

What I hope we will teach our daughters (and sons) about the priesthood

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As a small child, I remember confronting the question of whom I loved more – my father or my mother. Neither of them posed this question to me nor did anyone else, but once I had conceived of the question I was plagued by it for some time. Sometimes I knew I “liked” one of them more than the other; I could even think through which one I might choose to live with if I had to pick or which one I felt safest with, or most responsible for. But even as a very small child I concluded that I could not choose which of my parents I loved more. Perhaps this early experience helps me trust at a level deeper than words that God does not love one of us more than another even though we are very different from one another and from Him. Right now, in all our different personalities and skills and levels of spiritual development, God knows and loves each one of us passionately and personally. He loves each one of us as much as He loves any one of us.

This is an important starting point for me as I approach the topic of what I hope we will teach our daughters and sons about the priesthood. Because such discussions easily to gravitate to concern about the fairness of priesthood ordination in the LDS Church being open to men but not women. This dichotomy seems to represent an injustice for which God or the church owes us an explanation.

Children have a way of saying it like it is. In the book *Children’s Letters to God*, a little girl writes, “Dear God, Are boys better than girls? I know you are one, but try to be fair. Sylvia.” As an individual wrestling with God, as you do, for greater understanding of who God is and how he operates, I can answer Sylvia with conviction of my personal witness that, “No, boys are not better than girls, and yes, God is deeply and ultimately fair.”

Nephi writes, “The Lord God doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world. For he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all unto him. All are privileged, the one like unto the other and he inviteth all to come unto him and partake of his goodness and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female.” [2 Nephi 26:33] With this assumption, I want to want to explore the possibility that God’s distribution of priesthood authority and power might bless both men and women, adults and children, rather than privileging one at the expense of the other.

So let's suppose that you were assigned to teach a Primary class of eleven-year-olds, boys and girls, about the priesthood. Would you just take a minute and write down a simple answer to these three questions: 1-What is priesthood? 2-Who can have the priesthood and how to they get it? 3-How can someone magnify the priesthood and increase in priesthood power? I hope today that we can add somewhat to Primary-level answers to these questions.

So let's start: "What is priesthood?" How many of you would include the word "authority" in your definition of priesthood? How many would include the word "power?" These words show up commonly in descriptions of the priesthood. For example, President Joseph F. Smith described the priesthood as, "The power of God delegated to man by which man can act in the earth for the salvation of the human family." Doctrine & Covenants 107 states further, "The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right of presidency and has power and authority over all the offices in the Church in all the ages of the world to administer in spiritual things." Also, the power and authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood includes the privilege of "receiving the mysteries of the Kingdom, to have the heavens opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn, and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father and Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant." It goes on to say, "The power and authority of the Aaronic Priesthood is to hold keys of ministering of angels and to administer in outward ordinances."

Now I would say, brothers and sisters, that a person would be crazy not to desire such privileges. And this is where it starts to get tricky. Because when we think of priesthood as something that is the prerogative of men, then women are excluded from such power and authority. But if we think of women as also having such power and authority, then what exactly is it that men have that women do not? I've struggled to find a definition of priesthood that clearly distinguishes what it is that men have and women do not. Does priesthood have to do with performing ordinances? Yes, but women perform ordinances in the Temple. Is priesthood about leadership? Yes, but women lead, serve, teach, and operate in most of the capacities that the names of priesthood offices imply, including distributing the food and resources of the Church, which was the role of the Deacons; instructing and visiting Church members – the role of Teachers; officiating in ordinances – the role of Priests and High Priests; serving missions and conducting meetings – the role of Elders; uniting eternal families – the role of Patriarchs; and bearing witness of Christ in all the world – the role of Apostles. Well, maybe priesthood is necessary to preside over mixed-sex groups then. But women not only preside over the mixed-sex children in Primary, but over the mixed-sex adults who lead them and teach them.

