

“Be faithful unto the end, and lo, I am with you. These words are not of man nor of men, but of me, even Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, by the will of the Father. Amen” (D&C 31:11–13).

I testify that God the Father lives and answers our prayers. I am a witness that the loving Savior watches over His sheep with His faithful shepherds.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder David E. Sorensen

You can't pet a rattlesnake

Some years ago, Sister Sorensen and I had the privilege of visiting India. At one airport I remember walking across the landing strip and seeing some men sitting in front of wicker baskets, playing flutes. As they started to play the music, they would take the top off the basket and a cobra would appear! As the music continued, the snake would rise higher and higher, nearly reaching its full length until the cobra would collapse back into the basket. Once I noticed a cobra fall outside the basket. The man playing the flute reached over, petted the cobra, and carefully put it back into the basket. I was amazed that a man could handle such a dangerous creature, apparently without being harmed. But our guide quickly told me that this was very risky and told us that a major cause of death in this province was indeed poisonous snakebite.

My mind raced back to the days of my youth on the farm. In the summertime one of our responsibilities was to haul hay from the fields into the barn for winter storage. My dad would pitch the hay onto a flatbed wagon. I would then tromp down the hay to get as much as possible on the wagon. One day, in one of the loose bundles pitched onto the wagon was a rattlesnake! When I looked at it, I was concerned, excited, and afraid. The snake was lying in the nice, cool hay. The sun was glistening on its diamond back. After a few moments the snake stopped rattling, became still, and I became very curious. I started to get closer and leaned over for a better look, when suddenly I

heard a call from my father: “David, my boy, you can't pet a rattlesnake!”

Dangers of the media's poisonous snakes

Tonight I would like to talk to you about the dangers of petting poisonous snakes. The ones I refer to do not have long, slithering bodies but come in many other forms. Often the world makes these dangers look harmless—even exciting and interesting. But petting such snakes fills the mind with poison—poison that drives away the Holy Spirit.¹

Brethren, today's popular entertainment often makes what is evil and wrong look enjoyable and right. Let us remember the Lord's counsel: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil.”²

Pornography, though billed by Satan as entertainment, is a deeply poisonous, deceptive snake that lies coiled up in magazines, the Internet, and the television. Pornography destroys self-esteem and weakens self-discipline. It is far more deadly to the spirit than the rattlesnake my father warned me not to pet. The Bible records that King David was gifted spiritually, but he stood where he should not have stood. He watched what he should not have watched. Those obsessions became his downfall.³

Build fortifications against temptation

Resisting the temptations of today's electronic media is not easy. It takes focused courage and effort. In the small town where I grew up, one had to drive at least an hour to find trouble. But to-

day on the Internet, trouble is just a few mouse clicks away. To avoid such temptations, be like Captain Moroni of old; set up “fortifications” to strengthen your places of weakness. Instead of building walls of “timbers and dirt” to protect a vulnerable city, build “fortifications” in the form of personal ground rules to protect your priceless virtue.⁴ When you’re on a date, plan to be in groups and avoid being alone. I know men, young and old, who have simply determined not to turn on the TV or surf the Internet anytime when they are alone. Fathers, it is wise to keep computers and televisions in the family room or other high-traffic areas in your home—not in children’s bedrooms. I also know of fathers who, while on business trips, wisely choose not to turn on the hotel television.

Remember, such “fortifications” are not a sign of weakness. On the contrary, they show strength. The scriptures tell us Captain Moroni was so strong that if all men would be like him, “the very powers of hell would [be] shaken forever.”⁵ Remember, Moroni’s “strongholds”⁶ were the key to his success. Creating your own “strongholds” will be the key to yours.

Decide now where to draw the line

One key fortification you can build is to decide now, before you face a challenge, where to draw the line. Our prophet teaches that if we decide now not to watch inappropriate media but instead to walk away, “the challenge is behind us.”⁷

Recently my granddaughter Jennifer was invited to go with some of her school friends to a dinner and a movie. The girls all agreed on the movie they were going to see, and Jennifer was comfortable attending. However, the girl who left dinner to buy the movie tickets for the group returned with tickets to a different movie than was planned! She said, “It is a great show, and it’s R-rated.”

Jennifer, caught by surprise, couldn’t believe the situation had changed so quickly. But fortunately she had made up her mind before she ever found herself in this position that she would not watch R-rated movies. She was able to stand firm and say to her friends, “I can’t go see an R-rated movie. My parents would not approve.” To which the girls replied, “Oh, come on! Your parents will never know!” Confronted with this, Jennifer went on to say, “Well, actually it doesn’t matter whether my parents will know. I just don’t go to R-rated movies!”

Her friends were upset and tried to get her to relent. They told her she was ruining everything. When she would not give in, they threw the ticket and change in her face and deserted her for the R-rated movie. It wound up being a lonely night full of rejection from her friends. But it was a great moment for Jennifer and our family.⁸ She gained confidence, self-worth, and spiritual power.⁹

Do not sin now and plan to repent later

Knowingly petting a poisonous spiritual snake is doubly dangerous.¹⁰ Those who do remind me of the little boy who was overheard praying, “Heavenly Father, if you can’t make me a better boy, don’t worry about it. I’m having a real good time like I am.”

Don’t be like that shortsighted boy. Those who plan to sin, thinking they can repent before they receive the sacred covenants and ordinances of the temple, risk losing their spiritual health. They find it is a painful process to come back to the right path.

