

Kirk Cameron Provides Retreat for the Terminally Ill

Kirk Cameron is best known for playing Mike Seaver in the 1980s TV sitcom *Growing Pains* or his leading roles in Christian films such as *Fireproof* or the *Left Behind* series. What most don't know about, however, is the former child star's ministry side. *Charisma* connected with Cameron for a revealing interview about this and a related new movie.

Charisma: Every summer, you and your family invite terminally and seriously ill children and their families to Camp Firefly. What inspired you to start this camp?

Kirk Cameron: It's a camp my wife and I started with our family about 24 years ago, when we were working on *Growing Pains*. We were meeting lots of children through the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Their wish was to meet the Seaver family and get an autograph. Our hearts went out to them. My wife and I wanted to do something more for them than just sign a piece of paper and take a picture.

Charisma: What's the purpose of Camp Firefly?

Cameron: [We thought], "Wouldn't it be great if we could create an all-expenses-paid, weeklong vacation so that families can be together?" Often their wish lasts for a day or two and then they're back to their routine of dad working two jobs and mom at the hospital with the child and the siblings being taken to school by grandma and grandpa or an aunt and uncle.

We wanted to put them in an environment where they can just focus on their friends and family, or just focus on their faith and building friendships that will support them through this very difficult and challenging time. We bring six families to a camp in Georgia. It's a beautiful family resort,

and everyone stays in beautiful private condominiums. Lexus donates a car for each family to drive during the week. It's just a terrific week.

Charisma: How do you go about selecting the children that come to your camp?

Cameron: We don't discriminate based on what people's faith or religion are. We simply ask our doctors and social workers at hospitals all over the country to recommend families. They come from all different backgrounds. We have lots of time to talk sitting around the campfire and at the pool ... and activities that lend themselves to talking about faith, family, friendships and eternity.

Charisma: What impact has Camp Firefly had on you?

Cameron: It adds a whole new level to your compassion. It forces you to deal with difficult questions—and ask tough questions, like, “Why does God let bad things happen?”

Charisma: Is that what led you to make your new film, *Unstoppable* [releasing in theaters nationwide for one night only on Sept. 24]?

Cameron: It was based on a true story of the Sandgren family who came to Camp Firefly three years ago and lost their son to cancer.

I got a phone call one day from Mr. Sandgren saying that Matthew had just passed away. It just took all of the air out of my lungs. I found myself sitting in the driveway, saying, “Lord, why didn't You heal him? Lord, help me to understand.”

Charisma: Did you find an answer to your question while making this film?

Cameron: Well, without giving the whole movie away, I discovered that history reveals to us that everything going on from the beginning of creation is part of His story—that God

is offering a story and, yes, there is pain and suffering, but God is right there in the middle of it. He's not avoiding it. He is right here with us.