I have finally given up trying to define priesthood in a way that distinguishes, unilaterally, what men have that women do not, although, there is something about priesthood that men who hold these priesthood offices have that women do not. But I wonder if it would be more helpful to simply define priesthood as the power and authority given to men and women in God's Church

to administer the affairs of God's Kingdom, perform specific priesthood ordinances, create and unite eternal families, and obtain the blessings of heaven for themselves and others as they act in the earth for the salvation of the human family, as President Smith has stated.

Which takes us to our second question: "Who can hold the priesthood and how do they get it?" Men are given priesthood authority by being ordained to specific offices in the priesthood by the laying on of hands by other priesthood leaders and holders and through the ordinances and covenants of the temple. They may be given specific priesthood duties and keys that authorize them to oversee aspects of the work of the Church and they delegate priesthood authority to others. Women are given priesthood authority to fulfill specific assignments in the Church by the laying on of hands of men who hold Priesthood keys. Women are also endowed with priesthood power in the temple. Women can thus use priesthood authority to oversee and do the work of the Church in the Relief Society and other Church auxiliaries, perform specific priesthood ordinances, bring themselves and others into the presence of God and act in the earth for the salvation of the human family. The specific roles and responsibilities men and women assume differ somewhat, but both men and women can be given priesthood authority, they exercise priesthood power, they perform Priesthood ordinances, they are endowed, clothed, or vested with priestly identities, and they enter the Holy Order of the Son of God.

Let's consider the evidence for each of these five assertions one at a time. *One:* Women are given priesthood authority: Elder Dallin H. Oaks says, "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,"

(And that's a useful distinction for me, by the way. He's not just talking about women in the Relief Society or as temple ordinance workers, but he's including the young woman who lines up with her peers at 6 am at the door of the Temple nearest me, to perform, with the approval and authority of her bishop, a priesthood ordinance of baptism and confirmation for the dead – or one who has been set apart to preside over a youth class, or asked to bake the bread for the sacrament as is done in my ward.)

"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. Whoever functions in an office or calling received from one who holds priesthood keys exercises priesthood authority in performing her or his assigned duties."

Apparently the endowment also conveys specific priesthood authority of some kind to women as well as to men. Elder M. Russell Ballard, speaking to the sisters of the Church at last year's BYU

Women's Conference, says, "Like faithful sisters in the past, you need to learn how to use the Priesthood authority with which you have been endowed to obtain every eternal blessing that will be yours." So, women and young women can hold priesthood authority.

Two: Women exercise priesthood power. Elder Ballard again at BYU education week 2014: "When men and women go to the temple they are both endowed with the same power which is priesthood power. Access to the power and the blessings of the Priesthood is available to all of God's children."

Elder Russell M. Nelson at October 2015 General Conference: "The Kingdom of God is not and cannot be complete without women who make sacred covenants and keep them, women who can speak with the power and authority of the God." Women exercise priesthood power.

Three: Women officiate in priesthood ordinances. Women are set apart as temple ordinance workers for a straight-forward purpose – to perform temple ordinances. President Joseph Fielding Smith, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said in a talk to the sisters that Elder Oaks quoted from at General Conference recently, "A sister may have authority given to her to do certain things in the Church that are binding and absolutely necessary for our salvation. Such is the work that our sisters do in the House of the Lord. You sisters who labor in the House of the Lord can lay your hands upon your sisters with divine authority because the Lord recognizes positions which you occupy. It is within the privilege of the sisters of this Church to receive authority and power as queens and priestesses."

On the Church's official website, LDS.org, the Gospel Topics section includes essays that Seminary and Institute teachers have been instructed to learn like the back of their hand. In the article "Joseph Smith's Teachings About Priesthood, Temple, and Women," we read: "Joseph spoke of establishing [among the Relief Society sisters] a 'kingdom of priests.' He had used similar terms earlier when speaking of the relationship of all the Saints to the temple. This 'kingdom of priests' would be comprised of men and women who made Temple covenants.... The priesthood authority exercised by Latter-day Saint women in the temple and elsewhere remains largely unrecognized by people outside the Church and is sometimes misunderstood or overlooked by those within. Latter-day Saints and others often mistakenly equate priesthood with religious office and the men who hold it, which obscures the broader Latter-day concept of priesthood." Women officiate in priesthood ordinances.

