



Temple Blessings for Ourselves and Our Ancestors

*The purpose of temples is to provide a place
where holy ordinances are performed
for the living and for the dead.*

From the Life of George Albert Smith

In 1905, as a new Apostle, George Albert Smith toured several important Church history sites with President Joseph F. Smith and other members of the Quorum of the Twelve. One place they visited was Kirtland, Ohio, where the early Saints had built the first temple in this dispensation. “Coming in sight of the town,” Elder Smith recalled, “the first thing that greeted our vision was the beautiful temple of Kirtland. . . . It was there that the Prophet Joseph Smith and [Oliver Cowdery] saw the Savior upon the breastwork of the pulpit. It was there that Moses committed to them the keys of the gathering of Israel; and that Elias and Elijah came in the power and majesty of their great callings, and delivered the keys that had been committed to their care in the days of their ministry on the earth.”

As the group walked through the temple, Elder Smith thought about the devoted Saints who built it. “When we realized that the building was constructed by people in extreme poverty, how courageous men worked during the day to lay the foundations and build the walls of that structure, and then at night stood and defended it with weapons against those who had sworn that the building should never be completed, we could not help but feel that it was no wonder the Lord received their offerings and blessed them as few people have been blest upon the earth.”¹

Years later, after being set apart as President of the Church, President Smith dedicated the Idaho Falls Idaho Temple. In the

dedicatory prayer, he gave thanks for the saving work performed in the temple for the living and the dead:

“We thank thee, O God, for sending Elijah, the ancient prophet, to whom was ‘. . . committed the keys of the power of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, that the whole earth may not be smitten with a curse.’ [D&C 27:9.] We thank thee that he was sent to thy servant, Joseph Smith, to confer the keys and authority of the work for the dead, and to reveal that the plan of salvation embraces the whole of the human family, that the gospel is universal in scope, and that thou art no respecter of persons, having provided for the preaching of the gospel of salvation to both the living and the dead. We are most grateful unto thee that salvation is provided for all who desire to be saved in thy kingdom.

“May it be pleasing to thy people to search out the genealogy of their forebears that they may become saviors on Mt. Zion by officiating in thy temples for their kindred dead. We pray also that the spirit of Elijah may rest mightily upon all peoples everywhere that they may be moved upon to gather and make available the genealogy of their ancestors; and that thy faithful children may utilize thy holy temples in which to perform on behalf of the dead all ordinances pertaining to their eternal exaltation.”

In his prayer President Smith also acknowledged that the temple is indeed the house of the Lord and a place where God’s presence can be felt:

“Today we here and now dedicate the Temple unto thee with all that pertains unto it that it may be holy in thy sight; that it may be a house of prayer, a house of praise and worship, that thy glory may rest upon it and thy holy presence be continually in it; and that it may be an acceptable abode for thy Well-Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior; that it may be both sanctified and consecrated in all its parts sacred unto thee, and we pray that all those who may cross the threshold of this thine House may be impressed with the holiness of it. . . .

“Wilt thou, our Heavenly Father, let thy presence be felt here always, that all who assemble here may realize that they are thy guests and that this is thy House.”² [See suggestion 1 on page 90.]

Teachings of George Albert Smith

In the temple we receive sacred ordinances, including ordinances that bind families for eternity.

In order that we might be prepared for [the celestial] kingdom, the Lord, in his mercy, in this latter day restored the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and placed in it divine authority, and then gave understanding to His children that certain ordinances may be received and performed. For this purpose temples were built and into those temples those who desire a place in the Celestial Kingdom have the opportunity to go and receive their blessings, to enrich their lives and prepare them for that kingdom.³

We are the only people in the world who know what temples are for.⁴

Each [temple] has been built to one great eternal purpose: to serve as a House of the Lord, to provide a place sacred and suitable for the performing of holy ordinances that bind on earth as in heaven—ordinances for the dead and for the living that assure those who receive them and who are faithful to their covenants, the possession and association of their families, worlds without end, and exaltation with them in the celestial kingdom of our Father.⁵

Grateful should we be for a knowledge of the eternity of the marriage covenant. If in this life only had we hope, we would indeed be of all men most miserable [see 1 Corinthians 15:19]. The assurance that our relationship here as parents and children, as husbands and wives will continue in heaven, and that this is but the beginning of a great and glorious kingdom that our Father has destined we shall inherit on the other side, fills us with hope and joy.⁶

If I were to think, as so many think, that now that my beloved wife and my beloved parents are gone, that they have passed out of my life forever and that I shall never see them again, it would deprive me of one of the greatest joys that I have in life: the

contemplation of meeting them again, and receiving their welcome and their affection, and of thanking them from the depths of a grateful heart for all they have done for me.

But there are many, many millions of our Father's children who do not know that by partaking of certain ordinances prescribed by our Heavenly Father, husbands and wives may be united for time and eternity and enjoy the companionship of their children forever. How thankful we should be for that knowledge.⁷

There are only a few places in the world where we can be married for eternity, and that is in the temples of God. . . . There are also many of our brothers and sisters, all children of our Heavenly Father, who are denied this privilege because of . . . unavoidable reasons. But if they live worthily and if they would have availed themselves of the privilege if they had been able to do so, they will lose nothing by these temporarily unfavorable circumstances. But think then how much greater is the responsibility of those who live where men and women can be united for eternity, and where they can go and do the work for their dead! The people of the world do not have this blessing. I wonder if we appreciate it. . . .

Let us instruct our young people in these matters from their earliest youth, so that when they approach the time of marriage, there will be no question in their minds as to where or how or by whom that sacred ordinance should be performed—and the only place in which it may be performed for time and for eternity is in a temple.⁸

I thank [the Lord] for all the ordinances of the House of the Lord that I have received, each one of which has been intended not for me alone, but I have been permitted to receive a portion of that which has been intended for all his children, wherever they may be, if they are willing to receive what he offers to them, without money and without price.⁹

All of the . . . temples which have been built or yet will be dedicated, will prove to be a blessing beyond measure to all those who worthily avail themselves of the privilege of using it, both for themselves and for their kindred dead.¹⁰ [See suggestion 2 on page 91.]



“There are only a few places in the world where we can be married for eternity, and that is in the temples of God.”

Through temple work we make eternal blessings available to our deceased ancestors.

The genealogical society has spent years of time collecting [family history] information, and others spend years of time going into the House of the Lord to be baptized for those who are dead, to have husbands and wives and children sealed to one another, to unite the family as our Heavenly Father has instructed that we should do. It would be well if each of us would ask himself the question: What am I doing about it? Am I doing my part? Our Heavenly Father told the people through Joseph Smith that, unless we performed the work for our dead, we would lose our own blessings, and we would be cut off, and one of the very last things that the Prophet tried to do was to complete a temple in which the people could go and perform work for their dead. That is how important it is. It has to be done by someone.¹¹

I am here reminded of a story of two brothers who lived in a northern Utah town: The older brother, Henry, was a banker and merchant, and had ample means. The other brother, George, was a farmer, and did not have very much beyond his needs, but he had a desire to do temple work for their dead. He searched out their genealogy and went to the temple and worked for those who had passed on.

One day George said to Henry, "I think you should go down to the temple and help."

But Henry said, "I haven't time to do anything like that. It takes me all my time to take care of my business." . . .

About a year after that, Henry called at George's home and said, "George, I have had a dream, and it worries me. I wonder if you can tell me what it means?"

George asked, "What did you dream, Henry?"

Henry said, "I dreamed that you and I had passed from this life and were on the other side of the veil. As we went along, we came to a beautiful city. People were gathered together in groups in many places, and every place we came they shook your hand and put their arms around you and blessed you and said how thankful they were to see you, but," he said, "they didn't pay a bit of attention to me; they were hardly friendly. What does that mean?"

George asked, "You thought we were on the other side of the veil?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is what I have been talking to you about. I have been trying to get you to do the work for those people who are over there. I have been doing work for many of them, but the work for many more is yet to be done. . . . You had better get busy, because you have had a taste of what you may expect when you get over there if you do not do your part in performing this work for them." [See suggestion 3 on page 91.]

I have thought of this story from the lives of two brothers a good many times. Many people do not understand the seriousness and the sacredness of life; they do not understand the sacredness of



“Think of the devotion and the faithfulness of those who day after day go into these temples and officiate for those who have passed to the other side.”

eternal marriage. There are some of our people who have no interest in their genealogy. They care nothing about their forebears; at least you would think so by the way they behave. They do not go into the temple to do work for their dead. . . .

. . . After we have been to the House of the Lord for our own blessings, let us think of our responsibility to our forebears. What will be your reception when you go on the other side? Will you be the one they will reach out to and bless throughout the ages of eternity, or will you be like the brother who was selfishly working out his problems here and letting those who could not help themselves go on without his help?¹²

You know we are all tied together by the great work that is being done in the temples of our Father, where families that have not been united before are brought together by the power of the Holy Priesthood. The Lord intended that every one of his sons and

daughters should have the opportunity to be blessed, not only here upon the earth, but to enjoy eternal blessings.

Think of the devotion and the faithfulness of those who day after day go into these temples and officiate for those who have passed to the other side, and know this that those who are on the other side are just as anxious about us. They are praying for us and for our success. They are pleading, in their own way, for their descendants, for their posterity who live upon the earth.¹³

The Lord will assist us in searching for our kindred dead.

In Chicago a number of years ago, during the Century of Progress Exposition, I went into our Church booth one day and inquired of the missionaries as to who had charge of the great cultural and scientific fair.

They told me the man's name was Dawes, and I asked, "Is he the brother of Charles G. Dawes, who was vice president of the United States and also ambassador to Great Britain?"

And they answered, "Yes."

"Well," I said, "I am delighted to know that. I happen to know him."

I said to myself, "I think I will go call on him. He will be Henry Dawes." I knew Henry Dawes, so I went to the telephone and called his office. His secretary . . . told Mr. Dawes that George Albert Smith of Salt Lake City was there and wanted to meet him, and he told her to have me come over. So, instead of running me behind a hundred people to wait my turn, she took me to a side door, and there stood before me a tall man whom I had never seen before in my life.

He said, "I am Mr. Dawes."

He was very pleasant, but you can imagine how embarrassed I was. He *was* Mr. Dawes, and he was Ambassador Dawes' brother, but he was Rufus Dawes. I did not know there was a Rufus Dawes in the world.

"Well," I said, "I have come to tell you that this is a wonderful fair, and to express to you my appreciation for what you have done in organizing and seeing it through. It is marvelous what has been

accomplished, and what an education it is to so many people. Now, I understand that you are a busy man, and that is all I wanted to come and say, and to congratulate and thank you.”

“That is very considerate,” he said. “Come in.”

“No, that is all I came to say,” I replied.

He said, “Come right in.”

I said, “No, there are a hundred people waiting to see you.”

“None of them will say anything as nice as what you have said.”

So I went in, out of ideas and out of breath, almost. He insisted on my sitting down, and the next thing I said was: “By the way, Mr. Dawes, where do your people come from?”

“Do you mean in America?” he asked.

“I mean anywhere.”

He said, “Are you interested in genealogy?”

“I certainly am.” I answered. “We have one of the finest genealogical libraries in Salt Lake City.”

He said, “Excuse me just a moment,” and walked out of his office and came back with a carton about the size of an old family Bible. He took his knife, opened the carton, and took out a package wrapped in white tissue paper. He took the tissue paper off and put on the table one of the most beautifully bound books I have ever seen. It was well printed and profusely illustrated, and the cover was elegantly embossed with gold.

