

Counsel to Young Men

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The certainties of the gospel, the truth, once you understand it, will see you through these difficult times.



Young men speak of the future because they have no past, and old men speak of the past because they have no future. I am an old man, but I will speak to the young men of the Aaronic Priesthood about your future.

The Aaronic Priesthood you hold was restored by an angelic messenger. “The ordination was done by the hands of an angel, who announced himself as John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament. The angel explained that he was acting under the direction of Peter, James, and John, the ancient apostles, who held the keys of the higher priesthood, which was called

the Priesthood of Melchizedek.”¹

“The power and authority of the lesser, or Aaronic Priesthood, is to hold the keys of the ministering of angels, and to administer in outward ordinances, the letter of the gospel, the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, agreeable to the covenants and commandments.”²

You have been ordained to an office in the priesthood of God and given divine authority that is not and cannot be held by the kings and magistrates and great men of this earth unless they humble themselves and enter through the gate that leads to life eternal.

There are many accounts in the scriptures of young men serving. Samuel served in the tabernacle with Eli.³ David was a young man when he faced Goliath.⁴ Mormon’s service began when he was 10.⁵ Joseph Smith was 14 when he received the First Vision.⁶ And Christ was 12 when He was found in the temple teaching the wise men.⁷

Paul told young Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth.”⁸

When I began my teaching career, President J. Reuben Clark Jr., the First Counselor in the First Presidency, had spoken to teachers. His words went into my heart and influenced me ever since.

President Clark described youth as “hungry for things of the Spirit [and] eager to learn the gospel.” He said: “They want it straight, undiluted. They want to know . . . about our beliefs; they want to gain testimonies of their truth. They are not now doubters but inquirers, seekers after truth.”

President Clark continued: “You do not have to sneak up behind this spiritually experienced youth and whisper religion in [their] ears; you can come right out, face to face, and talk with [them]. . . . You can bring these truths to [them] openly. . . . There is no need for gradual approaches.”⁹

Since then I have taught young people in the same way that I teach adults.

There are some things you need to understand.

The priesthood is something you cannot see nor hear nor touch, but it is a real authority and a real power.

When I was five years old, I became very ill. It turned out that I had polio, a disease that was completely unknown to the small-town doctor. I lay for several weeks on a World War I army cot in our front room beside a coal stove. Afterward, I could not walk. I remember very clearly sliding around on the linoleum floor and pulling myself up on chairs, learning to walk again. I was more fortunate than some. A friend walked with crutches and steel leg braces all of his life.

As I moved into school, I found that my muscles were weak. I was very self-conscious. I knew that I could never be an athlete.

It did not help a lot when I read about the man who went to a doctor to find a cure for his inferiority complex. After a careful examination, the doctor told him, “You don’t have a complex. You really *are* inferior!”

With that for encouragement, I set about through life and determined to compensate in other ways.

I found hope in my patriarchal blessing. The patriarch, whom I had

never met before, confirmed to me that patriarchs do have prophetic insight. He said that I had a desire to come to earth life and was willing to meet the tests that would accompany life in a mortal body. He said that I had been given a body of such physical proportion and fitness to enable my spirit to function through it unhampered by physical impediment. That encouraged me.

I learned that you should always take care of your body. Take nothing into your body that will harm it, such as we are counseled in the Word of Wisdom: tea, coffee, liquor, tobacco, or anything else that is habit-forming, addictive, or harmful.

Read section 89 in the Doctrine and Covenants. You will find great promises:

“All saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;



“And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;

“And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.”

And then this promise: “And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them.”¹⁰

You may see others who seem to have been given a more perfect body than yours. Do not fall into the trap of feeling poorly about your height or weight or your features or your skin color or race.

You are a son of God. You lived in a premortal existence as an individual spirit child of heavenly parents. At the time of your birth, you received a mortal body of flesh and blood and bone in which to experience earth life. You will be tested as you prepare yourself to return to our Heavenly Father.

I ask you the same question that Paul asked the Corinthians: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”¹¹

Your gender was determined in the premortal existence. You were born a male. You must treasure and protect the masculine part of your nature. You must have respectful, protective regard for all women and girls.

Do not abuse yourself. Never allow others to touch your body in a way that would be unworthy, and do not touch anyone else in any unworthy way.

Avoid the deadly poisons of pornography and narcotics. If these are in your life, beware! If allowed to continue, they can destroy you. Talk to your parents; talk to your bishop. They will know how to help you.

Do not decorate your body with tattoos or by piercing it to add jewels. Stay away from that.

Do not run with friends that worry your parents.

Everywhere present is the influence of Lucifer and his legion of angels. They tempt you to do those things and say those things and think those things that would destroy. Resist every impulse that will trouble your spirit.¹²

You are not to be fearful. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “all beings who have bodies have power over those who have not.”¹³ And Lehi taught that all “men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil.”¹⁴ Remember, the prayerful power of your spirit will protect you.

