

MORNING DEVOTIONS YOUTH

Before camp begins, create a sacred space for the morning devotion gathering. The space should be a nice location outdoors. The focus of the space will be a prayer web upon which prayer ties and other special objects will be hung throughout the week. Create a web out of natural twine. You can make it between two trees, on a large fallen branch, or on a wooden or wire frame. The web should be at least three feet in diameter. Leave the web in place all week.

The sacred space you create will depend on the setting and natural materials you have available. Do you have a natural forest “cathedral,” a meditative pond, or a majestic rock wall? Keep it simple and as natural as possible. You may choose to edge it with rocks or fallen branches. It should be a large enough area for everyone to gather in a circle.

A note for larger camps: Each camper will be hanging six things on the web throughout the week, so depending on the size of your camp; you may need to make a larger web or more than one web. You can change the devotion location each day and start fresh with a new web or have a huge web wall. Adapt your web however necessary to accommodate your group size,

Morning Devotion Material

Prayer ties will be used each morning. You will need one strip of cloth or ribbon about 1 ½” x 14” for each person per day. (Many different colors create a nice effect.) Cut strips before camp begins.

Pens to write on the prayer ties (fabric pens or sharp point permanent markers).

Any additional materials are listed under the individual day.

Morning Devotion Time

Devotions are designed to last fifteen to twenty minutes; however, times may vary according to your group size.

Day One: Wahabu

meaning: God of love

pronounced: “Wa-ha-boo” with the accent on the second syllable

Gather in a circle and welcome everyone. Begin with these thoughts:

Leader: “Each morning this week we will be learning a Swahili (pronounced swa-hee-lee) word for our daily theme. Swahili is a language that is spoken in many African countries, Sometimes a word In Swahili can mean more than one word or concept in our language. We will be learning the Swahili word by doing our daily theme call. Today’s theme is *Wahabu*, which means ‘God of love.’”

Daily Theme Call

A variation of this activity will be used at the beginning of each morning devotion and each theme class. In the morning the call will be in a whisper; during theme class the call will be a yell.

Split the circle into two equal halves. One side will whisper the daily theme, and the other will echo back what it means. Example: One side whispers “*Wahabu*” and the other side whispers back, “God of love.” Repeat two more times. The volume should be loud enough to be clearly heard but soft enough to be a whisper.

Leader: After today's call: “Our God is a God of love. This week at camp, we want God's love to be in everything we do,

“This place we are gathered in for our morning devotions is a sacred space. A sacred space is a special place that helps us get closer to God. In this sacred space, everyone is welcome and accepted. This is a place of peace and togetherness. Each morning we will gather here to greet each other and start our day.”

Prayer Web and Prayer Ties

Leader: “We've all heard of the Ten Commandments, right? Who can tell me which are the two greatest commandments, according to Jesus?” (If anyone knows or wants to guess, take a few answers.)

Read or have a camper read the following paraphrased scripture:

Which of all the commandments is the greatest? “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” And the second greatest is, ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ There are no greater commandments than these. — Matthew 12:28-31

“Love God and love each other. It's as simple as that. (Continue using one of the following responses): (*for younger campers*) It is not always easy to do, but this is what we must strive for. Love is like the wind. We can't see the wind, but we can see the effects of the wind as it blows leaves, makes trees sway, and ruffles our hair. We can't see love as a touchable thing, (*for older campers*) “Love God and love each other. It's as simple as that. Simple does not mean easy. This is the hardest thing we will ever do, but this is what we must strive for. This is what matters. We show our love for God and others through our actions. Good works are love made visible.”

Explain the prayer web. (It will be helpful to open the circle at the web so everyone has a clear view of it.) Hand each person a prayer tie and pen. Ask each person to write on the prayer tie a one sentence prayer on the theme of God's love at camp. Prayers can be for the camp as a whole, for individuals at camp, for the staff, or whatever is on the campers' hearts. As campers finish, they may approach the web and tie their prayers anywhere along the web, then quietly return to their place in the circle.

Leader: (*for younger campers*) “The Holy Spirit is also like the wind: we can't see it but we can feel it. The Holy Spirit is like a gentle breeze that blows love into our hearts. This week, whenever you feel the wind on your face, let it remind you of the presence of love is and the Holy Spirit at our camp.”

(*for older campers*) The concept of love has been twisted and perverted in our society today. We can love French fries and cars. We confuse the words ‘love’ and ‘sex.’ Loving God is somehow made to seem ridiculous or outdated. Today, I challenge all of

us to focus on the true meaning of love as a pure virtue that comes from the Holy Spirit within our hearts.”

Suggested closing song for younger campers:

“Spirit of the Living God.”

Suggested closing song for older campers:

“Love, Love, Love, Love (the gospel in one word is love...)”

Day Two: Umoja

meaning: unity harmony

pronounced: “oo-mo-jah” with the accent on the second syllable

Daily Theme Call

See Day One Morning Devotion for instructions.

