



# Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel

---

Volume 14 | Number 2

Article 3

---

6-2013

## How Miracles Are Wrought: Reflections on Faith, Prayer, and Priesthood

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re>

---

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

"How Miracles Are Wrought: Reflections on Faith, Prayer, and Priesthood." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 14, no. 2 (2013): 10-27. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol14/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).



Walter Rane, © 1999 Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

To have faith in Christ is to trust in him, to rely completely upon him. The Lord Jesus extends his arm of mercy towards those who trust in him.

## *How Miracles Are Wrought: Reflections on Faith, Prayer, and Priesthood*

ROBERT L. MILLET

Robert L. Millet ([robert\\_millet@byu.edu](mailto:robert_millet@byu.edu)) is the Abraham O. Smoot University Professor and a professor of ancient scripture at BYU.

Bill and Cindy Larsen have been married for seven years. Bill's business has relocated them to a remote spot in Australia, and while Cindy enjoys the peace and quiet of the area in which they live, she feels lonesome occasionally. A few members of the local branch of the Church are scattered throughout the area, but the closest is a couple of hours away. Home teachers manage to get to them every other month or so, but it is extremely difficult to make contact with them. Bill is asked by his company to make a one-week trip to Hong Kong. While he is away, his three-year-old son, Eric, the younger of his two children, becomes seriously ill. After giving Eric some medicine, Cindy frantically seeks to make contact with the home teachers or with someone holding the Melchizedek Priesthood who might be able to give Eric a priesthood blessing. But so far, Cindy has been unsuccessful. Eric's temperature has risen to 103 degrees, and Cindy is on the verge of panic. Cindy makes her way to the bedroom, kneels beside the bed, and begins to pour out her heart in prayer: "I know, Heavenly Father, that if Bill were here or if the home teachers were available, they could give Eric a blessing, and I have every confidence that he would be made well. But they are not here, and I cannot find anyone

to help us. I plead with thee, with all my heart, in behalf of my baby boy. Wilt thou pour out a blessing upon us, upon him, that he may be made well, if it be according to thy divine will.”

The Cindys of the world often find themselves without the assistance of a righteous priesthood holder to act in the name of God. They then do the only thing they can do at the moment—they importune the Lord, they plead with that Being who has all power, and they pray to their Father in Heaven with great faith, for they know, as James has instructed, that the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous [person] availeth much” (James 5:16). Such a scenario raises a number of questions:

1. What is faith?
2. What are some fruits that flow naturally from the exercise of true faith?
3. How is faith related to the will of God?
4. What is the difference between a person acting or praying in faith and a person turning to or drawing upon the powers of the priesthood? Are we to understand that these are two distinct powers?
5. How do God’s Holy Spirit and the power of God’s priesthood work together to accomplish divine purposes?

### 1. The Nature of Faith

The faith about which we speak in our fourth article of faith is faith *in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Faith is the complete trust in, confidence in, and reliance upon the merits, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ for salvation. It is a gift of the Spirit (see Moroni 10:11), a divine endowment that affirms to the human heart the identity, redemptive mission, and miraculous power of the Savior. Though one might speak of faith in a broad sense as the underlying reason why people live and move and go about their daily activities, the faith of which the scriptures speak is faith in Jesus Christ.

“Faith is the substance [“assurance,” according to the Joseph Smith Translation] of things hoped for, the evidence [or proof] of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Alma declared to the Zoramites that to have faith is “not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21; see also Ether 12:6). Sincerity and devotion to a cause are not sufficient; saving faith can only be exercised in that which is *true*. Thus no matter how committed the richer Zoramites were to their unusual liturgy atop the Rameumptom (see Alma 31), their false beliefs concerning God could not result in faith unto life and

salvation. Their refusal to believe in the coming condescension of God the Son (Alma 31:16) precluded salvation, no matter how consistently they cried out to their deity in their weekly rituals.