I remember when I was “[baptized] by immersion for the remission of sins.”¹⁵ That was appealing. I assumed that all my past mistakes were now washed away, and if I never made any more mistakes in my life, I would be clean. This I resolved to do. Somehow it did not turn out that way. I found that I made mistakes, not intentionally, but I made them. I once foolishly thought maybe I was baptized too soon. I did not understand that the ordinance of the sacrament, administered by you of the Aaronic Priesthood, is in fact a renewing of the covenant of baptism and the reinstating of the blessings connected with it. I did not see, as the revelations tell us, that I could “retain a remission of [my] sins.”¹⁶

If you have been guilty of sin or mischief, you must learn about the power of the Atonement, how it works. And with deeply sincere repentance, you can unleash that power. It can rinse out all the small things, and with deep soaking and scrubbing, it will wash away serious transgression. There is nothing from which you cannot be made clean.

With you always is the Holy Ghost, which was conferred upon you at the time of your baptism and confirmation.

I was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood when World War II exploded upon the world. I was



Suva, Fiji

ordained an elder when we were all marched away to war.

I had dreams of following an older brother, Leon, who at that time was flying B-24 bombers in the Battle of Britain. I volunteered for air force pilot training.

I failed the written test by one point. Then the sergeant remembered that there were several two-point questions, and if I got half right on two of them, I could pass.

Part of the test was multiple choice. One question was “What is ethylene glycol used for?” If I had not worked in my dad’s service station, I would not have known that it is used for automobile antifreeze. And so I passed, barely.

I prayed about the physical. It turned out to be fairly routine.

You young men should not complain about schooling. Do not immerse yourself so much in the technical that you fail to learn things that are practical. Everything you can learn that is practical—in the house, in the kitchen cooking, in the yard—will be of benefit to you. Never complain about schooling. Study well, and attend always.

“The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.”¹⁷

“Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.”¹⁸

We are to learn about “things that are above, and things that are beneath, things that are in the earth, and upon the earth, and in heaven.”¹⁹

You can learn about fixing things and painting things and even sewing things and whatever else is practical. That is worth doing. If it is not of particular benefit to you, it will help you when you are serving other people.

I ended up in the Orient, flying the same kind of bombers that my brother flew in England. My mission, as it turned out, was in teaching the gospel in Japan as a serviceman.

Perhaps the hardest challenge of war is living with uncertainties, not knowing how it will end or if we can go ahead with our lives.

I was issued a small serviceman’s Book of Mormon that would fit into my pocket. I carried it everywhere; I read it; and it became part of me. Things that had been a question became certain to me.



Warsaw, Poland

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It was four years before we could return to our lives. But I had learned and had a sure testimony that God is our Father, that we are His children, and that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is true.

Your generation is filled with uncertainties. A life of fun and games and expensive toys has come to an abrupt end. We move from a generation of ease and entertainment to a generation of hard work and responsibility. We do not know how long that will last.

The reality of life is now part of your priesthood responsibilities. It will not hurt you to want something and not have it. There is a maturing and disciplining that will be good for

you. It will ensure that you can have a happy life and raise a happy family. These trials come with responsibility in the priesthood.

Some of you live in countries where most of what you eat and some of what you wear will depend on what can be produced by the family. It may be that what you can contribute will make the difference so that the rent is paid or the family is fed and housed. Learn to work and to support.

The very foundation of human life, of all society, is the family, established by the first commandment to Adam and Eve, our first parents: “Multiply, and replenish the earth.”²⁰

Thereafter came the commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”²¹

Be a responsible member of your family. Take care of your possessions—your clothing, your property. Do not be wasteful. Learn to be content.

It may seem that the world is in commotion; and it is! It may seem that there are wars and rumors of wars; and there are! It may seem that the future will hold trials and difficulties for you; and it will! However, fear is the opposite of faith. Do not be afraid! I do not fear.

At noon today four young men, all grandsons, came to visit us. Three of them had young ladies on their arms—one to talk about his coming wedding, two of them to announce their engagements, and the stray to talk about his mission call to Japan. We talked to them about the fact that one day each of you will take a pure and precious daughter of our Heavenly Father to the temple to be sealed for time and for all eternity. These young grandsons must know what Alma taught: that the gospel plan is “the great plan of happiness”²² and that happiness is the end of our existence. Of this I bear testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Introduction to D&C 13.
2. D&C 107:20.
3. See 1 Samuel 1:24–28.
4. See 1 Samuel 17.
5. See Mormon 1:2.
6. See Joseph Smith—History 1:7.
7. See Luke 2:41–52.
8. 1 Timothy 4:12.
9. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *The Charted Course of the Church in Education* (address delivered to seminary and institute leaders at Aspen Grove, Utah, Aug. 8, 1938, pamphlet, 2004), 3, 9.
10. D&C 89:18–21.
11. 1 Corinthians 6:19.
12. See Moroni 7:17.
13. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007), 211.
14. 2 Nephi 2:5.
15. Articles of Faith 1:4.
16. Mosiah 4:12.
17. D&C 93:36.
18. D&C 130:18.
19. D&C 101:34.
20. Genesis 1:28; Abraham 4:28.
21. Exodus 20:12.
22. Alma 42:8.