

POST-SUMMER

Processing Guidebook

for Summer Staff



30+ YEARS OF CHRIST-CENTERED MISSION TRIPS

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A note from the author

Hello alumni summer staff! Whether it has been a few days or years since you wrapped up your most recent summer with YouthWorks, I imagine you are still processing things that you experienced. After each of my summer experiences, my processing and reflecting has been different. Each of my six YouthWorks summer was marked with growth, development and change - but some years it took longer than others for me to identify that growth.

Sometimes my processing was joyful! Filled with wonderful summer memories, my reflection was an explosion of personal growth and Yea Gods. Other years, my processing was painful. I felt like the walking wounded with muted emotions and a distance between myself and God I couldn't seem to cross.

Over time I have realized that I truly need both types of processing. In the joy and in the pain, my YouthWorks summer experiences have changed me forever. Because of what I've been able to reflect on, I am so much more aware of who I am as God's child and my role in his Kingdom work. Sharing this feels vulnerable - this guidebook is raw and honest, including passages from my personal journals as real-time snapshots of my processing.

This guidebook is divided into two main sections: "When Processing Your Summer Feels Painful," and "When Processing Your Summer Feels Joyful." Feelings like joy and pain exist on a spectrum, not as a dichotomy. By covering the two extremes on this spectrum, I hope to, by default, touch on the in-between emotions you might be feeling, as well.



Above all, this guidebook is meant to encourage you as you seek to recognize the movements of God through your summer story. I included some activities and questions that have helped me in my own processing with the hope that they may seem helpful to you. Please feel free to adapt the activities in any way to make them more suitable to where you are in your processing journey.

We would love to hear how you are processing your summer, whether it's in joy, pain or somewhere in between. You can share stories, pictures and anything else you'd like to share at www.youthworks.com/share.

Blessings,
Rachel

- CHAPTER 1 -

When Processing Your Summer Feels Painful

I have tried again and again to process my summer; and for some reason I have been keeping my experience at an arm's length. Maybe tonight I will be able to sit and put some thoughts behind the emotions I am feeling. More than others, this summer was so hard. However, in so many ways, it was also good. There were not a lot of spiritual breakthroughs for me. No big, overwhelming "ah-ha" moments. Many days I felt like I was just going through the motions. The staff transitions were awful. The staff conflict was almost worse. How can I call this summer good?

-MY PERSONAL JOURNAL, AUGUST 14, 2017

One of my YouthWorks summer was downright difficult. At the end of the summer, I wanted nothing more than to jump right back into "regular" life. I hated when people asked me about my summer. Tears were uncomfortably close whenever I was asked to share my experience. I tried again and again to process my summer on my own and I just could not do it. I felt out of sync with the Lord.

During one group Bible Study, everyone went around the circle answering the question, "What recent thing in your life has brought you joy?" I simply sat there, unable to think of anything to contribute to the conversation.

This was very out of character for me! I felt numb, and desperately wanted to feel like myself again, with joyful words on my lips. Fortunately, I had people in my life who pressed me to share about my summer experience and it was during those conversations when I didn't want to talk, but I did anyway, that I realized some things.

One friend shared a Brené Brown quote with me: "We cannot selectively numb emotions. When we numb the painful emotions, we also numb the positive emotions." (*The Gifts of Imperfection*) This is exactly what I was doing! I was numbing my painful memories from my summer and subsequently numbing the positive memories, too. Through conversations with friends and this quote, I realized that I needed to lean into my pain a little. I needed to talk about my summer when I didn't want to. And I needed to let my tears fall, instead of holding them back.

UNCOVER THE HEART OF THE MATTER.

I needed to get to the root of my pain. One of the ways to do that was by answering the question, “Why was this summer so difficult for me?” The answer did not come easily to me. Through much prayer and reflection, I figured it out. For me, my pain was connected to a lie of inadequacy. I cared so much about what others thought of me. I wanted to be perfect, to never drop the ball, to create only amazing experiences for other people. And I believed the lie that my value was determined by other people’s opinion of how well I did those things. I let other people’s expectations become what mattered most to me.