When we come to know who Jesus is, how great and marvelous his powers and knowledge are, and the nature of his sacrificial offering—when we gain faith in Christ—then we gain a *hope* in Christ. No one can attain unto faith except he shall then have hope. We need not speak of faith as something one either has in its fulness or does not have, for gaining faith is a process. And so it is with hope. Individuals begin with the simple hope that there is a Savior (see Alma 32:27). On the other end of the continuum are those who know their Lord, have treasured up his word, and have been valiant in their witness. Their hope is for eternal life, for exaltation in the celestial kingdom (Moroni 7:40–42). Disciples of Christ have hope, not in the worldly sense (wishing or yearning), but rather in the sense of anticipation, expectation, and assurance that through the divine Redeemer we can be cleansed and forgiven, empowered, and eventually saved in the highest heaven. We are motivated and directed not by self-confidence but by our confidence or hope in Christ.

To have faith in Christ is to believe in Christ, to “believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; [to] believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth” (Mosiah 4:9). The Nephite prophets labored diligently to invite their people “to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God” (2 Nephi 25:23), “for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 30:2). The Nephites were called upon to “believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world” (Jacob 1:8). Truly, “whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life” (Helaman 14:8). In summarizing the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, Mormon wrote, “And if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, . . . it shall be well with you in the day of judgment” (Mormon 7:10).

In addition, to have faith in Christ is to trust in him, to rely completely upon him. The Lord Jesus extends his arm of mercy towards those who trust in him; “the same shall be lifted up at the last day” (Mosiah 23:22). Of the two thousand stripling warriors, Helaman noted, “Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually” (Alma 57:27). Nephi explained



that the Saints of God were able to come unto Christ through “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 3:19). Moroni likewise wrote that people are nourished by the good word of God, “to keep them in the right way, . . . relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith” (Moroni 6:4). Jacob added the sobering conclusion to the matter: only those who have “perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel”—meaning, presumably, a wholehearted belief in, a complete trust in, and a total reliance upon his redeeming blood—can be saved in the kingdom of God (see 2 Nephi 9:23). Again, because we cannot save ourselves, our absolute dependence cannot be on ourselves, no matter how impressive our accomplishments, but in him who bought us with his blood. Like Jacob, we are redeemed “because of the righteousness of [our] Redeemer” (2 Nephi 2:3).

## 2. Fruits of Faith

Faith and knowledge build upon one another. A certain degree of knowledge is necessary in order to exercise faith, even “a particle of faith” (Alma 32:27). Then, after one has begun to develop faith, new and added knowledge comes—new feelings and desires, new insights, new perspectives. After a person obtains a testimony of a particular principle, we could in a sense say that his or her faith is replaced by knowledge, as Alma said to the Zoramites (see Alma 32:34; see also Ether 3:19). In reality, however, faith has not disappeared but has instead been added upon. Faith is a principle of power and is thus a divine attribute possessed by God in perfection; God is the embodiment of faith, just as he is the embodiment of love and justice and judgment and mercy.<sup>1</sup> And so mortals are not working toward that day when they will no longer live and act by faith, but rather toward that day, beyond the resurrection, when they operate by perfect faith.<sup>2</sup>

The final great fruit of faith is eternal life. In the first estate, we walked by sight *and* by faith. Those who were valiant in the premortal existence demonstrated “exceeding faith and good works” there and were foreordained and foreappointed to significant assignments here (Alma 13:3; see also 13:1–2, 4–6). In this life, we walk by faith (see 2 Corinthians 5:7). That is, we proceed through life with the Spirit-given assurance that our actions are approved of God and will result in the salvation of our soul. To see with an “eye of faith” (Alma 5:15; 32:40) is thus to act according to the witness of the Spirit, to act as though one had seen and therefore had perfect knowledge. The Saints of God view things with an eye of faith in this life, until one day, because of their

faithful endurance, they see “with their eyes the things which they had [previously] beheld with an eye of faith” (Ether 12:19).

