

FINDING GOD IN CAMP

Whether this is your first time at summer camp or whether you have been to camp many times before, you have been anticipating this week for a long time. And now you are here. New sights, new sounds, new smells surround you. Every day will bring a new discovery about God, about yourself, about your relationship with your fellow Scouts, and about God's magnificent creation. In the midst of all the other exciting activities, you can also make this a time to live fully the twelfth point of the Scout Law: A Scout is Reverent. Reverent not just on the Sabbath or Holy Day of your faith, but every day. God will be your Counselor, your Guide, your Strength, and your Friend here at camp, as God is at all times in your life. The amazing and wonderful marvels of God's creation help you to know God better at camp, perhaps more than at any other time. Look up at the sky, day and night, and to the land and the waters. Nature reveals the enormity and power of God. See how things fit together by design and for a purpose so perfectly in God's creation from the tiniest to the greatest forms of life. Remember: "God doesn't make junk." God loves you and cares about you so much that even if you were the only person on the face of the Earth, God still would have created this Earth just for you.

PRAYER: Thank you, God, for this opportunity to be at camp. May it bring me the right balance of challenge and reward. May I give to it my best efforts and may you bless me as I do. Amen.



RESOURCES THAT ORIENT THE COMPASS OF LIFE

One requirement for advancement in Scouting is to learn how a compass works and how to orient a compass to find a direction for travel. It also requires a Scout to learn how to read a topographical map with all its colors, lines, and symbols and to use a map and compass together to complete a hike or bicycle trip without getting lost. These orienteering skills will help give you some of the best Scouting experiences you can enjoy. What are some other “maps” that help us orient our direction in life? The Scout Oath and the Scout Law are among those “maps” we are most familiar with. So are our families, friends, teachers and coaches, and religious leaders. But best of all are the sacred scriptures and sacred writings of our faith traditions. It is here that we find the teachings that give us guidance and direction for the journey of life so we can live life as fully as possible. The sacred writings of most of our faith traditions tell us that God is personal, loving, and just and wants to have a personal relationship with us. In almost every faith tradition is found the teaching that we know as “The Golden Rule,” which says that we should do to and for others what we expect others to do to and for us. Our scriptures and sacred writings are the compass, the map, the chart, and the guide for us to draw near to God. You are encouraged to use them as a daily reminder of your promise as a Scout to strive to live the Scout Oath and the Scout Law.

PRAYER: Thank you, God, for giving me many ways to know your will for my life. Give me the wisdom to follow you. Amen.



PERSEVERANCE

There's a common saying, "Every journey begins with one step." We can also say, "Every endeavor (or journey) continues with one *more* step." Someone has said, "great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance." Can you think of times in your own life when this has been true, when you've accomplished a task or project simply because you refused to give up when it would have been much easier to quit than to continue? Many times when life seems to be an ordeal we can make it into an adventure by our attitude, by how we inspire others to take "one more step" toward reaching the goal or finish line. Every day life holds the risk of sidetracking us from what we set out to accomplish. In Scouting perseverance may involve doing the requirements to reach the next rank, staying the course when the weather turns bad, or finishing a competitive game when we know we cannot come in first place. What other examples can you think of in your Scouting experience and in your life? No matter how great the distraction, we can finish the course if we stay focused and keep going and give it our Scouting best. God will help us do that if we daily make an effort to know that God is with us. Sometimes experiencing that through the examples of our friends and leaders, even more than through our own efforts, helps us keep focused on what is truly important.

