

CONNECTING Daughters of God WITH HIS Priesthood Power

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I've come to recognize as never before the importance of understanding the priesthood and its associated blessings for women. We're living in a day when equality, power, fairness, and tolerance are touted—often above other virtues. What's more, identity, authority, spirituality, and even God are topics of great confusion for many.

Many women, not knowing what blessings they have access to, are not taking full advantage of the spiritual feast available to them. Many men are also confused on the topic.

How can we better understand the connection women have with priesthood power and help them “to step forward,” to “take [their] rightful and needful place

in [their] home, in [their] community, and in the kingdom of God—more than [they] ever have before”?¹ First, we can humbly seek to understand truths associated with the priesthood, especially the most recent teachings of Church leaders. Second, we can seek to understand why some women don't fully realize their access to God's priesthood power.

WOMEN ARE ESSENTIAL PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORK GOD ACCOMPLISHES THROUGH HIS PRIESTHOOD POWER.

Third, we can be aware of how we can help women more fully participate in the work God accomplishes through His priesthood power.

1. What Truths Have Been Clarified Regarding Women and the Priesthood?

Apostles and general women auxiliary leaders have recently given more emphasis to the relationship of women and the priesthood. The following are some truths that are vital to understand and teach correctly.

The priesthood is the power and authority of God.

The priesthood is the power through which God accomplishes His great work of salvation, bringing to pass “the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Both men and women have an important role in God’s work, and both men and women have access to His power to accomplish His work.

Women play an official and critical role in the work of salvation.

Bonnie L. Oscarson, former Young Women General President, declared: “All women need to see themselves as essential participants in the work of the priesthood. Women in this

Church are presidents, counselors, teachers, members of councils, sisters, and mothers, and the kingdom of God cannot function unless we rise up and fulfill our duties with faith.”²

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught: “God has given the women of this church a work to do in building his kingdom. That concerns all aspects of our great triad of responsibility—which is, first, to teach the gospel to the world; second, to strengthen the faith and build the happiness of the membership of the Church; and, third, to carry forward the great work of salvation for the dead.

“Women in the Church are associates with their brethren in carrying forward this mighty work of the Lord. . . . Women carry tremendous responsibilities and they are accountable for the fulfillment of those responsibilities. They head their own organizations, and those organizations are strong and viable and are significant forces for good in the world. They stand in an associate role to the priesthood

[holders], all striving together to build the kingdom of God in the earth. We honor and respect you for your capacity. We expect leadership, and strength, and impressive results from your management of the organizations for which you are responsible. We uphold and sustain you as daughters of God, working in a great partnership to assist him in bringing to pass the immortality and the eternal life of all of the sons and daughters of God.”³

Both women and men are delegated power and authority by those who hold priesthood keys.

Priesthood keys are “the authority God has given to priesthood [holders] to direct, control, and govern the use of His priesthood on earth.”⁴ President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, explains, “Every act or ordinance performed in the Church is done under the direct or indirect authorization of one holding the keys for that function.”⁵

Women have authority to perform their callings, under the direction of one who holds priesthood keys, just as men do. President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, stated, “Those who have priesthood keys . . . literally make it possible for all who serve faithfully under their direction to exercise priesthood authority and have access to priesthood power.”⁶

President Oaks said: “We are not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be? When a woman— young or old—is set apart to preach the gospel as a full-time missionary, she is given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood function. The same is true when a woman is set apart to function as an officer or teacher in a Church organization under the direction of one who holds the keys of the priesthood.”⁷

When teaching this concept to my students, I often ask, “If a stake is having a joint Young Men and Young Women presidency meeting, who presides?” Because both the stake Young Women president and the stake Young Men president were called and set apart by one holding priesthood keys (the stake president), with their callings, both have the same priesthood authority and therefore neither presides over the other. It would make sense for them to take turns in conducting meetings.

The Lord blesses women and men equally through His priesthood.

The Lord provides many blessings through His priesthood that may come to all members who make and keep sacred covenants. President Ballard taught, “All who have made sacred

Sister missionaries are an example of women being set apart and given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood function.

covenants with the Lord and who honor those covenants are eligible to receive personal revelation, to be blessed by the ministering of angels, to commune with God, to receive the fulness of the gospel, and, ultimately, to become heirs alongside Jesus Christ of all our Father has.”⁸

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) instructed: “The blessings of the priesthood are not confined to men alone. These blessings are also poured out upon . . . all the faithful women of the Church. . . . The Lord offers to his daughters every spiritual gift and blessing that can be obtained by his sons.”⁹

And as women go about their Father’s work, they too will be blessed to be “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17; see also verse 16).

Both women and men (single and married) may be endowed with priesthood power in the temple.