“The very name of the kind of life [God] lives,” Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained, “is eternal life, and thus eternal life consists in living and being as he is. In other words, eternal life is to gain the power of God, which power is faith, and thus to be able to do what he does and to live as he lives. And the great and eternal plan of salvation that he has ordained and established consists of those laws, ordinances, and powers whereby faith is acquired and perfected until it is possessed in the same degree and to the same extent that it exists in Deity. Faith will thus dwell independently in every person who gains eternal life.”<sup>3</sup>

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “when men begin to live by faith they begin to draw near to God; and when faith is perfected they are like him; and because he is saved they are saved also; for they will be in the same situation he is in, because they have come to him; and when he appears they shall be like him, for they will see him as he is.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the plan of salvation is “a system of faith—it begins with faith, and continues by faith; and every blessing which is obtained in relation to it is the effect of faith, whether it pertains to this life or that which is to come. To this all the revelations of God bear witness.”<sup>5</sup>

## 3. Faith and the Will of God

It is sometimes surprising to observe how some of us use the word *faith* in our daily walk and talk. A missionary in Vienna says to his companion, “Come on, Elder, where’s your faith? Why, if we had the faith we could baptize this whole city!” Occasionally, well-meaning but insensitive souls explain to a grieving mother and father that if the family had sufficient faith, their fifteen-year-old daughter, who has struggled with multiple sclerosis for five years, would not be forced to suffer longer. Faith is not the power of positive thinking, although it is certainly better to be optimistic than cynical. Faith is not the personal resolve that enables us to will some difficult situation out of existence. Faith is not always the capacity to turn tragedy into celebration. We do not generate faith on our own, for it is the gift of God, a gift of the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 2:8; Moroni 10:11). We do not act ourselves into faith, for faith is given by God to suit his purposes and bless the body of Christ, the Church.

People act in faith when they act according to the will of God. To say that another way, I have sufficient faith to move Mount Timpanogos to the

middle of Utah Lake only when I know that the Lord wants it moved! I have faith or power to touch the hearts of men and women with my testimony of the truth only when they are prepared and readied for the word. That is, to exercise great faith is not to violate another's moral agency. Even the Master could not perform miracles in the midst of a people steeped in spiritual indifference: "A prophet is not without honour," Jesus said in speaking of his own reception in Nazareth, "but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And *he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them*" (Mark 6:4–5; emphasis added). Similarly, the prophet-leader Mormon loved his people and poured out his soul in prayer in their behalf; "nevertheless, *it was without faith*, because of the hardness of their hearts" (Mormon 3:12; emphasis added). Someone watching from the sidelines, unaware of what faith really is, might have cried out: "Come on, Mormon, where's your faith?"

I remember very well one warm June evening in Louisiana, only a few months after I had returned from my mission. I was watching television with my mom and dad when the phone rang, and my father was quickly summoned to the hospital to give a priesthood blessing. A sixteen-year-old boy, a friend of my younger sister, had suddenly collapsed on the softball field and had been rushed to the hospital. My dad was told that the boy had been diagnosed with some strange degenerative nerve disease, and that if something didn't happen soon he would die. We rushed to the hospital, took the elevator to the fifth floor, and hurried through the doors that opened into the waiting room. We were greeted with the news that the young man had passed away. We did our best to console the mourners and then made our way home. As we walked in the back door of our house, my sister asked, "How is he?" I answered that her friend had died. She came right back with, "Well, why didn't you raise him from the dead?" Being the seasoned returned missionary that I was, having most of the answers to life's questions, I stuttered for a second and then turned to my father: "Yeah, why didn't we raise him from the dead?" Dad's answer was kind but firm. It was also terribly instructive. "Because the Spirit of the Lord didn't prompt us to do so," he said. I have to admit that at that moment such a reply seemed like a kind of spiritual cop-out. But in the years that followed, I came to know something about my dad's faith—that he had been with his father once many years before when in fact the Spirit had prompted and the dead had been raised to life again. He knew when to move and when not to move. He had faith.

Wilford Woodruff was traveling to Zion to assume his new assignment to the Quorum of the Twelve. On the journey, his wife, Phoebe, was overcome with a high fever and lay upon the point of death. "I alighted at a house," Brother Woodruff wrote,

and carried my wife and her bed into it, with a determination to tarry there until she either recovered her health or passed away. This was on Sunday morning, December 2nd.

After getting my wife and things into the house and wood provided to keep up a fire, I employed my time in taking care of her. It looked as though she had but a short time to live.

She called me to her bedside in the evening and said she felt as though a few moments more would end her existence in this life. She manifested great confidence in the cause she had embraced, and exhorted me to have confidence in God and to keep his commandments.

To all appearances she was dying. I laid hands upon her . . . , and she soon revived and slept some during the night.

