



## Effective Camp Research Project, Phase 2 Research Report

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The Effective Camp Research Project set out to answer: *What is the impact of the one-week summer camp experience on the lives of the primary participants and their supporting networks?* Phase 2 of the project, conducted in summer 2016, sought to confirm the theory from phase 1 that **five fundamental characteristics** (different from home, relational, safe space, faith centered, and participatory) were present in camp experiences that showed positive and lasting impacts. This phase further sought to investigate the nature and extent of these impacts.

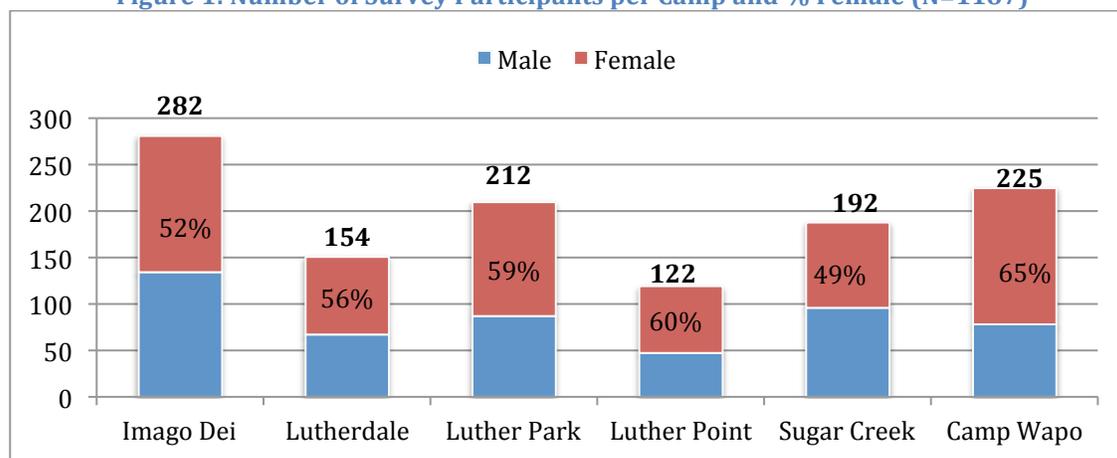
### Methodology

Researchers selected six camps using *purposive homogeneous sampling*: Sugar Creek Bible Camp, Lake Wapogasset Lutheran Bible Camp (“Wapo”), Lutherdale Bible Camp, Luther Park Bible Camp, Luther Point Bible Camp, and Imago Dei Village. These camps were all located in Wisconsin, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and served a minimum of 200 campers aged eleven to fourteen in week-long residential camp programs. The project used a longitudinal survey of summer camp participants, selected at each camp based on quota sampling. In order to directly compare the unique characteristics of different programs, each camp selected particular weeks of their summer programs to administer the questionnaires, with the goal of surveying between 200 and 250 campers. All campers aged eleven to fourteen within the selected weeks had an equal chance of participating, with the only selective criteria being the obtainment of parental consent and camper consent. Participating campers completed the first questionnaire immediately upon arrival at camp, prior to any camp activities or meeting their housing group. They completed the second questionnaire on the last day of camp. Those who provided e-mail addresses received the third questionnaire electronically sixty days after returning home from camp. Fully 86% of respondents to the first day survey had a matching last day survey, and 25% had a matching follow-up survey.

## Participant Demographics

Each camp surveyed campers from multiple weeks during the summer of 2016, with a total of twenty-four different camper weeks included in the study. Three of the six camps failed to reach the quota of 200 campers because of difficulty obtaining parental consent. Demographics varied only slightly among the camps, reflecting the homogeneity of the sample. Fully 92% of all participants were white, with the largest minority groups being mixed race (3%) and Asian (2%). Lutherdale and Camp Wapo had the highest percentages of minority participants (10.5%), likely explained by their drawing a sizeable number of campers from the metropolitan areas of Milwaukee and Minneapolis/St. Paul, respectively. The racial demographics reflected the Lutheran sample population of the upper Midwest. Fully 90% of participants were Lutheran, with the remainder Roman Catholic (4%) or other Christian (6%). Nearly all of the Imago Dei Village campers were Lutheran (98%), since the majority was attending as part of a confirmation program. A comparatively low 76% of Sugar Creek campers were Lutheran, while the other camps were between 85% and 95% Lutheran.

**Figure 1: Number of Survey Participants per Camp and % Female (N=1187)**

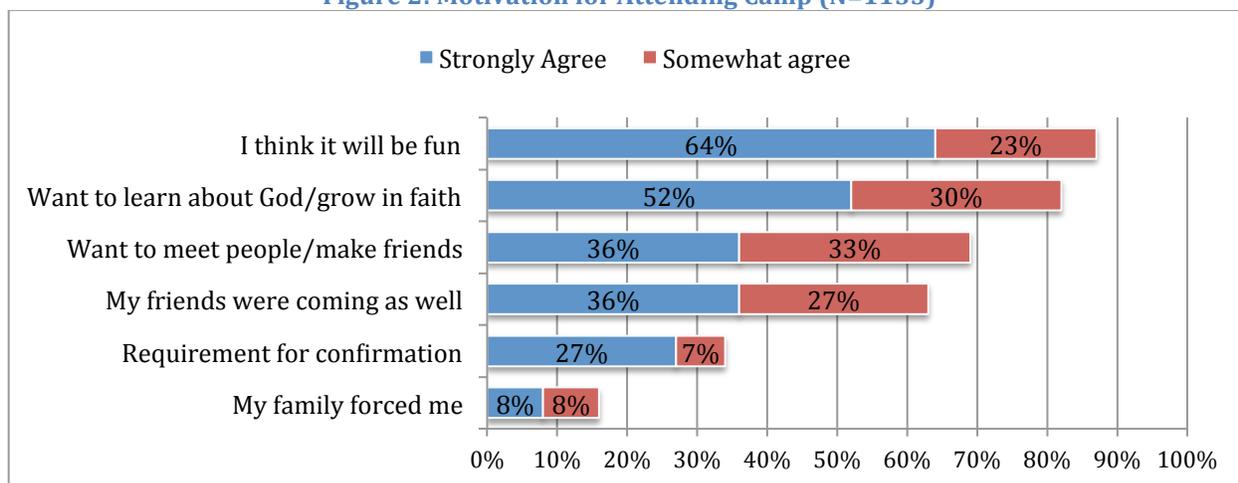


The gender breakdown of participants showed proportions in line with the accounts of camps across mainline Protestantism, with girls outnumbering boys by double-digit percentage points. The overall sample was 57% female, with Camp Wapo exhibiting the greatest gender imbalance at 65% female and Sugar Creek showing a statistically even balance of participants, with 49% female. Younger age groups of campers (eleven and younger) showed greater gender balance than older groups. The age breakdown was 22% eleven and younger, 25% twelve, 36% thirteen, and 17% fourteen or older.

## Faith Background and 4 Camper Types

Campers were asked about recent church attendance, personal Bible reading, prayer, and faith conversations with their family. Over a third reported attending worship services weekly in the two months prior to camp, while one in five attended once or not at all. Only 22% reported reading the Bible two or more times per week, while over half (53%) reported no Bible reading. A third of campers prayed with their family at least four times per week, while another third did not pray with their family at all in the two months prior to camp. About a third (32%) reported frequent conversations with their family about God and faith, while over a quarter (27%) said, “rarely” or “not at all,” and the remaining 41% said, “sometimes.” Faith backgrounds varied, but the majority of campers had some degree of ongoing exposure to Christian teaching and practice. Only 5% reported no Bible reading, church attendance, or family prayer in the past two months.

