

Interfaith Message: Marksmanship in Faith

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Two of my favorite things in Scouting: **Reverence & Shooting** ... so let's put them together.

In much the same way that we don't all have the same understanding of our Creator, not all of us look at shooting sports the same way. Through a combination of our life experiences and our personal preferences, we shoot different kinds of guns, in different settings, with different regularity – just like how we attend various *churches, temples, synagogues and mosques* and their presentations of our Creator.

I am a rifle guy – but even within that, there are different sights for different folks:

- Some prefer open sights ... a dove tail in back and a post in the front – similar to a life in faith where “everything is permissible but not always beneficial”
- Others prefer aperture sights ... where the target (our life) is “contained” within concentric circles.

My goal is not to convince you that rifles are better than shotguns -- which of course they are, because I only get one bullet to hit my target, not 30 chances of buckshot. Nor should I try to convince you that any one faith is more accurate than another. Instead, Reverence in Scouting should help you to connect with your understanding of our Creator in your own way – but during a shared experience like this.

So, we use what we share in our Scouting adventure and this activity to each commune individually with our Creator. For today, what we will be sharing through is “**Shooting: in four simple lessons.**”

LESSON ONE – SIGHT ALIGNMENT

Regardless of open sights, closed sites, scopes (or the bead on a shotgun), ***the bullets go where the barrel sends them.*** So, the question is how do you hit the target?

In the Christian faith, the term “sin” actually means “to miss the mark” as in an archery match. Regardless of your faith, similar to how the exercise of shooting is to hit the target – part of Reverence is to live your life in accordance with what your faith prescribes.

- So, in that way, our Creator is the front sight
- We, our own flawed individual selves, we are the rear sights.

I say that because the front sight doesn't move. By and large, it isn't adjustable. Our Creator's will and guidance stands firm.

The rear sight moves. Meaning, that if our lives (bullets) are not hitting the intended target – we adjust the rear sights ... we adjust ourselves.

Our creator, like that front post, does not change. We can't selectively say, “*I choose to not use the front sight for this shot*” ... or “*I'm going to move the front sight to better hit the target that I want*”. It truly doesn't work that way. The rear sight has to adjust. In shotgunning, you adjust your head to

ensure that your eye is correctly aligned down the barrel to the bead. In all cases, if you want to better hit your target, you have to adjust YOU.

LESSON TWO – THE SIGHT PICTURE

When you actually line up the shot, you are aligning the rear sight, the front sight and the target – and often your eye goes through that exact order.

- Start with yourself (rear sight) ... with your hopes/dreams/whatever
- Then our Creator (front sight) ... and get the rear aligned with the front, like we talked about
- And then your body shifts with those two aligned to be over a target – your life. In fact, the last time that Gary Scott tried to help me with shotgun shooting, most of our discussion was body position and pivoting while keeping an effective sight picture. Oh and then some clays flew by in front of me.

So, we get all aligned between the sights and the target, but have you ever noticed that it's IMPOSSIBLE to CLEARLY SEE both sights and the target. Your eye, like your heart, cannot equally focus on all three. (we'll ignore high-power optic/scopes for a moment)

- The target will be out of focus. Like life, we don't always have a clear picture of what is downrange – and that's okay.
- You could focus on the rear sight (you) ... but you are guaranteed to miss the mark.
- Focus on the front sight (our Creator). Sure, change your focus back to ensure YOUR alignment or forward to the target, but your FOCUS should be to the front sight.

LESSON THREE – MARKSMANSHIP and DISCIPLESHIP

Let's define Marksmanship as pursuing proficiency in shooting sports. It doesn't mean that you are a sniper-grade rifleman (which you may never become) ... nor that you will hit every clay or other target. It isn't about perfection, but about the pursuit to proficiency.

In my faith, the term *Discipleship* has the same connotation. It isn't about living a perfect life, as much as routinely learning more and continually trying to improve.

When we teach marksmanship, there are a few key principles that we always try to instill:

- 1) **Sight picture** ... like we talked about already...

But before those tools can really help them, they need to other disciplines:

- 2) **Consistency.**

If they shoot ten rounds and it looks like a messy shotgun pattern, clicking the rear sight this way or that after each shot won't help. So, the first thing we teach is consistency. Do the same things each time, so that all of your rounds fit under a quarter (or a dime).

Because, if you can shoot consistently, THEN we can click the rear sight this way or that way – and get the rear sight aligned to the front sight, so that the pattern is on the center of the target. And then, more practice will tighten the group closer and closer to center.

In much the same way, **consistent time with our Creator matters**. If we aren't consistent, then our prayers might feel empty ... or our church attendance might feel strained. Consistency in worship, and religious learning and regular prayer is important for having an authentic reverence with your Creator.

Just like playing Halo or Call of Duty won't actually improve your shooting skills – mealtime grace alone will likely not improve your sense of connection with your Creator. It won't.

3) Breathing

One of the easiest ways to help a Scout improve their shooting is to teach them breath control, as a way to calm their bodies and their minds a bit, which reduces jerking, which improves the shots.

In fact, many shooters will tell you that when they go to the range by themselves, they become oblivious to the loud bangs around them. Their breathing slows, their vision improves, and everything else fades away as they focus on the target – the only thing that matters for the moment.

Prayer works the same way, so in your **Quiet Time**: Slow down ... Breathe ... Focus on what really matters ... so that, your life, like your bullets will hit the mark.

LET'S WRAP THIS UP with ONE LAST LESSON – AFFECTING THE BULLET

We've talked a lot about skills of shooting, but there is also science. In science, there are three factors at work:

- 1) **Gravity** – which is the world around you, which will attempt to PULL you down from your intended target. The pun is intended, but that would be a whole other sermon.
- 2) **Power**

Most of my rifles are either .22 or .223. .22 means that the bullet is 22 hundredths of an inch in diameter. My .22 rifles can shoot 22 Short, 22 Long or 22 Long Rifle – which means that the bullet itself is nearly identical, but the amount of gunpowder behind it varies – and that gives it more power, which can overcome gravity, etc.

Some of my other rifles shoot 223 caliber (nearly the same), which means that those bullets happen to be 0.003 of an inch wider in diameter than the .22's. Three thousandths of an inch is nearly nothing ... but they have *a lot more powder* behind them.

Different faiths call **divine power** different things, mine uses the term *Holy Spirit*, but whatever your faith tradition calls the supernatural influence of your Creator, I would offer you this:

*There is **nothing** in this earthly world that is **stronger** than the **divine power** that can accelerate you, if you let it. (repeat that)*

The amount of powder behind your bullet is based on your discipleship, your prayer, your sight picture, your sight alignment, etc.

3) And lastly, **Control**

To control or channel all of that power, we have rifling. The trick is to apply enough friction on the side walls of the barrel to cause the bullet to spin, without causing it to slow it down. By making the bullet spin, it significantly increases its accuracy.

That's what this week is – training is rifling.

- As rifling ... we put a little friction on you (stress/instruction) to significantly affect/improve your performance.
- And this week hopefully puts a lot more powder behind your bullet.
- All, so that, you will hit your mark. The rest is up to you and your alignment with your target and with your God.

You may have started this week as a 22 Long ... but perhaps you'll leave as a 223, including that slightly wider diameter.

Let's pray ...

Thank you for today and the opportunity to commune with you. Collectively, and as individuals, we ask that your power, your powder, be magnified so that we will hit our mark, as you see fit.

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