Branching Out

CABIN DEVOTIONS
How To Use This Material

Some camps have cool themes, but lack a good metaphor. This makes it hard for counselors to explain the gospel and the Christian life to their campers. This is a great theme and a great metaphor for the spiritual life: Branching Out. Jesus pointed to agriculture as a way to explain the kingdom (Matthew 13:31), spiritual growth of the believer (John 15:1-6), and judgement (Matthew 7:19). This summer you’ll have the chance to use many of these scriptures to explain what it means to know Christ.

Three rules to leading a good devotion (Scaled according to age of course)

1. Ask good questions.

If you ask a question like “Who died for our sins?” You’ll get “Jesus. If you ask, “Why did Jesus die?” You’ll get “Our sins or I don’t know”. If you ask “What difference does it make that Jew died on a cross 2,000 years ago?” Now you have a discussion.

2. Affirm all answers (and questions)

Some of the kids you’ll have this summer will not have a working knowledge of the Bible or church. Be gracious.

3. Involve as many campers as possible

When a camper answers a questions, ask another camper “What do you think about what Bobby or Jenny just said?”
The Core Teaching

I have written each devotion in a generic way that you can scale it up or down based on your age group. Here is how the week will unfold.

**Sunday**- The Seed and the Soil

**Monday**- The Water and The Sunshine

**Tuesday**- The Fruit

**Wednesday**- The Pruning

**Thursday**- Branching Out

Each step is necessary in our Christian walk and will show campers that we are always in a state of growth, especially beyond camp.

Devotion Components

**The Point:** This is the truth you are driving home

**Key Scripture(s)**- I have given a core scripture but you can add more as needed.

**Opening Questions:** These are fun or get the ball rolling questions.

**Transition Statement:** Moves kids from broad thinking to specific thinking.

**Illustration:** Use this time to break out a visual and get your campers hands on.

**Discussion Questions:** These are questions that focus on the text.

**Closing:** This is an option to just closing in prayer. Closers can build spiritual momentum through-out your week.
The Point:
Branching out begins with a seed of faith.

Key Scripture(s): Mark 4:1-20, Matthew 17:14-21 (key verse 20)

Opening Questions
Have you ever planted something? Did it grow? If not, why not?

Does planting something sound like too much work? Why?

Transition Sentence: Some people look at growing their spiritual lives as too much work. Some don’t even know how to get it started. Jesus tells a parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning)

Illustration: Have some good rich soil in a pot. As you tell the story of the seed and the soil, use things like weeds, pebbles, etc, to describe each of the condition of the soil.

Read the text: Mark 4:1-20

Transition Statement: Soil represents our hearts. Which of these soils best represents the condition of your heart when it comes to God or the Bible? (a) I don’t understand it b) I get excited about my faith at first but then my faith fades away c) I accept it but then other stuff crowds out faith d) I’ve heard it, received, and I am growing in my faith

Discussion Questions:
In this story Jesus told, what did the seed represent? Why is the Bible important to our faith?

What did the four soils represent?

Why is good soil important to anything growing?

Closing: Pass out seeds to every camper. Ask them what they would like to have faith for this week (e.g To know God better, to understand the Bible, family needs at home). They don’t have to verbalize this need. Have a place for them to plant their seed as an act of faith that it will grow.
**The Point:** Branching out requires water and God’s light to grow.

**Key Scripture(s):** Psalm 1, I Corinthians 3:6, John 8:12, John 12:35-36, Psalm 89:15, John 4:14, John 7:38

**Opening Questions**

Tell me about your favorite water sport or activity.

Tell me about your favorite kind of light source (sun, moon, black light, cell phone, etc.)

**Read the Text**

**Transition Sentence:** Both water and light are essential for growing plants and to life itself on planet earth, but water and light are also essential to our walk with Christ.

**Read The Texts**

**Illustration:** Have a plant watering device and a flashlight. Explain that rain and sunshine come naturally from the sky, but sometimes there are clouds that block the sunshine and days and maybe weeks with no rain. Both impact plant growth. Imagine your life with God without the water of the Word of God and the Sonshine or the presence of God that comes from prayer, worship and obedience to God’s word. What is the result of both the plant and our spiritual lives without these things?

**Discussion Questions**

In Psalm 1, the writer says that the righteous person will grow when planted where? What will be the result?

In I Corinthians the Apostle Paul talk about our part in helping other grow in their relationship with God. According to him some people ___________ and some people ____________ but God does what?

What did Jesus tell the woman at the well would come flowing from her if she believed?

**Closing:** Just like a plant will not grow without light and water, our walk with Christ will not grow without reading the Bible or living in the light (living right). Try turing off the lights have
The Point: Branching out produces attitudes that glorifies God.

Key Scripture(s): Mark 4:26-29, Galatians 5:16-28, James 3:9-12, Matthew 7:17-20
John 15:8

Opening Questions

Can you think of a project that you worked really hard on but did not get the grade you deserved? Explain.

What would happen if your teacher worked on every project with you? How would this impact your grade? Why?

