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Power in the Priesthood

A man may open the drapes so the warm sunlight comes into the room, but the man does not own the sun or the light or the warmth it brings.

Priesthood Blessings Are for All

As the children in sacrament meeting happily sang the Primary song “Love Is Spoken Here,” everyone smiled with approval. A courageous mother raising five children listened attentively to the second verse: “Mine is a home where [every] hour is blessed by the strength of priesthood [power].”¹ Sadly she thought, “My children have never known such a home.”²

My message to this faithful woman and to all is that we can live every hour “blessed by the strength of priesthood power,” whatever our circumstance.

We sometimes overly associate the power of the priesthood with men in the Church. The priesthood is the power and authority of God given for the salvation and blessing of all—men, women, and children.

A man may open the drapes so the warm sunlight comes into the room, but the man does not own the sun or the light or the warmth it brings. The blessings of the priesthood are infinitely greater than the one who is asked to administer the gift.

To receive the blessings, power, and promises of the priesthood in this life and the next is one of the great opportunities and responsibilities

of mortality. As we are worthy, the ordinances of the priesthood enrich our lives on earth and prepare us for the magnificent promises of the world ahead. The Lord said, “In the ordinances . . . the power of godliness is manifest.”³

There are special blessings from God for every worthy person who is baptized, receives the Holy Ghost, and regularly partakes of the sacrament. The temple brings added light and strength, along with the promise of eternal life.⁴

All of the ordinances invite us to increase our faith in Jesus Christ and to make and keep covenants with God. As we keep these sacred covenants, we receive priesthood power and blessings.

Do we not feel this power of the priesthood in our own lives and see it among the covenant-keeping members of the Church? We see it in new converts as they step from the waters of baptism feeling forgiven and clean. We see our children and youth more sensitive to the promptings and guidance of the Holy Ghost. We see the ordinances of the temple becoming a beacon of strength and light for righteous men and women across the world.

This past month I watched a young couple draw enormous strength from the sealing promises of the temple as their precious baby boy was born but lived only one week. Through the ordinances of the priesthood, this young couple and all of us receive comfort, strength, protection, peace, and eternal promises.⁵

What We Know about the Priesthood

Some may sincerely ask the question, “If the power and blessings of the priesthood are available to all, why are the ordinances of the priesthood administered by men?”

When an angel asked Nephi, “Knowest thou the condescension of God?” Nephi answered honestly, “I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.”⁶

When we speak of the priesthood, there are many things we do know.

All Are Alike

We know that God loves all His children and is no respecter of persons. “He denieth none that come unto him, . . . male [or] female; . . . and all are alike unto God.”⁷

As surely as we know that God’s love is “alike” for His sons and His daughters, we also know that He did not create men and women exactly the same. We know that gender is an essential characteristic of both our mortal and eternal identity and purpose. Sacred responsibilities are given to each gender.⁸

From the Beginning

We know that from the beginning the Lord established how His priesthood would be administered. “The Priesthood was first given to Adam.”⁹ Noah, Abraham, and Moses all administered priesthood ordinances.

Jesus Christ was and is the Great High Priest. He called Apostles. “Ye have not chosen me,” He said, “but I have chosen you, and ordained you.”¹⁰ In our day heavenly messengers were sent from God. John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John restored the priesthood to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith.¹¹ This is the way our Father in Heaven has administered His priesthood.¹²

Many Gifts from God

We know that the power of the holy priesthood does not work independently of faith, the Holy Ghost, and spiritual gifts. The scriptures caution: “Deny not the gifts of God, for they are many. . . . And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh [them] all.”¹³

Worthiness

We know that worthiness is central to performing and receiving priesthood ordinances. Sister Linda K.

