

Transitions: A Camp Program for Teenagers

By Heather McNab, Camp Shagabec

Transitions is a program for teenagers, using Bible stories, nature studies, and guided discussion, suitable for a weekend at camp, especially in the fall, or possibly in an urban setting if you have access to some nature. It could be a weekend, or it could be thought of simply as three sessions to be done any time, as discussions to do around hikes.

In the discussion times you will find that I sometimes give my own answers, and they are in italics. The italics aren't necessarily something you would read to the participants. Naturally, in a discussion, there are no wrong answers; the point is to talk. Some of the nature talk requires you to know some very basic things. Like bug/amphibian life cycles. Like tropisms. Do a little research beforehand and you'll sound like a real pro. Or invite someone who is into that sort of thing. It's best if you're kind of excited by nature!

FIRST SESSION: Transitions

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

To everything there is a season,
a time for every purpose under the sun:
a time to be born, and a time to die
a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted,
a time to kill and a time to heal...
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
a time to lose and a time to seek...
a time to rend and a time to sew,
a time to keep silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

(Feel free to include the song "Turn, turn, turn.")

Feel free to discuss the Bible passage and what it might mean to each person. Do they agree with it? Disagree?

Discussion

This is a guide for a discussion. You might want to think about it beforehand and go a different direction. The purpose is to introduce the idea of transitions, and that life is full of them. They aren't necessarily bad or good, they just are.

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This weekend we're going to talk about transitions. At this time of year (fall...) there are many changes around us... What are some of them?

In the park where I used this program I would answer: Now there are hardly any people, the moose and deer have taken over, the leaves have changed colour, everything is closed except the hotel, the park smells different and looks different and sounds different and feels different. It's had a transition.

What are some transitions in nature?

Tadpoles into frogs. Caterpillars into moths.

Each of us has had some really obvious transitions—like what?

Like one day you're a fetus and the next day you're a baby. One day you're a preschooler and the next day you're a student. One day you're in elementary school, then the next day you're in high school. One day you can't drive, the next day you can. One day you're single, the next day you're married.

So as a kind of get-to-know you moment, let's go around the circle, state your name for the record, and tell us something you remember about one of those obvious transition moments in your life.

Most of you are in life's biggest transition time. What kinds of things are changing while you're a teenager? If you were a bug, what life stage would you be in?

Hey, and how about cartoons. The popular media isn't always a good place to go to get an accurate picture of life... it's full of quick changes. Like Clark Kent goes into a phone booth and poof he's superman. What else is there like that? (*Transformers... Animorphs... The Fantastic Four... The Incredibles...*). All of them are about suddenly becoming strong and powerful and big.

Why do you think that's such a common theme? (*Maybe because we all wish we could get big and strong and powerful without going through the slow growing and learning process.*)

Maybe we all have a universal wish for changes to be instant and easy like that. But they're not. Really we're more like that chubby caterpillar in *A Bug's Life*—the changes in us are almost impossible to see, but when you look back, you can see how much you've changed over a long time.

(Another example is the toys becoming real in the story, "The Velveteen Rabbit.")

So... what kinds of things help us to/make us transform, to morph, into someone who is more powerful, more strong, more big?

Or is that what we want—what have our transitions turned us into?

If you could go into a phone booth and turn into something you think is better—what would you turn into?

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We so often say, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" But I think we need to think more about *who* we want to be when we grow up. What do we want to be like? Sometimes it is our transition moments that bit by bit turn us into the person we're going to be.

I want you to think now about things in your life that have changed who you are or who have helped to develop in you the qualities that you like best.

I think that our more profound transitions are harder to pinpoint. Quite often it's something where you look back later and realize, that was a transition moment. For many people, 9/11/01 was a transition moment—everybody said that it changed everything.

Why?

Loss of innocence is one kind of transition, one kind of growing up. I think that loss of innocence occurs when we realize that stuff doesn't just happen to other people, it happens to us. Yes, America can be a war zone. Loss of innocence occurs when you realize that your mom and dad can't keep you safe from everything.

