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Best winter retreat ever! I had so much fun that nothing could possibly compare. I wish I could say that was this weekend but that wouldn't be honest of me. For sure, many can say that and completely mean it as it really was a good retreat. The reason will become clear, and you may even find it foreshadowed before I come out with it. From the beginning:

Friday

6PM: Arrived shortly before this time, late for the 5:45 call time. I thought I was ready, but of course remembered a few more things before I left. At least I did remember everything. In the past I have been left with no pillow, no deodorant, or similar mishaps. Was given a gift bag at the meeting containing essentials- sugar, water, t-shirt, hand-warmers... The latter was most likely due to last year's bitter cold retreat- something that was blessedly not repeated this year, at least for this group (high school suffered just a couple of weekends ago). Oh, anyone for some gum? I got a box, but I don't chew it. Just send me a self-addressed, stamped envelope and I will ship it off. ☐ Meeting ended, we took our posts for check-in which began at 6:15. I was a greeter by the boy's area. For awhile I was a little nervous as I only had two arrivals for my "cabin" (room) while others had four or five, but I needn't have worried- in the end every camper (retreater?) of mine showed up- others weren't so lucky. I think about ten boys failed to show up- the fairer section fared about the same.

7PM: Check-in starts to die down. Did I mention all of my campers showed up? Actually, I did lose one. There are two mentally disabled 4th-graders at my church and their dads (who stayed with them) wanted to be in the same cabin. While changing cabin assignments was generally not allowed, we made an exception for them. In fact, neither of them wound up in their original cabin as ours were pretty full, but in one that had lost two boys who didn't make it. Anyway, throughout this time, after letting them drop off their things, we sent them down to watch [Jonah](#) until the arrivals trickled down. Jonah would be the theme of the retreat. At about 7:25, the last of us headed to the movie area where the intro was made and we were sent off to start the first big game of the weekend.

8PM: My assignment- auditor. I stood by an opposing team's drop-off bin, where the kids would drop off all their treasures. Oh? I never mentioned the teams? Well, there are four teams, following the theme from summer camp which was a medical theme this year. I was a Mr. Yuk over the summer but this time was a Red Cross. The cabins were actually given names. Do you remember when [Sly](#) mouthed "You're the disease- I'm the cure" (paraphrased) in a movie 20ish years ago? Well, the boys were the diseases with cabin names like H1N1, TB, and Mad Cow Disease and the girls were the cures (Neosporin, Aspirin, etc.). My cabin was SARS. So back to the game, auditors made sure the kids were following the rules. This may be church, but you know some kids- suddenly forgetful of the rules when it could gain an advantage if you know what I mean. Here's what the game was- in pairs, the kids would link up (hold hands or arms) and search for little plastic ducks and reflectors strewn all over the church. When they found one, they had to get to their team bin. Throughout this, there were over a dozen leaders going after the kids with dodge-balls in hand trying to "infect" them. That may sound like a lot of leaders, but we're talking about 150 kids! If

infected, they had to drop whatever they might have been holding and hightail it to the medic to be “cured.” There were a few hundred of these things strewn about so the game lasted for awhile.

9PM: Pizza! Well, maybe I should have left that exclamation point off- we’re talking Papa John’s here. If you’re not familiar with them, think mass pizza chains in the style of Pizza Hut or Domino’s and you will know what I’m talking about. We chugged down pizza and pop and got ready for the first session, which started shortly after 9:45 with an upfront game followed by worship. What is an upfront game? Well, one camper (sometimes two) from each team was called up to play a silly or disgusting game- pure fun, though not always for the contestants... Tonight was licking names off of a tray. The catch? Part of what was used in the writing was sardines- eww. That’s apparently what the contestants thought too as none of them accomplished much in the allotted time. Then worship began with singing.

10PM: The session continued. Four worship songs later, Dr. John came out to teach (medical theme remember). You know how busy doctors get, so Drs. Brian and Steve would round out the retreat the next day. Starting in Jonah, we traversed chapters one and two alongside Jonah, teaching the kids about consequences of trying to ignore God and how God always pursues His children. After the lesson we broke off into our cabins. We were running late, so we kept the large group of ten kids and two leaders together and discussed the lesson, including a reading from Psalm 139:

*7 Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!*

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

*9 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*

*10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.*

*11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"*

*12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.*

11PM: Set up beds, get ready, and lights out. Another leader, the game leader of the week joined us- his son was in our cabin. He and I, the "old guys," naturally brought air mattresses to go with our sleeping bags... A little chaotic as expected, but by 20 minutes after lights-out time we finally got the boys laying in bed if not asleep yet. Someone came in with a ladder to unscrew the emergency light bulbs- you know, one of those lights that stays on 24/7 even if the room switches are turned off. This still left a flashing blue light from the router mounted in the ceiling unfortunately. I hope it didn't keep anyone awake. I got this bright idea that I would just leave my contacts in all night since they are extended wear after all. Up to this point I had done naps safely, so I figured why not? I had drops to put in my eyes in the morning.

Midnight: Finally asleep, or at least sometime before the next hour.

Saturday

Midnight-7AM: Z-z-z-z-wake up-z-z-z-z-wake up-z-z-z-z-you get
the picture-z-z-z-z

(to be continued)