Burton, general president of the Relief Society, has said, “Righteousness is the qualifier . . . to invite priesthood power into our lives.”¹⁴

For example, consider the plague of pornography sweeping across the world. The Lord’s standard of worthiness gives no allowance for pornography among those officiating in the ordinances of the priesthood. The Savior said:

“Repent of your . . . secret abominations.”¹⁵

“The light of the body is the eye. . . . If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.”¹⁶

“[For] whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”¹⁷

Unworthily administering or passing the sacrament, blessing the sick, or participating in other priesthood ordinances is, as Elder David A. Bednar has said, taking the name of God in vain.¹⁸ If one is unworthy, he should withdraw from officiating in

priesthood ordinances and prayerfully approach his bishop as a first step in repenting and returning to the commandments.

Humility

Another thing we know is that there is an abundance of priesthood blessings in families where a righteous mother and father are united in guiding their children. But we also know that God eagerly provides these same blessings to those in many other situations.¹⁹

A mother, carrying the weight of providing both spiritually and temporally for her family, sensitively explained that calling her home teachers to bless one of her children requires her humility. But she insightfully added that it requires no more humility than that of her home teachers as they prepare to bless her child.²⁰

The Keys of the Priesthood

We know that the keys of the priesthood, held by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, direct the work of the Lord upon the earth. Specific priesthood keys are conferred upon stake presidents and bishops for their geographic responsibilities. And they call men and women by revelation who are sustained and set apart to exercise delegated authority to teach and administer.²¹

While there are many things we do know about the priesthood, seeing through the lens of mortality does not always give a complete understanding of the workings of God. But His gentle reminder, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,”²² reassures us that with time and eternal perspective we will see things “as they really are”²³ and more completely understand His perfect love.





We all willingly serve. Sometimes we feel underwhelmed with our calling and wish we were asked to do more. Other times we are grateful when it is time for our release. We do not determine the callings we receive.²⁴ I learned this lesson early in my marriage. As a young couple, my wife, Kathy, and I lived in Florida. One Sunday a counselor in the stake presidency explained to me that they felt impressed to call Kathy as an early-morning seminary teacher.

“How will we do it?” I asked. “We have small children, seminary begins at 5:00 a.m., and I am the ward Young Men president.”

The counselor smiled and said, “It will be OK, Brother Andersen. We will call her, and we will release you.”

And that is what happened.

The Contribution of Women

Sincerely asking for and listening to the thoughts and concerns voiced by women is vital in life, in marriage, and in building the kingdom of God.

Twenty years ago in general conference, Elder M. Russell Ballard related a conversation he had with the general president of the Relief Society. There was a question raised about strengthening the worthiness of youth preparing to serve missions. Sister

Elaine Jack said with a smile, “You know, Elder Ballard, the [women] of the Church may have some good suggestions . . . if they [are] asked. After all, . . . we *are* their mothers!”²⁵

President Thomas S. Monson has a lifelong history of asking for and responding to the concerns of women. The woman who has influenced him the most is Sister Frances Monson. We miss her very much. Also, just this past Thursday, President Monson reminded the General Authorities how much he learned as a bishop from the 84 widows of his ward. They greatly influenced his service and his entire life.

Not surprisingly, before President Monson’s prayerful decision about the age change for missionary service, there were many discussions with the general Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary presidencies.

Bishops, as you follow the example of President Monson, you will feel



Vany Parrella

even more abundantly the guiding hand of the Lord blessing your sacred work.

We lived several years in Brazil. Soon after arriving, I met Adelson Parrella, who was serving as a Seventy, and his brother Adilson, who was serving in our stake presidency. Later I met their brother Adalton, serving as a stake president in Florianopolis, and another brother Adelmo, serving as a bishop. I was impressed by the faith of these brothers, and I asked about their parents.

The family was baptized in Santos, Brazil, 42 years ago. Adilson Parrella said, “At first, Father seemed very excited about joining the Church. However, he [soon] became less active and asked our mother not to attend church.”

Adilson told me that his mother sewed clothing for the neighbors to pay for her children’s bus fare to church. The four little boys walked together over a mile to another town, boarded the bus for 45 minutes, and then walked another 20 minutes to the chapel.

