

A constant expression of gratitude should be included in all our prayers. Often prayers are given for specific blessings which we, in our incomplete understanding, believe we need. While the Lord does answer prayers according to His will, He certainly must be pleased when we offer humble prayers of gratitude.

Brethren, the next time we pray, instead of presenting the Lord petition after petition for some action in our behalf, give Him thoughtful thanks for all with which He has blessed us.

President Joseph F. Smith has instructed us that "the spirit of gratitude is always pleasant and satisfying because it carries with it a sense of helpfulness to others; it begets love and friendship, and engenders divine influence. Gratitude is said to be the memory of the heart" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 262).

Pioneers' gratitude in spite of difficulty

In October 1879, a group of 237 Latter-day Saints from several small southwestern Utah settlements was called to blaze a new route and colonize what is today known as San Juan County in southeastern Utah. The journey was to have taken six weeks but instead took nearly six months. Their struggles and heroics are well documented, particularly their seemingly impossible task of crossing the Colorado River at a place called Hole-in-the-Rock. Those who have visited this

place marvel that wagons and teams could have been lowered through this narrow crack in the red rock canyon walls to reach the Colorado River far below. Once the Colorado was crossed, however, many other severe tests awaited them on the trail to San Juan County. Tired and worn out, early in April 1880 they faced their final obstacle, Comb Ridge. The Comb is a ridge of solid sandstone forming a steep wall nearly 1,000 feet high.

One hundred and twenty years later, our family climbed Comb Ridge on a bright spring day. The ridge is steep and treacherous. It was difficult to imagine that wagons, teams, men, women, and children could make such an ascent. But beneath our feet were the scars from the wagon wheels, left as evidence of their struggles so long ago. How did they feel after enduring so much? Were they bitter after the many months of toil and privation? Did they criticize their leaders for sending them on such an arduous journey, asking them to give up so much? Our questions were answered as we reached the top of Comb Ridge. There inscribed in the red sandstone so long ago were the words, "We thank Thee, O God."

Brethren, I pray that we might keep our hearts full of thanks and appreciation for what we have and not dwell on what is not ours. As holders of the priesthood, let us adopt an attitude of gratitude in all we do is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Keith K. Hilbig

Your link in the priesthood chain

Within this vast congregation of priesthood bearers assembled here and throughout the world sit several generations—tens of thousands of sons, fathers, grandfathers, even great-grandfathers—all of whom have faith in Christ, seek to keep His commandments, and desire to serve Him.

Some are part of a long tradition of priesthood men stretching back in time. Others are the very first men in their respective families to bear the priesthood of God. But all have the opportunity—and responsibility—either to create or to continue a chain of worthy men who honor the priesthood and render service in the kingdom, thereby linking families to-

gether from generation to generation. It is *your* individual link in that priesthood chain of which I would speak tonight.

In each dispensation faithful men have been given the priesthood to further the Lord's purposes. The scriptures recount the passing of priesthood authority from prophet to prophet, beginning with Adam.

We are figuratively part of that priesthood chain stretching back to the beginnings of the earth. However, each of us is now literally engaged in the critical task of creating our own strong priesthood link so as to be joined with our own forefathers and to our own posterity.

If one fails to obtain or to honor the Melchizedek Priesthood, his link will be missing, and eternal life will be unattainable (see D&C 76:79; 84:41–42)—hence, our great effort as a church to teach the message of the Restoration to all who are willing to listen and to prepare all who are desirous for the blessings of the priesthood and the temple.

Foreordained to hold the priesthood

Our privilege to bear the priesthood of God tonight has its beginnings in our premortal existence. The prophet Alma explained that men ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood on earth have been “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling” (Alma 13:3).

The Lord has long intended you to be a creator or a continuer of the chain of faithful bearers in your priesthood family. It was your faith and wise exercise of free agency—in the premortal existence and here in mortality—which permitted you to receive the holy calling of the priesthood.

The Prophet Joseph Smith stated in 1844, “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 365).

Thus, whether as the first in your family or as the fifth generation to hold the priesthood, we have each come to earth with a personal heritage of faithfulness and foreordination. Such knowledge gives us a firm resolve to always honor the priesthood and thereby to create or continue a multigenerational family in the Church and in the celestial kingdom.

Examples of priesthood service

We often define *priesthood* as the power and authority to act in the name of God upon the earth. But service to our Savior, our family, and our fellowman also defines our priesthood. The Savior intends that we exercise our priesthood primarily for the benefit of others. We cannot bless or baptize ourselves or provide the ordinances of the temple to ourselves. Rather, every priesthood bearer must rely upon others to lovingly exercise their priesthood authority and power to help each of us progress spiritually.

I was able to learn the importance of priesthood service not only by observing my grandfather, father, and brother magnify their callings but also from the brethren in my ward who were priesthood models to me.

When I was a newly ordained teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, my first home teaching companion was Henry Wilkening, a high priest who was nearly 60 years my senior. He was a German immigrant, a shoemaker by trade, small in stature, but an energetic and faithful shepherd to the families assigned to us. I trotted behind him (for he seemed to walk and to climb

stairs much faster than I could) during our monthly visits, which took us into sobering environments new to my sheltered experience. He expected me to present part of each lesson and to make all the appointments, but mostly I listened and watched as he aided brothers and sisters with various spiritual and social, economic and emotional needs previously unknown to me as a 14-year-old.

I began to realize how much good could be done by a single faithful priesthood bearer. I watched Brother Wilkening forging a strong priesthood link for himself through his loving service to those families in need—and to me in my youth.

The many priesthood men I observed while growing up taught me that providing priesthood service to others is not dependent upon a particular title or specific calling or formal position in the kingdom. Rather, the opportunity arises from and is inherent within the fact that one has received the priesthood of God.

President J. Reuben Clark Jr. wisely taught at the April 1951 general conference: "In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 154).

President James E. Faust

Be committed to doing the basics

My beloved brethren of the priesthood of God all over the world, I am pleased to be counted as one of you. This evening I would like to challenge the priesthood of the Church to be more committed in doing those things which build faith, character, and spirituality. These are the routine priesthood obligations we should be doing daily, weekly, monthly—year in and year out. The work

Service strengthens priesthood links

When we serve righteously with all our heart, whatever the responsibility apportioned to us, we are strengthening our priesthood link and connecting it ever more securely to those who have preceded and who will follow us.

I bear solemn testimony of the Savior's divinity and atoning sacrifice and of the restoration of His priesthood which we are privileged to bear—and pray that every son and father participating in this meeting will determine this night to serve the Lord by faithfully honoring the priesthood and firmly connecting his personal link to the priesthood chain which will bind him, his forefathers, and his posterity together throughout eternity. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Thank you, brethren, for those inspirational messages.

Our next speaker will be President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Following his remarks, we shall all sing "Come, O Thou King of Kings." President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will then address us.

of the Church depends upon basics such as paying tithes; taking care of family and priesthood duties; caring for the poor and the needy; having daily prayer, scripture study, and family home evening; home teaching; participation in quorum activity; and attending the temple. If called upon by the President of the Church, we would be ready, able, and willing to do "some great thing," such as working on the Nauvoo temple, but many are not quite so anxious to do some of these basics.