

IS IT WORTH IT?



TANALIAN
Bible Camp

Winter 2017 Newsletter

This summer, one of our SEND North teammates called and asked if we could make a way to get kids from their village to Tanalian Bible Camp. This village is outside of the area that we normally serve. We always desire to say "YES!" to kids who desire to spend a week learning about God's love. However, at some point the distance creates seemingly impossible challenges with flight cost and unpredictable weather. For this specific village, our option was a missionary owned plane with 3-5 seats that has no ability to fly in poor visibility for the four hour round trip flight.

How many kids need to sign up for camp from one village to make it cost effective to send a plane to pick them up? Which partnering flight organization or individual will pick them up? Will the type of plane be appropriate for the unforeseen weather challenges? Will the camper families be able to contribute financially or do we have enough scholarship funds to cover the flight? These are just a few of the logistic puzzle pieces I work with each week for camp, and I often have to ask this question, "*Is it worth it?*"

My SEND North teammates have worked for many years in this far away village. Their faithfulness and fortitude amaze me. They obediently remain in a very dark place under circumstances from which you and I might run. So when they suddenly had a group of kids interested in Bible camp, I found it was just the kind of question I couldn't say no to.

After discussing the aforementioned questions and, "*Was it worth it?*" with the team, it was with joy, trepidation, and a lot of faith that we answered yes.

Three 5th and 6th grade girls from this village signed up, but by the time of camp, there was only one girl able to come. The missionary texted me, "If there were one kid here who could most benefit from camp and have parents who are the least likely to allow their child go, this is the one."

We stepped out in faith and planned a flight that we couldn't pay for to bring one camper from a remote village who couldn't even afford \$1 of the camp fee

or the flight cost. The village missionary put out a call for financial help to their supporters. Another Alaskan village church of about 20 people heard that call and gathered the money for this young girl to experience her first week of Bible camp. She arrived at camp green and more airsick than I had ever seen a camper after a very long and bumpy flight. The thought again crept in, "*Was it worth it?*"

God had the perfect counselors picked out for this young camper who had never before experienced the kind of love and acceptance that she found at Tanalian Bible Camp. She was like a dry sponge that soaked up every bit of camp. At the end of the week, she shared with one of her counselors that she had decided that she wanted to follow Christ. How we rejoiced and what a precious moment it was to call the village missionaries and tell them, "*It was worth it!*" We were overcome by God's plan in all of these hurdles: missionaries in a challenging work, a child least likely to come to camp, a SEND North plane to make a very long flight and a little Alaskan church that provided the funds. What a picture of how God is pleased to use each of us to grow His kingdom one heart at a time.

Christy Zimmerman

Christy and her husband, Bret, are on staff with SEND North but partner as full-time team members with Tanalian Bible Camp and do ministry in Southwest Alaska.





AMAZING GRACE

I was on my way out of the chapel when I felt a tug on my arm. It was late Sunday evening, the last day of fifth and sixth grade camp, and we had just concluded our closing chapel service.

"Mark, I want you to know just how much this place means to me," a young man shared.

I paused, looking at the teary-eyed boy. Empathy filled my heart, and I sat down to listen.

"What is it about this place that means so much to you?" I asked.

He thought for a moment and then pointed at the sky and stammered, "I learned so much about..." He couldn't finish as tears welled up and spilled over.

I gave him a minute and continued to ask what he had learned about God that week. As he regained his composure, he shared

with me the truths he learned during the week: The truth of God's character, the truth of God's knowledge and love for him, the truth of his need of forgiveness and the truth that he could have a personal relationship with Jesus. I sensed he had a deeper longing in his heart. The Holy Spirit prompted me to ask another question, "Do you have a relationship with Jesus?"

"No," he said.

"Do you want one?" I asked.

"YES!" he eagerly responded.

In that moment, I witnessed a miracle. This dear young boy, recognizing his need of Jesus, prayed, confessed sin, acknowledged his need for Jesus to rescue him! He beamed and explained, "I feel so much joy!" Later that evening five more campers trusted Jesus for their salvation. Amazing grace!

When I am asked what ignites my passion

for ministry, this is it. Watching the transforming power of Jesus Christ break through the pain and shame of life and make it new is enough to make us stop in amazement at God's saving grace. But the work does not stop there. As campers leave the peace and safety of camp, many return to situations that are truly hard and broken. It is in these situations that the hope of Jesus can truly begin to transform not just one life but an entire community.

This is why I am excited to be a part of God's personal, transforming work in Southwest Alaska. As a member of the TBC team, I am blessed with many opportunities to bring this message of hope and freedom to our region. Thank you for partnering with us by praying, serving, and giving in Jesus' name.

