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Learning in the Priesthood

If you will be diligent and obedient in the priesthood, treasures of spiritual knowledge will be poured out upon you.

I am grateful to be with you in this meeting of the priesthood of God. We are in many different places tonight and at many stages in our priesthood service. Yet with all the variety of our circumstances, we have a need in common. It is to learn our duties in the priesthood and to grow in our power to perform them.

As a deacon I felt keenly that need. I lived in a tiny branch of the Church in New Jersey, on the East Coast of the United States. I was the only deacon in the branch—not just the only one attending but the only one on the records. My older brother, Ted, was the only teacher. He is here tonight.

While I was still a deacon, my family moved to Utah. There I found three wonderful things in place to speed my growth in the priesthood. The first was a president who knew how to sit in council with the members of his quorum. The second was great faith in Jesus Christ that led to the great love we have heard of—love for each other. And the third was a shared conviction that our overarching priesthood purpose was to labor for the salvation of men.

It wasn't the well-established ward

that made the difference. What was there in that ward could be anywhere, in whatever unit of the Church you are in.

These three things may be so much a part of your experience in the priesthood that you hardly notice them. For others you may not feel the need for growth, so these helps may be invisible to you. Either way, I pray that the Spirit will help me make them clear and attractive to you.

My purpose in speaking of these three aids to growing in the priesthood is to urge you to value them and to use them. If you do, your service will be transformed for the better. And if it is magnified, your priesthood service will bless Heavenly Father's children more than you can now imagine is possible.

I found the first when I was welcomed into a priests quorum, with the bishop as our president. That may seem a small, unremarkable thing to you, but it gave me a sense of power in the priesthood that has changed my service in the priesthood ever since. It began by the way he led us.

As near as I could tell, he treated the opinions of young priests as if we

were the wisest men in the world. He waited until all who would speak had spoken. He listened. And when he decided what should be done, it seemed to me that the Spirit confirmed the decisions to us and to him.

I realize now I had felt what the scripture means when it says that the president is to sit in council with the members of his quorum.¹ And years later as I was a bishop with my priests quorum, both they and I were taught by what I had learned as a young priest.

Twenty years later as a bishop, I had the opportunity to see the effectiveness of a council not just in the meetinghouse but also in the mountains. During a Saturday activity, a member of our quorum had been lost in the forest overnight. As far as we knew, he was alone and without warm clothes, food, or shelter. We searched for him without success.

My memory is that we prayed together, the priests quorum and I, and I then asked each to speak. I listened intently, and it seemed to me that they did too, to each other. After a while, a feeling of peace settled on us. I felt that our lost quorum member was safe and dry somewhere.

It became clear to me what the quorum was to do and not to do. When the people who found him described the place in the woods where he had gone for safety, I felt that I recognized it. But the larger miracle for me was to see a united priesthood council's faith in Jesus Christ bringing revelation to the man with the priesthood keys. We all grew that day in the power of the priesthood.

The second key to increased learning is to have love for each other that comes from great faith. I am not sure which comes first, but both always seem to be there whenever there is great and rapid learning in the



priesthood. Joseph Smith taught that to us by example.

In the early days of the Church in this dispensation, he received a command from God to build strength in the priesthood. He was directed to create schools for priesthood holders. The Lord set the requirement that there be love for each other among those who were to teach and to be taught. Here are the words of the Lord about creating a place of priesthood learning and what it was like for those who were to learn in it:

“Organize yourselves; . . . establish a house . . . of learning, . . . a house of order. . . .

“Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time

and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege.”²

The Lord is describing what we have already seen is the strength of a priesthood council or a class to bring revelation by the Spirit. Revelation is the only way we can come to know that Jesus is the Christ. That great faith is the first rung on the ladder we climb to learn the principles of the gospel.

In section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, in verses 123 and 124, the Lord stressed love for each other and not finding fault with each other. Each gained entry into the priesthood school established by the Lord’s prophet by making a covenant with uplifted hands to be a “friend and

brother . . . in the bonds of love.”³

Now, we do not follow that practice today, but wherever I have seen remarkable learning in the priesthood, there are those bonds of love. Again I have seen it as both a cause and an effect of learning gospel truths. Love invites the Holy Ghost to be present to confirm truth. And the joy of learning divine truths creates love in the hearts of people who shared the experience of learning.

The reverse is true as well. Discord or jealousy inhibits the ability of the Holy Ghost to teach us and inhibits our ability to receive light and truth. And the feelings of disappointment that invariably follow are the seeds of greater discord and faultfinding among those who expected a learning experience that did not come.

The priesthood holders who learn well together always seem to me to have great peacemakers among them. You see peacemaking in priesthood classes and in councils. It is the gift to help people find common ground when others are seeing differences. It is the peacemaker’s gift to help people see that what someone else said was a contribution rather than a correction.

With enough of the pure love of Christ and a desire to be peacemakers, unity is possible in priesthood councils and in classes. It takes patience and humility, but I have seen it happen even when issues are difficult and the people in councils or classes come from vastly different backgrounds.