In 1833 the Lord promised Joseph Smith that the Saints, both men and women, would be endowed with “power

from on high” (Doctrine and Covenants 95:8). President Ballard clarified: “The endowment is literally a gift of power. All who enter the house of the Lord officiate in the ordinances of the priesthood. This applies to men and women alike.”¹⁰ All worthy members who have received their endowment and keep the covenants they have made in the temple have priesthood power. Thus, women, married or single, can have priesthood power in their homes regardless of a visit from a priesthood holder.

Sheri Dew, former counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, asked, “What does it mean to have access to priesthood power? It means that we can receive revelation, be blessed and aided by the ministering of angels, learn to part the veil that separates us from our Heavenly Father, be strengthened to resist temptation, be protected, and be enlightened, and made smarter than we are—all without any mortal intermediary.”¹¹ What is the most important outcome of this power and how is it received? The Lord has revealed that



“the power of godliness,” including the power to become like Him, is manifested through priesthood ordinances (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:20).

Priesthood authority sometimes functions differently in the Church than in the family.

The Church organization is hierarchical; the family is patriarchal. President Oaks taught that there are “some differences in the way priesthood authority functions in the family and in the Church.”¹² By divine design, the husband and wife may have some different responsibilities, yet they work together as “equal partners.”¹³ Elder L. Tom Perry (1922–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Remember, brethren, that in your role as leader in the family, your wife is your companion. . . . Since the beginning, God has instructed mankind that marriage should unite husband and wife together in unity. Therefore, there is not a president or a vice president in a family. The couple works together eternally for the good of the family. They are united together in word, in deed, and in action as they lead, guide, and direct their family unit. They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward.”¹⁴

What happens then when a spouse dies? President Oaks taught: “When my father died, my mother presided over

our family. She had no priesthood office, but as the surviving parent in her marriage she had become the governing officer in her family. At the same time, she was always totally respectful of the priesthood authority of our bishop and other Church leaders. She presided over her family, but they presided over the Church.”¹⁵



2. Stumbling Blocks

What are some of the stumbling blocks that can keep women from fully realizing their access to God’s priesthood power?

Confusion by both men and women regarding the priesthood.

President Oaks taught: “The Melchizedek Priesthood is not a status or a label. It is a divine power held in trust to use for the benefit of God’s work for His children. We should always remember that men who hold the priesthood are *not* ‘the priesthood.’ It is not appropriate to refer to ‘the priesthood and the women.’ We should refer to ‘the *holders* of the priesthood and the women.”¹⁶

By saying, “The priesthood will now sing a song,” or “we need priesthood volunteers to go to Young

Women camp,” we are doing ourselves and others, no matter how well intended, a disservice by instigating and perpetuating confusion and minimizing God’s power.

Thinking that the priesthood does not have to do with women.

When invited to study the priesthood, some sisters respond, “I don’t need to get into that topic. It doesn’t apply to me.” But because the priesthood blesses all of God’s children, we all benefit from a greater understanding of it. We would all benefit from a greater understanding of the priesthood. Think of how the Church and our families would be blessed if both the women and the men of the Church were equally well-versed in understanding and teaching truths



3. What Can We Do?

regarding the priesthood.

Linda K. Burton, former Relief Society General President, emphasized that women as well as men need to study the topic of the priesthood. “Sisters, we cannot stand up and teach those things we do not understand and know for ourselves.”¹⁷

Putting limits on women that aren’t really there.

It’s clear that some callings in the Church require ordination to priesthood office, but we must be careful not to limit our women simply based on culture, history, false perceptions, or traditions. For example, women can be capable leaders and teachers, important voices in Church councils, and powerful examples of discipleship to members of all ages.

Here are some ways each of us can help our sisters in the gospel participate more fully in the work God accomplishes through His priesthood power.

Be up-to-date on the words of the Brethren and our women leaders.

Over the last several years, senior members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have spoken specifically on the role of women in the Church. Are we carefully listening to these talks?

For example, in 2015, President Russell M. Nelson exclaimed, “The kingdom of God is not and cannot be complete without women who make sacred covenants and then keep them, women who can speak with the power and authority of God!”¹⁸

Help all members understand the unique role of women in the work of the priesthood.

President Ballard reminded the women of the Relief Society that their “sphere of influence is a unique sphere—one that cannot be duplicated by men. No one can defend our Savior with any more

persuasion or power than can you—the daughters of God who have such inner strength and conviction. The power of the voice of a converted woman is immeasurable, and the Church needs your voices now more than ever.”¹⁹

Bonnie L. Oscarson declared, “[Women] of the Church need to see themselves as essential participants in the priesthood-directed work of salvation and not just as onlookers and supporters.”²⁰

Give credence to women leaders.

Justifiably, we give great attention to what is said by those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. They hold the keys of the kingdom, and the Lord directs His work through them. In addition to their teachings, female leaders of the Church have been set apart and given priesthood authority to speak to both men and women of the Church. We want to listen to their teachings as well and hear what counsel God would give us through them.



Involve women in councils, not only by title but with action.