PRAYER: God, give me the strength to endure, the wisdom to enjoy each moment, and the courage to push myself further than I ever have before. Amen. [From the Boy Scout High Adventure Base Worship Booklets]



THE TRULY WONDERFUL THINGS OF LIFE

A story is told about a teacher who had her students write down what they thought were the present “seven wonders of the world.” Many different ideas were presented, but among those most often mentioned were the great pyramids in Egypt, the Taj Mahal in India, the Grand Canyon, the Panama Canal, and the Great Wall in China. One student was having trouble with the assignment, so the teacher asked her to read her list. She said, “I’m having trouble because there are so many.” She went on to say, “I think the seven wonders of the world are to see, to hear, to touch, to taste, to smell, to laugh, and to love.” She had discovered that the most precious things in life are not things that can be built with human hands or purchased at any price. The truly wondrous things of life are those things we overlook as simple and ordinary and take for granted.

All our senses are given by God to make us more human and fulfilled in our life in God’s creation. Laughing and loving are universal in their meaning among all peoples of the Earth. In what ways are you seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, and smelling familiar things in new ways to expand your experience of God’s creation?

PRAYER: God, make my heart wide open to all the ways you connect me to your creation and to other people. I thank you for the wonderful ways you have created me in your image and likeness. Amen.



LIVING IN THE DEEP WATER

In a commencement address the Governor of Rhode Island talked about living life in the deep water. By that he meant to live life as fully as possible. Some people live only in the shallow water, superficially, and they never discover how wonderful life can truly be. The greatest “deep water” experience you can ever have is to honor God by living your life fully and with integrity. It is to deepen your relationship with God, to learn about yourself, to deepen your relationships with others—such as family, friends, neighbors, and fellow Scouts—and to plunge fully into the enjoyment of God’s magnificent creation. It means to live deeply in whatever arena of life you are in, be it school studies, sports and athletics, your work, your recreation and play, or your service to others. Think of the ways that Scouting is for you a “deep water” experience, how much fun you’ve had, and how you are better prepared for life because you have not been afraid to test the deep water. Most every faith tradition calls us to live thankfully and abundantly and joyfully, to “live in the deep water.” Promise yourself that you will always live life in the deep water, that you’ll honor God and self by living thankfully, joyfully, abundantly, and according to the principles embodied in the Scout Oath and Scout Law. You have only one life to live. Live it in the deep water. You’ll never regret doing so.

PRAYER: Be with me, God. Walk with me. Make me aware of your presence this day. Help me to live fully each good experience today. I will give you glory. [Adapted from the Book of Uncommon Prayer]



GOD RUNS BESIDE US

There was once a high school track coach who was not one of those coaches who stands on the sidelines yelling and clocking his runners. Instead he ran with them, making it difficult for any to slack off or fall behind or just plain drop out even when they wanted to. When they least expected it, there was the coach running right along beside them. Furthermore this coach didn't just run alongside his high school runners. He wanted to engage them in conversation. Now it's hard enough to keep your lungs and legs working as you run, but add to that chatting along the way. That's being challenged! But that was this coach's mode of operation. He knew his runners both physically and emotionally, and he ran beside them. For you, the person "running" beside you might be a supportive friend or parent, maybe even an older brother or sister, or some other relative. It might be a teacher or a religious leader giving you encouragement along the way. Chances are someone like that is in your life or will be in the future. For people of faith, whatever that faith tradition is, this image of one who is beside you to keep you focused and growing stronger and helping you to develop character, moral and physical fitness, a strong sense of confidence, and self-esteem, helping you to be the fullest person you hope to be ... this image is the image of God. God moves beside us, runs with us, engages us, energizes us. God sometimes takes us to places we don't even want to go or are afraid to go. But God knows what is best for us. God wants us to be the very best we can be because we reflect God's image and likeness and God loves us right into a full life when we let God do so. God will be with you today and always.

