

## President Gordon B. Hinckley

My brethren, as I have listened to the proceedings of the conference this day, I have thought of what a glorious organization this is—this Church of Jesus Christ, moving forward in these latter days under the leadership of a true prophet, whom we sustain and love.

### Dropping the ball

Bishop Edgley has told you a basketball story. I think I'd like to tell you a baseball story. I was reminded of it while watching a program on the Public Broadcasting System one evening not long ago. It was a program on baseball, once the great American pastime.

I recognize that baseball has little interest for people in most nations of the world, but I speak of it to highlight a principle that has meaning for people everywhere.

The event of which I speak occurred in the World Series of 1912. It was an eight-game series because one of the games was called at midpoint because of darkness. Playing fields were not electrically lighted at that time. It was the last game and the score was tied 1-1. The Boston Red Sox were at bat, the New York Giants in the field. A Boston batter knocked a high-arching fly. Two New York players ran for it. Fred Snodgrass in center field signaled to his associate that he would take it. He came squarely under the ball, which fell into his glove. It went right through his hand and fell to the ground. A howl went up in the stands. The roaring fans couldn't believe it. Snodgrass had dropped the ball. He had caught hundreds of fly balls before. But now, at this crucial moment, he dropped the ball.

The New York Giants lost. The Boston Red Sox won the series.

Snodgrass came back the following season and played brilliant ball for nine more years. He lived to be eighty-six

years of age, dying in 1974. But after that one slip, for sixty-two years when he was introduced to anybody, the expected response was, "Oh, yes, you're the one who dropped the ball."

### Running the wrong way

Some of you older men may remember the Rose Bowl football game of 1929, when a player named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble and ran almost the length of the field toward the goal of his opponent. He was tackled and brought down by one of his own team, preventing a touchdown. He had lost his sense of direction in a moment of stress. His mistake cost his team a victory. He was a great player. He lived to be eighty-four, but ever afterward he was remembered as the man who ran the wrong way.

This phenomenon is not peculiar to sports. It happens every day in life.

There is the student who thinks he is doing well enough and then, under the stress of the final exam, flunks out.

There is the driver who all of his life has had a flawless record and then, in a moment of carelessness, is involved in a tragic accident.

There is the trusted employee whose performance has been excellent, and then he succumbs to the temptation to steal a little from his employer. A mark is placed upon him which never seems to entirely disappear.

There is the life lived with decency—and then comes the destructive, ever-haunting, one-time moral letdown.

There is the outburst of anger that suddenly destroys a long-cherished relationship. There is the little sin that somehow grows and eventually leads to separation from the Church.

In all of these, someone dropped the ball. He had the self-confidence, possibly even the arrogance, to think

that he didn't really have to try, that he could make it with only half an effort. But the ball passed through his hands and hit the ground, and he gave away the game. Or he thinks he makes a smart catch of someone else's fumble and runs the wrong way, only to give victory to his opponents.

It all points up the need to be constantly alert. It points up the importance of unrelenting self-discipline. It indicates the necessity of constantly building our strength against temptation. It warns us against the misuse of our time, especially our idle time.

### Story of young Eugene L. Roberts

At Brigham Young University we have had some great athletic coaches. We have them now and we have had them in the past. One of these of long ago was Eugene L. Roberts. He grew up in Provo and drifted aimlessly with the wrong kind of friends. Then something remarkable happened. I read you his own words. He wrote:

"Several years ago when Provo City was scarred with unsightly saloons and other questionable forms of amusement, I was standing one evening on the street, waiting for my gang to show up, when I noticed that the [Provo] tabernacle was lighted up and that a large crowd was moving in that direction. I had nothing to do so I drifted over there and went in. I thought I might find some of my gang, or at least some of the girls that I was interested in. Upon entering, I ran across three or four of the fellows and we placed ourselves under the gallery where there was a crowd of young ladies, who seemed to promise entertainment. We were not interested in what came from the pulpit. We knew that the people on the rostrum were all old fogies. They didn't know anything about life, and they certainly couldn't tell us anything, for we knew it all. So we settled down to have a good time. Right in the midst of

our disturbance there thundered from the pulpit the following [statement]:

"You can't tell the character of an individual by the way he does his daily work. Watch him when his work is done. See where he goes. Note the companions he seeks, and the things he does when he may do as he pleases. Then you can tell his true character."

