

Eternal Families

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Our priesthood obligation is to put our families and the families of those around us at the center of our concern.

I am grateful to be with you this evening in the general priesthood session of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is a grand moment in the history of the Church. One hundred eighty-two years ago, in 1834, in Kirtland, Ohio, all of the priesthood holders were called to meet together in a 14-by-14-foot (4.2 by 4.2 m) log schoolhouse. In that meeting the Prophet Joseph Smith is reported to have said: “You know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother’s lap. You don’t comprehend it. ... It is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world.”¹

Millions of priesthood holders, in more than 110 countries, are gathered in this session. Perhaps the Prophet Joseph foresaw this time and the glorious future yet ahead of us.

My message tonight is an attempt to describe that future and what we must do to be a part of the plan of happiness our Heavenly Father has prepared for us. Before we were born, we lived in a family with our exalted and eternal Heavenly Father. He ordained a plan that enables us to advance and progress to become like Him. He did it out of love for us. The purpose of the plan was to allow us the privilege of living forever as our Heavenly Father lives. This gospel plan offered us a life of mortality in which we would be tested. A promise was given that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, if we obeyed the laws and priesthood ordinances of the gospel, we would have eternal life, the greatest of all His gifts.

Eternal life is that kind of life which God our Eternal Father lives. God has said that His purpose is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The great purpose of every priesthood holder, therefore, is to assist in the work of helping people rise to eternal life.

Every priesthood effort and every priesthood ordinance is intended to help Heavenly Father's children be changed through the Atonement of Jesus Christ to become members of perfected family units. It follows that "the great work of every man is to believe the gospel, to keep the commandments, and to create and perfect an eternal family unit,"² and to help others do the same.

Since that is true, everything we do should have celestial marriage as its focus and purpose. That means we must strive to be sealed to an eternal companion in the temple of God. We must also encourage others to make and keep the covenants that bind a husband and wife together, with their family, in this life and in the world to come.

Why should this matter so much to each of us—young or old, deacon or high priest, son or father? It is because our priesthood obligation is to put our families and the families of those around us at the center of our concern. Every major decision should be based on the effect it will have on a family to qualify for life with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. There is nothing in our priesthood service as important as this.

Let me tell you what this could mean to a deacon listening tonight as a member of a family unit and as a quorum member.

In his family, there may or may not be regular family prayer or frequent family home evening. If his father, sensing these obligations, calls the family together for prayer or scripture reading, the deacon can rush to take part with a smile. He can encourage his brothers and sisters to participate and praise them when they

do. He can ask his father for a blessing when school begins or in another moment of need.

He may not have such a faithful father. But the very desire of his heart for those experiences will bring the powers of heaven to those around him because of his faith. They will seek for the family life that deacon wants with all his heart.

The teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood can see in his home teaching assignment an opportunity to help the Lord change the lives of a family. The Lord suggested that in the Doctrine and Covenants:

"The teacher's duty is to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them;

"And see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking" (D&C 20:53–54).

Similarly, the priest in the Aaronic Priesthood is given this charge:

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“The priest’s duty is to preach, teach, expound, exhort, and baptize, and administer the sacrament,

“And visit the house of each member, and exhort them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties” (D&C 20:46–47).

You may wonder, as I did when I was a young teacher and priest, how in the world I could rise to those challenges. I was never sure how I could exhort in a way that would move a family toward eternal life without offending or seeming to criticize. I have learned that the only exhortation that changes hearts comes from the Holy Ghost. That occurs most often as we bear testimony of the Savior, who was and is the perfect family member. As we focus on our love for Him, harmony and peace will grow in the homes we visit. The Holy Ghost will attend us in our service to families.

The young priesthood holder may, by the way he prays, by the way he speaks, and by the way he encourages the members of the family, bring the influence and example of the Savior to their minds and hearts.

One wise priesthood leader showed me he understood that. He asked my young son to take the lead in a home teaching visit. He said that the family might resist his exhortations, but he thought the simple teaching and testimony of a boy might more likely penetrate their hardened hearts.

What can the young elder do to help in the creation of eternal families? He may be about to go into the mission field. He can pray with all his heart that he will be able to find, teach, and baptize families. I still remember a handsome young man with his lovely bride and their two beautiful little girls sitting with me and my missionary companion one day. The Holy Ghost came and testified to them that the gospel of Jesus Christ had been restored. They believed enough that they even asked if we could give their two little girls a blessing, as they had seen done in one of our sacrament meetings. They already had a desire for their children to be blessed, but they did not yet understand that the higher blessings would be possible only in the temples of God after they had made covenants.

