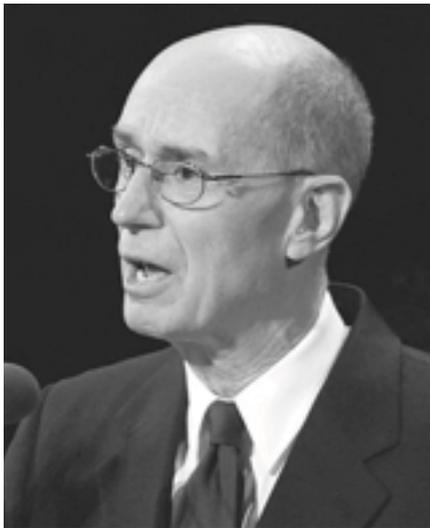


O Ye That Embark

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Our power to carry burdens can be increased more than enough to compensate for the increased service we will be asked to give.



My dear brethren, tonight I wish to encourage priesthood holders who at times feel overwhelmed with their responsibilities. That is a challenge I have spoken of before. I return to it because it returns so often in the lives of those I love and serve.

Most of you have discovered that your priesthood duties will stretch you to the point that you wonder if you can stretch that far. It may have happened when you were asked to speak in a stake conference before hundreds of people. For the recent convert, it may have been being asked to pray in public or teach a class for the first time. For some, it may have been trying to learn a language in a missionary training center. If that didn't take you to your limit, it surely

did on the streets of a strange city when your mission president charged you to speak to every person you met to testify of the Savior and of the Restoration of the gospel.

You may have thought then, "Once I finish my mission, being a faithful priesthood holder will get easier." But in a few years you found yourself getting even less sleep at night, while trying to support a wife and a new baby, being kind and loving, scrambling to get some education, reaching out to the members of your elders quorum, perhaps even helping them to move their furniture, and trying to find time to serve your ancestors in the temple. You may have kept a smile on your face with the thought: "When I get a little older, being a faithful priesthood holder will not require so much. It will get easier."

Those of you further down the road are smiling because you know something about priesthood service. It is this: the more faithful service you give, the more the Lord asks of you. Your smile is a happy one because you know that He increases our power to carry the heavier load.

The tough part of that reality, however, is that for Him to give you that increased power you must go in service and faith to your outer limits.

It is like building muscle strength. You must break down your muscles to build them up. You push muscles to the point of exhaustion. Then they

repair themselves, and they develop greater strength. Increased spiritual strength is a gift from God which He can give when we push in His service to our limits. Through the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, our natures can be changed. Then our power to carry burdens can be increased more than enough to compensate for the increased service we will be asked to give.

That helps me understand when I see someone else who makes priesthood service look easy. I know that they have either passed hard tests or that the tests lie ahead. So rather than envying them, I stand ready to help when the going gets harder for them, because it surely will.

That testing of our limits in priesthood service is made necessary by God's plan to qualify His children to live with Him again forever. Heavenly Father loves His children. He offered us eternal life, to live with Him again in families and in glory forever. To qualify us to receive that gift, He gave us a mortal body, the opportunity to be tempted to sin, and a way to be cleansed from that sin and to rise in the First Resurrection. He gave us His Beloved Son, Jehovah, as our Savior to make that possible. The Savior was born in mortal life, was tempted but never sinned, and then in Gethsemane and on Golgotha paid the price of our sins so that we could be cleansed. The purifying can come only to those who have faith enough in Jesus Christ to repent of sin, be cleansed through the ordinance of baptism, and make and keep covenants to obey all His commandments. And there was to be a fierce enemy of our souls, Lucifer, who would with his legions relentlessly try to capture every child of God to keep him or her from having the joy of eternal life.

In His kindness and in great trust, Heavenly Father, with the Savior, allowed a selected few of His sons on earth to hold the priesthood. We have



the authority and the power to act in God's name, to offer the true gospel of Jesus Christ and its ordinances to as many of Heavenly Father's children as we can. So you can sense the magnitude of our trust from God. And you can sense its supreme importance and the opposition we face.

It is not surprising that we feel from time to time nearly overwhelmed. Your thought that "I'm not sure I can do this" is evidence that you are understanding what it means to hold the priesthood of God. The fact is that you can't do it by yourself. The responsibility is too difficult and too important for your mortal powers and for mine. Recognizing that is at the foundation of great priesthood service.

When those feelings of inadequacy strike us, it is the time to remember the Savior. He assures us that we don't do this work alone. There are scriptures to put on your mirror and to remember in the moments when you are doubting your capacity.

For instance, President Thomas S. Monson remembered the promised words of the Savior as he blessed me six months ago to stand fearlessly in my calling when it seemed hard. These words of the Savior, which He gave to His tiny band of priesthood holders in this dispensation, came to the

prophet's mind as he laid his hands on my head: "And whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up."¹

The promise which President Monson remembered and quoted was fulfilled for me. Confidence replaced doubt, the Spirit came, medical helpers were inspired, my life was preserved, and I was borne up. Because of that blessing by President Monson, it will always be easy for me to remember the Savior and trust His promise that He goes before and beside us in His service.

