

# FAMILY HISTORY AND TEMPLE BLESSINGS

**By Elder Dale G. Renlund**

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

And by Ruth L. Renlund and Ashley R. Renlund





*During their 2016 RootsTech presentation, Elder Dale G. Renlund and his wife, Ruth, and daughter, Ashley, reminded Latter-day Saints that real power comes from combining family history with temple blessings.*

**ELDER RENLUND:** In December 1963, my family made the six-hour drive from Helsinki to the island of Larsmo, on the western coast of Finland. That's where my father grew up and where my grandmother Lena Sofia lived.

Years earlier, in 1912, Lena Sofia and my grandfather Leander listened to missionaries from Sweden preach the restored gospel. At that time there were fewer than 800 missionaries in the whole world.

Those missionaries taught the message of the restored gospel, and Lena Sofia and Leander were baptized the following day. They became members of a small branch, the first in Finland.

Just a few years later, Leander's mother, who had been living with them, died of tuberculosis. In 1917, Leander also died of tuberculosis, leaving Lena Sofia a widow and pregnant with their 10th child. That child—my father—was born two months after Leander's death. Lena Sofia eventually buried 7 of her 10 children. It was a very difficult struggle for her, an impoverished peasant woman, to keep intact what remained of her family.

For nearly two decades she did not get a good night's rest. She hustled at odd jobs during the day to scrape together enough food to eat. At night she nursed dying family members. Death literally hung over their heads. In those days timber was split and often put in the roof rafters to dry. Those timbers were then used to make coffins for those who died. It is hard to imagine how Lena Sofia felt.

On the day I met her in 1963, I had just turned 11 and she was 87. She was stooped from a lifetime of hard labor. She was so bowed over that when she stood from her chair, her height did not change. The skin of her face and hands was weather-beaten—as tough and textured as worn leather.

She stood as best as she could, pointed to a photo of Leander on the wall, and said to me in Swedish, “*Det här är min gubbe*” (This is my hubby).

I had enrolled in a Swedish-speaking school earlier that fall and was just relearning Swedish. I thought my grandmother had incorrectly used the present tense of the verb when she said, “This *is* my hubby,” because Leander had been dead for 46 years. I pointed out to my mother that Lena Sofia should have said, “This *was* my hubby.” My mother simply told me, “You don’t understand.”

She was right. I didn’t understand—not as I do now. Since then, I have reflected many times on the meaning of that experience and what my grandmother had taught me.

Think about the strength and comfort she must have gained from knowing about the sealing power! That power is given direction as we research and learn about our ancestors. Both family history and the blessings of the temple can be meaningful in our lives, but the real power comes when we combine them. It is not just randomly mixing two things together; rather, the one helps direct the other. The knowledge that these ordinances would someday be performed for her and Leander brought comfort and peace to Lena Sofia during the long years of her widowhood.

## The True Value of Family History

**ASHLEY:** Without family history, the sealing authority can’t get where it needs to be to be used. And the true value of family history is realized only because of the sealing authority. The *real* power is in the combination.

**SISTER RENLUND:** I love this concept. We learn about both of these blessings everywhere in the scriptures.

Combining them brings more blessings and power into our lives. Let’s look at a couple of examples.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord tells us He sent Elijah to “plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers.” And this would turn the hearts of the children to the fathers. I think this is part, Dale, of what your grandmother planted in you. Then the Lord tells us that “the whole earth would be utterly



wasted at [the Savior’s Second] coming” if this turning did not happen (see D&C 2:2–3). That is a powerful message.

So even if we had all the family history records the world could offer and all that we could possibly collect, without the sealing authority restored by the prophet Elijah, the purpose of the Creation would have been thwarted and “wasted.” This is one of the first messages the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith in our dispensation.

**ELDER RENLUND:** You’re right, Ruth. Without even knowing it, I have felt the strength and power of stories and examples my whole life from my grandmother and other progenitors.

