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# PRIESTHOOD POWER



## AVAILABLE TO ALL

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**W**e are privileged to live in this season of Church history when questions are being asked about the priesthood. There is great interest and desire to know and understand more about the authority, power, and blessings associated with the priesthood of God. It is my hope that the doctrine

of the priesthood may “*distil* upon [our souls] as the dews from heaven” (D&C 121:45; emphasis added). I testify that the Lord is hastening His work, and it is imperative for us to understand how the Lord accomplishes His work so that we may receive the power that comes from being aligned with His plan and purposes.

The Lord has always accomplished His work, which is to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), through the power of His priesthood. By it the heavens and earth were created. Through priesthood ordinances, the effects of the Fall can be overcome because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Because the authority of



the priesthood is entrusted to man to bless Heavenly Father's children, He wants us to invite the power of the priesthood into our homes to bless and strengthen our families and our individual lives.

In the 2013 worldwide leadership training, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles emphatically stated: "Men are not the priesthood!"<sup>1</sup> To me, that was a wake-up call as well as an invitation to all of us to study, ponder, and come to better understand the priesthood. If someone, perhaps a child or a friend who is a member of another faith, asked you the following questions, could you give an answer?

- What is the priesthood?
- Why is the priesthood so important?
- What are the keys of the priesthood?
- Who holds priesthood keys?

### What is the priesthood?

The priesthood is the eternal power and authority of God by which He blesses, redeems, and exalts His children. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained the priesthood this way: "Priesthood is the means whereby the Lord acts through men to save souls. . . . A priesthood holder is expected to exercise this sacred authority in accordance with God's holy mind, will, and purposes. *Nothing about the priesthood is self-centered. The priesthood always is used to serve, to bless, and to strengthen other people.*"<sup>2</sup>

"Nothing about the priesthood is self-centered. The priesthood always is used to serve, to bless, and to strengthen other people."

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



As I have studied, pondered, and sought to understand the priesthood, it has been helpful for me to consider what the world would be like *without* it. Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explored this idea when he said: "Can you imagine how dark and empty mortality would be if there were no priesthood? If the power of the priesthood were not upon the earth, the adversary would have freedom to roam and reign without restraint. There would be no gift of the Holy Ghost to direct and enlighten us; no prophets to speak in the name of the Lord; no temples where we could make sacred, eternal covenants; no

authority to bless or baptize, to heal or comfort. . . . There would be no light, no hope—only darkness."<sup>3</sup>

The thought of no priesthood power is sobering. I, for one, stand up and rejoice that this sacred power has been

restored to the earth through a prophet of God in this last and glorious dispensation of the fulness of times!

Elder Oaks cautions us, however, in our references to the priesthood: "While we sometimes refer to priesthood holders as 'the priesthood,' we must never forget that the priesthood is not owned by or embodied in those who hold it. It is held in *a sacred trust to be used for the benefit of men, women, and children alike.*"<sup>4</sup>

### Why is the priesthood so important?

We know that "the divine plan of happiness enables family relationships

to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.”<sup>5</sup> As Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “Priesthood authority has been restored so that families can be sealed eternally.”<sup>6</sup>

“Priesthood authority is required to perform the ordinances of the gospel. . . . Each ordinance opens the door to rich spiritual blessings.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus bestowed the sacred keys of the kingdom on Peter with the charge that “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

### **What are the keys of the priesthood?**

A simple explanation of priesthood keys is found in the May 2012 *New Era*:

“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. . . . Priesthood keys are the right to preside over and direct the Church. . . . 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).”<sup>8</sup>

### **Who holds priesthood keys?**

“Jesus Christ holds all the keys of the priesthood pertaining to His Church. He has conferred upon each of His Apostles all the keys that pertain to the kingdom of God on earth. The senior living Apostle, the President of the Church, is the only person on earth authorized to exercise all priesthood keys (see D&C 107:91–92). . . . [He then] delegates priesthood keys to other priesthood leaders so they can preside in their areas of responsibility. . . . Auxiliary presidents and their counselors do not receive keys. They receive delegated authority to function in their callings.”<sup>9</sup>

There is a difference, however, between priesthood authority and priesthood power. Priesthood authority is conferred by ordination, but priesthood power is available to all. Since priesthood power is something we all desire to have in our families and homes, what do *we* need to do to invite that power into our lives? Personal righteousness is imperative to having priesthood power.

### **Understanding the Doctrine of the Priesthood**

First, seek to be worthy of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Because the doctrine of the priesthood is best understood by revelation, it is essential to have the help of the Holy Ghost to reveal and distill the doctrine upon our souls.

Second, attend the holy temple. We know that temples “are the most holy of all places of worship”<sup>10</sup> and provide the ideal setting to learn about the priesthood by the spirit of revelation.



Third, read the scriptures. Searching, pondering, and studying the scriptures are invitations for the Holy Ghost to reveal to us important truths about the priesthood. I recommend the following to you for your careful and prayerful consideration: Doctrine and Covenants sections 13, 20, 84, 107, and 121, and Alma 13. Then I invite you to memorize the oath and covenant of the priesthood, which can be found in Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–44. By doing so, I promise you that the Holy Ghost will expand your understanding of the priesthood and inspire and uplift you in wonderful ways.