December 3rd found my wife very low. I spent the day in taking care of her. . . . She seemed to be gradually sinking, and in the evening her spirit apparently left her body, and she was dead.

The sisters gathered around her body, weeping, while I stood looking at her in sorrow. The spirit and power of God began to rest upon me until, for the first time during her sickness, faith filled my soul, although she lay before me as one dead.

I had some oil that was consecrated for my anointing while in Kirtland. . . . I then bowed down before the Lord and prayed for the life of my companion, and I anointed her body with the oil in the name of the Lord. I laid my hands upon her, and in the name of Jesus Christ I rebuked the power of death and the destroyer, and commanded the same to depart from her, and the spirit of life to enter her body.

Her spirit returned to her body, and from that hour she was made whole; and we all felt to praise the name of God, and to trust in him and to keep his commandments.

While this operation was going on with me (as my wife related afterwards) her spirit left her body, and she saw her body lying upon the bed, and the sisters weeping. She looked at them and at me, and upon her babe, and, while gazing upon this scene, two personages came into the room. . . . One of these messengers informed her that she could have her choice: she might go to rest in the spirit world, or, on one condition she could have the privilege of returning to her tabernacle and continuing her labors upon the earth. The condition was, if she felt that she could stand by her husband, and with him pass through all the cares, trials, tribulations and afflictions of life which he would be called to pass through for the Gospel's sake unto the end. When she looked at the situation of her husband and child she said: "Yes, I will do it!"

*At the moment that decision was made the power of faith rested upon me, and when I administered unto her, her spirit entered her tabernacle, and she saw the messengers [go] out the door."*<sup>6</sup>

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that working by faith is working by the power of mental exertion rather than physical force.<sup>7</sup> I am persuaded that the mental exertion of which he spoke is not merely a cognitive exercise, but

rather a strenuous effort, a spiritual search to know the will of God and then to accept and abide by that will. “Working by faith is not the mere speaking of a few well-chosen words,” Elder McConkie has written; “anyone with the power of speech could have commanded the rotting corpse of Lazarus to come forth, but only one whose power was greater than death could bring life again to the brother of Mary and Martha. Nor is working by faith merely a mental desire, however strong, that some eventuality should occur. There may be those whose mental powers and thought processes are greater than any of the saints, but only persons who are in tune with the Infinite can exercise the spiritual forces and powers that come from him.” In short, “Faith cannot be exercised contrary to the order of heaven or contrary to the will and purposes of him whose power it is. *Men work by faith when they are in tune with the Spirit and when what they seek to do by mental exertion and by the spoken word is the mind and will of the Lord.*”<sup>8</sup>

The Lord asks us to move forward on the path of life on the basis of what has been made known through prophets. We cannot always see the end from the beginning. We cannot always act in the face of the observable or the demonstrable. In many cases, believing must precede seeing. Indeed, the revelations affirm that as we search diligently, pray always, and *believe*, all things shall work together for our good (see D&C 90:24). We are further counseled to dispute not because we see not, for we receive no witness until after the trial of our faith (see Ether 12:6). This is the nature of the leap of faith, a leap from the safe and the secure to the anticipated and the hoped for (see Alma 32:21). The disciples of Christ are not called upon to proceed wholly in the dark, to leap from the precipice without evidence of deliverance. Rather, we are asked to rely upon the unseen, to trust in the quiet but persistent whisperings of the Spirit, to lean upon the prophetic promises. In the words of President Harold B. Lee, we must “learn to walk to the edge of the light, and perhaps a few steps into the darkness, and [we] will find that the light will appear and move ahead of [us].”<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Priesthood and Faith

The priesthood is the power of God delegated to man on earth to act in all things pertaining to the salvation of his children. It is conferred by ordination, through the laying on of hands of those authorized to exercise it. It is God’s power. In addition, as President John Taylor explained, it is “the government of God, whether on the earth or in the heavens, for it is by that power, agency,

or principle that all things are governed on the earth and in the heavens, and by that power that all things are upheld and sustained.”<sup>10</sup> Further, President Taylor explained: “The power manifested by the priesthood is simply the power of God, for he is the head of the priesthood, with Jesus as our President and great High Priest; and it is upon this principle that all the works of God have been accomplished . . . ; and any manifestation of power through the priesthood on the earth is simply a delegated power from the priesthood in the heavens, and *the more the priesthood on the earth becomes assimilated with and subject to the priesthood in the heavens the more of this power shall we possess.*”<sup>11</sup> This discourse is similar to the inspired words penned by the Prophet Joseph in Liberty Jail, that “the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36).

