

Your Priesthood Playbook

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Create your own playbook of how you will prove yourself as a disciple of Christ.

Last December, the First Presidency issued a statement announcing that 11-year-old boys would “begin attending ... Aaronic Priesthood quorums ... at the beginning of January in the year they turn 12.”¹

As a result, during the first part of this year, there were quite a few startled 11-year-olds who had assumed they would be staying in Primary until their next birthday but were now passing the sacrament on Sundays as the Church’s newest ordained deacons.

I wonder who was surprised most by the change—the deacons or their parents. Of these almost 80,000 new deacons, many are with us tonight in this great Conference Center or are participating through technology. Welcome to the great brotherhood of the priesthood!

This change makes this meeting a historic one—it is likely the largest group of Aaronic Priesthood holders *ever* to attend a general priesthood session of general conference. In light of this special occasion, I direct my remarks especially to the young men of the Aaronic Priesthood.

Lessons Learned from Sports

As students, many of you are also developing your talents, interests, and hobbies through extracurricular activities at school or in private lessons, teams, and groups outside of school, including sports.

Having enjoyed sports throughout my life, I have always admired those who develop their athletic abilities to the point where they perform at high levels. For someone to be *really* good at anything, it takes, in addition to natural talent, great discipline, sacrifice, and countless hours of training and practice. Such athletes often hear the sometimes-harsh criticisms of coaches and willingly put aside what they want now for something greater in the future.

We know Church members and priesthood holders who have experienced success at the highest levels of professional athletics. There are many good examples, but I can list only a few here for the sake of time. You might recognize some of these athletes: in baseball, Jeremy Guthrie and Bryce Harper; in basketball, Jabari Parker and Jimmer Fredette; in soccer, Ricardo Rojas; in rugby league, William Hopoate; and in football, Taysom Hill and Daniel Sorensen. Each has made significant contributions to his sport.

While they are extremely successful in their sports, these athletes would be the first to admit they are not perfect athletes or perfect human beings. They work hard to be the best in their sport—and to live the gospel. They get up if they stumble, and they strive to endure to the end.

Study the Playbook

In team sports, plays are developed for certain game situations and compiled into a playbook. Athletes learn their specific assignment for each play. Successful players study the playbook so thoroughly that when a play is called, they know exactly, almost instinctively, where to go and what to do.

Photograph by Dave Kaup/REUTERS/stock.adobe.com

In a similar way, we holders of the priesthood also have a team (a quorum) and a playbook (the holy scriptures and words of modern prophets).

Do you strengthen your teammates?

How well have you studied your playbook?

Do you fully understand your assignment?

Confronting the Opposition

To take the analogy even further, great coaches know the strengths and weaknesses of their team as well as those of the opposition. They create a game plan that will give them the best chance for victory. What about you?

You know what temptations you are most vulnerable to, and you can predict how the adversary will try to derail and dishearten you. Have you created a personal game plan and playbook so that you will know how to respond when faced with opposition?

As you confront various moral temptations—whether in the company of others or when you are alone staring at a screen—you know your game plan. If a friend suggests you drink alcohol or try drugs, you know the play. You have practiced and know how to react in advance.

With a game plan, a playbook, and a firm commitment to execute your role, you will find that temptation has less control over you. You will have already made the decision of how you will react and what you will do. You won't need to decide every time you are confronted with temptation.

One of the Twelve recently shared a story that illustrates this principle. As a priest in high school, he was hanging out with his friends. After they got something to eat, they were driving around when someone suggested they should go to a certain movie. The problem was he knew it was a movie he shouldn't see. Although he immediately felt pressure and anxiety about the situation, he had planned for this. This was a page straight out of his priesthood playbook.

Taking a deep breath and summoning his courage, he announced, "I'm not interested in that movie. Just drop me off at my house," which they did. A simple play leading to a victory! Years later, one of the friends with him that night described how this example proved to be a great strength for him to courageously face similar circumstances in his own life.

Pages from the Playbook

I asked a few of the Brethren to recommend plays you might include in your playbook. Here are some of their inspired suggestions:

- Pray every day for greater light and a testimony of Jesus Christ.
- Listen carefully to the teachings of your parents, your bishop, and your Young Men and quorum leaders.
- Avoid pornography and immoral social media content.
- Remember the promises you have made to God, and work to keep them.
- Study scripture stories of great prophets, and emulate their good qualities.
- Bless Heavenly Father's children through service.
- Seek good friends to help you become the person you want to be.
- Become an expert in the FamilySearch app, and research your own family history.
- Plan places of retreat where you can escape evil influences.
- Love and help strengthen other members of your priesthood quorum.

I also communicated with the athletes whose pictures we viewed earlier. I found it interesting that they do not identify themselves only by what they *do*, as professional athletes, but also by who they *are*, as sons of a loving Heavenly Father and holders of the priesthood of God.

