

# SOLDIERS FOR CHRIST BOOT CAMP

Story by Jose Martinez  
Photos courtesy of CC Golden Springs

**You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.**

2 Timothy 2:3-4

Exhausted from three days of intense physical workouts, teenager John Cleveland was sore, tired, and spiritually conflicted. The youth boot camp program had been more challenging than he had anticipated, and he found himself overwhelmed physically and mentally. Now he sat listening to Raul Ries, pastor of Calvary Chapel Golden Springs, CA. Raul was talking about the cross and forgiveness through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

***If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.***

Romans 10:9

That night, John and nearly 30 other teenagers accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

As he had done so many times before, John's first instinct was to tune out the Gospel. He had always hardened his heart toward anything to do with Christianity. But now, something was happening inside. Deep down, he knew he needed Jesus to wash away his sins and give him new life.

"I was ignoring everything Pastor Raul was saying," recalled John, now 18. "Then I felt the Holy Spirit working in me, and I gave up and accepted [Christ]." He explained his former attitude toward Christianity: "When I started, I looked at whatever anyone claimed was Christian, and I wanted



CC Golden Springs youth pastor and drill instructor, Scott Salamat, exhorts recruits at Soldiers For Christ boot camp.



Lining up for a morning meal, teenagers stand at attention. Recruits endured two weeks of intense physical training and discipline.



Recruits challenge each other for the position of squad leader.

to be the opposite of that. At that time, I hated it."

During the rigorous program, teens are given nicknames based on their performance. John was nicknamed "Sloth" after a character from the movie, *The Goonies*. He said, "I was never a physical person, so the first three days killed me. Halfway through my second day, I wanted to quit. But I was doing it for my parents, so I couldn't. I almost walked out three times in the first three days."

Now he's grateful to God that he stayed and made a personal commitment to Christ. Dozens of other participants have done so. The brainchild of CC Golden Springs' youth pastor, Scott Salamat, the Soldiers For Christ Boot Camp was started three years ago as an intensive, soul-searching vehicle for teens.

"When I was younger I went through junior Marine Corps—ironically called 'Devil Pups,'" Scott explained. "My vision was to give them military-style training but instill in them Christian values."

A former U.S. Marine himself, Pastor Raul endorsed the program. "I thought it was



A squad learns teamwork and discipline through physical training.



At last summer's Soldiers For Christ camp, Pastor Raul Ries of CC Golden Springs, CA, who is also a former U.S. Marine, shares his testimony with the teenagers and encourages them to make a decision to follow Jesus Christ.

**"We're trying to get them to be disciplined and [prepare them] to endure hardships in life."** Scott Salamat



Recruits are required to memorize daily Bible verses during the two-week program.

good because there are a lot of kids who do not know how to be disciplined," said Raul. "I thought that a boot camp would be so cool for them, not only to experience what the military does, but to ... help straighten their lives out and then get them involved in ministry."

The two-week summer program is three-fold: teens are physically and mentally challenged during the first three days, then rebuilt and equipped with the Word.

The kids arrive the first day at 6 a.m. and immediately are given a number in place of their names. Over the next few days, nicknames are handed out depending on their behavior or performance. Some names are still used today among the youth at CC Golden Springs.

"After the first three days, we give them the tools they'll need to be a Christian, like memorizing all the books of the Bible,"

**"I thank God for having this boot camp because it makes you depend on God more than on yourself."** Adrian Talamantes

Scott explained. Starting every morning with a devotional lesson, the teens also attend three Bible studies throughout the day. "They're constantly in the Word, and everything we give them—as far as mental tasks—is in the Bible." Scott and his team rewrote the U.S. Military's "Soldier's Handbook" to include Scripture and biblical principles. During the program's trials, participants are urged not to quit. "We're trying to get them to be disciplined and [prepare them] to endure hardships in life. ... In the Bible, the apostle Paul talks about enduring hardships to build your character as a Christian," Scott explained.

*"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ... You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."* 2 Timothy 2:1, 3

Five months prior to the start of boot camp, the youth leaders are trained as drill instructors. "You have to remember that our goal is to build these kids up," Scott said. "We want first to strip off all the worldly conflicts and influences, and then build them up spiritually speaking. And we do that within three days."

Raul comes to speak with the kids—occasionally passing out food and conducting kung fu demonstrations. He shares his testimony and encourages them to persevere. He strongly supports the program because he has seen lasting fruit.

"A lot of the kids who have gone through the boot camp have had a change in their homes and in their attitudes toward the church," Raul noted. "A lot of them are now active in different ministries. This gives them the opportunity to see that the world is bigger than [themselves]. This gives them a vision and a passion."

Since attending the Soldiers For Christ Boot Camp, some of the teenagers at CC Golden Springs have ministered through outreaches in Las Vegas and Honduras—something they never would have imagined before. "Parents see that in two weeks there's a real change," Raul said. "When the kids come home, they see that something has happened to their child. A lot of them now have a great vision to get involved."

One of those kids is Adrian Talamantes, a 17-year-old young man nicknamed "Archer"

during the program. "I felt the Lord wanted me to go to this boot camp because I really wanted a change in my life," Adrian recalled. "I thank God for having this boot camp because it makes you depend on God more than on yourself. It gives you discipline and really helps you."

Open to boys and girls between the ages of 14 through 18, Soldiers For Christ Boot Camp participants are mostly non-Christians or non-churchgoers, though some pastors' kids have come.

"[Not] every kid comes out right-on with God because it's up to them what they do afterward," Scott said. "But almost everybody [from the church youth group] got involved with ministry after boot camp."

"It's so fruitful," Scott continued. "We've seen so many kids changed because of it. Some of these kids have never experienced love like that. Discipline now is taking a kid's iPod away. What's that? We take their TV, their radio, their music, their friends, and their whole life away from them for two weeks. When they come back, they say they don't need that stuff. By depriving them of all the things that they hold dear, we show them those things are not that important."

The military style is simply a tool, not the focus, said leaders. "Last year, we had four kids join the Marines, but what we're trying to do is more on a spiritual level. Whatever they do after that, I'll support—whether they choose to go into the military or not."

Scott said the best part of the program is graduation. "They go through a lot of stuff and overcome a lot of obstacles to get there. It's a big accomplishment for them." 🙌

*Soldiers For Christ Boot Camp  
Next session: July 9–24, 2007*

**Calvary Chapel Golden Springs**  
[www.calvarygs.org](http://www.calvarygs.org)  
909-396-1884



During free time, recruits enjoy a fun and physically challenging game.