

carefully interviewing all candidates for ordination to either the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood to insure that they meet the established standards for worthiness.

We declare with soberness that the Lord has now made known his will for the blessing of all his children throughout the earth who will hearken to the voice of his authorized servants, and prepare themselves to receive every blessing of the gospel.

Sincerely yours,

Spencer W. Kimball
N. Eldon Tanner
Marion G. Romney

Thus on June 9, 1978, a day that began like any other, that exciting and timely revelation was announced to the world. And only two days later, on June 11, hands were placed upon my head and I was ordained an elder in the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood.

What a difference a day makes! All those years that I'd desired more than anything else to be a minister! And the ministerial days that had followed, when I had known I lacked something that a true messenger of God should have. Then to give up being a minister for membership in a church where I was plummeted to the bottom of the ecclesiastical totem pole! But now—finally—my elusive dream had come true! I had been found worthy to receive the greatest power bestowed on man!

I'm sure I would have walked around in a trance for several days if I hadn't been the object of so much excitement, curiosity, and genuine interest. By some quirk, I had managed to be the first black man ordained to the priesthood, and when such a newsworthy story breaks, you can't begin to imagine the assortment of people who suddenly come out of the woodwork—newspaper reporters, magazine editors, freelance writers, television news commentators. I found my face being flashed across newspapers, on the evening news, even in magazines—I was almost afraid it would turn up on the front of some T-shirt somewhere. And not only were local news agencies interested in the story, but on Tuesday, only two days after I was ordained, I received a call from an agent representing "Good Morning

America," the morning. They wanted me to appear on national television, but I was overwhelmed; there's no way I was merely a symbol of something. I felt humbled and honored to represent the Church.

My experience on national television was an incredible one. David Hartman expressed his interest in receiving the priesthood.

I'm sure Toe felt the same way. I had appointments with writers, other media-associated people, and I imagine that so many people were calling me. Writers for *Time*, *Ebony*, and an editor from Australia even called me one night. One morning I appeared on the air with a disc jockey who had just heard about my ordination.

Before even a week had passed, I was off the wall with invitations to speak at MIA groups, and I was so busy and willing to share our message that I was a little curious to me that I had received the priesthood. There were plenty of other people who had received the priesthood and who were more experienced. Anything makes for a very hectic schedule, of course, and a couple of fireside chats were scheduled solid for six weeks.

The attention and the change, at least amount of change in my life, was a much more significant one. Not only would my children and wife, but I

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America," the morning television show hosted by David Hartman. They wanted me to appear on their show the very next morning. I was overwhelmed; there's no other way to put it! I realized, of course, that I was merely a symbol of this great event in our Church's history, but I felt humbled and honored—plus a great sense of responsibility to represent the Church well to the rest of the world.

My experience on "Good Morning, America" was a memorable one. David Hartman was the perfect host, and I felt gratified to express on national television my thoughts and thankfulness about receiving the priesthood.

I'm sure Toe felt like my receptionist for a while as we set up appointments with writers, newsmen, photographers, and the host of other media-associated people who sought our time. I couldn't imagine that so many people wanted to talk to me. I was interviewed by writers for *Time*, *Ebony*, and *People* magazines. One newspaper editor from Australia even flew in to see me. The phone rang day and night. One morning I answered it at 6:00 A.M. only to find myself on the air with a disc jockey from California who wanted his listeners to hear about my ordination "straight from the horse's mouth."

Before even a week or two had elapsed, our phone began ringing off the wall with invitations for Toe and me to speak to wards, firesides, MIA groups, and stake conferences. Of course we were happy and willing to share our testimonies of the gospel, but it seemed a little curious to me that I would be the focus of so much attention. There were plenty of other equally worthy Negro brethren who'd also received the priesthood, many of whom I'm sure were better speakers and who were more exemplary men than I. But being the "first" in anything makes for instant celebrities, and Toe and I entered into a very hectic schedule, often attending two or three sacrament meetings and a couple of firesides on a single Sunday. At one point we were scheduled solid for six months in advance.

The attention and jam-packed schedule, however, brought the least amount of change to our lives. The greatest impact of my ordination was a much more meaningful, significant, and far-reaching one. Not only would my priesthood allow me to bless the lives of my children and wife, but I now had the privilege of receiving my bless-

ings in the house of the Lord. I was no longer the cause for holding Toe or my children back. Our family could be sealed together as an eternal family!

