

Whenever I want to talk to my friends about something crazy, wacky, or unforgettable that happened to me, it's usually prefaced with the term "You know, at my church camp...". After over a decade full of camps, retreats, and tournaments in a little nook outside of Caldwell, I've grown connected to the place. To put it simply, the Hus Encampment is where I've made my closest friendships, my greatest memories, and my biggest strides in faith.

The boys that I went to camp with for the past decade, are without a doubt the most interesting bunch of characters that you could stumble across. We have guys who strive for absolute dominance in every single competition, guys who constantly are vying for the girls' attention, and naturally, guys who are scheming for legendary pranks for the entire duration of the camp. It's not like they're contained to one region of Texas, either. Our entire friend group are essentially chunks of Bryan, Taylor, Wall, Nevada, and Illinois, all stuck together with the glue of camp memories. While it sounds like boyish antics from the outside eye, the truth is, we support each other throughout the year. It's almost like a brotherhood, and something that simply wouldn't exist without the Hus Encampment. As might be expected, we're also great friends with the girls our age (although there's a fair bit of friendly competition at camp), and I know of several instances where some guys would travel a great distance to go to prom with their camp friends.

Of course, all of these close friendships are defined by the memories we make together, and needless to say, there's been some quite crazy ones. Whether we're falling through ceilings, sneaking into the kitchen to get some snacks late at night, or encouraging each other to eat some "mysterious" gummy bears, the experiences we make at camp stick with us when we leave, and whenever we see each other outside of camp, there are non-stop references made to said experiences. To be honest, one of the reasons I cannot wait to go back every year is so we can make even more crazy stories that will last with us for the rest of our lives. I've talked to a large amount of other youth about their own church camps, and I can earnestly say that the Hus Encampment is unique in providing a wholesome yet engaging environment in which to cultivate the future generations.

All of this means nothing, however, if we don't accomplish what the camp was built for, which is to build future leaders for Christ. Coming from my own experience, I've almost grown more spiritually there than at my home church. That's not a knock on any of the churches of our denomination, but it's reasonable to see that youth are more willing to embrace Christ when surrounded with people their age, in contrast to being delivered a message designed to relate to all ages. While I make it seem like all we do at camp is pranks, games, and shenanigans, that couldn't be farther from the truth. There have been tons of occasions where my cabin will lay awake late at night, discussing world events and biblical philosophy. Sometimes, we even have friendly debates over different perspectives on God's word. What's important to stress here is that we weren't forced to have these discussions at all, but were rather inspired by the topics we covered that day. The last night of camp is the traditional "big vesper" night, which is when we look back at what we've learned and forward into the future. It's on that night when I, at least, have the closest moments with the Lord, surrounded by my closest friends.

In conclusion, the Hus Encampment is more than just a summer camp for us. It's a second home, where we live, laugh, and grow together in the presence of Christ. It's given me friends and memories that shaped the man I am today, and would otherwise be absent without the camp. Most importantly, it molds the next generation in moral values and Christian goodness, and continued support for this endeavor will ensure an even greater number of future leaders will maintain these values.