Ask yourself: What is my pain really about? What is beneath the surface of these emotions? Am I believing any lies about myself or other people? Record your answers here:

This lie was a burden I carried well beyond the summer. Through my time of prayer and reflection, I realized it was time to let go of the lie and embrace God’s truth. In God’s kingdom, there are no performance reviews or evaluations. There is only endless grace and abundant love. I truly am enough, because God is enough. God’s Word contains holy truths about who I am as God’s child.

CHECK OUT SCRIPTURE.

The best way to counteract lies is to replace them with God’s truth found in Scripture. One way to find truths that relate to your situation is to do a quick Google search. For example, I searched “verses to remind me I am enough.” Whenever searching for Scripture in this way, take time to read the verses before and after the passage, so you can understand the context. Write down truths from the Bible that apply to your situation. Pray these words over your own situation.

TALK ABOUT IT.

Talking about my summer was the last thing I wanted to do in the days and months after it ended. However, talking with trusted friends turned out to be incredibly helpful. These friends offered me nonjudgmental feedback and asked me difficult questions I was unable to ask myself. At the time, sharing my true thoughts and emotions felt vulnerable - in a way that scared me! In the end though, these conversations started the helpful reflection process *and* deepened our friendships.

List three or four trusted people who will ask you honest (and perhaps difficult!) questions about your summer:

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

CULTIVATE GRATITUDE.

Like the Brené Brown quote implied, once I leaned into my pain - and replaced lies with truth! - I was able to also lean into the joy that had been there all along. One day I made a list. I wrote down every good and joyful memory from the summer I could think of.

- Dance party on the last day of programming with my favorite community kids.
- Singing with the community member experiencing homelessness in the housing site parking lot after Friday morning send-off.
- A conversation with my favorite Service Partner - her husband has terminal cancer, but she expressed such great faith that no matter what, God is in control of the situation and all will be well.
- When an Adult Leader intentionally sought me out to share a word of encouragement and prayer - he had no idea how much I needed that.
- Getting to be The Awesome Game Commissioner on a site.
- Random late-night kitchen cleanups with the team, singing, talking and laughing together.
- The two teenage girls who wrote a beautiful song and sang it for everyone at The Gathering. Teenagers are incredible.
- Long car rides for Friday shopping full of life-giving conversations. We talked about life, vocation, purpose, God, communities, our strengths and our struggles.

The original list, written in my journal on September 13, 2017, is actually a lot longer than what you see here. These bullet points can never contain the depth of significance these memories hold for me. These were holy moments - times I stepped out of my comfort zone, times when I saw the way someone else experienced God and times when I was entrusted with others' stories. These memories represent a small picture of God's kingdom and a glimpse into the authentic Biblical community I experienced amidst a difficult summer.

A CHALLENGE.

Write a list of good things that happened to you this summer. Having trouble getting started? Think about a time when you laughed the hardest, when you had a conversation that stuck with you or when you simply had fun.

GIVE THANKS.

The Apostle Paul concluded his first letter to the Thessalonians with these words:

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus... May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

- 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18, 23-24

God is truly faithful. God can redeem anything. Becoming like Jesus through sanctification is not always a fun process. However, think about the person you used to be compared to the person you are now. Think about how you have grown and changed. God is truly faithful.

This is a poem I wrote in November of 2017, months after my difficult summer ended. In many ways, this poem represents the conclusion of my experience processing my summer. Through my pain, God was changing me and making me more like Jesus. Yea God! I am forever grateful for the summer experience that brought me to this place. God is truly faithful.

“ I was once all alone living in a great darkness.
My deeds, though moral, were often cold and heartless.
I thought I was right, but my thoughts were mistaken.
My soul so thirsty, almost anything I would take-in
to fill the missing piece that only you could fit.
Those things were poor substitutes, that I can admit.

I looked to the world to find my life's purpose
Nothing I did ever went past the surface.
I knew in my heart who I was created to be
My mind was the roadblock, preventing me to see
that my desires were deceitful and my thinking not right.
But then, as the saying goes, at last I saw the light.

This light revealed all of my darkest places
but did it in a way that was loving and gracious.
With my heart and my mind both on the same page,
I am overcome with your Spirit, its fruit as my gauge
of how far I am from that person in my past.
I was meant to be your daughter, I know now at last.