Bible Story

You are most welcome to read the Bible, but it is better to read it to yourself, then tell the teens the story in your own words. Here's my summary of the story... but it's better to make it up yourself.

Acts 8:3 and Acts 9

There was once this guy named Saul. It was shortly after Jesus had died, and there was this movement of Jesus' followers starting up a new church and they allowed anybody in—Jewish people and also anybody else who wanted to join up. Saul hated them. He worked toward trying to wipe these people out. He took part in arresting Christians, persecuting them, killing them.

Acts 8:3

Saul tried to destroy the church; going from house to house, he dragged out the believers, both men and women, and threw them into jail.

Acts 9

One day Saul was going to Damascus to arrest Christians, and suddenly a light from the sky flashed around him and he heard a voice from the sky saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Sure enough, it was Jesus. Saul was suddenly blind, so his friends helped him to get to Damascus and for three days he couldn't see and didn't eat or drink.

Then God sent a guy named Annanias to Saul. The scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again, he was baptized, and he became a disciple.

He changed his name to Paul, and he became one of the main founders of the Christian church. St. Paul, we call him, and we've named some big churches after him. He risked persecution himself, and he wrote all those letters to new churches.

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Discussion

Talk about a transition moment. Have you ever been struck by a blinding light while you were walking down the road?

Did this really happen the way it says in the book? I don't know. If the writer just told it this way in order to make a point, what was the point?

(Maybe that sometimes truth strikes us suddenly. Maybe our ignorance makes us blind and God opens our eyes sometimes with truth.)

Have you ever had something open your eyes?

So let's pray.

God of our transitions, God of stability, we ask you to be with us this weekend as we take our separate journeys together. Amen.

SECOND SESSION: Tropisms/Motivation Toward Change

Nature Activity

Today we must go on a quest. We need to wear sturdy shoes. We need to find out what makes things grow the way they do.

For this Nature Study portion of the weekend, you need to understand the following words:

Phototropism (growing toward light)

Geotropism (growing toward the earth, or my favorite, "negative geotropism," growing away from the center of the earth—it's what makes the lodgepole pine straight enough to make poles out of for your lodge)

Hydrotropism (obviously, growing toward water)

Thigmotropism (responding to touch or physical contact—like the tendrils on the sweet peas)

Skototropism (growing toward darkness. This might also be just thought of as negative phototropism.)

You can search online to learn more about each growth habit. Search "tropisms." Talk to some local biologist or teacher for examples in your area of each growth habit. The teens will have some knowledge of some of the words from high school science. But really—if all you know is the definition and some particular plants to look for, that's enough.

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Warm-up: The Motivation Game

This game is to show that different people are motivated in different ways... as we learned that plants are. This is a great leadership training game, too, because as leaders we really need to understand that the techniques we use on one person will not work on all persons!

First choose one person to be the "Motivator." This person should be a fairly confident person.

Prepare by writing the statements on pieces of paper and having each participant except the Motivator choose one. Without letting the Motivator know what is on the pieces of paper, make sure that each person understands their task.

Explain to the Motivator that all he/she has to do is make each person in the circle say the word, "sunshine."

Now we play a game.

Copy these and hand them out:

Only say "sunshine" if the person looks you in the eye when asking you to say it.

Only say "sunshine" if everyone else has already said it.

Only says "sunshine" if the person is touching you when they ask you to say it.

Say "sunshine" every single time the person looks at you, even when they're not asking you to say sunshine.

Say "sunshine" only when the person on your left says it.

Say "sunshine" only if the person shouts at you.

Say "sunshine" only if the person kneels before you and asks politely.

If you have more participants, make up more. Or make two circles.

Continue until the Motivator has figured everybody out. Give hints if it's going on too long.

Debrief the game by asking them about the experience. What do we learn from this about working with people? How is this exercise similar to the way we behave in school or at camp?

Discussion

So, how about you? What makes you grow? Does sunshine make you grow? Gravity? Water? Touch? Darkness?

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What things motivate you to do stuff?

Make up a tropism word for what makes you respond.