Now let's listen to their thoughts:

- Jimmer Fredette, here as a deacon learning to tie his tie, says: "I have learned to lean heavily on my knowledge and faith of the truthfulness of the gospel. This has guided me to be ... a worthy priesthood holder and above all—a positive example."
- Bryce Harper, here as a husband, writes: "I thought fame, fortune, and an MVP award would make me happy. Something was missing. So, I ... prepared and [entered] the temple. I am now on a path to [return] to my Heavenly Father and have an eternal family—which is the greatest joy in the world!"
- Daniel Sorensen, here as a missionary, says: "A good playbook is a plan that uses the talents and strengths of each team member. ... As I study and practice the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I can know how to use my strengths to serve in the priesthood."
- Jeremy Guthrie, here currently serving as mission president, shared: "As a 12-year-old deacon ... [I felt] the Spirit testify to me [that] 'this life is the time ... to prepare to meet God.'² The game plan is faith in God unto action [and] repentance through the Savior. ... The playbook is found in the holy scriptures and through living prophets."
- Jabari Parker, here at his ordination to the office of elder, says: "I couldn't imagine the person that I would've turned out to be if I hadn't made the decision to be baptized. ... I'm so grateful that I have God in my life to guide me every day."

- Ricardo Rojas, here currently serving as branch president, said: “Through [God’s] priesthood [we] can help in His work. We are called to ‘be strong and of a good courage’³ in defending the truth.” This has helped him succeed both on the pitch and as a priesthood holder.
- Taysom Hill, here as a missionary, feels the gospel of Jesus Christ has served as a playbook for him in his life. He shared, “Believing in [God’s] plan and doing my best to fulfill my role in it has given me an overwhelming sense of peace and happiness in life, knowing God is pleased with my efforts.”
- William Hopoate, here at his son’s baby blessing with four generations, says that the gospel helps him “identify the opposition’s strategies and provides the spiritual efficacy to withstand fiery darts and better serve others.”

What about you? Do you recognize your *higher* and *holier* identity as a son of God, a bearer of His holy priesthood? With this eternal identity in mind, create your game plan and priesthood playbook that will guide you during times of temptation and adversity. Consider both offensive and defensive strategies.

Offensive strategies help strengthen testimonies and increase resolve to stay on the strait and narrow path. Examples include regular prayer, scripture study, church and temple attendance, paying tithing, and following the counsel found in the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet.

Defensive strategies include planning ahead how you will face temptation. When tempted to compromise your personal standards, you know beforehand what you will do.

You need a playbook for that.

Don’t feel like praying today? Time to execute the play you already game-planned.

Do you feel your testimony waning? You have a play for that. You know what to do.

All-Stars in God’s Eyes

You are bearers of the holy priesthood of God. Your commitment to hold firmly the iron rod will transform you into the eternal being who you were created to become.

God knows and loves you. He will bless you and guide your steps.

You might be thinking that you are no one special, that you are not all-star material. But that is not true. Don’t you know that God has proclaimed, “The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones”?⁴

So, do you feel weak? insignificant? Congratulations, you just made the lineup!

Do you feel unimportant? inferior? You may be just who God needs.

What greater example is there than David stepping onto the battlefield against a frightening opponent, Goliath? Relying on the Lord, with a plan, David saved not only himself but the army of Israel!⁵ Know that the Lord will be with you as you summon your courage to be on His side. “If God be for us, who can be against us?”⁶

He can open doors and help us find strengths and abilities we never knew we had.⁷

Listen to your trusted coaches, such as your parents, bishop, and Young Men leaders. Learn the playbook. Read the scriptures. Study the words of modern-day prophets. Create your own game plan of how you will prove yourself as a disciple of Christ.

Know in advance the plays you will employ to strengthen your spirit and avoid the snares of the adversary.

Do this and God will surely utilize you.

Now, there may be some who detach themselves from the gospel and wander away. Others may sit in the stands and watch the game from afar. Some may choose to stay on the bench, even though the coach has tried to send them in. *I invite you to rescue, support, and love them as a fellow team member!*

Others want to get in the game—and *do*. What matters most is not how talented they are but their willingness to put themselves on the field. They do not wait to have their number called, because they know the scripture that says, “If ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work.”⁸

You can put yourself in the lineup.

You do this as you study and execute your priesthood playbook.

Along the way you will most likely stumble and fall—perhaps many, many times. You are not perfect; falling is part of the qualifying process that allows you to refine your character and serve in a more compassionate way. The Savior and His infinite Atonement provide the way to overcome our mistakes through sincere repentance.

Great athletes spend hundreds of hours perfecting one small aspect of their game. As a priesthood holder, you need the same mind-set. If you fail, repent and learn from it. Practice so you will do better the next time. Ultimately, it's up to you. Will you learn the playbook?

I urge you: Trust in the Lord. Put on the whole armor of God,⁹ and get in the game.

There aren't many who play professional sports at the highest levels, but when it comes to discipleship, there are many who choose to follow Christ.

In fact, that is your mission in this life—to learn the ways of the Lord, enter the path of discipleship, and strive to live according to God's plan. God will uphold and bless you as you turn to Him. You can do this because you are an all-star in His eyes.

I pray that you will make the commitment to live worthy of the holy priesthood that you bear and strive to execute your sacred role every day. I bless you with the ability and desire to do so. I add my testimony of the power of the priesthood that you hold, of living prophets, and of Jesus Christ and His role as our Savior and Redeemer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.