Connect them with Heaven

By Young Men General Presidency

Leaders need to be with the Aaronic Priesthood Young Men to promote trusting relationships that will anchor them to the gospel and connect them with heaven. When young men are connected with heaven, Jesus Christ can then mentor them (Psalms 23). To be connected means to join two things together—in this case a young man with heaven. Heaven is where God lives and watches over us all with power and love. When we connect a young man with heaven, he looks up to God and not sideways to man for direction in his life.

To connect with heaven we communicate with our Heavenly Father through daily prayer and scripture study. We keep and renew our covenants so that the power of godliness is manifest in our lives (D&C 84:21). We follow the example of Jesus Christ. A young man must understand that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven and the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness (D&C 121:36).

Why is it important for a young man to be connected with heaven? Because that is where we came from and that is where we want to return. It is our heritage as Heavenly Father’s children to become like Him. We cannot do that on our own.

Consider these steps as you help a young man connect with heaven.

1. Connection with heaven begins with faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is a choice. Such connection happens when a young man chooses to center his life and faith in Christ. Faith is built upon a correct understanding of God. We need to help young men understand that God is our loving Heavenly Father. This understanding comes to a young man as he studies the scriptures, attends church and lives what he learns. Young men are sons of God. They were not sent to earth to fail. Teach them that a loving Heavenly Father wants to give us all He has.

2. Heavenly Father wants to communicate and we can communicate with him through sincere prayer. Prayer is essential to connect to and align our will with His and secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant but that are made conditional on our asking for them (Bible Dictionary, Prayer). Through prayer, we come to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. This is the path to God’s life, eternal life.

3. Repentance is the action of faith to follow Christ’s example and turn our heart and will to God. It is a request to God to be forgiven of our sins and the mistakes we all make in mortality. Repentance is how we access the power of Christ’s atoning gift to become sanctified and be strengthened in our weaknesses. Repentance is a good thing. It is an essential step in connecting to heaven.

4. Partaking of the sacrament is another essential step in connecting to heaven. We renew our covenants by taking upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ, always remembering Him and keeping His commandments. The Lord in turn promises His Spirit to be with us. Through the covenants we make and renew each week with Heavenly Father, the power of godliness is manifest in our lives (D&C 84:21).
We were recently taught a great truth from Elder Yoon Hwan Choi of the Quorum of the Seventy. He shared some marvelous advice from his father: “Don’t look around, look up!” (April 2017 general conference) Often in today’s world we become easily distracted and forget our focus on our Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ. As we consider the many distractions that can divert our attention, we need to ask the question—what would cause our children to look “around” them and not focus “upward?” We don’t have to look far to see the multitude of distractions that affect our boys on a daily basis. In this increasingly busy and turbulent time, there are many things that can divert their attention. We must help them learn to look up in everything that they do. If we can help them understand and live this wonderful principle, it can deepen their conversion and strengthen them and their families. If they understand who they are and where they came from, they can look up and know for a surety that their loving Father in Heaven can help them.

The Young Men General Presidency has taught us that if we focus on helping our boys gain a deep and lasting conversion it will connect them with heaven (YM auxiliary training).

How can we do this? How can Scouting help us? If we look at the Scout Law, it has twelve very important points. “A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.”

Allowing our boys to have responsibilities creates in them an attitude of loyalty and lets them show that they can be trustworthy in our eyes as well as the Lord’s. It is important that we allow them to plan, prepare and follow through in their assignments and achievements. By doing this, they create patterns of commitment and success in even the smallest of endeavors.

Helping boys learn the value of serving others will help them look upward. If they are being helpful, friendly, courteous and kind to those around them, they can focus on the needs of others instead of on themselves. The Savior is the perfect example for our young boys. If they can foster His characteristics, they will more anxiously be obedient to His commandments which will bless their lives and their future families forever.

Our world needs brave, clean and reverent boys who will be our future leaders. President Thomas S. Monson reminded us that, “The call for courage comes constantly to each of us. Every day of our lives courage is needed—not just for the momentous events but more often as we make decisions or respond to circumstances around us” (President Thomas S. Monson, “Be Strong and of a Good Courage,” Ensign, May 2014).

