

Message to My Grandsons

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*I hope each one of you becomes a man of God.
You will become a man of God through righteous works.*



Brethren, tonight I would like to talk to you as I would to my grandsons. I hope that what I have to say will apply to all young priesthood holders everywhere. As I think of this large congregation and also the many thousands more who have joined us by satellite, I am reminded that the great blessing of holding the priesthood of God is one that is reserved for the relatively few, considering the billions of people in the world. To hold the priesthood is a signal honor; yet any worthy man or boy over the age of 12 in the Church may receive it.

Priesthood is the authority delegated to man to minister in the name

of God. It is a power that no one can assume on his own initiative. As Paul said, “No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”¹ It is an authority beyond all human power to create.

Peter, a young priest, wrote of an experience that taught him that priesthood power is very real. A young convert in his ward in Ontario, Canada, was sustained as a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, and Peter was asked to be the “voice” in the ordination. Peter wrote, “I had never laid my hands on anybody’s head before, and I felt so inadequate. But then the Spirit reassured me that it would be fine for me to do it. . . .

“The young man to be ordained sat down in the chair, and I stood directly behind him. [Our Young Men president] guided me through the ordination prayer and I repeated every word he said. After we had finished the ordination and said, ‘. . . and we wish to pronounce a blessing on your head at this time . . .’ [the Young Men president] looked at me and indicated that I was on my own.

“At that point, the priesthood entirely changed its meaning for me. It was no longer just a title, but the actual authority to act in God’s name, and I was giving that authority to someone else. I paused and waited

for the Spirit to whisper to me what I was to say. It is difficult for me to describe the feelings I had that day during the blessing, but I can say that I now have a stronger testimony that the power of the priesthood is real.”²

You young men are no doubt looking forward to receiving the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood. Of this higher priesthood the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “Its institution was prior to ‘the foundation of this earth, or the morning stars sang together, or the Sons of God shouted for joy,’ and is the highest and holiest Priesthood, and is after the order of the Son of God.”³

As priesthood holders we are agents of the Lord. The Lord spoke of this sacred agency to the elders of the Church in Kirtland in 1831: “Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord’s errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord’s business.”⁴

President Hinckley has often reminded us that missionary work is essentially a priesthood responsibility. It is a great honor and responsibility to be called to serve the Lord in missionary work. This service brings lasting joy, even though it also can be challenging and discouraging at times. My mission changed the course of my life. It was one of the greatest experiences I have ever had. Serving a mission prepares us for the rest of our life’s work and our eternal work.

I hope each one of you becomes a man of God. You will become a man of God through righteous works. You will honor and magnify your priesthood and, as the Apostle Paul said, “follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.”⁵

It is not always easy to follow a righteous plan and be obedient to the laws of society and the laws of the Lord. In the long run, however, following the rules is still the best pathway to obtaining all the things the Lord has promised.

We are all accountable for our actions. My experience as a lawyer taught me that those who follow a life of crime frequently blame their father or mother or society when they are imprisoned. Yet they willfully chose to act “contrary to the nature of God” and consequently are “in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.”⁶ Some of them even claim, “The devil made me do it!” The truth in that statement is that the devil entices us to do evil.⁷ The falsehood is because we have agency. The devil can’t make us do anything we choose not to do.⁸

Snares and pitfalls can come to all of us, whether in our youth, middle age, or old age. As someone once observed, “In youth we run into difficulties; in old age difficulties run into us.”⁹ The increased permissiveness of our society will require us to hold very tightly to the iron rod of righteousness in order to receive the blessings and protection of the Lord. There is great danger in trifling with Satan’s temptations. We will need to guard against all forms of evil all of the days of our lives.

All you young men who hold the priesthood have the duty to respect womanhood. As you date the lovely young women of the Church, you have a duty to protect their physical safety and virtue. The priesthood you hold gives you the greater responsibility to see that the high moral standards of the Church are always maintained. You know better than to approach the edge of sexual enticement. You will lose part of that which is sacred about yourself if you go beyond the edge and abuse the great powers of procreation. How can any of us hope to play a great role in time or eternity if we have no power of self-control? To be married to a righteous woman who loves the Lord, loves you, and respects the priesthood is one of the greatest of blessings of life and eternity. I have learned



this from over 60 years of marriage to my wife, Ruth.

