



**By Elder Dallin H. Oaks**  
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

# Healing the Sick

*We have this priesthood power, and we should all be prepared to use it properly.*

In these times of worldwide turmoil, more and more persons of faith are turning to the Lord for blessings of comfort and healing. I wish to speak to this audience of priesthood holders about healing the sick—by medical science, by prayers of faith, and by priesthood blessings.

## I.

Latter-day Saints believe in applying the best available scientific knowledge and techniques. We use nutrition, exercise, and other practices to preserve health, and we enlist the help of healing practitioners, such as physicians and surgeons, to restore health.

The use of medical science is not at odds with our prayers of faith and our reliance on priesthood blessings. When a person requested a priesthood blessing, Brigham Young would ask, “Have you used any remedies?” To those who said no because “we wish the Elders to lay hands upon us, and we have faith that we shall be healed,” President Young replied: “That is very inconsistent according to my faith. If we are sick, and ask the Lord to heal us, and to do all for us that is necessary to be done, according to my understanding of the Gospel of salvation, I might as well ask the Lord to cause my wheat

and corn to grow, without my plowing the ground and casting in the seed. It appears consistent to me to apply every remedy that comes within the range of my knowledge, and [then] to ask my Father in Heaven . . . to sanctify that application to the healing of my body.”<sup>1</sup>

Of course we don’t wait until all other methods are exhausted before we pray in faith or give priesthood blessings for healing. In emergencies, prayers and blessings come first. Most often we pursue all efforts simultaneously. This follows the scriptural

teachings that we should “pray always” (D&C 90:24) and that all things should be done in wisdom and order.<sup>2</sup>

## II.

We know that the prayer of faith, uttered alone or in our homes or places of worship, can be effective to heal the sick. Many scriptures refer to the power of faith in the healing of an individual. The Apostle James taught that we should “pray one for another, that ye may be healed,” adding, “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). When the woman who touched Jesus was healed, He told her, “Thy faith hath made thee whole” (Matthew 9:22).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Book of Mormon teaches that the Lord “worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men” (Moroni 10:7).

A recent nationwide survey found that nearly 8 in 10 Americans “believe that miracles still occur today as [they did] in ancient times.” A third of those surveyed said they had “experienced or witnessed a divine healing.”<sup>4</sup> Many Latter-day Saints have experienced the



power of faith in healing the sick. We also hear examples of this among people of faith in other churches. A Texas newspaperman described such a miracle. When a five-year-old girl breathed with difficulty and became feverish, her parents rushed her to the hospital. By the time she arrived there, her kidneys and lungs had shut down, her fever was 107 degrees, and her body was bright red and covered with purple lesions. The doctors said she was dying of toxic shock syndrome, cause unknown. As word spread to family and friends, God-fearing people began praying for her, and a special prayer service was held in their Protestant congregation in Waco, Texas. Miraculously, she suddenly returned from the brink of death and was released from the hospital in a little over a week. Her grandfather wrote, "She is living proof that God does answer prayers and work miracles."<sup>5</sup>

Truly, as the Book of Mormon teaches, God "manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles . . . among the children of men according to their faith" (2 Nephi 26:13).

### III.

For this audience—adults who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood and

young men who will soon receive this power—I will concentrate my remarks on healing blessings involving the power of the priesthood. We have this priesthood power, and we should all be prepared to use it properly. Current increases in natural disasters and financial challenges show that we will need this power even more in the future than in the past.

Many scriptures teach that the servants of the Lord "shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18).<sup>6</sup> Miracles happen when the authority of the priesthood is used to bless the sick. I have experienced these miracles. As a boy and as a man I have seen healings as miraculous as any recorded in the scriptures, and so have many of you.

There are five parts to the use of priesthood authority to bless the sick: (1) the anointing, (2) the sealing of the anointing, (3) faith, (4) the words of the blessing, and (5) the will of the Lord.

#### Anointing

The Old Testament frequently mentions anointing with oil as part of a blessing conferred by priesthood authority.<sup>7</sup> Anointings were declared to be for sanctification<sup>8</sup> and perhaps can also be seen as symbolic of the blessing to be poured out from heaven

as a result of this sacred act.

In the New Testament we read that Jesus's Apostles "anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:13). The book of James teaches the role of anointing in connection with the other elements in a healing blessing by priesthood authority:

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:14–15).

#### Sealing the Anointing

When someone has been anointed by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the anointing is sealed by that same authority. To seal something means to affirm it, to make it binding for its intended purpose. When elders anoint a sick person and seal the anointing, they open the windows of heaven for the Lord to pour forth the blessing He wills for the person afflicted.

President Brigham Young taught: "When I lay hands on the sick, I expect the healing power and influence of God to pass through me to the patient, and the disease to give way. . . . When we are prepared, when we are holy vessels before the Lord, a stream of power from the Almighty can pass through the tabernacle of the administrator to the system of the patient, and the sick are made whole."<sup>9</sup>

Although we know of many cases where persons blessed by priesthood authority have been healed, we rarely refer to these healings in public meetings because modern revelation cautions us not to "boast [ourselves] of these things, neither speak them before the world; for these things are given unto you for your profit and for salvation" (D&C 84:73).





