Priesthood Keys

These 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. These keys are mentioned frequently in the Church, but we may not always understand them, so here are a few facts about priesthood keys.

What are priesthood keys?

Priesthood keys are the right to preside over and direct the Church within a jurisdiction. 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).

Where do priesthood keys come from?

All priesthood keys ultimately come from Heavenly Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith taught, "The keys [of the priesthood] have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 104). The keys necessary for governing the Church in the latter days were restored to Joseph Smith by heavenly beings—for instance, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Moses, Elias, and Elijah (see Joseph Smith—History 1:72; D&C 27:12; D&C 110:11–12). These keys have been passed on to his successors.
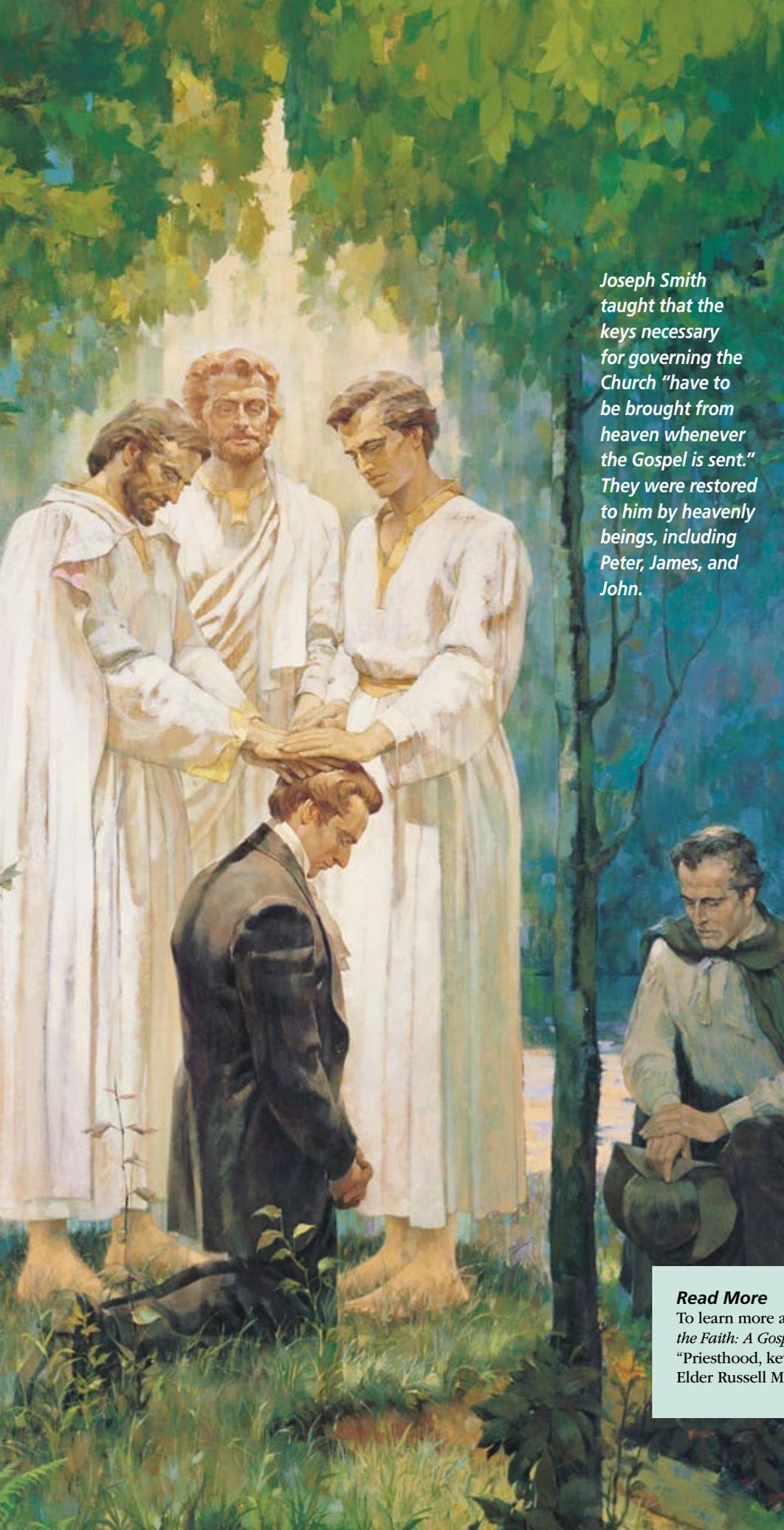
What do priesthood keys do? Why are they necessary?

Ordinances such as baptism and the sacrament help us to return to Heavenly Father in the celestial kingdom. Through the keys of the priesthood, the Church administers these ordinances and provides an organization to carry on the work of the Lord in an orderly manner— "Mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion" (D&C 132:8).

So, for instance, although the Church has many worthy priesthood holders, they need authorization from someone holding keys before performing most ordinances. For example, if Aaronic Priesthood holders hear about a homebound ward member who would like to receive the sacrament at home, they cannot simply go and administer the sacrament to that member because they believe it's the right thing to do. They must be authorized by the bishop, who holds the keys over the Aaronic Priesthood. And a father who holds the priesthood cannot simply baptize his 8-year-old daughter or ordain his 12-year-old son to the Aaronic Priesthood without first being authorized by the bishop to do so.

Who has priesthood keys?

Members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles hold all the keys necessary for governing

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the Church. Only the President of the Church has the right to exercise all of those keys. He delegates these keys to others who preside in the Church—temple presidents, mission presidents, stake presidents, district presidents, bishops, branch presidents, and quorum presidents, including deacons and teachers quorum presidents.

What is the difference between holding keys and having a calling?

Having a calling means having responsibilities; holding keys means presiding over and directing the work of the priesthood. For instance, a ward Young Men president works under the direction of the bishop, who holds keys over the ward, but the Young Men president's responsibilities do not include presiding over the priesthood, so he does not receive keys. The keys to direct the work of the Aaronic Priesthood in the ward belong to the bishop, the teachers quorum president, and the deacons quorum president. *NE*

Read More
To learn more about keys of the priesthood, read *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (2004), 126–27; Topical Guide, "Priesthood, keys of"; and "Keys of the Priesthood," by Elder Russell M. Nelson (*Ensign,* Oct. 2005, 40).