



# Camp at Home

100 PRACTICAL IDEAS  
FOR FAMILIES

by Susan Yates

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# Camp at Home

My recent book, [Cousin Camp](#), describes the necessary principles to build strong families and to create a faith-filled family legacy. Included in this book are complete plans for hosting a Cousins Camp—or really any type of family reunion, or a camp for your neighbors or your church community.

John and I have been married for over 50 years; we have five children who are grown and married, and 21 grandchildren. For the past 11 summers, we've hosted an annual Cousin Camp for those of our grandchildren who are at least four years old. Over the years we've made lots of mistakes, shed tears, laughed uproariously, thrown out plans, separated quarreling kids, cheered when kindness overcame selfishness, and fallen into bed exhausted—but, above all, we've had a blast. Seeing two girl cousins who used to fight like cats now snuggling on our bedroom floor in sleeping bags, giggling together, makes it all worth it.

John and I have had a very simple vision for our family. We long for each member to love the Lord with all their heart, mind, and soul, and to love and care for each other (see Matthew 22:37–39). As we have raised our family, we've had to fall back on this vision time and time again. It's our foundation in both good times and hard times.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are two things we need: **HELP** and **HOPE**.

We need real, practical things to **help** us get through this post-COVID season and we need fresh **hope** for the future as we make plans to gather with those we love. Simply taking time to dream about a future family get-together has a way of invigorating us. Vision feeds hope. As we begin to plan and pray now for the future, we will sense our hope growing.

The purpose of this download is two-fold: to take some ideas from my [Cousin Camp](#) book and adapt them to your current situation—in a sense, to show you how to host a “Camp at Home.” And secondly, to encourage you to begin to pray for and plan toward future family gatherings.

But before we get to the “nuts and bolts,” there are a few things you need to know:

## DISCOVER A BIGGER VISION

No matter what our family or our individual situations look like, we need to remind ourselves and our kids that “God isn’t caught off guard” by anything that has happened. He is still in charge. And He is the God who redeems.

Best of all, our heavenly Father loves to do a new thing, in our own lives, our family, our neighborhood, our church!

David says it this way, “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a **NEW** song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.” (Psalm 40:1-3, emphasis mine)

## THREE THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

In this time of uncharted waters there are four things we need to keep in focus.

### 1. Remember

Our first priority comes straight from the First Commandment: “to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul” (Matthew 22:37-39). What does this look like? Making time to be alone with the Lord every day, to read the scriptures and to pray. A young mom with four small children called me this week. “I’m feeling so overwhelmed,” she admitted. “My house is a wreck, my kids are eating junk, I can’t get my work done, I’m completely disorganized. I’m a mess.” I love her honesty.

I said to her, “Just do the one first thing. Get up 20 minutes early and spend time praying and reading God’s Word. You can tell God exactly how you are feeling and ask Him to order your day. I suggest reading a psalm every day and underlining one character trait of God that is meaningful to you. Ephesians is also a good book for this. Choose that trait to reflect on throughout your day.”

When I find myself in this spot, I am often reminded of the truth of Matthew 6:33: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto it.” It’s too easy to think, I’ll spend time with the Lord when things calm down. But things don’t calm down. Life just gets messier. I need to seek Him first.

Give Him the first 20 minutes. It will make a big difference in your day.

### 2. Recognize

Recognize the power of the enemy. We do have an enemy, the devil (1 Peter 5:8). He wants to damage our faith, destroy our family relationships, and direct us to negative feelings about ourselves and those around us.

One of his greatest tools is discouragement. It’s dangerous because it is so subtle. It may sound like this:

*I don't like my spouse right now. He doesn't meet my needs. There's someone else who is better for me. **Temptation***

*That other mother has it all together. Her kids are doing well. She's enjoying this time. She accomplishes so much...and I, well... **Comparison***

*I don't even like my child at this moment. He (or she) is driving me crazy. **Temporary feelings (a loss of perspective)***

*My friend isn't handling her kids or our relationship the way I think she should. She should... **A critical, judgmental spirit***

Each one of these feelings discourages us. It will help us to recognize where they are coming from and tell the enemy to flee. James says, "Resist the devil and He will flee from you" (James 4:7). Replace the accusations of the enemy with God's all-powerful truths found in scripture.

"Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Take time daily to ask Him to fill you with His grace and His truth and the unlimited power of His Holy Spirit.

