

Brethren, We Have Work to Do

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As men of the priesthood, we have an essential role to play in society, at home, and in the Church.

Brethren, much has been said and written in recent years about the challenges of men and boys. A sampling of book titles, for example, includes *Why There Are No Good Men Left*, *The Demise of Guys*, *The End of Men*, *Why Boys Fail*, and *Manning Up*. Interestingly, most of these seem to have been written by women. In any case, a common thread running through these analyses is that in many societies today men and boys get conflicting and demeaning signals about their roles and value in society.

The author of *Manning Up* characterized it this way: “It’s been an almost universal rule of civilization that whereas girls became women simply by reaching physical maturity, boys had to pass a test. They needed to demonstrate courage, physical prowess, or mastery of the necessary skills. The goal was to prove their competence as protectors of women and children; this was always their primary social role. Today, however, with women moving ahead in an advanced economy, provider husbands and fathers are now optional, and the character qualities men had needed to play their role—fortitude, stoicism, courage, fidelity—are obsolete and even a little embarrassing.”¹

In their zeal to promote opportunity for women, something we applaud, there are those who denigrate men and their contributions. They seem to think of life as a competition between male and female—that one must dominate the other, and now it’s the women’s turn. Some argue that a career is everything and marriage and children should be entirely optional—therefore, why do we need men?² In too many Hollywood films, TV and cable shows, and even commercials, men are portrayed as incompetent, immature, or self-absorbed. This cultural emasculation of males is having a damaging effect.

In the United States, for example, it is reported: “Girls outperform boys now at every level, from elementary school through graduate school. By eighth grade, for instance, only 20 percent of boys are proficient in writing and 24 percent proficient in reading. Young men’s SAT scores, meanwhile, in 2011 were the worst they’ve been in 40 years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), boys are 30 percent more likely than girls to drop out of both high school and college. ... It is predicted that women will earn 60 percent of bachelor’s, 63 percent of master’s and 54 percent of doctorate degrees by 2016. Two-thirds of students in special education remedial programs are guys.”³

Some men and young men have taken the negative signals as an excuse to avoid responsibility and never really grow up. In an observation that is too often accurate, one university professor remarked, “The men come into class with their backward baseball caps and [their lame] the ‘word processor ate my homework’ excuses.

Meanwhile, the women are checking their day planners and asking for recommendations for law school.”⁴ One female movie reviewer expressed the rather cynical view that “what we can count on men for, if we’re lucky and we choose to have a partner, is to be just that—a partner. Someone who stands in his own space even as he respects our standing in our own.”⁵

Brethren, it cannot be this way with us. As men of the priesthood, we have an essential role to play in society, at home, and in the Church. But we must be men that women can trust, that children can trust, and that God can trust. In the Church and kingdom of God in these latter days, we cannot afford to have boys and men who are drifting. We cannot afford young men who lack self-discipline and live only to be entertained. We cannot afford young adult men who are going nowhere in life, who are not serious about forming families and making a real contribution in this world. We cannot afford husbands and fathers who fail to provide spiritual leadership in the home. We cannot afford to have those who exercise the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God, waste their strength in pornography or spend their lives in cyberspace (ironically being *of* the world while not being *in* the world).

Brethren, we have work to do.

Young men, you need to do well in school and then continue your education beyond high school. Some of you will want to pursue university studies and careers in business, agriculture, government, or other professions. Some will excel in the arts, music, or teaching. Others will choose a military career or learn a trade. Over the years, I have had a number of craftsmen work on projects and repairs at my home, and I have admired the hard work and skill of these men. In whatever you choose, it is essential that you become proficient so that you can support a family and make a contribution for good in your community and your country.

I recently saw a video showing a day in the life of a 14-year-old young man in India named Amar. He gets up early and works two jobs, before and after school, six and a half days a week. His income provides a substantial part of his family’s livelihood. He hurries home on his worn bicycle from his second job after dark and somehow squeezes in a few hours of homework before dropping onto his bed on the floor between sleeping siblings around eleven o’clock at night. Although I’ve never met him, I feel proud of him for his diligence and courage. He is doing the very best he can with his limited resources and opportunities, and he is a blessing to his family.

