OCTOBER 2026

Christian Encounter
NEWSLETTER

STUDENT PROFILE

## Charlie

*Slice number 40, he's lost all hope*
*He hit rock bottom*
*Won't grab the saving rope*
*Cause he can't see the end of his road*
*The sound in his mind are the demons*
*Trying to steal his soul*
*Underground is where he lives*
*Stuck in his coffin shaped hole*
*I wish I could say to the boy in my past*
*'You are loved, this pain won't last.'*

Charlie sings of his past in his most recent song, "Slice." This song shares his state during the onset of his teen years and his struggle after losing an uncle. This was the beginning of his downward decline and when anger and uncertainty began to define his life.

Charlie's birth parents had given him up when he was two. Losing his uncle - who was very much a part of his adopted family - felt similar, but was different, and Charlie didn't understand it. His uncle had stopped coming by, adopted a different lifestyle, and was no longer recognizable. There was no explanation.

Charlie had grown up in church, but his faith, too, was marked with uncertainty. "At VBS, I would give my life to Jesus every time they asked. I was never sure if I was a child of God."

When given the opportunity to be baptized at 13, he said "Yes" and joined 11 others that day, hoping his actions would make others proud. "After that, I gave up on Christianity. I thought, 'I'm saved - I can do whatever I want now.'"

Charlie internalized his anger, and the distance between him and those around him started to grow. He began stealing from his family members. It was a cry for attention. When he didn't get the response he wanted, his behavior escalated. Charlie started to spiral into depression, and he became verbally abusive towards his mother. "I was angry at my birth mom, but it was coming out on my mom."

One day while Charlie was working, he examined his life and thought, "'Why am I still a Christian? I'm not following God.' I wanted to throw it away."



***(cont. on pg. 3)***

DIRECTOR'S VIEW

## In the face of temptation



One of our girl students told the group at the end of the 15-day wilderness backpacking trip, "I've been thinking I'd be here and then afterward fall away from God someday. But on the wilderness trip I realized I wanted Jesus in my life. He saved me and without Him I wouldn't have anything. I want a life of love and faithfulness. I'm a new person, and I'm never going back to that nothingness again." She then shared how shortly after coming to this conclusion, she saw a bottle half-filled with alcohol in the bushes. She hesitated, wrestling. She decided to pick it up. She was only saved from temptation by an intern coming along just in time. Standing there, moments after deciding that Jesus was all she needed, she felt like a fake and a failure.

Probably all Christians can identify with her in this. We have moments of great clarity and deep devotion to Jesus. Then–sometimes within minutes–something happens, and we are tempted and even sin. Many come to doubt their salvation because of this. If I've truly been made new by God, how can my heart vacillate like this?

The wonderful, difficult truth to grasp is our salvation is not a result of our work, which could never be enough. As Jonathan Edwards said, Christianity is not about moral reformation—bending the heart through our best efforts. It is about spiritual transformation: the heart of sin is being replaced with a new, living heart, as we are made alive in Christ.

***(cont. on back pg.)***

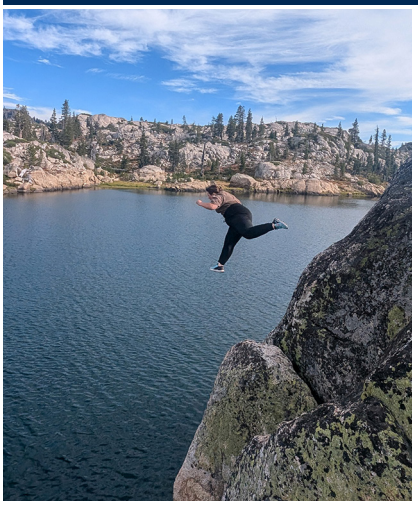
# WILDERNESS TRIP 2026








*CER's annual 15-day backpacking trip serves as an opportunity for our students and interns to unplug from the responsibilities and distractions of daily life and experience the great outdoors. CER has been leading wilderness backpacking trips since the 1970's.*



In his kindness the Lord met me on the rockface and began the process of burning away a false identity. While it is true that I am capable, and I am mentally and physically stronger than I once thought, those things are not the truest things about me. My identity is not found in what I am capable of. It is not found in my performance. It is not found in my lack of mistakes. My value comes from being an image bearer of my Heavenly Father, and I am not capable of doing anything that would change that reality. - Capri