Figure 2: Motivation for Attending Camp (N=1155)



In terms of motivation, a third of campers were attending camp, at least in part, because of a confirmation requirement, and at least 16% of participants felt like their family forced them to be there. The two dominant factors, however, were an interest in having fun and a desire to learn more about God or grow in faith (Figure 2). The numbers varied among the camps, with two-thirds of Imago Dei campers agreeing they attended because of a confirmation requirement and more than a third agreeing that they were forced to come. In contrast, only 4% of Camp Wapo participants indicated that their families forced them to come, and only 7% agreed they were there as part of a confirmation requirement. Camp Wapo, Sugar Creek, and Luther Point all had high numbers of returning campers (two-thirds or more), while Imago Dei and Lutherdale participants were predominantly first-time campers (only a third had attended the camp before).

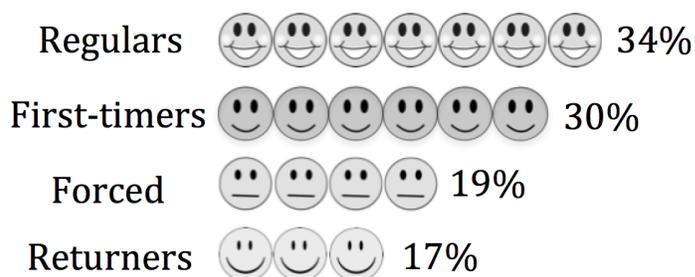


Figure 3: Camper Types, All Camps

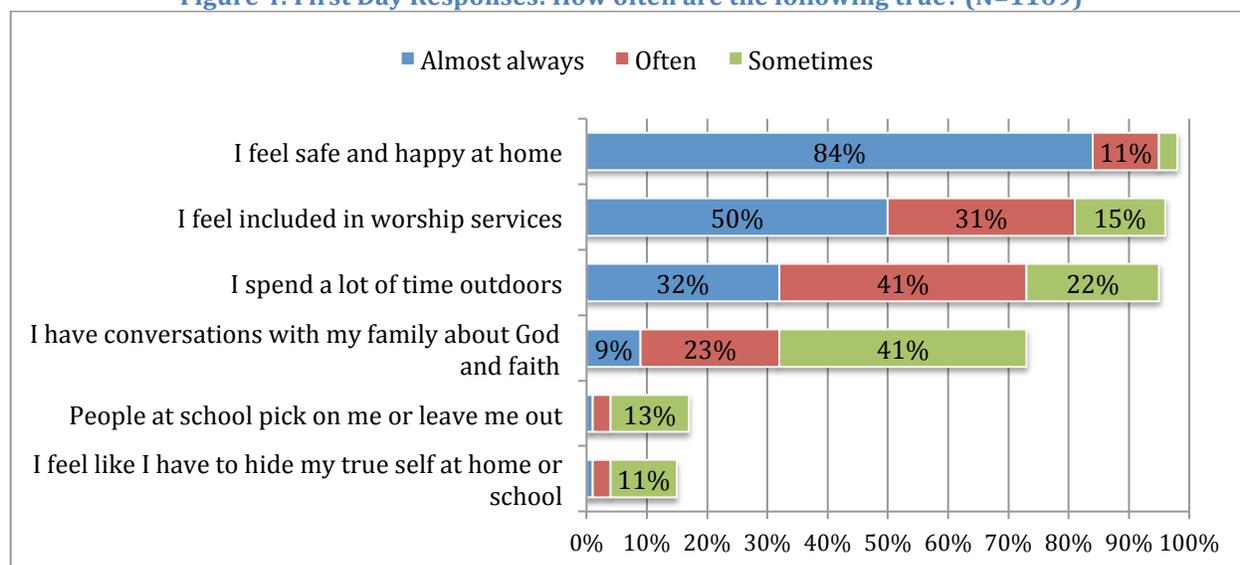
The data suggest that there were four main types of campers attending these camps. First, there were the *camp regulars* who had been to camp multiple times before and were planning to attend in the future. Camp had become, for these campers, part of the rhythm of their yearly schedule. Second, were the *returners* who had been to camp once or twice before but were not accustomed to camp experiences on a regular basis. Third, were the *first-time* camp attendees who were engaged in the experience and motivated to attend. Fourth, were the campers who felt *forced* to come. They may have acknowledged a hope that camp would be fun, but attending was not entirely their choice. In addition to participants who agreed with, “My parents forced me to come,” those who indicated that a confirmation requirement was stronger motivation than the expectation for fun were also categorized as this type.

The largest number of campers that were classified in the *forced* typology came from weeks designated as Confirmation Camp. Forced campers accounted for nearly a third of all campers during the two Confirmation Camp weeks at Lutherdale, for instance, but less than 10% during the other two weeks surveyed. Camp Wapo had the lowest proportion of forced campers (2%), and it shared similar proportions of *camp regulars* as Luther Park, Luther Point, and Sugar Creek (between 38% and 44%). Forced campers showed significantly lower levels of family prayer, Bible study, and family conversations than all other camper types, suggesting that their reluctance to attend camp was associated with low engagement in faith practices. The other three types showed no statistically significant differences in these measurements. This was surprising, since it was expected that those who attended camp in the past would show higher levels of faith measurements than those who had never attended. It is notable that *camp regulars* were higher numerically on all of these measurements than both *first-timers* and *returners*. These findings suggest that ongoing impacts of the camp experience on these particular measurements were heavily dependent on the larger ecology of a young person’s faith environment away from camp. It is also notable that there were no significant differences among any of the four groups in terms of worship attendance. This begins to paint a picture of the diversity of experiences that campers

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brought to the first day of camp. In addition, 19% agreed that they were concerned about being away from technology, while 55% agreed that they were excited to be away from home for a week. Figure 4 further adds to the complexity.

**Figure 4: First Day Responses: How often are the following true? (N=1169)**



The faith practice most strongly correlated with higher faith measurements on the first day of camp was frequency of faith conversations in the home. Campers who reported having more frequent conversations with their families about God and faith were significantly higher in measurements of overall belief, what we will define below as *vertical* faith ( $r=.298$ ), and perceived relevance of their faith, what we will call *horizontal* faith ( $r=.416$ ). This item was correlated much more strongly than previous camp attendance, personal Bible reading, frequency of family prayer, and church attendance. The only item that showed a comparable relationship with faith measurements was, “I feel included in worship services.” These findings suggest that the two most important markers of higher faith in incoming summer campers were more frequent faith conversations in the home and greater inclusion in worship services.

### The Camp Experience

Participants indicated an overwhelmingly positive experience on the last day of camp. Figure 5 shows that they reported enjoying almost everything, with the camp counselors earning the most positive responses. Campers who were *forced* to come were, unsurprisingly, lower in comparison with the other three camper types, but responses remained overwhelmingly positive on the last day of camp, with 88% agreeing that they had a lot of fun and 93% that they tried

something new. It is notable that the forced campers showed no difference from the other groups in their enjoyment with the camp counselors and the other campers, indicating the importance of the relational element of the camp model. The experience evidently exceeded the expectations of most of the forced campers, since only 45% agreed on the first day that they were motivated to attend camp because they thought it would be fun. One reason for gathering such a large sample (over 1000) in this study was to shed light on the factors contributing to roughly 3% of campers interpreting the experience in overall negative terms. These data indicate that most of those who had a negative experience did not want to be there in the first place. Fully 61% of campers who did not agree on the last day, “I had a lot of fun” were among those *forced* to come to camp.

