

Christian Wilderness Ministry

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Why Minister through a Wilderness Program?

Jesus spent time in the wilderness to help discover God's purpose in his life and to prepare himself for ministry. During this time Jesus was tested physically and spiritually; and the Father ministered to him. (Luke 4:1-15)

Through a wilderness ministry, followers of Christ and unbelievers can discover God's purpose in their life and how to "walk in Christ" as they serve him. While hiking and living in the wilderness, individuals and groups will be tested physically and spiritually. This provides opportunities for God to speak and minister to individuals through relationships with others, the creation, His Spirit, and His Word.

The skills and lessons learned by experiencing the natural wilderness will help participants to live a more rewarding life in their everyday "wilderness" experiences back home.

Elements Found in a Wilderness Ministry

- Exposes people to "the creation" and their creation by God
- Teaches people to understand, respect, and responsibly live in the wilderness environment
- Allows a person to examine the basics of their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual life
- Allows a group, a body of people, to experience and understand each others lives as separate individuals and as a connected body
- Develops a sense of community versus isolation; relationships are evaluated in the wilderness and lessons applied to relationships at home
- Stresses cooperation versus competition; life in the back-country demands dependence on others and a servant's heart
- An atmosphere of relaxation is promoted versus the rush of everyday living; this allows a person the opportunity to "listen" to themselves, others, the creation, and God
- Provides an element of "danger," insecurity, which develops a feeling of trust and confidence in oneself, others, and God

Developing a Christian Wilderness Ministry

Before your church and/or association begins a wilderness ministry you must carefully consider your insurance coverage. Contact your church's/association's insurance company to discover if a church sponsored hiking/backpacking outing is covered by your policy. If not, determine how much it will cost to obtain additional coverage.

1. An experienced and trained steering committee should be enlisted to develop and guide the ministry.
2. Determine the type and scope of your ministry; day hikes, campground camping, backpacking trips, weekend trips, expedition trips, target group, church or public participants, etc.

3. Develop a ministry proposal that will include the following items:

- Purpose
- Ministry description/areas of operation
- Ministry guidelines
- Wilderness and Christian curriculum
- Staff training and selection
- Ministry finances
- Equipment/supplies/food
- Participant requirements
- Emergency and safety procedures
- Evaluation

4. Secure the approval of your church/association for the wilderness program.

5. Obtain the necessary permits from the appropriate governmental agencies. Some areas require a special commercial use permit; some, a regular back-country permit, and some hiking areas require no permit at all.

6. Publicize wilderness ministry opportunities: church/associational newsletter, youth rallies, speaking to different groups, slide shows, promotional flyers, etc.

7. Train staff and refine the program through a training trip.

8. Send registered participants ministry information and a trip preparation list; what to bring, what not to bring, schedule, guidelines, covenant, how to prepare physically and spiritually, etc.

9. Ensure that the ministry participants are using quality equipment. Having the proper equipment makes the difference between having a great time or a miserable time.

10. Purchase of expendable supplies and food items: fuel, first-aid supplies, cleaning materials, toilet paper, etc.

11. Ministry operation.

12. Ministry evaluation and reports.

13. Follow-up on personal ministry needs.

14. Plan and make adjustments for next year's program.

Adapted from an article by Steve Hughes in the 1993 National Resort Ministries Conference notebook. Used by permission.