



## Open Your Soul to the Lord in Prayer

*Through personal and family prayer,  
we can feel Heavenly Father's influence  
in our lives and in our homes.*

### **From the Life of George Albert Smith**

Prayer was an important part of the home where George Albert Smith grew up. "Secret and family prayers were attended to by each member of the household," he said. "I learned quite early in life that the Lord would answer prayer for He answered mine and in many ways He gave me evidence of His watchful care."<sup>1</sup>

Even late in his life, President Smith remembered with fondness how his mother, Sarah Farr Smith, taught him to pray:

"I was trained at the knee of a Latter-day Saint mother. One of the first things I remember was when she took me by the hand and led me upstairs. In the room there were two beds, the bed in which my parents slept, and a little trundle bed over on the other side. I can remember it as if it were yesterday. When we got upstairs, she sat down by my little trundle bed. She had me kneel in front of her. She folded my hands and took them in hers, and taught me my first prayer. I will never forget it. I do not want to forget it. It is one of the loveliest memories that I have in life, an angelic mother sitting down by my bedside and teaching me to pray.

"It was such a simple prayer, but . . . that prayer opened for me the windows of heaven. That prayer extended to me the hand of my Father in heaven, for she had explained to me what it all meant as far as a little child could understand. From that day until now, while I have covered approximately a million miles in the world among our Father's other children, every day and every night, wherever

I have been, when I have gone to my bed or arisen from it, I have felt I was close to my Heavenly Father. He is not far away.”<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his life, President Smith relied on prayer not only as a means of drawing nearer to God but also to ask Him for help in times of need. One day while swimming in the Pacific Ocean, off the coast of California, he had the following experience:

“I was considered a very good swimmer and thoroughly enjoyed the sport. This particular day the tide was very high and very swift. As I left the shore and swam out into the ocean, I dived through the big breakers as they would crest and spray over me. My objective was the large swells beyond the breakers, where I could lie on my back and ride the big swells up and down.

“While engaging in this interesting sport, one very huge wave crested and broke before I could right myself following the dive through the previous one. The second one caught me and threw me to the floor of the ocean. I could feel myself being dragged out by the undertow. At this particular time many waves came in rapid succession and I was not able to right myself before I had to dive from one into another. I realized that my strength was rapidly leaving me, that it was going to be necessary for me to find some means of help. As I rode to the crest of one huge wave, I saw the underpilings of a pier close at hand, and I thought if with superhuman effort I could reach the security of the pilings that I would be able to save my life.

“I silently asked my Heavenly Father to give me the strength to reach my objective. As I was washed into arm’s length of the pier, I reached out and put my arms around one of the posts. They were covered with sharp dark blue barnacles, and as I wound my arms and legs around its security, they cut my chest, legs and thighs. I hung on as long as I could stand the pain and watched for a big friendly swell to come my way that I might throw myself on it and travel to a piling closer to shore. Each time with a prayer in my heart I would make the effort of traveling from one pile to another with the aid of the rolling swell.

“Slowly but surely and with great difficulty, I made my way to the shore where the water was shallow enough for me to walk to the

beach. When I reached the safety of the warm sand, I fell, exhausted. I was so weak, so nearly drowned I was unable to walk home until I had rested some time. Lying on the sand with its warmth and security, I thought of the harrowing experience that I had just endured and my heart was filled with gratitude and humility that the Lord had . . . spared my life.”<sup>3</sup> [See suggestion 1 on page 100.]

## **Teachings of George Albert Smith**

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### **Prayer allows us to talk to our Heavenly Father as though He were present.**

It is a wonderful blessing that we enjoy in these times of stress and uncertainty 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.<sup>4</sup>

A number of years ago . . . I heard of [a] nine-year-old boy, an orphan, who was hurried off to the hospital, where examination indicated that he had to be operated upon without delay. He had been living with friends who had given him a home. His father and mother, (when they were alive) had taught him to pray; thus, when he came to the hospital, the thing he wanted was to have the Lord help him.

The doctors had decided to hold a consultation. When he was wheeled into the operating room, he looked around and saw the nurses and the doctors who had consulted on his case. He knew that it was serious, and he said to one of them, as they were preparing to give him the anesthetic: “Doctor, before you begin to operate, won’t you please pray for me?”

