we also minister to people with many needs. Suffering is inevitable, and part of planting a church is serving suffering people.

The Lopez family has been through some difficult times. Luis and Georgina Lopez have two daughters and a son. Their son, Neymar Lopez, is seven years old, and he is a joyful child. He waits for Sunday to come to church. His arrival at our Celebration Service is a source of joy for all of us because he has a contagious joy. Every Sunday, he comes to our congregation with a box of donuts.

Lately, Neymar began having health problems. We were praying for him as his health problems were very recurrent — flu, fever, etc. The doctors could not find a diagnosis. In December, his father informed us that Neymar was diagnosed with cancer. It was news that shocked all of us at Ebenezer.

His parents were doing everything possible, along with his doctors, to treat Neymar, but what could we all do at Ebenezer? We dedicated ourselves to praying to the God of the impossible, praying every day for Neymar's health. We could not visit him because his defenses were low.

I thank God for the faith of the Lopez family that never wavered and for Ebenezer's support in praying and being attentive to the development of Neymar's treatment. After his first stage of treatment, I visited him in January to pray for Luis, as the leader of his home, and for Neymar.

The results of the first stage of treatment showed that there were no traces of cancer in Neymar's body. Glory to God! We have seen God's answer to our prayers. Our heavenly Father is a God of the impossible. God has once again given us hope — a light in the midst of darkness. Keep praying for Neymar for the next stages of his treatment. To God be the glory!



God is Still Calling People to Salvation

By Roberto Marcelletti • Misión Gracia Soberana, NW Ark.

Seeing God's transforming grace in the lives of those He sovereignly calls to salvation is glorious. I'm going to share with you about Nanie, an older woman who came to our community in September 2023. She was born in Puerto Rico and had a very difficult childhood. Her parents abandoned her, and, as a result, she grew up with resentment toward them. Her grandmother picked her up and took her to church when she was very young, but she only went to accompany her grandmother since her heart was very far from the Lord because of her difficult situation of resentment and hatred. Then she got married and, unfortunately, when a person does not have the Lord as a guide, she and her three children suffered in this relationship of abuse and mistreatment. From this relationship, two daughters were born with autism. She has had a very difficult life.

Her sister, Iris, was the first to begin worshipping with us. She invited Nanie to her house on Thursdays because we have our Grace Group there every week. She ignored her sister's invitations and rejected Christianity because she blamed God for all the difficulties she had experienced since she was a child. But one day, she agreed to go, and the Lord moved her, and she couldn't stop crying. She told of the difficulties she had lived through — abandonment, abuse and raising her daughters alone with special conditions.

From the moment we met her, she was a very nervous person with many fears. The whole Grace Group began praying for Nanie and in about two weeks, she attended the Sunday service and gave her life to Christ. She began to go to church every Sunday and to the Grace Group on Thursdays.

One Thursday before the meeting, Nanie shared the great news that she had given her life to Christ. Still, the struggle did not end since the daughter with whom she lives told Nanie she did not want to see any Christians in her house because she hated them. We started praying for Nanie's daughter and, at Christmas, my wife invited her to our Christmas service. She attended, and since that day, she has visited us three times and helped us decorate the church on Saturdays.

Nanie is happy about this, and we see the transforming grace in her every day. Now, Nanie is being prepared because she wants to be baptized this year. Seeing how God transforms the people we serve is beautiful and hopeful. I ask your prayers that God will continue to guide us to where He is working.



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Mustang Message

CBC Fulfilling Its Mission: Transforming Lives

By Mason Crymes



Central Baptist College's mission is to transform lives, so it is great to hear from alumni whose lives have been changed by the mission of the school. Noah and Jordan Pratt are two recent CBC graduates who shared some of their CBC stories with us.

As prospective students, Noah and Jordan applied for the leadership scholarship (an institutional scholarship awarded to incoming freshmen demonstrating leadership capabilities). This scholarship ended up being what brought the two together. Jordan recounted the day this happened, "We were both seniors in high school and were interviewing for the leadership scholarship. Thankfully, we both got it and, three years later, he became my husband!"

In addition to their role as leadership students, both students were heavily involved on campus in other ways. Noah was a resident coordinator, resident assistant, Student Orientation Staff (SOS) member and the director of intramural sports. Jordan was an Resident Assistant (RA), an SOS member and was on the homecoming court three times.

To the couple, CBC brought about many great relationships and memories. Noah talked about some of the highlights of his CBC experience, saying, "I loved chapel, basketball games, intramural sports, hall wars and spending time as an RA with my hall."

Jordan also talked about some of the relationships she built. "I have great memories in the dorms as I met four of my bridesmaids who will be lifelong friends — Kat Carson, Cassie Hager, Allison Mantooth and Mallory Guyton," she said.

After graduating, Noah and Jordan moved to Kansas City, Mo., where Noah is pursuing a Master of Divinity, and Jordan works as a sixth-grade math and inquiry teacher.

When speaking about the Bible department, Noah said, "Getting to sit under Dr. Tim Brewer's teaching was my favorite part of the Bible Department. Through his teaching and discussion with other Bible majors, I began to have a deeper love of theology."

Similarly, Jordan talked about the way the Education Department helped her. "The greatest and sweetest memory is when I was struggling in my student teaching. The professors were so encouraging and would meet with me after school and be a shoulder to cry on. They let me know that I was not alone and encouraged me every step of the way," she said.

To those who may be considering CBC, Jordan gives some encouragement. "You should come to CBC because of the low student-to-faculty ratio. I always felt accounted for and pushed because the professors knew me personally, but they also showed love and grace because of their faith," she said.

Jordan later commented on what CBC did for her as a whole, saying, "CBC was a home to me for four years, and my life changed a lot during that time. There was not a day that went by that I wasn't encouraged in some way. I never felt like I was going through life by myself."

Noah also talked about what he hopes people know about CBC. "Our purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever," he said. He continued, "If that is our purpose, our aim should be to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. I believe CBC can definitely help people accomplish that mission."



CBC is committed to transforming lives by providing an education that integrates Christian faith and academic excellence in a Christ-centered environment.