

## **Elder Oaks and Panel Discussion**

**1 May 2007**

### **Elder Dallin H. Oaks**

This is the Salt Lake Temple. We are viewing it from the South Visitors' Center, where we are gathered for this discussion of Aaronic Priesthood and Scouting.

I first went into this temple 55 years ago. Later, a wise bishop helped me understand what I had experienced in receiving my temple endowment. He pointed out that everything that happens in the temple fits under one of three purposes. We are taught precious, eternal truths; we make covenants with the Lord; and we are promised blessings. Those three great categories---teaching, covenants, and blessings---are the foundation of what we seek to do with the young men who hold the Aaronic Priesthood. To discuss how these great fundamentals guide us in what we should do in our administration of the procedures and programs of the Aaronic Priesthood, I've asked several leaders to join me in this discussion.

You will all recognize Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve. Elder Steven E. Snow of the Seventy is the executive director of the Priesthood Department. We're especially pleased to have with us a stake president and a bishop, President David L. Frischknecht and Bishop Jeffrey D. Swenson, whose ward is in President Frischknecht's stake.

Brethren, as we begin, let me turn to Elder Holland. Elder Holland, what do we hope to be doing with our young men?

### **Elder Jeffrey R. Holland**

I would say, first, we want them to enjoy their Aaronic Priesthood years, to magnify their calling in that Aaronic Priesthood, to enjoy the privileges and opportunities of those Aaronic Priesthood offices, and to advance---to move successively through the Aaronic Priesthood stages toward the ordination of the Melchizedek Priesthood, which they will receive at the proper age. That would be in anticipation---and all of these are kind of sequential in a way---that would be in anticipation of going to the temple. In some ways almost the ultimate Melchizedek Priesthood experience in the very spirit of your introduction---what you learned there, what you have remembered there, and what you have gone back to relearn and remember there. Once they have had that privilege in the temple and had those gifts given, then we hope every young man will serve a mission---those that are able---and that they will prepare themselves worthily and have the physical ability to do so, that they'd have that great experience in the mission field. Then return from the mission field to marry a worthy young woman who's as prepared as the young man is to make those covenants again in the temple and to culminate, I think, for the rest of their lives and on into eternity with a happy family, with a happy marriage, with covenant keeping, children, and all the joys that we want in family life in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Elder Oaks**

Thank you. Elder Snow, how do we attempt to do this?

### **Elder Steven E. Snow**

Well, the direction, of course, comes from the scriptures and from the Brethren. But one

way we do this is through fulfilling our duty to God with the Duty to God program that we use with our young men. And it's had a great deal of success, had some revisions over the years. We still find some challenges on occasion with the program.

### **Elder Oaks**

I have before me this *Fulfilling Our Duty to God* pamphlet---*Aaronic Priesthood: Deacon*---and I see these headings: the "Certificate Requirements," "Priesthood Duties and Standards," "Family Activities," "Quorum Activities," and then under "Personal Goals" we have "Spiritual Development." None of those are going to overlap Scouting in a significant way. The ones following can overlap Scouting and create the ambiguity that we've talked about or the sense of overlap: "Educational, Personal, and Career Development," "Citizenship and Social Development," "Physical Development." There is some overlap here. How do we handle this?

### **Elder Snow**

I think certainly Scouting and the activities of the Duty to God program help build young men. But I think, from our point of view, the most significant is the spiritual development. That's what I think this program distinguishes itself from other programs affiliated with Boy Scouts of America, all of which are good and build good young men. But I think our focus should be on their spiritual preparation for receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood: for the temple, for missions, and marriage.

### **Elder Oaks**

And wouldn't it be accurate to say that the focus of the Duty to God program is not just on achieving a series of requirements, but it's on becoming something that we want a young man to be in his life journey, with Melchizedek Priesthood and mission and marriage being important milestones along that path. But the focus is on what the young man is to become.

### **Jeffrey D. Swenson**

I think in the process of becoming a better young man we become better fathers. And I've become a better bishop. I was a better father as a result of this program, because many of the activities described in [*Fulfilling Our*] *Duty to God* involve young men discussing important gospel and life concepts with their parents. And had I not been prompted by this program to do that with my son, I would not have had many of the discussions that I had with him as a father that I did. And, likewise, I've used this program to counsel young men and set goals for them to achieve before we meet the next time.