The doctor, with seeming embarrassment, offered his excuses and said, “I can’t pray for you.” Then the boy asked the other doctors, with the same result.

Finally, something very remarkable happened; this little fellow said, “If you can’t pray for me, will you please wait while I pray for myself?”

They removed the sheet, and he knelt on the operating table, bowed his head and said, “Heavenly Father, I am only an orphan

boy. I am awful sick. Won't you please make me well? Bless these men who are going to operate that they will do it right. If you will make me well, I will try to grow up to be a good man. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for making me well."

When he got through praying, he lay down. The doctors' and the nurses' eyes were filled with tears. Then he said, "I am ready."

The operation was performed. The little fellow was taken back to his room, and in a few days they took him from the hospital, well on the way to complete recovery.

Some days after that, a man who had heard of the incident went to the office of one of the surgeons and said, "Tell me about the operation you performed a few days ago—the operation on a little boy."

The surgeon said, "I have operated on several little boys."

The man added, "This little boy wanted someone to pray for him."

The doctor said very seriously, "There was such a case, but I don't know but that it is too sacred a thing for me to talk about."

The man said, "Doctor, if you will tell me, I will treat it with respect; I would like to hear it."

Then the doctor told the story about as I have retold it here, and added: "I have operated on hundreds of people, men and women who thought they had faith to be healed; but never until I stood over that little boy have I felt the presence of God as I felt it then. That boy opened the windows of heaven and talked to his Heavenly Father as one would talk to another face to face. I want to say to you that I am a better man for having had this experience of standing and hearing a little boy talk to his Father in heaven as if he were present."<sup>5</sup> [See suggestion 2 on page 100.]

Let us so live that every night when we kneel to pray and every morning when we bow before the Lord in thanksgiving, there will be in us the power to open the heavens so that God will hear and answer our prayers that we will know that we are approved of Him.<sup>6</sup>



*“We should live so near to our Heavenly Father that when we bow before him we may know that the thing we are asking will be pleasing unto him.”*

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**If we live near to our Heavenly Father, we will be inspired to know what to pray for.**

My father as a young man came [near to] losing his life in the Provo River. . . . His father, who was at Salt Lake City, felt impressed to go into a room that had been set apart for prayer. He . . . knelt down . . . and said, “Heavenly Father, I feel that there is something seriously wrong with my family in Provo. Thou knowest I can not be with them there and be here. Heavenly Father, wilt thou preserve and safeguard them. . . .”

At the time when he was praying, just as near as it was possible to indicate by checking the time, my father had fallen into the river. It was at flood time. Timbers and rocks were pouring down from the canyon, and he was helpless. Those who were near saw his predicament, but they couldn’t reach him. The turbulence of the

water was such that nobody could live in it. They just stood there in horror. Father was doing everything he could to keep his head above water, but he was being thrown up and down and banged against the rocks and logs. All at once a wave lifted him bodily from the water and threw him upon the shore. It was a direct answer to . . . prayer.<sup>7</sup>

We should attend to our secret prayers. We should live so near to our Heavenly Father that when we bow before him we may know that the thing we are asking will be pleasing unto him, and if it isn't granted in the way that we ask it we may know that the blessing will come to us that we are entitled to and that will really be a blessing.<sup>8</sup> [See suggestion 3 on page 101.]

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**Prayer is a powerful influence in our personal lives,  
our homes, and our communities.**

The Lord . . . has explained to us how we may receive blessings through prayer. There are many people in the world who do not realize the real benefits of prayer. Prayer is a power. It has an influence that comparatively few people seem to understand. . . .

. . . How many are there in this Church who do not know that they have the right, the absolute right, to pray to their Father in heaven, and ask Him to take from them their distress and lead them to contentment and happiness?<sup>9</sup>

It is strange that any member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should have to be urged to say his prayers, and yet there are some people who do not pray in secret or have their family prayers. Yet unless we pray we lose the protection that prayer offers.<sup>10</sup> [See suggestion 4 on page 101.]

