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Where Are the Keys and Authority of the Priesthood?

Priesthood authority and keys start the engine, open the gates of heaven, facilitate heavenly power, and pave the covenant pathway back to our Heavenly Father.

As the winter afternoon sun slid behind the expansive snow-covered ski hill, the freezing mountain air sharply bit our cheeks and noses, acting almost like a stern usher instructing us to find our cars and trucks in the ski resort parking lot. There in our comfortable cars, heaters would soon warm cold fingers and toes. The sound of the frozen snow crunching with each step we took confirmed that this was extreme cold.

Our family had enjoyed a fun-filled day on the ski slopes, which was now coming to a frosty close. Arriving at the car, I reached in my coat pocket for the keys and then another pocket and another. “Where are the keys?” Everyone was anxiously waiting on the keys! The car battery was charged, and all the systems—including the heater—were ready to go, but without the keys, locked doors would deny entrance; without the keys, the engine would not provide power to the vehicle.

At the time, our primary focus was on how we were going to get into the car and get warm, but I couldn’t help but think—even then—there just might be a lesson here. Without keys, this wonderful miracle of engineering was little more than plastic and metal. Even though the car had great potential,

without keys, it could not perform its intended function.

The more I reflect on this experience, the more profound this analogy has become to me. I marvel at Heavenly Father’s love for His children. I stand in wonder at the heavenly visitation and the grand visions of eternity God bestowed upon Joseph Smith. And in particular, my heart is filled with overwhelming gratitude for the restoration of priesthood authority and priesthood keys. Without this restoration, we would be locked out from the vehicle necessary to transport us on our journey home to loving heavenly parents. The performance of every ordinance of salvation comprising our covenant pathway back to the presence of our Father in Heaven requires appropriate governance through priesthood keys.

In May of 1829, John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, conferred upon them the Aaronic Priesthood, and bestowed upon them the keys attendant to that priesthood. Soon thereafter, Peter, James, and John conferred upon them the Melchizedek Priesthood keys.¹





Nearly seven years later on a Sunday in the Kirtland Temple, just one week following its dedication, “the Lord Jehovah appears in glory” to Joseph and Oliver, an event followed by the appearance of Moses, Elias, and Elijah, who committed “their keys and dispensations.”² The restored priesthood authority and these keys had been lost for centuries. In the same way that our family was locked out of the car, resulting from lost car keys, so too had all of Heavenly Father’s children been locked out from the saving ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ—until a divine restoration was effected by these heavenly messengers. Never, ever again do we have to question, “Where are the keys?”

On a beautiful fall day last year, I visited the peaceful forest located in northeastern Pennsylvania known in scripture as Harmony, where John

the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and restored the Aaronic Priesthood. I also stood on the banks of the Susquehanna River where Joseph and Oliver, endowed with authority and keys, were baptized. Near this same river, Peter, James, and John appeared and restored the Melchizedek Priesthood and its attendant keys.³

These sites, as well as the reconstructed first home of Joseph and Emma, where most of the Book of Mormon was translated; the nearby home of Emma’s parents; and a visitors’ center incorporated into a new meetinghouse, comprise the new Priesthood Restoration Site, dedicated by President Russell M. Nelson in September of last year. There, I felt the power and reality of the heavenly events which took place on that sacred ground. That experience led me to ponder, study, and pray about priesthood authority

and priesthood keys, which impressed me with a desire to share with the young men and young women of the Church how priesthood authority and restored keys can bless them.

First, an understanding of these terms may be helpful. The priesthood, or priesthood authority, has been defined as “the power and authority of God”⁴ and “the consummate power on this earth.”⁵ Priesthood keys are defined for our understanding as well: “Priesthood keys are the authority God has given to priesthood leaders to direct, control, and govern the use of His priesthood on earth.”⁶ Priesthood keys control the exercise of priesthood authority. Ordinances that create a record in the Church require keys and cannot be done without authorization. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught that “ultimately, all keys of the priesthood are held by the Lord Jesus Christ, whose priesthood it is. He is the one who determines what keys are delegated to mortals and how those keys will be used.”⁷

Now, for you young men and young women, I have considered three ways that you can “find the keys,” or use priesthood keys and authority to bless your life and the lives of others.

The First Is to Prepare for Missionary Service

My young brothers and sisters, you may not realize it, but the keys of the gathering of Israel, restored by Moses, enable missionary work in our dispensation. Consider the full-time missionary force of approximately 75,000 laboring in the field under the direction of these keys. With this in mind, remember it is never too early for you to prepare for missionary service. In *For the Strength of Youth*, we read, “Young men of the Aaronic Priesthood, . . . work diligently to prepare yourself

to represent the Lord as a missionary.”⁸ Young women can prepare also, but you “are not under the same mandate to serve.”⁹ All of your preparation, however, whether you serve as a full-time missionary or not, will accrue lifelong benefits to you as a member missionary.