### **3. Realize**

It's helpful to realize again and again that God has given you the exact family that He created you to have. He's given you the exact children in the exact birth order, with their exact personalities—not merely so that you can raise them, but in order that they might be His tools in your own life. He's given you that strong-willed child who is driving you crazy, that one you don't "get," the one with special needs or behavioral problems. Every child is a gift from God and He will use each one in our life to grow and strengthen us as we depend on Him.

It's likely that at least one of your kids is giving you a hard time during this pandemic. In times like these, we need to ask God for His generous wisdom as expressed in James 1:5: "He will give us wisdom in His time and in His way." Our child is His child first, but we are also His children, and He loves us and is maturing us while we raise our little ones.

# Part Two:

## HELP AND HOPE: 100 practical ideas!

I'm about to overwhelm you with ideas. But first I want to give you an escape and a warning. Many of you are already overwhelmed with ideas you've saved, favorited, or pinned on the internet. You may see friends sharing photos or links on social media of the creative and fun things they are doing with their families. If you aren't doing these things, you may feel "less than," guilty, and overwhelmed with "oughts." Don't fall into the "comparison trap." No two families are alike, and you need to do what is right for you and your kids during this season.

There is a dangerous idol of "more." This idol says the more you do, the better parent you are. More is not always better. In fact, it can be too much. We need time to simply "be" and so do our kids.

Each of us at different times on our parenting journey will feel like we have ruined our kids, or even our grand-kids. It is important to remember this: *My ability to ruin my child is not nearly as great as God's power to redeem him or her.*

## PLANNING YOUR CAMP AT HOME:

When you begin to plan a camp, you will have questions: How do we plan our day, our week, the next month? What can we do to make family life fun, meaningful, and fresh? How can we use this time to draw closer to one another and also to connect with family we can't see right now? One way is to plan a "Camp at Home."

Your camp can last for one day, three days, or even a week. It's up to you. You can also adapt these ideas for a camp for your neighborhood or church community.

### Several things to keep in mind:

1. Plan this camp with your spouse or with another friend whose kids are similar in ages. It's much more fun to brainstorm with someone else. Determine who will do what. Consider your individual strengths and your time constraints in your planning.
2. Set a date for camp to begin and to end. Err on the side of shorter and make that a success. You can always plan a follow-up camp. (But get a little rest first!)
3. Plan a daily schedule. Kids like routine. They are used to a school routine. Choose different time blocks for your day, depending upon the ages of your children. Blocks might include: Bible study, craft time, free play, outdoor energy games, creative alone time. If you have a friend running a camp at her home simultaneously, you can schedule a FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom session as social time for the kids. You can also plan a time to connect with grandparents. Don't forget a clean-up party. Music and dancing make cleaning up more fun! Posting the day's schedule in a visible place will keep kids from constantly asking, "what's next?"

4. Ensure the kids “buy in” to the camp. How you do this will depend upon the ages and numbers of your kids, and your relationship with them. You may need to simply announce that you are going to do this and give them the dates, no negative opinions allowed. But be sure you ask them for ideas. “What are some things you think would be fun to do at camp?” Incorporate the ones that seem best and most plausible to you. Have your kids, particularly the older ones, take as much leadership as possible. (For more details, see the [Cousin Camp](#) book.)
5. Keep a healthy perspective. Things will go wrong. Be flexible. Ideas will flop. In the long run, it doesn’t really matter. What does matter is that we experience laughter and fun together, and take small steps in family bonding.

## 100 IDEAS OF FUN THINGS TO DO!

I have arranged the following **100** ideas into several categories: **The little years** (toddlers/preschool), **the middle years** (elementary), and **the teen years** (middle school and high school). Note: Many ideas overlap and can be adapted for another age. There is also a **Whole Family** category. Finally, there’s a section including ideas to do with grandparents, cousins, or extended family during this time—which will enable us to grow closer when we can’t be together physically. Do not feel pressured to do all of these! Just pick one, or a few! This is not another ‘to do’ list to work through. These are merely helpful suggestions.

### IDEAS FOR THE LITTLE YEARS:

1. Collect rocks. Paint them and make a rock garden, or hide them around the neighborhood for others to find.
2. Use chalk to cover sidewalks, patios, and driveways with positive messages and beautiful art.
3. Give each child a paper bag. They can decorate it if they choose. Walk around outside and collect only things that God has made and put them in your bag. Come back and have “show and tell!” What is your favorite? Why?
4. Scour the basement or garage for several hammers and nails of different sizes with large heads. Create wood projects under adult supervision. Wood glue can be used too, as well as popsicle sticks, corks, or twigs. The idea is creativity! You can also paint your creation.
5. Finger paint in the bathtub or on paper outside—or even on each other!
6. Make a paper journal to write in each day. Choose a scripture verse. Have them (or you) write it in their journal and let them color a picture to illustrate it.
7. Pick some flowers and leave them on a neighbor’s step with an uplifting note or picture.
8. Plant a garden.
9. Build a rock wall.
10. Cook a meal or something simple for someone else (healthcare workers, shut-ins, firefighters or police). Deliver it with a picture that says “thank you for your service.”

