

Transcript: To Young Men Only

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There are present in this priesthood session only brethren. I approach a subject that could not appropriately be discussed if there were others present. I have prayed fervently for inspiration as I speak to young men of Aaronic Priesthood age: to young men only.

I wish to discuss a subject that fathers should discuss with their sons. Because some young men do not have fathers and because some fathers (and some bishops) do not know how to proceed, I approach a very personal subject, one that is important to every young man. You have been given a mortal body with which to experience earth life. Through it you will be tested. Your body is the instrument of your mind and the foundation of your character. It has within it powers which, if properly used, will contribute greatly to your exaltation. If you use this gift worthily, it will serve you throughout all eternity. Never be ashamed of your body. No two are just alike. Some young men worry because they think their body is not well proportioned. They think they are too short or too tall or too stout or too thin or too something else. Physical proportions need have little to do with success, particularly spiritual success. Be grateful for your body. Strive to keep it healthy through proper nourishment, rest, and exercise. Develop your body to full and useful capacity. Develop many stamina and control. Take nothing into your body that would harm it. Do not use tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or any other harmful substance. A young man should learn to rule his body. Like his temper, he should keep it always under complete control. That sometimes is not easy to do. Within your body you have the power of creation. You will one day find a mate and desire greatly to express fully your love with her. The righteous expression of this physical love in marriage is approved of the Lord. She then may conceive and give birth to a boy or a girl, a baby of whom you will be the father. This is a very sacred power. The Lord has commanded that you use it only with one to whom you are legally and lawfully wedded. He has decreed serious penalties indeed for the misuse of it. This power begins early in life, with some when you are hardly in your teens. This has a purpose, for with this power come the attributes of manhood. You notice changes in your stature and in your voice; a beard and other masculine characteristics become part of your nature. Your feelings also change. This physical power will influence you emotionally and spiritually as well. It begins to shape and fit you to look, and feel, and to be what you need to be as a father. Ambition, courage, physical and emotional and spiritual strength become part of you because you are a man. You become very interested in young women --and want to be with them. This is as it should be. This power of creation affects your life several years before you should express it fully. You must always guard the power with

many wisdom. You must wait until the time of your marriage to use it. During that waiting, what do you do with these desires? My boy, you are to control them. You are forbidden to use them now in order that you may use them with worthiness and virtue and fullness of joy at the proper time in life. I wish to explain something that will help you understand your young manhood and help you develop self-control. When this power begins to form, it might be likened to having a little factory in your body, one designed to produce the product that can generate life. This little factory moves quietly into operation as a normal and expected pattern of growth and begins to produce the life-giving substance. It will do so perhaps as long as you live. It works very slowly. That is the way it should be. For the most part, unless you tamper with it, you will hardly be aware that it is working at all. As you move closer to manhood, this little factory will sometimes produce an oversupply of this substance. The Lord has provided a way for that to be released. It will happen without any help or without any resistance from you. Perhaps, one night you will have a dream. In the course of it the release valve that controls the factory will open and release all that is excess. The factory and automatic release work on their own schedule. The Lord intended it to be that way. It is to regulate itself. This will not happen very often. You may go a longer period of time, and there will be no need for this to occur. When it does, you should not feel guilty. It is the nature of young manhood and is part of becoming a man. There is; however, something you should not do. Sometimes a young man does not understand. Perhaps he is encouraged by unwise or unworthy companions to tamper with that factory. He might fondle himself and open that release valve. This you shouldn't do, for if you do that, the little factory will speed up. You will then be tempted again and again to release it. You can quickly be subjected to a habit, one that is not worthy, one that will leave you feeling depressed and feeling guilty. Resist that temptation. Do not be guilty of tampering or playing with this sacred power of creation. Keep it in reserve for the time when it can be righteously employed. One of you, perhaps, has not fully understood until now. Perhaps your father did not talk to you. You may already have been guilty of tampering with these powers. You may even have developed a habit. What do you do then? First, I want you to know this. If you are struggling with this temptation and perhaps you have not quite been able to resist, the Lord still loves you. It is not anything so wicked nor is it a transgression so great that the Lord would reject you because of it, but it can quickly lead to that kind of transgression. It is not pleasing to the Lord, nor is it pleasing to you. It does not make you feel worthy or clean. There are ways to conquer such a habit. First of all, you must leave that factory alone long enough for it to slow down. Resisting is not easy. It will take weeks, even months. But you can get the little factory slowed back to where it should be. I have other suggestions. The power to prevent such habits or to break them rests in your mind, not in your body. Don't let that physical part of you take charge. Stay in control. Condition your body to do the will of your mind. To do this you must keep your mind on worthy thoughts. Divert your thoughts from things that lead you into mischief. Vigorous physical exercise helps young men in many ways. You are most vulnerable when you are idle or when you are discouraged. This is the time to be on guard. I know a way to keep your thoughts worthy. It has helped me, and I explained