The Second Way to “Find the Keys” Is to Attend the Temple

Sealing keys, restored by the Old Testament prophet Elijah, enable ordinances to take place in holy temples. Ordinances performed in these temples enable individuals and families to return to the presence of our heavenly parents.

We encourage you young men and young women to research and find the names of your ancestors and perform proxy baptisms for them in the temple. We note that this is already taking place in significant and unprecedented numbers throughout the world! Baptistries in many temples are filled with young men and young women early in the morning and into the night. Keys are turned that allow families to be bound together as sacred ordinances are performed in these temples.

Can you see the relationship between priesthood keys and blessings? As you engage in this work, I think you will find that the Lord is in its details. An experience demonstrates this. I recently learned of a mother who regularly escorted her children to the temple to perform proxy baptisms. On this particular day, as this family completed their baptisms and were leaving the temple, a man entered the baptistry area with a large batch of his own family names. Realizing there was no one remaining in the baptistry to assist with these family names, a temple worker caught the departing family

and asked the children if they would consider reentering and changing once again to assist with these baptisms. They willingly agreed and went back in. As the children were baptized, their mother, listening, began to recognize the names and soon, to the amazement of all, realized the man’s batch of family names were deceased ancestors of her family as well. A sweet, tender mercy for them.

Two weeks ago the Provo City Center Temple was dedicated as the 150th operating temple of the Church worldwide. We note that when President Thomas S. Monson was sustained as an Apostle in 1963, there were 12 operating temples in the Church. Temples are getting closer and closer to you. However, for those of

you who live where distance or circumstances do not allow regular temple attendance, you should always keep yourself worthy to attend. You can do important work outside of temples as you research and submit your family names.

Finally, Number Three: Go Forward with Faith

The Old Testament prophet Abraham received a great blessing from the Lord in his dispensation, sometimes referred to as the Abrahamic covenant. Thousands of years later, the blessings of the dispensation of the gospel to Abraham were restored. This occurred when the prophet Elias appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple.





Through this restoration, each of you has access to the great blessings promised to Abraham. These blessings can be yours if you remain faithful and live worthy. In the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*, you are given some very practical instruction about how to “go forward with faith.” I summarize some of that counsel: “To help you become all that the Lord wants you to become, kneel each morning and night in prayer to your Father in Heaven. . . . Study the scriptures each day and apply what you read to your life. . . . Strive each day to be obedient. . . . In all circumstances, follow the teachings of the prophets. . . . Be humble and willing to listen to the Holy Ghost.”

This counsel is followed by a promise leading to promises that come through the blessings of Abraham: “As you do these things, the Lord will make much more out of your life than you can by yourself. He will increase your opportunities, expand your vision, and strengthen you. He will give you the help you need to meet your trials and challenges. You will gain a stronger testimony and find true joy as you come to know your Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, and feel Their love for you.”¹⁰

To summarize: prepare for missionary service, attend the temple, and go forward with faith.

Conclusion

Let’s now end where we began, stranded in the frigid parking lot asking, “Where are the keys?” By the way, later that evening I did miraculously find the keys that had fallen out of my pocket on the mountain. The Lord has shown us that He will not leave us standing in the bitter cold without keys or authority to lead us safely home to Him.

If you are like me, you may often find yourself in daily life asking, “Where are the keys” to the car, the office, the house or apartment? When this happens to me, I can’t help but smile inside, for as I am looking for the keys, I find myself reflecting on restored priesthood keys and on President Thomas S. Monson, whom we sustain “as prophet, seer, and revelator”¹¹ and as the only person on earth who possesses and is authorized to exercise all priesthood keys. Yes, the keys are safely in the possession of prophets, seers, and revelators. They are conferred, delegated, and assigned to others in accordance with the

Lord’s will, under the direction of the President of the Church.

I testify that priesthood authority and priesthood keys start the engine, open the gates of heaven, facilitate heavenly power, and pave the covenant pathway back to our loving Heavenly Father.

I pray that you, the rising generation of young men and young women, will “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ,”¹² that you may understand that it is your sacred privilege to act under the direction of those who hold the priesthood keys that will unlock blessings, gifts, and powers of heaven for you.

I testify of God the Father; of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ; of the Holy Ghost; and of the Restoration of the gospel in these the latter days, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Joseph Smith—History 1:68–72.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 110, section summary.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:20.
4. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), page 8.
5. Boyd K. Packer, “Priesthood Power in the Home” (worldwide leadership training meeting, Feb. 2012), [lds.org/broadcasts](https://www.lds.org/broadcasts); see also James E. Faust, “Power of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 41–43.
6. *Handbook 2*, 2.1.1.
7. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2014, 50.
8. *For the Strength of Youth* (booklet, 2011), 43.
9. Thomas S. Monson, “Welcome to Conference,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 5.
10. *For the Strength of Youth*, 42–43.
11. See Officers Sustained forms read at annual ward and stake conferences.
12. 2 Nephi 31:20.



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