You adult men—fathers, single adults, leaders, home teachers—be worthy models and help the rising generation of boys become men. Teach them social and other skills: how to participate in a conversation, how to get acquainted and interact with others, how to relate to women and girls, how to serve, how to be active and enjoy recreation, how to pursue hobbies without becoming addicted, how to correct mistakes and make better choices.

And so to all who are listening, wherever this message may reach you, I say as Jehovah said to Joshua, “Be strong and of a good courage” (Joshua 1:6). Take heart and prepare the best you can, whatever your circumstances. Prepare to be a good husband and father; prepare to be a good and productive citizen; prepare to serve the Lord, whose priesthood you hold. Wherever you are, your Heavenly Father is mindful of you. You are not alone, and you have the priesthood and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Of the many places you are needed, one of the very most important is your priesthood quorum. We need quorums that provide spiritual nourishment to members on Sunday and that also serve. We need leaders of quorums who focus on doing the Lord’s work and on supporting quorum members and their families.

Consider missionary work. Young men, you have no time to waste. You can't wait to get serious about preparing until you are 17 or 18. Aaronic Priesthood quorums can help their members understand the oath and covenant of the priesthood and get ready for ordination as elders, they can help them understand and prepare for the ordinances of the temple, and they can help them get ready for successful missions. Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and the Relief Society can help parents prepare missionaries who know the Book of Mormon and who will go into the field fully committed. And in each ward and branch, these same quorums can lead out in an effective collaboration with the full-time missionaries who are serving there.

A related work that rests primarily on priesthood shoulders is the Savior's call, echoed by President Thomas S. Monson, to rescue those who have drifted from the gospel or who have become disaffected for any reason. We have had wonderful success in this effort, including excellent work by young men. An Aaronic Priesthood quorum in the Rio Grande (Spanish) Ward in Albuquerque, New Mexico, counseled together about whom they could bring back and then as a group went to visit each of them. One said, "When they came to my door, I felt important," and another confided, "I feel happy inside that someone actually wants me to go to church; it makes me want to go to church now." When the quorum members invited one young man to come back, they asked him to come with them on the next visit, and he did. They were not just inviting him to attend church; they were immediately making him a part of the quorum.

Another challenging but stimulating priesthood work is that of family history and the temple. Watch for a First Presidency letter arriving shortly that will offer a renewed call and a higher vision of this vital part of the work we have to do.

Our quorums also form a brotherhood of mutual support. President Gordon B. Hinckley once said: "It will be a marvelous day, my brethren—it will be a day of fulfillment of the purposes of the Lord—when our priesthood quorums become an anchor of strength to every man belonging thereto, when each such man may appropriately be able to say, 'I am a member of a priesthood quorum of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I stand ready to assist my brethren in all of their needs, as I am confident they stand ready to assist me in mine. ... Working together, we can stand, without embarrassment and without fear, against every wind of adversity that might blow, be it economic, social, or spiritual.'"⁶

Despite our best efforts, things don't always work out as we have planned, and a particular "wind of adversity" that can come into a man's life is unemployment. An early Church welfare pamphlet stated: "A man out of work is of special moment to the Church because, deprived of his inheritance, he is on trial as Job was on trial—for his integrity. As days lengthen into weeks and months and even years of adversity, the hurt grows deeper. ... The Church cannot hope to save a man on Sunday if during the week it is a complacent witness to the crucifixion of his soul."⁷

In April 2009 former Presiding Bishopric counselor Richard C. Edgley told the story of an exemplary quorum that mobilized to assist a fellow member who had lost his job:

"Phil's Auto of Centerville, Utah, is a testament of what priesthood leadership and a quorum can accomplish. Phil was a member of an elders quorum and worked as a mechanic at a local automobile repair shop. Unfortunately, the repair shop where Phil worked experienced economic trouble and had to let Phil go from his job. He was devastated by this turn of events.

"On hearing about Phil's job loss, his bishop, Leon Olson, and his elders quorum presidency prayerfully

considered ways they could help Phil get back on his feet. After all, he was a fellow quorum member, a brother, and he needed help. They concluded that Phil had the skills to run his own business. One of the quorum members offered that he had an old barn that perhaps could be used as a repair shop. Other quorum members could help gather needed tools and supplies to equip the new shop. Almost everyone in the quorum could at least help clean the old barn.