"I looked up toward the rostrum," Roberts continued, "because I was struck with this powerful statement. I saw there a slim, dark-haired fierce-eyed fighting-man whom I knew and feared; but didn't have any particular love for."

As he continued, "[the speaker] went on to make a comparison. He said: 'Let us take the eagle, for example. This bird works as hard and as efficiently as any other animal or bird in doing its daily work. It provides for itself and its young by the sweat of its brow, so to speak; but when its daily work is over and the eagle has time of its own to do just as it pleases, note how it spends its recreational moments. It flies in the highest realms of heaven, spreads its wings and bathes in the upper air, for it loves the pure, clean atmosphere and the lofty heights.

"On the other hand, let us consider the hog. This animal grunts and grubs and provides for its young just as well as the eagle; but when its working hours are over and it has some recreational moments, observe where it goes and what it does. The hog will seek out the muddiest hole in the pasture and will roll and soak itself in filth, for this is the thing it loves. People can be either eagles or hogs in their leisure time.'

"Now when I heard this short speech," said Gene Roberts, "I was dumbfounded. I turned to my companions abashed for I was ashamed to be caught listening. What was my surprise to find everyone of the gang with his attention fixed upon the speaker and his eyes containing a far-away expression.

"We went out of the tabernacle that evening rather quiet and we separated

from each other unusually early. I thought of that speech all the way home. I classified myself immediately as of the hog family. I thought of that speech for years. That night there was implanted within me the faintest beginnings of ambition to lift myself out of the hog group and to rise to that of the eagle. . . .

"There was instilled within me that same evening, the urge to help fill up the mud holes in the social pasture so that those people with hog tendencies would find it difficult to wallow in recreational filth. As a result of constant thinking about that speech, I was stirred to devote my whole life and my profession toward developing wholesome recreational activities for the young people, so that it would be natural and easy for them to indulge in the eagle-type of leisure.

"The man who made that speech which affected my life more than any other speech I ever heard, was President George H. Brimhall. May God bless him!" (Raymond Brimhall Holbrook and Esther Hamilton Holbrook, *The Tall Pine Tree: The Life and Work of George H. Brimhall* [n.p., 1988], pp. 111-13).

### Choose to be eagles, not hogs

That simple story, told by a great teacher, turned around the life of a drifter and made of him an able and gifted leader. I repeat it tonight because I think that most of us are constantly faced with a choice of whether we wallow in the mire or fly to lofty heights.

What we do in our leisure time can make such a tremendous difference. Pity the poor man or boy of low purpose and weak ambition who, after a day of work, finishes his evening meal and then turns to the television screen for the rest of the evening to watch pornographic videotapes or sleazy late-night programs. Can you think of any picture which more nearly approaches President Brimhall's description of the hog that seeks the

mudhole in the pasture and wallows in the mire?

There is a better way, my brethren. Do you want to drop the ball in your lives? Do you wish to help Satan score? There is no surer way than to become engulfed in the tide of pornography that is sweeping over us. If we succumb to it, it destroys us, body and mind and soul.

On the other hand, the whole design of the gospel is to lead us onward and upward to greater achievement, even, eventually, to godhood. This great possibility was enunciated by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the King Follet sermon and emphasized by President Lorenzo Snow. It is this grand and incomparable concept: *As God now is, man may become!* (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], pp. 342-62; *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, comp. Clyde J. Williams [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984], p. 1).

Our enemies have criticized us for believing in this. Our reply is that this lofty concept in no way diminishes God the Eternal Father. He is the Almighty. He is the Creator and Governor of the universe. He is the greatest of all and will always be so. But just as any earthly father wishes for his sons and daughters every success in life, so I believe our Father in Heaven wishes for his children that they might approach him in stature and stand beside him resplendent in godly strength and wisdom.

### Put on the whole armor of God

Today is a part of eternity. As Amulek in the Book of Mormon declared, "This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God" (Alma 34:32).

Eternal vigilance is the price of eternal development. Occasionally we may stumble. I thank the Lord for the great principle of repentance and forgiveness. When we drop the ball, when we make a

mistake, there is held out to us the word of the Lord that he will forgive our sins and remember them no more against us. But somehow we are prone to remember them against ourselves.

For the priesthood of this church, it is so important that we walk the high road.

As Paul admonished:

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world. . . .

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; . . .

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Ephesians 6:10-12, 14, 16).

All of us live in the world. Of course we do. We cannot live a cloistered existence. But we can live in the world without partaking of the unseemly ways of the world.

### **Don't drop the ball**

The pull gets ever stronger. The adversary is clever and subtle. He speaks in a seductive voice of fascinating and attractive things. We cannot afford to let down our guard. We cannot afford to drop the ball. We need not run the wrong way. The right way is simple. It means following the program of the Church, bringing into our lives the principles of the gospel, and never losing sight of what is expected of us as sons of God with a great inheritance and a marvelous and eternal potential.

Simple and tremendously challenging are the words of the Scout Oath: "On my honor I will do my best." If every one of us would make that effort,

the world would be much better, and we would be much happier. It is so often the very small and singularly inconsequential acts of our lives that eventually make so great a difference. I'm confident Brother Uchtdorf would agree that a giant airplane flying one degree off course will, unless it is corrected, simply fly in circles until its fuel is exhausted and it falls. The history of this church is replete with cases of men who started on the road to apostasy with small, seemingly unimportant decisions. Oliver Cowdery was one of them. Martin Harris was one of them. David Whitmer was one of them.

Thomas B. Marsh, the first President of the Quorum of the Twelve, sided with his wife in an argument over a little cream. He would not let the matter drop and carried it to the highest councils of the Church. He lost his place and never fully regained it. He dropped the ball at a crucial time and has been remembered ever since for what he did (in George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:283-84).

The Lord is forgiving, but sometimes life is not forgiving.

In the world in which we walk, we must be careful. The temptations are tremendous. We all know about them. The little decisions can be so crucial and so everlastingly important in their consequences.

### **Live with goodness and consistency**

We must strengthen one another, help one another, play the game together if we are to win the victory. Don't forget Fred Snodgrass. It should never have happened. He gave away the World Series. Don't forget Roy Riegels. He ran the wrong way and thought the crowd was cheering him on when they were bemoaning his mistake. Stay away from the mire in the pastures of life. Look upward to the heavens and draw strength therefrom. As holders of the priesthood, we must live by a greater

loyalty than other men. We must live with loyalty to God, in whose name we are authorized to speak and act.

Thank you, my brethren, for the goodness and consistency of your lives. This work is becoming as a city set upon a hill, whose light cannot be hid because so many of you are true and faithful. May the Lord bless you. May he grant unto you peace in your lives, that peace which comes with honesty and integrity and prayer. May he bless you with the love of your families, your wives, and your children. May he bless all of us with strength to live with consistency without stumbling as we walk the way of immortality and eternal life, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### **President Monson**

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has just spoken to us.

It will now be our privilege to listen to the counsel of our beloved prophet, President Howard W. Hunter, who will be our concluding speaker.

Before hearing his remarks, we remind you that the CBS Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be from 9:30 to 10:00 tomorrow morning. Those desiring to attend the broadcast and the Sunday morning session, which will follow, must be in their seats before 9:15 A.M.

As you leave this priesthood meeting tonight, we ask you to obey traffic rules, to use caution, and to be courteous in driving.

We express our gratitude to the combined men's chorus from the Tabernacle Choir and Mormon Youth Chorus for the inspiring music this evening.

Following President Hunter's address, the choir will conclude by singing "Beautiful Savior." The benediction will be offered by Elder Lowell D. Wood of the Seventy.

## **President Howard W. Hunter**

My dear brethren of the priesthood, I consider it a privilege to meet with you this evening in this general priesthood meeting. The priesthood is the greatest brotherhood on the earth. I feel great strength in seeing your faithfulness and feeling your love and sustaining vote. We are particularly grateful to have so many of our Aaronic Priesthood brethren here with their fathers or advisers.

#### **Marriage is a sacred privilege and obligation**

The subject of my address this evening will be more particularly directed to the husbands and fathers. All of you who hold the Aaronic Priesthood will soon arrive at the years of marriage and fatherhood. Therefore, what I say tonight has application to all present.

I wish to speak of the relationship that a man holding the priesthood should have with his wife and children. With a knowledge of the plan of salvation as a foundation, a man who holds the priesthood looks upon marriage as a sacred privilege and obligation. It is not good for man nor for woman to be alone. Man is not complete without woman. Neither can fill the measure of their creation without the other (see 1 Corinthians 11:11; Moses 3:18). Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God (see D&C 49:15-17). Only through the new and everlasting covenant of marriage can they realize the fulness of eternal blessings (see D&C 131:1-4; 132:15-19). As a matter of priesthood responsibility, a man, under normal circumstances, should not unduly postpone marriage. Brethren,