One side whispers umoja and the other side whispers back “unity, harmony.”

Leader: (for younger campers) After today’s call, say “Jesus wants us to enjoy being together at camp this week. That doesn’t mean we all have to think alike or act alike. It means we need to celebrate what we have in common. It also means celebrating our differences and letting it be okay that we’re not all exactly the same, that is living in unity and harmony.

(for older campers) After today’s call say, “We don’t have to all think alike or act alike to find true unity. That would be rather boring. We can celebrate what we have in common and celebrate our differences. Unity can come when we let it be okay that we’re not all exactly the same,”

“Here we are standing in a circle where everyone is equal and everyone is loved. Are we all the same? No, we have many differences. Now we’re going to play a game that celebrates our differences and creates unity.”

Game: Symphony of Diversity

Directions:

Each person thinks of a sound that they can repeat over and over. It can be a vocal sound or a percussion sound made with their body (examples: clapping in a certain rhythm, stomping feet, clucking tongue). The rules are 1) no real words can be used for sounds, and 2) the sound must be made only with one’s body—no other instruments, rocks, or sticks.

The leader will start with his/her sound and then go around the circle adding one person at a time until everyone is making their sound. After a few moments, the leader stops. The wave goes around the circle again, one person stops at a time until all is quiet.

Leader: “Isn’t it amazing how different everyone’s sounds were? There was a great diversity of responses to the instructions to make a sound with only the body. We used those differences to come together. When everyone was making their sound, we were working together to make a symphony with our differences. That’s the way it is with serving God. We all have different gifts and talents, but it takes all of us doing our part to make the circle of Jesus unified and complete.”

Prayer Web and Prayer Ties

Hand each person a prayer tie and pen. Ask each person to write on the prayer tie

a one sentence prayer about unity and celebrating each other's differences. They can ask God to help them create unity at camp and at home, they can write a prayer for other people, or they can ask forgiveness for a time when they used differences to make fun of someone. Ask them to hold onto their prayer ties for now.

As campers finish writing, have them tie their prayers together into one long strand and then weave it along the outside edge of the web(s) so that it creates a colorful border. There may be a bit of confusion at first, but let them figure out how to tie the prayers together as a team-building exercise.

If your group is large, consider dividing into smaller groups. The small groups can combine their ties and then join ends with other groups, or if that would be too time consuming, just have the small groups weave their strands onto the web(s) without combining into one long strand. Optional: play soft instrumental or Christian music on a boom box during this activity

Closing Song: "Weave Us Together" (Sing a New Song, 51) Note: The verses of this song are rather complicated, so consider just singing the chorus as a group, repeating it two or three times. Or have a soloist sing the verses and have the group join in on the chorus.

Day Three: Jamii

meaning: one family

pronounced: "jah-mee" with syllable

Daily Theme Call

See Day One Morning Devotion for the accent on the first

Additional Materials:

1. String or thin wire for attaching natural objects to the prayer web
2. Scissors or wire cutters

instructions.

One side whispers "jamii" and the other side whispers back "one family."

Leader: *(for younger campers)*

After today's call, say "We are all sisters and brothers in Christ. We belong to a family of people who believe in Jesus. Did you know that we have brothers and sisters all over the world? This week we are lucky enough to learn a little about Africa, where we have many sisters and brothers in the church. We have a responsibility to our family, and that is to always put Jesus at the center of everything we do. If Jesus is the center of our lives, then we will act according to his teachings."

(for older campers) After today's call, say "We belong to a worldwide family of people who believe in Jesus Christ. We are all sisters and brothers in Christ. Our responsibility to this family is to live a Christ-centered life in a time when that seems increasingly difficult."

Nature Symbol Activity and Prayer Ties

"Today we are going to represent our family of Jesus on our prayer web and create a group prayer asking Jesus to help us follow his example."

First have campers find a natural object that will represent them. Caution them not to kill anything living. Their object should be no larger than their hand and not too heavy.

Give them five minutes to search for their object. Set a boundary that they must stay within. As they return give each an appropriate length of string and have them hang their object on the prayer web. When everyone's object is hung, explain that they represent each member of the family of Jesus at camp.

When everyone is back, hand each person a prayer tie and pen. Have them write on their prayer tie a word that they would consider to be a characteristic of Jesus, answering the question, "To be like Jesus I need to be more _____."

It's fine if words are repeated. Those repetitions are characteristics that campers consider especially important. Explain that you are going to start a prayer and go around the circle. Each person will say their word and then quietly go tie on their prayer tie and return to their place in the circle. Of course, if someone doesn't wish to speak, they may just tie on their prayer. Begin the prayer with: "Dear Jesus, thank you for each person represented on our prayer web by things from your holy creation. We want to be like you and so now we pray that you give each person the strength and wisdom to be..."

When each person has shared their word, finish the prayer with "Amen."

Day Four: Uzima

meaning: health, life, wholeness

pronounced: "oo-zee-mah" with the accent on the second syllable

Daily Theme Call

See Day One Morning Devotion for instructions.

One side whispers "uzima" and the other side whispers back "health, life, wholeness,"

Option: Since the meaning of uzima is longer, you could split the circle into four parts and each part would whisper one word in order: uzima, health, life, wholeness.

Leader: After today's call, say "God wants all of creation to be healthy, whole, and full of life. Unfortunately, there is much brokenness and sickness in the world. Our responsibility as Christians is to help God's creation be as healthy and whole as possible. That includes people, animals, and the environment. God knows that all of creation is interconnected and that people cannot be totally whole and healthy unless animals and the environment are as well. "God also wants each one of us to be healthy, whole, and full of life: in our physical body, our mind, and our spirit. Just like we are connected to the rest of God's creation, our body, mind, and spirit are interconnected as well. We can't be totally whole unless our body, mind, and spirit are healthy. I'm going to do a demonstration that proves that our body, mind, and spirit are interconnected."

Activity: Body-Mind-Spirit Connection

Ask for a volunteer. Tell that camper to stretch her/his arm out straight in front and resist when you press down on it. Now, press down on that arm to test the camper's strength. Press just until the arm starts to give in. Remember how much force you had to exert. Now tell the camper to repeat after you one line at a time:

I am very smart and capable.

I'm beautiful inside and out.

I'm full of love and goodness.

I love people and they love me,

I can do anything with Jesus' help.
I'll be the best that I can be.
Jesus loves me and will always be with me.

After saying these statements, ask the camper to extend the same arm and test his/her strength. The camper's strength should have improved because of the positive impact of the statements. Having positive thoughts in the mind feeds the soul and strengthens the body. Point out that negative thinking drains our strength, while positive thinking and attitudes toward self and others have a positive impact on the body, mind, and spirit. Time permitting, repeat the exercise with more campers.

Prayer Web and Prayer Ties

Hand each person a prayer tie and pen. Ask each person to write on the prayer tie a one-sentence prayer asking God to help her/him be healthy and whole in body, mind, and spirit. If they have one area they need more help in, they can focus on it in their prayer. As campers finish writing, they can approach the prayer web and tie on their prayers. *Optional: play soft instrumental or Christian music on a boom box during this activity.*

Closing Song: sing "Peace Like a River" and include the following verses: I've got peace like a river... I've got love like the ocean... I'm as whole as creation...

Day Five: Heri

meaning: good wishes, goodwill, blessings

pronounced: heh-ree, rolling the "r" sound, as in Spanish, with the accent on the first syllable

Daily Theme Call

See Day One Morning Devotion for instructions.

One side whispers "heri" and the other side whispers back good wishes, good will, blessings." Option: Since the meaning of heri is longer, you could split the circle into four groups and each group would whisper one part in order: heri, good wishes, goodwill, blessings.

Leader: After today's greeting, say "Today is our last morning in this sacred space. We will send each other off with good wishes for the future. Remember that back home you can also have sacred space. Your sacred space could be your church, a special place in nature, a certain part of your room, or even a place you just think about and go to in your mind. Try finding a sacred space that is special to you so you can go there to be quiet and feel close to God."

Visualization Activity

This activity will help campers find a sacred space within themselves. Have campers close their eyes and lead them through this visualization:

1. Imagine a place in your mind that is beautiful and sacred to you. It can be a place you have visited before, or it can be a place that you just make up. (pause 10 seconds)
2. Take a moment to walk around and explore this special place in your mind. Be

aware of how it looks, how it feels, how it smells. Listen to the sounds that are in this place. (pause 10 seconds)

3. Now find a nice place to sit and just soak in all the beauty around you. Try to feel God's presence in that beauty. (pause 10 seconds)

4. You become aware that there is now someone sitting next to you. It is Jesus come to be with you in your sacred space. You can talk to him if you wish, and tell him whatever is on your heart, or you can just sit and enjoy the warmth and love of his presence. (pause 30 seconds)

5. Now open your eyes and return to our circle. Know that Jesus will always be waiting for you in that place. All you have to do is go to him.

Leader: "Finding that sacred place within ourselves to meet God is one way of allowing God to bless us. Remember, we are blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others: We can be a blessing to our family, friends, and neighbors by spreading goodwill. When I talk of spreading goodwill, I mean sharing the love of God with those around us—in other words, doing good works in our communities to make God's love visible. Later today we will have the opportunity to think of ways we can do this when we get home, Right now let's pray for God to direct us toward places where we can help."

Prayer Web and Prayer Ties

Hand each person a prayer tie and pen. Ask campers to write on the prayer tie a one-sentence prayer asking God to lead them into places where they can spread love and do good work. If there is a particular area campers want to help, they can include that in their prayer. As campers finish, they may approach the web and tie their prayers anywhere along the web, then quietly return to their place in the circle.

Closing Song: "It Only Takes a Spark."