As we consider these twelve wonderful elements of building character, achievement will be more fully and frequently experienced as we help our boys remember to always “look up.” As parents and leaders, we can be assured that our Heavenly Father will not leave us alone in this sacred responsibility of helping to bring his beloved children back to Him. We are promised that we will have His Spirit to guide us as we unitedly strive to always “look up” with love and devotion to Him.
Scouting professionals and volunteers—from 21 councils and 16 states—gathered in Salt Lake City, Utah, March 30th through April 1st for the LDS-BSA Relationships Seminar. Held each April and October, the three-day event coincides with the general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The purpose of the seminar is to strengthen LDS-BSA relationships through a deeper understanding of the Church. Invitees include Council Key-3s, LDS-BSA Relationships committee chairmen, and Scouting professionals from many faiths. Participants tour key Church facilities, hear from Church and Scouting leaders, and attend two sessions of general conference.

"Throughout the seminar we strive to give Scouters a vision of why and how The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints uses Scouting," explained Mark Francis, LDS-BSA Relationships Director. "This April we had the largest group we have ever hosted. There is a tremendous interest in successful LDS-BSA relationships committees and how Scouting functions to support the purposes of the Aaronic Priesthood."

The opening event was a Thursday evening training session at the Church Office Building with Brother Douglas D. Holmes, First Counselor in the Young Men General Presidency. "We are interested in helping young men become true disciples of Jesus Christ. For over 100 years Scouting has been an unbelievable partner in helping to forge that discipleship," taught Brother Holmes.

His comments set the tone for the weekend and were a wonderful introduction to the position and structure of the Church. Watching a clip of The First Vision was a highlight of the evening. Brother Holmes also spent a significant amount of time answering questions participants had about the Church and Scouting. "We are grateful for the good you do not only for our young men but for the nation as a whole. Thank you on behalf of the Church and the leaders of the Church." Brother Holmes ended by sharing his personal witness of Jesus Christ.

Afterwards, Karen Meier, Scout Executive, Inland Northwest Council noted, "We all heard the three reasons why the Church uses the BSA program. Brother Holmes was authentic in his clear message of who has the ‘keys’ or line of decision-making."

Participants gathered again early Friday morning at the Church Office Building for a session on LDS-BSA Relationships.

"The relationship between the Church and the BSA dates back over 100 years," taught Brother Francis. "Collectively, we have the capacity to solve the toughest problems and find solutions to benefit everyone."

He asked participants to download the Gospel Library App so they would have easy access to the (green) Handbook on Scouting provided by the Church. "Having the app is one of the incredible tools which can help you forge relationships and connect with the LDS community," commented Brother Francis.

Following the early morning training the group traveled to the Missionary Training Center in Provo. Attendees of non-LDS faiths met with MTC President David C. Martino and learned more about the specific training young missionaries receive before going out into the world. President Martino thanked the visitors for what they do in Scouting that specifically prepares young men to serve missions for the Church. Participants then visited classrooms with missionaries and observed the language training. Several attendees commented that their visit to the MTC was the highlight of their weekend. continued
A tour of Welfare Square was another highlight of the day. “The Welfare Square tour was impactful because it showed the breadth and the width that the Church takes in caring for its members and others in the community,” commented Paul Penttila, Scout Executive, Nevada Area Council. “Telling local Scouting leaders that we’ve been to Welfare Square will help us strengthen our relationships with the leaders of the Church in our communities.”

Participants also had opportunities during the weekend to visit the Family History Library, Church History Museum, and additional venues on Temple Square.

“The time on Friday spent traveling in the vans and at dinner conversing with LDS members really answered a lot of my questions and dispelled some myths I had been taught,” commented Greg Harmon, Director Outdoor Adventure, Grand Canyon Council.

On Saturday the group attended the morning session of general conference in the Conference Center.

“The conference messages were geared towards hope and service and I think that’s a great correlation to Scouting because we try to teach our Scouts about service to family, God, and others,” noted Paul Penttila.

Saturday meals included visits and remarks from Young Men General President Stephen W. Owen and Second Counselor Joseph M. Brough.

“Everything we are trying to do in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Boy Scouts of America is to build goodness,” taught Brother Owen. “It’s really good to memorize and know but it’s so much more important to feel. You have wonderful opportunities in Scouting to be with the youth and to help them learn to feel. I’m grateful to sit with you, walk with you, and work with you. We’re in this together as we instill faithfulness in the youth of the Church.”