“They shared their ideas with Phil; then they shared their plan with the members of their quorum. The barn was cleaned and renovated, the tools gathered, and all was put in order. Phil’s Auto was a success and eventually moved to better and more permanent quarters—all because his quorum brothers offered help in a time of crisis.”⁸

Of course, as has been repeated by prophets over the years, “The most important of the Lord’s work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own homes.”⁹ We have much to do to strengthen marriage in societies that increasingly trivialize its importance and purpose. We have much to do to teach our children “to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:28). Our task is nothing less than to help our children experience the mighty change of heart or conversion to the Lord spoken of so eloquently in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 5:1–12; Alma 26). Together with the Relief Society, priesthood quorums can build up parents and marriages, and quorums can provide the blessings of the priesthood to single-parent families.

Yes, brethren, we have work to do. Thank you for the sacrifices you make and the good you do. Keep going, and the Lord will help you. At times you may not know quite what to do or what to say—just move forward. Begin to act, and the Lord assures that “an effectual door shall be opened for [you]” (D&C 118:3). Begin to speak, and He promises, “You shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say” (D&C 100:5–6). It is true that we are in many ways ordinary and imperfect, but we have a perfect Master who wrought a perfect Atonement, and we have call upon His grace and His priesthood. As we repent and purge our souls, we are promised that we will be taught and endowed with power from on high (see D&C 43:16).

The Church and the world and women are crying for men, men who are developing their capacity and talents, who are willing to work and make sacrifices, who will help others achieve happiness and salvation. They are crying, “Rise up, O men of God!”¹⁰ God help us to do it. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Kay S. Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys* (2011), 16.

2. “When you ask young people today what will make them adults, almost no one mentions marriage. They are far more likely to see issues around work—completing education, financial independence, a full-time job—as the signs that they have arrived. Work, career, independence: these are the primary sources of identity today” (Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 45). The pressure on women to adopt this antimarriage ethic is especially intense. A *Times* of London contributor wrote: “No one, not my family or my teachers, ever said, ‘Oh yes, and by the way you might want to be a wife and mother too.’ They were so determined we

would follow a new, egalitarian, modern path that the historic ambitions of generations of women—to get married and raise a family—were intentionally airbrushed from their vision of our future” (Eleanor Mills, “Learning to Be Left on the Shelf,” *Sunday Times*, Apr. 18, 2010, www.thetimes.co.uk; in Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 72). Another writer in her 40s quoted some responses to an article she wrote about her regrets over not marrying: “I am totally appalled by your need for a man,” “Get some self-esteem!” “You have taken codependency to a whole new low,” and “If my daughter grows up to want a man half as much as you do, I will know that I’ve done something wrong in raising her” (Lori Gottlieb, *Marry Him: The Case for Settling for Mr. Good Enough* [2010], 55). The good news is that most people, including educated young adults, aren’t buying the antimarriage, antifamily message. “According to a study by a University of Pennsylvania economist, in the United States in 2008, 86 percent of college-educated white women were married by age 40, compared with 88 percent of those with less than a four-year degree. The numbers for white, college-educated men are similar: 84 percent of them were married by 40 in 2008. The conventional wisdom, not borne out by research, by the way, may have it that marriage is a raw deal for women. But college-educated white women don’t seem to believe it. They are the most likely of any group to think that ‘married people are generally happier than unmarried people.’ ... The large majority—70 percent—of first-year college students think raising a family is ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ to their futures” (Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 173–74).

3. Philip G. Zimbardo and Nikita Duncan, *The Demise of Guys: Why Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do about It* (2012), e-book; see the chapter “Behind the Headlines.”

4. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Why There Are No Good Men Left: The Romantic Plight of the New Single Woman* (2003), 67.

5. Amanda Dickson, “‘Hunger Games’ Main Character a Heroine for Our Day,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 2, 2012, www.deseretnews.com.

6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Welfare Responsibilities of the Priesthood Quorums,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 86.

7. *Helping Others to Help Themselves: The Story of the Mormon Church Welfare Program* (1945), 4.

8. Richard C. Edgley, “This Is Your Phone Call,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2009, 54.

9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 134.

10. “Rise Up, O Men of God,” *Hymns*, no. 323.

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