

That He May Become Strong Also

By President Henry B. Eyring
First Counselor in the First Presidency

I pray that we will rise to our call to lift others to prepare them for their glorious service.

I feel blessed to be in this meeting with those who hold the priesthood of God. The devotion, the faith, and the selfless service of this body of men and boys are a modern miracle. I speak tonight to priesthood holders, older and younger, united in wholehearted service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord grants His power to those in all priesthood offices who worthily serve in their priesthood duties.

Wilford Woodruff, as President of the Church, described his experience in the offices of the priesthood:

"I heard the first sermon I ever heard in this Church. The next day I was baptized. ... I was ordained a Teacher. My mission immediately commenced. ... I went through that whole mission as a Teacher. ... At the conference I was ordained a Priest. ... After I was ordained a Priest I was sent ... on a mission to the southern country. That was in the fall of 1834. I had a companion with me, and we started out without purse and scrip. I traveled alone a good many miles and preached the Gospel, and I baptized a number that I could not confirm in the Church, because I was only a Priest. ... I traveled some time preaching the Gospel before I was ordained an Elder. ...

"[Now] I have been some fifty-four years a member of the Twelve Apostles. I have traveled with that and other quorums now for sixty years; and I want to say to this assembly that I was just as much sustained by the power of God while holding the office of a Teacher, and especially while officiating in the vineyard as a Priest, as I ever was as an Apostle. There is no difference in this so long as we do our duty."¹

That wonderful spiritual possibility of no difference is suggested in the Lord's description of the Aaronic Priesthood as an "appendage" of the Melchizedek Priesthood.² The word *appendage* means the two are connected. This connection is important to the priesthood becoming the force and the blessing it can be, in this world and forever, for it "is without beginning of days or end of years."³

The connection is a simple one. The Aaronic Priesthood prepares young men for an even more sacred trust.

“The power and authority of the higher, or Melchizedek Priesthood, is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church—

“To have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, 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.”⁴

Those priesthood keys are fully exercised by only one man at a time, the President and presiding high priest of the Lord’s Church. Then, by the President’s delegation, every man who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood can be endowed with authority and the privilege of speaking and acting in the name of the Almighty. There is infinity to that power. It is concerned with life and death, with family and the Church, with the great nature of God Himself and His eternal work.

The Lord is preparing the Aaronic Priesthood holder to become an elder serving with faith, power, and gratitude in that glorious Melchizedek Priesthood.

For elders, deep gratitude will be essential to playing your part in full priesthood service. You will remember your days as a deacon, teacher, or priest when those who held the higher priesthood reached back to lift and encourage you in your priesthood journey.

Every holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood has such memories, but the sense of gratitude may have diminished with the years. My hope is to rekindle that feeling and with it a determination to give to all you can the same kind of help you once received.

I remember a bishop who treated me as if I were already what I had the potential to become in priesthood power. He called me one Sunday when I was a priest. He said he needed me to be his companion to visit some members of our ward. He made it sound as if I were his only hope for success. He didn’t need me. He had excellent counselors in his bishopric.

We visited a penniless and hungry widow. He wanted me to help him reach her heart, challenge her to make and use a budget, and promise her that she could rise to be in a position not only to take care of herself but also to help others.

We went next to comfort two little girls living in a difficult situation. As we walked away, the bishop said quietly to me, “Those children will never forget that we came to them.”

At the next house, I saw how to invite a less-active man to come back to the Lord by convincing him the ward members needed him.

That bishop was a Melchizedek Priesthood holder who was raising my sights and giving me a boost by example. He taught me to have the power and the courage to go anywhere in service for the Lord. He is long gone to his reward, but I still remember him because he reached down to lift me up when I was an inexperienced Aaronic

Priesthood holder. I learned later that he saw me on a future priesthood path of greater responsibilities, then beyond my own vision.

My father did the same thing for me. He was a seasoned and wise holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Once he was asked by an Apostle to write a short note about the scientific evidence for the age of the earth. He wrote it carefully, knowing that some who might read it had strong feelings that the earth was much younger than the scientific evidence suggested.

I still remember my father handing me what he had written and saying to me, "Hal, you have the spiritual wisdom to know if I should send this to the apostles and prophets." I can't remember much of what the paper said, but I will carry with me forever the gratitude I felt for a great Melchizedek Priesthood holder who saw in me spiritual wisdom that I could not see.