**Figure 5: What Campers Enjoyed Most, Last Day Survey (N=1134)**

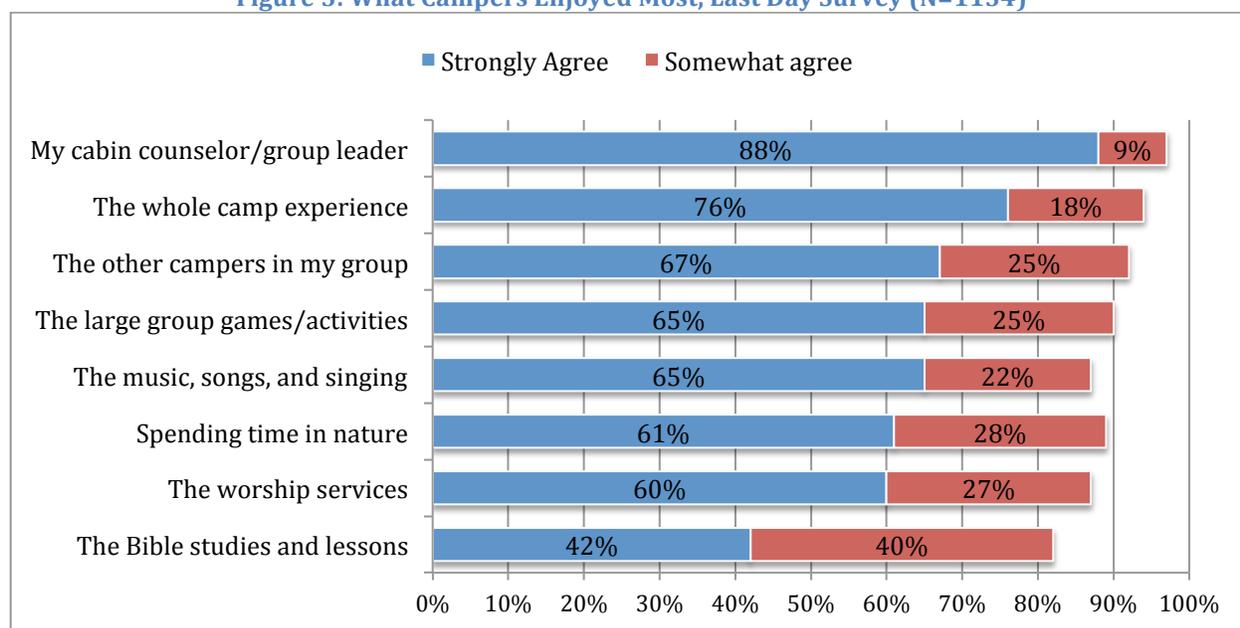
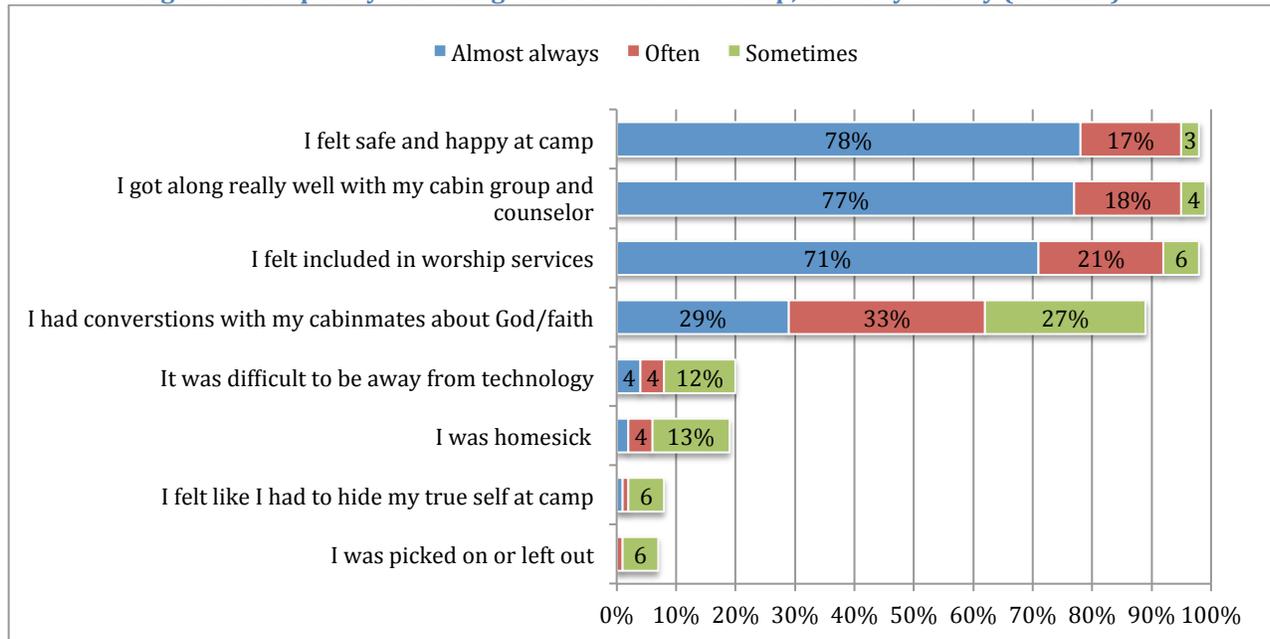


Figure 6 shows camper responses on the last day of camp to questions about their feelings and faith practices during camp. Several things are noteworthy. First, the vast majority of participants perceived the experience as a safe, inclusive space, which was identified in Phase 1 as a key characteristic of the camp model. In fact, fewer campers reported being picked on, left out, or having to hide their true selves at camp than those who felt the same in their home or school environments (Figure 4). Of the 150 campers who reported on the first day that they had to hide their true selves at school or home at least sometimes, 80% reported on the last day that this was the case “rarely” or “never” at camp. Likewise, of 172 campers who reported being picked on or left out at school at least sometimes, 76% reported that this happened rarely or never during their week at camp. In addition to being safe, the majority of campers reported

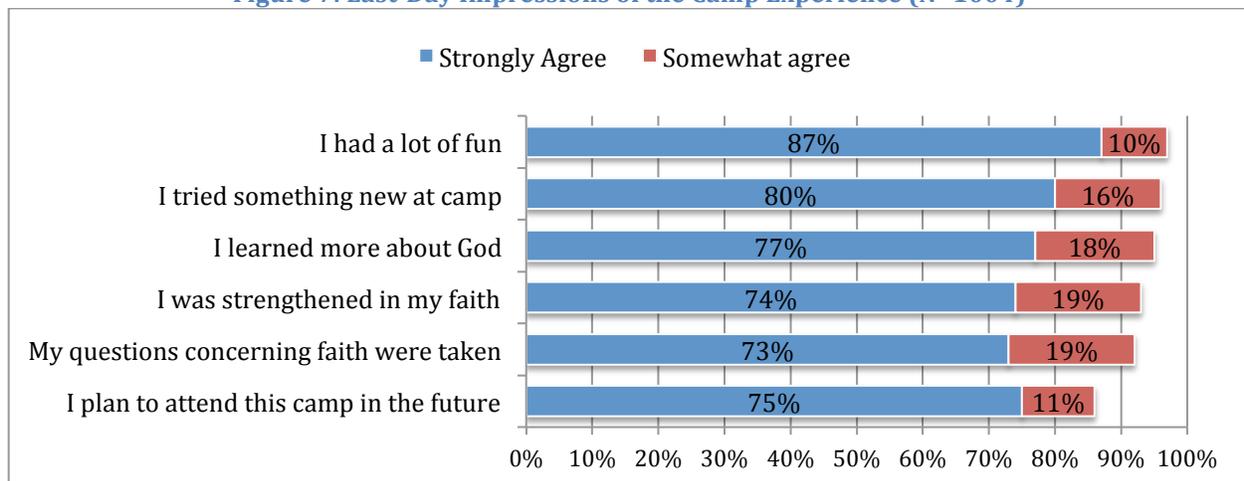
having frequent conversations with their cabin mates about faith and feeling included in worship services. These numbers were significantly higher than those reporting the same at home or in their home churches (Figure 4), indicating the strength of the camp model in providing a participatory and faith-centered environment.

