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Serve with the Spirit

Let us do whatever is required to qualify for the Holy Ghost as our companion.

I am grateful for this opportunity to be one with you, honored by God to hold the priesthood. We have been called to use divine power to serve the children of our Heavenly Father. How well we meet that obligation will have eternal consequences for those we are called to serve and for us and for generations yet unborn.

I hold in sacred memory two priesthood bearers who had qualified for the Spirit of God to go with them on the errand to which the Lord called them. They had found the restored gospel themselves in America. They were the Lord's servants who first spoke of that gospel to two of my European ancestors.

One of those ancestors was a young girl living on a small farm in Switzerland. Another was a young man, an orphan and an immigrant to the United States from Germany, living in St. Louis, Missouri.

Both of them heard a priesthood holder testify of the restored gospel—for the girl by the fireplace of her little home in Switzerland, and for the boy it was sitting in the balcony of a rented hall in America. Both of them knew by the Spirit that the message those elders brought to them was true.

The boy and the girl chose to be baptized. The two of them met for

the first time on the dusty trail years later, walking hundreds of miles to the mountains of western America. They talked as they walked. What they talked about was the miraculous blessing that in all the world, the servants of God had found them and even more miraculous, that they knew their message was true.

They fell in love and were married. And because of a testimony of the Spirit, which began as they heard the words of priesthood holders under the influence of the Holy Ghost, they were sealed for eternity by priesthood power. I am among the tens of thousands of descendants of that boy and that girl who bless the names of two priesthood holders who brought the ministrations of the Spirit of God with them as they climbed the hill in Switzerland and rose to speak in that meeting in St. Louis.

That happy story and millions more like it are repeated across the world and will be over generations. For some it will be the story of a young home teacher who said words that sparked a desire in your grandfather to come back to the Church. For some it will be the words of comfort and blessing from a patriarch that sustained your mother when tragedy nearly overwhelmed her.

There will be a common theme in all those stories. It will be the power of the priesthood in a holder whose power to serve was magnified by the Holy Ghost.

And so my message for us tonight is this: let us do whatever is required to qualify for the Holy Ghost as our companion, and then let us go forward fearlessly so that we will be given the powers to do whatever the Lord calls us to do. That growth in power to serve may come slowly, it may come in small steps that are difficult for you to see, but it will come.

Tonight I will make a few suggestions for the qualification of receiving the Holy Ghost as a companion in your priesthood service. Then I will give a few examples of priesthood service in which you can expect to see your powers to serve strengthened by the influence of the Spirit.

Now, we all know that confirmation into the Church gave us the gift of the Holy Ghost. But the companionship of the Holy Ghost, the manifestations of it in our life and service, requires us to put our lives in order to qualify.

We cultivate spiritual gifts by keeping the commandments and trying to live a blameless life. That requires faith in Jesus Christ to repent and be cleansed through His Atonement. So as priesthood holders we should never miss an opportunity to participate with all our hearts in the promise offered in every sacrament meeting for members of the restored Church to “take upon them the name of [God's] Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them.”¹

Just as we must be cleansed of sin to have the Spirit with us, we must be humble enough before God to recognize our need for it. The disciples of



Dublin, Ireland

the resurrected Savior demonstrated that humility, as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

The Savior was preparing them for their ministry. They knelt on the ground to pray. Here is the account: “And they did pray for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them.”² They were baptized as you have been. And the record says that in answer to their pleading, they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

The Savior prayed aloud to thank His Father for giving the Holy Ghost to those He had chosen because of their belief in Him. And then the Savior prayed for a spiritual blessing for those they were serving. The Lord pled with His Father: “I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in their words.”³

As the humble servants of the Savior, we should pray for the manifestations of the Holy Ghost to come to us in our service and to those we serve. Humble prayer to our Heavenly Father, in deep faith in Jesus Christ, is essential to qualify us for the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

Our humility and our faith that invite spiritual gifts are increased by our reading, studying, and pondering the scriptures. We have all heard those words. Yet we may read a few lines or pages of scripture every day and hope that will be enough.

But reading, studying, and pondering are not the same. We read words and we may get ideas. We study and we may discover patterns and connections in scripture. But when we ponder, we invite revelation by the Spirit. Pondering, to me, is the thinking and the praying I do after reading and studying in the scriptures carefully.

For me, President Joseph F. Smith set an example of how pondering can invite light from God. It is recorded in the 138th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. He had been reading and studying many scriptures, trying to understand how the effects of the Savior’s Atonement would reach those who had died never having heard His message. Here is his account of how revelation came: “As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great.”⁴

Repentance, prayer, and pondering over the scriptures are essential parts of our qualifying for the gifts of the Spirit in our priesthood service. Further magnification of our power to serve will come as we respond with faith to go forward in our callings with the Holy Ghost to help us.

President Thomas S. Monson put it this way for us: “What does it mean to magnify [your] calling? It means to build it up in dignity . . . , to enlarge

and strengthen it to let the light of heaven shine through it to the view of other men. And how does one magnify a calling? Simply by performing the service that pertains to it.”⁵

I will suggest two services to which we are all called. In carrying them out under the influence of the Spirit, you and others will see your power to serve, strengthen, and magnify.

