

Excerpts from “Brethren We Have a Work to Do” & “Let Us Be Men” (Christofferson)



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Excerpts from "Brethren We Have a Work to Do"

1. Brethren, much has been said and written in recent years about the challenges of men and boys. A sampling of book titles, for example, includes *Why There Are No Good Men Left*, *The Demise of Guys*, *The End of Men*, *Why Boys Fail*, and *Manning Up*. Interestingly, most of these seem to have been written by women. In any case, a common thread running through these analyses is that in many societies today men and boys get conflicting and demeaning signals about their roles and value in society.
2. The author of *Manning Up* characterized it this way: "It's been an almost universal rule of civilization that whereas girls became women simply by reaching physical maturity, boys had to pass a test. They needed to demonstrate courage, physical prowess, or mastery of the necessary skills. The goal was to prove their competence as protectors of women and children; this was always their primary social role. Today, however, with women moving ahead in an advanced economy, provider husbands and fathers are now optional, and the character qualities men had needed to play their role—fortitude, stoicism, courage, fidelity—are obsolete and even a little embarrassing."¹
3. In their zeal to promote opportunity for women, something we applaud, there are those who denigrate men and their contributions. They seem to think of life as a competition between male and female—that one must dominate the other, and now it's the women's turn. Some argue that a career is everything and marriage and children should be entirely optional—therefore, why do we need men?² In too many Hollywood films, TV and cable shows, and even commercials, men are portrayed as incompetent, immature, or self-absorbed. This cultural emasculation of males is having a damaging effect. ...
4. Some men and young men have taken the negative signals as an excuse to avoid responsibility and never really grow up. In an observation that is too often accurate, one university professor remarked, "The men come into class with their backward baseball caps and [their lame] the 'word processor ate my homework' excuses. Meanwhile, the women are checking their day planners and asking for recommendations for law school."³ One female movie reviewer expressed the rather cynical view that "what we can count on men for, if we're lucky and we choose to have a partner, is to be just that—a partner. Someone who stands in his own space even as he respects our standing in our own."⁴
5. Brethren, it cannot be this way with us. As men of the priesthood, we have an essential role to play in society, at home, and in the Church. But we must be men that women can trust, that children can trust, and that God can trust. In the Church and kingdom of God in these latter days, we cannot afford to have boys and men who are drifting. We cannot afford young men who lack self-discipline and live only to be entertained. We cannot afford young adult men who are going nowhere in life, who are not serious about forming families and making a real contribution in this world. We cannot afford husbands and fathers who fail to provide spiritual leadership in the home. We cannot afford to have those who exercise the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God, waste their strength in pornography or spend their lives in cyberspace (ironically being of the world while not being in the world).
6. Brethren, we have work to do.
7. Young men, you need to do well in school and then continue your education beyond high school. Some of you will want to pursue university studies and careers in business, agriculture, government, or other professions. Some will excel in the arts, music, or teaching. Others will choose a military career or learn a trade. Over the years, I have had a number of craftsmen work on projects and repairs at my home, and I have admired the hard work and skill of these men. In whatever you choose, it is essential that you become proficient so that you can support a family and make a contribution for good in your community and your country. ...
8. You adult men—fathers, single adults, leaders, home teachers—be worthy models and help the rising generation of boys become men. Teach them social and other skills: how to participate in a conversation, how to get acquainted and interact with others, how to relate to women and girls, how to serve, how to be active and enjoy recreation, how to pursue hobbies without becoming addicted, how to correct mistakes and make better choices.
9. And so to all who are listening, wherever this message may reach you, I say as Jehovah said to Joshua, "Be strong and of a good courage" (Joshua 1:6). Take heart and prepare the best you can, whatever your circumstances. Prepare to be a good husband and father; prepare to be a good and productive citizen; prepare to serve the Lord, whose priesthood you hold. Wherever you are, your Heavenly Father is mindful of you. You are not alone, and you have the priesthood and the gift of the Holy Ghost. ...