## Faith

Faith is essential for healing by the powers of heaven. The Book of Mormon even teaches that “if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them” (Ether 12:12).<sup>10</sup> In a notable talk on administering to the sick, President Spencer W. Kimball said: “The need of faith is often underestimated. The ill one and the family often seem to depend wholly on the power of the priesthood and the gift of healing that they hope the administering brethren may have, whereas the greater responsibility is with him who is blessed. . . . The major element is the faith of the individual when that person is conscious and accountable. ‘Thy faith hath made thee whole’ [Matthew 9:22] was repeated so often by the Master that it almost became a chorus.”<sup>11</sup>

President Kimball even suggested that “too frequent administrations may be an indication of lack of faith or of the ill one trying to pass the responsibility for faith development to the elders rather than self.” He told about a faithful sister who received a priesthood blessing. When asked the next day if she wished to be administered

to again, she replied: “No, I have been anointed and administered to. The ordinance has been performed. It is up to me now to claim my blessing through my faith.”<sup>12</sup>

## Words of Blessing

Another part of a priesthood blessing is the words of blessing spoken by the elder after he seals the anointing. These words can be very important, but their content is not essential and they are not recorded on the records of the Church. In some priesthood blessings—like a patriarchal blessing—the words spoken are the essence of the blessing. But in a healing blessing it is the other parts of the blessing—the anointing, the sealing, faith, and the will of the Lord—that are the essential elements.

Ideally, the elder who officiates will be so in tune with the Spirit of the Lord that he will know and declare the will of the Lord in the words of the blessing. Brigham Young taught priesthood holders, “It is your privilege and duty to live so that you know when the word of the Lord is spoken to you and when the mind of the Lord is revealed to you.”<sup>13</sup> When that

happens, the spoken blessing is fulfilled literally and miraculously. On some choice occasions I have experienced that certainty of inspiration in a healing blessing and have known that what I was saying was the will of the Lord. However, like most who officiate in healing blessings, I have often struggled with uncertainty on the words I should say. For a variety of causes, every elder experiences increases and decreases in his level of sensitivity to the promptings of the Spirit. Every elder who gives a blessing is subject to influence by what he desires for the person afflicted. Each of these and other mortal imperfections can influence the words we speak.

Fortunately, the words spoken in a healing blessing are not essential to its healing effect. If faith is sufficient and if the Lord wills it, the afflicted person will be healed or blessed whether the officiator speaks those words or not. Conversely, if the officiator yields to personal desire or inexperience and gives commands or words of blessing in excess of what the Lord chooses to bestow according to the faith of the individual, those words will not be fulfilled. Consequently, brethren, no



elder should ever hesitate to participate in a healing blessing because of fear that he will not know what to say. The words spoken in a healing blessing can edify and energize the faith of those who hear them, but the effect of the blessing is dependent upon faith and the Lord's will, not upon the words spoken by the elder who officiated.

#### Will of the Lord

Young men and older men, please take special note of what I will say now. As we exercise the undoubted power of the priesthood of God and as we treasure His promise that He will hear and answer the prayer of faith, we must always remember that faith and the healing power of the priesthood cannot produce a result contrary to the will of Him whose priesthood it is. This principle is taught in the revelation directing that the elders of the Church shall lay their hands upon the sick. The Lord's promise is that "he that hath faith in me to be healed, *and is not appointed unto death*, shall be healed" (D&C 42:48; emphasis added). Similarly, in another modern revelation the Lord declares

that when one "asketh according to the will of God . . . it is done even as he asketh" (D&C 46:30).<sup>14</sup>

From all of this we learn that even the servants of the Lord, exercising His divine power in a circumstance where there is sufficient faith to be healed, cannot give a priesthood blessing that will cause a person to be healed if that healing is not the will of the Lord.

As children of God, knowing of His great love and His ultimate knowledge of what is best for our eternal welfare, we trust in Him. The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and faith means trust. I felt that trust in a talk my cousin gave at the funeral of a teenage girl who had died of a serious illness. He spoke these words, which first astonished me and then edified me: "I know it was the will of the Lord that she die. She had good medical care. She was given priesthood blessings. Her name was on the prayer roll in the temple. She was the subject of hundreds of prayers for her restoration to health. And I know that there is enough faith in this family that she would have been healed unless it was the will of the Lord to take her home at this time."

I felt that same trust in the words of the father of another choice girl whose life was taken by cancer in her teen years. He declared, "Our family's faith is in Jesus Christ and is not dependent on outcomes." Those teachings ring true to me. We do all that we can for the healing of a loved one, and then we trust in the Lord for the outcome.

I testify of the power of the priesthood of God, of the power of the prayer of faith, and of the truth of these principles. Most of all, I testify of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose servants we are, whose Resurrection gives us the assurance of immortality, and whose Atonement gives us the opportunity for eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 163.
2. See Mosiah 4:27.
3. See also Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43.
4. *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant* (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, June 2008), 34, 54, <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports#>.
5. See Steve Blow, "Sometimes, 'Miracles' Are Just That," *Dallas Morning News*, Jan. 30, 2000, 31A.
6. See also Matthew 9:18; Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32–35; 16:18; Luke 4:40; Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8; Doctrine and Covenants 42:44, 48; 66:9.
7. See, for example, Exodus 28:41; 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13; 2 Samuel 5:3.
8. See Leviticus 8:10–12.
9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 252; see also Russell M. Nelson, "Neither Trust in the Arm of Flesh," *Liabona*, Mar. 2010, 40; *Ensign*, Mar. 2010, 24; *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 474.
10. See also 1 Nephi 7:12; Doctrine and Covenants 35:9.
11. "President Kimball Speaks Out on Administration to the Sick," *Tambuli*, Aug. 1982, 36–37; *New Era*, Oct. 1981, 47.
12. *Tambuli*, Aug. 1982, 36; *New Era*, Oct. 1981, 46–47.
13. *Teachings: Brigham Young*, 68.
14. See also 1 John 5:14; Helaman 10:5.