WHAT I DID LAST SUMMER

Kara Lassen Oliver


MAKING THE CONNECTION
“In many parts of the United States, summer breaks from school are becoming shorter and shorter. School systems are switching to year-round or adjusted academic calendars. Students are more likely to get summer jobs or to attend summer school. With the shorter summer and increased demands on their time, the opportunity for camps, trips, and free time is getting smaller and smaller.

“But an excitement and anticipation for the summer months remains. Sleeping in, bathing suits, and longer days have not yet lost their siren song of fun and freedom.

“Youth return from summer break not only with darker skin and maybe some extra inches of height but also with stories to tell—often stories about experiences that were profound and life-changing. We should settle in with a cup of coffee or soda and listen to all the details, looking for the fingerprints of God, seeing growth in Christ, and listening for the promptings of the Holy Spirit.” —Kara

MEET THE WRITER
The summers of my youth are a blur of swimming, bike riding, and youth trips—freedom. As a parent of a fourteen-year-old and an eight-year-old, I struggle to create the same kind of freedom in the lives of my own kids, instead of scheduling every moment of their summer with camps and opportunities. I look forward to lazy days with books rather than video games, dance parties rather than headphones, and conversation rather than carpool. Read more about Kara at “Writing the Journey” (http://oliverkml.wordpress.com).

STUFF YOU WILL NEED
- copies of Psalm 27 on 8 ½ x 11-inch sheets of paper
- colored pens or pencils
- (optional) *Oh, the Places You’ll Go*, by Dr. Seuss; Random House, 1990 (http://www.amazon.com/Oh-The-Places-Youll-Go/dp/0679805273)
PLUGGED IN

+ “I Saw What I Saw” ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lt_WpluguwE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lt_WpluguwE)) — Sara Groves wrote this song after her mission experience in Rwanda.


+ Search “what I did over summer break worksheet” in Google images. Find some great journal prompts, images, and forms for encouraging youth to remember and record the memorable people, events, and aha! moments from the summer.

CHECKING IN
Before the group arrives, spend some time reading over a list of their names, seeing each person’s face in your mind and remembering specific joys and concerns that you are aware of. You may want to spend some time in silence, letting go of the distractions of your own busy life. Offer God your worries and concerns so that you can be fully present to the group.

As group members arrive, invite them to sit in a circle or around a table.

Say: “Sometimes people talk about the seasons of life. Seasons of life are different from seasons of the year because they don’t follow a predictable pattern. While spring is typically March through May or June, a season of sadness or a season of celebration cannot be assigned to a certain month or time of year. What, do you imagine, are some seasons of life?”

Invite the group to brainstorm and to come up with a list of the seasons of life. You may want to help by offering examples, such as seasons of joy, grief, change, waiting, love, anger.

Then go around the circle, and invite each person in turn to name the season he or she is living in today. Explain that it could change tomorrow.

[Optional: Read the book Oh, the Places You’ll Go, by Dr. Seuss. It’s a fairly long read, but it illustrates so profoundly what it means to move through the stages and seasons of life, especially for youth who are about to graduate.]

Ask a volunteer to close your “Checking In” time with a word of prayer.

EXPLORING THE WORD
Scripture: Psalm 27

Before you begin the activity, ask group members to pair up. Give people about three minutes to tell their partners what they did last summer. It may take some time to remember—What was the best trip? the most boring time? With whom did you spend the summer? Where did you go?

Then give each person a copy of Psalm 27 and a variety of colored pens or pencils.
Explain to the group that they will be reading the psalm several times, looking for different insights each time.

First, read the Psalm aloud and ask group members to read along with you silently.

Second, explain that you will read the Psalm aloud again. During the reading, they are to select one of the colored pens and to underline the words, phrases, or lines that remind them of what they did last summer. Allow some time after the reading for them to finish.

Then ask group members to pair up again. (They may choose the same or a different partner.) Give them a few minutes to explain to their partners why they underlined certain words or phrases in the psalm.

Third, ask group members to turn their paper over and to make a list of some of the things they know they will be doing or want to do this summer.

Then read aloud Psalm 27 a third time. Ask people to circle the words or phrases that describe how they want to live this summer. What do they want to learn? How do they want to interact with people? What are their hopes or fears? Allow time after the reading for them to finish.

Finally, have people turn their paper over again and write a prayer or letter about their hopes for the summer.

**SHARING IN PRAYER**
To close the session, invite group members to experience a soaking prayer. This is a time to soak in the love and peace of God as they would soak in the sun of summer.

Have people find a place in the room where they can lie flat on the floor. Ask them to close their eyes and to image themselves lying on a beach or by the pool, floating in a pool or out in the ocean, even lying on a warm sidewalk.

Once everyone seems still and settled, ask them to imagine a clear sky, sunshine, and the warmth of the sun reaching out to them: the sun on their face, warmth on their arms and legs. Encourage them to let the warmth soak in.

After a few moments, ask them to imagine that the light and warmth are the love of God, which is consistent, comfortable, and warm. The warmth is relaxing, but it also gives them energy and strength.

After several minutes, close by reading aloud Psalm 36:9–10 (CEB):

“Within you is the spring of life.
In your light, we see light.
Extend your faithful love
to those who know you;
extend your righteousness
to those whose heart is right.
Amen.”
TAKING IT FURTHER

• Offer group members the option of giving you their prayers or letters. Explain that you will return them at the end of the summer as a way of checking in and giving them a chance to review their hopes for the summer.

• If group members enjoyed the soaking prayer, invite them to continue this prayer practice (http://alivenow.upperroom.org/2012/08/06/soaking-prayer/).

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