During the Saturday evening meal Brother Brough taught, “We use Scouting to help our young men learn to be in the service of their God.”

“Being able to personally interact with Brother Owen and Brother Brough was one of those moments that one doesn’t forget because of their role in the Church and specifically because of their role in Scouting,” noted Paul Penttila. “It’s important for me to take those opportunities and listen as they speak from their hearts about why Scouting is important and how we can learn to serve Scouting better in the partnership.”

Garfield Murden, Senior Member Experience Specialist noted, “I understand now that the Church views Scouting as a tool to build young people. Scouting isn’t the end goal. We need to help people get that vision.”

“I now feel that I can at least have an intellectual conversation with my LDS leaders,” commented Kevin Fox, Camping Director, Denver Area Council.

And Dan Zedan, Council Commissioner, Three Fires Council concluded, “This seminar was well worth the time, I highly recommend attending.”
Baden Powell, the founder of Scouting, is quoted as saying “There is no religious ‘side’ of the movement. The whole of it is based on religion, that is, on the realization and service of God”.

One of the highlights I remember when I was a Scout, and one that I liked to emphasize as an eleven-year-old (EYO) Scout leader, was the Scout slogan of “Do a Good Turn Daily.” Doing a good turn emphasizes the Savior’s call to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:29). We connect our EYO Scouts with heaven when we work with them and teach them the Scout slogan. I trained my patrol leader to conduct an opening, then have each Scout make a report of their week as a Scout to include any good turns they have performed. It was slow at first, but after a while they began to bring their stories of the good things they had accomplished—one item at a time. Very soon, you could see their self-esteem improve through their conversations about the good that they were accomplishing in life.

This is an important exercise. As Church members, we need to learn how to return and report. Not just of our troubles, woes, needs, and wants, but also of our accomplishments. I emphasized to my EYO Scouts around the campfire that the good turn is just one of many things we should include in our report to Heavenly Father each evening in our prayers and on Sunday during the passing of the sacrament. Learning in their youth the value of introspection will allow them later in life to know what they are doing well as well as areas where they might have missed the mark in their lives.

A discussion with EYO Scouts around the campfire about what constitutes a good turn stimulates their young minds to think about service to others. The power behind the Scout slogan leads the EYO Scout on a singular basis, down a road of service—one day at a time. You can connect doing a good turn with Mosiah’s words, “And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

Scouting is firmly rooted in teaching young men to become men of character. The strength of the program lies in the fact that it clearly defines what it means to be a man of character. Not only is it defined by service to others through doing good turns daily, but also by the tenets of the Scout Oath and Scout Law. In the Scout Oath it unequivocally states the standard that is acceptable in life—to do one’s best. As Elder David A. Bednar puts it, “Ordinary people who consistently do small and simple things that are right before God will bring forth extraordinary results.” Learning to do the small and simple things well helps our youth gain confidence and build their character. As their character grows in a positive direction, it becomes more open to the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

Scouting’s tenets teach boys to be prepared. As an EYO Scout leader I spent time around a campfire talking to the EYO Scouts about being spiritually prepared. We prepare ourselves spiritually by keeping the commandments. Thus, we can connect with the heavens in our time of need and use the power of the priesthood to bless ourselves and others during tumultuous times. As Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley said, “We can so live that we can call upon the Lord for His protection and guidance. We cannot expect His help if we are unwilling to keep His commandments.”

Scouting provides youth the means to connect with heaven in their daily lives by providing service to others, building their character to emulate the Savior, and by being spiritually prepared. Helping your EYO Scouts see the values they are learning, and practicing those values on a daily basis, is giving them the skills they need to connect with heaven.
Mac’s Message #80: Scouting Connects Young Men to Heaven

By Mac McIntire, LDS-BSA Relationships Scout Blog

“Scouting is not about awards; it’s about experiences,” said Douglas D. Holmes, first counselor in the Young Men general presidency, at the recent LDS-BSA Relationships Seminar held before April general conference. “It’s about experiences that matter.”