As I contemplated this, the realization of what was about to take place overwhelmed me to the point that I was no longer in control of my emotions. Tears streamed freely down my face and my heart was bursting with love for my Heavenly Father, who had made this possible, and for my family, who meant more to me than mortal words could ever express. How grateful I was that, four years earlier, I had listened to the words of my bishop, who had counseled me to let Toe make the decision about our marriage! I would never again have to feel that I had deprived Toe of something she was worthy of.

The day I received the priesthood, Bishop Swain advised Toe and me to not delay in taking our family to the temple. Our house was now a center of excitement and preparation! The children caught on to Toe's and my enthusiasm as we all looked forward to that day. And there were humorous as well as spiritual experiences associated with preparation to go to the temple.

On the morning that Toe called the temple to schedule a time for our family to be sealed, she sat Alexander and Zechariah down and explained to them what was going to happen.

"On Friday we're all going to the temple to be sealed together for time and eternity," Toe said.

Alexander looked at her with a puzzled expression and replied, "But Mommy, the seal is not in the temple, it's in the zoo." Toe chuckled all morning about that one, as I did in the evening when she told me about it. This was going to be a new experience for all of us.

On the morning of June 23, 1978—two weeks after the announcement—we piled the children in the car and headed for probably the most important appointment we'd ever keep. As we drove to Temple Square I was flooded with memories of some of the stories I'd heard as a little boy about my relatives. Great-grandpa Freeman had to "jump the broom" to make his marriage to Ellen official. There had not even been a minister present who could legally pronounce them man and wife, much less an official ceremony. They were bound together only by their own vows and the desire to love and honor each other all of their lives.

Now, only three generations later, I am entering the holy temple to be sealed with his wife and children. I felt the tears fall freely down my face. I knew full well that I was living up to my commitments and that my actions would reflect those covenants.

And as our family gathered that morning in the temple, I felt you could call it that—originally. It is an exhibit of love for parents to have their children sealed in the sealing room and kneel beside us and pray with a surge of realization. Heavenly Father, just as you made a family to make eternal covenants and lived up to those covenants with your Father. I've tried to find a way to express them, but my emotions overwhelm me. I can only give thanks to you.

I walked out of the temple that morning to teach my family the importance of obedience to you, to bless our home, and to overcome mortal hurdle together. I turned over to an elder when it came to the bishop's approval. His approval could lead each of them to be an instrument through which you would preside in my home. My family, in the temple, if they lived within the gospel framework of marriage. To work toward a more realistic goal, for a more realistic marriage could a couple

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Now, only three generations later, their great-grandson was entering the holy temple to be united in the highest form of marriage with his wife and children, not only for time but for all eternity. Again I felt the tears fall freely as gratitude filled my heart for this blessing. I knew full well that I was preparing to make eternal covenants and commitments and that, even more than before, all of our lives must reflect those covenants.

And as our family participated in the necessary ordinances that morning in the temple, I found that there was one compensation—if you could call it that—for not having been married in the temple originally. It is an exhilarating and eye-opening experience for two parents to have their children, dressed completely in white, walk into the sealing room and kneel beside them at the altar. When our two boys knelt beside us and took our hands, I couldn't help but feel—with a surge of realization—that my children were children of our Heavenly Father, just as I was. Here we knelt together as an earthly family to make eternal covenants that would enable us, if we honored and lived up to those covenants, to return as a family to our Heavenly Father. I've tried to find the words that express how I felt at that moment, but my emotions and feelings go far beyond my ability to express them. I can only give thanks to my Heavenly Father, who loves me.

I walked out of the temple on that sunny day with a recommitment to teach my family the principles of the gospel and the great importance of obedience to those principles. We now had the priesthood to bless our home, and I was determined that we would jump the mortal hurdle together. I would never again have to hand my child over to an elder when it came time to have him or her blessed. Subject to the bishop's approval each time, when my children turned eight I could lead each of them into the waters of baptism and would be the instrument through which each could receive the Holy Ghost. I could preside in my home. My children would be able to be married in the temple, if they lived worthily, and they could rear their families fully within the gospel framework and inside the holy covenant of eternal marriage. To work toward exaltation now seemed a much closer and more realistic goal, for I knew that only within the bonds of eternal marriage could a couple and a family achieve exaltation in the highest

realm—godhood. The plan of salvation now fully applied to me—Joseph Freeman, Jr.