Read The Text

Transition Sentence: Our mouths produce words. Our hands produce products in factories. Our teams produce points on sports fields. These are man made products. When we know God through Christ, He will produce the right attitudes and actions in us by His Spirit.

Illustration: Have a bowl of fruit or just grapes. As kids participate you could throw them a grape or a piece of fruit. Explain that each of these fruits came from a tree or a vine. Apple trees do not produce bananas. each tree produce after it’s own seed.

Discussion Questions:

What are some the “fruits” or attitudes that Galatians says the Spirit of God produces in our lives? Why does the Spirit ant these to be a part of our lives?

According to John 15:8, why does Jesus say that producing fruit is important?

Mark 4:26-29 says that seed produces on it’s own, effortlessly. What part do we play in the seed of faith growing to a point where it can survive and produce what God intended in our lives?

Closing: We are not responsible for the fruit, but we are responsible for the condition under which the plant can grow. Share the fruit with your campers. As you hand out a piece, ask the camper to share which fruit of the Spirit they need most in their life right now.
Wednesday
The Pruning

The Point: Branching out requires pruning away the stuff that keeps us from growing.

Key Scripture(s): John 15:1-8, Galatians 6:7

Opening Questions

Name something that you can cut off but grows back (Lizards tail, my lawn, fingernails, hair etc.)

Why do these things need frequent maintenance? What would happen if you never cut any thing?

Read The Text

Transition Sentence: God loves us enough to prune away the bad seed we have sown as well as prune away the good things to make room for great things.

Illustration: You can buy a pruning tool at the dollar store. Grace some branches from outside and let each of the branches represent part of our lives. The branches could represent media, friends, habits, etc. Share parts of your testimony where God pruned you and you saw growth in that area of your life. As you talk about the thing that was pruned, cut part of the branch off.

Discussion Questions:

Have you ever felt like God took something away from your life for a reason? What was it and what might have been His reason for pruning it from your life?

According to Jesus, what is the point of pruning our lives?

According to Jesus, what is the only way we can produce fruit?

Have you ever sown some bad seed? How so?

Closing: Hand out some small branches. Ask each of your campers to share an area of their life that needs pruning. When they are finished sharing, have them cut off a piece of the branch. You could also use one branch that gets passed around. Make sure the campers know to be safe with this tool. (Keep an eye on the younger kids)
The Point: Branching out is on going.

Key Scripture(s): John 15:1-7, Matthew 13:31,32, Matthew 28:19, 20

Opening Questions

When was the last time you branched out to try something new?

Was it scary? How so?

Read The Text

Transition Statement: Branching out can be a scary moment. Some of you have challenges when you get back home. The good new is, the seed of God’s love never stops growing and eventually it produces exactly what we need, not only in spite of difficult weather but because of it.

Illustration: If you chose to grow a plant all week from seed to flower, this become a great picture of what God has done in the life of your campers. Share the fact that now they become the sowers. Jesus commended his disciples to take what they have learned and sow the seed of God's word into others so they could watch them grow.

Discussion Questions:

In John 15:1-7 what does Jesus describe us as?

Does being branches mean we have to produce? In what way?

In Matthew 13, what becomes of the seed? How can this true of the seed of God’s word and God’s love in our own life when we go home?

How can we good seed sowers in our homes, schools, and communities?

Closing: If you chose to for each camper to grow a plant, buy some popsicle sticks and ask kids to write down the names of friends or family they need to “sow some seed” of love on to the popsicle sticks. Afterwards, have a time of prayer where they can pray for each person and then put the stick in the plant where the person’s name is showing.
Ideas For Your Cabin/Group

Personal Growth

Buy some pots at the dollar store, a bag of soil, some seed, and let kids grow their plant through the week as you teach on spiritual growth. Kids could decorate their pots with markers and at the end of the week, kids bring their plant home as a reminder of what it means to grow in the Lord.

Music helps plant grow

Here are 10 Christian songs you can use as part of your devotions. Use the songs with age appropriate groups (ex: Blessings could go with any group and War Inside is best with middle school and up.) Look up the lyrics and use them as discussion starters or closers.

For Your Splendor by Christy Nockels

Blessings by Laura Story

Need It Daily by Tedashi

War Inside by Switchfoot

Strength of My Life by Planetshakers

On Your Knees- Newsboys

Gotta Grow- Trip Lee

Grow- JJ Heller

Grow- Json

I Am A Seed- David Crowder Band

These songs could act as the soundtrack for your cabin. You could use songs to wake up to and go to bed to as well as use in your devotions.

The Question Pot

Have a large plant pot in your cabin where kids can write down questions and drop them in, about the devotions, life, services, etc.. This teaches them that asking questions is a good thing.

The Prayer Pot

Have a planting pot where kids can throw their prayer requests whenever they want. use this to pray daily for your campers.
I wrote these for a camp in Vero Beach, Florida that is near and dear to my heart called Life For Youth Camp. They are a fantastic retreat center that I highly recommend. Visit them at www.lifeforyouthcamp.com