Friends and acquaintances add much to the richness of life, but these relationships can be temporary. No one loves you more or has greater concern for your welfare than your parents. You may question what they tell you, but you cannot question their love for you and interest in your well-being.

The time will come when you

young men will have the responsibility of caring for a wife and children, who will depend upon you. When you marry, you will be responsible for your wife’s welfare and ultimately for the welfare of your children as you start a family. Marriage and fatherhood can bring great eternal happiness and joy. As President Joseph F. Smith said, it is “family life, on which the government of the Church is based and perpetuated.”¹⁰ To find sublime fulfillment in

the home, both partners need to be fully committed to the marriage. President David O. McKay once said, "When one puts business or pleasure above his home, he that moment starts on the downgrade to soul-weakness."¹¹

Some of you are well on your way to successfully meeting some of your goals in life. We are proud of you. My father once told me that he thought he would have it made when he graduated from law school. He said that really in a sense his graduation was only the beginning of greater challenges. We do not have it made, nor will we be free from worldly challenges in this life.

We live in an age of specialization. When I was a boy, many people had Model T Fords. Compared to modern cars, they were relatively simple mechanically. Many people were able to fix their own cars by grinding the valves, changing the rings on the pistons, putting in new brake bands, and using a generous supply of baling wire. Nowadays automobiles are so sophisticated that the average person knows very little about how to repair them. The mechanics of today use a computer to diagnose engine problems. I mention this example to encourage you young men to get training and education in order to keep up. Technical education is very important, and the same thing is true in fields of higher education. Any kind of skill requires specialized learning.

I do not care what vocation you choose to follow in life so long as it is honorable. How you provide for your family is your decision. Acquiring a skill is a good way to pay the bills, but there really ought to be something more in terms of personal involvement. Do not become so preoccupied with the material things of life that you lose the essence of your humanity. You may recall Dickens's character Jacob Marley, who lamented his obsession with work when he exclaimed:



Two boys in the Comayaguela Honduras Torocagua Stake attend a conference broadcast.

"Business? . . . Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business."¹² Each of us ought to play some role in strengthening society, especially in doing the work of God.

I have learned that for those of us who hold the priesthood, the best formula for success is "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."¹³ Success will not come immediately because it requires preparation and hard work. There really are no shortcuts to success.

Each of us is a unique creation of our Heavenly Father. No two of us are completely alike. No one else has exactly the same gifts and talents that we have been given. We should increase those talents and gifts and use them to leverage our uniqueness. For example, when I was growing up, there was a fine young man in our neighborhood who was not a scholar but made beautiful furniture with his hands. He and I were drafted into the military the same day. He could not learn to make his bed so it would pass inspection, but he could make pieces of wood into exquisite art. As President Howard W. Hunter said:

"Some persons have the idea that talent, creativity, moral stability, or greatness are not in the realm of youth, but are reserved to those who are older. This is not so."¹⁴

You young men have a future with great promise. You are the beneficiaries of knowledge the world has never known before. This knowledge will allow you to contribute to the future of modern business, industry, agriculture, and the professions. You may be among those who will defend a way of life on the battlefields. You will be among those who spread the principles of the gospel in the world and help the Church grow.

Now, my dear grandsons and all special young men within the sound of my voice, go forward. Go forward in faith and righteousness, following the leadership of our prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. If you do, the Lord will strengthen and magnify you so that you will accomplish great things. I testify of the great and profound influence the priesthood has been in my life. In all my long years of life I have tried not to hide who I am and what I believe. I cannot recall a single instance when it hurt my career or I lost valued friends by humbly acknowledging that I was a member of this Church. I leave my testimony and blessing with you today in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Hebrews 5:4.
2. Peter Pomart, "The Power Is Real," *New Era*, Oct. 1996, 10; see *Liabona*, June 1997, 44.
3. *History of the Church*, 4:207.
4. D&C 64:29.
5. 1 Timothy 6:11.
6. Alma 41:11.
7. See Moroni 7:12.
8. See James 1:12-15; 4:7.
9. Josh Billings, in Evan Esar, ed., *Dictionary of Humorous Quotations* (1962), 36.
10. "Parents Should Be Consulted," *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1902, 308-9.
11. In Conference Report, Apr. 1964, 5.
12. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in *The Best Short Stories of Charles Dickens* (1947), 435.
13. Matthew 6:33.
14. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 117.