I still feel pain to think of that couple and those little girls, probably now grown old, without the promise of an eternal family. Their parents had at least an inkling of the blessings that could be made available to them. My hope is that they somehow, somewhere may yet have the opportunity to qualify to be an eternal family.

Other elders going into the field will have the happier experience my son Matthew had. He and his companion found a widow with eight children living in

Matthew Nau. He and his companion found a widow with eight children living in poverty. He wanted for them what you want—to have an eternal family. To my son, it looked impossible or at least unlikely at that moment.

I visited that little city years after my son had baptized the widow, and she invited me to meet her family at church. I had to wait a while because her children, with her many grandchildren, came from several different chapels in the area. One son was faithfully serving in a bishopric, and each of her children was blessed by temple covenants and sealed in an eternal family. As I parted from this dear sister, she put her arms around my waist (she was very short, so she could just barely get to my waist) and said, “Please, tell Mateo to come back to Chile before I die.” She had been given, because of those faithful elders, the happy anticipation of the greatest of all the gifts of God.

There are things an elder, as he returns from his mission, must do to be true to his commitment to seek eternal life for himself and for those he loves. There is no more important commitment in time or in eternity than marriage. You have heard wise counsel to make marriage a priority in early post-mission plans. The faithful priesthood servant will do it wisely.

In considering marriage, he will see that he is choosing the parents of his children and the heritage they will have. He will make the choice with earnest searching and prayerful consideration. He will ensure that the person he marries shares his ideals for family and his convictions of the Lord’s purpose for marriage and that she is a person to whom he would be willing to trust his children’s happiness.

President N. Eldon Tanner gave wise counsel: “The parents that you should honor more than any others are the parents of your children-to-be. Those children are entitled to the best parents that it is possible for you to give them—clean parents.”³ Purity will be your protection and the protection of your children. You owe them that blessing.

Now, there are some husbands and fathers listening tonight. What can you do? My hope is that your desire has increased to make the changes necessary for you and your family to live in the celestial kingdom someday. As a priesthood father, with your wife at your side, you can touch the hearts of each family member to encourage them to look forward to that day. You will attend your sacrament meetings with your family, you will hold family meetings in which the Holy Ghost is invited, you will pray with your wife and family, and you will prepare yourself to take your family to the temple. You will move with them along the path to an eternal family home.

You will treat your wife and children the way Heavenly Father has treated you.

You will treat your wife and children the way Heavenly Father has treated you. You will follow the example and direction of the Savior to lead your family in His way.

“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—

“Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprovéd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy” (D&C 121:41–43).

The Lord has told priesthood fathers what kind of husbands they are to be. He says, “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22). When the Lord speaks to both the husband and the wife, He commands, “Thou shalt not ... commit adultery, ... nor do anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6).

For youth, the Lord has set the standard. “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Colossians 3:20), and “honour thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12).

When the Lord speaks to all in the family, His counsel is to love and support each other.

He asks us to “strive to perfect the lives of each [member of the family]; [to] strengthen the weak; reclaim [the] straying loved [one], and rejoice in their renewed spiritual strength.”⁴

The Lord also asks that we do all we can to help those of our kindred dead to be with us in our eternal home.

The high priests group leader who has worked diligently to help people find their ancestors and take names to the temple is rescuing those who have gone before. There will be thanks in the world to come to those high priests, and to those who offer the ordinances, because they did not forget their family waiting in the spirit world.

Prophets have said: “The most important of the Lord’s work that you will ever do will be the work you do within the walls of your own home. Home Teaching, bishopric’s work, and other Church duties are all important, but the most important work is within the walls of your home.”⁵

In our home and in our priesthood service, the greatest value will be in the small acts that help us and those we love work toward eternal life. Those acts may seem small in this life, but they will bring everlasting blessings in eternity.

As we are faithful in our service to help Heavenly Father's children to go home to Him, we will qualify for the greeting we all so much want to hear when we finish our earthly ministry. These are the words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Among those "many things" is the promise of an endless posterity. My prayer is that we may all qualify and help others to qualify for that supernal blessing in the home of our Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.