

# Only an Elder

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Brethren, what think ye of the office of an elder? Someone asks: "What office do you hold in the Church? What is your priesthood position?" An answer comes: "Oh, I'm only an elder."

Only an elder! Only the title by which a member of the Council of the Twelve is proud to be addressed; only the title which honors the President of the Church, who is designated by revelation as the first elder (see [D&C 20:2, 5](#)); only the office to which millions of persons are ordained in the vicarious ordinances of the holy temples.

Only an elder! Only the office which enables a man to enter the new and everlasting covenant of marriage and to have his wife and children bound to him with an everlasting tie; only the office which prepares a man to be a natural patriarch to his posterity and to hold dominion in the house of Israel forever; only the office required for the receipt of the fullness of the blessings in the house of the Lord; only the office which opens the door to eternal exaltation in the highest heaven of the celestial world, where man becomes as God is.

Only an elder! Only a person ordained to preach the gospel, build up the kingdom, and perfect the Saints; only a minister whose every word is scripture; only the holder of that office which carries the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, of having the heavens opened, and of communing with the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn, and of enjoying the communion and presence of God the father and Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. (See [D&C 107:19](#).)

Only an elder! Every elder in the Church holds as much priesthood as the President of the Church. No apostle can or will rise higher in eternity than the faithful elder who lives the fullness of the gospel law.

What is an elder? An elder is a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. He holds the holy Melchizedek Priesthood. He is commissioned to stand in the place and stead of his Master—who is the Chief Elder—in ministering to his fellowmen. He is the Lord's agent. His appointment is to preach the gospel and perfect the Saints.

What is an elder? He is a shepherd, a shepherd serving in the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd. It is written: "And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God." ([Ezek. 34:31](#).) It is also written, and that by Peter, the first elder in his day: "*The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder. ...*

*"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;*

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, *but being ensamples to the flock.*”

“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” (1 Pet. 5:1–4; italics added.) Know this: elders, who are standing ministers in the Lord’s kingdom, are appointed *to feed the flock of God, to take the oversight of the flock, to be examples to the flock.*

What is an elder? “And now come, saith the Lord, by the Spirit, *unto the elders of his church,* and let us reason together. ...

“Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—*unto what were ye ordained?*”

“*To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.*” (D&C 50:10, 13–14; italics added.)

An elder is the Lord’s representative sent forth to teach his gospel for the salvation of men.

Who can measure the worth, the infinite worth, of a soul, a soul for whom Christ died? And yet, is not the soul of an elder worth even more, for an elder is his minister to bring many infinitely precious souls unto him in the kingdom of his Father. Do all the elders feed the flock of God, take the oversight thereof, and stand as examples to the others in the sheepfold? Hear the prophetic answer:

“Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”

“*The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost. ...*”

“[Therefore], thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand.” (Ezek. 34:2, 4, 10; italics added.)

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on earth. It is not a democracy, not a republic, not an oligarchy, not a dictatorship, not any form of government except a kingdom. It operates from the top down. The Lord speaks, and his servants obey. The elders go forth, and the people are taught.

Our great need, the charge that is laid upon us, *is to perfect the elders so they can feed the flock, lest the sheep perish for want of the word of God.* The number one need within the Church today is to reclaim the elders so they, in turn, can “feed the flock of God.”

What are the resources for saving elders? There is no secret formula. We cannot wave a wand and reclaim inactive people without effort and without struggle. But we do have the whole program of the Church, and somewhere within its framework is something which will appeal to every person who is willing to let the blessings of the gospel come into his life. As we approach this problem (and every other one with which we are faced), we must do so with the clear understanding that the only fully approved solution is one that operates within the framework of priesthood correlation.

What is priesthood correlation? It is that system of Church administration in which we take all of the programs of the Church, wrap them in one package, operate them as one program, and involve all the members of the Church in that operation. It is a system which requires us to operate within the existing framework of the Church. The day is long since past in which

we discover some problem and set up a committee or some other organization to solve it. Instead we use the revealed priesthood organization, which means that we use home teachers in the way set forth in section 20, and we correlate all priesthood and auxiliary operations through the ward priesthood executive committee and the ward correlation council. President Harold B. Lee defined priesthood correlation as simply *“putting the priesthood where the Lord put it and helping the family to function the way it should function.”* (See “Correlation and Priesthood Genealogy” in *Genealogical Devotional Addresses, 1968*, Provo, Utah, Brigham Young University Press, 1969, p. 55.)

