

**Talk given by Elder Cree-L Kofford  
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It is good to be here and see many old friends. I am honored to have been invited to come to honor you. It is a thrill to see you and to appreciate the depth and breadth of your support of this great organization.

I came to Scouting late in my life. At the time when I should have been enjoying its benefits I lived on a farm in a very, very small town about 20 miles from the closest paved road. There weren't enough young men to worry about so we didn't have Scouting. My first real encounter with Scouting came shortly after I graduated from the University of Utah. The phone rang at my home and the voice announced that he was an official of the Scouting organization in the Provo area. He said, "You have been recommended to us as someone to help us with the Eagle Recognition Banquet." I wasn't sure I knew what that was so I wisely kept quiet. He said, "We take every young man who has received his Eagle and we have a banquet which honors them. Our practice," said he, "is that we ask them what they are most interested in and then we seek sponsors from among the most outstanding men in the community to take them to the dinner and spend the evening with them, explaining the things in which the boy is interested. Your job," he said, "if you decide you want to help, is that you are to assist us in finding the sponsors." I thought that sounded kind of interesting so I started on the project. I wasn't sure how I would get in to see anyone or to talk to them, but perhaps one story will illustrate the manner in which it occurred.

One of the young men wanted to be a pilot, particularly in the military. Now the most outstanding man I knew of in Utah County at that time, and who was a pilot, was the head of the BYU Air-ROTC. So I thought, gosh if we can get him that might be a good thing. So I called. He was a colonel in the Air Force. I finally wended my way through his secretary and office staff and told him I was calling on a matter of business for the Boy Scouts of America. He said, "I am not interested." I said, "You don't know whether you are interested. I haven't told you why I am calling yet." He said, "I don't have time to talk to you." I said, "If you will give me a minute and a half, I assure you that when I am finished you will be glad I called." He said, "Well, I can't talk to you now but if you will call me at this time," (it was two or three days later) "I'll talk to you." So when I called a few days later as requested, his first words were, "Oh yes, I remember you. You have one and one-half minutes." And he said, as though to set me at ease, "I have my watch out." I thought, "You know, if this guy has his watch out I'd better do the same." So I did. For a minute and twenty seconds, I talked as fast and as forcefully as I knew how, ending with, "We want you to go pick this young man up. We want you to spend the evening with him, be polite and considerate and concerned about him, and take him to the Eagle Recognition Banquet. And, oh, by the way, we want you to pay for it." To his credit, it didn't take him but a moment to say, "I'll be delighted to help." Interestingly, that was the response I received from every single leader in Utah County that I spoke to over the course of those weeks when I was working on that assignment, all the way from executives at Geneva Steel

to executives at BYU and local businessmen and professionals. I have found that kind of reception the rest of my life.

That began my fifty-year love affair with Scouting. Shortly thereafter we moved from Utah to go to the University of Southern California. After graduating from there, I was called to preside as a Bishop of one of the local LDS wards. It was a large ward with a big contingent of young men, many from disadvantaged homes. I said to myself, "I need all the help I can get if we are going to save these young people" and concluded that Scouting was one of the vehicles most useful in accomplishing the changing of lives that was needed. So we poured every bit of talent we had into the Scouting organization. All of the organization the Scouting and church manuals called for, we had. I think it was the only one in the entire world that was staffed in complete detail, including the full troop committee with substitutes and everything else. It worked. Over a period of years, the Aaronic Priesthood leaders, together with the Scout program, were able to change a lot of lives.

When I became president of the Pasadena Stake, which some of you may know is the stake over which President Howard W. Hunter presided, I inherited a tradition of excellence in Scouting. It was something that was just there. Everyone did it. Everyone who became a member of a bishopric or the High Council or the Aaronic Priesthood program or the Mutual program (in those days we called it MIA, I believe it was) was expected to have a Scout uniform and expected to wear it on various occasions throughout the month as we went to various places. It was marvelous to see half of the men in a large assembly dressed in Scout uniforms, talking about many kinds of business. I don't know that's necessary but it created an atmosphere of Scouting. Everybody understood Scouting and knew it was important. Our Courts of Honor were works of art. I have been to Courts of Honor (which we held on a Stake basis because we inherited that as a format) where there would be large numbers of visitors. Some of them came just to see the posting of the colors, which I will tell you was done with dignity and class. Many would come just to see the ciphers who were turning into real human beings because of the efforts of great Scoutmasters. And so it was fun to be there. I was particularly pleased when our Scout people told us we had been awarded the #1 troop in the Church two years in a row. I didn't do anything to accomplish it but I was certainly glad to accept the glory that it brought and, of course, I have been grateful for all the other good things that Scouting does.