President Ballard said: “Any priesthood leader who does not involve his sister leaders with full respect and inclusion is not honoring and magnifying the keys he has been given. His power and influence will be diminished until he learns the ways of the Lord.”²¹

Do not give “authoritative” answers to questions the Lord Himself hasn’t answered.

President Oaks has cautioned Church members to avoid answering questions the Lord has not answered: “Don’t make the mistake that’s been made in the past, . . . trying to put reasons to revelation. The reasons turn out to be man-made to a great extent. The revelations are what we sustain as the will of the Lord

and that’s where safety lies.”²²

President Ballard gives a perfect example of this: “Why are men—and not women—ordained to priesthood offices? . . . The Lord has not revealed why He has organized His Church as He has.”²³ President Ballard also warned us “not to pass along faith-promoting or unsubstantiated rumors or outdated understandings and explanations of our doctrine and practices from the past. It is always wise to make it a practice to study the words of the living prophets and apostles; keep updated on current Church issues, policies, and statements through mormonnewsroom.org and LDS.org; and consult the works of recognized, thoughtful, and faithful Latter-day Saint scholars to ensure you do not teach things that are untrue, out of date, or odd and quirky.”²⁴ Remember that sometimes “I don’t know” really is

the best answer. We must search diligently in the light of faith to learn divine truth.

Help women and men better understand the priesthood.

Helping both men and women become confident in their ability to study and learn about the priesthood is critical. Some scriptures that can help in this process include, but are not limited to, Alma 13 and Doctrine and Covenants sections 2, 13, 20, 76, 84, 95, 107, 110, 121, and 124. Attending the temple for the purpose of seeking faithfully not only for answers but especially for inspired questions regarding the topic cannot be overemphasized.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles instructed: “This doctrine of the priesthood—unknown in the world and but little known even in the Church—cannot be learned out of the scriptures alone. . . .

“The doctrine of the priesthood is known only by personal revelation. It comes, line upon line and precept upon precept, by the power of the Holy Ghost to those who love and serve God with all their heart, might, mind and strength. (See D&C 98:12.)”²⁵

4. Conclusion

Help women understand that they must stand with the Lord and His prophets.

The world is becoming more divisive and cynical. Women, in many ways, are being pitted against each other. Opinions are strong and emotions run deep. Imagine the influence for good in this world if all members of the Church could see that they, like Esther, have been reserved “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14) and that they, individually and as a united whole, are needed to lead, not follow, the world.

Emma Smith stated: “We are going to do something extraordinary. . . . We expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls.”²⁶ These pressing calls, even pleas, have come from the leaders of the Church to the sisters over the last several years as never before. As we better understand the truths associated with the priesthood, recognize possible reasons why many women are living below their privileges, and act on the knowledge we gain regarding women and their opportunities to participate in the work of the priesthood, we may “find the joy and the peace that comes from knowing through your teaching that you have touched a life, you have lifted one of Heavenly Father’s children on his or her journey to one day be embraced once again in His presence.”²⁷ ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 97.
2. Bonnie L. Oscarson, “Rise Up in Strength, Sisters in Zion,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 14.
3. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (2016), 101.
4. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 2.1.1.
5. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 49.
6. M. Russell Ballard, “Men and Women in the Work of the Lord,” *New Era*, Apr. 2014, 4; see also *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 138–39.
7. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood,” 51.
8. M. Russell Ballard, “Men and Women in the Work of the Lord,” 4–5.
9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith* (2013), 163. For a more in-depth discussion on the blessings of the priesthood, see Bruce R. McConkie, “The Ten Blessings of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 33–35.
10. M. Russell Ballard, “Let Us Think Straight” (Brigham Young University devotional, Aug. 20, 2013), 7, speeches.byu.edu.
11. Sheri Dew, *Women and the Priesthood: What One Mormon Woman Believes* (2013), 125.
12. Dallin H. Oaks, “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 26.
13. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
14. L. Tom Perry, “Fatherhood, an Eternal Calling,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 71.
15. Dallin H. Oaks, “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” 26.
16. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Powers of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 65.
17. Linda K. Burton, “Priesthood: A Sacred Trust to Be Used for the Benefit of Men, Women, and Children” (Brigham Young University Women’s Conference, May 3, 2013), womensconference.byu.edu/transcripts.
18. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” 96.
19. M. Russell Ballard, “Men and Women and Priesthood Power,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2014, 33.
20. Bonnie L. Oscarson, “Rise Up in Strength, Sisters in Zion,” 14.
21. M. Russell Ballard, “Men and Women and Priesthood Power,” 31.
22. Dallin H. Oaks, *Life’s Lessons Learned: Personal Reflections* (2011), 68–69.
23. M. Russell Ballard, “Men and Women and Priesthood Power,” 31.
24. M. Russell Ballard, “The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century” (address given to Church Educational System Religious Educators, Feb. 26, 2016), broadcasts.lds.org.
25. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrine of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 1982, 32.
26. Emma Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 14.
27. M. Russell Ballard, “The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century.”