Although unable to go to church with her children, Sister Parrella read the scriptures with her sons and daughters, taught them the gospel, and prayed with them. Their humble

home was filled with the rich blessings of priesthood power. The little boys grew up, served missions, were educated, and married in the temple. The blessings of the priesthood filled their homes.

Years later, as a single sister, Vany Parrella entered the temple for her own endowment and, later still, served three missions in Brazil. She is now 84 years old, and her faith continues to bless the generations that have followed her.

Testimony and Promise

The power of God's holy priesthood is found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I testify that as you worthily participate in the ordinances of the priesthood, the Lord will give you greater strength, peace, and eternal perspective. Whatever your situation, your home will be "blessed by the strength of priesthood power" and those close to you will more fully desire these blessings for themselves.

As men and women, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters of God, we move forward together. This is our opportunity, our responsibility, and our blessing. This is our destiny—to

prepare the kingdom of God for the return of the Savior. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. "Love Is Spoken Here," *Children's Songbook*, 190–91.
2. Personal email, Aug. 5, 2013.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:37, 51.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:35; 109:22.
6. 1 Nephi 11:16–17.
7. 2 Nephi 26:33.
8. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 104; see also Doctrine and Covenants 84:16; 107:40–53; 128:18, 21; Russell M. Nelson, "Lessons from Eve," *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 86–89.
10. John 15:16.
11. See Joseph Smith—History 1:72; see also Doctrine and Covenants 13; 27.
12. See M. Russell Ballard, "Let Us Think Straight" (BYU Campus Education Week devotional, Aug. 20, 2013); speeches.byu.edu. Elder Ballard stated: "Why are men ordained to priesthood offices and not women? President Gordon B. Hinckley explained that it was the Lord, not man, 'who designated that men in His Church should hold the priesthood' and that it was also the Lord who endowed women with 'capabilities to round out this great and marvelous organization, which is the Church and kingdom of God' ('Women of the Church,' *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 70). When all is said and done, the Lord has not revealed why He has organized His Church as He has."
13. Moroni 10:8.
14. Linda K. Burton, "Priesthood: 'A Sacred Trust to Be Used for the Benefit of Men, Women, and Children'" (Brigham Young University Women's Conference address, May 3, 2013); ce.byu.edu/cw/womensconference/pdf/archive/2013/lindaBurtonTalk.pdf.
15. 3 Nephi 30:2.
16. Matthew 6:22–23.
17. Matthew 5:28; see also Alma 39:9. President Thomas S. Monson said: "Pornography is especially dangerous and addictive. Curious exploration of pornography can become a controlling habit, leading to coarser material and to sexual transgression. Avoid pornography at all costs" ("Preparation Brings Blessings," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2010, 65). "Extremely alarming . . . are the reports of the number of individuals who are utilizing the Internet for evil and degrading purposes, the viewing of pornography being the most prevalent of these purposes. My brothers and sisters, involvement in such will literally destroy the spirit. Be strong. Be clean. Avoid such degrading and destructive types of content at all costs—wherever they may be! I sound this warning to everyone, everywhere" ("Until We Meet Again," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 113). "Avoid any semblance of pornography. It will desensitize the spirit and erode the conscience. We are told in the Doctrine and Covenants, 'That which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness' [Doctrine and Covenants 50:23]" ("True to the Faith," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2006, 18–19).
18. See David A. Bednar, *Act in Doctrine* (2012), 53.
19. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2005, 24–27.
20. Personal email, Aug. 5, 2013; see James 5:14.
21. See Hebrews 5:4.
22. Isaiah 55:8.
23. Jacob 4:13.
24. See Doctrine and Covenants 81:4–5. President Gordon B. Hinckley said: "Your obligation is as serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere. No calling in this church is small or of little consequence" ("This Is the Work of the Master," *Ensign*, May 1995, 71).
25. M. Russell Ballard, "Strength in Counsel," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 76.



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