There are *three basic principles of priesthood correlation* which guide us in the operation of all Church programs. They grow out of this basic statement: *The family* is the most important organization in time or in eternity. *The Church* and all its organizations, as service agencies, are in a position to help the family. *Home teachers* represent the Lord, the bishop, and the priesthood leader in making available to the father, the family, and the individual the help of the Church and all its organizations. Thus, the three basic principles of priesthood correlation are:

1. *All things center in the family and the individual. They do everything in the Church.* They are responsible to do missionary work, to do their own genealogical work, to provide for their own personal welfare. We do not call missionaries or appoint committees to preempt the family’s primary responsibility. It is not the high priests group leader who is responsible for priesthood genealogy in the ward. It is not the stake or fulltime missionaries who are responsible for missionary work in the ward or stake. In both cases it is the family and the individual, who are aided and helped by these Church specialists.

2. *The Church and all its organizations are in a position to help the family and the individual.* Missionaries, committees, and various specialists in one field of service or another are called to help the family. Parents—*not* the Church organizations—are responsible to bring up their own children in light and truth and to teach them the principles of the gospel. But these organizations are set up to help the parents do the work the Lord has laid upon them. Properly speaking, we do not help missionaries, but missionaries help us. It is our primary responsibility to warn our neighbors, and the stake and fulltime missionaries are specialists who are called in, for instance, to help in the teaching process.

3. *Home teachers represent the Lord, the bishop, and the priesthood leader in making available to the family and the individual the help of the Church and all its organizations.* Without question the greatest defect of the home teaching system in the Church is that it remains almost unused. Instead of *letting* and expecting home teachers to do their work we often set up some fringe committee and then wonder why home teachers lack interest in their work. If we have a need to reclaim elders, we should not set up some special organization. Rather, we should use home teachers and the existing organizations of the Church.

The Church has need of every elder. None can be spared. The Church must be perfected and the gospel taught to every creature. There is no way to teach the gospel to three and a half billion people without more missionaries. We need help, and the place to begin is with our inactive and our prospective elders.

Who is responsible to reactivate a delinquent elder? Let’s have our priorities straight. The first and chief responsibility rests with the elder himself. He made the baptismal covenant to serve the Lord; he promised to magnify his calling when he received the Melchizedek

Priesthood. It is his salvation which is at stake. He has a personal obligation to return to the Lord and seek his blessings.

The second responsibility to reactivate an elder rests with his family. *Salvation is a family affair*. The greatest blessings attending Church service flow to the individual and his family. The preservation of the eternal family unit is the chief of these blessings.

After the individual and family responsibility comes that of the Church. The Church makes salvation available. It is the Lord's organization through which all men are invited to do those things which they must do to enter the Eternal Presence. In almost all instances, the beginning processes of reactivation, at least, start with an approach by someone in a Church position—one elder, for instance, serving as a home teacher to another. It is neither our purpose nor our province to prescribe the details of Church participation in the reactivation processes. There are many approaches, and the spirit of inspiration must always attend the work, which should be done within the framework of priesthood correlation and using existing organizations and programs.

In the stake, the stake president is responsible for the reactivation of elders. He is the presiding elder in the stake and serves as chairman of the stake Melchizedek Priesthood committee. One of his counselors, to whom he may delegate a major responsibility for carrying the work forward, is the vice-chairman. The stake president has the help of the stake Melchizedek Priesthood committee, plus all the resources of the stake, at his disposal. He may use a high councilor to aid and work with two or three elders quorums. But specifically and paramountly, the stake president uses the bishops of wards and the presidents of elders quorums in the reactivation processes.

High councilors are men of stability and sense and spiritual maturity—some of the most able and competent leaders in the stake. They are the eyes and ears and voice of the stake president. Suppose each high councilor on the stake Melchizedek Priesthood committee has as his main stake assignment the privilege of giving guidance and help to two or three elders quorums. Such a high councilor is careful not to take over the operation of the quorums; but, drawing on his extensive background of Church experience, think what sound and wise counsel he can give.

What more important work does a stake president have than (1) to involve himself in training quorum leaders, (2) to meet regularly with elders presidents to give instruction and assignments, and (3) to hold (or have one of his counselors hold) regular personal priesthood interviews with elders presidents.

Elders quorums are organized on a ward basis. All the elders in the ward are members of the quorum. All *prospective* elders in the ward meet with the quorum and receive the same training and guidance given the elders, which prepares them for the Melchizedek Priesthood and to become quorum members. Elders quorum presidents are responsible to watch over and strengthen all elders and prospective elders.