For that reason, I admire Scouting. I have admired it for a long time. I like it as an organization. I am like many of you, I am relatively direct. I like to tell people where I stand and I try not to deviate from where I stand once I have said it. That is not a very good way to get along in some circumstances, but that is just the way I am. I think Scouting's built that way. I love that. I love the integrity which that brings. There are men who illustrate what I think Scouting is. One of them is a prophet of the Book of Mormon named Abinadi who was captured by a wicked king and told he was going to be put to death. The king offered Abinadi the chance to live if he would recall the bad things he had said about the King and his people. Abinadi responded as follows: "I will not recall the words which I have spoken, for they are true." That answer cost him his life. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates did about the same thing. You remember him. He was a gifted teacher. He was tried for, among other things, corrupting the youth. At one point in his trial, he was allowed to speak to those holding the trial. He said, "Acquit me or not acquit me, but one thing, I will never

change my life even if it means I die many times.” Now, that’s the kind of thing Scouting is. Let me tell you why I say that. Scouting has pronounced its principles clearly and unequivocally. We could look at a number of places but let me just quickly look at one with you. I am reading from something that most of you have memorized. The Boy Scout Oath. “On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law. To help other people at all times. To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.” The Cub Scouts say about the same thing. They pledge to do their duty to God and their country, and the Tiger Cub program, in which some of us are interested, says I promise to love God, my family and country. Scouting says in that way and in a number of other ways those are the principles for which we stand. These are the things that are important to us. Now it’s a short jump from there to say, therefore, if you don’t believe in a personal God, you have no place in Scouting. Scouting has said that. There’s no bones about it. We just say that to people and that’s the way Scouting is run. Scouting says you can’t stay morally clean and straight and be honest with your God if you are engaging in homosexual activities and so there isn’t any place in Scouting for homosexuality. Scouting has said that. It has stood by it and it has cost it dearly, as I am going to explain to you in a minute. Scouting is Abinadi in corporate form. It’s Socrates in the twenty-first century.

Well, what’s happened is that Scouting has been faced with a changing set of circumstances. The things for which Scouting stands were popular back in the 40's and 50's and 60's and we were lauded and applauded for them. But the world began to shift and it would have been very easy for Scouting to have shifted. They could have altered their life, to use Socrates’ metaphor, and could have changed. Scouting did not. It stood firm on its principles. It stood firm while the Girl Scouts allowed the girls to change their pledge, leaving out the pledge to God. It stood firm while the Canadian Scout movement moved forward without the thorny issues of homosexuality and duty to God involved in its principles. It stood firm when in 1997 the British Scout program eliminated any discrimination or exclusion of those engaging in homosexual activities. It stood on its principles at a time when many in the world were beginning to turn against those principles. It stood while the Washington Post printed editorials accusing Scouting of all sorts of bad things. It stood while the New York Times wrote editorials accusing it of all the bad things. And face after face lined up against Scouting and Scouting stood firm, and that is why I admire it. I love it for that reason. It has never deviated from its principles. It has paid the price to stay there and it stays there today to the great frustration of many who would bring it down.

It reached its climax on June 28, 2000. That’s a day many of you totally involved with Scouting will know. It’s a day which started about ten years earlier when a young man named Dale, who was a student at one of the universities in New Jersey and who had been an Assistant Scoutmaster (and, if my memory is correct, an Eagle Scout) said publically, “I am a homosexual” and Scouting said, “You cannot be a homosexual and be in the Scouting program because our principles do not allow it.” And arrayed against Scouting came a host of demons that would have done hell justice. They filed a suit against Scouting and a New Jersey trial court held in favor of the young man. The New Jersey Supreme Court upheld the trial court’s decision. There was a shudder throughout many around the world who thought that Scouting was about to be brought to its knees. Some of us wonder if Scouting will have the courage to stand. Not many do. We have all known companies

who have buckled under the pressures that have been brought against principles that are God given. Fortunately and thankfully and gratefully, Scouting did not buckle. Scouting did not deviate. Scouting did not change and finally on June 28, 2000 the United States Supreme Court, in a five to four decision (which is way too close), announced a decision in favor of Scouting, reversing the holding of the New Jersey court and giving Scouting the right to proceed with the principles for which it stood and still stands.

