

Orson Scott Card  
In the Village — 26 January 2009

## Wise Old Men

Here's the great secret that *could* make the lessons in Melchizedek priesthood quorum meetings far more useful and interesting than they are right now.

Once again, I am learning an obvious lesson from Relief Society.

In Relief Society, they don't take all the younger women who are just starting their marriages and beginning to raise their kids and put them in a meeting of their own, where they never get to talk to or hear from the women who have already passed through that phase of life.

Instead, they're all in the same room. Whenever there's a discussion, the older women are there as a been-there-done-that resource.

It doesn't mean that every middle-aged or elderly sister is an expert on everything. But it does mean that in an average ward, *some* older sister has probably been through something similar to most problems the younger sisters are facing.

Balancing job with family? There's bound to be at least one older sister who can say, "I decided to quite my job and stay home with the kids; now I'm back in the workplace and yes, my career took a hit, but I wouldn't trade it."

While there's also going to be at least one who can say, "I made sure I kept my work schedule under control, and here's how I handled the daycare situation."

Divorce? Some of the older sisters have been through it — or avoided it. Problem kids? Some of the older sisters have probably raised kids with similar misbehavior. Health challenges? Let me tell you about *my* operation/therapy/medical bills/allergic reactions!

The older sisters can also serve as a good example or provide service — because they know about the need. Yes, you *can* go to the temple while you have small children, because I'm coming over to your house to tend them.

No, you *can't* afford the time to keep your house perfectly, if that means never getting relaxed time with your husband; if you only vacuum half as often, the carpet doesn't turn into sludge.

The same could be true for men, if only the elders and high priests could meet together more often, in circumstances that allow real discussion and conversation.

In our ward, at least, I've been delighted with the high quality of discussions in high priests group lessons; I've learned a lot from the men in my quorum. Unfortunately, a lot of what I've learned has been in the "now you tell me" category — because when I was an elder and needed the advice, I wasn't in the same room with men of such experience and well-earned wisdom.

Yet combining quorum lessons for Lessons in Real Life could also be disastrous — because of all that one-upmanship stuff I talked about in the previous two columns on this subject.

After all, the high priests tend to be guys who've been in bishoprics and stake presidencies, or at least on high councils. And high priests tend to be much more willing to speak up and spout off — no, wait, I mean "share their views" — than elders are, if only because the older you get, the less worried you are about what other people think of you.

That's why I think, at least at first, at least till the quorums get used to it, it's best to combine the quorums but then divide them again along different lines. After all, there are already two rooms assigned for the two meetings. Why not take the combined Melchizedek priesthood and divide them down the middle, sending one half into one room and the other half into the other.

Now each group is much smaller, where it's harder to remain anonymous and easier to feel like you have a personal relationship with the men in the group.

I don't actually care how you divide them up: assigning the men by name, random distribution, or even self-sorting — as long as both teachers are equally popular. What matters is that when you have lessons in urgently needed real-world topics, high priests and elders are in the same room together.

What about the content of those lessons? Here's where the teachers will really have to work to earn their positions. If you're one of the teachers of these special sessions, you'll teach (as with the Relief Society) only *one* lesson a month.

That means you have time to read a whole book for each lesson. Search for good books with valid, gospel-harmonious ideas for solving problems. Even if the book is imperfect, you can easily get your class to discuss what's wrong

with the author's suggestions and how Mormon men might do things differently.

It could be the best hour of the month, for elders and high priests alike — well-prepared, practical lessons in which elders can profit from high priests' experience, and high priests can find themselves useful to the young men on the front lines.

And when Young Men are ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood, they'll be able to see exactly why they're glad they graduated to the grownup quorum — because this is exactly what they need to learn as they're starting out their adult lives.