

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

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From our history we learn that at a challenging time for women in the Church, “a group of Latter-day Saint women gathered...in the presence of newspaper reporters from across the United States, these women expressed their support for living prophets and for the practices of the Church. They defended themselves and...proclaimed their faith and their covenants. Sister Eliza R. Snow said: ‘It was high time [to] rise up in the dignity of our calling and speak for ourselves.... The world does not know us, and truth and justice to our brethren and to ourselves demands us to speak....’”¹

Another woman said, “We are here to express our love for each other, and to exhibit to the world our devotion to God our Heavenly Father; and to show our willingness to comply with the requirements of the Gospel.”²

Dear sisters, we have come with a similar purpose—to express our support for living prophets, proclaim our faith and covenants, express our love for you, and demonstrate our devotion to our Heavenly Father and our willingness to accept and embrace the requirements of the gospel—particularly today in regard to the doctrine of the priesthood.

We rejoice that we are privileged to live in this season of the history of the Church when questions are being asked about the priesthood. There is great interest and desire to know and understand more about the authority, power, and blessings associated with the priesthood of God. It is our hope for this next sacred hour together that “the doctrine of the priesthood...[may] *distil* upon [our] soul[s] as the dews from heaven.”³ We hope to *instill* within each of us a greater desire to better understand the priesthood. I testify that the Lord is hastening His work, and it is imperative for us to understand how the Lord accomplishes His work so that we may receive the power that comes from be aligned with His plan and purposes.

Since the beginning of time, the Lord has accomplished His work, which is to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man,”⁴ through the power of His priesthood. By it the heavens and earth were created. By it the effects of the Fall were overcome through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Because the authority of the priesthood is entrusted to man to bless all of Heavenly Father’s children, He wants us to invite the power of the priesthood into our homes to bless and strengthen our families and our individual lives.

What has been your past experience or attitude when you have listened to or taught a lesson on the priesthood? Be honest. Was your first reaction something like, “This doesn’t apply to me. This is for the men and boys over 12.” Or when you have read your scriptures and come to a part that mentions priesthood, have you thought to yourself, “I’ll just skip this part. I don’t need to know this”? In the recent 2013 Worldwide Leadership Training, Elder Oaks emphatically stated: “Men are not the priesthood!” To me, that is a wake-up call as well as an invitation to all of us to study, ponder, and come to better understand the priesthood. Sisters, we cannot stand up and teach those things we do not understand and know for ourselves.

That raises a question, then: how much do we *really* know or understand about this divine gift, the priesthood of God? If someone asked you the following questions, perhaps a child or a friend who is a member of another faith, could you give an answer?

- What is the priesthood?
- What is the difference between the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood?
- What are the priesthood responsibilities of a deacon? a teacher? a priest? an elder? a high priest? a Seventy? an Apostle? the President of the Church?
- What are the keys of the priesthood?
- Who holds priesthood keys?
- Why is the priesthood so important?

I will address a few of these questions and then invite you to exercise your agency and discover for yourselves answers to the other questions. We will begin with the *why*.

Why is the priesthood so important?

“The priesthood is the eternal power and authority of God by which He blesses, redeems, and exalts His children.”⁵ Or as Elder Russell M. Nelson taught, “Priesthood authority has been restored so that families can be sealed eternally.”⁶ We know that “The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.”⁷

“Priesthood authority is required to perform the ordinances of the gospel.... Each ordinance opens the door to rich spiritual blessings.”⁸ Jesus bestowed the sacred keys of the kingdom on Peter with the charge that “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”⁹

What is the priesthood?

Elder David A. Bednar defines the priesthood as follows: “Priesthood is the means whereby the Lord acts through men to save souls.... A priesthood holder is expected to exercise this sacred authority in accordance with God’s holy mind, will, and purposes. *Nothing about the priesthood is self-centered. The priesthood always is used to serve, to bless, and to strengthen other people.*”¹⁰

Understanding that the priesthood cannot be used in any degree for selfish means helps us more clearly see that Jesus Christ is the perfect example of how the priesthood is to be used to bless, lift, comfort, and strengthen others. Elder Richard G. Scott further explains: “The perfect role model for use of the holy priesthood is our Savior, Jesus Christ. He ministered with love, compassion, and charity.... By following His example as a faithful, obedient priesthood bearer, we can access great power.”¹¹