it to on one occasion in a general conference talk. Let me repeat it for you. Probably the greatest challenge to people of any age, particularly young people, and the most difficult thing you will face in mortal life is to learn to control your thoughts. As a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7.) One who can control his thoughts has conquered himself. When I was about ten years old, we lived in a home surrounded by an orchard. There never seemed to be enough water for the trees. The ditches, always fresh-plowed in the spring, would soon be filled with weeds. One day, in charge of the irrigating turn, I found myself in trouble. As the water moved down the rows choked with weeds, it would flood in ever direction. I raced through the puddles trying to build up the bank. As soon as I had one break patched up, there would be another. A neighbor came through the orchard. He watched for a moment and then with a few vigorous strokes of the shovel he cleared the ditch bottom and allowed the water to stay in its course, you'll have to make a place for it to go," he said. I have come to know that thoughts, like water, will stay on course if we make a place for them to go. Otherwise, our thoughts follow the course of least resistance, always seeking the lower levels. I had been told a hundred times or more as I grew up, that thoughts must be controlled, but no one told me how. I want to tell you young people about one way you can learn to control your thoughts, and it has to do with music. The mind is like a stage. Except when we are asleep, the curtain is always up. There is always some act being performed on that stage. It may be a comedy, a tragedy, interesting or dull, good or bad; but always there is some act playing on the stage of the mind. Have you noticed that without any real intent on your part, in the middle of almost any performance, a shady little thought may creep in from the wings and attract your attention? These delinquent thoughts will try to upstage everybody. If you permit them to go on, all thoughts of any virtue will leave the stage. You will be left, because you consented to it, to the influence of unrighteous thoughts. If you yield to them, they will enact for you on the stage of your mind anything to the limits of your toleration. They may enact a theme of bitterness, jealousy, or hatred. It may be vulgar, immoral, even depraved. When they have the stage, if you let them, they will devise the most clever persuasion to hold your attention. They can make it interesting all right, even convince you that it is innocent --for they are but thoughts. What you need to do at a time like that, when the stage of your mind is commandeered by the imps of unclean thinking, whether they be gray ones that seem almost clean or the filthy ones which leave no room for doubt? If you can control your thoughts, you can overcome habits, even degrading personal habits. If you can learn to master them, you will have a happy life. This is what I would teach you. Choose from among the sacred music of the Church a favorite hymn, one with words that are uplifting and music that is reverent, one that makes you feel something akin to inspiration. Go over it in your mind carefully. Memorize it. Even though you have had no musical training, you can think through a hymn. Now, use this hymn as the place for your thoughts to go. Make it your emergency channel. Whenever you find these shady actors have slipped from the sidelines of your thinking onto the stage of your mind, put on this record, as it were. As the music begins and the words form in your thoughts, the unworthy ones will slip shamefully away from your mind. Because it is uplifting and clean, the baser thoughts