The bishop has a vital, personal, and important role in the reactivation of elders. He presides in the ward and is a common judge in Israel. He receives tithes and offerings. He determines worthiness for temple recommends. He recommends brethren for advancement to the

Melchizedek Priesthood. He calls brethren to positions of responsibility in the ward. As the presiding high priest, he presides over the ward priesthood executive committee and the ward correlation council and gives counsel to its members, including the elders president. He receives priesthood evaluations from the elders president.

But it is to the elders quorum president that we turn for the active, detailed, day-by-day operation of the program of reactivation. He is to preside over his quorum members. He is to “sit in council with them, and to teach them according to the covenants.” (D&C 107:89.) He has a responsibility for their temporal and spiritual well-being. He is appointed to lead them to eternal life in our Father’s kingdom. And his responsibility extends out to all the prospective elders in the ward. *Except the bishop himself, who in the ward has a responsibility comparable to that of the elders quorum president?*

Some elders quorum presidents seem to feel that the burdens of reactivating their brethren are so great that it is almost futile to undertake the task. One reason for this view is the nagging feeling on the part of the elders quorum presidents that they must come up with some kind of a program and devise some system to save their brethren. Actually, the reactivation processes already exist. They are available everywhere. They are easy to operate. They divide the load upon many shoulders, and the burden becomes easy and the yoke light.

The reactivation process consists of (1) *using home teachers*, (2) *using the Church and all its programs*, and (3) *running the quorum itself in the proper manner*. The most effective reactivation is always on a one-to-one basis, on a family-to-family basis. It is personal contacting. It is friendship. It is fellowship. It is done by home teachers! *Use home teachers to reactivate!*

There is no substitute for home teaching. We do not need to appoint special fellowshiping committees to help reactivate elders or prospective elders. We do not need to issue a special call or make special arrangements for fellowshiping work. Instead, we use home teachers to do the things that by revelation they are commanded to do. Home teaching is one of the best resources in the Church. Home teachers visit in the homes of the members, watch over and strengthen the Saints, see that there is no iniquity in their lives, and see that all do their duties.

Assume an extreme case, one in which the picture is dark, one where discouragement could come easily. Still, something must be done. A start must be made. And the load can be lightened through home teaching. If each active elder, in his role as a home teacher, on a one-to-one basis, on a family-to-family basis, assumed responsibility for only one other elder and his family, if each active elder conscientiously and actively did his duty—how many months would pass before there would be twice as many active elders who could be used? It may not be easy, but it is not insurmountable, and it can be done.

Home teachers have status. Their calls are official. They have been sent by their quorum president, by the bishop, and by the Lord. They should visit frequently in their assigned homes. They are there to do the things listed in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Home teachers and their families should fellowship inactive families. Social and recreational arrangements are helpful. The home evening approach is excellent. On some evening other than Monday, the inactive family may be invited to a family home evening where family

fellowshipping and gospel teaching will be involved. Home teachers tie their contacts into the quorum and its teaching and activity functions. *Service is essential to salvation.* Every quorum member, active and inactive, should be asked to serve on a task committee or quorum project as soon as it is possible to do so.

A project to encourage families to gain temple blessings is approved. Special seminars may be held for missionary or other assignments. Socials at frequent intervals aid in fellowshipping. Every quorum member should receive a Church assignment. Members should be taught how to administer to the sick. And so it goes, on and on—quorum activities with fellowshipping overtones are limitless.

As all of you know, the reactivation program is summarized in this way: (1) identify each individual; (2) call home teachers; (3) build personal relationships; (4) fellowship by families; (5) provide quorum socials; (6) assign personal responsibility; (7) teach gospel truths; (8) review current progress; and (9) conduct private interviews.

One of the greatest and most important things the quorum itself can do is to teach all its members the doctrines of salvation. *"Faith cometh by hearing,"* so Paul said, meaning that faith is generated in the hearts of men only when they hear the truths of the gospel taught by a legal administrator and by the power of the Holy Ghost. (See [Rom. 10:14-15, 17.](#))

An elders quorum should be a school of the prophets, a place where every elder and prospective elder learns what he and his family must do to gain peace in this life and eternal life in the world to come.

We have adopted the standard works themselves, without modification, change, or dilution, as the priesthood study manuals. Every elder and prospective elder should read, ponder, and pray about all that is recorded in holy writ. We must learn directly from the fountain itself.