- 11.** Play “hide and seek.”
- 12.** Play “hide the object.” One person hides an item while others close their eyes. When the hunt begins, the hider yells “hot!” when someone is close to the object and “cold!” when they move away. The finder gets to be the next hider.
- 13.** Pull out dress-up clothes, put on music, and have a dance party.
- 14.** Have a sugar cookie decorating party. You can buy premade sugar cookies, tubes of dough, or make your own from scratch. You’ll need sprinkles and small icing tubes for decorating. Let the kids make a mess!
- 15.** Find a large cardboard box, or tape several smaller cardboard boxes together. Cut out windows and doors and make a playhouse or whatever you dream up! Spend time coloring it and decorating it with stickers.
- 16.** Throw a blanket over a table and play in your new fort.
- 17.** Make a Safari Day! Everyone gets on the bed or lines up in chairs as if on a safari bus. Put funny hats on to keep off the “sun” as you take a tour through Zambia. No hands allowed outside the vehicle and no feet on the ground! Fire ants! Speed up if one of the rhinos makes a charge! Slam on the brakes to take a closer look at the monkeys. [\*\*WATCH THIS VIDEO.\*\*](#)
- 18.** End your safari with the “Five (or however many people you have) Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed” song! Let one “fall off” each round. Later, tell everyone to bring all of their stuffed animals to the safari area. Sort animals by habitat. Get back on the “bus.” Take a tour of the habitats and have each child take a turn making up a story about one of the animals in the habitat.
- 19.** Tell an “add-on” story. You begin a story, then take turns with your children as each person adds on to the story.
- 20.** Build card houses out of decks of cards. (Note: they often stand up best when on a carpet.) Put children in different locations so they don’t knock each other’s house down.)

## IDEAS FOR MIDDLE YEARS:

- 21.** Buy or make a journal. Put the person’s photo on it or personalize it with stickers. The journal should have two parts: a diary of your current life and a section of gratitude lists you add to each day, reminding yourself of things for which you are thankful.
- 22.** Make or buy a stack of postcards and send a note to someone each day. You can even leave them around your house for family members to find.
- 23.** Become a tree expert. Go outside and have each person pick a different leaf from the ground. Look up the tree on the internet or in a book and write down three facts about “your” tree. Share what you’ve learned with your family. You can also iron some leaves between two pieces of wax paper and hang your tree art in a window.

24. Send an email or text to someone each day to tell them you are praying for them—and remember to pray for them!
25. Have a whipped cream fight outdoors. Do this on a warm day, if possible, so you can hose off in the yard afterwards!
26. Have a cooking competition. Who can make the best guacamole or brownies, or the most creative pizza toppings?
27. Do someone else's chore as a kind surprise.
28. Find an old white pillowcase and some permanent markers. Choose a Bible verse with each child and write it out on the case. Example: for a child with nighttime fears, write, "He who watches over you will not slumber; Indeed He who watches over (insert their name) will not slumber..."(Psalm 121:3). They can go to sleep on their "new case" with this promise.
29. Write a poem or short story or song.
30. Learn how to play an instrument.
31. Choose a new life skill to learn: a foreign language, sign language, knitting, cooking, woodworking, auto mechanics, etc. Use the computer to teach yourself and share your skill with the family in one week.
32. Design a Bible study for a small group of kids who are younger than you are.
33. Write out your testimony and give it to the family. When and how did you come to know Jesus? What have been specific times that your faith has grown? What do you want God to do in your life in the next few weeks?
34. Take turns reading aloud. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a great series for this age.
35. Have a "dance off." Film it on a phone and send it to cousins or friends. Challenge them to do one and send it back!
36. Make a play. Create costumes from whatever you can find around the house. Film it and send it to family members or friends.
37. Paint a picture of your favorite place or thing.
38. Paint a picture as a gift for someone.
39. Decorate blank tiles with funny quotes, verses, or pictures and leave them outside for neighbors to pick up on their walks.
40. Play board games. Clean out and organize your game cabinet, and make a pile of outgrown games to donate.
41. Complete a jigsaw puzzle together.
42. Go through old toys. Fill a bag with outgrown ones to give away.
43. Pretend it's Halloween. Find old costumes and have a parade.