**Figure 6: Frequency of Feelings and Practices at Camp, Last Day Survey (N=1114)**



## Measuring Camper Outcomes

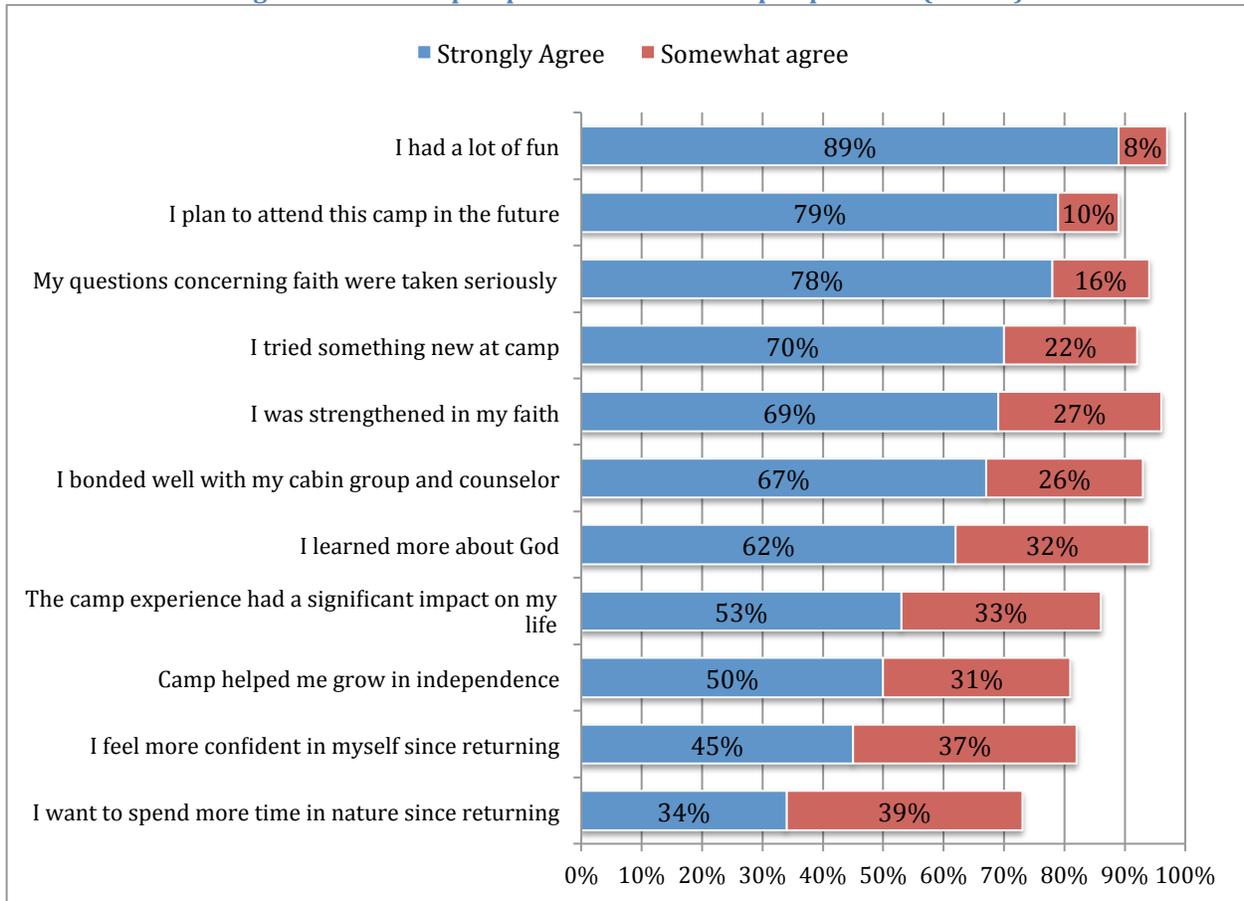
**Figure 7: Last-Day Impressions of the Camp Experience (N=1004)**



The survey measured change during the course of the camp week in two ways. First, the last day and follow-up questionnaires asked the campers directly whether or not they perceived change. Second, campers answered identical items on the different questionnaires to see if there

were any changes in their responses over time. Responses were based on a five-point Likert-type scale, and statistically significant change was determined using t-tests. The first method for measuring change indicated overwhelmingly positive outcomes (Figure 7). The major concern with this method is that campers may have experienced an emotional high, causing them to exaggerate the benefits of the experience as a way of expressing their elation.

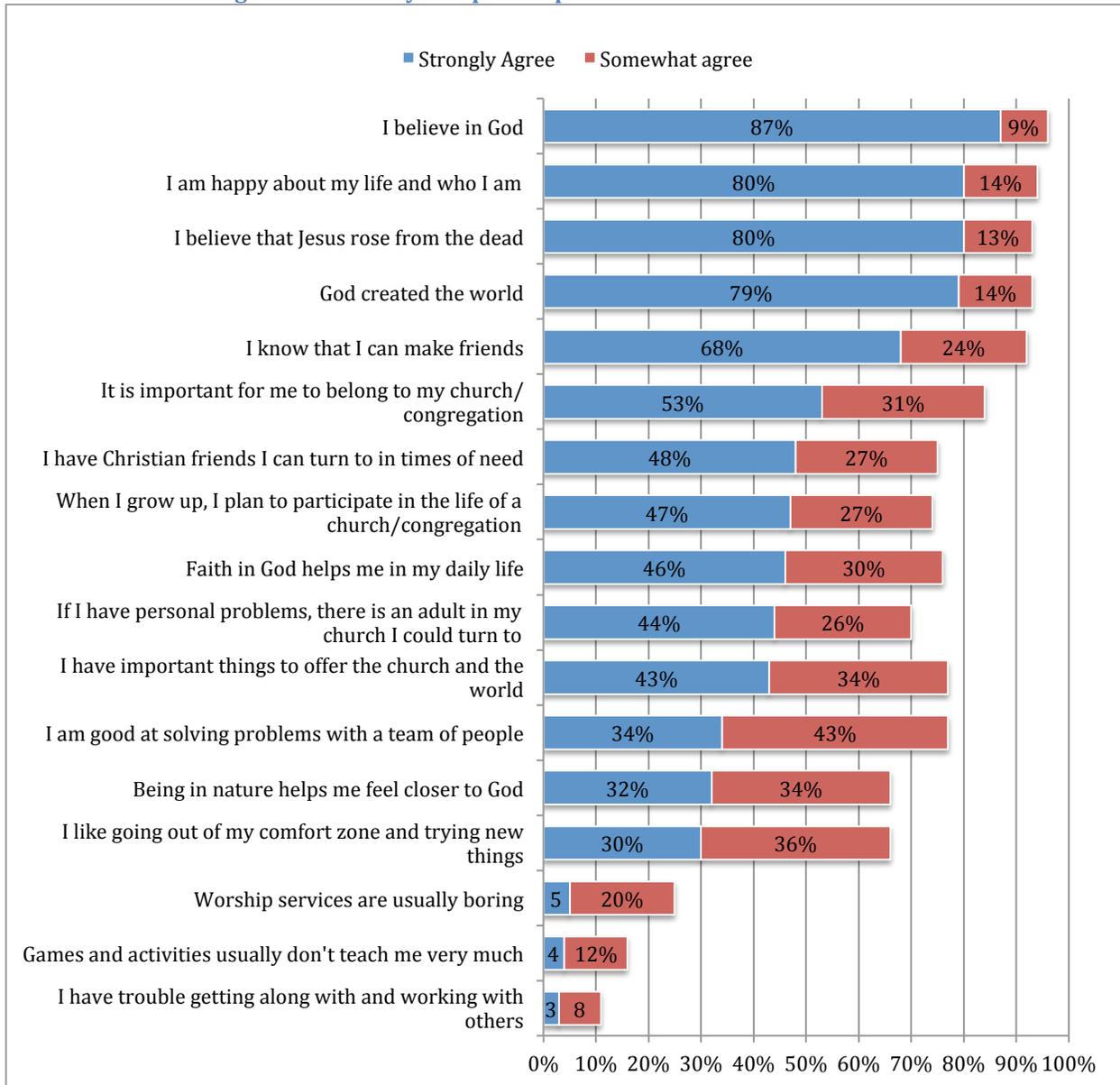
**Figure 8: Follow-up Impressions of the Camp Experience (N=272)**



