

To the Aaronic Priesthood: Preparing for the Decade of Decision

ELDER ROBERT D. HALES

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

How you bear [the] priesthood now will prepare you to make the most important decisions in the future.



What a joy to be in your presence, brethren, as you are gathered across this world. I am reminded of the words of the hymn: “Behold! A royal army, with banner, sword, and shield, is marching forth to conquer on life’s great battlefield.”¹ Indeed, you are the royal army of God, faithful and true.

Tonight I wish to speak to the youngest members of this royal

army—the Aaronic Priesthood: deacons, teachers, and priests venturing forth upon the battlefield of life. Although you do not remember it, you enlisted in this cause with a single decision, made long ago in our premortal existence. There, in the Grand Council in Heaven, you decided to obey the will of your Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Remember this: you are a son of God who decided to follow the Savior when it mattered most, and that makes you a great man indeed.

Because of that divine decision which determined your eternal progression, you received a physical body, gained the agency to choose good over evil, and are now growing and preparing to take upon yourselves the attributes of our Savior. You have been baptized and have received the Holy Ghost. You are learning who you are, why you are here, and where you are going. And now you have received the Aaronic Priesthood!

The Aaronic Priesthood is the preparatory priesthood, given for this

preparatory time in your life. *How* you bear that priesthood now will *prepare* you to make the most important decisions in the future. These decisions include receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood, going to the temple, serving a mission, getting an education, selecting an occupation, and choosing a companion and being sealed for time and for all eternity in the holy temple. There is a time and season for all of our decisions. Make sure you make decisions in the proper time and season. All of these life-altering decisions will be made in a very busy, relatively short period during your 20s—during what I call the “Decade of Decision.”

While training to be a jet fighter pilot, I prepared to make such vital decisions in a flight simulator. For example, I practiced deciding when to bail out of an airplane if the fire warning light came on and I began to spin out of control. I remember one dear friend who didn’t make these preparations. He would find a way out of simulator training and then go to play golf or swim. He never learned his emergency procedures! A few months later, fire erupted in his plane, and it spun toward the ground in flames. Noting the fire warning light, his younger companion, having developed a preconditioned response, knew when to bail out of the plane and parachuted to safety. But my friend who had not prepared to make that decision stayed with the plane and died in the crash.

In the decade ahead, your time for preparation will be limited. As you are Aaronic Priesthood bearers, it is important that you prepare now. You must develop your own preconditioned responses for the important decisions you will make in the next decade of your life. You must know what to do and when to do it when each decision presents itself. Remember that making no decision at all could be just as deadly as making the wrong decision.



Many of the decisions you make or don't make will have eternal consequences.

Now is the time to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, which means accepting His invitation to “come, follow me.”² This is the decision we made in our premortal lives. Now we must make it again here in mortality, every day, in every situation by taking the Savior's name upon us, remembering His atoning sacrifice, and keeping His commandments. This we covenanted to do when we were baptized, and we have the opportunity to renew those covenants each week

as we partake of the sacrament.

Now is the time to organize and prepare ourselves to have the Holy Ghost as our constant companion. This means doing what your parents and leaders have taught you to do—study the scriptures; pray morning and night; keep a neat, well-groomed appearance; follow a schedule; set and achieve goals; be honest in your dealings; keep commitments; and be worthy of the priesthood you bear. Always, always live the standards, revealed by prophets, in the booklet *For the Strength of Youth*.

Now is the time to decide who

your friends are and to become worthy of a righteous eternal companion. It is very simple, brethren. As my mother taught me, “Birds of a feather flock together.” Your peer group can inspire you to do great things or tempt you into strange and miserable paths. True friends make it easier to live the gospel. They never make us choose between their ways and the Lord's ways. They help us be the kind of person that attracts other true friends. And they help us *become* the kind of person a righteous companion can choose to be with forever. If you want those kinds of friends, ask yourself: “Am I that kind of friend to others? Am I the kind of person I want my eternal companion to be?”

Now is the time to prepare for your mission. Depending upon your individual circumstance, you may be able to serve a full-time proselyting mission. While this is important, remember that even more important is going to the temple *on the way* to your mission. A mission is a priceless opportunity to keep temple covenants by living the law of consecration—giving all of your time, gifts, and talents to the Lord and serving Him with all your heart, might, mind, and strength. I have always felt that the two years you serve will be a tithing of time on the first 20 years of your life. But even if you are not able to serve a full-time mission, you can prepare for one day in the future, when the time is right, to go to the temple to make sacred covenants so that you can receive your eternal blessings.

Now is the time to prepare for training, education, and an occupation. As young men of the Aaronic Priesthood, you are in the internship of life. Your diligence in school now will qualify you to keep President Hinckley's counsel in the future—to get all of the education you can.³ Decide now to do your best in school and at work. Then, when opportunities knock, you will be ready to open



the door and take advantage of them. We should all remember: “To every man is given a gift.”⁴ Develop your gifts and talents. Young men, prayerfully select classes, training programs, and jobs that will prepare you for greater opportunities and more responsibility in the future.

Now is the time to obey. In the premortal existence, ours was not a selective obedience. We did not pick and choose which parts of the eternal plan to follow. I learned that lesson on our first night flying solo in pilot training when all of us were given the instruction: “Don’t fly acrobatic patterns at night. You are beginning pilots without instrument flight training.” Some time later, an otherwise good pilot and a great friend chose to disobey that command. As he flew loops and barrel rolls through the night sky over Texas, he looked through the cockpit canopy and thought he saw stars above him, but he was really seeing the lights of oil rigs below. He was experiencing vertigo: the g-forces on his plane made it seem he was right side up, yet he was upside down. As he pulled up on the stick to climb higher into the night sky, he dove toward the earth and crashed into the twinkling lights of the oil field below.

