

### President Hinckley

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

Bishop Victor L. Brown, the Presiding Bishop of the Church, will be our next speaker, and he will be followed by Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve.

## Bishop Victor L. Brown

I approach this assignment tonight with a prayer in my heart. The subject assigned to me is one of great importance and one that does not necessarily have easy, quick answers. It is: "Steps that can be taken by the leaders and members of the Aaronic Priesthood to reactivate those members who are inactive." My remarks, therefore, will be addressed primarily to bishops and their associates.

### Aaronic Priesthood

I am well aware that all here tonight know what the Aaronic Priesthood is. Nevertheless, may I refresh our memories. The name *Aaronic Priesthood* comes from Aaron, a brother of Moses. Because Moses was halting in speech, Aaron became his spokesman. They were very close associates and went through many trials together. The Lord chose to give Aaron's name to the Aaronic Priesthood.

I would think the most important event in all history in exercising this priesthood was when John the Baptist baptized the Savior in the river Jordan. The next most important event took place on May 15, 1829, when the same John the Baptist, now a heavenly messenger, laid his hands on the heads of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, saying,

"Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never

be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness." (D&C 13.)

If we just had the capacity to understand the full meaning of the holding of the keys of the ministering of angels and of the gospel of repentance and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, I believe every young man who has gone into the waters of baptism would look forward to receiving the Aaronic Priesthood with all his heart and would do everything in his power to become worthy of it. I am confident there are some who feel this way, but there are many who do not.

### Priesthood activation

Each bishop should know exactly how many boys in his ward have not been ordained, how many do not hold the priesthood office they should based on activity and age, and how many do not attend any meetings. Each of these boys is just as much a child of God as are the active youth.

As leaders, what are our attitudes toward percentages as they relate to active versus inactive? You have probably heard the story of the father who had four daughters. As each of them left on a date one evening, he cautioned them to be home by midnight. The first returned at 11:45; the next, at 11:50; and a third came in at midnight, whereupon he locked the doors, turned out the lights, and went to bed. When his wife reminded him that Mary had not come in yet, he said with great satisfaction, "Seventy-five

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percent of them are home—isn't that a pretty good percentage?"

It is so easy to love those who are active and responsive and sometimes so difficult to do the same for those who are inactive and rebellious. To help us be successful leaders of youth, the Lord gave us a lesson we should learn well. It is the story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11-32.

### **The prodigal son**

You will remember that a father divided his wealth between his two sons, the younger of whom "took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living." When famine came, he tended hogs for a rich man, eating from what he fed the animals.

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! . . .

"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

"And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet."

When the older brother, who had remained true and faithful, heard how his father rejoiced over the return of his wayward brother, he became angry and complained that no one had given him a party. His father replied: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

"It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

### **A road that prevents receiving God's greatest gifts**

The lesson I would like to empha-

size from this scripture is the importance of love. To be successful as a teacher of youth, one must truly love each of them regardless of his activity. Without sincere love, one can hardly qualify as a leader of young men.

I in no way wish to imply that all or even most of those who are not active in their priesthood responsibility conduct themselves as did the wayward son. I have great faith in all youth. Notwithstanding this, I feel it is extremely important that those who do not honor their priesthood understand that they have taken a road which, if not changed, will eventually prevent them from receiving the greatest gift of God to man—that of eternal life and exaltation.

I should like now to suggest how we as leaders can be an influence for good in the lives of these young men in order to help them become obedient to gospel laws and thus qualify themselves for eternal blessings.

### **Boy must know his leaders**

First, it is important that they know who their leaders are. The bishop is the president of the Aaronic Priesthood in his ward and also the president of the priests quorum. As president of the Aaronic Priesthood he has the ultimate responsibility for each young man between the ages of twelve and eighteen, whether ordained or not. He, of course, cannot possibly do all that is necessary by himself. He must have help. Nonetheless, he determines the spirit in which the work will be done.

A wise bishop will recognize each boy's father as his most important helper. This sometimes is a problem, particularly when the father is inactive or is not a member, or there is no father in the home. In most cases, however, the father still exerts the greatest influence on his own son. Studies indicate that a large majority of inactive boys have inactive fathers.

If the father is to have a positive influence on his son, the bishop, through the elders quorum presidency and the home teachers, will exert a positive influence on the father, leading him to activity—or at least to an attitude of encouraging his son to be active.

### **The quorum president**

At the same time, there is another officer who can have a profound influence on the boy, and that is his quorum president, working with his counselors. Too often we do not recognize the importance of peer influence. Of course, if the quorum president is to have much influence he must acknowledge and understand his responsibility for every member of his quorum. If he is called in a casual way and his office is not recognized by his adult leaders, his attitude will probably be very casual and his success very limited. If the bishop delegates the responsibility of the call to anyone else, its importance will be diminished in the eyes of the boy. The call should come from the president of the Aaronic Priesthood.