The follow-up questionnaire asked about camper outcomes two to three months after the experience (Figure 8). If the overwhelmingly positive responses were the result of an emotional high on the last day of camp, the follow-up should have elicited more measured responses. Campers that responded to both the last day and follow-up surveys showed a significant *decrease* in agreement with: “I learned more about God,” “I tried something new at camp,” “I was strengthened in my faith,” and “I had a lot of fun.” This suggests that campers were less certain about these outcomes than they were on the last day of camp, indicating that the emotionally charged environment of camp may have resulted in temporarily high responses on the last-day

survey (a *camp high*). This is not the whole story, however, since the follow-up impressions remained overwhelmingly positive. Camp participants had time and distance to consider the impacts of the experience, and the vast majority agreed that they grew in independence (81%), self-confidence (82%), faith (96%), and knowledge of God (94%). They were also asked directly if they agreed that the camp experience had a significant impact on their lives, and 86% agreed.

**Figure 9: First-Day Camper Responses to 17 Measurement Items**



Directly asking the campers whether or not they perceived changes was valuable, but the more reliable way of measuring camper outcomes was to ask identical questions at different points in time to see if their responses changed. Campers answered seventeen identical survey

items on all three questionnaires. Figure 9 shows responses to these items on the first day of camp. It is important to note that campers showed a high level of agreement with many of the items, meaning that there was little room for positive change. The particularly high level of agreement with the three belief statements confirms that most campers were not newcomers to the Christian faith. Camp was not functioning as a conversion experience for these campers, since more than 96% agreed or strongly agreed with, “I believe in God,” and 93% agreed with the more specific Christian statements, “God created the world” and “I believe that Jesus rose from the dead.” General belief, however, did not mean that these campers found significant meaning and relevance in their faith or Christian practices. A sizeable minority, for example, agreed that worship services are usually boring (25%). While three-quarters agreed, “Faith in God helps me in my daily life,” this number was significantly less than those agreeing with the belief statements, and less than half of respondents “strongly agreed” with the statement.

**Figure 10: T-tests of 17 Identical Items First Day to Last Day of Camp, with Lasting Change indicted in Bold and Temporary Change in Italics**

Question	n	T1 Mean	T2 Mean	DM (T2-T1)	t value
<i>Worship services are usually boring.</i>	952	2.59	2.18	-.405	-9.605***
<b>I like going out of my comfort zone and trying new things.</b>	959	3.78	4.08	.302	9.586***
<b>Being in nature helps me feel closer to God.</b>	937	3.86	4.13	.274	8.849***
<b>I know that I can make friends.</b>	963	4.57	4.74	.173	7.782***
<b>I have important things to offer the church and the world.</b>	901	4.17	4.35	.173	6.457***
<b>Faith in God helps me in my daily life.</b>	945	4.17	4.33	.157	6.065***
<b>If I have personal problems, there is an adult in my church I could turn to.</b>	915	3.99	4.20	.212	5.854***
<b>It is important for me to belong to my church/congregation.</b>	944	4.35	4.47	.112	4.776***
<b>I have Christian friends I can turn to in times of need.</b>	898	4.13	4.27	.139	4.306***
<i>I believe that Jesus rose from the dead.</i>	953	4.73	4.79	.062	3.503***
<i>Games and activities usually don't teach me very much.</i>	949	2.28	2.14	-.137	-3.248**
<i>I believe in God</i>	952	4.85	4.88	.037	3.171**
<i>God created the world.</i>	962	4.71	4.76	.050	3.152**
<b>When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.</b>	894	4.15	4.23	.084	3.084**
<b>I am good at solving problems with a team of people.</b>	953	4.04	4.13	.087	3.034**
<i>I am happy about my life and who I am.</i>	957	4.73	4.77	.045	2.564*
I have trouble getting along with and working with others.	944	1.80	1.79	-.007	-.187

Asterisks indicate that the t-test was significant at  $p < .05$  (\*),  $p < .01$  (\*\*), or  $p < .001$  (\*\*\*)

Campers responded to the same seventeen items on the last day of camp, and there was significant change in sixteen of the items. Figure 10 shows the results of the t-tests for the first and last day surveys. Bold or italic type indicates how the item changed on the follow-up survey, which will be discussed in the next section. Negative values indicate a decrease in the level of agreement, while positive values indicate an increase in agreement from the first day to the last day. Notice that the negative values actually indicate positive outcomes. For example, campers were significantly *less likely* to agree that worship services are boring on the last day of camp. Only 17% agreed on the last day, compared with 25% on the first day, while the percentage of those disagreeing jumped from 48% to 64%. The only item that showed no change during the camp experience was, “I have trouble getting along with and working with others.” This item had the lowest level of agreement on the first day of camp, and it remained low. These results corroborate the campers’ own impressions from the last-day and follow-up surveys that they grew in faith, knowledge of God, and self-confidence. The question is, how much of this growth lasted and how much was simply part of the camp high?