Repentance—a spiritual snakebite kit

For those who suffer from a poisonous snakebite, there is a painful cleansing process. Where the bite was inflicted, a cut with a sharp knife is required. Then

someone must cleanse the infected blood from the wound. Often a stay in the hospital is required. My plea to you tonight, brethren, is to avoid petting that rattle-snake. It is much better not to commit the sin.¹¹

Some young men, as they advance in the priesthood, plan for a mission, or prepare to go to the temple, realize they suffer from a snakebite that has spiritually poisoned them. Sexual sins are among the most poisonous.

If you or someone you know has been poisoned spiritually, there is a spiritual snakebite kit. It's called repentance.¹² And like the remedy for temporal snakebite, it is most effective if applied quickly and early. It can combat even the most venomous spiritual poisons. "For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him."¹³ The miracle of forgiveness is real.¹⁴ Your repentance is honored of the Lord.¹⁵

An important step in obtaining the cure for spiritual poison is to get on your knees and ask Heavenly Father to forgive you.¹⁶ Pray for the desire to do what is right. Pray for the courage to talk to your parents and the bishop if necessary.¹⁷ Regardless of your fears, they will continue to love you. You don't have to do this alone. The path of repentance, though difficult, need not be traveled alone. Parents and leaders can provide valuable encouragement and support.

The power and freedom of forgiveness is real. The Savior taught, "The truth shall make you free."¹⁸ Joy comes from living the way the Savior lived.¹⁹ He has asked us to keep our thoughts pure.²⁰ He has asked us to maintain our self-respect. He has asked us to become a good influence on our family and our friends. We are to love them and to lift them toward the light. He said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have

love one to another."²¹ He has promised He will help us live His standards. He has said: "Take my yoke upon you. . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."²²

Pattern our lives after the Master

Brethren of the priesthood, can you join me right here, right now, once again to commit and to take upon you the name of Christ? With this priesthood which you hold, can you rise up and wield the power of God to defend righteousness? Can you stand in holy places?²³

We have all accepted the responsibility to pattern our life after the Master. He has committed the keys of the priesthood and of divine revelation to our living prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley. He counsels: "Stay away from pornography."²⁴ "I plead with you to get it out of your life."²⁵

Don't allow the poison to touch your souls, brethren. Remember, "He that is righteous is favored of God."²⁶ I testify of this in the name of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:33; Moses 8:17.
2. Isaiah 5:20.
3. See 2 Samuel 11; Doctrine and Covenants 132:39.
4. See Alma 53:4, 7.
5. Alma 48:17.
6. See Alma 53:4-5.
7. "A Prophet's Counsel and Prayer for Youth," *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 4.
8. See Galatians 5:16-21.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:45-46.
10. See Mosiah 27:10-11; Alma 1:15.
11. See Luke 15:21.
12. See Isaiah 1:18.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 18:11.
14. See Mosiah 26:29.
15. See 2 Nephi 9:23; 26:27.
16. See Alma 34; 3 Nephi 18:29-32.
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 64:7.
18. John 8:32.

19. See 2 Nephi 2:25; 9:18; Mosiah 2:41; 4:3.
 20. See Articles of Faith 1:13.
 21. John 13:35.
 22. Matthew 11:29–30.
 23. See Doctrine and Covenants 101:22.
 24. In Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 71; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 54.
 25. In Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 51.
 26. 1 Nephi 17:35.

Elder John H. Groberg

Unfathomable value of the priesthood

Fellow bearers of the priesthood everywhere: I hope we appreciate the priceless privilege of holding the priesthood of God. Its value is unfathomable.

Through its power, worlds—even universes—have been, are being, and will be created or organized. Through its power, ordinances are performed which, when accompanied by righteousness, allow families to be together forever, sins to be forgiven, the sick to be healed, the blind to see, and even life to be restored.

Purity required for priesthood power

God wants us, His sons, to hold His priesthood and learn to use it properly. He has explained:

“No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge.”¹

For if we “exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men [especially our wives and children], in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.”²

Thus, we see that while the power of the priesthood is unlimited, our individual power in the priesthood is limited by our degree of righteousness or purity.

Just as clean wires, properly connected, are required to carry electrical

power, so clean hands and pure hearts are required to carry priesthood power. Filth and grime slow or prevent the flow of electrical power. Unclean thoughts and actions interfere with individual priesthood power. When we are humble, clean, and pure of hand, heart, and mind, nothing righteous is impossible. An ancient Oriental saying declares, “If a man lives a pure life, nothing can destroy him.”³

“I cannot approach God with dirty hands”

In His love for us, God has decreed that any worthy man, regardless of wealth, education, color, cultural background, or language, may hold His priesthood. Thus, any properly ordained man who is clean in hand, heart, and mind can connect with the unlimited power of the priesthood. I learned this lesson well as a young missionary years ago in the South Pacific.

My first assignment was to a small island hundreds of miles from headquarters, where no one spoke English, and I was the only white man. I was given a local companion named Feki, who was then serving a building mission and was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood.

After eight seasick days and nights on a small, smelly boat, we arrived at Niutopotapu. I struggled with the heat, the mosquitoes, the strange food, culture, and language, as well as homesickness. One afternoon we heard cries of anguish and saw a family bringing the limp, seemingly lifeless body of their eight-year-old son to us. They wailed out that he had fallen from a mango tree and would not respond to anything. The faithful father