

Study, teach, testify, and obey

Dear brethren of the priesthood, we must never forget for a moment that the covenants we have made to keep—the promises we have made with the Lord and with our Heavenly Father—are the most important decisions we have made in our lives. Let us study and ponder the scriptures and listen to the counsel of living prophets. Let us teach and testify of the truthfulness of the commandments in our homes and elsewhere as directed by the Spirit. Let us reflect our love of the Lord by being obedient to the commandments and reaping the promised blessings both in this life and in the

life to come. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

I testify that God lives. Jesus is the Christ. May we remember who we are and act accordingly, that we may gain the riches of eternity for ourselves, our families, and our friends, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve has spoken to us.

We will now be pleased to hear from Elder W. Eugene Hansen of the Presidency of the Seventy.

Elder W. Eugene Hansen

My beloved brethren, I feel the awesome responsibility of this evening as I respond to the assignment of the First Presidency to speak to the priesthood of the Church.

Here in the Tabernacle there is a perceptible spirit of warmth and love and brotherhood which is characteristic and typical of the priesthood of God. Also I sense that as you meet in dedicated buildings throughout the world, you too will feel that same spirit and brotherhood.

A great dispensation

This is a great time to be living in the world, “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (Ephesians 1:10; see also D&C 27:13).

A humble boy’s prayer was the beginning of this dispensation as the Father and the Son appeared to the Prophet Joseph and vested in him the divine commission to assist in ushering in this special period of time.

Ancient prophets, servants of God, have visited the earth for the purpose

of restoring precious priesthood keys—keys of authority and responsibility given them by the Lord at an earlier time (see D&C 27).

This is the restored Church of Christ. Our Savior, the Only Begotten Son of God, stands at the head of this Church. He established it nearly 2,000 years ago.

Rattlesnakes and wayward sheep

At the priesthood session of conference, I am always impressed with the number of young men of Aaronic Priesthood age who are here, many with their fathers, some with grandfathers, others with priesthood leaders. You young men bring with you the special, vibrant, enthusiastic spirit of the youth of our time. So I would like to direct my remarks to you for the next few minutes.

First, an experience that I had as a youth which helped teach me an important lesson. It occurred when I was quite young—to be more specific, a boy of 10 or 11. I was herding our flock of sheep in the mountains of northern Utah to the east of East Garland. My grandfather

had entrusted me with the sheep as we were moving them up the mountain to the summer range. I had just watered them in a small mountain stream and bedded them down for a short rest before going on.

While they were settled, I went about to explore the terrain and check the route ahead. I was a couple of hundred yards up the canyon when I heard a sound that chilled me to the bone. Once you have heard a rattlesnake, a very poisonous reptile, you'll never forget the sound.

Cautiously I moved toward that sound. To my surprise I observed not one but three rattlers just a few yards away. They were on a rocky knoll that had been warmed by the spring sun. While the sight of three rattlers in a bunch intrigued me, because you seldom see more than one at a time, it also concerned me since the sheep would need to pass this way.

Before long the sheep roused and started moving up the canyon. As they came closer, the snakes seemed to sense the intruders and slithered down the incline toward the creek.

Fearing the danger, I immediately turned my sheep up the hill away from the direction the snakes were moving. I was successful for a time, but then a couple of sheep broke away from the flock. As they did so, the entire flock seemed determined to follow those two errant old ewes, and there was no stopping them. You may have heard the characterization "They all followed like a bunch of sheep." Well, that's what happened here. To make matters worse, they were moving directly toward the location of the rattlers.

I had hoped that the natural instinct of the sheep would keep them at a safe distance. But some of the flock were pushed directly into the path of the snakes. And there was no escape for

the unfortunate ones that sustained the strikes of those disturbed reptiles.

It was a sad young shepherd who had to report to his grandfather a short time later the loss of two of his prized ewes. The experience of that day provided a very forceful illustration to me of what can happen when the sheep ignore their shepherd.

I was there as the shepherd. I perceived the danger and was trying my best to protect my sheep. But as a few started to go in the wrong direction, others were determined to follow. Though only two of the flock were lost, it was a loss that need not have been.

Heed spiritual shepherds

Unfortunately, in life we all too often see the results of those who ignore the attempts of spiritual shepherds to guide their paths past hazards and dangers that may be unperceived at the time.

Parents, bishops, grandparents, Scoutmasters, advisers, and genuine friends often can provide spiritual shepherding. Note that I refer to genuine friends in the category of spiritual shepherds. Notice also that I did not include peers in that group. I readily acknowledge that peers in some cases can be and are an influence for good.

Resist negative peer pressure

A genuine friend who has another's best interest at heart may often be the one who encourages or provides the strength in a weak moment to prevent that person from making a serious mistake. In so doing he or she helps prevent the sorrow and sadness, the embarrassment and loss of self-respect that nearly always accompany sin. But unfortunately, so many times there are situations where peer influence has a definite negative effect.

We read and hear of so many surveys and interviews where youth disclose that it was the influence and pressure of peers that led them to immoral and foolish behavior. Satan knows this. He is an expert at deceit. I suppose he should be; he's had plenty of practice. He is aware of the tremendous influence a group of peers can have on an individual.

There is a compelling desire to belong—to be one of the group. If he can get just one person to influence others to choose the wrong way for whatever reason, Satan wins. Often the easiest and simplest nudging is that “everyone is doing it” or “it’s the cool thing” or “how do you know it’s bad if you haven’t tried it?”

Don’t be deceived. Don’t be influenced with this kind of enticement. Keep your eyes above the crowd. Be your own person. You have been taught correct principles. Stick with those principles.

Do not try to justify “a little sin”

There is no neutral area between good and evil. If you are on the devil’s turf, get off it as fast as you can. As strong as Nephi was, I can’t forget his humble prayer: “O Lord, wilt thou . . . make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?” (2 Nephi 4:31).

Some foolishly try to justify conduct they know is wrong with, “It’s such a little sin; it won’t matter.” While it may be true that the particular conduct is not at the top of the scale, the more dangerous part is the road that it puts you on. “Little wrongs” just seem to have a way of leading into “bigger wrongs.”

The words of the American clergyman Harry Emerson Fosdick provide further instruction here: “The tragic evils of our life are so commonly unintentional. We did not start out for that poor, cheap goal. That aim was not in our minds at all. . . . Look to the road you are walking on! He who picks up one end of a stick picks up the other. He who

chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to” (*Living under Tension* [1941], 110–11).

Remain strong and faithful

Now, my young brethren, you know what is right. You have been taught well. You have the Holy Ghost. Your challenge is to remain strong and faithful. Keep your bodies and minds clean and pure. Make the decision early to get on the right road and then stay there. Your Heavenly Father loves you. He has confidence in you. He wants you to be happy. He has provided a pattern for you to follow (see D&C 52:14). That pattern is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest blessings of this dispensation is the presence of living prophets to provide direction and guidance. President Gordon B. Hinckley is our beloved prophet today. He loves you. Listen to his counsel:

“Prove your strength, show your independence, by saying no when enticement from peers comes your way. Your own strength will add strength to those who are weak. Your own example will give determination to others” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1987, 59; or *Ensign*, May 1987, 48).

“You can determine the kind of life you will have in your thirties or forties by what you do in your teens” (quoted in *Ensign*, Dec. 1995, 66).

I pray you will make the decisions that will result in true happiness.

This is the true Church of Jesus Christ. This is His work. Of that I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

W. Eugene Hansen has just spoken to us.

We will now be pleased to hear from President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency.