

Priesthood: “A Sacred Trust to Be Used for the Benefit of Men, Women, and Children”

Carole M. Stephens
First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency

This address was given Friday, May 3, 2013 at the BYU Women’s Conference

© 2013 by Brigham Young University Women’s Conference. All rights reserved

For further information write:

BYU Women’s Conference

161 Harman Continuing Education Building

Provo, Utah 84602

801-422-7692

E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu

Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

Several years ago my husband and I helped our daughter, Melanie, and her new husband, Joshua, move to Havre, Montana, where they would continue their education. I was excited about their new opportunity, but my mother heart was heavy as I thought about leaving this young couple so far from our circle of family support.

We arrived late on a Saturday night. Early Sunday morning, we tried to find information about meeting times and the location of the nearest chapel, with no success. Later that morning, we were able to find a phone number for the chapel, and our daughter spoke with the bishop.

Shortly after the phone conversation, there was a knock on the door of the apartment. I opened the door to see a young man, a deacon, standing on the front porch. He was dressed in slacks and a white shirt and tie, and he was holding a blue donation envelope in his hand with the last name, Wright, already written across the top! This young man stood tall, squared his shoulders, and said, “I am a representative of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and I’ve come to collect fast offerings if you’d like to contribute.”

I smiled as tears welled up in my eyes. The heaviness in my heart was replaced by gratitude.

I invited him in to meet my daughter and her husband. He noticed boxes and said, “Oh, you’re just moving in. Do you need any help? We love to help people move in!”

I visited with him for a few minutes while the fast offering contribution was prepared. Then we walked with him to the door and said good-bye. I noticed his mother waiting in the car supporting her son as he performed his priesthood duties.

When I later reflected on this experience, I realized that the power of the priesthood was blessing our family three ways that day: we were blessed by the deacon, an Aaronic Priesthood holder faithfully doing his duty; through the bishop, holding the Melchizedek Priesthood and the keys to

preside over the ward and watch over the members; and through a mother supporting a son to accomplish the Lord's work.

First, I was blessed through a young man, a deacon upon whom had been conferred the Aaronic Priesthood, "the power and authority...of the ministering of angels, and to administer in outward ordinances."¹

In Doctrine and Covenants 84:111, the Lord teaches that "the deacons and teachers should be appointed to watch over the church, to be standing ministers unto the church."

A standing minister, appointed to watch over the Church and to assist in temporal things. There he was! Courageous, confident and faithful in his priesthood duties, he was prepared—prepared to watch over and bless a new family.

Speaking to Aaronic Priesthood holders during a priesthood session of general conference, Brother David L. Beck said this: "You received the power, the authority, and the sacred duty to minister the moment you were ordained to the priesthood.... The Aaronic Priesthood holds the keys of the ministering of angels [see D&C 13:1]...."

"Jesus Christ is your example. He 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' [Matthew 20:27–28.] To minister means to love and care for others. It means to attend to their physical and spiritual needs. Put simply, it means to do what the Savior would do if He were here."²

This young deacon followed the example of the Savior as he ministered to our family. Having been ordained to an office in the Aaronic Priesthood, he could trace his priesthood line of authority to the Savior, beginning with the person who ordained him and going back to Peter, James, and John, who received the priesthood from Jesus Christ.

As Elder Russell M. Nelson explained, "The Master reminded His disciples of the source of their authority: 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you' (John 15:16)."³

Second, our family was blessed that day through the keys, authority, and priesthood power in the bishop. The Melchizedek Priesthood had been conferred upon him, and, as bishop, he held keys to minister to the temporal and spiritual needs of the members of his ward. I never met him, but seeing how quickly and faithfully he, as the shepherd, responded to a phone call from one of his flock whom he had never met, I was filled with gratitude. He could not possibly meet the needs of every member of his ward on his own. So acting in his office as president of the Aaronic Priesthood in the ward and being responsible for tithes and offerings, he had delegated that responsibility in an orderly way that very day to a member of the deacons quorum, who was sent to minister to our family.

The Lord taught, "Behold, mine house is a house of order,...and not a house of confusion."⁴

We learn from Alma in the Book of Mormon that men are called to serve as high priests because of their faith and good works. He taught: "This high priesthood being after the order of his Son,

which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things.

“Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end—

“Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth.”⁵

Third, I was blessed by a faithful mother who supported her son in the performance of his priesthood duties. Elder M. Russell Ballard taught: “It is crucial for us to understand that Heavenly Father has provided a way for all of His sons and His daughters to have access to the blessings of and be strengthened by the power of the priesthood....

...All—men, women, children; married, widowed, or single; no matter what our circumstances—...can be partakers of the blessings of the priesthood.”⁶

This understanding begins in our homes. It is most often taught by precept, as this faithful mother was teaching her son. I don’t know what this mother’s circumstances were that day. She may have left preparation of the Sunday dinner or the care of other children, but I observed that by her simple act of driving her son she was teaching him the importance of faithfully fulfilling his priesthood duties, thereby protecting him from temptation and sin.

President Boyd K Packer taught: “The Lord said, ‘Lift up your hearts and rejoice,...and take upon you my whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day,...taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked’ (D&C 27:15, 17; emphasis added).

“...That shield of faith is not produced in a factory, but at home.”⁷

Paul reminded Timothy where his faith had been produced. He said, “I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.”⁸

In the book of Alma, we learn of stripling sons who had learned from their covenant-keeping mothers that if they were faithful and obedient and trusted God, nothing doubting, He would protect them.

These young men also had covenant-keeping fathers, courageous men who had buried their weapons of war and entered into a covenant that they would never again use them to shed the blood of others, even in self-defense, “yea, they had entered into a covenant and they would never break it...”⁹

The sons, however, were prepared to defend their people. They “entered into [a] covenant and took their weapons of war to defend their country.”¹⁰

Listen as the scriptures describe some of their attributes: “And they were all young men, and they were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted.

Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him.”¹¹

In a letter written to Moroni, Helaman described the faith and courage these young men exhibited: “And now I say unto you, my beloved brother Moroni, that never had I seen so great courage....

Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death....Yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it.”¹²

Helaman told Moroni that these young men “did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them.”¹³

They understood the importance of making covenants with the Lord and faithfully living them. They were also recipients of the blessings that come to those who faithfully keep their covenants.

Like these stripling sons, our sons and daughters need to understand that their parents “know it.” The stripling sons “[did] not doubt [their] mothers knew it” because those mothers didn’t just say it—they exemplified it. These mothers understood that priesthood power, blessings and authority were in and through and around them because they were covenant women. They were converted, obedient, and courageous. Their minds were firm, and they were true at all times. Their sons did not doubt that they knew it because it was who they were and it was how they lived.

We have received priesthood ordinances. We have been immersed in the waters of baptism. We have received the “unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost”¹⁴ by the laying on of hands. Having received this gift, we have the responsibility to seek, receive, and act on the personal revelation we receive from the Spirit. In addition, we have the opportunity to make additional covenants and be “endowed with power from on high.”¹⁵ These ordinances make it possible to receive the promised blessings of eternal life, we must receive these ordinances and keep our covenants. President Harold B. Lee taught, “The only place on earth where we can receive the fullness of the blessings of the priesthood is in the holy temple. That is the only place where, through holy ordinances, we can receive that which will qualify us for exaltation in the celestial kingdom.”¹⁶

“Each [of us] is a beloved spirit...daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each [of us] has a divine nature and destiny.”

Our Father knows us, loves us, and has a plan for each of us. He has provided all we need to return to Him again. Priesthood ordinances mark the path back to Him.

The strengthening, enabling, healing, and comforting power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ provides a way for us to progress on the path back to our heavenly home.

The fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Every child, woman and man has access to the full blessings and power of Heavenly Father through priesthood covenants.

We are representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I testify of these things...I know it! In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

¹ D&C 107:20.

² David L. Beck, “Your Sacred Duty to Minister,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2013, 56.

³ Russell M. Nelson, “Keys of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2005, 42.

⁴ D&C 132:8.

⁵ Alma 13:7–9.

⁶ M. Russell Ballard, “This is My Work and Glory,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 19, 20.

⁷ Boyd K. Packer, “The Shield of Faith,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 8.

⁸ 2 Timothy 1:5.

⁹ Alma 43:11.

¹⁰ Alma 53:18.

¹¹ Alma 53:20–21.

¹² Alma 56:45, 47–48.

¹³ Alma 57:21.

¹⁴ D&C 121:26.

¹⁵ D&C 38:32.

¹⁶ Harold B. Lee; Stand Ye in Holy Places, *Ensign*, 1974, page 117.