Let me tell you who filed friends of the court briefs against Scouting in that case. I believe there were about twenty organizations who filed trial briefs on behalf of Mr. Day. You will be interested in their reading. I will try to be brief. The American Civil Liberties Union, the American Federation of Teachers, the Anti-Defamation League, the California Women's Law Center, Center for Women's Studies, the Equal Rights Advocates, Human Rights Campaign, Mexican-American Legal Defense, Educational Fund, NAACP Legal Defense Educational Fund, National Asian Legal Consortia, National Council of Jewish Women, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Now Legal Defense in Education Fund, National Partnership for Women and Families, National Women's Law Center, Northwest Women's Law Center, People for the American Foundation, Women Employed, Women's Law Project, People for the American Way. They stood there that day and saw the Supreme Court rule against them. That array of talent caused the Director the ACLU's Lesbian and Gay Rights Project to comment: "This brief makes an incredibly profound statement. Not simply in its content, but in its source. Every leading civil rights and first amendment group in the country has come forward together."

They may have come forward, but they hit an immovable object when they tackled the Boy Scouts of America. I don't think they understand the word principle in the same way the Boy Scouts understand it. That's why I admire them. It hasn't stopped since then. You would have thought that might have given respite to the great organization that it is, but it didn't. In the year 2000, within a few weeks after the Supreme Court ruling, a representative in the United States House of Representatives suggested that Congress revoke the 84-year old charter of the Boy Scouts of America. United Way began efforts to discontinue funding to Boy Scouts. In the year 2001, a reformed Jewish leader suggested that their parents remove their children from the Boy Scouts and its synagogues and their sponsorship of Scout troops cease because of the stand of the Scouts on gays and homosexuals. And in February of 2001, the Washington Park Church in Denver terminated its 60-year association with the Boy Scouts of America by holding a service of separation from the Scouts in front of the congregation. More recent events of similar nature have occurred.

The purpose is not to talk about those who fight against the principles of Scouting. It is to honor Scouting because of its integrity, to stand for what it believes. That's why I admire them. I admire them as I admire Socrates. I admire them as I admire Abinadi. God bless the Scouts and Scouters for having the courage to stand.

Now, let me tell you why I love them. I love Boy Scouts of America for another reason. It doesn't have anything to do with their integrity, though they have it. It doesn't have anything to do with their moral fiber, though they have it. It has everything to do with your children and grandchildren. Just

think about them for a minute. If I were to ask you to quickly tick off in your mind a list of characteristics you would most like to see in your daughter's new found husband or in your son's new found wife or grandchild's wife or husband, you would list certain things. I believe I know what they would be. Now, if I ask you on a separate list to write the things you think they are being taught in schools and in society today, how close would the two come? Unless you are very, very, very fortunate, you will find very little connection between the two. What you think is important would include many of the things that the Savior taught in the fifth chapter of Matthew, or the Sermon on the Mount as we call it. Those things which are personal characteristics. I believe you would desire such things as loving, kind, considerate, determined, patient, faithful, loyal, hard working. These, and others like them, are the characteristics I believe you would want.

What will you find being taught to your children? Unfortunately, except in a very few places in our society today, we have made idols out of other things. When was the last time you saw the school newspaper at your local high school pick the boy or girl who was the greatest peacemaker, or the most loving, or the kindest, or the most honest, or who had the greatest integrity? Have you ever, ever in your life seen anybody publically honored for that in a public school setting? If you have, you have had a unique experience. What have you seen honored? Let me tell you what you have seen honored. You have seen athletics honored. You have seen the picture of the young man throwing a touchdown in the last minute of the fourth quarter of an important game. You have seen a picture of a beautiful three-point jump shot. That's what you have seen. In our society today, your children are going to school with the idol of an athlete. Now, you are fortunate if your children are athletic. It's no problem. But if they are like some of your children, they are living in a quiet hell and you know it if you are looking and paying attention to them. They go to school alone. They work at school alone. They eat lunch alone. They come home alone. They have no friends. Why? Because they can't throw a football ninety yards. They can't put a three pointer in the basket. Once in a while, in some schools, intelligence will get them some credit, but not much. Athletics has taken the place of all other principles.

Some would argue that Christ made a big mistake 2000 years ago. He should have started off by saying, "Blessed are those who can run 20 yards through a tough opposing line." That would have been far more applicable to our society today. And, by the way, if you have ever been a boy who's slightly under-sized, who doesn't have a body like Arnold Schwarzenegger, you haven't lived. You women don't have any idea what goes on in school. Have you ever heard of school bullies? You think they are coming right out of pioneer times? Don't believe it. Try being a seventh grader going into a junior high school in many schools in the country today to know what it feels like. Lunch money gets stolen, you get banged against a locker, they scare you to death. You can't tell your mother. You don't want her to know that you're scared out of your wits. You can't tell your dad. He still has his golf trophy on the mantle in the study. He's an athlete. In reality, many of the dads aren't really athletes but they have their sons believing they are and so the son has no place to go. That's bad.