I would also invite you to ponder Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–46 and ask yourselves questions such as:

- Is my heart set upon the things of this world?



- Do I aspire to the honors of men or women?
- Do I try to cover my sins?
- Am I prideful?
- Do I exercise control or domination or compulsion upon my children, my spouse, or others?
- Am I earnestly striving to practice righteous principles such as persuasion, meekness, long-suffering, kindness, gentleness, love unfeigned (meaning genuine, sincere, or heartfelt love)?
- Does virtue garnish my thoughts unceasingly?
- Do I long for the Holy Ghost to be my constant companion?

The words *persuasion, meekness, long-suffering, kindness, gentleness, and love unfeigned* took on a new and very personal meaning to me as I remembered a blessing I requested of my father years ago.

When I was a young single adult, I was struggling with a difficult decision. As I had done on several occasions, I approached my dad and requested a father’s blessing. Expecting him to immediately act on my request, I was surprised when he responded by saying, “I’ll need some time to prepare to give you this blessing. Are you OK with waiting a couple of days?”

Interestingly, 40 years later, I have forgotten what he said in that father’s blessing, but I’ll never forget the profound reverence my dad had for the holy priesthood as he prepared himself spiritually to pronounce a father’s blessing upon my head. He understood the principles taught in Doctrine and Covenants 121 and was determined to live them in order to qualify for priesthood power to bless his family.

### Words of the Living Prophets

It is my privilege to work with inspired prophets, seers, and revelators on an almost daily basis. If we really want to know the doctrine of the priesthood, we have a reliable and God-given living resource: prophets, seers, and revelators. I testify that they are men of God possessing priesthood power by personal righteousness.

In a recent general conference,

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “In our Heavenly Father’s great priesthood-endowed plan, men have the unique responsibility to administer the priesthood, but they are not the priesthood. Men and women have different but equally valued roles. Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman. In other words, in the eternal perspective, both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife.”<sup>11</sup>

I am learning that women’s moral influence is a complementary gift to priesthood power. Speaking to the women in the Church, President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) urged, “We entreat you to minister with your powerful *influence* for good in strengthening our families, our church, and our communities.”<sup>12</sup> In a recent general conference, Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said to the women, “Whether you are single or married, whether you have borne children or not, whether you are old, young, or in between, your moral authority is vital.”<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Elder Ballard remarked, “There is nothing in this world as personal, as nurturing, or as life changing as the *influence* of a righteous woman.”<sup>14</sup>

We have addressed a few of the questions associated with the holy

priesthood of God, but there are undoubtedly others.

### First Obey, Then Understand

I conclude with an experience that has helped me to deal with unanswered questions. A few years ago, my husband and I were invited to a gathering of many experienced Church leaders. A new presiding officer had recently been called, and at the end of the meeting a very difficult and contentious question was asked. Realizing the difficulty of the question, my husband and I immediately offered up our sincere prayers to Heavenly Father on behalf of this new leader. As he came to the pulpit to respond to the question, I witnessed a change in his countenance as he stood majestically, squared his shoulders, and spoke with the power of the Lord.

His response was something like this: “Brother, I do not know the answer to your question. But I will tell you what I do know. I know that God is our Eternal Father. I know that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of the world. I know that Joseph Smith saw God the Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and was the instrument through which the power of the priesthood was restored to the earth. I know the Book of Mormon is true and contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I know we have a living prophet today who speaks for the Lord to bless our lives. No, I do not know the answer to your question,

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but these things I know. The rest I take on faith. I try to live this simple statement of faith I learned years ago from Marjorie Hinckley, wife of President Gordon B. Hinckley, who said, ‘First I obey, then I understand.’”

The priesthood of God is a sacred trust given to bless men, women, and children so we can return as families to live eternally together in God’s presence. Righteousness is the qualifier for each of us to invite priesthood power into our lives. May this doctrine distill upon our souls and draw us closer to Him whose Church and priesthood power and authority this is. ■

*From an address given for Women’s Conference at Brigham Young University on May 2, 2013.*

#### NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Power of the Priesthood in the Family” (worldwide leadership training meeting); *wwlt.lds.org*.
2. David A. Bednar, “The Powers of Heaven,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 48; emphasis added.
3. Robert D. Hales, “Blessings of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 32.

4. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Relief Society and the Church,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 36; emphasis added.
5. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Nurturing Marriage,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2006, 37.
7. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 2.1.2.
8. “Priesthood Keys,” *New Era*, May 2012, 38.
9. *Handbook 2*, 2.1.1.
10. Guide to the Scriptures, “Temple, House of the Lord”; *scriptures.lds.org*.
11. M. Russell Ballard, “This Is My Work and Glory,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 19.
12. *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 157; emphasis added.
13. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Moral Force of Women,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 30.
14. *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 156; emphasis added.

The following web page teaches key ideas about the priesthood and could be helpful in home evening, Sunday lessons, or missionary work: [lds.org/go/b614000](https://www.lds.org/go/b614000).