

President Henry B. Eyring

My dear brethren, it is a joy for me to be with you in this worldwide meeting of the priesthood of God. Tonight I will speak of priesthood preparation, both our own and that which we help provide for others.

Preparation in the priesthood

Most of us must wonder to ourselves at times, “Am I prepared for this assignment in the priesthood?” My answer is, “Yes, you have been prepared.” My purpose today is to help you recognize that preparation and draw courage from it.

As you know, the Aaronic Priesthood is designated as a preparatory priesthood. The great majority of Aaronic Priesthood holders are young deacons, teachers, and priests between 12 and 19 years of age.

We may come to think of priesthood preparation as occurring in the Aaronic Priesthood years. But our Heavenly Father has been preparing us since we were taught at His knee in His kingdom before we were born. He is preparing us tonight. And He will continue to prepare us as long as we will let Him.

The purpose of all priesthood preparation, in the premortal life and in this life, is to fit us, and those we serve for Him, for eternal life. Some of the first lessons in the premortal life surely included the plan of salvation, with Jesus Christ and His Atonement at its center. We were not only taught the plan but were in councils where we chose it.

Because a veil of forgetfulness was placed over our minds at birth, we have had to find a way to relearn in this life what we once knew and defended. Part of our preparation in this life has been to find that precious truth so that we can then recommit to it by covenant. That has required faith, humility, and courage on our part as well as help from people who had found the truth and then shared it with us.

It may have been parents, missionaries, or friends. But that help was part of our preparation. Our priesthood preparation always includes others who have already been prepared to offer us the opportunity to accept the gospel and then choose to act by keeping covenants to get them down into our hearts. For us to qualify for eternal life, our service in this life must include working with all our heart, might, mind, and strength to prepare others to return to God with us.

So part of the priesthood preparation we will have in this life will be opportunities to serve and teach others. It may include being teachers in the Church, wise and loving fathers, members of a quorum, and missionaries for the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord will offer the opportunities, but whether we are prepared will depend on us. My intent tonight is to point out some of the crucial choices necessary for priesthood preparation to succeed.

The Lord calls the weak and simple

Good choices both by the person training and the one being trained depend on some understanding of how the Lord prepares His priesthood servants.

First, He calls people, young and old, who may appear to worldly eyes, and even to themselves, to be weak and simple. The Lord can turn those apparent shortcomings into strengths. That will change the way the wise leader chooses whom to train and how to train. And it can change how the priesthood holder responds to the development opportunities he is offered.

Let’s consider some examples. I was an inexperienced priest in a large ward. My bishop called me on the phone one Sunday afternoon. When I answered, he said, “Do you have time to go with me? I need your help.” He explained only that he wanted me to go as his companion to visit a woman I did not know, who was

without food and who needed to learn how to manage her finances better.

Now, I knew that he had two seasoned counselors in his bishopric. Both were mature men of great experience. One counselor was the owner of a large business, who later became a mission president and a General Authority. The other counselor was a prominent judge in the city.

I was the bishop's newly called first assistant in the priests quorum. He knew that I understood little about welfare principles. I knew even less about financial management. I had not yet written a check; I had no bank account; I hadn't even seen a personal budget. Yet, despite my inexperience, I sensed that he was deadly serious when he said, "I need your help."

I have come to understand what that inspired bishop meant. He saw in me a golden opportunity to prepare a priesthood holder. I am sure that he did not foresee in that untrained boy a future member of the Presiding Bishopric. But he treated me that day, and all the days I knew him over the years, as a preparation project of great promise.

He seemed to enjoy it, but it was work for him. On our return to my home after we visited the widow in need, he parked the car. He opened his well-worn and heavily marked scriptures. And he gave me kindly correction. He told me that I needed to study the scriptures and learn more. But he must have seen that I was weak and simple enough to be teachable. To this day I remember what he taught that afternoon. But even more, I remember how confident he was that I could learn and be better—and that I would.

He saw beyond the reality of who I was to the possibilities that lie inside someone who feels weak and simple enough to want the Lord's help and to believe that it will come.

Focusing on what we can become

Bishops, mission presidents, and fathers can choose to act on those possibilities.

I saw it happen recently in a fast meeting as a deacons quorum president bore his testimony. He was about to become a teacher and leave his quorum members behind him.

He testified with great feeling in his voice of the growth in goodness and power in the members of his quorum. I've never heard a person praise an organization more wonderfully than he did. He praised their service. And then he said that he knew that he had been able to help the new deacons when they felt overwhelmed because he had felt overwhelmed when he came into the priesthood.

His feelings of weakness had made him more patient, more sympathetic, and therefore better able to strengthen and serve others. In those two years in the Aaronic Priesthood, it seemed to me, he had become seasoned and wise. He had learned that he was helped as a quorum president by a clear and vivid memory of his own needs when he was two years younger. His challenge in the future in his leadership and ours will come when such memories fade and grow dim through time and our success.

Paul must have seen that danger in counsel to his younger companion in the priesthood, Timothy. He encouraged and instructed him in his own priesthood preparation and in helping the Lord prepare others.

Listen to what Paul said to Timothy, his younger companion:

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands. . . .

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine;¹ continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."²

Paul gave good counsel for all of us. Don't worry about how inexperienced you are or think you are, but think about what, with the Lord's help, you can become.

