

New Dads needed for 100m sprint – reflection on South London Summer Camp

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There are several events and programs that I have been to while being part of our movement that with hindsight I have probably decided weren't so valuable, but one annual date in the my family's calendar is the South London summer camp, which I have never *once* regretted taking part in.

It distils some of the essence that moved many of us to consider a different way of life from the one we were living 20/30/40 years ago. Rather than being packed full of lectures about an ideal world it provides a program and a variety of experiences that gives me a chance to touch the reality of that dream I got caught up in when I went along to a workshop in New York 23 years ago.

Something from the youngest to the eldest

The program includes everything from rock climbing, to beach trips, family days out, to water games, scavenger hunts, camp fires & marshmallows, football, BBQs, time for the wives and mums to meet, time for the Dads to meet, time to be by yourself, to chat with friends, spiritual guidance, sports competitions, archery, go carting (pedal powered) etc, etc.

As always this year was a precious experience, but this time round in particular it was helpful for Chieko and I to be able to share with lots of other parents about family life and raising our children as they start to grow up and figure out their own world view.

In some of the discussions we had there was some quite vigorous debate about what to share with our children, and we didn't all have the same perspective, but it was nonetheless still v helpful.

I really do feel that the national, European and international church organisations are struggling these days a lot and therefore to differing degrees have little they can practically offer families. Even many local churches are struggling to be in a strong position to offer much to their congregations.

But in the environment at this summer camp that is held out in Essex near the sea in a scout camp, there is a culture and spirit which allows families to really enrich each other, raise each other up, and give new confidence to our sense of purpose and family mission.

One person said to me how it is often v hard in the few minutes one has on a Sunday morning to really talk with others in a way that one can do when one has the space and environment created in the scout camp where we now have a slightly longer time of 5 nights to be together.

Adrian Lee and I were talking at breakfast on the last morning, about how we might like to find half a w/end in the autumn or winter to find an air bnb for a Saturday night with a few others just to try to create a mini kind of time to reflect and share and have some space to pray etc to retreat from our busy lives and support each other the way we do on camp, probably with out the whole family.

Professionals:

Having Toby, Simon, and Ashley doing all the communication as people who communicate for a living

with groups of children and adults, having people like Anthony who cook for a living, and someone like Ajay judging and reviewing the skits, really enhances the whole experience. When things are done to a high standard it definitely adds value.

Ajay's review is one of my favourite bits of the camp now. It is not only interesting, but also incredibly educational for all the team members.

The choice of team leaders was really good. They were all v well balanced people it seemed, who were there for the right reasons, which is always important.

When I made a suggestion to Simon R. and Toby who were both v busy at the time and had already made a plan for the day, they considered it and then changed their plan, and decided to do the races and team sports day at the camp rather than the beach. That is the kind of intelligent, enlightened leadership culture we need in our movement, because sometimes some of us when we are in a role to lead and have not even made a plan, are still not able to respond to suggestions from those we are leading or feedback from those that work with us.

Early Morning Study:

The early morning study content was a good choice, and though the program, we watched by an American guy who used to be a doctor was occasionally a bit contrived it was on the whole addressing the issues and topics that we need to look at.

In particular it looked at the idea of unconditional love: this is a theme that we have either had repeated so many times in our church, or sometimes it has been taken as a theme in order to get people to do things with out being volunteers, so it is certainly a topic that we need to revisit, and the Real Love videos were a helpful way in for me to reconsider this whole aspect of my life and faith.

All in all, I will probably put some time aside to try and gather my thoughts further on all that went on in the 5 days camping, as I feel like I need to harness and develop some of the energy and ideas and spirit that I experienced in order to allow it to feed and sustain me over the coming months.

It was interesting as we were leaving I managed to briefly upset my wife with a careless word few words, and for a short half an hour I felt like the spell had been broken...

We used to have workshops on MFT every so often to reenergise ourselves. For me the summer camp is the only one I know at the moment that does what those workshops did for me in the 90s.

And finally...

Perhaps the only regret I have is that winning the Dad's race is not challenging me like it did when I first came along with my family and couldn't even workout how to set up a tent. And so my hope is that in years to come a new challenger will come along who steals the title from me. It might even feel good to lose (it's that kind of place.)