

# A Champion of Youth

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In 1968 at the MIA June conference, Elder Harold B. Lee gave a marvelous talk which he entitled *A Leader—The Champion of Youth* (Salt Lake City: Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association, 1968). Since having heard and read the talk, I would like not only to address my remarks to that subject but to qualify as champion of and for the youth.

I recall the story of a teacher helping a young student on with his galoshes. They seemed smaller than his shoes. She got down on both knees and pushed, pulled, and stretched one boot until she finally got it on. Then she went through the same struggle and finally got the other one on. As she finally finished pulling it on, he said, “These are not my galoshes.” The teacher pulled and struggled and finally got them off. Then he said, “They are my sister’s, but my mother made me wear them.”

Some who work with youth may feel that they do not “fit” the calling. It is not always comfortable to work with the youth, but for me, as God is my witness, I love them.

At an encampment in Finland, the Scouts decided I should know how to sauna. Finns heat their saunas to 170 or 180 degrees. President Olli Roto, the stake president who was teaching me, along with the Scouts, who were experts, made a small bundle of birch branches. When we really began to perspire, he took the bundle of birch leaves and swatted me all over my back, chest, and legs, and said, “That brings the blood to the surface.” I said, “It works.” Then we ran down and dove into the Baltic Sea, then went back into the sauna. It’s amazing what we learn when we’re working with youth.

Elder Orson F. Whitney said: “You parents of the wilful and the wayward! Don’t give them up. Don’t cast them off. They are not utterly lost. The Shepherd will find his sheep. They were his before they were yours—long before he entrusted them to your care; and you cannot begin to love them as he loves them. They have but strayed in ignorance from the Path of Right, [but] God is merciful to ignorance. Only the fulness of knowledge brings the fulness of accountability. Our Heavenly Father is far more merciful, infinitely more charitable, than even the best of his servants, and the Everlasting Gospel is mightier in power to save than our narrow finite minds can comprehend” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, p. 110).

Elder Lee in his talk referred to Horace Mann, who was “called to dedicate a great school for boys. ... he said, ‘If this school costing all the millions that it has cost is

able to save but one boy, it is worth all that it has cost.’ One of his friends said to him after the meeting, ‘You let your enthusiasm run away with you, didn’t you? You don’t mean that the millions we have spent here would be worth it all if we saved just one boy.’ Horace Mann looked at him and replied, ‘No, my friend, it wouldn’t be too much to spend if that one boy were my son.’”

Then Elder Lee with great power and emotion said: “I want to tell you it wouldn’t be too much if that were one of my grandsons. They’re precious to me and some of them are stubborn, hard-headed, and rascals just like their grandfather, hard to manage and difficult. If somebody, please, God, would just steer them past this dangerous age so that maybe they will find themselves like someone tried to help me when I was at that dangerous age, I would be most grateful” (*A Leader—The Champion of Youth*, p. 3).

The youth of today are wonderful. Elder L. Tom Perry, the Utah South Area Presidency, and the Young Women presidency recently held meetings for all the seminary students in the Salt Lake area. In Salt Lake City, youth filled the Tabernacle, the Assembly Hall, and the Salt Palace auditorium, and 4,000 youth crowded the grounds of Temple Square and listened to the public address system. We had 23,000 young people in the Marriott Center at BYU, 3,200 at Dixie College, and over 3,000 at Snow College. The total count exceeded the number of seminary students enrolled by 5,000.

We invited this marvelous modern army of Israel to put on the armor of God, to stand for truth, and to become a marvelous, forceful influence against immorality, drugs, and indulgence. The response has been wonderful. The youth of the Church are one of the most powerful forces for good on the earth today.

It is not difficult to understand why the great God in heaven has reserved these special spirits for the final work of the kingdom prior to his millennial reign.

My heart, like Enoch’s, seems to swell “wide as eternity” (Moses 7:41) as I consider what our youth and those being born in this time will accomplish. This generation will face trials and troubles that will exceed those of their pioneer forebears. Our generation has had some periods of respite from the foe. The future generation will have little or none. But their great faith in the Lord will give them needed strength.