The doctrine that Paul urges us to feast upon in our priesthood preparation is the words of Christ and so to qualify for the receipt of the Holy Ghost. Then we can know what the Lord would have us do in our service and receive the courage to do it, whatever difficulty we face in the future.

Building spiritual strength

We are being prepared for priesthood service that will become more challenging with time. For instance, our muscles and our brains age as we do. Our capacity to learn and remember what we have read will diminish. To give the priesthood service the Lord expects of us will take more and more self-discipline every day of our lives. We can be prepared for that test by building faith through service as we go.

The Lord has given us the opportunity to prepare by something He has called "the oath and covenant [of] the priesthood."³

It is a covenant we make with God to keep all His commandments and give service as He would give it if He were personally present. Living up to that standard as best we can builds the strength we will need to endure to the end.

Great priesthood trainers have shown me how to build that strength: it is to form a habit of pushing on through the fatigue and fear that might make you think of quitting. The Lord's great mentors have shown me that spiritual staying power comes from working past the point when others would have taken a rest.

You great priesthood leaders who have built that spiritual strength in your youth still possess it when physical strength weakens.

My younger brother was in a small Utah city on business. He got a phone call at his hotel from President Spencer W.

Kimball. It was late at night after what was a hard day of work for my brother and surely for President Kimball, who began the conversation this way. He said, "I heard that you were in town. I know it's late and that you may be in bed, but could you help me? I need you as my companion to see the condition of all our chapels in this city." My brother went with him that night, lacking knowledge of chapel maintenance or anything about chapels and not knowing why President Kimball would be doing such a thing after his long day or why he needed any help.

Years later I received a similar call late at night in a hotel in Japan. I was then the new commissioner of education for the Church. I knew that President Gordon B. Hinckley was staying somewhere in that same hotel on his separate assignment to Japan. I answered the ringing phone just after I had lain down on the bed to sleep, exhausted by having done all I thought I had the strength to do.

President Hinckley asked in his pleasant voice, "Why are you sleeping when I am here reading a manuscript that we have been asked to review?" So I got up and went to work, even though I knew that President Hinckley could give a better review of a manuscript than I could possibly do. But somehow he made me feel that he needed my help.

President Thomas S. Monson, at the end of almost every meeting, asks the secretary to the First Presidency, "Am I up to date on my work?" And he always smiles when the answer comes back: "Oh, yes, President, you are." President Monson's pleased smile sends me a message. It makes me think, "Is there something more I could do on my assignments?" And then I go back to my office to work.

Preparing to keep priesthood covenants

Great teachers have shown me how to prepare to keep the oath and covenant when time and age will make it harder.

They have shown and taught me how to discipline myself to work harder than I thought I could while I still have health and strength.

I can't be a perfect servant every hour, but I can try to give more effort than I thought I could. With that habit formed early on, I will be prepared for trials later. You and I can be prepared with the strength to keep our oath and covenant through the tests that will surely come as we approach the end of life.

I saw evidence of that in a Church Board of Education meeting. President Spencer W. Kimball by then had given years of service while enduring a series of health challenges only Job would understand. He was chairing the meeting that morning.

Suddenly, he stopped speaking. He slumped in his chair. His eyes closed. His head fell on his chest. I was seated near him. Elder Holland was next to us. The two of us rose to help him. Inexperienced as we were in emergencies, we decided to carry him, still seated in his chair, to his nearby office.

He became our teacher in that moment of his extremity. With one of us lifting each side of his chair, we went out of the meeting room into the hallway of the Church Administration Building. He half opened his eyes, still dazed, and said, "Oh, please be careful. Don't hurt your backs." As we got near his office door, he said, "Oh, I feel terrible that I interrupted the meeting." Minutes after we got him into his office, still not knowing what his problems were, he looked up at us and said, "Don't you think you ought to go back to the meeting?"

We left and hurried back, knowing that somehow our being there must matter to the Lord. President Kimball had since his childhood pushed himself beyond his limits of endurance to serve and to love the Lord. It was a habit so ingrained that it was there when he needed it. He was

prepared. And so he was able to teach and show us how to be prepared to keep the oath and covenant: by steady preparation over the years, through all our strength in what might appear to be little tasks with small consequences.

God will strengthen us

My prayer is that we may keep our priesthood covenants to qualify ourselves for eternal life and those we are called to train. I promise you if you do all that you can, God will magnify your strength and your wisdom. He will season you. I promise you that those whom you train and set an example for will praise your name as I have this day the great trainers I have known.

I testify that God the Father lives and loves you. He knows you. He and His resurrected and glorified Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to an inexperienced boy, Joseph Smith. They trusted him with the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel and of the true Church. They encouraged him when he needed it. They let him feel loving chastening when it would bring him down to lift him up. They prepared him and They are preparing us for the strength to keep working toward the celestial glory that is the aim and the reason of all priesthood service.

I leave you my blessing that you will be able to recognize the glorious opportunities God has given you in calling and preparing you to His service and the service of others. In the name of our loving leader and teacher, Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See 2 Nephi 32:3–6.
2. 1 Timothy 4:12–14, 16.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 84:39.

President Uchtdorf

We remind you that the Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be tomorrow morning from 9:30 to 10:00 mountain daylight