Four: In the temple women are endowed, clothed, or vested with priesthood identities. Any individual who attends temple thoughtfully will notice the priesthood language used again and again in initiating, clothing, and instructing both women and men to prepare them to officiate in the ordinances of the temple – to minister in the work of angels and to enter God's presence. The direct descendants of Aaron, the only legitimate heirs to the priesthood in Moses' day, were

consecrated to or vested with their priestly office upon reaching adulthood through special ceremonies and sacrifices described in the Bible dictionary as follows: 1) They were washed at the door at the door of the Tabernacle. 2) They were clothed with the priestly garments, coats, girdles, and turbans. 3) They were anointed with holy oil. They then offered three sacrifices: a sin offering to put away their sin, a burnt offering to indicate the full and complete surrender of themselves to God, and a peace or consecration offering. The priests' hands were filled with parts of these sacrifices. These sacrificial offerings, the gifts that hence forward they would offer on behalf of the people, were thus committed to them. Women are initiated into, endowed with, clothed with, or vested with priestly identities in the temple.

And *Five*: In the temples we enter into the Holy Order of the Son of God. The Melchizedek Priesthood was originally known as the *Holy Priesthood, After the Order of the Son of God*. What is this order "after" which the High Priesthood is named and structured? Wikipedia tells us that "religious orders exist in many of the world's religions and that a religious order is a community of people who live in some way set apart from society in accordance with their specific religious devotion usually characterized by the principles of its founder's religious practice." Thus, the Order of the Son of God, would be a community of people set apart and organized according to the principles and religious practices of Christianity's founder, who is Jesus Christ. That is why it's not called the Order of St. Luke or the Order of St. Joseph or the Order of the Jesuits, but The Order of the Son of God. The Holy Priesthood is "after" this order.

In President Ezra Taft Benson's stunning article, "What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple," the title of which inspired the title of my remarks today we read more about this Order. I am quoting him at length: "When our Heavenly Father placed Adam and Eve on this earth, He did so with the purpose in mind of teaching them how to regain his presence. Adam and his posterity were commanded by God to be baptized, to receive the Holy Ghost and to enter into the Order of the Son of God. To enter into the Order of the Son of God is the equivalent today of entering in to the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood, which is only received in the House of the Lord. Because Adam and Eve had complied with these requirements, (and those requirements again: to be baptized, to receive the Holy Ghost to enter into the Order of the Son of God) God said to each of them, 'Thou art after the Order of Him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity.'"

President Benson then refers to Adam gathering his righteous posterity in the Valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman to give them his last blessing and then says, "The Prophet Joseph Smith said that Adam blessed his posterity because he wanted to bring them into the presence of God." How did Adam bring his descendants into the presence of the Lord? By entering into the Priesthood Order of God. Today we would say, 'They went to the House of the Lord and received their blessings.' The Order of Priesthood spoken of in the scriptures is sometimes referred to as the Patriarchal Order because it came down from father to son." Still quoting, "But this order is otherwise

described in modern revelation as an order of family government where a man and woman enter into a covenant with God just as did Adam and Eve, to be sealed for eternity, to have posterity, and to do the will and work of God throughout their mortality. Adam followed this order and brought his posterity into the presence of God. Moses taught this Order of Priesthood to his people and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God, but they hardened their hearts and could not endure His presence. The Lord further instructed Moses, 'I will take away the Priesthood out of their midst, therefore, my Holy Order and the ordinances thereof.' My purpose in citing this background is to illustrate that this Order of Priesthood has been on the earth since the beginning and it is the only means by which we can one day see the face of God and live. Even though the Aaronic Priesthood and Melchizedek Priesthood have been restored to the earth, the Lord urged the Saints to build a Temple to receive the keys by which this Order of Priesthood could be administered on the earth again, even the fullness of the Priesthood."

I hope you've noted, as I have, that President Benson specifically and ubiquitously refers to both men and women, Adam and Eve, in his description of the Holy Order of the Son of God. "The ordinances and covenants of the temple guide the participation then of both men and women in this Holy Order, culminating in eternal marriage."