As I have studied, pondered, and sought to better understand the priesthood, it has been helpful for me to consider what the world would be like *without* it. Elder Robert D. Hales explored this idea when he said: “Can you imagine how dark and empty mortality would be if there were no priesthood? If the power of the priesthood were not upon the earth, the adversary would have freedom to roam and reign without restraint. There would be no gift of the Holy Ghost to direct and enlighten us; no prophets to speak in the name of the Lord; no temples where we could make sacred, eternal covenants; no authority to bless or baptize, to heal or comfort.... There would be no light, no hope—only darkness.”¹²

The thought of no priesthood power is a sobering thought. I, for one, stand up and rejoice that this sacred power has been restored to the earth through a prophet of God in this last and glorious dispensation of the fulness of times!

Elder Dallin H. Oaks cautions us in our references to the priesthood: “While we sometimes refer to priesthood holders as ‘the priesthood,’ we must never forget that the priesthood is not owned by or embodied in those who hold it. It is held in a *sacred trust to be used for the benefit of men, women, and children alike*.”¹³

I’d like to share an example of my father’s use of that sacred priesthood trust that left an impression on me as a small child, probably about age 5 or 6. One of my family members was ill, and a man who was perhaps a home teacher came to assist my father in giving a priesthood blessing. My three siblings and I, all very young, were present. In my memory, the home teacher seemed to strongly suggest that this was no place for children to be, since we would undoubtedly be noisy and disrupt the Spirit of the priesthood blessing. I recall my darling daddy gently but firmly letting the home teacher know that we children would be staying because our faith was needed to call down the blessings from heaven from whence we had recently come. I’ll never forget that.

What are the keys of the priesthood?

A simple explanation of priesthood keys is found in the May 2012 *New Era*:

“[Priesthood] keys unlock the door to the power of God. With a set of keys, you can do a lot of things that you wouldn’t otherwise be able to do—enter buildings, drive cars, and open trunks, among other things. Keys, basically, mean authority and access.

“The same is true of priesthood keys. They control access to the blessings and ordinances of the priesthood.... Priesthood keys are the right to preside over and direct the Church.... Keys usually apply to a geographic area, like a ward, stake, or mission. They also usually include authority over specific ordinances and activities (for instance, baptism, the sacrament, missionary work, and temple work).”¹⁴

Who holds priesthood keys?

“Jesus Christ holds all the keys of the priesthood pertaining to His Church. He has conferred upon each of His Apostles all the keys that pertain to the kingdom of God on earth. The senior living Apostle, the President of the Church, is the only person on earth authorized to exercise all priesthood keys (see D&C 43:1–4; 81:2; 107:64–67, 91–92; 132:7).... [He then] delegates priesthood keys to other priesthood leaders so they can preside in their areas of responsibility.... Auxiliary presidents and their counselors do not receive keys. They receive delegated authority to function in their callings.”¹⁵

It is reassuring to know that there is order in the conferring and delegating of priesthood keys. The Lord taught in Hebrews 5:4 that “no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God.” In other

words, this is His Church, and callings and assignments come from Him through those entrusted with keys.

There is a difference, however, between priesthood authority and priesthood power. Priesthood authority is conferred by ordination; priesthood power is available to all. Since priesthood power is something we all desire to have in our families and homes, what do *we* need to do to invite that power into our lives? In the 2013 World Wide Leadership Training, Elder Oaks, Elder Golden, and Bishop Causse taught that personal righteousness is imperative to having priesthood power.

We've talked about the *why*, the *what*, and the *who* in relation to the holy priesthood of God. Now let's consider a couple of the *hows*.

How can we better know the doctrine of the priesthood for ourselves?

What sources can help us not only learn for ourselves but also invite others to discover these essential principles?

