

**Message: “Don’t Be Afraid”**

**Seeing the Scouts and their families brings back memories of my time as a scout.** I started in Cub Scouts, was a Webelo and then, at the age of 12, became a Boy Scout.

**This ties to our scripture in a couple of ways.** The most obvious way is the trek Jesus took with Peter, James and John. They hiked to the top of a mountain, literally and spiritually. This reminds me of my first summer camp as a Boy Scout. If you’ll bear with me, I’d like to share a bit of my story.

**It was exciting when I joined the troop.** I got to learn all sorts of new skills and make friends. Best of all, I got to hang out with the guys who were in high school. They were cool. They were also exploring new experiences. Their choice of summer camp was a good example.

**We traveled to the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico to camp out in the wild.** The focus of our expedition was to hike Sierra Blanca, a 16,000-foot mountain. We would set up base camp, get organized and then be transported to the trail head. I won’t bore you with a lot of the details, but there is one key point to know: once we were dropped off, we were completely on our own.

**Our objective was to hike up, over and down the mountain.** The trek was 35 miles long and took 5 days. There was no water, no food, no restrooms, no phone and no help. The twenty of us on the trip, scouts and adults, would have to depend on ourselves and each other.

**I should give you a bit of background on what I was like at the time.** I was sickly as a child, suffering from asthma and anemia. I played some baseball and a lot of front yard games. I weighed 70 lbs. And, by the time my parents got done helping me pack for the trip, my backpack probably weighed 60 lbs! My pack and sleeping bag alone weighed 20 lbs; that’s the way it was with old gear. This was 1970.

**My Dad and Mom had experience with scouts.** They were supportive. And the Scoutmaster was a leader in a local church. So, we set off. At first, it was a blast. We set up base camp, got to know each other for a day or two. We then stored unnecessary equipment and divided up the remaining food, water and gear among the 20 of us.

**I remember traveling for miles and miles before the truck dropped us off about half a mile from the tree line.** Boy, it looked far away and we were breaking the trail. I put my much-lighter pack on my back, fell in line and we started out. 35 miles and 5 days to go!

**I'd love to tell you the trip went great,** I was fine and everyone was impressed. But that's not what happened. By the time we got to the tree line, I was gassed! I was panting, drinking water way too fast and out of energy. I made it about 100 yards into the trees when I had to stop for the *first* time.

**The other scouts passed by, gently ribbing me.** After all, we were only 3/4 of a mile into a 35-mile hike. The adults encouraged me to get moving. But I couldn't. I was frozen, realizing how much I was in over my head. I didn't want to let everyone down, but I didn't know what to do. There was no way back. The truck was gone.

**So I tried again.** And again. And again. You can guess what happened. I only traveled about 100 yards each time. By this point, one of the Scoutmasters was walking with me. My heart was pounding, and I couldn't catch my breath. And, if this wasn't embarrassing enough, I burst into tears. Crying in front of the older scouts. I was humiliated.

**What happened next was humbling.** I remember each of the other scouts and leaders coming up to me. Everyone took something out of my pack, taking one of my burdens on themselves. Before you knew it, my pack was empty. The Scoutmaster sent the troop ahead and stayed with me. When I got control of myself, he coached me up the mountain, a few yards at a time. He taught me to look for short-term wins. We'd hike to a tree or a bend in the path or a rock. We looked toward the peak to get our direction. And, when needed, we'd stop to rest. We paced ourselves, I got my breathing under control, and only drank water when we needed it.

**Somehow, I made it to the first night camp.** I barely remember eating before crashing in my sleeping bag. The next morning, everyone asked me how I was. No one made fun of me. No one told me I shouldn't be there. They did ask what I felt up to doing. It was uplifting. I felt okay.

My spirit was okay. We set out. And I did better. I began to find a rhythm. It was still very difficult, but with help, I managed.

**If the story ended there, it would be a win-win.** But the trip took an unexpected turn, as life often does. You see, during the mid-day break, an incident occurred. Somehow, 3/4 of our water was lost. We didn't have enough water to spend four more days on the mountain. There was a stream near the end of the trail, 28 miles away, but it was up and over a mountain.

**The Scout leaders gathered us.** They asked what we wanted to do. We could go back and hope we might be able to find help on the dirt road. But there was no water that way. Or we could do a 4-day hike in 2-days, as there was a stream at the end of the trail.

**What would we do?** I remember we prayed as a group for God's guidance. The whole troop said go forward. There was never a question in my mind. Maybe if the other scouts or leaders had made fun of me or hadn't helped or been encouraging, I might have made a different decision. I felt great confidence and energy doing so.

**And we did it.** We made the peak in the afternoon but kept going. I felt awesome. We were singing songs in cadence as we hiked. I felt full of energy. I even took some gear back. They gave me the point position on the third day. We hiked 20 miles that day, arriving in the early evening. We camped out by the stream for two days, waiting until the truck arrived.

**It was a turning point in my life.** The sickly, timid boy who was afraid was gone. I found new confidence and faith in myself and others. And it has helped me as a person and leader all my life. Praise God.

**Love transforms fear.** This is the second way my story ties in. Far too often, we live half a life because we're afraid. We can fear those with power, influence and wealth. There are some who use their position to make us afraid. This is often confused with strength. I believe it's really a weakness. The threat of violence can only return opposition and violence. Those making threats are afraid themselves. They're really trying to save themselves by acting out first.

**Jesus' trip to the mountain with three of his best friends gives us a different picture: there is another way to be and to live.** It's the way of love, mercy and grace. Those who live this way aren't judgmental, rigid or uncaring. The way of love doesn't condemn. Those who embrace this view don't seek power, wealth and position for themselves. For them, the currency they use is love, which they freely, openly and willingly share. This isn't a utopian view or what we have to wait for after we die. This is a view of the beloved community, where God's blessings are received and shared here and now.

**Transfiguration Sunday is a day when we remember and embrace what God revealed on the mountain.** Jesus was revealed to be more than a great teacher, gifted healer and amazing prophet. Jesus is God made flesh, both human and divine in some mysterious way we don't understand. The Greek word used is metamorphoo (μεταμορφόω) which the English word metamorphosis comes from. It means to change form in keeping with an inner reality.<sup>1</sup>

**A caterpillar is a butterfly in the "before" form.** Only after it transforms do we see the beauty and grace of the butterfly. Similarly, Jesus is God in the "earthly" form. What Peter, James and John saw was a brief glimpse of the beauty and grace of Christ. And we get a glimpse, spiritually, through them. Let's review the scene ...

**After Jesus' revelation, the others didn't know what to say or do.** To make things even more confusing, Moses and Elijah show up and start talking with Jesus. Jesus often spoke about the Law and the Prophets. Moses is the law giver and Elijah a prophet who did miracles, much like Jesus. Both represent the covenant relationship God made in his promise to Abraham.

**One question asked is "How would they recognize Moses and Elijah?"** We don't know, but I can see Jesus greeting them: Yo, Moshe! Wassup, Elias. (I mean no disrespect). Faced with this, Peter starts babbling trying to figure out how to give respect to all three, but he misses the point. There's only one person due our reverence, respect and awe: Jesus. They find this out only moments later.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/3339.htm>

**Suddenly, a cloud covers the top of the mountain.** And a voice says, *“This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!”* (Matthew 17:5). And this brings them to their knees in awe and reverence. They have no strength or energy to do anything else. They don’t know what to do or what will come next. They feel like they’re over their heads.

**In this scary moment, love and grace appear.** Jesus cares. The cloud disappears. Jesus reaches down and touches the disciples. When he does so, Jesus is saying, “it’s me; you’re okay, I’m here with you.” And he spoke words to lift them up and encourage them, “don’t be afraid.” Even though the path ahead may be hard, there is a way. Look ahead for the signs, the landmarks, the bend in the path of life. You can make it. I’ll be with you, every step of the way.

**And they look up into Jesus’ smiling face, get to their feet and continue the journey with him.** They make a stop at the foot of the hill, where Jesus shows compassion on a child with epilepsy, who keeps falling into the fire when seizures affect them. He heals them, showing the group they have more to learn and more experiences to come. One of the most challenging is their journey to Jerusalem a few weeks later. This is a story for the upcoming weeks. It teaches us about the depth and meaning of faith. I hope you’ll come and walk this path with us, spending time with Jesus on your own mountaintop journey.

**What do you take away from our time together?**

We can go away with the idea we can be self-sufficient. If we have enough willpower, we can accomplish anything, until we can’t. Or we can go away seeing Jesus as some sort of first century Marvel character. A fiction made up to give hope to the hopeless. And that’s not true.

**Or we can see a glimpse of the beauty, grace and majesty of God.**

We don’t have to be afraid. God isn’t coming to punish us or separate us from our loved ones. God comes to us in Jesus, showing us we can live full, meaningful lives. We can boldly and confidently travel on this journey we call life, filled with faith, love and hope.

**I don’t know about you, but I know which path I’m going to take.**

*Let us pray a Scout's Prayer<sup>2</sup> (modified)*

O God, make us Trustworthy, for there are those who trust us.

Make us Loyal, for through loyalty we reach our highest ideals.

Teach us to be Helpful, for through helpfulness do we forget our selfishness.

Make us Friendly, for there are so many who need a friend.

Train us in Courtesy, for courtesy is the carpet on life's floor.

Make us Kind for kindness is the oil in the cogs of life's machinery.

Insist upon our Obedience, for victory comes only to those who obey.

Make us Cheerful, for cheerfulness is the green grass among the rocks in the path of life.

Train us in Thrift, for thrifty habits brighten our future.

Make us Brave; brave in the dark and brave in the light; but save us from becoming fakers in bravery.

Help us to be Clean – clean in thoughts, speech, and deed. And may we remember that our bodies are your holy temples, and that any abuse is to tamper with your Great Plans.

Above all, O God, help us to be Reverent toward all things which you have made when we are in your great out-of-doors, among the trees, along the streams, and on the hillsides. May we know it was you who made the waters to flow, the trees to reach heavenward, and the mountains to endure to all ages.

In all these things we ask that you help us. And may we never forget the covenant you made with us through Jesus Christ, so we may live and walk with you always. And in his matchless name, we pray. Amen

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<sup>2</sup> <http://scoutermom.com/4680/scouts-prayer-lord-badenpowell/>

**Matthew 17:1-9 (CEB)**

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain. He was transformed in front of them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light.

Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus. Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good that we’re here. If you want, I’ll make three shrines: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, look, a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!” Hearing this, the disciples fell on their faces, filled with awe.

But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anybody about the vision until the Human One is raised from the dead.”