Children, male or female, born to such a union are born in this covenant. And they become legal heirs to all the priesthood blessings, privileges, and responsibilities of that covenant just as the sons of Aaron did in his day. This is contingent, as it was in that period of time, on their later being vested with those priestly identities in the temple. This makes such a birth, to a child born in the covenant, equivalent to a priesthood ordinance for it bestows upon the covenant woman's posterity a birthright that is both essential and otherwise attainable only through the sealing power of the priesthood.

A child not so born can turn to someone with this sealing power to receive this blessing and birthright through a priesthood ordinance in the temple. But I will leave it to you to decide which of these experiences or ordinances is the real thing and which is done in the generosity of God to redeem and make up for the absence of the real thing. Giving birth may be one way that covenant women participate in the priesthood power of binding on earth what shall be bound in heaven, acting in the earth for the salvation of the human family. So, women can hold priesthood authority, act with priesthood power, perform priesthood ordinances, be vested with priestly identities, and enter the Holy Order of the Son of God which can, alone, bring us back into God's presence.

We've looked at what priesthood is, who can have it, and how they can get it. Now let's consider a final question: How can someone magnify the priesthood and increase in priesthood power?

During a period of great sickness in the Church, Joseph Smith “rebuked the Elders who would continue to lay hands on the sick without the power to heal them.” Said he, “It is time that such things ended. Let the Elders either obtain the power of God to heal the sick or let them cease to minister the forms without the power.” That’s from Parley P. Pratt.

What is priesthood power? How does a person grow in their ability to exercise it? I’d like to suggest three form of priesthood power we are all invited to develop: first, the power to perform miracles; second, the power of influence; third, the power to enter God’s presence.

The story just cited illustrates the first priesthood power – calling down the powers of heaven to perform miracles and exercise the gifts of the Spirit. We clearly increase in such powers by personal revelation and devotion to the Lord’s work. But a story from President Russell M. Nelson suggests another aspect of how we might develop this priesthood power through practice and learning from failure. President Nelson tells of a time in the early days of innovative open-heart surgery when as a doctor he was asked to operate on a very ill child with congenital heart disease. One child in this family had already died from this disease before these surgery techniques were available. A second child in this same family had also died of the disease while on the operating table under Dr. Nelson’s hand. Now, the family brought this third child to him for surgery. I can only begin to imagine how fervently he must have prayed and studied and hoped for the gift and power of healing for this little girl and her mourning family. He performed the operation, it appeared to be successful, but a few hours later this third child also died. Elder Nelson writes, “I went home grief stricken. I threw myself upon our living room floor and cried all night long. Danel, my wife, stayed by my side listening as I repeatedly declared that I would never perform another heart operation. Then around five in the morning Danel looked at me and lovingly asked, ‘Are you finished crying? Then get dressed, go back to the lab, go to work. You need to learn more. If you quit now, others will have to painfully learn what you already know.’”

This is not just a good story about the power and influence of a righteous woman, although it that, but it is a good story about the way we feel when we’re trying to do new things, hard things, and when we fail. It’s a story about how we grow in spiritual power by trying to solve problems we don’t know how to solve, trying to understand doctrine that’s not been understood, and take on roles that we are not sure how to assume, and bring life to spiritual gifts that when mishandled, can also bring spiritual death. We, with pioneers of all kinds must be willing to re-write the old adage we learned from our mothers – that if a thing is worth doing, it’s worth doing well. Brothers and sister, if a thing is worth doing, it’s worth doing badly while we learn to do it better, and rather than not doing it at all. We will have to learn to get up and try again no matter how serious our errors, if we are to get better at important, even spiritually crucial things, we currently do not know about or how to do.