Our youth influence their peer groups for good. President Wilford Woodruff said in a general conference in 1898, “Concerning the work of the dead, the Prophet Joseph Smith said that in the resurrection those who had been worked for would fall at the feet of those who had done their work, kiss their feet, embrace their knees and manifest the most exquisite gratitude.” I believe our youth will rescue an entire generation. Their work will bring these same feelings and emotions from parents and grandparents of those spiritually rescued.

I believe the promise of Ammon to his brethren applies to the youth today. In the 26th chapter of Alma we read: “Yea, they shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day; yea, neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds; but when

the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them.

“But behold, they are in the hands of the Lord of the harvest, and they are his; and he will raise them up at the last day” (Alma 26:6–7).

This is a chosen generation.

Some time back, I was in Raymond, Alberta, Canada. Debbie, a beautiful teenage girl, spoke at stake conference. Among other things she said, “I want to tell you about a friend I had when I went through high school.” She said she felt homely but her friend told her she was beautiful. When there were dances, he would dance with her. He built her up. She said: “He was my very best friend. He was handsome and popular, and he lived his religion. I never heard him swear, he never violated the Word of Wisdom, and he faithfully went to church.

“It was a good thing that he was a strong member of the Church,” she said, “because I tailed him everywhere he went. I did what he did, and I would have followed him anywhere. I cannot express the love and respect I have for him. I was not his girlfriend, but I sure loved him. He is on a mission now, and we write regularly. He still loves me and is still my best friend. He is my older brother.”

What a blessing it is to the Church when brothers and sisters are filled with that kind of love and respect for each other!

In April 1945 Elder Harold B. Lee talked about our young men in the military. He said, “I listened to a doctor recently who said that the medical journals reported that the boys who had become mentally unbalanced in large majority [in World War II], were the boys who had broken homes, whose wives or sweethearts had been unfaithful at home.” Then he said this: “We have heard much in this conference about our boys. We have heard but little about our girls” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1945, p. 165).

Thank God for great women like President Dwan Young and President Ardeeth Kapp, who are great champions of youth. These are wonderful, noble, great women with vision and understanding.

Women are endowed with special traits and attributes that come trailing down through eternity from a divine mother. Young women have special God-given feelings about charity, love, and obedience. Coarseness and vulgarity are contrary to their natures. They have a modifying, softening influence on young men. Young women were not foreordained to do what priesthood holders do. Theirs is a sacred, God-given role, and the traits they received from heavenly mother are equally as important as those given to the young men.

Sometimes misguided women or men direct our youth away from their divinely appointed role. Worlds without end, men will never be able to bear children. Every young woman may be a procreator with God and carry a little one under her breast

either in this life or in the eternal worlds. Motherhood is a wonderful, priceless blessing, no matter what all the world may say. Priesthood ordination is a blessing to men. There are serious consequences when either motherhood or priesthood is abused or laid aside.

All of the prophets have been champions of youth, but I think our beloved prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, stands at the pinnacle of those who love, defend, and champion our youth. Who will ever forget President Benson's marvelous recent counsel to the young men and the young women of the Church? Both of these talks have been distributed to the Church in pamphlet form (see *To Young Men of the Priesthood*, pamphlet, 1986; *To the Young Women of the Church*, pamphlet, 1986).

President Gordon B. Hinckley, during the February 1985 Diamond Jubilee of Scouting in America, said:

“What a wonderful thing it is to plant in the heart of a boy the compelling axiom—‘Be prepared.’ Be prepared for what? For tying knots, yes. Knot tying is Tenderfoot duty, but it is important. In one sense this whole business of living and doing is one of tying knots, the kind of knots that will hold and not give under stress and strain. We see all around us the evidence of failure, of knots that slipped when they should have held. They are evident in career failures, in business failures, in professional failures, in marriage failures. To be able to tie the right knot for the right reason, for the right occasion, and to have it hold against every stress is a part of the process of being prepared” (Boy Scouts Program, 10 Feb. 1985).

