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Last December, as a Junior in High School, I would say that I was pretty comfortable with myself and happy with the direction my life was going. I had just finished up a successful Volleyball season, had auditioned for the School Musical, and started working on my Speech for the new season. I also went to Church every Sunday with my family, was recently Confirmed, and felt satisfied with my faith life. However, God had a greater and more surprising plan in mind for me. It all started when Todd Van Erp, one of my family friends, invited me to go on a TEC retreat. He briefly explained what it would be like, and knowing that I didn't have any other plans over the weekend after Christmas, I decided to give it a try. In the weeks leading up, so many of my family friends reached out to me, expressing how excited they were for me. This honestly confused me... what was so great about this retreat???

The night before the weekend, I regretted ever signing up. I wasn't looking forward to going anymore. It was Christmas break, and I would've preferred to stay home, watch Hallmark movies, and sleep in. The last thing I wanted to do was spend 3 full days doing what I was told I would do; get up early, listen to talks, have some discussions, and go to church. Nevertheless, my parents, who had gone on TEC in college, insisted that I go, telling me that I needed to follow through with the commitment I'd made.

From the moment I arrived at the TEC center, I felt comfortable and at home. Everyone working the weekend was so welcoming and excited to be there, it was almost overwhelming. Any and all of my preconceptions about the weekend were immediately shattered. Before going, I thought that I wouldn't fit in or wouldn't be good enough to be there. Instead, the opposite was true. Each person met me where I was at, and led me closer to Christ. There was no judgement, only acceptance and love. As the weekend went on, I enjoyed it even more than I had before, if that was even possible. The 3 days were jam packed with surprises, new friends, and a whole lot of memories. By the last day, I had never felt so loved and at peace. I never wanted to leave.

It wasn't until after I got home that I realized how big of an impact TEC had on my life. I truly have not been the same since. The community that was formed and the people I met on that first weekend were incredible, but nothing can compare to how much I grew in my faith. Before TEC, God was just a part of my life. Now, God IS my life. He is present in every aspect of my days; at school, work, church, youth group, home, and everywhere in between. TEC has now become a tool that I and so many thousands of others use to help spread the love that we received on our first weekends.

Since my first TEC one year ago, my life has flipped upside down and become better than I ever could've imagined! God has so much in store for me, and continues to reveal His amazing plan for me through TEC. The people and experiences He has placed in my life through this program are absolutely irreplaceable!! Each weekend I work, I am blown away by the love I feel and the new friends I make. I can undoubtedly say that I no longer go through the motions of life, I grow through them, with gratitude, love, and an unwavering faith in our God. I am so blessed to be part of this amazing program!