

Betsy's Testimony

My name is Betsy Petersen, I am a freshman, and today I want to tell you about my experience at Camp Okoboji. Camp Okoboji changed my life. I am a big believer that God puts people in different situations for a reason. I signed up for Camp a week before we went and around 7 months after we were supposed to sign up. Hannah figuring out how to get me signed up and there so late was nothing short of a miracle. I had to choose between staying and practicing volleyball before tryouts, or driving 10+ hours to a state no one talks about and a camp I had never heard of. Going to Camp Okoboji was a leap of faith. I had no idea what I was walking into.

But as soon as we got there I was hit with the realization that Camp Okoboji is the best place on earth. The people there were kind and welcoming. They treated us as if we had been attending camp our entire lives. The campgrounds were beautiful. As soon as we arrived, Hannah lead us on a prayer walk and we admired the beauty God was presenting to us. This was the moment I realized that this place was different.

There was a lot going on in my life when I went to Camp Okoboji, and it was all weighing heavily on my heart. But once I saw the sunset behind the lake and the stars crying out in worship, I knew God was going to do something powerful at Youth Week.

At our home camp, Camp Chi Rho, we often sing the song "Sanctuary". The lyrics are, "Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving I'll be a living sanctuary for you". Oftentimes when I'm singing these words, I'm not really taking them to heart. The real meaning of this song is about giving our hearts to God and allowing Him to use them for His purpose. At Camp Okoboji I discovered what it really means to be a sanctuary for Him.

Our theme for the week was "Give Me A Sign" and revolved around Jeremiah 29:11. Hannah lead the main Bible study everyday and took it in a direction no one expected. She

talked about how often we pray for God to give us signs, when the sign - Jesus - has been there the whole time. Sin is clouding our vision. We were split into different discussion groups, and met with our group multiple times a day. These were the people I confided with and were vulnerable with. We would discuss the Bible study of the day and how it applied to our lives. The stories that were shared every day were absolutely beautiful.

On the last day of camp, we sang a song called "Friends". The lyrics are, "I thank you, I thank you God for all of my friends with me today". On our drive up to camp, Hannah told us about this song and how moving and emotional it was on the last day. Her warnings were correct. The last day I cried more than I ever have because at Camp Okoboji I had made some of the best friendships and I'd become closer with the group I came with. These are friends who share in my happiest times and my lowest times. These are friends who hold my hand when I can't keep smiling. These are friends that have made the biggest impact on my life, even though we were only together for 5 days.

One person who made a huge impact on my life was my counselor, Katie. She was relatable, funny, and understanding. She would go on walks with me and talk when I needed a break from everything. She would hug me and distract me by telling funny stories about her years as a camper. On the last day, we exchanged numbers so that we can still check in with one another. She was the exact person I needed at that point in my life, and her kindness showed God's love so purely throughout that week.

One of our youth groups favorite songs to sing at Camp Chi Rho is a song called, "Come to the Waters". The lyrics are, "Come to the waters, stand by my side. I know you are thirsty, you won't be denied. I felt every teardrop when in darkness you cried, and I strove to remind you that for those tears I died". This song talks about the vulnerable relationship we have with Jesus. This became so apparent to me at Camp Okoboji, as I shared many vulnerable moments with the campers around me.

One very special place at Camp Okoboji is called The Point. At night, we would go down to The Point and sit around a campfire, singing songs that glorify God and hearing our final devotion for the day. But the best part of The Point was after the devotion, when we would sit and have silent prayer time. During this time, Hannah and Pastor Tom would stand on each side of the fire. Lines of people would go up to see them and they would pray for you and hear what was hurting you. We would sit and hum the song “Dear Jesus” and oftentimes cry. Cry about the beauty around us. Cry about tough situations in our lives. And cry because we knew camp would only last 5 days. Sometimes if my brothers and sisters in Christ were crying, I would sit next to them and pray for them. This experience tied our youth group together so much. It was a time we depended on each other.

As we were dismissed from The Point we would sing these words, which are now deeply in my heart, “Dear Jesus, thou art everything to me. And everything I owe I give to thee. My wealth, my all, but most of all, dear Lord, I give myself to thee”. This song talks about laying our burdens at the Lord’s feet.

At the end of the week, we wrote prayer requests on a piece of paper and passed them around our small groups. We each took turns writing prayers for each other on that paper. This activity made me realize the power of prayer. It helped me recognize all the blessings God has given me and that He was working in my life for His purpose. I keep this paper in my phone and pull it out anytime I need a reminder.

Through Youth Week we sang a song called, “Throne of God”. At the beginning and end of this song, you speak the words, “Yes I’m gonna build a ring around the throne of God. Gonna sing His praises throughout eternity. Yes I’m gonna build a ring around the throne of God. Gonna shout hallelujah to the King of Kings”. This song reminds me of the awe and wonder we feel when we recognize God’s great love and mercy. It represents for me what Camp Okoboji brought to my life. Camp helped me learn about great friendships, but most importantly it

pointed me to Christ. I cherish my moments and Camp Okoboji and can't wait to go back next year.