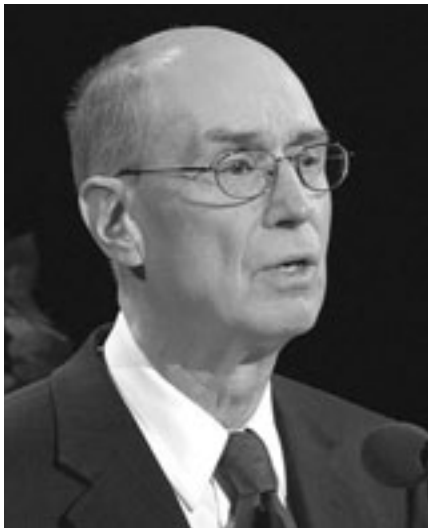


Be Ready

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The preparation that counts will be made by the young men making choices to rise to their great destiny as priesthood servants for God.



Wherever I am in the day or night, there is nearby a small container of olive oil. This is the one which I keep in the middle drawer of the desk where I work. There is one in my pocket when I am working outdoors or traveling. There is also one in the kitchen cabinet in my home.

The one I hold now has a date on it. It is the day when someone exercised the power of the priesthood to consecrate the pure oil for the healing of the sick. The young men of the Aaronic Priesthood and even their fathers might think that I am a little extreme in my preparation.

But the call during the day or the knock at the door at night always comes as a surprise. Someone will say, "Please, could you come quickly?"

Once, years ago, it was a father calling from a hospital. His three-year-old daughter had been thrown 50 feet (15 m) by a speeding car as she ran across the street to join her mother. When I arrived at the hospital, the father pled that the power of the priesthood would preserve her life. The doctors and the nurses only reluctantly let us reach through a plastic barrier to place a drop of oil on the one opening in the heavy bandages which covered her head. A doctor said to me, with irritation in his voice, "Hurry with whatever you are going to do. She is dying."

He was wrong. She lived, and contrary to what the doctor had said, she not only lived, but she learned to walk again.

When the call came, I was ready. The preparation was far more than having consecrated oil close at hand. It must begin long before the crisis which requires priesthood power. Those who are prepared will be ready to answer.

The preparation begins in families, in Aaronic Priesthood quorums, and mostly in the private lives of young men. The quorums and the families must help, but the preparation that counts will be made by the young men making choices to rise to their great destiny as priesthood servants for God.

The destiny of the rising generation of priesthood holders is far more

than to be ready to bring God's power down to heal the sick. The preparation is to be ready to go and do whatever the Lord wants done as the world is preparing for His coming. None of us knows exactly what those errands will be. But we know what it will take to be ready, so each of us can prepare.

What you will need in the dramatic moment will be built in the steady performance of obedient service. I will tell you two of the things you will need and the preparation it takes to be ready.

The first is to have faith. The priesthood is the authority to act in the name of God. It is the right to call down the powers of heaven. So you must have faith that God lives and that you have won His confidence to allow you to use His power for His purposes.

An instance from the Book of Mormon will help you see how one man made that preparation. There was a priesthood holder named Nephi who received a hard assignment from the Lord. He was sent by God to call wicked people to repentance before it was too late for them. In their wickedness and hatred, they were killing each other. Even their sorrow had not humbled them enough to repent and obey God.

Because of Nephi's preparation, God blessed him with power to fulfill his assignment. In His loving and empowering words to Nephi, there is a guide for us:

"Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unweariness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments.

"And now, because thou hast done this with such unweariness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and

I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

“Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people.

“Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people.”¹

As the account from the Book of Mormon tells us, the people did not repent. So Nephi asked God to change the seasons. He asked for a miracle to help the people choose to repent because of famine. The famine came. The people repented, and then they begged Nephi to have God send rain. He did ask God, and God honored his unshakable faith.

That faith did not come in the moment when Nephi needed it, nor did God’s trust in Nephi. He earned that great faith and God’s confidence by courageous and sustained labor in the Lord’s service. You young men are building that faith now for the days ahead when you will need it.

It may be so small a thing as to keep careful minutes in a deacons or a teachers quorum. There were young men years ago who kept meticulous records of what was decided and what was done by boys only months older than they were. That took faith that God called even 12-year-olds into His service who were being guided by revelation. Some of those quorum secretaries of long ago now sit in the presiding councils of the Church. They now read the minutes others prepare. And revelation



flows to them now as it did to the leaders they served when they were boys like you. They had been prepared to trust that God reveals His *will*, even in apparently small matters, in His kingdom.

Now, the Lord said Nephi could be trusted because he would ask nothing contrary to God’s will. To have that confidence in Nephi, the Lord had to be sure that Nephi believed in revelation, sought it, and followed it. Long experience following inspiration from God was a part of Nephi’s priesthood preparation. It must be part of yours.