Years ago when I was in school, we sometimes would have a teacher who believed that he could have a class of 30 kids, teach them all in exactly the same way, and expect them all to succeed. If they didn't succeed, it was their own fault.

Now we realize that people have different learning styles—some need to hear it, some need to see it, some need to touch it.

I think that like that little exercise, each of us is motivated by something different.

Chances are that every adult in your life wants the same things for you. Your parents, your teachers, your camp counsellors, want you to succeed—they want you to find a mate (not too soon), find a good career, live through adolescence without becoming addicted to anything or being killed in a car accident or from AIDS. And so they all try to steer you toward that.

But... some of them go about it all wrong. What do those adults do wrong for you? What would they have to do to make it work? What would motivate you to do the right things?

Some teenagers really need to have this discussion. Some teenagers are headed in directions that aren't good for them, and thinking about SELFF-motivation might be what they need to get headed in a better direction. So... let the discussion go toward self-motivation.

THIRD SESSION: Transitions, Change, Moving On

Introductory Stories

If you have the book, *Keepers of the Earth—Native Stories and Environmental Activities for Children* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac, ISBN 0-920079-57-1, then use "The origin of death," page 181. (Go ahead and use the discussion and so on.)

Also appropriate here is the poem "To be of the earth is to know," on page 288 of *Earth Prayers from Around the World, 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*. Edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, ISBN 0-06-250746-X.

After that poem: Which of these stages are you in? Can you relate these stages to different times of life? Do you think the author was really talking about plants at all?

Another great book to use here: *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf, a Story of Life for All Ages*, by Leo Buscaglia, ISBN 0-8050-106405.

Nature Study

The story in the Bible says that Jesus died and then was raised to life.

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How can life come from death?

Sounds like we need a quest.

I want to find something dead that is full of new life.

Find it.

My very, very favorite thing in nature is a dead stump or log. Particularly in moist areas (i.e., not where I live) there is a huge amount of life on a dead log. All kinds of mosses and lichens and fungi... bugs too. It's very exciting. Look at one dead stump and count the kinds of life forms you see... then look at another dead stump and count them there... notice the amazing diversity! You don't need to know what anything is—just to notice the abundance of life.

Discussion

Sometimes things have to die for new life to happen. We have to leave behind our childhood to become adults. Summer must give way to autumn, and autumn to winter, in order that spring may come again.

What have you left behind to be who you are now?

Once again, feel free to read this story right out of the Bible, but I recommend that you read it and tell the story in your own words... like a story.

Genesis 18:20–33

Genesis 19:1–26

There's another story in the Bible, about a guy named Lot, who is married to a woman who is named, "Lot's wife"—let's give her a name. Let's call her Sheila. They lived in a town called Sodom. There is a really bizarre story in Genesis 19 about the town. It seems that the people of Sodom were really bad and the Lord decided to destroy the place. Abraham pleaded with the Lord—if there are 50 innocent people in the town, will you destroy them with the wicked? God says, okay fine, if there are 50 innocent people I'll spare the town. In a very amusing dialogue, Abraham gradually gets the Lord to agree to spare the town even if there are as few as 10 innocent people.

But... it seems that there weren't 10 innocent people in town! So two angels urge Lot to take his wife and family members and get out because sulphur will rain down on the city and destroy it. An angel warns them to run away and NOT LOOK BACK.

Sheila looked back.

And Sheila was turned into a pillar of salt.

Bizarre story? It's worse if I tell you the parts I left out!

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But anyway... she looked back. She turned into a pillar of salt. Did it really happen? I don't know. But maybe the message is in the pillar of salt.

Maybe the message is that sometimes in life we have to leave things behind, and not look back.

What things have you left behind? Or... is there something now that you should leave behind?

Some teenagers engage in activities that they should leave behind, but this has to be on their own terms and in their own time. It's good to remember that when we are ready to change and move on to good habits, we should not look back longingly at our bad habits... we aren't likely to turn into a pillar of salt, but we might give in to the old ways!

Let's pray:

God of beginnings, God of endings, help us in all our transitions, and help us to recognize your presence in those moments of change. Thank you for this time that we have had together. Amen.

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