I would like to emphasize this: I hope that the Latter-day Saints will not fail to hold their prayers, their secret prayers and their family prayers. Children who are reared in homes where they do not have family prayers and secret prayers lose a lot, and I fear that in the midst of the world's confusion, of hurry and bustle, many times homes are left without prayer and without the blessings of the Lord; these homes cannot continue to be happy. We live in an age when



*“Safeguard your families in every possible way.  
Unite them under the influence of prayer.”*

we need our Heavenly Father as much as they ever needed Him in any age.<sup>11</sup>

Do not put away from you the power of God. Retain in your homes the influences of prayer and of thanksgiving, and let gratitude flow to him who is the author of our beings and the giver of all good.<sup>12</sup>

Let our homes be the abiding place of prayer and thanksgiving and gratitude. . . . Let us pray for the great men and women of the world who need the Lord but do not understand his interest in them. Pray for . . . our governors, our mayors of cities, the men who have influence in politics in our various communities, that they may do the things that will be better for all of us and make us happier, and please our Heavenly Father. That is our privilege. I say to you that the power of prayer is something that cannot be measured.<sup>13</sup>

### **Family prayer brings unity to families.**

We [as family members] will not always see alike; men will not always reason as their wives do and vice versa, but if you will pray together, with a real desire to be united, I can say to you, you will agree on all important matters.

I noticed . . . on a billboard: “The family that prays together stays together.” I do not know who placed it there, but I want to say that if you will think about it for a moment you will know that it is true. I admonish you to pray together to the Lord, and I do not mean by that to just say prayers, I do not mean to . . . repeat something over and over again, but open your souls to the Lord as husbands and fathers in your home, and have your wives and your children join you. Have them participate. There then comes into the home an influence that you can feel when you go there.<sup>14</sup>

As one of those whom the Lord has asked to teach, I plead with you to set your houses in order. Don’t take too many things for granted. Don’t be led into the follies and foibles of the world. Safeguard your families in every possible way. Unite them under the influence of prayer. . . . What a power prayer is to keep us in the pathway to eternal life and lead us into the celestial kingdom!<sup>15</sup> [See suggestion 5 on page 101.]

### **Suggestions for Study and Teaching**

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

1. In “From the Life of George Albert Smith” (pages 93–95), notice how President Smith’s early experiences with prayer influenced him throughout his life. What are some effective ways to teach children about the power of prayer?
2. Review the story about the nine-year-old boy (pages 95–96). Why is it that our prayers sometimes don’t feel like a face-to-face conversation with Heavenly Father? Consider what you can do in your personal prayers to feel His presence more often.