### **Elder Snow**

Well, I personally believe that if they'll thoughtfully consider the requirements of Duty to God, what's set forth in the pamphlets, it'll become pretty self-evident what's most important---and that is the spiritual development of our young men. A lot of the other physical activities and physical requirements---citizenship requirements---that will be sorted out with their Scouting program.

### **Elder Oaks**

And giving priority to the spiritual is consistent with the paramount importance of the Aaronic Priesthood---but not ignoring activities, because that catches the attention and energizes the enthusiasm and participation of the young man. But I hope we're not caught up in the technicalities of the overlap of the program. In this guidebook for parents and

leaders of youth, which governs the entire Fulfilling Our Duty to God program, we have this statement on page 13: "The requirements listed in the *Aaronic Priesthood: Fulfilling Our Duty to God* guidebooks may be modified or replaced according to personal or local circumstances, interests, and needs with the prior approval of parents and Aaronic Priesthood leaders."

We've got some flexibility in modulating the overlap or seeming overload involved in these programs.

### **Elder Holland**

We also probably need to be reminded that one of the values and one of the great merits of a priesthood program in the Church structure stepping in to help with some of this is a great many young men in this Church don't have a father in the home. And we're not here to replace or violate that family structure, but we may need to fill in a gap.

In the spirit of Elder Oaks's comment about flexibility, it seems to me that we can't go through this whole evening and not say something about mothers. Mothers achieve most award programs for most boys. We ought to be particularly sensitive that we are not layering on undue difficulty on a mother who may have two or three ages of sons and daughters.

### **Elder Oaks**

And let's in all things make sure that this program is presented as an aid for a young man to become what his Heavenly Father and his mother and father want him to become.

### **David L. Frischknecht**

I guess that's a little bit why it's a little bit difficult for me when I hear comments like, "Well, on Wednesdays we do Scouts, and on Sunday we have our quorum instruction," and "When are we supposed to do the Duty to God Award?" Well, everything is purposed towards helping the Aaronic Priesthood holders fulfill their duty. And this weaves into all of the---it must weave into their individual lives---in their quorum lives, including their quorum activities.

### **Elder Snow**

I think often as priesthood leaders we think there's the need to entertain our young people. And if we can look for opportunities for them to serve, we'll be blessed, and we'll bless them. I think that's what Duty to God does, is it does remind us and reminds our young men of many different opportunities to serve and to progress spiritually.

### **Elder Oaks**

For those who are greatly concerned about the checklist of requirements in this Duty to God program, let me just say that we are conscious that there are formal overlaps between the requirements of Fulfilling [Your] Duty to God and the great programs of the Scout movement. And we're working on that. We'll have some things to say about that later. But for the present, our advice has been to focus on the spiritual strength and priority of the Fulfilling [Your] Duty to God program and the uniquely successful activities program of the Scouts.

### **David L. Frischknecht**

Something that helps, I think, towards that is to really listen and understand the words

when we describe the program fulfilling our duty to God." If you were to ask a young man, "Now, where can you learn about fulfilling your duty to God?" he might grab first for one of these pamphlets if we haven't given the right emphasis to the scriptures. Where an Aaronic Priesthood bearer first finds his duty to God is in section 20 and section 107 and in other scriptural accounts.

### **Elder Oaks**

Good point, good point.

### **Elder Holland**

And maybe just to come back to Elder Oaks's teaching and covenants and blessings, I will be eternally grateful for my Young Men advisers, Aaronic Priesthood advisers, quorum advisers, and my Scout leaders. They shaped my life in a dramatic way. And the teaching of the scriptures, making the Sunday quorum experience something significant and spiritual and powerful---that can be a bit of a challenge with a 12-year-old, or a 14-year-old, or a 16-year-old. But someone who can do that will change a life forever. And I'm one of many, including all of you, who's the product of that kind of a teacher, in a quorum or sometimes out on a Scout hike.

### **Jeffrey D. Swenson**

You know, we've talked about implementing the Duty to God program, and a lot of us think of, "Well, is it a program, or is it a way or a tool for us to guide our young men?" And I look at it as a father or as a priesthood leader or as a bishop when I'm interviewing that young man. I want to make sure that he's progressing in many different aspects of his life. Is he progressing towards fulfilling an honorable mission? Is he progressing towards receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood? Is he progressing in his education? Is he progressing in being worthy to go to the temple? And if you look at the Duty to God program, if you look at the goals that are listed in the Duty to God program, they address all of those; and it can be a perfect template to use as a father or as a priesthood leader or as a bishop to follow their progress. And instead of looking at it as a program, you look at it as, "How is this young man doing in every aspect of his life that's important to the Lord and important to him as a priesthood holder?"