Mark McGee

Executive Director

YOUNG LEADERS



Four years ago, Jaden Geffe came to camp for the first time even though the friend who invited him decided not to come. That year he soaked up camp and wondered what it would be like to be a counselor one day.

He took the opportunity this summer to join the all summer staff after he attended high school camp. "I was having a lot of fun, really liked the people I was around and wanted to stay," Jaden shared. "It was a good and productive use of my time."

Along with his role on support staff, Jaden took a leadership role as a counselor in training for the two youngest aged camps, being mentored by two older men in the process. Jaden said he loved teaching. He was focused on memorizing God's Word during the summer and helped his campers do the same. "It was cool seeing the kids grow in God's Word," Jaden shared.

He is carrying out part of Tanalian's vision to see young adults equipped

to teach and lead among kids from the same region of Alaska. Mark McGee observed his humble approach to work and self-sacrifice, being willing to joyfully clean toilets, wash dishes and jump into work projects around camp. "He sought to be taught and mentored, modeling amazing service work," Mark reflected. "His attitude was a big encouragement to our team."

A vision of Tanalian's is to continue expanding the support staff program with high school and college age all summer staff. "We desire to pour into them spiritually while teaching a good work ethic in an environment where people care for them," shared Mark. "We value the way they serve camp and see the value of pouring into them, helping them grow as servant leaders, following Jesus' example."

Jaden is just one example of the 25 local Alaskan youth who served on summer staff. He and many others plan to return next summer to work on staff.



THE BIBLE TRUMPS ALL THINGS

"The Bible trumps all things," is a phrase often heard from Tanalian Leadership Center Director Eric Wardell when one asks him about the program that mentors high school graduates from the villages of Southwest Alaska. The staff is deeply invested in the lives of the students and alumni because the students' spiritual well being is a priority of the program. "The Bible is the very core of helping a TLC student see life and its challenges with a biblical worldview," shared Eric.



For two hours each day, students and staff gather to study the Word of God through various teaching methods, covering the whole narrative of the Bible. "The more I teach Bible, the more I realize that learning it should not be a merely academic exercise, but something that was designed to engage the whole being," expressed Andrew Rowland, the TLC Biblical Studies Coordinator.



One way this is done is through using a scroll that runs the length of the table where students are encouraged to draw the story or write important points on it, helping them engage and focus. "A favorite method of teaching is giving the students a Bible story to learn and re-tell

in their own creative way. It's great to see what they come up with as they absorb and share the stories of God's Word," shared Andrew.

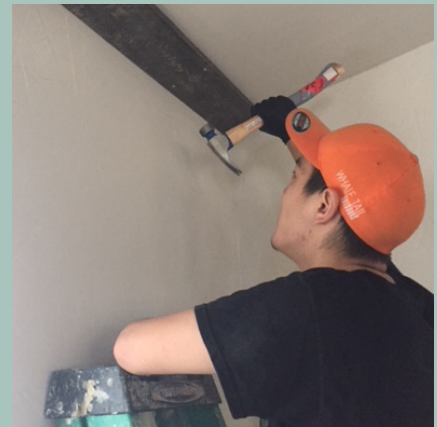
Paulina, a second year TLC student, said that recapping the story several times out loud helps make it easier to understand. Other times students will teach class, learning the scripture through studying it and then gaining the valuable skill of re-teaching it. "Historically, Alaska Native culture has been an oral culture. With that in mind, we have found that oral learning and storytelling have been effective techniques for absorbing the truths of God's word," Andrew explained.

"My favorite part of teaching Bible is just watching the gradual spiritual growth of students over time. Sometimes you can watch it happen before your eyes, other times it takes years, but the Word of God has power, and it is evident in the transformed lives of each of the students," Andrew shared.



This was Paulina's fourth summer volunteering at summer camp. She shared that as a counselor she used tools she learned at TLC to teach Bible stories to her campers. "Working at camp this year helped me grow in my relationship with God, and I am more open to learning God's Word this year." Through a mixture of grace and truth and time, Paulina is growing as she is exposed to the living Word of God in both programs, each preparing her for the other. This year, a camper from her home village chose to follow Christ. "This makes me want to be able to go home and do a Bible study with her. I think I could do that after what we learn at TLC," she shared.

Ormun, also a returning student had a chance to be a counselor at Brooks Range Bible Camp this summer and apply what he learned at TLC. He too wants to be able to share the Bible with his family and peers. He has a heart for youth and wants them to know the hope found in Jesus Christ.