I know that the gospel is true. I know that happiness depends on how fully we are willing to live the commandments. It is a tremendously reassuring feeling to know there is one to whom I can always turn for strength, direction, and love—someone who is my Elder Brother, Jesus Christ.

And of course, the feelings and experiences I was having were being duplicated in many other homes. One really tremendous effect of the revelation has been that it has helped not only black members catch the vision of their potential and worth, but it has helped other members and black people all over the world as well. There has been an almost unexplainable increase in love and warmth from members of the Church and an increased interest from nonmembers—particularly black nonmembers.

Our Genesis group has reflected this change. It seems that each week we have new faces in the crowd, and many of the new ones are those who have been contacted by the missionaries and who have then been routed to our group. So far, it has seemed that if a person comes to meet with us more than once, and especially if he comes three times, he eventually joins the Church.

It almost seems that all members of the Church feel an increased desire to fellowship and reach out to black people, whereas prior to the revelation, missionary activity was not particularly directed to the black population and I think Church members in general did not quite know how to deal with the rather awkward Negro/priesthood situation. Now there is no reason for anyone to catch his breath or hesitate when a Negro asks about the Church, for the almost inevitable and embarrassing confrontation does not now have to take place.

There has been a noticeable strengthening among the members of the Genesis group, and we have found that our testimony meetings are even more moving and inspiring than before. I think that we all, as black members of the Church, have a heightened sense of awareness and belonging. After all, it's readily recognized that attitude often determines action. Individuals will usually act or live up to the manner in which they're treated. In other words, if you tell a child that he's smart or clever, chances are he'll really be smart and clever. If

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I can feel the chan vinely commissioned to feelings of self-esteem (humility (can I measure sense of pride and a def cising the priesthood. F teacher for several year upon to perform an or prayer circle, and so or elder to come with us. I have to call on another before I'd come home f the ward who had a yo very ill. The father ne perform the blessing. V right over to see if they s Hawaiian friend had w confined to bed, and co self. Her fever was dang to take her to the hospi have a blessing.

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you tell your wife what a fine housekeeper she is, she'll work to live up to that praise. We as Negro members of the Church have in essence been reassured that we are now worthy of being treated like everyone else. Self-esteem isn't at the mercy of conditions that can't change. And it has made a difference.

I can feel the change within myself. To know that I've been divinely commissioned to act in the Lord's name evokes simultaneous feelings of self-esteem (my own feelings of worth are enhanced) and humility (can I measure up to this responsibility?). There is a certain sense of pride and a definite thrill that comes with holding and exercising the priesthood. For example, even though I have been a home teacher for several years, whenever my companion and I were called upon to perform an ordinance—administer to the sick, stand in a prayer circle, and so on—my companion always had to call another elder to come with us. I'll always remember the first night that I didn't have to call on another elder to stand in for me. Late in the evening, before I'd come home from work, Toe received a call from friends in the ward who had a young girl visiting them from Hawaii who was very ill. The father needed another priesthood bearer to help him perform the blessing. When I got home at about 11:00 P.M. I went right over to see if they still needed me; as it happened, they did. Their Hawaiian friend had worked herself into a state of exhaustion, was confined to bed, and couldn't perform even the smallest tasks for herself. Her fever was dangerously high, and my worried friends wanted to take her to the hospital. But the girl resisted, insisting that she first have a blessing.

So this other elder and I performed the ordinance. As I pronounced a blessing on her head, I could really differentiate between the simple prayers of faith I'd offered before in behalf of members of my own family and this blessing, which was pronounced according to the will of the Lord and under his specific authority. The words actually came into my mind as I blessed this girl, and I knew that I was speaking for the Lord. It was an overwhelming feeling and experience!

As I spoke, I felt inspired to say that this girl would regain her strength and health. I wasn't prepared for what happened immediately after the blessing, though. She popped up from her chair

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JOSEPH FREEMAN

First Black to Receive the Priesthood
Following the 1978 Revelation

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*To Jose
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