## IDEAS FOR TEEN YEARS:

44. Build a “weight room.” Put sand in empty milk jugs for weights. Use exercise DVDs if you have them, or search for age-appropriate workouts on YouTube.
45. Design a new workout regime. Make a chart to track progress and give yourself a prize at the end of a specified time period.
46. Create a new business. Make a business plan, design calling cards, and go to work!
47. Learn to sew. Find simple patterns online and make masks for neighbors or to donate to your local hospital.
48. Choose a “possible” profession. Learn everything you can about it and give a lecture to the family on what you “do.”
49. Brainstorm ways in which you can serve your neighbors or those in need. Do them.
50. Build a fort in your yard. Use sticks, blankets/towels, or patio furniture and lawn chairs.
51. Play “hide and seek.”
52. Pull out old board games and play them with a sibling.
53. Sleep out under the stars in a sleeping bag or tent.
54. Write thank-you notes to first responders or health care professionals and deliver them.
55. Organize a car parade in your neighborhood for someone’s birthday, to thank medical folks, to send love to someone who is ill. Decorate posters and banners, and drive by in a celebratory procession.
56. Write an essay to your future grandchildren. Describe your life. How have you felt? What have you have had to do? To not do? What has been hard? What has been good? What is something you’ve learned? What advice would you give them? Attach a photo of yourself to your essay and put it in a safe place.
57. Pick one Bible character to become your “best friend.” Study him or her. Write a paper on them. Deliver it to the rest of the family. What was their personality like? What was their greatest challenge, failure, success? How do you want your life to be like theirs or not like theirs?
58. Write a letter to a grandparent. Tell them what you appreciate or admire about them.
59. Listen to a podcast and discuss it as a family.
60. Have each of your children adopt a younger child from a family you know and become their buddy for a week (make treats for them, call them, send them notes or small gifts, pray for them). Hopefully this might begin a relationship that will last beyond this time.
61. Each day, make one person in charge of a family game or event.
62. Design a family coat of arms. Sketch it out and hang it up in your home.
63. Play “Sardines.” (One person hides and when another finds him, the finder hides with the hider until only one person is left.)

64. Pair up family members to cook each night. Encourage them to use new recipes. Non-cooks do the clean-up.
65. Create a “dance mix” and share it with extended family.
66. Create a scavenger hunt for the whole family. Divide into teams.

## IDEAS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY:

67. Go to church “online” together each Sunday. If your church doesn’t have streaming services available, find one that does. Ask each person to be prepared to share two things that speak to them in the service or through the sermon. Make Bibles and pen and paper available for everyone, and sing as you are able.
68. Each morning have one person choose a character trait of Jesus or God for everyone to focus on during the day. Each night, share how you saw this during the day.
69. Discuss and write out your core family values. What values do you want to characterize your family? Note: you can also do this in conjunction with the “family coat of arms” idea.
70. Divide into two teams and play charades. Parents against kids? Boys against girls?
71. Draw names for “secret buddies” for the week and do kind things for that person throughout the week. Have a “reveal party” at the end of camp.
72. Pretend you are dining at a fancy mansion or a palace. Make a fancy meal. Decorate the table. Use your best china and best manners. Each person must come up with a few good conversation questions. See [this](#) for help.
73. Plan a daily Bible study/prayer time. Rotate the leadership. Put pictures of family and friends on the table and take turns praying for them (the *Cousin Camp* book has three Bible studies on p. 63–64).
74. Choose a passage of scripture to memorize.
75. Tape or film a conversation with your grandparents. Have specific questions to ask them. Where and what year were you born? What was a new invention when you were a child, a young adult? What world crisis do you remember? How did it impact your family? What was your hobby? Where were you in the family line-up? What siblings did you have? Have your kids come up with questions to ask.
76. Have everyone sit at the table and make a list of everything you can do when you are bored. Try to think of at least 75 things and give a prize for the best idea. Post this on a wall and use it! (Note: these things should not require an adult, so you can direct kids to the list when they whine that they are bored.)
77. Have a night to cook s’mores by a fire or roast jellybeans on a thin stick. Delicious!
78. Invent a new game.
79. Make an “extra chores for money” list and let kids sign up for them. (I do not recommend paying for regular chores—they come with being a part of a family.) This can be a time to clean out all those nooks and crannies that don’t usually get done.