The experiences that matter most in Scouting are those that bring young men to Christ and help them “become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and live by its teachings” (Handbook 2: Administering the Church, 8.1.3). Scouting—particularly LDS Scouting—is all about learning one’s duty to God. It is about connecting young men to heaven, meaning connecting them to their Heavenly Father; His Son, Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Ghost. Scouting experiences should be purposely focused on helping young men feel close to the Godhead.

When Moses was on a high mountain he talked to God and was reminded of his divine heritage. He was humbled by the immenseness of God’s creations. Although he felt insignificant in comparison, he was reminded again and again that he is a son of God (Moses 1:2-6). Perhaps like the Psalmist, he, too, thought: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, [yet] hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet . . . O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Psalm 3:6, 9).

No wonder we want our young men to get out among nature. No wonder outdoor activities are a significant part of the Aaronic Priesthood program, with Scouting as a means to connect young men to heaven. Being out under the heavens—the stars, the sky, sunsets and sunrises—can be an awesome, emotional experience that causes a boy to feel God’s presence. Since the beginning of time, the wilderness has been the location of significant conversion experiences. It has been the place where fulfilling one’s duty to God and accepting one’s priesthood stewardship has been galvanized. Private, reflective, spiritual moments in the woods, out in the desert, or on a mountain top have turned many of God’s children from a world of sin to a life of service.

As I said in one of my blog messages, “The six years a young man spends in the Aaronic Priesthood and Scouting program should be a spiritual training camp. During this period, a boy should rub shoulders with spiritually tuned parents and mentors, enjoy meaningful outdoor activities, learn practical leadership skills, pray regularly, and thoroughly immerse himself in the ‘priesthood playbook’ (the scriptures). A well-planned, spiritually-focused, comprehensive Aaronic Priesthood and Scouting experience can help young men permanently capture their elusive testimonies. It can anchor boys to the saving principles of the gospel” (Mac’s Message #10).

A former member of my ward often shared the purpose his mission president established for the missionaries in his area. Their goal was to “Help Others Feel and Recognize the Spirit.” This mission president realized HOFRS (pronounced hoe-fers) experiences were critical to helping people “become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and live by its teachings.” Adult Aaronic Priesthood and Scouting leaders ought to be in the business of creating numerous opportunities for HOFRS experiences for young men. Youth are connected to heaven and become closer to God and His Son, Jesus Christ, when they feel and recognize the Spirit of the Holy Ghost while engaging in meaningful priesthood quorum and Scouting activities. Aaronic Priesthood and Scouting activities ought to be a spiritual feast, rather than a mere fun-fest. They ought to focus young men on heavenly things, rather than on the things of the world.

At the recent LDS-BSA Relationships Seminar, Brother Holmes said, “Scouting is a tool to make our young men better disciples of Christ. But it is only a tool.” What priesthood leaders do with that tool, and how they labor in the Lord’s vineyard, can significantly impact whether a boy is firmly connected to heaven. Therefore, let us “Go to, and labor in the vineyard, with [our] might” that we may “have joy in the fruit” of our labors and preserve for the Lord that “which is most precious unto him” (Jacob 5:71, 74).
Our goal as LDS Scouters is unique. It is to: “Help young men become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and fulfill their divine roles” (Young Men Auxiliary Training). The Young Men General Presidency has suggested three ways to accomplish this goal:

1. **Be with them.**
2. **Connect them with heaven.**
3. **Let them lead.**

This month’s newsletter focuses on the second principle, “Connect them with heaven.” We all want our Scouts to become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ. But how can we help them become converted on a campout, at a troop meeting or other Scout activity?

As Scouters, we may feel a need to be in total control. We want to see “results” and “make things happen.” In contrast, the Lord’s way of influencing us is only “by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—” (D&C 121: 41-42).

One approach to creating an atmosphere where the Spirit can speak to our Scouts is called “guided discovery.” The word “discover” means to “show interest in (an activity or subject) for the first time” (Oxford Dictionaries Online, “discover”). One Scouter has described “guided discovery” as “an approach where Scouts are asked a question which leads them to examine a situation and then discover the best way to proceed” (The Guided Discovery Process, Larry Green).

The key to applying the principle of “guided discovery” is to focus on our Scouts, not ourselves. The Church’s online “Young Men Auxiliary Training” includes training videos such as “Help Us Discover the Gospel.” This video illustrates the importance of using the “discovery” method to help connect our youth with heaven.