### **David L. Frischknecht**

One of the things that makes this---all of what we try to do with Aaronic Priesthood bearers---come alive is when they find themselves fulfilling their duty and helping other people move towards the Savior; when they recognize that their participation in the sacrament each week (in truth, there are people in that congregation that are taking that sacrament for the first time in a long time, and they're renewing their covenants) is parallel to how John the Baptist, who is the outstanding priesthood bearer of all time, according to the Bible Dictionary, how he was preparing the people to receive the Savior. When the Aaronic Priesthood holders can see themselves as helping others prepare to receive the Savior, then it becomes alive to them. When they understand that doing their duty is helping other people draw nearer to the Lord, then it's not a program anymore---it's real. And I guess I would say this as well: if you're 12, your mission is a long ways away. It's hard to think that far. You know you want to be preparing for it, but if you're 12 and you know that you're fulfilling your duty to God right now in helping and serving other people right now, then you can progress, and then you can move forward. But Aaronic Priesthood isn't just about preparing for something in the future---it's doing real work right now.

**Elder Oaks**

Right now: next Sunday.

**David L. Frischknecht**

Right.

**Elder Holland**

In the spirit of that, could I just---and this I think will fit in with what Bishop Burton said earlier, and it strikes me as a very important point---if we can help convey to the young man the grand tradition of the priesthood, and in this case the grand tradition of the Aaronic Priesthood, its historicity, its ancient origins. I'm not sure that we do enough, probably, in the modern day to put some of this in the historical context. I hope that's fitting, President Frischknecht, with what you were saying about self-motivation and being a self-starter. I'd be a little more of a self-starter, I think, if I understood I was in league with Moses and Aaron and a whole generation of ancient brethren. That's a great tradition. Probably we could do a little more to teach and to convey to the young men.

**David L. Frischknecht**

Well, and that people are counting on you; that people, to renew their covenants, they're counting on you to be fulfilling your duty the way you ought to do it with that authority that you just described.

**Jeffrey D. Swenson**

I think what that does, too, is when we put this outline in front of the young man, he realizes---just like many of us do about our responsibilities that we all have---when he looks at this, especially a priest, he thinks, "I've got to be preparing myself to have a career; I've got to be ready to serve a mission; I've got to be preparing and thinking about becoming a father and a Melchizedek Priesthood holder." And it puts the goals and the objectives very boldly in front of them that otherwise would not be there if the program didn't exist.

**Elder Oaks**

And it gives meaning, enlightenment, and motivation to the wonderful goals of Scouting as well when we present Fulfilling Our Duty to God Award in that way.

**Elder Holland**

Brethren, speaking for myself, it's been a privilege today to be together, talk about these important matters, think about our young men, think about our families, our present mothers and fathers, and our future mothers and fathers. Elder Oaks, any summary counsel for us?

**Elder Oaks**

Thank you. Brethren, we thank you for your time and attention. You have a sacred trust to teach and help young men learn and fulfill their duty to God; this includes the meaning of covenants and the significance of the promised blessings. We hope you have caught the spirit of what we have tried to teach in this discussion. We've spoken of Fulfilling Our Duty to God as a priesthood program that involves important priesthood duties now and leads to the three M's---Melchizedek Priesthood, mission, and marriage in the temple.

We've stressed that a young man's fulfilling his duty to God is about becoming what God wants him to become. That requires us to concentrate on young men fulfilling requirements listed under "Priesthood Duties and Standards," "Family Activities," "Quorum Activities," and "Spiritual Development." The other requirements, which overlap Scouting, are of lesser importance for purposes of this priesthood program.

Finally, priesthood leaders and parents need to administer this Fulfilling Our Duty to God program as an opportunity to bless the lives of our young men. As you follow this counsel, the Spirit will inspire you, and you will see this program in a new light.

I invoke the Lord's blessings upon you in your vital responsibility to help young men fulfill their duty to God and thus put their feet on the pathway to the temple.

This is the work of the Lord; I testify of it and invoke His blessings upon you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.