Even Joseph Smith had to learn how to acquire the spiritual healing power he later became so proficient at. Five years before he personally performed those many healing miracles that caused him to chastise the Elders from ministering the forms without the power, he and Hyrum fell violently ill with the cholera at Zion's Camp, cholera to which many succumbed. He reports, "Soon after arriving at the point of destination the cholera broke out among us and the brethren were so violently attacked that it seemed impossible to render them any assistance. They immediately sent for Hyrum and me to lay hands on them. But when we laid our hands upon them, the disease instantly fastened itself upon us and in a few minutes we were in awful distress." Joseph and Hyrum's prayers in administering to each other did not help. Hyrum cried out, "Joseph! What shall we do? Must we be cut off from the face of the earth by this horrid curse?" Joseph replied, "Let us get down upon our knees and pray to God to remove the cramp and other distress and restore us to health that we may return to our families." "I cried heartily unto God, but the heavens seem sealed against us and every power that could render us any assistance shut within its gates."

The universe was still. They continued to pray and finally Hyrum exclaimed, "I have had an open vision in which I saw Mother on her knees under an apple tree praying for us! And she is even now asking God in tears to spare our lives. The Spirit testifies to me that her prayers, and ours, shall be heard." And thus they were healed.

Joseph declared on his return, "Mother, how often have your prayers been a means of assisting us when the shadows of death encompassed us." Apparently Joseph and Hyrum's mother is one whose faith and hope tutored them in obtaining the priesthood power Joseph later exercised with such confidence, and chastised others for not having.

A second aspect of priesthood power that we can develop and learn is the power of influence upon other people. Doctrine & Covenants 121 tutors us in the principles by which we increase in this priesthood power. It says, "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness and by love unfeigned, by kindness and pure knowledge which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy and without guile."

I don't know how to pronounce this man's name – Dr. Dacher Keltner, a psychology professor at Berkeley, who studies how the power of influence is gained and lost. In his book *The Power Paradox*, recently released, Keltner cites research indicating that those who rise to power in many settings are those who were enthusiastic and bold, kind and appreciative, focused and articulate about the task at hand, calm during times of stress, open to others' perspectives, assertive, but humble, and who advance the greater good. The highest performing teams are led by high-empathy individuals who ask questions, actively listen, and empathize with others' emotions, who tactfully use silence to encourage others to speak, who avoid interrupting, who

invite less powerful people to express opinions, and who consciously and frequently express gratitude. The most influential people are good story-tellers who help create a cohesive narrative about projects, goals and lessons from failure and success. Keltner notes that these skills and the team performance they facilitate rise in groups as the proportion of women rises at the table. Once people have attained power, however, they tend to shift their attention away from others to focus on their own desires and interests. The “paradox of power” is that the skills that bring people to power often decline once power is attained. Keltner finds that once we gain power we tend to lose empathy for others, we become more self-serving, impulsive, disrespectful and impolite. Our stories shift to tales of our own exceptional worth, and we are deserving of the good things we have. We decline in our ability to read and be moved by others’ emotions. We are more impressed and inspired by our own stories than by hearing from others. (And these are all specific research conclusions.) In two studies, those who drove the most expensive cars were almost four times more likely to cut in front of other drivers at a four-way stop than those driving a cheaper older-model car. And while the poorest drivers never once cut in front of pedestrians at a crosswalk, the richer drivers did so forty-six percent of the time. Even people artificially and temporarily assigned to power, in a social science experiment, were more likely to grab the last cookie and talk with their mouth full, impulsively ignoring social politeness. Contrary to popular opinion, his research found that the more powerful and well-off are more likely to shop-lift than the poor. Those primed to feel powerful are more likely to endorse not paying taxes, speeding, or over-reporting travel expenses.

The Lord is prophetic about these findings in Section 121 which states, “It is the nature and disposition of almost all men” — and we could add women — “as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, to immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion... to cover our sins, gratify our pride, our vain ambition... to persecute the saints, and to fight against God.”

By contrast, “the poor and relatively powerless report feeling more frequent and intense compassion for others throughout their day. And they have a much easier time taking the perspective of other people in something as simple as drawing an ‘E’ on your forehead so someone else could read it, something the more powerful failed at more than three times as commonly.”