### **Lasting Change and the Camp High**

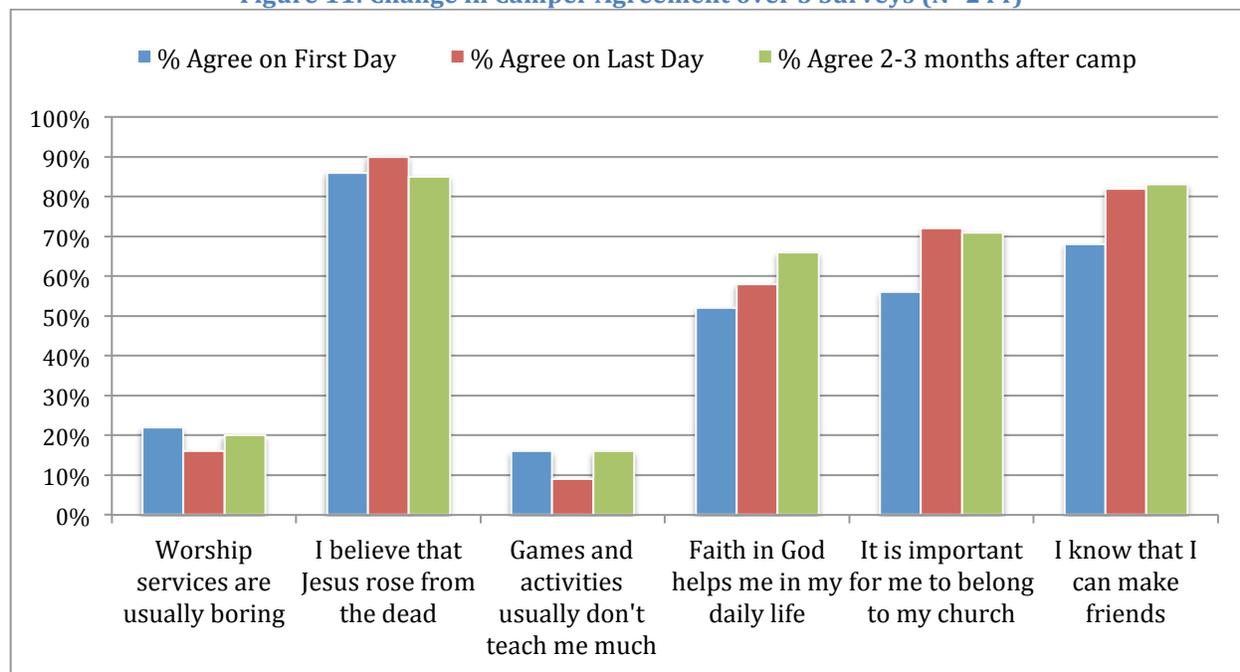
Campers were sent the follow-up questionnaire sixty days after the last day of their camp session, and they had thirty days to complete it, so their responses captured their thoughts and beliefs two to three months after camp. We have already seen that their overall interpretations of the camp experience, including their personal growth, remained overwhelmingly positive, but there were also indications that their enthusiasm had faded somewhat in the interim. Comparing their responses to the seventeen identical survey items over the course of all three questionnaires provides insights into which camp outcomes lasted over time.

Of the sixteen items that showed statistically significant growth during the camp experience, six returned to pre-camp levels by the time of the follow-up survey. These items are indicated in italics in Figure 10 above. This finding provides clear evidence that the *camp high* was a real and measureable phenomenon for these campers, but it also reveals that the lasting impacts of camp outweighed the temporary ones. The other ten survey items showed no statistical decrease from the last day of camp to the follow-up survey (bold items in Figure 10), indicating that the growth measured during the camp week was retained months after camp.

Figure 11 graphically illustrates three items that exhibited the *camp high* in comparison with three items that showed lasting change.

There was clearly an emotional component to the camp high, resulting in campers agreeing more on the last day of camp that they had a lot of fun compared with two months later. The emotional nature of the camp high was confirmed in the temporary increase in agreement with, “I am happy about my life and who I am.” The temporary increase in this item should be interpreted as an emotional high (associated with the specific word “happy”) rather than a temporary self-confidence boost, since the other items related to self-confidence showed no similar post-camp drop, as will be discussed.

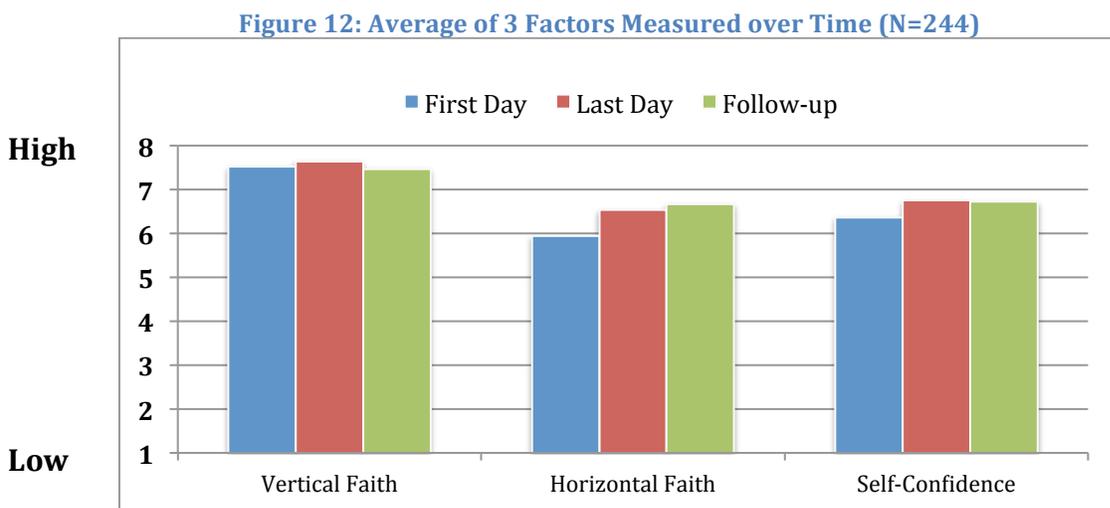
**Figure 11: Change in Camper Agreement over 3 Surveys (N=244)**



The camp high also included increased interest in worship services and awareness of participatory learning. The inverse bell curve evident with these two items in Figure 11 suggests that campers experienced worship services and learning more positively while in the camp environment. This is presumably the case because campers felt more included and engaged in worship and in their own learning, a finding that was demonstrated above. The regression to pre-camp levels indicates that their experiences away from camp did not change significantly as a result of the participatory camp experience. Campers returned home to worship services and classroom environments that remained unchanged.

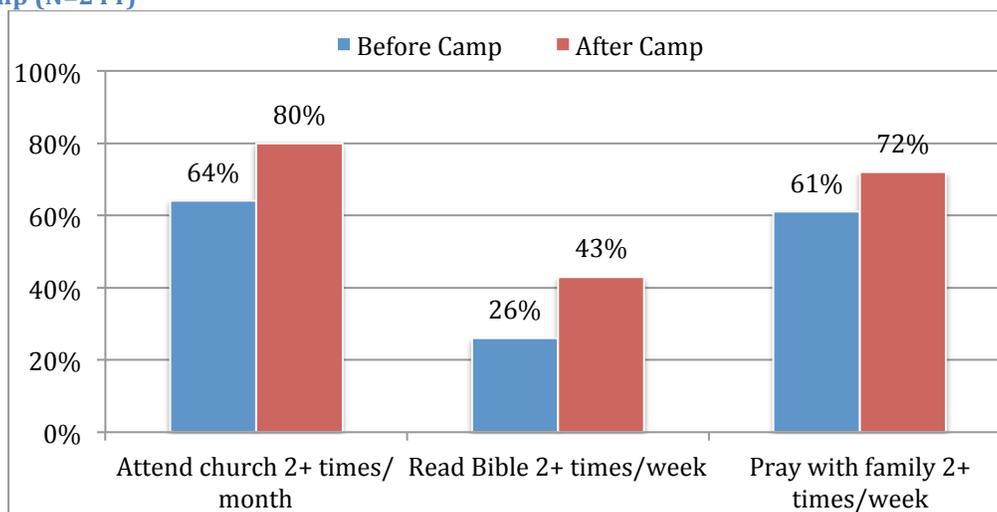
The bell curve evident in Figure 11 with the item, “I believe that Jesus rose from the dead” mirrors the responses to both “I believe in God” and “God created the world.” These were the only three doctrinal questions, and they showed a high consistency of response (Cronbach  $\alpha = .841$ ), indicating that they were together measuring a single factor that might be considered cognitive belief or **vertical faith**. This vertical faith factor was part of the *camp high*, along with the aforementioned increases in positivity, worship engagement, and participatory learning.