One aspect Eric believes is important is the ability to apply Biblical principles through living life alongside the students. "We are often able to process every day life while they work together, asking about Bible class, or themes that are connecting with them," he explained. Eric continues to share about several students who have connected with the story of Joseph and the unfair things that have happened in their life or their family's life. "The theme of forgiveness is powerful in that story and encouraged a student to seek forgiveness in his life," Eric shared. "Sometimes we just stop work and take the time to talk, because the greater need is what God is doing in the student's heart and life."

Andrew said, "Students often come to us seeing themselves as characters caught in a tragic story. Our desire is to show them how they are actually a part of the great and victorious story that God is writing, and they get to choose how to participate in it. They can be a part of a story of hope." Eric added, "We want them to leave the program with new hope and it is an honor to be part of that process."



BABY SHARK

If you ask a 5th and 6th grade camper what they like about camp, the answer is almost always "It's fun!" Camp is a break from their boring summer. "Some of these kids just need fun as an escape, or to fill the void of a childhood they are missing," camp volunteer Casey Mast reflects. Having fun with his campers was the breakthrough in building the trust in relationship Casey desired.

One of his campers in particular started the week very aloof, disconnected from the group and seemed "too cool for school." Casey was continually in prayer, seeking wisdom as he walked this new journey of being a camp counselor.

The changing point came from singing a song called "Baby Shark" with fun, silly motions to the lyrics. "It is a hilarious song, and by the end everyone in the room was laughing," said Casey. "My entire cabin was on the ground giggling by the end of the song."

Later that night, when Casey got back to the cabin, the camper he was having a hard time connecting with, asked for a piggyback ride to the bathrooms. "He had never asked for anything, let alone something silly and somewhat childish," Casey explained. But Casey gave him one, and on the

way they sang the Baby Shark song together. He described that they made up their own lyrics, including doing silly things like bumping him into the wall or hitting tree branches, and that was the moment the camper finally started to deep belly laugh. From that moment, Casey felt they went from counselor-camper to big brother-little brother as the Spirit guided and allowed trust to be built.

"The first few days he did not at all show any signs of interest in the messages at chapel or reading the Bible," explained Casey. "Toward the end of the week he read the scriptures he liked from his own Bible, which I didn't know he had because he never brought it out of his bag to show me." Out of that change of heart he ended up going from not at all caring about the gospel to choosing to follow Christ. "I still get emotional as I remember listening to him talk to Mark McGee about how He just wants God to be his best friend," expressed Casey.

Mark got the privilege of leading this young man to Christ that night.

"God uses fun to share His love," shared Casey. "I asked God desperately for guidance, and all I got was, 'just have fun.' So I did, and God used it in a significant way."

PURSUING THE HEART

At Tanalian Bible Camp, God is surely doing what only He can do, planting hope in weary hearts. A long time ago at camp the truth that in Christ I have an anchor of hope no matter what storm I meet was planted in my heart. This summer I got to see God revealing this truth once again to downtrodden youth. What an unspeakable joy it is to be a small part of this work.

Growing up in Southwest Alaska I experienced the benefits of TBC firsthand. Attending and then volunteering at camp throughout my middle school and high school years was an incredible opportunity that challenged and encouraged my faith.

The Christ-centered community and Biblical teaching I encountered have been influential to this day in growing me into a more rooted follower of Christ. My favorite week of every year was spent in Port Alsworth surrounded by friends and a staff who are like family to me.

As a student, double majoring in Counseling and Bible at Moody Bible Institute, I wanted to dedicate myself to a ministry the summer before my senior year. This led me back to TBC last summer where I served as the Female Support Staff Mentor. I was blessed to have eight to ten high school girls to mentor every week, all former campers serving after their week of camp ended, just as I had once done. Hours spent scrubbing toilets and washing dishes together were valuable windows of opportunity in which I had conversations about what God was doing in my life and desire to do in theirs. I longed to give them a glimpse of God pursuing our hearts by my pursuing theirs.



One week in particular I felt that I was struggling to build relationships with the girls. As I was walking back to a staff cabin, I was praying that God would open doors and soften hearts. Upon entering the cabin I quickly realized that one of the girls was sharing with the others about how God was working through significant pain in her life to draw her closer to Himself. Her story of light and hope brought a much needed peace to the cabin and my own heart. Minutes prior I had been scratching my head trying to figure out a new way to connect with the girls, yet the Lord was teaching me a valuable lesson. I was learning to completely depend upon Him to do a work only He can do, softening hearts, including mine.

Spending my summer at camp allowed me to catch the vision of what God is accomplishing through TBC. I can't wait to return after I graduate and be an active member of God's family in Southwest Alaska. Although I do not know my exact role in this work, I can't help but wonder what incredible things God has in store for Southwest Alaska.

Hope Swanson