One night, some years later, after I had been ordained an Apostle, the prophet of God called me and asked me to read something that had been written about Church doctrine. He had spent the night reading the chapters of a book. He said with a chuckle, "I can't get through all of this. You shouldn't be resting while I'm working." And then he used almost the same words my father had years before: "Hal, you are the one who should read this. You will know if it is right to publish it."

That same pattern of a Melchizedek Priesthood holder raising sights and giving confidence came one night at a speech festival sponsored by the Church. At 17 years of age, I was asked to speak to a large audience. I had no idea what was expected of me. I wasn't given a subject, and so I prepared a talk that was way beyond what I knew about the gospel. As I spoke, I realized I had made a mistake. I can still remember that after I spoke, I had a sinking feeling of having failed.

The next and final speaker was Elder Matthew Cowley of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He was a great orator—beloved across the Church. I still remember looking up at him from my seat next to the rostrum.

He began in a powerful voice. He said that my speech had made him feel that he was at a great conference. He smiled as he said it. My feelings of failure left and were followed by confidence that I might someday become what he seemed to think I already was.

The memory of that night still leads me to listen carefully when an Aaronic Priesthood holder speaks. Because of what Elder Cowley did for me, I always expect that I will hear the word of God. I am seldom disappointed and often amazed, and I can't help but smile as Elder Cowley did.

Many things may help strengthen our younger brothers to rise up in the priesthood, but nothing will be more powerful than our helping them develop the faith and confidence that they can draw on the power of God in their priesthood service.

That faith and confidence won't stay with them from a single experience of being lifted by even the most gifted Melchizedek Priesthood holder. The ability to draw on those powers must be cultivated by many expressions of confidence from those who are more experienced in the priesthood.

The Aaronic Priesthood holders will also need daily and even hourly encouragement and correction from the Lord Himself through the Holy Ghost. That will be available to them as they *choose to remain worthy of it*. It will depend upon the choices they will make.

That is why we must teach by example and by testimony that the words of the great Melchizedek Priesthood leader King Benjamin are true.⁵ They are words of love spoken in the name of the Lord, whose priesthood this is. King Benjamin teaches what is required of us to remain pure enough to receive the encouragement and the correction of the Lord:

"And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them.

"But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not."⁶

We all are aware of the fiery darts of the enemy of righteousness being sent like a terrible wind against the young priesthood holders we love so much. To us, they seem like the stripling warriors, who called themselves the sons of Helaman. They can survive, as those young warriors did, if they keep themselves safe, as King Benjamin urged them to do.

The sons of Helaman did not doubt. They fought bravely and came off conquerors because they believed the words of their mothers.⁷ We understand the power of the faith of a loving mother. Mothers provide that great support to their sons today. We holders of the priesthood can and must add to that support with our determination to answer the charge that as we are converted, we are to reach down to strengthen our brethren.⁸

My prayer is that every Melchizedek Priesthood holder will accept the opportunity offered by the Lord:

"And if any man among you be strong in the Spirit, let him take with him him that is weak, that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also.

"Therefore, take with you those who are ordained unto the lesser priesthood, and send them before you to make appointments, and to prepare the way, and to fill appointments that you yourselves are not able to fill.

"Behold, this is the way that mine apostles, in ancient days, built up my church unto me."⁹

You priesthood leaders and fathers of Aaronic Priesthood holders can work miracles. You can help the Lord fill the ranks of faithful elders with young men who accept the call to preach the gospel and do it with confidence. You will see many you have lifted and encouraged stay faithful, marry worthily in the temple, and in turn, lift and prepare others.

It will not take new activity programs, improved teaching materials, or better social media. It will not require any call beyond what you have now. The oath and the covenant of the priesthood gives you power, authority, and direction. I pray you will go home and study carefully the oath and covenant of the priesthood, found in Doctrine and Covenants section 84.

All of us hope that more young men will have experiences like Wilford Woodruff, who as an Aaronic Priesthood holder taught the gospel of Jesus Christ with converting power.

I pray that we will rise to our call to lift others to prepare them for their glorious service. I thank with all my heart the wonderful people who have lifted me and shown me how to love and lift others.

I testify that President Thomas S. Monson holds all the keys of the priesthood on earth at this time. I bear witness that he, over a lifetime of service, has been an example for us all of reaching to lift others as a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood. I am personally grateful for the way he has lifted me and shown me how to lift others.

God the Father lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church and kingdom. This is His priesthood. I know this for myself by the power of the Holy Ghost. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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