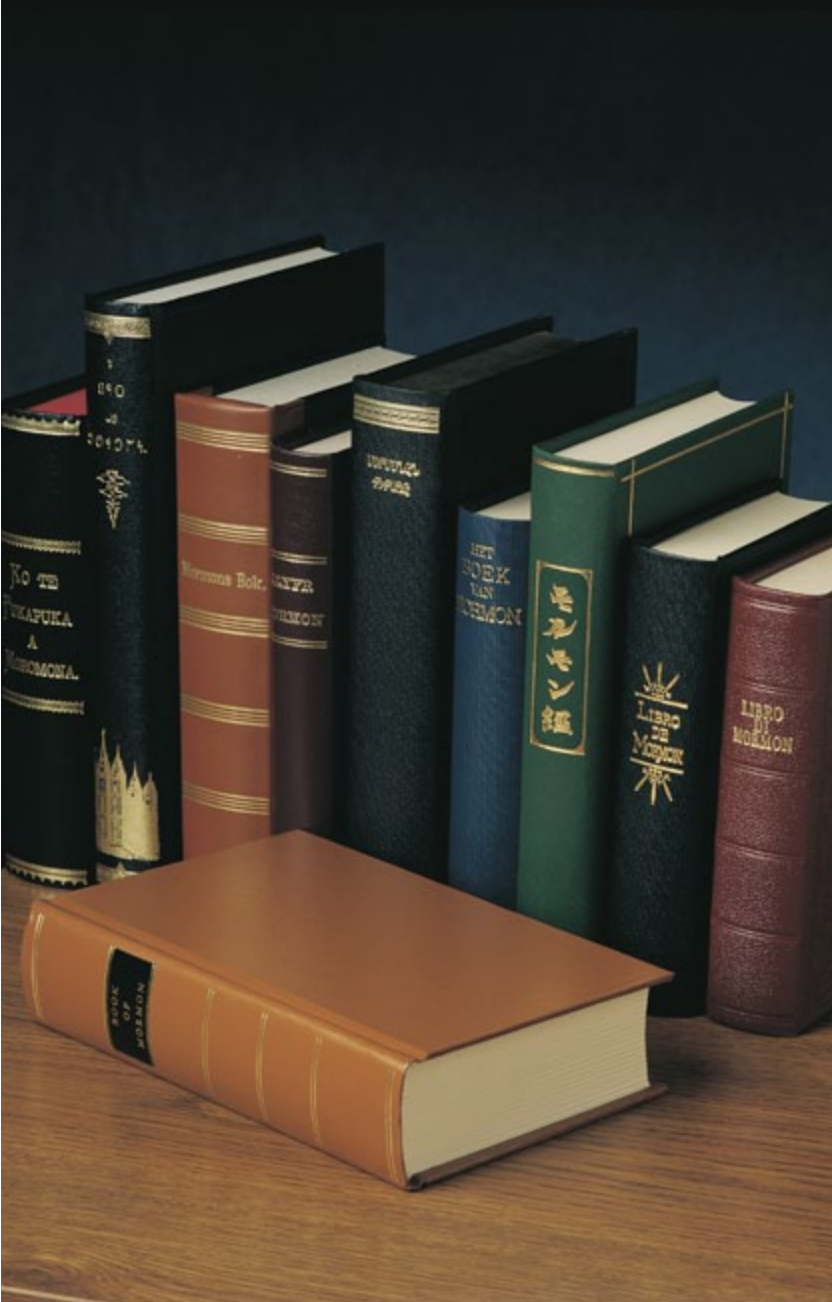
3. As you ponder President Smith's teachings on pages 97–98, think of a time when you felt prompted to ask for something in prayer. What would you say to someone who feels that his or her prayers have gone unanswered?
4. Consider President Smith's statement, "Unless we pray we lose the protection that prayer offers" (page 98). In what ways have you felt the power and protection of prayer? Consider sharing your testimony of the power of prayer with those you visit as a home teacher or visiting teacher.
5. President Smith taught that prayer will "keep us in the pathway to eternal life" (page 100). Why do you think this is so? What can families do to make sure they pray together consistently? Consider what you can do to make personal prayer a more meaningful part of your life.

*Related Scriptures:* Matthew 6:7–13; 7:7–11; 2 Nephi 4:35; Alma 34:18–27; 37:37; 3 Nephi 18:20–21; Doctrine and Covenants 88:63–64

*Teaching help:* "It is the pupil who has to be put into action. When a teacher takes the spotlight, becomes the star of the show, does all the talking, and otherwise takes over all of the activity, it is almost certain that he is interfering with the learning of the class members" (Asahel D. Woodruff, in *Teaching, No Greater Call*, 61).

### Notes

1. "Testimony of Elder George Albert Smith," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal*, Feb. 2, 1915, 501.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1946, 150–51.
3. "How My Life Was Preserved," George Albert Smith Family Papers, University of Utah, box 121, scrapbook 1, pages 45–46.
4. In Conference Report, Apr. 1931, 31.
5. "A Story of Two Boys," *Improvement Era*, June 1949, 365.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 17.
7. "Pres. Smith's Leadership Address," *Deseret News*, Feb. 16, 1946, Church section, 1.
8. In Conference Report, Oct. 1934, 51.
9. "Saints Blessed," *Deseret News*, Nov. 12, 1932, Church section, 5.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1941, 25.
11. Priesthood meeting, Oct. 4, 1947, archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
12. "Pres. Smith's Leadership Address," 6.
13. In Conference Report, Apr. 1948, 163–64.
14. In Conference Report, Apr. 1949, 190.
15. In Conference Report, Apr. 1933, 72.



*"[The scriptures contain] what your Father and mine has thought of enough importance to preserve and give to the children of men and make accessible in many languages of the World."*