In a nutshell, there are lessons in Godliness to be learned and brought to the table that come from both positive experience with power and experiences of powerlessness. Although people experiencing powerlessness are likely to seem reserved, hesitant, inhibited, or even disengaged because they are much more attuned to social threat, they have often been tutored in the empathy that the powerful can quickly lose. Individually and as a Church collective we need experience from both power and powerlessness in order to become, alongside Him whose Order we enter, High Priests who can be touched with the feeling of others’ powerlessness. Both having priesthood offices that are lower than others on the hierarchy, and not having priesthood office at

all, can tutor men and women in the skills of gaining power regardless of position, and the deeper empathy that can come with experiencing powerlessness.

Young powerless children may especially benefit from having mothers and fathers who have been tutored in the empathy- enhancing perspectives of powerlessness. The Church and society at large benefit when people familiar with the frustrations, losses, threats, and despairs of powerlessness, bring their perspectives on it and their capacities for empathy and compassion to the tables of power. We are poised as women to make such a contribution as we learn the skills of righteous influence and step up with enthusiasm, boldness, openness, kindness, generosity, and humility to use the good power we are increasingly in a position to claim. These are the very qualities that increase this third kind of power, power to reform our character, sanctify our motives, deepen our compassion, and become more like God so that we can see Him as He is because we are like Him and enter His presence.

So what do I hope we will teach our daughters and sons about the priesthood? The priesthood includes authority and power of God given in different ways to both men and women to act for the salvation of the human family and the creation and exaltation of our individual families – that priesthood power increases in our lives as we learn and practice empathy and love unfeigned as we school ourselves against the lure of unrighteous dominion and as we become filled with charity and gain confidence in the presence of God. As we do, I fully trust that the doctrine of the priesthood will distill upon our souls as the dews from heaven including doctrine we do not fully understand now. The Holy Ghost with all His spiritual power will become our constant companion and our dominion will flow unto us without compulsory means forever and ever. Thank you.

Q&A

Q. If women can exercise the priesthood and share in the priesthood, why not allow them to be ordained into the priesthood in a formal ordinance as men are?

A. I have no idea. That's not my prerogative and it's not the prerogative of anyone else in this room, as far as I know, to make that decision. I believe there may be reasons that the Lord withholds that from women – to teach us things about both priesthood and power that we might not learn if we all shared it equally. I don't know.

Q. Why do men hold callings that women do not? Should this be changed?

A. Perhaps, sometimes it can be. I think there are many things that – I loved the quote today from Matt Grow, the quote about sometimes what the Lord reveals to us depends on the state that we are in, not just the state that the prophet is in.

Q. What do you think we should call the wives of mission presidents?

A. Man, I wish somebody would figure that out! It is just ridiculous that we can't seem to figure out an answer to that, but even as the wife of a mission president, I've never been able to figure out a really good name, but it seems like we ought to find something. A friend of mine says that he thinks we should be called Sister President, but I don't know. I hope someone will find that one and I think people are open to that re-naming if somebody would come up with that.

Q. Do you think that we are having this discussion because, perhaps, we are un-appreciative of the greatest creative power on Earth? The privilege of a woman within her person to call down a spirit son or daughter from God's presence and clothe him or her with a physical body, gestate, birth, and nourish thereafter is a power unmatched. The fact that men exercise some unique priesthood privileges is the only thing that gives some equality to the sexes.

A. I would agree; beautifully said.

Q. Your thoughts on the ordination of men vs. the non-ordination of women.

A. I think I've said all I have to say about that.

Q. What office are women ordained to?

A. They are not.

Q. Is the "ordain women" movement just clueless?

A. I doubt it. I am sure these are thoughtful people. I know they are thoughtful people. Some of them are dear to me, but we just have different opinions about the approach to take.

Q. Why are references to women sparse in all the scriptures?

A. Because that's just the history of the world. References to women are sparse in all the history of the world.

Q. Are changes in teaching or Church policy necessary to help us as men and women to realize the full blessings of the priesthood?

A. Again, out of my pay range. I think that's enough for now. Oh, we've got more.

Q. Joseph Smith was very much involved with the power of the priesthood before he received the priesthood.

A. Yes he was. Yes, this does relate I think.

Thank you very much.

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