And President Thomas S. Monson's entire life has been committed to the youth. He sits on the National Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America. His talks over the years have reflected a special love for youth. Who will ever forget his talk “Run, Boy, Run” (see *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, pp. 19–21)?

Donald Dowdle, a great friend of mine, sat in a meeting years back. A young counselor in the stake presidency, Thomas S. Monson, had just concluded speaking. The old patriarch in the stake stood up in the congregation and said, “Thomas Monson will sit in the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.” Then he sat down. Indeed, Thomas Monson would and has. And what a towering champion of youth he has been!

That great American philosopher Yogi Berra said, “Good pitching is better than good batting, and vice versa.” He also said, “If you don't know where you are going, you are liable to end up some place else.”

I think Lord Baden-Powell was endowed from on high with a fire burning in his bosom for the youth. He wanted them to know where they were going. He was another great champion of youth. He wrote what he called his farewell message to Scouts of the world:

“Dear Scouts:

“If you have ever seen the play ‘Peter Pan,’ you will remember how the pirate chief was always making his dying speech because he was afraid that possibly when the time came for him to die he might not have time to get it off his chest. It is much the same with me, and so, although I am not at this moment dying, I shall be doing so one of these days and I want to send you a parting word of good-bye.

“Remember, it is the last you will ever hear from me, so think it over.

“I have had a most happy life and I want each one of you to have as happy a life, too.

“I believe that God put us in this jolly world to be happy and to enjoy life. Happiness doesn’t come from being rich, nor merely from being successful in your career, nor by self-indulgence. One step towards happiness is to make yourself healthy and strong while you are a boy, so that you can be useful and so can enjoy life when you are a man.

“Nature study will show you how full of beautiful and wonderful things God has made the world for you to enjoy. Be contented with what you have got and make the best of it. Look on the bright side of things instead of the gloomy one.

“But the real way to get happiness is by giving out happiness to other people. Try and leave this world a little better than you found it and when your turn comes to die, you can die happy in feeling that at any rate you have not wasted your time but have done your best. ‘Be prepared’ in this way to live happy and to die happy—stick to your Scout Promise always—even after you have ceased to be a boy—and God help you to do it. Your friend, Baden-Powell”

Now to my young friends also, from one who loves you:

What you do now, today, may have far-reaching consequences. I believe today’s Aaronic Priesthood and young women of the Church will lead the youth of the world through the most trying time in history. It is time for the Aaronic Priesthood to come of age. The rod of iron leading to the tree of life for you, our young men, may well be the implementation of the complete and full work of the Aaronic Priesthood. As we marshal your forces in your true identity as deacons, teachers, and priests in the holy Aaronic Priesthood, we mobilize an army of Israel such as has never been known before in the Church. Your numbers are legion. I believe you will be expected to perform the most important work in this dispensation, with the exception of the work done by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

President Spencer W. Kimball said: “When I read Church history, I am amazed at the boldness of the early brethren as they went out into the world. They seemed to find a way. Even in persecution and hardship, they went and opened doors which evidently had been allowed to sag on their hinges and many of them to close. ...

“These men of valor began to walk the earth with dignity and honor, with mantles on their shoulders, and keys in their hands and love in their hearts” (address delivered at Regional Representatives’ seminar, 4 Apr. 1974, p. 9).

My faithful young friends, you can match their boldness stride for stride. You can walk with equal dignity and honor, with the mantle on your shoulders and keys in your hands and love in your hearts.

Then we will exclaim as did Ammon: “Therefore, let us glory ... in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel” (Alma 26:16).

I know of no more glorious work. As God is my witness, I love it with every particle of my heart and soul, and I love him with even more than my life. I hold it a high honor to walk by your side as a true and loyal champion of youth.

God bless you, youth of the noble birthright, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.