I see that happening today. In recent months I have heard deacons, teachers, and priests give talks which are clearly as inspired and powerful as you will hear in this general conference. As I have felt the power being given to young holders of the priesthood, I have thought that the rising generation is rising around us, as if on an incoming tide. My prayer is that those of us in the generations which have come before will rise on the tide with them. The preparation of the Aaronic Priesthood is a blessing to us all as well as to those they will serve in their generation and the generations to follow.

Yet all is not perfect in Zion. Not all

of the youth choose to prepare. That choice must be their own. They are responsible for themselves. That is the Lord’s way in His loving plan. But many young men have little or no support from those who could help as they prepare. Those of us who can help will be held accountable by the Lord. A father who neglects or interferes with a son’s development of faith or his ability to follow inspiration will someday know sorrow. That will be true for anyone placed in a position to help these young men choose wisely and well in their days in the preparatory priesthood.

Now, the second thing they will need is confidence that they can live up to the blessings and the trust which God has offered them. Most of the influences around them drag them down to doubt the existence of God, of His love for them, and of the reality of the sometimes quiet messages they receive through the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of Christ. Their peers may urge them to choose sin. If young men choose sin, those messages from God will become more faint.

We can help them choose to prepare by loving them, warning them, and by showing confidence in them. But we can help them even more by our example of a faithful and inspired servant. In our families, in quorums, in classes, and as we associate with them in any setting, we can act as true priesthood holders who use its power as God has taught us.

For me, that instruction is most clear in the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord warns us in that section to have our motives pure: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned.”² As we lead and influence young men, we must never do it to gratify our pride or our ambition. We must never use compulsion in any

degree of unrighteousness. That is a high standard of the example we must set for our youth.

I saw it done when I was a teacher and a priest. My bishop and those who served under him were determined not to lose even one of us. As nearly as I could see, their determination was motivated by love for the Lord and for us, not for any selfish purpose.

The bishop had a system. Every adviser of every quorum was to contact every young man he had not spoken to that Sunday. They were not to go to bed until they had either talked to the boy who had been missing, to his parents, or to a close friend. The bishop promised them that he would not turn out his light until he had heard a report about every boy. I don't think he gave them an order. He simply made it clear that he did not expect their lights to go out until they had given that report.

He and those who served under him were doing far more than watching over us. They were showing us by example what it means to care for the Lord's sheep. No effort was too much for him or for those who served us in our quorums. By their example, they taught us what it means to be unwearied in the Lord's service. The Lord was preparing us by example.

I have no idea whether they thought any one of us was going to be anything special. But they treated us as if they did by being willing to pay any personal price to keep us from losing faith.

I don't know how the bishop got so many people to have such high expectations. As nearly as I can tell, it was done "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned." The "no lights out" method the bishop used would not work in some places. But the example of unwavering care for every young man and reaching out quickly brought the power of heaven into our lives. It always will. It helped



young men prepare for the days when God needed them in families and in His kingdom.

My father was an example for me of what the Lord teaches in the 121st section about getting heaven's help in preparing young men. During my early years, he was sometimes disappointed by my performance. He let me know it. Hearing his voice, I could feel he thought I was better than that. But he did it in the Lord's way:

"Reproving betimes with sharpness,

when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy."³

I knew, even after the most direct correction, that Dad's reproof was given in love. In fact, his love seemed to increase when he used even his strongest correction, which was a disapproving and disappointed look. He was my leader and my trainer, never using compulsory means, and I am

sure that the promise given in the Doctrine and Covenants will be fulfilled for him. His influence on me will flow unto him “forever and ever.”⁴

Many fathers and leaders, when they hear the words of the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants, will feel that they must rise higher to come up to that standard. I do. Can you remember a moment when you rebuked a child or youth with sharpness when you were moved by something other than inspiration? Can you remember a time when you told a son to do something or make a sacrifice you were not willing to do or make yourself? Those feelings of regret can spur us to repentance to become more nearly the examples we have covenanted to be.

As we meet our obligations as fathers and leaders, we will help the next generation rise to their glorious future. They will be better than we are, just as you have tried to be even better parents than your parents and better leaders than the great ones who helped you.

It is my prayer that we will be determined to do better every day to prepare the rising generation. Each time I see a bottle of consecrated oil, I will remember this night and the feeling I have now of wanting to do more to help young men prepare for their days of service and opportunity. I pray for a blessing of preparation for them. I am confident that, with the Lord’s help and ours, they will be ready.

I bear you my witness that God the Father lives and that Jesus Christ lives and leads this Church. He is the perfect exemplar of the priesthood. President Thomas S. Monson holds and exercises all the keys of the priesthood on the earth. That is true. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Helaman 10:4–7.
2. D&C 121:41.
3. D&C 121:43.
4. D&C 121:46.