Even though the war is won, the battle isn't over.
My mind can be a traitor, for the sake of full disclosure.
The process of renewal requires help in every minute.
My input equals output, to that I will submit
that only through connection to the source of life I'll know
how to be made new each day, this light my life will show.

”

A CHALLENGE.

For me, writing has always been a type of cathartic release. Writing journal entries and poetry - and reading them over afterwards - helps me sort through my thoughts and emotions. Writing also is a creative outlet I can use to express my thanks to God. The writers of the Psalms in the Bible must have felt the same way. They are honest expressions of each writer's thoughts and emotions, but the Psalms also include some incredible truths.

Yea God! God did big things in you and through you this summer! Write a prayer, song or poem thanking God for these things. *If you need some ideas to get you started, try finishing these sentences: God you are... In my life you have... Help me to... I struggle with... I trust that you are... I praise you for...*

- CHAPTER 2 -

When Processing Your Summer Feels Joyful

The most powerful part of last summer happened on our last night of programming. On that last day, I said goodbye to many people. I never thought it would be so hard to say goodbye. Many tears were shed in the process. Immediately following these emotional goodbyes, we had to do The Gathering.

As tradition has it, every Thursday night was the footwashing service. This time was always moving for the participants but not often for the staff, because we do this every week. This week was the exception. After washing Adult Leaders' feet, I felt compelled to take up another bucket and wash my teammates' feet as well. This act of service made my heart so full of love for these people and the work they had put forth this summer. It was as though something clicked and I finally understood why it was important to serve.

After footwashing, we transitioned to our team meeting. I was the last person to join the meeting and walked into the room to see my team with a bin of water on the floor, waiting to wash my feet. As they did, I felt loved, valued, served and appreciated more than I ever had before in my life. I felt the love of my Father shown through the servant actions of these people who were already so near and dear to my heart. In some ways, I still have a hard time articulating what this experience meant to me, let alone this entire summer. God was so good and so faithful throughout this whole summer. To him be the glory!

-MY PERSONAL JOURNAL, FEBRUARY 9, 2014

My first YouthWorks summer was a "mountaintop" experience for me. Everything was amazing! Of course, my summer contained incredibly difficult moments, but I was able to identify a greater purpose through the hardships. Every late night, stressful moment and tear shed all felt completely worth it.

Upon returning home, I could immediately rattle off a laundry list of ways I saw God that summer and ways that I had grown personally. Leaving Exit RAMP I felt a flurry of emotions. I felt sad to leave an amazing community I had come to love deeply. I felt blown away by God's faithfulness. I felt inspired to do really be things for the kingdom of God. My life had truly been changed.

My transition back home was tough. It was difficult to have such a transformative experience, then abruptly return to my old context. The people in my life didn't understand what I had experienced that summer. While the transition was tough, it was also good. It was good for me to learn to articulate what I had experienced in new ways to new people. It was good for me to wrestle with my feelings of transition. In the end, it didn't take long for me to feel settled. My internal feelings were at sync with my external environment and looking back on my experience brought only an abundance of joy.

As you process through your summer, consider how what you experienced can move you towards new and different things - whether you are back in a familiar context or in a new one.

REMEMBER.

It often takes some time and intentionality to identify the movements of God in your life. God's movements can be found in small holy moments that don't seem all that special when you're in them, but contain deep significance upon reflection.

I spent time intentionally reflecting on my YouthWorks summer today. I felt overwhelmed by how incredible the experience really was. I have of course reflected on this summer before now, but it was as if today is the first time I have fully comprehended the impact this has had on my life and just how my character has been shaped since then. Before this point my thoughts on the summer were mostly nostalgic. It was a novel experience, I met some cool people and lived in an interesting place for the summer. Now I am thinking about the way God moved in my heart and character. Service was a powerful way for me to get from Point A to Point B spiritually. It was transformative experience to take on the attributes of Christ and live out my faith in a real and applied way. The results are almost tangible.