It is possible to rise to the lofty standard set by the Lord for priesthood holders in making decisions in quorums. It is possible when there is great faith and love and the absence of contention. Here is the Lord’s requirement for His endorsement of our decisions: “And every decision made by either of these quorums must be by the



unanimous voice of the same; that is, every member in each quorum must be agreed to its decisions, in order to make their decisions of the same power or validity one with the other.”⁴

The third aid to learning in the priesthood comes with a shared conviction about why the Lord blesses and trusts us to hold and to exercise His priesthood. It is to labor for the salvation of men. This shared conviction brings unity in quorums. We can begin to learn about this from the scriptural account of how we spirit sons were prepared before birth for this rare honor of holding the priesthood.

Speaking of those given great priesthood trust in this life, the Lord said, “Even before they were born, they, with many others, received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men.”⁵

In the priesthood we share the sacred duty to labor for the souls of men. We must do more than learn that this is our duty. It must go down into our hearts so deeply that neither the many demands on our efforts in the bloom of life nor the trials that come with age can turn us from that purpose.

Not long ago I visited a high priest in his home. He is no longer able to

come to our quorum meetings. He lives alone. His beautiful wife died, and his children live far away from him. Time and illness limit his ability to serve. He still lifts weights to keep what he can of his once-powerful strength.

When I walked into his home, he stood up from his walker to greet me. He invited me to sit in a chair near him. We talked of our happy associations in the priesthood.

Then with great intensity he said to me, “Why am I still living? Why am I still here? I can’t do anything.”

I told him that he was doing something for me. He was lifting me with his faith and his love. Even in our short visit, he made me want to be better. His example of determination to do something that mattered had inspired me to try harder to serve others and the Lord.

But from the sad sound of his voice and the look in his eyes, I could sense that I had not answered his questions. He still wondered why God let him live with such limitations on his ability to serve.

In his usual generous way, he thanked me for coming to see him. As I got up to leave, the nurse who comes to his home a few hours every day walked in from another room. During our private conversation, he had told me a little about her. He said

she was wonderful. She had lived among the Latter-day Saints most of her life but was still not a member.

She walked up to show me to the door. He motioned toward her and said with a smile, “See, I can’t seem to do anything. I have been trying to get her baptized into the Church, but it hasn’t worked.” She smiled back at him and at me. I walked outside and turned toward my home nearby.

I realized then that the answers to his questions were planted long ago in his heart. That valiant high priest was trying to do his duty, taught to him through decades in the priesthood.

He knew that the only way that young woman could have the blessing of salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ was to make a covenant by being baptized. He had been taught according to the covenants by every president of every quorum from the deacons to the high priests.

He remembered and felt his own oath and covenant in the priesthood. He was still keeping it.

He was a witness and a missionary for the Savior wherever life would take him. It was already in his heart. The desire of his heart was that her heart could be changed through the Atonement of Jesus Christ by keeping sacred covenants.

His time in the school of the priesthood in this life will be relatively brief compared to eternity. But even in that short span, he has mastered the eternal curriculum. He will carry with him, wherever the Lord will call, priesthood lessons of eternal worth.

Not only should you be eager to learn your priesthood lessons in this life, but you should be optimistic about what is possible. A few of us may limit in our minds our possibilities to learn what the Lord sets before us in His service.



One young man left his little Welsh village in the early 1840s, heard the Apostles of God, and came into the kingdom of God on earth. He sailed with the Saints to America and drove a wagon west across the plains. He was in the next company after Brigham Young coming into this valley. His priesthood service included clearing and breaking ground for a farm.

He sold the farm for pennies on the dollar to go on a mission for the Lord in the deserts of what is now Nevada to take care of sheep. He was called

from that to another mission across the ocean in the very village he had left in his poverty to follow the Lord.

Through it all, he found a way to learn with his priesthood brethren. Bold missionary that he was, he walked down the lane in Wales to the summer estate of a man who was four times the prime minister of England to offer him the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The great man let him into his mansion. He was a graduate of Eton College and of Oxford University. The missionary talked with him about the origins of man, the central role of Jesus Christ in the history of the world, and even the fate of nations.

At the end of their discussion, the host declined the offer to accept baptism. But as they parted, that leader of one of the great empires of the world asked the humble missionary, "Where did you get your education?" His answer: "In the priesthood of God."

You may have thought at one time how much better your life would have been if only you had been admitted to

study in some fine school. I pray that you will see the greatness of God's love for you and of the opportunity He has given you to enter His priesthood school.

If you will be diligent and obedient in the priesthood, treasures of spiritual knowledge will be poured out upon you. You will grow in your power to resist evil and to proclaim the truth that leads to salvation. You will find joy in the happiness of those you lead toward exaltation. Your family will become a place of learning.

I testify that the keys of the priesthood have been restored. President Thomas S. Monson holds and exercises those keys. God lives and knows you perfectly. Jesus Christ lives. You were chosen for the honor of holding the sacred priesthood. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:87.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 88:119, 122.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 88:133.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 107:27.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 138:56.