The six items that followed the pattern of the camp high were exceptions to the overall picture that the camp experience resulted in lasting change. If the camp high was associated with vertical faith, then the lasting change can rightly be called **horizontal faith**. Exploratory factor analysis identified three items with a high level of response consistency related to the relevance of faith in everyday life: “Faith in God helps me in my daily life,” “I have important things to offer the church and the world,” and “It is important to belong to my church/congregation” (Cronbach  $\alpha = .798$ ). These items all showed significant and lasting positive change, as did the items related to faith *relationships*: “I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need” and “If I have personal problems, there is an adult in my church I could turn to.” Participants also exhibited lasting change in measurements of **self-confidence**. Factor analysis extracted three items related to self-confidence: “I know that I can make friends,” “I am good at solving problems with a team of people,” and “I am happy about my life and who I am” (Cronbach  $\alpha = .581$ ). The factor showed positive change during the camp week that continued through the follow-up.



The three factors of vertical faith, horizontal faith, and self-confidence were measured on a scale from low (1) to high (8) based on the combined responses to the three items in each index. The change over the course of the three surveys is shown in Figure 12. The rather modest increase in vertical faith has a bell curve indicating a camp high, while the other two factors demonstrate lasting change. The lasting change in self-confidence corroborates numerous studies of camp outcomes, most prominently the *Directions* study from the American Camp Association. The finding that lasting camp outcomes are associated with horizontal rather than vertical faith measurements corroborates and expands on the findings from secondary analysis of the National Study of Youth and Religion dataset that showed long-term impacts on measurements of communal religiosity (Sorenson 2014).

**Figure 13: Percentage of Campers Participating in Christian Practices 2 Months Before and 2 Months After Camp (N=244)**



Additional survey responses demonstrated that camp participants engaged in Christian practices with greater frequency in the months following camp than in the months preceding camp. These included increases in church attendance, Bible reading, and praying with their family (Figure 13). There were also indications that camp participants were having more frequent conversations with their families about God and faith in the months following camp. Over a quarter (27%) of participants indicated on the first day of camp that they had these conversations “rarely” or “never.” In the months following camp, 60% of these participants reported having multiple conversations with their family about God and faith. This is a major finding, especially considering the strong correlation between faith conversations in the home

and higher faith measurements. It is evident that camps can effect lasting change in both vertical and horizontal faith by fostering more frequent conversations in the home.

These findings compellingly demonstrate that the Christian summer camp experience at these six camps resulted in positive and lasting change. There were also temporary benefits to the camp experience that are often pejoratively termed the *camp high* but might more accurately be characterized as immediate outcomes. These immediate outcomes included increased positivity, greater interest in worship services, participatory learning, and increased vertical faith (or cognitive belief). The lasting outcomes clearly evident in this study included increased self-confidence, increased horizontal faith (or faith relevance), more frequent devotional practices, increased interest in church attendance, and faith conversations/practices in the home.

### **Differences Among Camps and Camper Types**

The camp experience did not affect all campers equally. The above findings are based on the overall results from more than a thousand camp participants that had unique experiences based on their personal backgrounds, the camp they attended, the characteristics of the specific week they were present, the makeup of their individual cabin groups, and a host of other factors. On the horizontal faith index, for example, 39% of campers showed no change from the first day to the last day of camp, while another 39% showed positive change and the other 22% showed negative change. Some of this variability is attributable to error or unmeasured factors, but there were other factors that had clear impacts on the nature and degree of camp outcomes.

The camps themselves, though they were selected for their similarities, had important differences, though these differences were not determinative of outcomes. Camp Wapo had both the largest camper capacity and the smallest acreage, with more than three hundred campers each week situated on twenty-five acres of property. Sugar Creek, in contrast, had less than 150 campers each week spread out over 600 acres, with housing accommodations more rustic than those of Camp Wapo. The majority of Sugar Creek campers slept in covered wagons or camped out in tents during the week, while Camp Wapo campers stayed in cabins with bathrooms and temperature control. It was expected that these differences would result in Sugar Creek campers growing more in items related to the outdoors. This was not the case, however. Though campers at both camps showed significant increase in the item, "Being in nature helps me feel closer to God," the Camp Wapo campers showed slightly more growth. A follow-up survey question

asked if campers wanted to spend more time in nature since returning from camp. There was no overall difference between campers at Sugar Creek and Camp Wapo on this survey item. This is one example demonstrating that the settings themselves were not determinative of growth. Camps were effective at facilitating growth when the five fundamental characteristics of the camp model were in place, and the findings confirm the theory from the Phase 1 study that the camp model is highly adaptive, functioning similarly in places that look and feel very differently.

The pattern of growth was, in fact, fairly consistent across all six camps and all four camper types. The degree of change varied, but they all followed the overall pattern of a camp high associated with vertical faith and lasting change associated with horizontal faith and self-confidence. There was one key exception, which will be explored below. The differences between camps can be better explained by other factors related to changes in the camp model rather than differences inherent in the camps. The pattern of growth was also consistent across all camper types described above. Campers who were *forced* to attend were significantly lower than the other camper types on many of the first day measurements, meaning that there was more room for growth. This did not, however, result in significant differences in the growth evident in the data. Forced campers were just as likely to exhibit growth as camp regulars, returners, and first-time campers who came willingly. Even the campers who did not agree on the first day survey that they were attending camp “to grow in my faith” exhibited the same pattern of growth as those who came with a desire to grow in their faith. The pattern also remained unchanged whether or not campers reported enjoying the large group games, spending time in nature, or even the Bible studies. These were not the make-it or break-it elements of the experience.

### **Breakdowns in the Camp Model**

Phase 1 of the project indicated that a breakdown in one of the five fundamental characteristics of the camp model constituted a breakdown in the model itself. Phase 2 data confirm this finding and indicate that the breakdown can happen on an individual or systemic level. The clearest breakdown evident in the data on an individual level was related to the characteristic of camp as a *safe space*. If campers reported being picked on or left out at least sometimes (7%) or reported feeling like they had to hide their true selves at least sometimes (8%), they exhibited no change in any of the three factors during the camp experience. There were not enough campers reporting these circumstances occurring “often” or “almost always” to

determine if they might have shown negative results, but the existing data show a clear breakdown in the growth pattern if the safe space was violated at least “sometimes.”

It was challenging to determine a breakdown in the relational characteristic of camp because so many campers reported enjoying their counselors (97%), fellow campers (92%), and getting along really well with their cabin group (95%). Those campers who did not “strongly agree” that they enjoyed their counselor were less likely to show the pattern of growth, indicating the power of the camper-counselor relationship. Those who did not agree that they got along really well with their cabin group and counselor (only 45 individuals) actually showed a slight *decrease* in the self-confidence measurement. Though this was not statistically significant, these findings together indicate that a strain in relationships among cabin mates or especially with the counselor dramatically altered the camp experience to the point that the outcomes were affected.

The pattern of growth during the camp experience was also altered when campers reported difficulty being away from technology at least “sometimes,” reported being homesick at least “sometimes,” or did not agree with, “I tried something new at camp.” These items are related to the fundamental characteristics of *away from home* and *participatory*. It is unclear why some campers had difficulty being away from technology. The Phase 1 findings indicated that many campers found this element of camp refreshing and even beneficial. It is possible that missing technology was an element of homesickness, and it is also possible that these campers were not actively engaged in the activities provided at camp, causing them to long for the devices capable of capturing their attention. The former possibility is related to a breakdown in *away from home*, while the latter is more closely related to a breakdown in the *participatory* element of camp. Both explanations are plausible and supported in other survey items. Forced campers were much more likely to report missing their technology than the other camper types. It is revealing that campers who did not agree that they tried something new were unlikely to exhibit growth in any of the three factors during camp. The participatory nature of camp broke down, and all three factors showed overall *negative* change for these campers, including a statistically significant decrease in vertical faith. It is unclear whether or not the camp experience was harmful for these campers, but it is clear that a breakdown in the model affected the outcomes.