What then is the difference between a man who holds the priesthood administering to the sick and a person who prays with great faith? We have seen often enough that the outcome may not be different at all: the sick are healed by the prayer of faith (see James 5:14–15; D&C 46:20), and the sick are healed by the power of the priesthood (see Mark 6:13; D&C 42:44). In speaking of the former group, those who pray with great faith, Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught:

We know that the prayer of faith, uttered alone or in our homes or places of worship, can be effective to heal the sick. Many scriptures refer to the power of faith in the healing of an individual. . . . Many Latter-day Saints have experienced the power of faith in healing the sick. We also hear examples of this among people of faith in other churches. A Texas newspaperman described such a miracle. When a five-year-old girl breathed with difficulty and became feverish, her parents rushed her to the hospital. By the time she arrived there, her kidneys and lungs had shut down, her fever was 107 degrees, and her body was bright red and covered with purple lesions. The doctor said she was dying of toxic shock syndrome, cause unknown. As word spread to family and friends, God-fearing people began praying for her, and a special prayer service was held in their Protestant congregation in Waco, Texas. Miraculously, she suddenly returned from the brink of death and was released from the hospital in a little over a week. Her grandfather wrote, “She is living proof that God does answer prayers and work miracles.”<sup>12</sup>

Well then, what is the difference between a prayer and a priesthood ordinance? When one operates by and through the power of the priesthood, he is acting in the name and by the sacred power of God; that is, he is standing in the place of God, is acting for and in his behalf. There has been given to this man—and again, this comes by ordination—what might be called a divine



investiture of authority. God is the Principal, and the human servant is the agent—the servant’s speech and actions cannot, must not, be independent of the one whom he represents. “Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord’s errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord’s business” (D&C 64:29). If there were cause to do so, if the heavens were in agreement, and if the priesthood holder were prompted and properly directed to do so, he could pronounce in the name of the Lord that a specific consequence should come to pass, in this case a healing. His words would not be in the form of a prayer or a request. This would not entail asking God to bless the suffering one. It would be in the form of “We bless you that. . . .”

But what if no clear impression comes as to what to say or do? What if it is unclear whether our Father intends that this person be made well? In other words, what if the man performing the ordinance simply doesn’t know whether the person being administered to is “appointed unto death” (D&C 42:48)? Then it would certainly be unwise to presume upon the mind of God or the powers of God. “Ideally, the elder who officiates will be so in tune with the Spirit of the Lord,” Elder Oaks instructed, “that he will know and declare the will of the Lord in the words of the blessing. President Brigham Young taught priesthood holders, ‘It is your privilege and duty to live so that you know when the word of the Lord is spoken to you and when the mind of the Lord is revealed to you.’ When that happens, the spoken blessing is fulfilled literally and miraculously. On some choice occasions I have experienced that certainty of inspiration in a healing blessing and have known that what I was saying was the will of the Lord.” Elder Oaks then acknowledged the reality: “However, like most who officiate in healing blessings, I have often struggled with uncertainty on the words I should say. For a variety of causes, every elder experiences increases and decreases in his level of sensitivity to the promptings of the Spirit. Every elder who gives a blessing is subject to influence by what he desires for the person afflicted. Each of these and other mortal imperfections can influence the words we speak.” He then went on to explain that the words spoken within the blessing “are not essential to its healing effect. If faith is sufficient and if the Lord wills it, the afflicted person will be healed or blessed whether the officiator speaks those words or not.”<sup>13</sup> Why is this the case? Because it is through the ordinances that the power of godliness is manifest (see D&C 84:21).