We do, however, publish a study guide, which contains teaching aids and outlines the passages to be read by subjects. Under our new system we will do two things: (1) *read the assigned standard works verbatim*, from beginning to end, and (2) *study by subjects* (both doctrines and duties), with references drawn from all the standard works. Under our new system of quorum study, it is essential—nay, imperative—that quorum members bring their scriptures to class with them. This is also the express and personal request of President Kimball. Our very able associate, Brother Dean Larsen, director of instructional materials for the Church, tells us that in his high priests group the instructor asked, "How many of you have prepared for the lesson and brought your standard works with you this morning?" Finding none had, he said, "Well, in that case, I can't teach you a lesson, and so we won't have one today." The report is that thereafter the members began to bring their scriptures with them. A brief lesson once a week is only a drop in an ocean of study. Our new study guide is designed to open the door to individual study of the scriptures, as well as to help us to study together as a family.

One of the Sunday School classes is specifically designed to aid in the conversion and reactivation processes. It is the Gospel Essentials class. Here we present 12 lessons on basic subjects on a recurring cycle. After studying this course, adult students go to the Gospel Doctrine class. Home teachers keep track of what lessons are being presented to their contacts, and then consider the same matters in their regular home teaching visits. Those



who should take a cycle of Gospel Essentials class lessons include investigators, new converts, prospective elders, and inactive elders.

There is also one matter—often overlooked—which we desire to recommend and encourage. It is the policy of the Church to have a *choir in every ward*. It would be most appropriate if all elders and prospective elders having vocal musical ability would sing in these choirs. There may also be special occasions when an elders chorus could be asked to participate in ward or stake meetings. Stake presidents may desire—say, once a year—to have a priesthood chorus present the music in stake conference. But it is important, of course, to keep ward choirs as the most important part of the Church music program. The songs of Zion have converting power, and the Lord says it is pleasing unto him when we sing them. “For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart,” he says; “yea the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.” (D&C 25:12.)

Conversion always attends effective missionary work. Those brethren who are ordained elders at 18 and whose fulltime missionary service is ahead of them need special attention. They have been receiving help and encouragement over the years from their bishop. Now the quorum president must step in and see that everything is done that will make them worthy, qualified, and able when the day of their call comes. Elders are needed as missionaries. *The Lord wants more missionaries*. Every able young man in the Church should serve a mission. Missionary service blesses the life of a young man more than any other thing could during the time and season involved. Elders quorums must become the Church agency that puts the crowning effort on getting all our able young men out on the Lord’s errand, preaching his gospel, and declaring his message to his other children.

What is the missionary duty of the elders quorum president? What should an elders quorum president do to be sure that every young elder is prepared for his missionary call? Young men can be taught the gospel with special reference to moral worthiness. They can be encouraged to continue to build up their mission savings account, to read the Book of Mormon and strengthen their testimonies, to learn the proselyting discussions (and perhaps be given opportunity to give them in the homes of their inactive brethren), to find investigators, to breathe and feel the spirit of missionary work; and all this should be guided and encouraged by the elders quorum president.

A new and revised edition of the *Melchizedek Priesthood Handbook* is being made available for the first time at this seminar. As you study it, you will see that it has been completely rewritten and deals more with principles and less with mechanics. Priesthood leaders will have a greater need than ever before to learn correct principles and then choose the course they should pursue. Greater inspiration than ever is now needed to direct quorum affairs aright.

But in all this, there is reward!

“Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

*“And he that reapeth receiveth wages.”* (John 4:35–36; italics added.)

“Behold, the field is white already to harvest; therefore, whoso desireth to reap, let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that *he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God.*” (D&C 6:3; italics added.)

“And now, behold, I say unto you, that *the thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father.*” (D&C 15:6; italics added.)

Let us now, however, return to our theme, which is: “*Brethren, what think ye of the office of an elder?*” *Only an elder!* Only the office held by apostles and prophets in this life; only the office that they will have when they come forth in immortal glory and enter into their exaltation; only the open door to peace in this life and a crown of glory in the life to come. Only an elder! Only an elder in time and in eternity! “What are we to understand by the four and twenty elders, spoken of by John?” The revealed answer: “We are to understand that these elders whom John saw, were elders who had been faithful in the work of the ministry and were dead.” (D&C 77:5.) Now, let us hear the words which John wrote relative to those who were faithful elders while in this life and who are exalted elders in the realms ahead: “Behold, a door was opened in heaven. ...

“And immediately I was in the spirit; and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and *upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment, and they had on their heads crowns of gold.*” (Rev. 4:1-2, 4; italics added.)

Only an elder! “They had on their heads crowns of gold.” Moses prayed, “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!” (Num. 11:29.) Well might we pray: “Would God that all the elders among the Lord’s people would be faithful, *that they would feed the flock of God, that they would take the oversight of the flock, that they would be examples to the flock*—all to the honor and glory of that God whose ministers they are.”

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.