The counselors in the bishopric have vitally important responsibilities, but they do not have the keys of presidency as the bishop does. They participate in the selection process, but the bishop makes the final decision. The quorum president should know how earnestly the bishopric has prayed for direction, and that he has been selected through inspiration from the Lord.

When a twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy is called to be the president of a quorum and is left alone by his adult leaders, he might well flounder and fail. It is critically important that his adviser and others teach him how to be an effective president. To do this, the adviser, who has a major role to play, will not take over his responsibility but rather will coach him in order to help him grow in the office. One deacons quorum president must have been

taught well by his adviser to have had the following experience:

A stake Aaronic Priesthood committee member attended one of the quorum meetings for several weeks in a row. One Sunday morning, he noticed a boy in attendance who had not been there before. To his dismay, this inactive boy was called on to offer one of the prayers. Anyone would know that the first time an inactive boy comes to priesthood meeting he should not be embarrassed by being asked to pray.

After the meeting, this high counselor asked the adviser why the president of the quorum would do such a foolish thing. The adviser said, "Why don't you ask him?" When asked, the quorum president replied, "I just spent three days this week teaching him how to pray." Sometimes these young people have a special touch which only peers seem to have. However, they do need to be taught well how to lead.

### **Tailor program to the boy**

Even though we have all made an effort to diminish the role of programs and increase the importance of the individual, we have not yet made enough progress. We sometimes develop a program and expect every boy to fit it. If he does not, then it is just too bad. I would hope that each boy is considered as an individual with personal interests, desires, problems, and talents.

If we accept this proposition, then the member of the bishopric who has responsibility for the quorum, with the quorum presidency and the adviser, will very carefully and diplomatically determine why the interests of the world have become more important to a young man than activity in and devotion to the priesthood. This will result from very carefully listening to every boy's needs. Leaders will then see that the priesthood appeals are so designed as to prick the interest of each individual boy. I have grave doubts that success can be found in the

reactivation of members of the quorums by using a broad brush approach. The approach must be tailored to the boy if it is to be successful.

### Internalizing teachings

Every quorum activity should have a designated purpose, and that purpose should be gospel oriented. For example, may I relate a story of an Aaronic Priesthood youth in Korea who happened to come from a rather affluent family. One day one of his father's business associates called the father and inquired if he were having financial difficulties, offering help if it were needed.

The father responded that things were going well.

The man asked, "Are you sure?"

The father replied, "Things are fine. Why do you ask?"

The friend then indicated he had seen the young man on a street corner selling newspapers. The father couldn't believe it. He told his friend that his son received an adequate allowance and asked if there might have been a mistake of identity. The friend responded there was no mistake; he had personally visited with the boy.

That evening when his son came home from school, the father asked him if he had been selling newspapers on the street corner. The reply was yes. The father asked, "Why? Isn't your allowance sufficient?"

His son responded that it was adequate, but he had a friend at school who was very poor and who was going to have to drop out of school if he didn't get some financial assistance. As it turned out, this young Aaronic Priesthood holder was using his allowance money to buy newspapers. Then he and some of his classmates were selling the newspapers to raise money to help keep his friend in school.

A short time before this, he had asked his mother to pack larger lunches for him. She did so, thinking that as a growing teenager he was just extra

hungry. He confessed to his father he had been sharing his lunch with this same friend, who otherwise would have gone hungry.

The father was obviously touched by his son's thoughtfulness but asked the reason for such action. The boy replied, "We studied the lesson of the Good Samaritan a few weeks ago. I wanted to know the real meaning of this lesson by being a good Samaritan, not just learning about one." (See "Profiting for Others," *NEW ERA*, June 1979, p. 50.)

When a young man participates in this kind of spiritual experience, his life changes. The priesthood means something to him that it did not mean before, and the chances are he will always be an active priesthood bearer. Such internalizing of the teachings of the Savior in the heart of any boy can become a protection from the evils of the world.

There is no magic formula I know of which will cause an inactive boy to become active. It takes interested, caring, loving, consistent leadership on the part of adults and the quorum president, with the help of the quorum members. Whatever they do must be appealing, meaningful, and must result in a fulfilling experience. *Fun and games will not save any boy.* They may help him feel good about his association, but if he does not gain a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel which causes him to live the gospel, we will have missed the mark as leaders.

May we be so perceptive as to look through the window of each boy's heart and then have the wisdom to reach out, take his hand, and walk beside him on the pathway to exaltation and eternal life, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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