## 5. God’s Spirit and Power

In setting forth briefly how the Nephites had been instructed to perform various ordinances, Moroni added the following interesting detail: “And after this manner did they ordain priests and teachers, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and *they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them*” (Moroni 3:4; emphasis added). A similar comment is made in a revelation given at the time of the organization of the restored Church: “Every elder, priest, teacher, or deacon is to be ordained according to the gifts and callings of God unto him; and *he is to be ordained by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is in the one who ordains him*” (D&C 20:60; emphasis added). This cannot mean that the power of the Holy Ghost is exactly the same as the power of the priesthood; if such were true, then any person—man, woman, or child—who had been baptized and confirmed could perform the ordinances, which we know is not the case (see Articles of Faith 1:5). Then what do Moroni and the Lord mean?

First of all, the one doing the ordaining must be a member of the Lord’s Church, must have been baptized by water and then confirmed, thus receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then he must have had the priesthood conferred upon him—the Aaronic and possibly the Melchizedek also, depending on which is the power necessary to perform the specific ordinance. Second, the enjoyment of the Spirit in our lives is a sign of our Father in Heaven’s approval, an indication that our sins have been forgiven (Mosiah 4:3) and that our lives are on track, that we are indeed worthy to act in the name of the Lord. A century and a half before the birth of the Savior, a chastened and repentant Alma the Elder taught the gospel to all who would receive it and then baptized many at the Waters of Mormon. Before performing the very first baptism, “Alma took Helam, he being one of the first, and went and stood forth in the water, and cried, saying: O Lord, *pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart*” (Mosiah 18:12; emphasis added). As we have already observed, worthiness is essential to the receipt of power in the priesthood.

As Elder David A. Bednar declared: “The power of the priesthood is God’s power operating through men and boys like us and requires personal righteousness, faithfulness, obedience, and diligence. A boy or a man may receive priesthood authority by the laying on of hands but will have no priesthood power if he is disobedient, unworthy, or unwilling to serve. . . . Priesthood holders young and old need both authority and power—the

necessary permission and the spiritual capacity to represent God in the work of salvation.”<sup>14</sup> The Prophet Joseph Smith thus pointed out that “the Holy Ghost is God’s messenger to administer in all [the] priesthoods.”<sup>15</sup> In short, the greater the faith, the greater the priesthood power. As we cultivate the gift of the Holy Ghost in our daily lives, we become a fit vessel by which heavenly power is conveyed to men and women on earth.

The gifts of the Spirit are available to every member of the Church who lives worthy of the companionship of the third member of the Godhead. That is to say, spiritual gifts are not gender specific. Interestingly, however, two of the gifts—the ministry of angels, and the gift of faith to heal—are connected with God’s priesthood. Because the Aaronic Priesthood was restored to the earth by John the Baptist in May 1829 (see D&C 13), the right to enjoy the ministry of angels is available to all, based upon the mind and will of God, for angels “minister according to the word of [Christ’s] command” (Moroni 7:30). And, as we have seen, while all members of the Church—and all of God’s children, for that matter—may and should pray with great faith for the blessing and recovery of the sick or afflicted, administration to the sick may be done only by those who have received the Melchizedek Priesthood by ordination.

Now while it is necessary and appropriate to draw some distinctions, it may be less helpful to do so when it comes to delineating what portion of the Lord’s power is utilized at a given time. For example, can we always discern whether an individual was influenced by the Light of Christ rather than the Holy Ghost? Can we clearly and accurately explain the difference between the Holy Spirit of Promise and the spirit and power of Elijah? Do we suppose, for example, that our Father in Heaven and his Son Jesus Christ use one power for one situation and then somehow shift gears for another? Does the Lord grant “faith power” to the Cindys of the world whose hearts are pure and desires are earnest, but send “priesthood power” when an elder or high priest is involved in the administration? In writing of the Light of Christ, Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: “It has neither shape nor form nor personality. It is not an entity nor a person nor a personage. It has no agency, does not act independently, and exists not to act but to be acted upon. As far as we know, it has no substance and is not material, at least as we measure these things. It is variously described as light and life and law and truth and power. It is the light of Christ; . . . it is the power of God who sitteth upon his throne. *It may be that it is also priesthood and faith and omnipotence, for these too are*



Photo by Weiden C. Andersen, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

If the power of faith and the power of the priesthood are both God’s power, why perform priesthood administrations when a prayer of faith might accomplish the same result?