As shown in this video, Elder Bednar has taught the importance of self-reliance in gospel education in this way: “As parents and gospel instructors, you and I are not in the business of distributing fish; rather, our work is to help our children learn ‘to fish’ and to become spiritually steadfast...Such learning requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion and not just passive reception” (David A. Bednar, “Watching with All Perseverance,” 180th Annual General Conference).

This approach is how the Savior taught. When the Savior wanted His disciples to really learn, He didn't just talk; He listened, answered their questions, and invited them to “discover the gospel for themselves” (“Help Us Discover the Gospel” video); (emphasis added).

Teaching in the Savior’s way is not usually teaching with “lectures or long sermons; it invites real, heartfelt questions” (“Help Us Discover the Gospel”). As shown in the above training video, before Jesus answered Nicodemus’ questions about baptism, he listened carefully; then, he gave short answers. The Savior guided His pupils to “discover” the truths of the gospel in their own way and in their own time. We can do the same.

In the “Help Us Discover the Gospel” video, one teacher observes, “As much as I want to pour into their heads everything I’ve learned and have in my heart, I can't do it. They have to find it for themselves. And so that's what my challenge is, it's to help them to feel and learn for themselves.”

How do we help our Scouts “discover” gospel principles for themselves? We can ask more questions, listen to our Scouts and guide them without lecturing. As we follow these principles, we can help create a setting where our Scouts can become converted to the gospel for themselves.
What is Varsity Scouting “Operation On-Target?”

Contributed By Gavin Christen, Area 4 Varsity Committee Vice Chair

Operation On-Target is a high adventure activity that puts Varsity Scouts on mountain peaks, on valley floors, on top of buildings, or in any place they can send a flash and see a return flash. These flashes come from using signal mirrors. A 2”X3” mirror flash can be seen 20 miles away.

The founder of Operation On-Target, Doug Brewer, said in the early part of the 1980’s that the name “Operation On-Target” was chosen at the inception because “the purpose of the experience was to get Scouts on target with the Varsity Scout program and on target on the peaks with mirrors.”

Operation On-Target is scheduled annually for the third Saturday in July nationwide, and the third Saturday in September for Arizona and New Mexico. Southern California takes part in both July and September. This year’s dates are July 15th and September 16th. The Appalachian Trail has what is called the “Golden Packet Event” that occurs during the July date each year.

When the team reaches their On-Target destination, letters of inspiration are read with all the boys as a reflection. These letters have been written by some very important people from 1983 to the present. The VIP letters have been written by Presidents of the Church, General Authorities, Church leaders, famous athletes, and Presidents of the United States. These letters can be found at www.bsaontarget.org.

Every year there are pins or patches for those who take part in the event. The Operation On-Target Varsity Scout Activity Pin can be ordered through the council or through the National BSA store. Custom-made pins or patches can be ordered at www.bsaontarget.org.

When Operation On-Target started in the early 1980’s, the goal was to send a mirror flash from the Canadian border to the Mexican border. This was achieved by Scout units in 1988. To have a successful Operation On-Target experience you need a peak or location, a ham radio operator, and mirrors. And the most important part is to have FUN.
Safety Moment—So the Tour & Activity Plan is Gone...Now What?

Contributed by Alan Rogers, LDS Risk Management Division

For more than 50 years the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) has used some form of planning and review tool, which was submitted to the local council or BSA National offices for review. As of April 1, 2017, the Tour and Activity Plan (T&AP) is no longer available. This is the result of an evaluation by a cross-functional team within BSA which determined that T&APs were significantly underutilized, added complexity, and limited the “safety planning” components of the planning process to just a few leaders.

BSA expects that the elimination of the BSA Tour and Activity Plan will:

- **Reduce complexity** by cutting back on processes and paperwork for unit leaders.

- **Increase or improve consistency** with existing planning resources –
  - BSA National Offices - Commitment to Safety,
  - The Guide to Safe Scouting,
  - The Activity Planning and Risk Assessment Strategy
  - National Camp Standards (NCAP) planning tools

- **Change the conversation** by engaging everyone (including youth) in risk-based planning.