PRAYER: Dear God, when I pray let me feel your presence. When I worship you let me feel your love. In the quiet moments of the day, I will open my heart to you, God. And I know that you are with me always and that you will hear my prayers. Amen. [From The Graduate's Book]



BEING PUT TOGETHER RIGHT

Daniel Beard, one of the founders of the Boy Scouts of America, once said, “This was a good country in the past. It is a good country today. It will be a good country tomorrow unless we fail it.” There’s a story about parents who were having trouble getting their child interested in geography. They thought that if they purchased a puzzle of the United States, the puzzle would spark her interest. And to their amazement this child was able to put together that puzzle in no time at all. They asked her how she did it in such a short time. She explained that on the back of the map was a picture puzzle of the face of George Washington. She said, “When you get the man put together right, the United States comes out all right too.” Now that’s a significant insight. Because the best way to put things together as they should be in our country, in the world, is for each of us to be “put together right.” This story has important applications. Being “put together right” begins with our faith in God. It is living our faith that inspires us and molds us into people who reflect the image of God in our world. Being “put together right” means that we put faith, family, and friends first in the priorities of our lives. More than ever before our society, our nation, and our world need people just like you, people who are being “put together right,” people who will make a significant difference in the world and produce a secure future for themselves and their families.

PRAYER: God, I am thankful that I live in such a wonderful country as the United States of America. I am thankful for all the blessings you have bestowed on my country. Knowing that a good nation must be made from the strengths of its people, help me to be the best citizen I can be so that I will make a difference today and every day. Amen.



CHOOSE TO FOLLOW THE LIGHT

A troop of Scouts was touring Chicago. One of the highlights of their trip was to go to the observation deck near the top of the Sears Tower, a hundred floors above the ground. It was late in the afternoon, and far below busy traffic was moving along the city streets and people were hurrying home from work. One of the Scouts noticed something. People who were walking into the sun, low in the western sky, were walking with their shadows behind them while people walking in the opposite direction, away from the sun, were walking into their shadows. It didn't take him very long to make a connection between what he was seeing and his own faith tradition. Many faiths use the contrast between light and dark as an image of good and evil. To be in the light, or walking toward the light, is to be moving toward God, who is the source of all love and goodness for us and for all God's creation. To be walking away from the light, into one's shadow, can be compared to walking away from God, away from all that is good, into the darkness of separation from God, from others, from self, and even from God's own creation, of which we are a part. The choice is ours, isn't it? We can either choose to do that which is good or that which is bad, to live close to God or away from God and from one another. Which choices have you made in your own life? When have you made them? When have you changed direction and moved toward God and the light? How have you helped a friend, perhaps a Scout of your troop or patrol, to find the direction that leads to the light of God? The next time you are outside on a sunny day observe where your shadow is and make that a reminder of the teachings of your faith tradition about the power of God and the power of evil and the choices we make.

PRAYER: God, you are my light. Help me always to make choices that lead to you and give me the strength to follow them. Amen.



WORK HARD, PLAY FAIR, AND PADDLE YOUR OWN CANOE

“Work hard, play fair, and paddle your own canoe.” These are the words of Walter Jones, who was the equivalent of an Eagle Scout as a boy in Canada and an active adult Scout leader in both Canada and the United States throughout his life. He was also a leader in his religious faith tradition in both countries. His favorite advice to his own children and to youth in general is summed up in these words, “work hard, play fair, and paddle your own canoe.” Walter Jones’s wish for every young person, indeed every person, was for each to reach his or her full God-given potential in life. To “work hard” does not necessarily mean hard physical labor. It means to dedicate yourself to getting a good education, to helping out at home in the neighborhood and community where you live, and to finding the career that best fits your abilities and gifts. This will help you support your family and make you a productive citizen willing to give of yourself to make your community better. To “play fair” means to have fun in life, to enjoy time with family and friends, to know the benefits of recreation without always having to come in first, to develop the kind of values and character that will make others want to spend time with you. To “paddle your own canoe” means not to compare yourself with others, but to be fully the person God would have you to be. What other meanings in these words of advice can you think of for your own life? How does your Scouting experience help you fulfill these concepts? God does indeed want us to be the best we can be, and one way to reach that is to “work hard, play fair, and paddle your own canoe.”

PRAYER: God, help me to honor you with my life today. Help me to do my best for you in things I will learn today, in my companionship with my friends, and in reaching the goals that you have helped me set for myself. Amen.



