



Young Men's Group Connect Father and Son

By: Bruce Pokarney

Sam Schultz has always looked up to his dad, Aaron. But now, the 18-year old recent high school graduate gets to see his father in a slightly different light. **Both attend the monthly gathering of a new, small group at Bethlehem created specifically for young men ages 15 to 51.** With Father's Day 2026 arriving, the bond between Aaron and Sam Schultz has only strengthened through the monthly gathering of the 15-51 Young Men's Group.



"We're all close and feel we can open up, but I also think the more it grows, the better the conversation becomes and that we can see each other as not just people who go to this church, but actual people with lives outside the church," says Sam, who will attend Northern State University this fall and aims to pursue a degree in elementary education.

Facilitated by Pastor Matt Spoden, the group meets the first Monday evening of each month and invites those who seek a supportive, faith-based community to think deeper about topics and issues that men wrestle with. Participants initially were adult men. But then, Sam Schultz accompanied his father at one of the early meetings.

"This group not only makes me reflect on myself, it gives me the opportunity to see my son benefit," says Aaron Schultz, local director of the United Way and immediate past president at Bethlehem. "The gentlemen around the table are mentors to him as well. There are topics I probably wouldn't readily bring up to Sam. Some of the struggles that I face or the challenges I see, you don't always

talk about them as a father. But with a group of other men, it makes those topics okay.”

Being the first and, at the time, only son to attend the 15-51 Young Men’s Group, Sam blazed the trail and soon invited some of his friends and their dads to show up. He sees it as a natural next step in his faith journey at Bethlehem. It also reminds him that his dad has always been a part of his spiritual growth.

“As a kid, a lot of what I knew about faith all came out of the Spark Story Bible. That gave you an overall idea but it didn’t go in depth on a lot of things. My dad had a lot more knowledge than I did and it really helped being able to ask him questions. That just expanded when we joined this new group.”



Aaron understands and appreciates the important role parents play in nurturing their children’s faith. He and his wife Jacla have tried to impress upon Sam and his little brother, Turner, that faith is not just a practice that takes place on Sunday, but a guidepost for how to live a life.

“My parents are now active members of Bethlehem as well, so there are times when I have my dad next to me on one side and my sons on the other side of me—three generations exploring their faith journey.”

The conversations that take place during 15-51 Young Men’s Group are relevant and impactful. Whether it’s navigating relationships within families or discussing current events and how they affect families, each member of the group brings their own voice and perspective. **The view from an 18-year old holds the same value as one from a forty-something.**

“In my mind’s eye, I still sometimes see Samuel as that 6-year old kid running around,” says Aaron. “But to hear him articulate answers and to see him interact, I see a young man moving forward as a person of faith as well. It’s pretty remarkable to see.”

The group isn’t all about serious issues. Lighter topics find their way into the conversation, favorite music and sports being examples. But in the end, it’s about community. And in the case of Aaron and Sam Schultz, the 15-51 Young Men’s Group is another opportunity for father and son to grow together.

Thank you for being a vital part of Bethlehem and for your support. With your partnership and the power of the Holy Spirit, Bethlehem is touching lives each and every day – connecting us with God, one another, and our mission in the world.



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