For some leaders, this may not mean much because they were not familiar with the tools and resources the Tour and Activity Plan provided or how to use it properly. Others may shout for joy, as they are not required to complete one more form or online application before their unit goes on a high adventure activity. Some other leaders felt the T&AP was an indispensable part of the activity planning process and we applaud your efforts.

Leaders and boys still need to be registered and leaders need to be committed to follow safety guidelines for all youth activities as requested by the BSA and the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as outlined in their annual Safety in Church Activities letter.

Safety is still the priority! BSA is trying to change the conversation to involve the youth, direct youth leaders (such as den leaders, scoutmasters, coaches, and crew advisers), as well as the leaders from your chartering organization (bishops and counselors over the youth) who approve your unit’s plans and activities.

The desire is to gain greater a safety commitment by all front-line youth leaders, but in a less regimented, more common sense approach. They will need to be familiar with the potential hazards and do a risk-based assessment. Then they can discuss concerns and counsel together, while planning how to mitigate, reduce, or avoid anticipated risks. We have learned that solid and effective planning is the best way to help ensure an outing is Christ-centered, safe, and fun. As leaders counsel together and plan an activity, sometimes possible risks seem to jump right off the page. In other cases, the hazards may be more subtle and need to be coaxed into the light. After we take time to identify them, those risks can be mitigated or avoided. This describes the basic principle of planning a safe activity.

Over the next several months, we will focus several blog articles on our responsibilities and the benefits of following the programs and guidelines of the BSA. We will also help you identify some available resources that can be effective in your activity planning efforts.

When all is said and done, safety is important to the First Presidency “...both to preserve the safety of participants and to protect the Church from significant liabilities” (Safety in Church Activities, May 19, 2016). It is also important to your local and national BSA leaders as stated in BSA’s Commitment to Safety: “We want you to know that the safety of our youth, volunteers, staff, and employees is an important part of the Scouting experience.”

Perhaps this quote by Sir Robert Baden-Powell from his 1914 book Quick Training for War is appropriate to include here: “… The books lay down definite principles and examples which serve to guide the leaders when applying their common sense to the situation before them. No two situations are ever precisely the same, and it is therefore impossible to lay down exact rules that should guide in every case, but a man who carries precedents and principles in his head has no difficulty in applying their teaching in supreme moments of sudden emergency ...”

Remember – The “Adventure is Waiting...” I hope yours will be a safe one!
How Scouting Connected My Son to Heaven and Prepared Him to be a Missionary
by Nettie H. Francis is the mother of 5 sons: 2 Eagle Scouts, 1 Cub Scout, and 2 WannaBe Scouts

The Scout motto, "Be Prepared," parallels the title of the Aaronic or "Preparatory" Priesthood. But how exactly does Scouting prepare young men to be honorable priesthood holders and missionaries? In my opinion, Scouting provides opportunities for boys to connect with heaven in difficult situations away from home. Here are a few experiences my own son had as a Scout.

The first significant spiritual experience I remember him sharing was as an eleven-year-old Scout. Our family spent one week at Philmont Scout Ranch and he participated in activities with the other boys his age. One day the staff leaders took this large group of rambunctious Scouts on a long day hike. Our son prepared as requested with a daypack, several water bottles, food, sunscreen, hat, and rain gear. When he returned from the hike later that afternoon, he shared the following story with me:

"The hike started out fine. Everything was beautiful and we were having a lot of fun. But after a few hours I started to feel really tired. My pack was very heavy. I was hungry, hot, and thirsty. We had already rested during the hike but I wanted to rest again. However, I was too embarrassed to tell my leader that I needed another break. I didn't know what to do or how I could go on. Then I had the idea that I should say a prayer. So I did. I didn't stop hiking or close my eyes, I just prayed silently in my mind and asked Heavenly Father to please help me to make it through this hike.

"As soon as I said, 'Amen,' my pack felt lighter. I didn't feel as hot, thirsty, and tired and I suddenly had plenty of energy to go on. I didn't need to ask my leader to take a break, and I finished the hike without any problems. I know that Heavenly Father really does answer our prayers."

It is hard to express the tremendous gratitude I felt when my son shared this experience with me. At church he had learned about praying to Heavenly Father, but Scouting provided a pinnacle experience to test what he had learned.