80. Plan and carry out a service project together.
81. Watch documentaries as a family and discuss them.
82. Pair up to cook each night. Encourage the chefs to try new recipes.
83. Designate one night each week as family theme night. Examples: “Tacky Night” when you come to dinner dressed in ridiculous clothing, “Chopstick Night” when you have to eat everything with chopsticks (serve Jell-O!), “Formal Night” when you wear formal attire and pretend you are at a fancy mansion like Downton Abbey (‘fancy’ British accents encouraged!).
84. Play cornhole. (Neighbors can do this while social distancing.)
85. Set up a neighborhood Bingo game. (Go to: [myfreebingocards.com/bingo-card-generator](https://myfreebingocards.com/bingo-card-generator)) Bring silly prizes.

## IDEAS FOR GRANDPARENTS, COUSINS, AND EXTENDED FAMILY:

86. Talk to your married children and their spouses. Ask them: “What are some specific ways in which I can care for your kids during this time and also support you?” (They may have different ideas than you do.)
87. Ask your adult children to send you specific things for you to pray for each of their children.
88. Set up a regular video chat with your adult children.
89. Video chat with your grandchildren. Have a few specific questions to ask them that call for more than a one-word answer. (“What did you do this morning? What’s something fun you have done this week? What’s your favorite thing to do in your house? Yard?”)
90. However, remember that younger kids have short attention spans, so keep your call short! Don’t be offended if teens don’t want to talk. It is natural for them to be more interested in their friends. Simply send them short texts or notes that don’t require an answer, but that let them know you care.
91. Set up a convenient time to read poetry or books aloud to small children. This can be done over the phone or a video chat. This can provide a short amount of time for the child’s parents to be off duty. Choose a specific book or poem according to a child’s interests.
92. Send a box of favorite old books for a child to read now, or ones they will be able to soon. (This is also a good way to clean out your stuff!) You can add a note to a book, telling a child why you liked it!
93. Order books to be sent to your far away family and ask them to tell you about their favorite parts after they arrive.
94. Create a family newspaper. Have the grandkids dictate to you over the phone a story about something they have done or are interested in, and you can write or type it up. They can choose to illustrate their story and send you a picture. You can “publish it” and mail the newspaper to the family.
95. Make a “Family Tree” poster. Put pictures up (or even draw them—which can be hysterical) of each person.

96. If you are tech-savvy, play games remotely with your grandkids. But let them choose the game. Cous-ins of similar ages and interests can also do this.
97. Have a “dance off.” Film your dancing on a phone and send it to cousins. Challenge them to do one and send it back! Grandparents may even want to get in on this challenge—you might be surprised!
98. Make a play. Create costumes from whatever you can find that you already have. Film it and send it to a family that lives far away.
99. Write out your family history (in short chapters) for your grandchildren to read now, and cherish later. Be sure to include funny stories. Mail it to them along with copies of some old photos.
100. FOR EXTENDED FAMILY FUN: Have each of your children become a special buddy to a cousin or extended family member. They can talk, send silly cards, and pray for one another. You may need to initiate this plan with other parents. This can also work with friends or neighbors.

## AND NOW YOU CAN DREAM ABOUT A FAMILY REUNION!

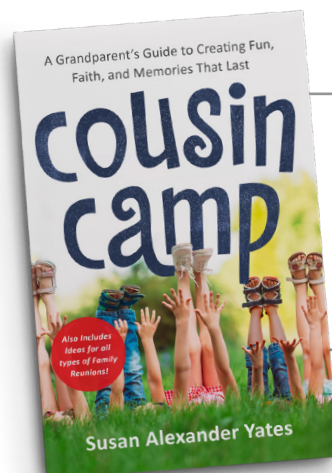
After reading all of these ideas, your head is likely swimming. But I hope there is at least one thing from this “pool” which will be helpful to you in your unique situation.

And I hope you will begin to dream and to plan for a Cousin Camp or Family Reunion in the future. It actually helps to have plenty of time to plan family gatherings (especially within large families) so I encourage you to start dreaming, praying, and planning now. My book, *Cousin Camp*, is designed to be your guide. May God richly bless you during this time.

Warmly,

**Susan Yates**

For more blogs, camp movies, and family-oriented resources, visit my site: [www.susanalexanderyates.com/cousincamp/](http://www.susanalexanderyates.com/cousincamp/)



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