“YESTERDAY IS HISTORY, TOMORROW IS MYSTERY, TODAY IS....”

There’s an old saying, “Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, today is...” We can fill in the answer to what today is in many ways. What are some of the ways you would answer that? Let’s look at it in light of the opportunities that you have in your life. Yesterday is indeed history. It is past. It is gone. It is only now in your memory. Perhaps it was a really good day, perhaps only an average day with nothing of real note taking place. Or maybe it was the kind of day that we all have from time to time, a day we are glad is over and gone. And then there’s tomorrow. Tomorrow has not yet come. We may have plans for tomorrow, things to do, friends to hang out with, school work to complete, places to go, but until tomorrow is here we don’t really know whether or not we will be able to fulfill our plans. Tomorrow is filled with unknowns. Tomorrow truly is a mystery for us. But what about today? Today is the only “real” time we have. What are your plans for today? What are your goals for this day? How are you going to honor and thank God today by the things you say and you do, and the things you don’t say and don’t do? Each new day brings with it a chance for a new beginning. The choices you make today may be influenced by what happened yesterday, and they may affect what you plan for tomorrow. But today is God’s gift to you. Be thankful for it and do your best to make it the best day of your life and a day in which you will come closer to the person God would have you to be.

PRAYER: God, today is the day that you have made. Help me to rejoice and be thankful for this day and live it fully. Amen.



THIS FRAGILE EARTH, OUR ISLAND HOME

Astronomer Carl Sagan often presented a vision of planet Earth by reflecting on a spacecraft with intelligent beings approaching Earth from a distant place in the universe. His descriptions of what these beings see as they come closer and closer to Earth, with increasing clarity of the planet and its many life forms and human-made objects, were always very vivid. Many lessons can be learned from such images. On a dark and clear night go off to a place where you can see the myriad of stars and heavenly bodies clearly in the darkened sky. Pick out the pinpoint of light of a distant star and pretend that it is planet Earth and you are looking at it from an almost unimaginable distance. It seems like a very insignificant place amid the visible stars and other objects in the night sky, doesn't it? Reflect on the fact that this is what our Earth does look like from such a distance. Now think of that famous picture of the rising Earth taken from the moon a few decades ago, that exquisite watery blue sphere with its white cloud formations and the broad expanses of its continents clearly visible, this "fragile Earth, our island home." Think about how unique Earth is in our solar system, perhaps even in our Milky Way Galaxy and beyond. Think about our place on Earth as human beings created in the image and likeness of God and what that means in terms of our relationship to all of God's creation, both on Earth and throughout the universe. How privileged we are to be co-creators with our God and to share in the wonders of God's universe! It is a humbling experience, a beautiful experience, an experience beyond words. Relax, reflect, enjoy, praise and thank God in your own words. And promise to do your part to take care of your world and the people within it.

PRAYER: Thank you for helping me to know that in the immense and beautiful universe you continue to create you have made me unique and special in your image and likeness. Amen.



PURPOSE AND DESIGN IN GOD'S CREATION

God's design of God's creation is a wonderful miracle. The beauty of nature is inspiring. As often as you can, spend at least a few minutes a day to look closely at some part of the natural world around you. Give thanks to God for its design and its connection to all other living things (and nonliving too, such as rock and earth and water and clouds). You will be awed by what you experience and discover. One day the writer of this reflection was sitting quietly in a sunny location in Florida when he happened to catch in his vision the tiniest of brightly colored spiders dropping on a thread of silk from a tree branch. As he watched, this spider swayed in the light breeze until he landed on another lower branch. It was not long before a framework for a web was formed from three or four sturdy single vertical strands placed at some distance from one another. Then the work of shaping the web began in earnest and was accomplished quite quickly. Around and around, beginning from the outside and working toward the center, this tiny spider connected strands of its web together in an exquisite geometric pattern, each circular strand perfectly separated from the next in an exact design. Finally the spider reached the very center and took up residence, waiting for an unsuspecting insect to be caught in the newly constructed web to provide the food and nourishment for the spider's life and species to continue. Each part of God's creation is uniquely gifted by its Creator with all it needs for survival and the continuance of its species. This is no less true for you. The difference is that you are aware of how you are using God's gifts to you. Use them wisely and for their intended purposes, and your life will bring equal glory to God as that tiny little spider in a tree in Florida did.

