

# In the Center of the Flock—at Camps and Summer Services

**In addition to the many activities in our congregations and the online sermons and publications available to believers, attending special service events and camps can be a great support to remaining “in the footsteps of the sheep.” While such attendance does not assure that one is in the center of the flock, there among escorts listening to God’s Word and speaking of the way and the journey is a secure place to be, for our Good Shepherd is there. In the text that follows, believers of various ages share thoughts about the importance of services and camps in their endeavor of faith.**

The warm sun is shining through the windows as I make my way around the dorm greeting the campers with “Good Morning!” and “God’s Peace!” The girls grin through their morning sleepiness as they scoot off to get into the shower ahead of the others. Over morning coffee, I greet the other staff members at camp in like manner. What a peaceful feeling it is to be able to start the day out with other believers in a camp setting, followed by lessons and discussions around faith topics, and the blessing of the gospel before going to sleep at the end of the day.

## **God’s Children Gather**

As the season changes to spring, the weather warms, school is coming to an end, and many thoughts turn to planning for summer. Believers are fortunate to have camps and Summer Services events to look forward to. Many families include these as a part of their family vacations and summer activities.

Believers of all ages also plan their summer around much anticipated camp activities. Camps add to the richness of summer. These events are places where we can gather with God’s children and be refreshed by God’s Word. After a busy school year of teaching, I look forward to spending longer amounts of time with believers in camp settings and summer services. Being among believers at these activities feels secure. God’s Word encourages this: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

Each summer, in a different town in Finland, the large, white *suvisaurat* (summer services) tent beckons in the distance as lines of cars and campers settle into the fields around it for the long weekend of services. Loudspeakers for acres around broadcast the sermons and singing from

inside the tent, warming the hearts of weary travelers and inviting others to the hearing of God's Word. For many, the *suvisurat* are long-awaited and annually attended. Families spend their vacation time around the hearing of God's Word and having fellowship with believers from Finland and all over the world.

My husband Ari and I are fortunate to be able to visit his family and our friends in Finland every summer. We try to schedule our visit so that we are able to attend these services as often as possible. Ari has often remarked how from a very young age his faith has been strengthened by being with the tens of thousands of believers at these services in Finland. "It has always felt like a miracle that so many of God's children can be gathered in the same place, listening to God's Word, and singing hymns and songs of Zion together," he says.

Todd Jurmu, of Corcoran, Minn., attended Jämsä Opisto in Finland during the 2014–15 school year and was able to attend the summer services there as well. "Being at summer services in Finland was overwhelming at first because there were so many people," he says. "Yet, it was really refreshing to have services, basically constantly going on. It was nice to see some people I already knew and other believing friends from opisto!" These special events are truly a blessing from God.

### **God Knows Our Needs**

LLC Summer Services in North America are also a festive summer event where believers often travel long distances to enjoy a weekend with friends in faith from Canada, the United States, and from other countries around the world. It's a joyful time to gather around God's Word and have fellowship together. As Shelby Jurmu, of Buffalo, Minn., relates, "Being at summer services or local special services increases my desire to hear God's Word and be with the believers. We connect with longtime friends and make new friends with whom we share the joys and sorrows of life. It's a small taste of what heaven must be like."

God's children often encourage each other to be in the center of God's flock. Much joy and comfort is found in participating in camp and summer service events with believers, both those who are longtime acquaintances and others who are new friends. Amber Moll, of Zimmerman, Minn., has been able to attend a variety of camps during the summer that are offered for school-age children. "It's nice to be surrounded by believers," she says. "It's easier to believe, and there are not so many temptations."

Having worked at and attended camp and summer services, Jodie Fredrickson, of Loretto, Minn., relates: "Being at camp and large services makes me feel like I'm in the center of the flock. I know that when I stumble there are all of these other believers to pick me up again. It's hard to leave services and camp because it seems so easy to be a believer there. At work and

school, there are all sorts of things that can draw me in.”

Jodie’s mother Maria also shares: “At services and camps we meet new people, but because they share the same spirit, it feels that we have known them forever. It’s refreshing to know that they are our escorts on our way to heaven.”

Lisa Haataja, of Kalispell, Mont., says: “Going to services or camps is a nice refuge for me to enjoy the fellowship of other believers. It’s a time where I can remove myself from daily life and focus on what’s most important.”

Our hearts are thankful that God has blessed us with a multitude of camp and special service events during the summer months in which we can gather together and spend time with believers around God’s Word. We are able to be refreshed in our walk of life as a child of God on our way to heaven. As Jean Moll, of Zimmerman, Minn., shares: “The enemy can’t reach us as easily when we’re in the midst of God’s children. We are with others that have a common goal to reach heaven one day.”

In addition to the summer activities mentioned, believers are fortunate to have escorts on our way to heaven and be able to attend services and weekly events in our home congregations throughout the year. Gathering around God’s Word, having fellowship with other believers, and believing our sins forgiven in Jesus’ name and blood all help to keep us at the center of God’s flock.

The words of the songwriter offer our thanks to God: “Thank You for our friends and escorts; hand in hand we journey home. In the bonds of peace and freedom, mutual joy and love we own. Thank You for the festive moments when we pause from daily care to give thanks and sing of heaven and the rest awaiting there” (SHZ 351:3,5).

Suzanne Pitkanen

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How has it helped you to gather at services, camp events, and other activities of God’s children? What purpose do these gatherings serve in your life? What does it mean to you?
2. Share specific experiences from attending summer services or a camp that stands out. What did it teach you, or how did it touch you?
3. What does this Bible portion, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17), mean to you?” How does it apply to your life as a member of God’s kingdom?
4. Can your participation in a specific event also serve other believers? If so, in what way? Share

examples.

**5.** How can a person remain in the center of the flock even if he or she is not able to attend the larger services or attend the camps of God's children?