*the power of God.*”<sup>16</sup> Later in that same work, Elder McConkie pointed out that “in the broadest sense, priesthood and faith, the two welded together as one, constitute the power by which the worlds were and are and everlastingly shall be made.”<sup>17</sup>

If, then, the power of faith and the power of the priesthood are both God’s power, why should we concern ourselves with both? Why perform priesthood administrations, for example, when a prayer of faith might accomplish the same result? Thank goodness for those prayers of faith that call down the powers of heaven, for the noble men and women, boys and girls, who offer up their petitions in great earnestness, who have learned to attune their minds and hearts to the will of God and thereby ask “in the Spirit” (D&C 46:30). Miracles are wrought by such persons. As long as time lasts and the earth shall stand, we will need and rely upon such actions.



And yet there is an additional measure of blessing, a value added when the holy priesthood is exercised. The priesthood of Almighty God is intended to do more than repair that which is broken, far more than to heal the sick and even raise the dead. The priesthood is, in the language of the Prophet Joseph Smith, “the channel through which the Almighty commenced *revealing His glory* at the beginning of the creation of this earth, and through which He has continued to reveal Himself to the children of men to the present time, and through which He will make known His purposes to the end of time.”<sup>18</sup> In a revelation given to Joseph Smith in September 1832, the Lord explained that the “greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even *the key of the knowledge of God*. Therefore, *in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest*. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; for without this [the power of godliness] no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live” (D&C 84:19–22; emphasis added). A righteous man who honors his priesthood and magnifies his callings blesses his family in ways that do not require the laying on of hands. Because that man worthily holds the priesthood, he stands as an agent in the place and stead of his glorious Principal. There is a light, a power, a lifting influence, a peace and security felt by family members. The priesthood administers the gospel; it reveals God’s glory; it prepares us to see his face; it opens channels of divine communication. We look forward to that glorious day when every home enjoys the sweet fruits of the priesthood, when every son and daughter, mother and father, sense powerfully that their home has begun to mirror that heavenly home we once knew.

Now of course there are those times when, in spite of prayers, fasting, and priesthood blessings, the desired result—in the case of the sick, a healing blessing—is not realized. Because we don’t know the end from the beginning and do not always possess the Lord’s view of things as they are and as they will be, we would of course wish that nearly all priesthood blessings and prayers of faith would be rewarded with a miracle. The words of Elder Spencer W. Kimball from a now-classic message are instructive: “The power of the priesthood is limitless,” he said, “but God has wisely placed upon each of us certain limitations. I may develop priesthood power as I perfect my life, yet I am grateful that even through the priesthood I cannot heal all the sick. I might heal people who should die. I might relieve people of suffering who should suffer. I fear I would frustrate the purposes of God.”<sup>19</sup> Though it may be

difficult for mortals to comprehend, from God’s point of view, death passes upon all men and women “to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:6).

Elder Oaks reminded the men called to bear the priesthood that

the first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and faith means trust. I felt that trust in a talk my cousin gave at the funeral of a teenage girl who had died of a serious illness. He spoke these words, which first astonished me and then edified me: “I know it was the will of the Lord that she die. She had good medical care. She was given priesthood blessings. Her name was on the prayer roll in the temple. She was the subject of hundreds of prayers for her restoration to health. And I know that there is enough faith in this family that she would have been healed unless it was the will of the Lord to take her home at this time.” I felt that same trust in the words of the father of another choice girl whose life was taken by cancer in her teen years. He declared, “Our family’s faith is in Jesus Christ and is not dependent on outcomes.”<sup>20</sup>

Miracles take many forms, and it is no doubt just as powerful a miracle for a man or woman to acquire this kind of trusting perspective as it is for the sick to be healed. Faith is, we remember, a gift of the Spirit, a heavenly endowment that provides, at least momentarily, a glimpse of what John Henry Newman called “the distant scene.”<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

During the time that I was bishop of our home ward, Theron Baird, one of the men in our ward—a delightful fellow who had served as our home teacher and had endeared himself to our children—was diagnosed with cancer. This man had served years before as a bishop himself, and so he was particularly sensitive to all of the little details that needed to be handled at Church, all of the i’s that needed dotting and the t’s that needed crossing. Throughout sacrament meeting, for example, he could frequently be seen helping latecomers to find a seat, and he was the first to jump up and open the curtains to the cultural hall when the number of attendees exceeded what the chapel could hold. It was his truck that was used to tote the supplies to scout camp, and it was he who volunteered to be a priesthood chaperone during the annual girls’ camp. I knew him quite well, for I was his home teacher as well as his bishop. I had said to my wife on a number of occasions that every ward (and every bishop) needed a Theron Baird. And then suddenly he was in danger of being snatched away from us by death.

