



**HOW CAMP INFLUENCED
THE LIFE OF AN
OLYMPIC SKIER**

GOING FOR MORE THAN GOLD

by Jen Howver

Every kid who walks into a camp or conference center has a lifetime of adventure in front of him or her. And for those of us serving these campers, we know that God has a plan for them that reaches beyond what we (or they) can imagine. But we probably don't look at a camper and think to ourselves, "I bet one day he's going to grow up to be an Olympic champion." Well, for one boy who started going to summer camp in first grade, that's exactly what he's turned out to be. But David Wise is so much more than a gold medal skier. ▶

Photo courtesy of Sarah Brunsom/U.S. Freeskiing

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—DAVID WISE

As the first gold medalist in the relatively new Olympic sport of freestyle halfpipe skiing (which debuted in Sochi, Russia in 2014), and a three-time winner of gold in the X-Games, Wise stands out in his sport. His commitment to his faith and his family makes him an anomaly in the action sports world, where partying and wild lifestyles are commonplace. In fact, it's been the subject of stories that have been written about him.

But this isn't that story. It's also not the story of his acclaimed skiing career. This is the story of how camp changed the life of David Wise.

A Kid at Camp

From first grade through high school, Wise attended summer camps. When he thinks of that kid at camp, Wise describes himself as “a bit wild,” though shy and quiet. But he was athletic and was willing to take chances physically — doing crazy jumps and stunts. Plus, he was small for his age.

“That meant I could easily achieve the most airtime on the blob,” Wise shared. He would look for a heavy counselor to launch him off the blob, and sometimes it was great and people would cheer, while other times he would “get launched off axis, wiggle around like a cat, and SPLAT. Then everyone would really cheer!”

Once when he was in high school he was part of a Christian leadership camp. Wise remembers a time when the guys and girls were separated for, what he called, “a very heavy, but meaningful message,” which was followed by a time of worship.

“I've always been a bit shy about musical worship, partly because I'm naturally an introvert, and mostly because I'm just a bad singer,” Wise said. He preferred to worship through

Photo courtesy of Sarah Brunson/U.S. Freeskiing



his God-given talents, including skiing and sports. And though he believed that surrender in worship was somehow unmanly, which he admits was an illusion, that night was life changing.

“I have never experienced more impactful worship than that night,” Wise shared, explaining that hundreds of young men surrendered their pride, let go of self-consciousness, and worshiped together under the stars.

“For the first time, I understood the heart of David, the psalmist, and realized that true surrender to God’s will isn’t unmanly,” said Wise.

“In fact, it is just the opposite. Any man can act tough and inflate his own ego, but it takes a true follower of Christ to know that you are a child of the King, who is fearfully and wonderfully made, and only want to use that knowledge to glorify Him more.”

The Significance of Camp

When he reflects on his own experiences, Wise explains why camp experiences can be so meaningful. He points out that many kids don’t always have the chance to “experience God through nature, which I think is incredibly important.” He also explains that camp provides a place where kids can be free from distractions and have opportunities to seek God, or, “perhaps more correctly, have the time to be still and realize that God is seeking them.”

Wise recognizes that the people who work at camps aren’t in it for “fame or glory or money.” But he knows that those people serve “because they want to provide an opportunity for kids to experience God significantly.

“Honestly, I think just being surrounded by sold-out adult followers of Christ was one of the most impactful things about camp for me,” Wise shared.

Camp Romance

Wise first met his wife, Alexandra, at a Christian leadership camp. He remembers noticing her when he was dropped off and making a strategic move to get into the same van as “that really cute one” on the ride to camp. “That was the beginning of a great friendship that I think always had an undertone of attraction,” said Wise.

Over the years they would see each other from ▶

Photo courtesy of David Wise



time to time, but Wise says that he believes she was always there in his subconscious. “Years later we reconnected and God took my blindfold off and showed me that she was the one I had been praying and hoping for all along,” Wise recalled.

Within a year they were married, “and that was the start of the absolute best years of my life.” For Wise, having a spouse who is committed to Christ is amazing. “From those first experiences I had with her at camp, I knew that not only was Alexandra stunning, but she also had a beautiful soul and wasn’t afraid to answer God’s call.”

The couple now has two kids, a daughter, Nayeli, and a son, Malachi. And his family remains a top priority for Wise while he juggles all of his training and competitions.

From Camper to Camp Counselor

While he can’t remember the names of many of his camp counselors, Wise says that he can remember their faces and the important conversations that

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took place. “Every single one of them contributed to who I am, but my most significant experience with camp counselors was becoming one myself.”

Just after high school Wise volunteered to help at a junior high camp, thinking he would be good as a recreation leader. But his pastor had other plans. Wise found out once he arrived at orientation that he would be a counselor in a cabin with a dozen junior high students. Wise told his pastor that it was a mistake, since he was by far the youngest counselor. But his pastor believed in him and told Wise to ask for help when he needed it and to trust in God.

“I may or may not have had a lasting influence on those kids’ lives, but I know that by them opening their hearts to me and allowing me to serve them impacted me permanently,” Wise said. Because of those kids, Wise realized that his value went far beyond being a good skier. “I could also be a good mentor and friend in the same way that others had been good mentors and friends to me.”

These days his schedule is pretty crazy. With an Olympic trial, X Games, Dew Tour, World Cup and World Championships this season, Wise is busy training. But, he said when his schedule allows for it, “I’m always up for speaking at camps and even doing guest counselor gigs.” ●

EXTRA INFO

HALFPIPE FREESTYLE SKIING

Random Facts You Probably Didn’t Know

David Wise now reigns in the sport of halfpipe freestyle skiing, but there are a few other things you might want to know about this action sport. After all, in just over a year the Winter Olympics will be back!

- While the International Ski Federation (FIS) recognized freestyle skiing as a discipline in 1979, it wasn’t until 1994 that it was recognized as an Olympic medal status event.
- It would be another 20 years before halfpipe freestyle skiing would reach the Olympics, in Sochi, Russia in 2014.
- In 2009 David Wise became the first skier to land the “Double Cork 1260,” a trick that would become his signature move.
- In April 2016 David Wise broke the world record for highest air on a hip jump by more than 9 feet, with a height of 46 feet, 7 inches. (OK, so this isn’t a halfpipe competition, but it’s a pretty cool fact about David Wise!)



Jen Howver was once a camp kid who later spent

two summers working at a camp in Michigan, where she met and later married her husband, Jay. Fast forward 20 years and now Jen works as a marketing consultant and editor of *InSite* Magazine. She and Jay live in Monument, Colo., with their daughters, Noelle and Chloe, and way too many pets.