Now, if you want to know how bad it is for girls, try being a girl who's 35 pounds overweight and not terribly pretty. That's an experience. That's a marvelous thing. Open your eyes. See what goes

on. Walk down to the school bus stop and watch them standing by themselves. Can you imagine what's said about them as they walk down the aisle of the school bus or, for that matter, the aisle of the sidewalk. Words that you wouldn't want your daughter to hear are shouted because they are not five feet four and they don't weigh 104 pounds and they don't look like the latest Pop star. They look more like their mother. But our society today doesn't make any room for that. That's what's happening. That's what your children are facing, and my children, and my grandchildren. And, unless our young men are taught differently by someone who cares, they are among those helping to ruin the lives of our young women. I was a public school teacher long enough to know that I know what I'm talking about. I have worked with youth for nearly 50 years and I know what I'm telling you is true. I'm not denigrating in any way the public school system or education. They do the best they can. There are simply not enough resources to do what needs to be done. Churches can help and can do a lot of things but there are some things that cannot be taught in classrooms or in other places that are typically church-oriented. And that's where Boy Scouts of America comes in. There are places and things which can better be taught in a tent out in a forest or, for that matter, in no tent under the sky. There are things that can be taught when a man reaches out and teaches a young man. There are things which are taught in the atmosphere that Scouting produces that cannot as effectively be taught anywhere else.

Let me close by telling you a story of a young man. I met him when he was very young. His name was Rusty. Rusty was horribly underweight, terribly unattractive. He had buggy whips for arms and was not accepted. He had a dour personality and no friends. His mother was not much different. She was divorced, overweight, had a little black cloud that followed her everywhere she went. She hadn't had a wonderful, positive experience in her entire life. I first had close contact with Rusty in an experience I will never forget. Our scout troop had decided they would take the Scouts into the high Sierras for a week-long trip and, as was customary, most of the fathers who had Scouts in the troop went along to be of whatever assistance they could. I foolishly volunteered to go. We had to climb over Mono Pass up in the High Sierras. I swear that pass is 25,000 feet high. We camped at Mono Lake for a day to acclimatize and then started up what seemed to me to be a sheer cliff. Today they would have to use rope climbing equipment to climb that cliff, but our Scoutmaster didn't know that and so he just started up. He came to me as we started and said, "Brother Kofford, would you please stay back with Rusty? I know he is not going to be able to keep up. I don't want to embarrass him by yelling at him all the time. If you will just stay with him and come along, I would appreciate it." So I did. It turned out I was very grateful to have Rusty. He walked very slowly and he was still faster than I was. We went along for a while. It was evident that Rusty, while pleasant enough, was anxious to see his scoutmaster. They had already started to bond. Soon here came the Scoutmaster down the hill. My first thoughts were, "You are too dumb to be a Scoutmaster. Nobody comes down that hill after you have once gone up it." He came down, put his arm around Rusty and pulled him off to one side of the trail. I stayed a respectful distance away. They talked about things that I didn't hear, but I did watch Rusty. His face smiled. His shoulders squared. A light came into his eyes. When they had finished talking, the Scoutmaster just put his arm around him and slapped him on the back and said, "That's good, Rusty. I will look for you in camp." As he started to leave to go back up, he said, "I've got to go catch up with the others but, Rusty, I'll save a place right by me for you when you get into camp. I want to be sure you are there."

Rusty changed. He transformed that day. Now I don't mean to suggest that all of his problems disappeared, but I can tell you they began to disappear. And in the years that followed, Rusty was a regular attender at Scout meetings. He changed dramatically. He ultimately graduated from high school and established himself as a respectable person within the community. I will forever credit two men, his priesthood advisor and his scoutmaster. The teachings the Scoutmaster gave could only have been given in places like that trail going up over Mono Pass. They couldn't have been given anywhere else and Rusty probably wouldn't have listened anywhere else. That's why I love Scouting. Scouting did that for my sons. It will do that for yours and for most of you your grandsons. Thank goodness we have Scouting. I love it, I admire it and I am grateful for it, even as I am grateful for you and your contributions to Scouting. Without what you represent, what I have described cannot happen.

God bless you for all you do and thank you for being here.