It was decided (against Theron's modest wishes) that we as a ward would devote ourselves to a period of fasting and prayer in his behalf, and that we would meet together late on a Sunday afternoon to end the fast formally and unitedly as a congregation. We sang several hymns. Using Isaiah 58 as a scriptural text, I spoke and bore testimony of the power of fasting and prayer to "undo the heavy burdens" and to "break every yoke," in this case the yoke of impending death. We then called upon one of our beloved old high priests to lead us in prayer, a man of great faith and devotion, one who spoke tenderly and pleadingly with God our Father as a child speaks to his earthly parent. After the close of the brief meeting, the members of the ward surrounded Theron, embraced and reassured him of their love, and eventually left the building. When all had departed, Theron and his wife, Jennifer, accompanied the members of the bishopric into the bishop's office. Theron was then anointed with consecrated oil and was given a priesthood blessing. There was with us in that small room, as there had been in the chapel, a great outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord, and we knew on that occasion that God was in his heaven, that we were following the prescribed order of things in his Church and kingdom, and that our prayers and petitions and priesthood ordinances would not go unnoticed by a gracious God. Under inspiration, promises were made to Theron, assurances that his time to leave us was not yet, and that he still had a significant labor to perform in the Church and in his family before his graduation into the next life.

Within a matter of weeks, I felt a very strong impression to call Brother Baird to serve as the ward Young Men president. It was counterintuitive, for I knew it to be an assignment that would require an appreciable amount of time and energy. He accepted the call and served marvelously, blessing the young men in our ward in ways that few other leaders or advisers could have. In looking back on that sweet season, I recall that at one time our ward had as many as twenty-two young men and women laboring as full-time missionaries at the same time, and much of the credit for that accomplishment belongs to Theron—his sensitivity, his devotion, and his unselfish love. Theron was called home a few years later, but his legacy lives on among his family members as well as those whose lives were touched by his.

This experience seems to demonstrate how faith, prayers, and priesthood ordinances work together in blessing the Saints of the Most High and building the kingdom of God on earth. Just as it would not seem needful or appropriate to try to tease apart what portion of Theron's healing could

be attributed to our faith or our fastings and what portion traced to the priesthood blessing, so it seems fruitless to try to do so in everyday life. Each dimension—faith, prayer, and priesthood blessing—is an avenue to the power of the Almighty, a channel of his divine grace, a sacred means by which frail, mortal men and women may make contact with and be enabled by an immortal, glorified, omnipotent Being, who just happens to be the Father of our spirits. Our God and his Beloved Son are "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" and have opened to us the means by which we may approach them, know them, and grow in spiritual stature so as to become like them. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15–16). **RE**

#### Notes

1. See *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 1:15–17; 7:2.
2. See Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 209.
3. McConkie, *New Witness*, 169.
4. *Lectures on Faith* 7:8.
5. *Lectures on Faith* 7:17.
6. Wilford Woodruff, "Leaves from My Journal," *Millennial Star*, October 3, 1881, 639; emphasis added.
7. *Lectures on Faith* 7:3.
8. *New Witness*, 191–92; emphasis added.
9. Cited in Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 184.
10. *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 129.
11. *Gospel Kingdom*, 130; emphasis added.
12. Dallin H. Oaks, "Healing the Sick," *Ensign*, May 2010, 47–48.
13. Oaks, "Healing the Sick," 49; the quotation from President Brigham Young is found in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 68.
14. David A. Bednar, "The Powers of Heaven," *Ensign*, May 2012, 49.
15. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:555.
16. *New Witness*, 257; emphasis added.
17. *New Witness*, 309.
18. *History of the Church* 4:207; emphasis added.
19. Spencer W. Kimball, "Tragedy or Destiny?," address delivered at Brigham Young University on 6 December 1955, in *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 99.
20. "Healing the Sick," 50.
21. "Lead, Kindly Light," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 97.