-MY PERSONAL JOURNAL, FEBRUARY 9, 2014

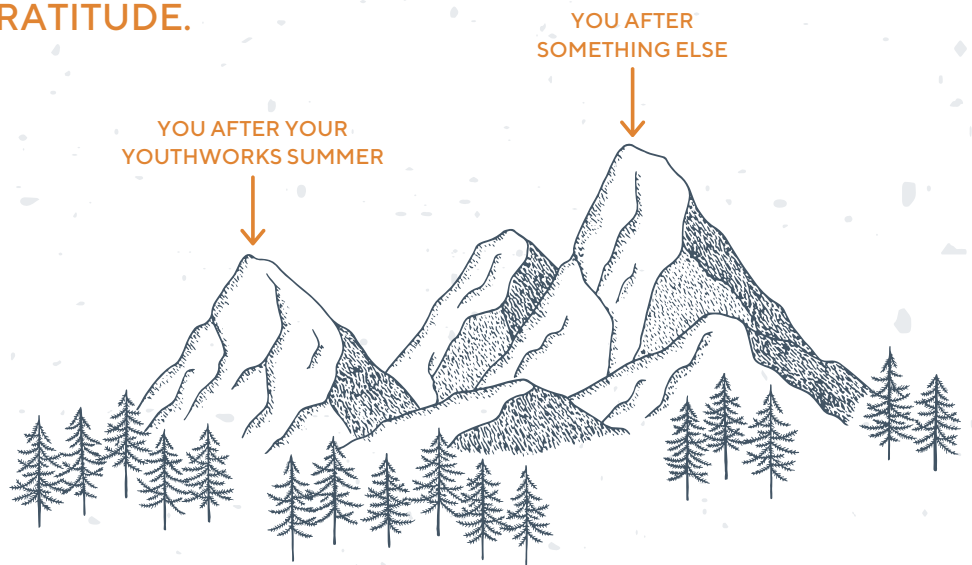
Before you know it, your summer experience will be a distant memory. It would be a shame to move past this event too quickly without pausing to identify the things God did in and through you this summer. It might be helpful to write some things down. This way you can continue to process and look back on your reflections months and years from now to remember the movements of God in your YouthWorks summer.

Here are some questions to get your gears moving:

- What was your favorite summer memory?
- What gave you joy this summer?
- Who are some people from this summer who stand out in your memory?
- What did you learn about other people?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What do you miss the most?
- Did this summer inspire any new passions for you?

KEEP AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE.

When you have a mountaintop moment, it's easy to assume everything will be downhill from here. This shouldn't be the case! Mountains are typically found in a range with lots of other mountains. This mountaintop moment can and should be your base to reach other, even higher mountaintops.



For a few years, I consistently kept a gratitude journal. It was very simple, but effective in helping me look for small snapshots of God's goodness each day. Before bed, I would write down the date and fill out one line with what I was grateful for that day.

1/18/15 - Sunshine, coffee, time to spend in the Word, snow tubing, church, community, bagels

1/26/15 - God's hilarity in answering prayers, my goofy roommates, feeling care for in the little things

2/1/15 - Honesty regarding difficult situations, family support and love, God hears prayers, God promises hope

11/19/1 - Good weekend at the youth retreat, laughing until my sides hurt about rock jokes, Midwest Mountaineering Expo, volunteering at children's church

I love this quote from Henri Nouwen, "Every time we decide to be grateful it will be easier to see new things to be grateful for. Gratitude begets gratitude, just as love begets love." (*Life of the Beloved*) I have found this to be so true in my life. You asked students all summer to look for ways God is moving and acknowledge gratitude for others. Now you can carry on these practices yourself, keeping an eye out for reasons to say Yea God or give someone Mad Props.

A CHALLENGE.

For ten days, keep a gratitude journal. It doesn't need to be fancy or extensive. Just write down things you're grateful for each day.

DAY 1: _____

DAY 2: _____

DAY 3: _____

DAY 4: _____

DAY 5: _____

DAY 6: _____

DAY 7: _____

DAY 8: _____

DAY 9: _____

DAY 10: _____

STAY CONNECTED.

You probably met some incredible people during your YouthWorks summer who impacted you, either in big ways or small. It could be a meaningful experience for you and them to reconnect! Let those people know the impact they had on your life. Even a simple text message could go a long way.

- Who do you want to keep in touch with? _____, _____, _____
- How will you reach out to them? (Circle one.)
CALL TEXT EMAIL SOCIAL MEDIA OTHER: _____
- What do you want to express to these people?

PRAY.