First, seek to be worthy of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Because the doctrine of the priesthood is best understood by revelation, it is essential to have the help of the Holy Ghost to reveal and distill the doctrine upon our souls. Elder Bednar reminded us that “this blessing is not restricted to the presiding authorities of the Church; rather, it belongs to and should be operative in the life of every man, woman, and child who reaches the age of accountability and enters into sacred covenants. *Sincere desire and worthiness invite the spirit of revelation* into our lives.”¹⁶

Second, the holy temple. We know that the temple “is the most holy of any place of worship on the earth”¹⁷ and is the ideal setting to learn about the priesthood by the spirit of revelation. In the temple we are all taught together, make covenants with our Heavenly Father together, and receive sacred priesthood ordinances together. To use the words of the Lord, “[We] grow up in [Him] and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost”¹⁸ in His holy temples. We have learned that unity invites revelation, and there is no better place to feel the spirit of unity and revelation than in the Lord's house.

Third, the scriptures. Searching, pondering, and studying the scriptures are invitations for the Holy Ghost to reveal to us important truths about the priesthood. If I were teaching Priesthood 101, the curriculum would certainly include the following scriptures: Doctrine and Covenants sections 13, 20, 84, 107, and 121. Alma 13 would be another excellent source.

Two sections have been especially revelatory to me. I recommend them to you for your careful and prayerful consideration. First, the oath and covenant of the priesthood, which can be found in D&C 84:33–40. I invite you to memorize those eight verses, sisters. By doing so, I promise you that the Holy Ghost will expand your priesthood understanding and inspire and uplift you in wonderful ways.

Secondly, I would invite you to ponder Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–46. Look for the principles in these verses that govern the righteous exercise of priesthood power. Look for warnings and promises from the Lord, and apply them to yourself. In order to qualify for the blessings of priesthood power, we would do well to ponder these verses and ask ourselves questions such as:

- Is my heart set upon the things of this world?
- Do I aspire to the honors of men or women?
- Do I try to cover my sins?
- Am I prideful?

- Do I exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon my children, my husband, or others?
- Am I earnestly striving to practice righteous principles such as:
 - Persuasion
 - Long-suffering
 - Gentleness
 - Meekness
 - Unfeigned love (meaning genuine, sincere, or heartfelt love)
 - Kindness
- Does virtue garnish my thoughts unceasingly?
- Do I long for the Holy Ghost to be my constant companion?

The words *persuasion*, *meekness*, *long-suffering*, *kindness*, *gentleness*, and *love unfeigned* took on new and very personal meaning to me as I remembered a blessing I requested of my father years ago.

When I was a young single adult, I was struggling with a difficult decision. As I had done on several occasions, I approached my dad and requested a father’s blessing. Expecting him to immediately act on my request, I was surprised when he responded saying, “I’ll need some time to prepare to give you this blessing. Are you okay with waiting a couple of days?”

Interestingly, 40 years later, I have forgotten what he said in that father’s blessing, but I’ll never forget the profound reverence my dad had for the holy priesthood as he prepared himself spiritually to pronounce a father’s blessing upon my head. He understood the principles taught in D&C 121 and was determined to live them in order to qualify for priesthood power to bless his family.

We have discussed the Holy Ghost, the temple, and scriptures as key resources to better gain an understanding of the priesthood. Let’s consider one more: the **words of living prophets**. When I was a new mother, I had many questions about raising children. I learned to seek reliable sources for help—like close family members and the wonderful and righteous women in my ward who had much experience in being mothers. Their counsel proved to be incredibly helpful to me as I sought them out and asked the right questions.

Likewise, if we want to really know the doctrine of the priesthood, we have a reliable and God-given living resource—prophets, seers, and revelators. They have learned and lived priesthood principles for many years. I have shared a few inspired statements of the Brethren about the priesthood already, but would like to share with you one more example of what the living prophets are teaching us today. In our most recent general conference, Elder M. Russell Ballard taught:

“In our Heavenly Father’s great priesthood-endowed plan, men have the unique responsibility to administer the priesthood, but they are not the priesthood. Men and women have different but equally valued roles. Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman. In other words, in the eternal perspective, both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife.”¹⁹

It is my privilege to work with inspired prophets, seers, and revelators on an almost daily basis. I testify that they are men of God possessing priesthood power that comes from their personal righteousness.

I am learning that influence is a complementary gift to priesthood power. Speaking to the women in the Church, President Howard W. Hunter urged, “We entreat you to minister with your powerful *influence* for good in strengthening our families, our church, and our communities.”²⁰

Similarly, Elder Ballard remarked, “There is nothing in this world as personal, as nurturing, or as life changing as the *influence* of a righteous woman.”²¹

Let me share a simple illustration of the influence of a righteous woman I know and love.