The first is as His agent to teach and testify to others for Him. The Lord included the youngest and the least experienced of the Aaronic Priesthood holders in that call to serve. After describing the duties of the Aaronic Priesthood holders, He said:

“But neither teachers nor deacons have authority to baptize, administer the sacrament, or lay on hands;

“They are, however, to warn, expound, exhort, and teach, and invite all to come unto Christ.”⁶

Somewhere in the world this week there will be a deacon asked by his quorum president to invite a member of their quorum whom he has never seen to a meeting. The 13-year-old president is not likely to use the words “warn, exhort, and teach,” but that is what the Lord expects of the deacon assigned to go to the rescue.

To the deacon who receives the call to go to his quorum member, I will make three promises. First, as you pray for help, the Spirit will calm your fears. Second, you will be surprised that you know what to say when you get to his home and during the walk with him back to the church. What you say may seem jumbled to you. But you will feel that words were given to you at the moment you needed them. And third, you will feel the approval of the Lord, who called you through your president, whatever the outcome.

I cannot promise what success will come since every person is free to

choose how he or she responds to a servant of God. But the deacon you speak to for the Lord will remember you came to him. I know of one boy, now a man still far away from Church activity, whom a deacon was sent to find, and he told his grandfather of that visit 20 years earlier. And it seemed to have no effect, and yet he even named the deacon who came. The grandfather asked me to find and thank the deacon who was called to invite, to exhort, and to teach. It had been only one day in the life of a boy, but a grandfather and the Lord remember the words the boy was inspired to speak and the boy's name.

I urge all of us, young and old, who are called to speak in a meeting in the name of the Lord to dismiss our feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy. We don't have to use soaring language or convey deep insights. Simple words of testimony will do. The Spirit will give you the words for you to speak and will carry them down into the hearts of humble people who look for truth from God. If we keep trying to speak for the Lord, we will be surprised someday to learn that we have warned, exhorted, taught, and invited with the help of the Spirit to bless lives, with power far beyond our own.

In addition to the call to teach, all

of us will be sent by the Lord to succor those in need. That is another priesthood service in which we will feel the influence of the Spirit increase our power to serve. You will find yourself more able to recognize pain and worry in the faces of people. Names or the faces of people in your quorum will come into your mind with the impression that they are in need.

Bishops have that feeling come to them during the night and each time they sit on the stand looking at the members of their ward or thinking of those who are not there. It can happen to them when they find themselves near a hospital or a care center.





Members in Rome, Italy, translate general conference talks.

More than once I have heard the words when I walked in the door of a hospital: “I knew you would come.”

We need not worry about knowing the right thing to say or do when we get there. The love of God and the Holy Spirit may be enough. When I was a young man I feared that I would not know what to do or to say to people in great need.

Once I was at the hospital bedside of my father as he seemed near death. I heard a commotion among the nurses in the hallway. Suddenly, President Spencer W. Kimball walked into the room and sat in a chair on the opposite side of the bed from me. I thought to myself, “Now here is my chance to watch and listen to a master at going to those in pain and suffering.”

President Kimball said a few words of greeting, asked my father if he had received a priesthood blessing, and then, when Dad said that he had, the prophet sat back in his chair.

I waited for a demonstration of the comforting skills I felt I lacked and so much needed. After perhaps five minutes of watching the two of them simply smiling silently at each other, I saw President Kimball rise and say, “Henry, I think I’ll go before we tire you.”

I thought I had missed the lesson, but it came later. In a quiet moment with Dad after he recovered enough to go home, our conversation turned to the visit by President Kimball. Dad said quietly, “Of all the visits I had, that visit I had from him lifted my spirits the most.”

President Kimball didn’t speak many words of comfort, at least that I could hear, but he went with the Spirit of the Lord as his companion to give the comfort. I realize now that he was demonstrating the lesson President Monson taught: “How does one magnify a calling? Simply by performing the service that pertains to it.”

That is true whether we are called to teach the gospel by the Spirit or go with the Holy Ghost to those with feeble knees and hands that hang down.⁷ Our priesthood service will be strengthened, people will be blessed, and the light of heaven will be there. The light of heaven will be there for us as well as for those we serve. We may be tired. Our own and our family’s troubles may loom large. But there is a blessing of encouragement for those who serve under the influence of the Spirit.

President George Q. Cannon had more than his fair share of sorrow,

opposition, and trials in his years of priesthood service. He also had experience with the Holy Ghost as his companion in difficult times and hard service. This is the assurance to us in our priesthood service, in the Church and in our families. For me the promise has been true when I have felt the Spirit in my priesthood service. “Whenever darkness fills our minds, we may know that we are not possessed of the Spirit of God. . . . When we are filled with the Spirit of God we are filled with joy, with peace, and with happiness, no matter what our circumstances may be; for it is a spirit of cheerfulness and of happiness. The Lord has given unto us the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is our privilege to have that Holy Ghost reign within us, so that from morning till night and from night till morning we shall have the joy, the light and the revelation thereof.”⁸

We can watch for that blessing of happiness and joy to come when we need it during the difficult times in our faithful priesthood service.

I testify that we are called of God by prophecy. This is the true Church of Jesus Christ, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. God lives and hears our every prayer. Jesus is the resurrected Christ and our Savior. You can know these things are true by the power of the Holy Ghost, which will come to you in your service. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
2. 3 Nephi 19:9.
3. 3 Nephi 19:21.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 138:11.
5. Thomas S. Monson, “Priesthood Power,” *Liahona*, Jan. 2000, 60; *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 51.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 20:58–59.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
8. George Q. Cannon, in Brian H. Stuy, comp., *Collected Discourses Delivered by President Wilford Woodruff, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, 5 vols. (1987–92), 4:137.