As a young deacon he attended his first weeklong Scout camp at Camp Buffalo Bill—a beautiful camp located just outside the East Entrance to Yellowstone National Park. One afternoon each troop made a boat out of cardboard and duct tape and participated in a rowing race across the small lake. My son and his fellow Scouts crafted a boat and started the competition with high hopes. But halfway across the lake the boat disintegrated and sank. They were forced to grab their paddles and swim to shore. My son was sopping wet, cold, and mad. He even cried and wanted to come home. But instead his good Scoutmaster took the boys back to camp, built a fire, and soon they were all feeling better. By the time my son returned home that weekend the boat experience was just a funny story. He had learned at church to be cheerful, but Scouting gave him the preparatory opportunity to practice what he had learned.

As a 14-year-old Scout my son attended the 2010 National Jamboree in Virginia. He spent two weeks mingling with youth from all over the nation and world. He met dozens of Scouts who pledged duty to God and country despite their differing backgrounds and beliefs. At the jamboree he observed these boys and leaders while they camped, competed, and participated in high adventure. When he came home from the jamboree he stood in sacrament meeting and shared a powerful testimony of what he had experienced.

My son had learned in church that all people are children of God. But Scouting gave him the preparatory opportunity to mingle with boys from around the world and truly experience tolerance and appreciation for all.

When he was 16 years old he worked on staff at beautiful Camp Bartlett in southern Idaho. He lived away from home for 10 weeks, sleeping in a leaky staff tent in a mosquito-infested valley. During the day he taught lifesaving, canoeing, rowing, and swimming to young Scouts. It was exhausting work. continued
One very rainy night the call was made for the staff to go to the participant campsites and help Scouts dig ditches and divert water from their tents. It was late, and my son didn’t want to go out into the rain. Still, he pulled himself from his dry sleeping bag and spent the next few hours digging trenches for others. Two years later, at his missionary farewell, he bore testimony that this difficult experience was life changing. He had been taught in church to put others above self, but Scouting gave him the opportunity to do so.

Two years ago my son left to serve as a missionary in Denmark. Days in Denmark are often cold, dark, and rainy. Serving a mission isn’t easy, but as a young Scout he has already practiced relying on his Heavenly Father, remaining cheerful in difficult times, loving all people, serving others, and caring for himself away from home. These vital missionary skills were taught in church and solidified through Scouting. Yes, Scouting worked for us.

I’m sure most mothers can understand the joy I felt at hearing about my son’s struggles, his prayers, and ultimately his answers—and to know that he discovered for himself that Heavenly Father knows him. I’m grateful for difficult Scouting activities that continue to help all of my sons learn and understand their relationship with God and that continue to connect them with heaven.

I believe that the LDS-BSA partnership is inspired for our day when young men need experiences to test what Church teachers and parents have taught them. The defining moments of life don’t always happen when a boy is wearing a white shirt and tie and sitting in a church pew. For my son they happened while his hands were dirty, when he was sweaty and uncomfortable, and when he was wearing a Scout uniform—an outdoor activity shirt that reminded him of his duty to God, prepared him to be a missionary, and connected him to heaven.

Questions and Answers about Changes to the Young Men Program

Beginning in 2018, the Church will no longer participate in BSA Varsity and Venturing programs.

Click on the link to read the statement: [http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/questions-answers-changes-young-men-program](http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/questions-answers-changes-young-men-program)

2.0 Training and Development

Young Men and Primary leaders who are called to Scouting responsibilities should receive training in Scouting principles, policies, and procedures as used by the Church. Trained Scout leaders who understand and live the gospel, understand priesthood governance, and understand the Scouting program are better able to serve young men and boys involved in Scouting activities. Accordingly, adult leaders are considered trained when they complete the following training:

♦ Youth Protection Training (available online, to be completed before service with youth begins and repeated every two years).

♦ Leader position-specific training for Cub Scout, Boy Scout, Varsity, and Venturing leaders, or Troop Committee Challenge for troop committee members.

♦ Introduction to Outdoor Leadership Skills for Boy Scout, Varsity, and Venturing leaders (offered by BSA local districts and councils).

[Click here for the current version of the handbook](#)

Contact Us

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