10. Of course, as has been repeated by prophets over the years, “The most important of the Lord’s work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own homes.”⁵ We have much to do to strengthen marriage in societies that increasingly trivialize its importance and purpose. We have much to do to teach our children “to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:28). Our task is nothing less than to help our children experience the mighty change of heart or conversion to the Lord spoken of so eloquently in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 5:1–12; Alma 26). Together with the Relief Society, priesthood quorums can build up parents and marriages, and quorums can provide the blessings of the priesthood to single-parent families.
11. Yes, brethren, we have work to do. Thank you for the sacrifices you make and the good you do. Keep going, and the Lord will help you. At times you may not know quite what to do or what to say—just move forward. Begin to act, and the Lord assures that “an effectual door shall be opened for [you]” (D&C 118:3). Begin to speak, and He promises, “You shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say” (D&C 100:5–6). It is true that we are in many ways ordinary and imperfect, but we have a perfect Master who wrought a perfect Atonement, and we have call upon His grace and His priesthood. As we repent and purge our souls, we are promised that we will be taught and endowed with power from on high (see D&C 43:16).
12. The Church and the world and women are crying for men, men who are developing their capacity and talents, who are willing to work and make sacrifices, who will help others achieve happiness and salvation. They are crying, “Rise up, O men of God!”⁶ God help us to do it. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Kay S. Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys* (2011), 16.
2. “When you ask young people today what will make them adults, almost no one mentions marriage. They are far more likely to see issues around work—completing education, financial independence, a full-time job—as the signs that they have arrived. Work, career, independence: these are the primary sources of identity today” (Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 45). The pressure on women to adopt this anti-marriage ethic is especially intense. A *Times of London* contributor wrote: “No one, not my family or my teachers, ever said, ‘Oh yes, and by the way you might want to be a wife and mother too.’ They were so determined we would follow a new, egalitarian, modern path that the historic ambitions of generations of women—to get married and raise a family—were intentionally airbrushed from their vision of our future” (Eleanor Mills, “Learning to Be Left on the Shelf,” *Sunday Times*, Apr. 18, 2010, www.thetimes.co.uk; in Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 72). Another writer in her 40s quoted some responses to an article she wrote about her regrets over not marrying: “I am totally appalled by your need for a man,” “Get some self-esteem!” “You have taken codependency to a whole new low,” and “If my daughter grows up to want a man half as much as you do, I will know that I’ve done something wrong in raising her” (Lori Gottlieb, *Marry Him: The Case for Settling for Mr. Good Enough* [2010], 55). The good news is that most people, including educated young adults, aren’t buying the anti-marriage, antifamily message. “According to a study by a University of Pennsylvania economist, in the United States in 2008, 86 percent of college-educated white women were married by age 40, compared with 88 percent of those with less than a four-year degree. The numbers for white, college-educated men are similar: 84 percent of them were married by 40 in 2008. The conventional wisdom, not borne out by research, by the way, may have it that marriage is a raw deal for women. But college-educated white women don’t seem to believe it. They are the most likely of any group to think that ‘married people are generally happier than unmarried people.’ ... The large majority—70 percent—of first-year college students think raising a family is ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ to their futures” (Hymowitz, *Manning Up*, 173–74).
3. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Why There Are No Good Men Left: The Romantic Plight of the New Single Woman* (2003), 67.
4. Amanda Dickson, “‘Hunger Games’ Main Character a Heroine for Our Day,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 2, 2012, www.deseretnews.com.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 134.
6. “Rise Up, O Men of God,” Hymns, no. 323.

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Excerpts from "Let Us Be Men"

1. Years ago, when my brothers and I were boys, our mother had radical cancer surgery. She came very close to death. Much of the tissue in her neck and shoulder had to be removed, and for a long time it was very painful for her to use her right arm.
2. One morning about a year after the surgery, my father took Mother to an appliance store and asked the manager to show her how to use a machine he had for ironing clothes. The machine was called an Ironrite. It was operated from a chair by pressing pedals with one's knees to lower a padded roller against a heated metal surface and turn the roller, feeding in shirts, pants, dresses, and other articles. You can see that this would make ironing (of which there was a great deal in our family of five boys) much easier, especially for a woman with limited use of her arm. Mother was shocked when Dad told the manager they would buy the machine and then paid cash for it. Despite my father's good income as a veterinarian, Mother's surgery and medications had left them in a difficult financial situation.
3. On the way home, my mother was upset: "How can we afford it? Where did the money come from? How will we get along now?" Finally Dad told her that he had gone without lunches for nearly a year to save enough money. "Now when you iron," he said, "you won't have to stop and go into the bedroom and cry until the pain in your arm stops." She didn't know he knew about that. I was not aware of my father's sacrifice and act of love for my mother at the time, but now that I know, I say to myself, "There is a man."
4. The prophet Lehi pled with his rebellious sons, saying, "Arise from the dust, my sons, and be men" (2 Nephi 1:21; emphasis added). By age, Laman and Lemuel were men, but in terms of character and spiritual maturity they were still as children. They murmured and complained if asked to do anything hard. They didn't accept anyone's authority to correct them. They didn't value spiritual things. They easily resorted to violence, and they were good at playing the victim.
5. We see some of the same attitudes today. Some act as if a man's highest goal should be his own pleasure. Permissive social mores have "let men off the hook" as it were, so that many think it acceptable to father children out of wedlock and to cohabit rather than marry.¹ Dodging commitments is considered smart, but sacrificing for the good of others, naïve. For some, a life of work and achievement is optional. ...
6. We who hold the priesthood of God cannot afford to drift. We have work to do (see Moroni 9:6). We must arise from the dust of self-indulgence and be men! It is a wonderful aspiration for a boy to become a man— strong and capable; someone who can build and create things, run things; someone who makes a difference in the world. It is a wonderful aspiration for those of us who are older to make the vision of true manhood a reality in our lives and be models for those who look to us for an example.
7. In large measure, true manhood is defined in our relationship to women. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have given us the ideal to pursue in these words:
8. "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. ... By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families."²
9. ... President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking in this meeting in April 1998, gave specific counsel for young men:
10. "The girl you marry will take a terrible chance on you. ... [You] will largely determine the remainder of her life. ...
11. "Work for an education. Get all the training that you can. The world will largely pay you what it thinks you are worth. Paul did not mince words when he wrote to Timothy, 'But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel' (1 Tim. 5:8)."³
12. Integrity is fundamental to being men. Integrity means being truthful, but it also means accepting responsibility and honoring commitments and covenants. President N. Eldon Tanner, a former counselor in the First Presidency and a man of integrity, told of someone who sought his advice:
13. "A young man came to me not long ago and said, 'I made an agreement with a man that requires me to make certain payments each year. I am in arrears, and I can't make those payments, for if I do, it is going to cause me to lose my home. What shall I do?'
14. "I looked at him and said, 'Keep your agreement.'