In addition to the individual campers who experienced a breakdown in the model for their particular experience, there were systemic breakdowns evident in the camp model. Camps are not identified by name here in order that the circumstances of the breakdowns can be targeted for change rather than deflecting blame onto specific camps. Moreover, the breakdowns were not endemic to the camps but rather isolated to specific weeks or specific cabin groups. The data from one camp, for example, did not follow the pattern of growth for the self-confidence factor. Closer examination of the data revealed that this non-growth was the result of a single week accounting for 21% of the completed surveys. During this week of camp, participants showed a significant *decrease* in self-confidence ( $p < .05$ ), while responding campers from the other weeks at this camp showed the typical pattern of increased self-confidence that remained high in the follow-up survey. What happened during this particular week of camp to disrupt the growth pattern on a systemic level? The answer may be found in a number of intervening factors. Researchers collected data from camp staff members on each of the twenty-four different camper weeks included in the survey sample. These data included details about weather, the general mood of the camp community, and any other unusual characteristics of the camp week. The specific week in question was the first week of camp. There had been difficulty recruiting sufficient summer staff members, so many of the positions had been filled with international staff members, some of whom missed a sizeable portion of the two-week staff training period that immediately preceded the first week of camp. Staff members also reported that the first week of camp was a large week in terms of camper numbers. It appears that an insufficiently trained staff was thinly stretched during this particular week, and the results were a systemic breakdown in the camp model, which was community-wide, occurring for both boys and girls. Two-thirds of the campers still strongly agreed that they planned to attend this camp in the future, but that is compared with 82% from the other weeks at the same camp that strongly agreed with this statement.

There were similar breakdowns during individual weeks at two other camps. Though the decreases in self-confidence were not statistically significant in these cases, they clearly deviated from the norms. At one of the camps, it appears that the breakdown happened in one or two specific cabin groups and was directly related to a feeling that camp was not a safe space. Seven of the responding nineteen girls from this week (an astounding 41%) reported, "I felt like I had to hide my true self" at least sometimes. There is no way to confirm that these girls were part of the

same cabin group, but it is plausible. The girls from this week of camp showed a significant decrease in the self-confidence factor, while the boys followed the typical pattern of increase in self-confidence. A third camp had a single week of overall negative change in the self-confidence factor. As with the first camp described, the breakdown appears to have been camp-wide, affecting responses from both boys and girls. Camp staff identified a few unique characteristics of this camp week that may have contributed to the anomalous results. It was a particularly full week, meaning that there were campers sleeping on the floors of housing units rather than in bunks. Staff also noted that visiting church professionals staying at camp (typical at this site) were uncharacteristically “grumpy” and that there was a power outage during the week that caused some inconvenience. These factors may have contributed to the drastically different results compared with other weeks. It is notable that staff from different camps reported that there were two additional weeks having particularly large camper enrollments. These weeks followed the typical pattern for growth in the three factors, but growth was lower overall than that seen in other weeks at the same camp. These findings suggest that overfilling camp weeks may be detrimental to the camper experience and outcomes.

In contrast to these negative anomalies, there were individual camp weeks that showed particularly strong growth in comparison to other weeks at the same camp. Two of these weeks showed particularly noteworthy growth and deserve closer attention. These weeks took place at different camps. The factor that both had in common was a weather emergency that necessitated creative response. One of these was among only two camper weeks in the whole study that had a reported weather rating of “poor,” defined as frequent or exceptional inclement weather that caused multiple cancellations and schedule adjustments. The weather was hot and humid all week, with frequent strong storms. Two cabin groups had a harrowing canoe trip on the river that week, in which multiple canoes tipped and a counselor (who was also a lifeguard) collapsed from exhaustion after making some rescues and returning the group safely to shore. The counselor was able to return to her cabin group after spending a night in the infirmary and offered her campers the traditional end-of-week verbal affirmations. All of the campers from this week showed high levels of growth (more than any other week measured on both horizontal faith and self-confidence), but the girls showed particularly positive results. More than half exhibited growth in horizontal faith and a shocking 62% grew in the self-confidence measure. As the director put it, the campers likely experienced growth throughout the week, but the river trip may have “pushed

it over the edge.” These experiences and the staff members’ responses to them most directly affected the participants in the river trip, but the impacts evidently extended to the rest of the camp community, as well.

The other week that showed particularly strong growth saw the main sports field transformed into an unusable quagmire due to the previous week’s storms. There was a single afternoon of rainy weather during this particular week, and the staff members responded creatively by holding an impromptu fort-building contest in one of the main buildings. They reported that it turned into a tremendous group building experience that was a novelty not only for the summer staff but also for the returning campers that made up two-thirds of the enrollment that week. Nearly half (49%) of the campers exhibited growth in the self-confidence factor during that week, compared with only 24% during the other weeks at the same camp. Campers also showed higher growth in horizontal faith. It is plausible that the impromptu fort-building contest served as a catalyst for group building, conversations, and creativity that resulted in increased growth.

### **Conclusions and Next Steps**

Phase 2 of the Effective Camp Research Project has confirmed the validity of the camp model consisting of five fundamental characteristics: faith-centered, relational, participatory, a safe space, and different from home. This model has proven highly adaptive to various camp programs, group sizes, and circumstances. The presence of this camp model did not cause change in the camp participants but rather opened the possibility for change. These data reveal that the model was highly effective in fostering positive outcomes in camp participants ages eleven to fourteen. Furthermore, many of these outcomes lasted months after the camp experience. A breakdown in one of the fundamental characteristics caused a breakdown of the model itself, typically resulting in no clear positive outcomes, though there is some evidence that the effects were negative in some cases.

Anecdotal accounts of a *camp high* that fades shortly after the experience were partially confirmed, though there was more compelling evidence for lasting outcomes. The temporary changes are more properly defined as immediate outcomes, since they had some inherent benefits whether or not they lasted long-term. These immediate outcomes, evident on the last day of camp, included increased feelings of safety, increased positivity, greater interest in worship

services, participatory learning, and increased vertical faith (or cognitive belief). The lasting outcomes that were clearly evident two or more months after the camp experience included increased self-confidence, increased horizontal faith (or faith relevance), more frequent devotional practices, increased interest in church attendance, and faith conversations/practices in the home. The effects on faith practices in the home are especially compelling, since faith in the home is a strong indicator of long-term faith commitment and growth.

This project is limited in describing a particular camp model present in week-long Lutheran camps in Wisconsin. To the extent that the model is present in camps of other denominations and regions of the country, similar outcomes are expected, but more research is needed to confirm this. Future studies should examine camps in other mainline denominations, other areas of the country, and camp sessions of varying lengths. There are also enduring questions about the faith backgrounds of camp participants. The camp experience functions within a large ecology of faith formation, and this study has only begun scratching the surface of factors that may impact camper faith measurements before, during, and after camp. Future studies can dig more deeply into the congregational communities from which campers come and the extent to which faith is practiced in the home, since only a handful of such questions were included in the present study. Now that the camp high has been associated with vertical faith and lasting change with horizontal faith, additional questions should be included in future survey instruments to confirm or perhaps modify these findings. It is expected that additional doctrinal statements would show a similar bell curve of growth and regression to pre-camp levels, but more research is needed to confirm this, since only three such questions appeared in this survey. Future research should also examine the extent to which the camp model is present in other types of camp experiences aside from week-long residential camps. Adventure camps, wilderness expeditions, service camps, leadership training camps, and high school camps would be excellent candidates for future research.

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