I know that the promise of angels to bear us up is real. You might want to bring to memory the assurance of Elisha to his frightened servant. That assurance is ours when we feel close to being overwhelmed in our service. Elisha faced real and terrible opposition:

"And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?"

"And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than

they that be with them.

"And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."²

Like that servant of Elisha, there are more with you than those you can see opposed to you. Some who are with you will be invisible to your mortal eyes. The Lord will bear you up and will at times do it by calling others to stand with you. That is why we have quorums. That is why quorum leaders look at faces and into eyes in quorum meetings. That is why the bishop is more than presiding in the priests quorum. He is watching the faces of the priests. You will have such a bishop or such an elders quorum president or such a mission president. And he will come to help you and call others to stand with you. It may be to call the right companion to serve with you in your time of need.

That suggests at least two things. One is to recognize and welcome those whom the Lord sends to help us. The other is to see in every assignment the opportunity to strengthen another. A mission president once told me of a missionary he assigned

to more than 12 or 13 companions. He said to me, "Every one of those companions was about to go home early or be sent home. But we didn't lose one of them."

When I mentioned that miraculous fact later to the companion who saved so many at the point of their being overwhelmed, I got a response which surprised and taught me. It was this: "I don't think that story is true. I never had a companion who was failing."

I could see that a mission president had been inspired to send the right angel time after time. We can expect in our service to have help sent to us at the right time who will see strength in us and lift us up. And we can look forward to being the one sent by the Lord to encourage another.

I can tell you from experience something about how to help if you are the one sent. Shortly after I was called to the Quorum of the Twelve, I got a phone call from President Faust, counselor in the First Presidency. He asked me to come to his office. I went with some concern as to why he would take the time to visit with me.

After some pleasantries, he looked at me and said, "Has it happened yet?" When I looked puzzled he went on to say, "I've been watching you in meetings. It seems to me that you have been feeling that your calling is beyond you and that you are not qualified."

I said that doubt had come to me, as if I had hit a wall. I expected that he was going to reassure me. I told him that I appreciated his being aware of my doubts and asked for his help. But I was surprised by his kind, firm reply. He said, "Don't ask me. Go to Him." Then he pointed up to heaven. Now years later I sit in that same office. When I walk into it I look up and remember him and how he taught me by example how to help those who are feeling overwhelmed in the Lord's service. Find a way to send them with confidence to Him. If



they will follow your counsel, they will gain the strength they need and to spare.

Time and again over your life, the Lord has been giving you the experiences to build strength, courage, and determination. He knew how much you would need that to serve Him. Some of it may have come, as it did for me, when you stood with other priesthood holders and said aloud the words: "Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day."³

When you committed to that high standard and met it, the Lord was building a trust and strength in you that would be there when you needed it, whenever you were called to serve

a cause higher than self-interest. I felt it one bright spring day on a lawn. I was being commissioned to defend my country. We were not then at war, but I was heading for an unknown service that I knew would require all I had to offer, perhaps my life. I raised my right hand with the others to pledge that I would defend my country with "true faith and allegiance" and that "I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservations or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter; So help me God."⁴

I have no doubt that the power to keep that promise, which I kept, had been forged in me from the time I was a deacon. In my early years in the priesthood, I sat a number of

times in what was then called a “missionary farewell.” There are now so many rising to the call to serve that we let them speak only briefly in a sacrament meeting before they go. But then an entire meeting was focused on the missionary who was embarking. It always included some selected music. I can still feel what I felt as a quartet of returned missionaries would sing, “I’ll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,” and the words went on to pledge, “I’ll say what you want me to say,” and finally, “I’ll be what you want me to be.”⁵

My heart was stirred in those days then as it is now with a conviction that the promise was true for me and for us in all our priesthood service. We will find joy in going wherever the Lord would have us serve. We will be given the revelation to speak His words to invite Heavenly Father’s children to become changed by the Atonement and fit to go home and live with Him. And I felt then as I do now that our faithful service would allow Him to change our hearts to fit us for His companionship and to serve Him forever.

I bear you my witness that when we give our all in priesthood service, the Lord will give us all the courage we need and the assurance that He goes with us and that angels will bear us up.

I testify that we are called of God. This is His true Church, and you hold His everlasting priesthood. I am a witness that President Thomas S. Monson holds all the keys of the priesthood and exercises them in the world today. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. D&C 84:88.
2. 2 Kings 6:15–17.
3. D&C 4:2.
4. “Oaths of Enlistment and Oaths of Office,” <http://www.army.mil/CMH/faq/oaths.htm>.
5. “I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go,” *Hymns*, no. 270.