The most significant part of the trip for me was the run at the end because of the spiritual metaphors that were part of it. Before the run, the trip leader recited Hebrews 12:1-2, which exhorts believers to set aside the sin and hindrances that entangle us and run the race of faith with endurance. During the run I was thinking about this passage, and I felt like it gained new meaning to me because of the physical demonstration. We were setting aside our packs (a hindrance) and running a race that required endurance. But God also showed me some deeper metaphors: We were each running our own race (i.e. it wasn't a competition), but we had a common goal and would encourage each other toward that goal... it was a hard run, but we needed to run it, and thinking of the reward at the end was a powerful motivator; and, perhaps the sweetest connection. At the finish, we were cheered on and greeted by Ranch family and could finally rest, because our work was done. I imagine heaven will be the same way. - Ryan

# Charlie *(cont. from pg. 1)*

That evening, his friend's dad picked him up, saying that God told him he needed to help Charlie because Charlie was at rock bottom. Though a significant conversation, Charlie still needed more support.

Charlie's internal struggle continued to intensify to the point where he made an attempt on his own life. Someone had unknowingly walked in while this was happening - he could have cried out, but he remained silent. And so he carried this burden alone.

A few weeks later, he called another uncle, and simply stated, "I have to leave." His uncle left work, picked him up, and talked with him. Charlie stayed with him that night. This uncle had been an intern at Christian Encounter many years before, so as Charlie spent time with him, he would hear stories about his time at the Ranch.

Charlie would periodically stay at his uncle's for a week at a time. After several months, his parents began looking for a more permanent arrangement. Charlie suggested that he could go to the Ranch where his uncle had worked.

Charlie arrived at Christian Encounter last July. "I acted really weird when I got here, because I was trying to mask that I was feeling empty and dead."

The month prior to his arrival, Charlie's family had taken a road trip out west and visited a few national parks.





He recalls a moment at the Grand Canyon, as he took in the vast landscape, when something stirred in him, and he decided he wanted to follow God. "In my heart, I came back to faith."

The annual 15-day backpacking trip was shortly after Charlie's arrival at the Ranch, and as he hiked to different destinations, he could hear the voices of his parents, his cousin, his friend's dad, and his counselor all echoing in his head: "You need to forgive yourself." It was day ten of the trip when Charlie took this next step. "Once I did that, I was able to grow. I shifted to running towards God, and I started to look inside myself a little more."

As his relationships began to solidify, Charlie heeded input from others. "I made a choice to let other people be my iron and sharpen me instead of just relying on myself."

"Around Thanksgiving I realized I was having growing pains. I was letting God chisel me into the shape He wanted me to be."

Charlie enjoyed Christmas for the first time in many years and made lots of fun memories on the Guys' Igloo Trip.

As he worked towards finishing high school in June, an unease settled in Charlie as the unknown of his future loomed before him. He was intent on following God's will for his life, but what was God's will?

As some doors opened and others closed, Charlie desperately tried to understand why. His questions turned into doubts, and all these thoughts became increasingly burdensome.

With the arrival of August came another wilderness trip for Charlie. Several days into the trip, he had a genuine mountaintop experience. As he stood atop the mountain peak and surveyed the valleys and lakes for miles, he was in awe. In the stillness, he laid down the burdens he had been carrying, and he felt free.

"As the trip progressed, I felt so light that the childlike imagination that I had lost started coming back. All the fantasy worlds that I had created and forgot about came rushing back to me….At times I felt like a child again, and it was a really beautiful thing to be washed in the grace and love of God."

*God will pick you up*
*Just wait til the light of morning*
*What is life? What is glory?*
*These are the questions of my story*
*I scream to my past, hold on to what is true*
*You are loved, you are saved*
*The scars on your wrist are just a path you paved*
*The marks don't change who you are*
*You've been judged, but you are loved*
*Don't give up, please don't give up*
(Lyrics to "Slice.")

*Zoya Lee*

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## Temptation *(cont. from pg. 1)*

The battle still rages. The apostle Paul laments in Romans 7: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." And yet the power of sin is broken, as he wrote a few verses later: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

With the life of Jesus inside us, we are now able to walk and grow from a place of freedom and love for Jesus and others, not driven by trying to earn or atone for our sin. And we are not alone in the battle! Philippians 2:13 reads, "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." He is working inside us, accomplishing this transformation. And He may send along an intern to help in a moment of need–not to tell us we're fakes or failures, but as a gift of love to help us see Jesus as all we need.

*Nate Boyd, Executive Director*

## MEMORIALS

***In memory of Sandra Carder, given by:***
David & Tena Brown

***In memory of Dennis P. Davidson, given by:***
Susan Davidson

***In memory of Sharon Douglass, given by:***
Dave & Jeannie Douglass

***In memory of Jerry Merriam, given by:***
Gene & Robbin Adams
Dennis & Shelly Ramsey

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