15. "Even if it costs me my home?"
16. "I said, 'I am not talking about your home. I am talking about your agreement; and I think your wife would rather have a husband who would keep his word, meet his obligations, ... and have to rent a home than to have a home with a husband who will not keep his covenants and his pledges.'" ⁴
17. Good men sometimes make mistakes. A man of integrity will honestly face and correct his mistakes, and that is an example we can respect. Sometimes men try but fail. Not all worthy objectives are realized despite one's honest and best efforts. True manhood is not always measured by the fruits of one's labors but by the labors themselves—by one's striving. ⁵
18. Though he will make some sacrifices and deny himself some pleasures in the course of honoring his commitments, the true man leads a rewarding life. He gives much, but he receives more, and he lives content in the approval of his Heavenly Father. The life of true manhood is the good life.
19. Most importantly, when we consider the admonition to be men, we must think of Jesus Christ. When Pilate brought Jesus forth wearing a crown of thorns, he declared, "Behold the man!" (see John 19:4–5). Pilate may not have fully understood the significance of his own words, but the Lord indeed stood before the people then as He stands today—the highest ideal of manhood. Behold the man!
20. The Lord asked His disciples what manner of men they should be and then answered, "Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27; see also 3 Nephi 18:24). That is our ultimate quest. What did He do that we can emulate as men?
21. Jesus rejected temptation. When confronted by the great tempter himself, Jesus "[yielded] not to the temptation" (Mosiah 15:5). He countered with scripture: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Gospel commandments and standards are our protection also, and like the Savior, we may draw strength from the scriptures to resist temptation.
22. The Savior was obedient. He forsook completely the "natural man" (Mosiah 3:19) and yielded His will to the Father (see Mosiah 15:7). He was baptized to show "that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments" (2 Nephi 31:7).
23. Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). He employed the divine powers of the holy priesthood to bless those in need, "such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases" (Mosiah 3:5). Jesus told His Apostles: "Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:44–45). As His fellow servants, we may become great in His kingdom through love and service.
24. The Savior was fearless in opposing evil and error. "Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple ... and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:12–13). He called upon all to repent (see Matthew 4:17) and be forgiven (see John 8:11; Alma 5:33). So might we stand firm in defending sacred things and in raising the warning voice.
25. He gave His life to redeem mankind. Surely we can accept responsibility for those He entrusts to our care.
26. Brethren, let us be men, even as He is. (D&C 117:13, 15; emphasis added).

Notes

1. See, for example, James E. Faust, "Challenges Facing the Family," Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Jan. 10, 2004, 1–2; Eduardo Porter and Michelle O'Donnell, "Middle-Aged, No Degree, No Wife," New York Times, published in Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Aug. 6, 2006, p. A7; Peg Tyre, "The Trouble with Boys," Newsweek, Jan. 30, 2006, 44–51.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," Liahona, Oct. 2004, 49; Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. "Living Worthy of the Girl You Will Someday Marry," Ensign, May 1998, 49–50.
4. In Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 99; or Improvement Era, Dec. 1966, 1137.
5. In the late 1830s, after the Saints had abandoned Kirtland, the Lord called a man named Oliver Granger to go back and try to settle some unfinished matters for the First Presidency. In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord said: "Therefore, let [Oliver Granger] contend earnestly for the redemption of the First Presidency of my Church, saith the Lord; and when he falls he shall rise again, for his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord. ... Therefore let no man despise my servant Oliver Granger, but let the blessings of my people be on him forever and ever.

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