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June 17, 2011

Gardner-Webb Welcomes Crossroads Worldwide for its 16th Consecutive Year of Summer Camp Ministries

When Clayton King ('95) hosted his first summer camp at Gardner-Webb as a GWU senior in 1995, he had no idea he would become president and founder of a worldwide ministry. He had no clue that a decade and a half later, he would have shared the Gospel with more than 40,000 students through his Crossroads Worldwide summer camps. He only knew that his vision for an evangelistic camp ministry was a true calling, and he trusted God for the rest.

“At 15, when I went to my first weeklong summer camp, I encountered the gospel and I felt that God had unfolded this lifelong vision for me to do a summer camp ministry,” King says. But fast-forward to this summer, and King is gearing up for his 16th consecutive summer of Crossroads camp at Gardner-Webb, where he and his staff will encourage middle and high school students to allow the power of Christ’s grace to change their lives.

Crossroads Worldwide is a non-profit organization based out of Boiling Springs that promotes evangelism and discipleship around the globe through a variety of ministries, mission trips, and mentoring networks. But its primary ministry is Crossroads summer camps, which more than 3,600 students will attend this summer alone. The emphases of Crossroads camps are sound biblical teaching and discipleship. “We’re a simple ministry,” King insists. “We preach the gospel. We teach the Word. We talk about practical issues that students deal with. We want them not only to hear the gospel and be saved, but we want them to grow deeper in their relationships with Christ as disciples.”

Every summer, the camps revolve around a theme—this summer’s theme is “God’s Kingdom”—and students enjoy nightly teaching in a corporate worship service centered on that theme. “The Kingdom is where God rules,” says Crossroads Ministry Director, Matt Orth. “He rules in Heaven, but He also rules in the hearts of believers. His Kingdom is here, among us, but it is also coming. We want to teach the students that the rule of Jesus Christ is worth submitting to and living in, and that wherever they go, the Kingdom goes. So we want them to reorder their lives under the gracious rule of Jesus Christ, their true King, and not under the rule of materialism, or selfishness, or lack of self control, or whatever else they might submit to.”

Students also attend breakout workshops that focus on explicating and applying that central theme to their lives. A student might attend a workshop, for example, on how to better read the Bible, tracing some passages about God’s Kingdom and discussing how to apply those practically.

But if you think the camp sounds too tame for teenagers' voracious energy and appetite for action, you're mistaken. Campers enjoy a host of afternoon activities that promote community and relationships—everything from dodgeball and Ultimate Frisbee, to rock climbing at Crowder's Mountain, to collaborative music recording sessions in Crossroads' Jam Studio.

But while having a great time is central to the Crossroads experience, it's not the ultimate purpose. "Camping ministry, at its core, is designed to put students in an environment that is different than their home environment, and give them an opportunity to listen to things that really matter," Orth explains. "It's tough to listen with all the familiarity of the home environment, and all the competing pressures. But the Christian camp is a place of retreat, an opportunity to hear the truths that really matter, and a chance to make memories."

"Plus, each of us on the leadership staff have made significant life decisions and have been changed at a camping conference experience," adds Justin Brock, Crossroads missions director. "That's why camp ministry is close to our hearts, because we know that this isn't just kids having fun. This experience could change their lives forever."