One day when my husband was serving as a stake president, he received an urgent phone call requesting his immediate help at a nearby hospital to give a priesthood blessing to a faithful man in our stake. As he arrived, the man’s wife met him at the door. Upon telling the physician that her stake president was there to give her husband a blessing, the doctor informed her that her husband was about to die and she had better prepare herself for the inevitable. Pounding on his chest with her fists, she emphatically opposed him and said in effect, “He is going to be healed. My stake president is here to give him a priesthood blessing, and he will live!”

Was it the priesthood blessing, offered by a worthy priesthood holder who pronounced a blessing, yet acknowledged the will of the Lord? Or was it the unwavering faith and influence of a righteous woman? Or was it both that brought about the miraculous healing that followed? I like to think Heavenly Father took both into account to bring about the miracle that preserved the life of this husband, who shortly afterward was called to serve as our stake patriarch.

We have addressed a few of the questions associated with the holy priesthood of God, but there are many more questions and much to learn. I conclude with an experience that has strengthened my testimony of the power of the priesthood and helped me to deal with unanswered questions.

A few years ago, my husband and I were invited to a gathering of many experienced Church leaders. A new presiding officer had recently been called, and at the end of the meeting a very difficult and contentious question was asked. Realizing the difficulty of answering the question, my husband and I immediately offered up our sincere prayers to Heavenly Father for this new leader. As he came to the pulpit to respond to the question, I witnessed a visible change in his countenance as he stood majestically, squared his shoulders and spoke with the power of the Lord. His response was something like this: “Brother, I do not know the answer to your question. But I will tell you what I do know. I know that God is our Eternal Father. I know that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of the world. I know that Joseph Smith saw God the Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and was the instrument through which the power of the priesthood was restored to the earth. I know the Book of Mormon is true and contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I know we have a living prophet today who speaks for the Lord to bless our lives.” He then continued, “No, I do not know the answer to your question, but these things I know. The rest I take on faith. I try to live this simple statement of faith I learned years ago from Sister Marjorie Hinckley, who said, ‘First I obey, then I understand.’”

I bear my witness that the priesthood of God is a sacred trust given to bless men, women, and children so we can return as families to live eternally together in God’s presence. Righteousness is the qualifier for each of us to invite priesthood power into our lives.

May this doctrine distill upon our souls and draw us closer to Him whose Church and priesthood power and authority this is. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ Eliza R. Snow, in Relief Society Minutes, Fifteenth Ward, Salt Lake Stake, Jan. 6, 1870, Church History Library, 140; punctuation and capitalization standardized; quoted in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 46–47.

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- ² In “Great Indignation Meeting,” *Millennial Star*, Feb. 22, 1870,115; quoted in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 47.
- ³ Doctrine and Covenants 121:45; emphasis added.
- ⁴ Moses 1:39
- ⁵ *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 127.
- ⁶ Russell M. Nelson, “Nurturing Marriage,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2006, 36–38.
- ⁷ “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
- ⁸ *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 2.1.2.
- ⁹ Matthew 16:19.
- ¹⁰ David A. Bednar, “The Powers of Heaven,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 48–51; emphasis added.
- ¹¹ Richard G. Scott, “Honor the Priesthood and Use It Well,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 44–47.
- ¹² Robert D. Hales, “Blessings of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 32–34.
- ¹³ *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 127; emphasis added.
- ¹⁴ “Priesthood Keys,” *New Era*, May 2012, 38–39.
- ¹⁵ *Handbook 2*, 2.1.1.
- ¹⁶ David A. Bednar, “The Spirit of Revelation,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2011, 87–90; emphasis added.
- ¹⁷ Bible Dictionary, “Temple.”
- ¹⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 109:15.
- ¹⁹ M. Russell Ballard, “This Is My Work and My Glory,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 18–21.
- ²⁰ Howard W. Hunter, “To the Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 96; quoted in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 157; emphasis added.
- ²¹ M. Russell Ballard, “Mothers and Daughters,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2010,18–21, quoted in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 156; emphasis added.