will disappear. For while virtue, by choice, will not associate with filth, evil cannot tolerate the presence of light. In due time you will find yourself, on occasion, humming the music inwardly. As you retrace your thoughts, you discover some influence from the world about you encouraged an unworthy thought to move on stage in your mind, and the music almost automatically began. Once you learn to clear the stage of your mind of unworthy thoughts, keep it busy with learning worthwhile things. Change your environment so that you have things about you that will inspire good and uplifting thoughts. Keep busy with things that are righteous. Another thing will help both to prevent and to overcome such habits. At times of special temptation skip a meal or two. We call that fasting, you know. It has a powerful effect upon you physically. It diverts some of that physical energy to more ordinary needs. It tapers desire and reduces the temptation. Fasting will help you greatly. In the scriptures, fasting and prayer are generally mentioned together. Prayer is a powerful instrument to bless young men. If a missionary, for instance, indulges in these unworthy practices, the Spirit of the Lord will leave him. When he is prayerful and will fast, the Spirit of the Lord sustains him. He soon develops a manly restraint and worthiness. Resist those temptations. Do not tamper with your body. If you have already, cease to do it --now. Put it away and overcome it. The signal of worthy manhood is self-control. This power is ordained for the begetting of life and as a binding tie in the marriage covenant. It is not to be misused. It is not to be used prematurely. It is to be known between husband and wife and in no other way. If you misuse it, you will be sorry. Now a warning! I am hesitant to even mention it, for it is not pleasant. It must be labeled as major transgression. But I will speak plainly. There are some circumstances in which young men may be tempted to handle one another, to have contact with one another physically in unusual ways. Latter-day Saint young men are not to do this. Sometimes this begins in a moment of idle foolishness, when boys are just playing around. But it is not foolishness. It is remarkably dangerous. Such practices, however tempting, are perversion. When a young man is finding his way into manhood, such experiences can misdirect his normal desires and pervert him not only physically but emotionally and spiritually as well. It was intended that we use this power only with our partner in marriage. I repeat, very plainly, physical mischief with another man is forbidden. It is forbidden by the Lord. There are some men who entice young men to join them in these immoral acts. If you are ever approached to participate in anything like that, it is time to vigorously resist. While I was in a mission on one occasion, a missionary said he had something to confess. I was very worried because he just could not get himself to tell me what he had done. After patient encouragement he finally blurted out, "I hit my companion." "Oh, is that all," I said in great relief. "But I floored him," he said. After learning a little more, my response was "Well, thanks. Somebody had to do it, and it wouldn't be well for a General Authority to solve the problem that way" I am not recommending that course to you, but I am not omitting it. You must protect yourself. There is a falsehood that some are born with an attraction to their own kind, with nothing they can do about it. They are just "that way" and can only yield to those desires. That is a malicious and destructive lie. While it is a convincing idea to some, it is of the devil. No one is locked into that kind of life.

From our premortal life we were directed into a physical body. There is no mismatching of bodies and spirits. Boys are to become men --masculine, manly men --ultimately to become husbands and fathers. No one is predestined to a perverted use of these powers. Even those who have been drawn into wicked practices and are bound by almost unyielding habits can escape. If one of you seems trapped in that, escape. Go to your father or bishop, please. Your parents, your bishop, the servants of the Lord, the angels of heaven and the Lord himself will help redeem you from it. Young Latter-day Saint men, do not tamper with these powers, neither with yourself alone nor with one of your own kind. Never let anyone handle you or touch those very personal parts of your body which are an essential link in the ongoing of creation. Many on the world would, I'm sure, be amused by this counsel. Let them be amused. They live by another standard, a lower one. We live by the Lord's standard and continue to teach it. It is normal and proper for a young man to become interested in young women, to begin to date, eventually to pair up. We encourage that, but be careful. Keep your relationships with young women pure and chaste. Reserve those life-giving powers for marriage. Then you can enter into the new and everlasting covenant. You and your sweetheart will be sealed together for time and for all eternity. These sacred life-giving powers will then be released for your use. They will become a binding tie in your marriage. Through them you will become a father. But for now, you prepare and follow the instruction in the scripture: "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord."(D&C 133:5.) God bless you, our young brethren, as you strive to be clean. In doing so, you will please the Lord and his prophet, of whom I bear witness, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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