

Beyond a Mountaintop Experience

This dad discovered the importance of transparency when he took his 14-year-old son on a father-son adventure in Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Wyoming is far from our home in Florida, but my 14-year-old son and I grew closer together when we took part in a Christ in the Tetons father-son retreat last year in the breathtaking Teton Mountains in Jackson Hole.

Joshua was happy to commit after hearing the itinerary: Five exhilarating days filled with climbing, fishing, rafting, horseback riding, hiking, biking and a day at Yellowstone National Park.

I wanted this to be an exciting time of refreshing and renewal for both of us because we've had our share of challenges to work through these last few years.

It was my hope that this trip would introduce some light into places not easily accessed in our relationship. My prayer was that something significant would occur as a result of our adventure.

The mountains were incredible and the accommodations and meals were top-notch. We enjoyed all the luxuries of life back home minus TV, radio and the Internet. Our fellowship with other fathers and sons proved enriching and highly enjoyable. This was an amazing experience.

My son and I gained an enlightened and fresh perspective on what godly manhood looks and acts like. Through the curriculum created by Robert Lewis, founder of Men's Fraternity, we

learned how a man of character would grow to reflect certain distinct faces: warrior, lover, friend and king. I was strengthened by these illustrations and encouraged that my son had received such a simple yet precise depiction of how to recognize a noble and godly man of character.

I don't know whether my son will best remember the exhilaration of rappelling down a mountain cliff, tackling an eight-foot rapid, catching his first rainbow trout or driving through a herd of buffalo, but I know this was an unforgettable trip for both of us. We were able to connect and get to know each other more intimately than ever before.

This was a great opportunity for me to enjoy his personality in a neutral setting and gain a better appreciation for his sense of humor. We had a fulfilling time traveling together—a rarity for fathers of teens these days.

I felt that the Lord had a special purpose for my son and me at this retreat. God must have known I was ready to take some important steps in my relationship with Joshua. I had been praying that God would do something inside both of us that would allow truth and healing to break through.

How often does a man feel safe enough to open up and become truly transparent? The idea of opening myself up for inspection and correction seemed scary to me, but I was able to confess sins from my past and ask my son for forgiveness. We had several significant moments together, which have been catalysts for growth between us. Joshua and I will walk through life with the memory of what occurred on this trip. More importantly, it seems the Holy Spirit orchestrated these circumstances in order to bring about spiritual breakthrough in our relationship.

I believe my son and I crossed over to some important new beginnings. There was truth waiting to be poured into my son's heart and it was time for me to act. Although Joshua is

familiar with the words “I love you,” he didn’t often hear the many reasons why. These are things a son must hear from his father.

At the end of the week, we had our mountain adventure. But the greatest part of the trip had more to do with my taking a risk of making myself transparent and vulnerable to my son. In reality, this was just the beginning of our adventure.

Joe Ciaramatero is a head hunter for a job search firm in Orlando, Fla.

Outward Bond

New Man’s guide to father-son adventures this summer.

With school out for the summer, you have the opportunity to get away with your son for some bonding time. You and your son can expect a life-changing experience with one of the following nonprofit, outdoor-based ministries, which specialize in father-son adventures.

JH Ranch

Located in northern California’s Salmon Mountains, Johnston Hospitality Ranch, better known as JH Ranch, opened in 1980 and is the oldest Christian adventure camp in the country. Launched in 1992, the Father & Son/Daughter Adventures are one-week programs that combine outdoor activities with devotional times in a group setting.

Activities include white-water rafting, a rope obstacle course, horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking and shooting down a 300-foot mountain water slide. Although there is no formal curriculum, the camp’s theme and premise are based on the greatest commandment (see Matt. 22:37-38).

"Our motto is 'I heard and I forgot. I saw and I remembered. I did and I understood,'" Bruce Johnston, president, explains. "We teach by way of practical application. A father and his son or daughter are placed in a real-life adventure environment, where they have an opportunity to apply the things they just heard. They're taking home lessons learned, which is better than just inspiration."

Located four hours north of Sacramento, JH Ranch anticipates 240 fathers and sons to take part in five sessions this summer, which run through Aug. 6. The camp's minimum age is 12. Cost per father-child is \$1,825, which includes housing, food and activities but not airfare or rental car expense. Housing features five sets of fathers and sons sharing a cabin, which has individual showers, electricity and bunk beds. For more information, visit www.jhranch.com, or contact 1-800-242-1224 or info@jhranch.com.

Summit Adventure

Based in Bass Lake, Calif., located near Yosemite National Park, Summit Adventure offers wilderness-based, adventure trips for dads and their sons. Adventures in Fatherhood features five days of backpacking, rock climbing, rappelling and extended periods of purposeful father-child devotional times in a wilderness area.

"The course is very physical—you will be at altitudes of around 8,000 feet carrying a backpack for some of the time," Tom Smith, executive director, says. "It's roughing it—you sleep under the stars. It's a backpacking trip. It's a challenging experience for sure, but not boot camp. Many dads use the course as a rite of passage as their child turns a certain age—12 or 13 is common.

"The course is centered on improving our relationship with God and each other," adds Smith, noting that Focus on the Family has used Summit for 25 years. "I've got a friend who has

brought all five of his kids and he doesn't like backpacking. But he realizes the power of the experience."

Summit, an accredited member of the American Mountain Guides Association, expects 80 fathers and sons to participate in six courses this summer, which run through Aug. 13. Minimum age for the course is 12. Cost per father-child is \$1,442, which includes food and equipment, but not airfare or car rental. For more information, visit [summit.org](#), or contact 559-642-3899 or tom@summit.org.

Christ in the Tetons

If you prefer world-class arrangements versus roughing it, then Christ in the Tetons (CITT), based in Jackson Hole, Wyo., is for you. For the last four years, CITT has offered weeklong Father and Son Adventures, which feature rock and mountain climbing, white-water rafting, horseback riding, fly fishing and hiking, as well as excursions to Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

Accommodations include a private cabin with two queen-sized beds per father-son, and the gourmet meals feature steak and salmon and shrimp scampi.

"It's a first-class adventure, but the real power in the program is the biblical curriculum," Russell Rainey, executive director, says. "Adventures for Life is a biblical manhood curriculum designed for fathers and sons to pursue a common vision for their lives."

The curriculum was created by CITT board member Robert Lewis, author of *Raising a Modern-Day Knight* and founder of Men's Fraternity, a revolutionary study in biblical masculinity.

"We're not churchy, but we're biblical," Rainey explains.

For more information, visit [citt.org](#), or contact 307-733-7562 or info@citt.org. This article originally appeared in *New Man* magazine in 2006.