PRAYER: When our eyes behold the beauty and grandeur of your world, O God, we see the wisdom, power, and goodness of its Creator. Your name alone is exalted. Amen.



RAINBOWS

More than 17,000 enthusiastic Scouts from 108 countries of the world gathered in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta, Canada, for the XV World Jamboree. Thunderstorms with cold rain threatened the opening ceremonies and arena show. Just before the events began the clouds parted, the setting sun shone brightly, and a rainbow arched across the sky over the site of the Jamboree. Summer thunderstorms are common also at the Florida National High Adventure Sea Base. At breakfast one morning the heavy downpour of rain stopped and a beautiful rainbow formed in such a way as to be almost a welcoming gateway to the Sea Base from the Bay of Florida/Gulf of Mexico side. Rainbows are one of God's truly spectacular natural phenomena. Even though we know how naturally they form, often the world seems to come to a temporary halt so we can enjoy the beauty of these colorful heavenly creations. One reason for this surely comes from the religious tradition that God sealed a new relationship with humanity and with all God's creation following the Great Flood by the sign of the rainbow in the sky. The rainbow has become a reminder of God's presence, often a reassuring message, as it were, that whatever has gone wrong will be made OK. Stories are told of how difficult and stressful situations that seem to have no resolution are calmed, at least for a time, by the sign of the rainbow in the heavens. God is present. God is walking with us through both the joys and the sorrows and the challenges of life. We need not be afraid. The next time you see a rainbow in the sky, may it be a reminder to you of God's companionship with you every step of your life. And give thanks.

PRAYER: God, I thank you for the many ways you make yourself known to your people. I especially thank you for the sign of the rainbow, which gives me joy and a continuing reminder of your loving and caring presence with me and with all people. Amen.



“THE WHOLE WORLD HAS BEEN WAITING FOR YOU TO SHOW UP.”

“The whole world has been waiting for you to show up!” These are the words of a Scout camp director to the excited Scouts at the closing campfire of summer camp. They are potent words, filled with hope and promise and expectation, and they set the tone for every Scout’s return back to home and community. You have enjoyed a terrific week of camp. You’ve worked on skills to advance in rank and to take with you for the rest of your life. Skills in leadership, in camping, in waterfront activities, in cooking, in hiking, perhaps in craft making, in field sports, and in building confidence and a stronger sense of yourself. You have enjoyed competitive games and campfire programs and service projects and special events. Maybe you’ve made some new friends who have helped to bring out the best in you, and you have done the same in them. You’ve learned to trust in yourself, in others, and in God. What other things can you add to this list as you reflect on your week at camp? Without perhaps even realizing it, you most likely have practiced every one of the twelve points of the Scout Law sometime this week. You’ve been trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. It has become ever so much more a way of life for you. You’ve changed this week and you are returning home stronger in body, mind, and spirit. You’ve grown up a bit and you are that much closer to fulfilling all the potential that God has given you for a healthy and productive and full life. You’ve come to the end of your summer camp experience for this year. And while you can’t stay here now, you can return again. And you probably will, because it has been one of the best weeks of your life. As you leave for home remember that you can do anything with your life from this moment on and also that you are called by God to make a difference in the world. You are a Scout!

PRAYER: God, life is full of beginnings and endings. Help me to make the best of each new experience as I grow in my relationship with you, with my family, and with my friends. Help me not to waste a single day, but to make every day a day on which I can make a difference for the betterment of all. Amen.