One way to stay connected to your summer experience is through prayer. In many of his letters to the early church, the Apostle Paul let the people he was writing to know that he was praying for them. You can do the same. Take a week to intentionally pray for your YouthWorks community. Here are some prompts to get you started, but feel free to adapt them however you like.

SUNDAY	Thank God for the things that happened this summer.
MONDAY	Pick one community member to pray for. Share with this person you are praying for them!
TUESDAY	Pray for your housing site(s). Pray for the ministry that happens there.
WEDNESDAY	Pray for a Service Partner – either an individual or an organization. Pray for their ministry in the community.
THURSDAY	Think about the strengths of the community. Praise God for them.
FRIDAY	Think about the struggles this community faces. Pray for justice, mercy and restoration of brokenness.
SATURDAY	Lift up specific prayer requests in this community.

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul wrote that he loved to visit the believers in Rome and experience mutual encouragement of each other's faith (Romans 1:11-12). You might long to return to your summer community, and, like Paul, experience mutual encouragement from each other's faith. While this is a possibility for some of us, for others it is not. No matter what, we can follow Paul's example and constantly life each other up in prayer.

KEEP UP SPIRITUAL PRACTICES.

My favorite place to do devotions during a YouthWorks summer is in Wanblee, SD. I love how the mornings here are hot, but once you move into the shade it is cool and enjoyable. I love sitting next to the prairie and looking at the cloudless blue sky and the tall grasses sprinkled with wildflowers. This setting is a great way to start my day focusing on the goodness of God and to center myself on his word. Today's word comes from Ephesians 4. The second half of the chapter calls for Christ-followers to be imitators of God and to put-off old ways of living and to be "made new in the attitude of your mind". My prayer for today: Jesus, make me new each day. Change me and make me to be more like you. When I look at creation, help me to remember you, my loving creator who creatively crafted and sustains this beauty.

– MY PERSONAL JOURNAL, JULY 23, 2018

For me, it was relatively easy to take time for daily devotions during a YouthWorks summer. It's literally built into the daily schedule! Because mornings at YouthWorks are always so busy, I would revel in the time to sit and be quiet with God. I always tried to do my devotions outside. Sitting in a beautiful setting always helped to connect me to the Lord.

Truthfully, it's difficult for me to take time for daily devotions in my every day life. My mornings now are not nearly as busy as they were during the YouthWorks summer, but I find it difficult to pause and spend time with God.

My YouthWorks summer taught me so much about the spiritual practices of prayer and Scripture reading. In my post-summer processing, it was helpful to establish a new daily rhythm that included these foundational disciplines.

Practical Tips for Reading the Bible

- Find a Bible reading plan. For me, it's helpful to have a plan for what I'll read each day.
- Listen to the Bible. Apps like Bible Gateway and YouVersion have audio options. Most days I listen to a Scripture passage on my drive to work.
- Read and study the Bible with other people. This practice provides accountability and new perspectives.
- Read whole books of the Bible in one sitting. Set aside a chunk of time in your day to do this.
- The YouVersion app has a "streak" feature that keeps track of how many days in a row you open and use the app. Set yourself a goal to read the Bible for a set number of days. Then try to one up yourself and beat your previous streak!

- CHAPTER 3 -

What's Next?!

No matter your summer experience, God used the gift of your summer to work both in you and through you. It would be a shame if your summer was the “big event,” when you finally got to live out your faith. Instead, look out for ways to live into how God is working every day. Look for ways to love and serve those God puts in your path. Let your summer be a launchpad that moves you into new and deeper experiences and relationships. Think of all the new skills you have because of your YouthWorks summer that can be used to help others (and yourself!) listen, learn and serve.

At YouthWorks we believe that mission trips have the power to change perspectives, shape passions, expose possibilities and inspire pursuits. These experiences are not just for teenagers and Adult Leaders; they are for you, as well! Intentionally think about how your perspectives have been changed, your passions shaped, what possibilities have been exposed and the pursuits you want to inspire, even if your summer was difficult.

Remember, God’s ultimate mission for your life is bigger than one summer of leading mission trips. How can you continue to make an impact for God’s kingdom today? This month? This year? I hope that you, with an open heart, continue to ask God, “What’s next?”