As I looked it over, I said, “Mr. Dawes, that is a beautiful piece of work.”

“It ought to be. It cost me twenty-five thousand dollars.”

“Well,” I said, “it is worth it.”

He said, “Is it worth anything to you?”

I said, “It would be if I had it.”

He said, “All right, you may have it!”—twenty-five thousand dollars worth of genealogy placed in my hand by a man whom I had met only five minutes before! Well, I was amazed. Our first visit continued but a short while longer. I told him how delighted I was

to have it and that I would place it in the genealogical library in Salt Lake City.

Before I left the room, he said, “Mr. Smith, this is my mother’s genealogy, the Gates’ genealogy. We are also preparing my father’s genealogy—the Dawes’ family. It will be one just like this. When it is finished, I would like to send you a copy of that also.”

Fifty thousand dollars of genealogy!—and just because I tried to be polite to someone. I do not think that was an accident. . . .

The Lord is helping us; it is marvelous how the way is opened and how other people frequently are prompted to prepare their genealogies. But sometimes we fail to take advantage of our opportunities to prepare our genealogies, notwithstanding the Lord has very pointedly said that unless we take care of our temple work we will be rejected with our dead [see D&C 124:32]. This is a very serious thing. This is something that we cannot change, if we have wasted our opportunities until life passes. . . . We cannot expect others to do this work for us.

So, the Lord, in one way or another, encourages, advises, and counsels us to do our work. Some families who can’t do the work themselves have someone else working all the time on their temple genealogy, and records.

If we do our part, our genealogies will be unfolded to us—sometimes in one way, sometimes in another. So I want to suggest to you, my brethren and sisters: let us do our part.¹⁴ [See suggestion 4 on page 91.]

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages v–vii.

1. Read the excerpts from the dedicatory prayer of the Idaho Falls Idaho Temple on pages 82–83, and read D&C 109:1–5, 10–13 (from the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple). Ponder the feelings you have when you attend the temple, and think about the experiences that have strengthened your testimony that the temple is the house of the Lord.

2. What reasons does President Smith give for building temples (see pages 83–84)? What can we do to encourage young people to prepare to be married in the temple?
3. Read the story on page 86. What are some simple ways for someone with many other responsibilities to participate in family history work? What can priesthood quorums and Relief Societies do to participate?
4. Review the section that begins on page 88. How has the Lord helped you as you've tried to find information about your ancestors? What other blessings have you received as you have participated in family history work?

Related Scriptures: Malachi 4:5–6; Doctrine and Covenants 97:15–16; 110; 124:39–41; 128:9, 15–24.

Teaching help: When one person reads aloud from President Smith's teachings, invite the other class members to "listen and look for specific principles or ideas. If a passage contains unusual or difficult words or phrases, explain these before the passage is read. If anyone in the group might have difficulty reading, ask for volunteers instead of having them take turns" (*Teaching, No Greater Call*, 56).

Notes

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1906, 57.
2. "Dedicatory Prayer . . . Idaho Falls Temple," *Improvement Era*, Oct. 1945, 564–65.
3. In *Deseret News*, Feb. 13, 1932, Church section, 7.
4. In Conference Report, Oct. 1950, 159.
5. "The Tenth Temple," *Improvement Era*, Oct. 1945, 561.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1905, 29.
7. "Priceless Prospects," *Improvement Era*, June 1950, 469.
8. "The Tenth Temple," 561, 602.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1929, 25.
10. "The Tenth Temple," 602.
11. "The Tenth Temple," 602.
12. "The Tenth Temple," 561, 602.
13. In Conference Report, Apr. 1937, 34–35.
14. "On Searching for Family Records," *Improvement Era*, Aug. 1946, 491, 540.



“It is a wonderful blessing that we enjoy . . . to feel sure of divine guidance, to have absolute faith in a personal God who is interested in us and who hears and answers our prayers.”