When you are flying an airplane, if

you change your position by just one degree at a time, your inner ear cannot detect the change. Brethren young and old, when we practice selective obedience, we change our position relative to the Lord—and usually by only one degree at a time. As the deceptive forces of the adversary work on us, we cannot detect them, and we experience spiritual vertigo. While it may *seem* like we are going in a safe direction, we are in fact headed for disaster. In the pre-existence, our decision to follow the Lord was all-or-nothing. Following that pattern through our mortal probation will get each of us back to our Heavenly Father.

Now is the time to use our time properly. “This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God.”⁵ I testify that your time on earth will be sufficient if you learn to use it wisely in your youth. “O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God.”⁶

Now is the time to safeguard your birthright. Nearing the end of his life, the Old Testament prophet Jacob gave a father’s blessing to each of his sons. Reuben was the firstborn and had the birthright—special blessings intended just for him. But in his blessing to Reuben, his father said, “Thou

art . . . unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”⁷ Think for a moment about what the phrase *unstable as water* means. When water gets hot, it evaporates. When it gets cold, it freezes. When it is unchanneled, it causes erosion and destroys whatever may be in its path.

As bearers of the Aaronic Priesthood, you too have a birthright. I challenge you to be obedient and strong. I challenge you not to let your resolve dribble out and your commitment to follow the Savior evaporate. Be firm as a rock in living the gospel. None of us know all the blessings that await us. The only way we lose those blessings is to give them up through disobedience. Don’t give up your eternal heritage for the things of this world. Let us be obedient and prepare now to honor, protect, and receive our glorious birthright.

Young men, you are the vital strength of the Lord’s army, the stripling warriors of these latter days.⁸ “Whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap.”⁹ Contemplating the glorious harvest ahead, I invite you to ponder how you will make decisions during the coming decade.

The law of the harvest offers a pattern for making decisions. Prepare the soil through prayer, knowing that you are a son of God. Plant the seeds by counseling with those who will give sound advice; then seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Let the seeds of inspiration grow. The budding ideas need tending. They need time to mature. The light of inspiration will bring the spiritual harvest which will come when we ask our Heavenly Father in prayer if we have made a correct decision. As we follow that light, the darkness will vanish and the light will grow “brighter and brighter until the perfect day”¹⁰—that day when we are in the presence of our Father in Heaven.

Finally, *be there*. Each of us was *there* in the Council in Heaven to

choose the great plan of happiness we now enjoy. Young men, when you have made a commitment to yourself, your family, your bishop, your employer, *be there*. When it is time to be in church, at Mutual, or fulfilling a priesthood assignment, *be there*. When it is time to graduate from school or training programs, *be there*. When it is time to serve a mission, *be there*. When the young woman you love most kneels at the altar of God's holy temple, *be there* (and not as a witness). When your family is gathered in the celestial kingdom, *be there*. When the Savior waits to greet you as you return with honor from your life on this earth and your Heavenly Father wants to encircle you about in the arms of His love, *be there*.

After your decade of decision, go onward and upward. "Rise up, O [ye] men of God!"¹¹ Be faithful husbands and fathers. Be true. Rise up and be worthy of the worthy daughters of God who support and sustain us. May we honor them as we honor the Lord.

I testify that your Heavenly Father knows you are here tonight. You are part of His mighty, royal army whose "ranks are filled with soldiers, united, bold, and strong, who follow their Commander and sing their joyful song: Victory, victory, thru him that redeemed us! Victory, victory, thru Jesus Christ, our Lord!"¹² He is there, He wants us to be with Him, He leads us, and our victory is in Him, I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. "Behold! A Royal Army," *Hymns*, no. 251.
2. Luke 18:22.
3. See "A Prophet's Counsel and Prayer for Youth," *Liabona*, Apr. 2001, 30–41; *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 2–11.
4. D&C 46:11.
5. Alma 34:32.
6. Alma 37:35.
7. Genesis 49:3–4.
8. See Alma 53.
9. D&C 6:33.
10. D&C 50:24.
11. *Hymns*, no. 323.
12. *Hymns*, no. 251.

Lay Up in Store

BISHOP KEITH B. McMULLIN

Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric

We call upon priesthood bearers to store sufficient so that you and your family can weather the vicissitudes of life.



My dear brethren, how blessed we are to be assembled together with the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles. Each priesthood bearer present, be he 12 or 112, can, because of our Savior Jesus Christ, inherit the celestial order of life "by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."¹ This is wonderful to contemplate, and I know it is true. You are in charge of your world!

With this prospect before us, consider the following story. A young man, full of ambition and energy, enrolled in a fine university. At the time, he was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. His goal was lofty—he wanted to become a doctor. His aim was ambitious—he wanted to be rich. He wanted to play football, so he sought out the coaches and eventually

made the team. Now he could have the recognition and bragging rights unique in the world of university sports. Such were the notions in his head.

But he had given little thought to something that would ultimately dismantle his lofty and vain ambitions—he had failed to lay up in store. He had overlooked the importance of adequate preparation, the requirements of regular attendance and disciplined study, and the college chemistry class. The consequence was swift and merciless. It took less than 90 days. It happened this way:

The day he found his 5-foot 8-inch, 170-pound body on the line of scrimmage opposite a mammoth lineman from the varsity squad, he knew he was in the wrong sport.

Unaccustomed to rigorous study, his eyes and mind refused to function after a brief time in the books.

The capstone of defeat was the final chemistry exam. Suffice it to say that his random answers to multiple-choice questions did not even approximate the law of averages. He failed miserably.

Hard work, a mission that awakened in him a correct vision of life's purposes, and unrelenting preparation eventually overcame the consequence of this brief period of foolishness. Even today, however, I still have nightmares about that chemistry class.