There’s a prophecy in Doctrine and Covenants section 128 where Joseph Smith quotes Malachi 4:5–6. He explains

the phrase “turn . . . the heart of the children to their fathers” in the context of the sealing power and baptism for the dead. Then he says, “And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times” (see D&C 128:17–18).

Think of that! Joseph Smith foresaw that even children would understand and know things that the learned men and women of the world could not explain. Children and youth all over the world participate in these blessings every day, just as I did when I was 11, learning about these concepts from my grandmother and mother. People who never hear of the Savior while living on earth can have the opportunity to receive the same blessings as those who do have the opportunity in this life. This opportunity for blessings excludes no one.

## Temple Ordinances and Individual Power

**SISTER RENLUND:** And the temple ordinances are central to individual power. In fact, the Lord has given us examples of this individual power. The early Saints were taught about the need for their endowments before they were able to further the work of salvation:

“It is expedient in me that mine elders should wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion—

“That they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, and have experience, and know more perfectly concerning their duty, and the things which I require at their hands.

“And this cannot be brought to pass until mine elders are endowed with power from on high” (D&C 105:9–11).

So the Lord was teaching about the importance of preparing to receive temple endowments so that the elders might be blessed with power from on high. This blessing enabled the Saints to continue to be more perfectly taught to use that power well.

**ELDER RENLUND:** You can extend this understanding if you continue to section 109, the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple. Joseph Smith prays, “And that all people who shall enter upon the threshold of the Lord’s house may feel thy power, and feel constrained to acknowledge that thou hast sanctified it, and that it is thy house, a place of thy holiness” (D&C 109:13).

**ASHLEY:** Yes, the temple ordinances are pure and powerful. But I can see how, when you add the temple to the work of studying and learning about your ancestors, the power is greater and takes our blessings to the next level.

**SISTER RENLUND:** Dale, do you think Lena Sofia understood that when she made her comment to you about Leander? Was her understanding more powerful because she was acknowledging the power of the temple along with her love for him and her family?

**ELDER RENLUND:** Yes, this is exactly what she was teaching. Lena Sofia knew that her long-dead husband was and would remain hers throughout the eternities. Through the doctrine of eternal families, Leander remained a presence in her life and part of her great hope for the future. Lena was like others, who “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

In a blazing affirmation of her faith in the sealing authority, in 1938, Lena Sofia submitted the family records for her deceased children who were over eight years of age when they died. That way their temple work could be performed, although she herself would not get to the temple during her lifetime. These records were among the earliest submitted from Finland to a temple for ordinances.

Do you remember the challenge Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave at RootsTech in 2014?

**ASHLEY:** He said, “Prepare as many names for the temple as baptisms you perform in the temple.”<sup>1</sup>

**SISTER RENLUND:** And in 2015, he added eight words: “And help someone else to do the same.”<sup>2</sup>

## Adding Spiritual Power

**ELDER RENLUND:** Exactly. I've been thinking about this apostolic challenge and how it can continue to grow. In light of our conversation, I believe we can add an element of spiritual power to this promise. Let's read in Ezekiel chapter 47:

"Afterward he [an angel] brought me [Ezekiel] again unto the door of the house [of the Lord]; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.

"Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side.

"And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles.

"Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins.

"Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. . . .

"Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.

"And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh" (Ezekiel 47:1–5, 8–9).

Ezekiel sees a river that increases as it flows from the house. The water that is moving forth from the temple

represents blessings that flow from the temples to heal families and give them life.

**ASHLEY:** But the water gets deeper as it gets farther away. That doesn't make sense to me.

**ELDER RENLUND:** Think of me (one person), my parents (two people), my grandparents (four people)—all the way back, and forward too. The growth of the river is similar to the exponential growth of our family through the generations.

The blessings of the temple are available to everything and everyone. And what blessings! "Every thing shall live whither the river cometh."

## "She's Waited Long Enough"

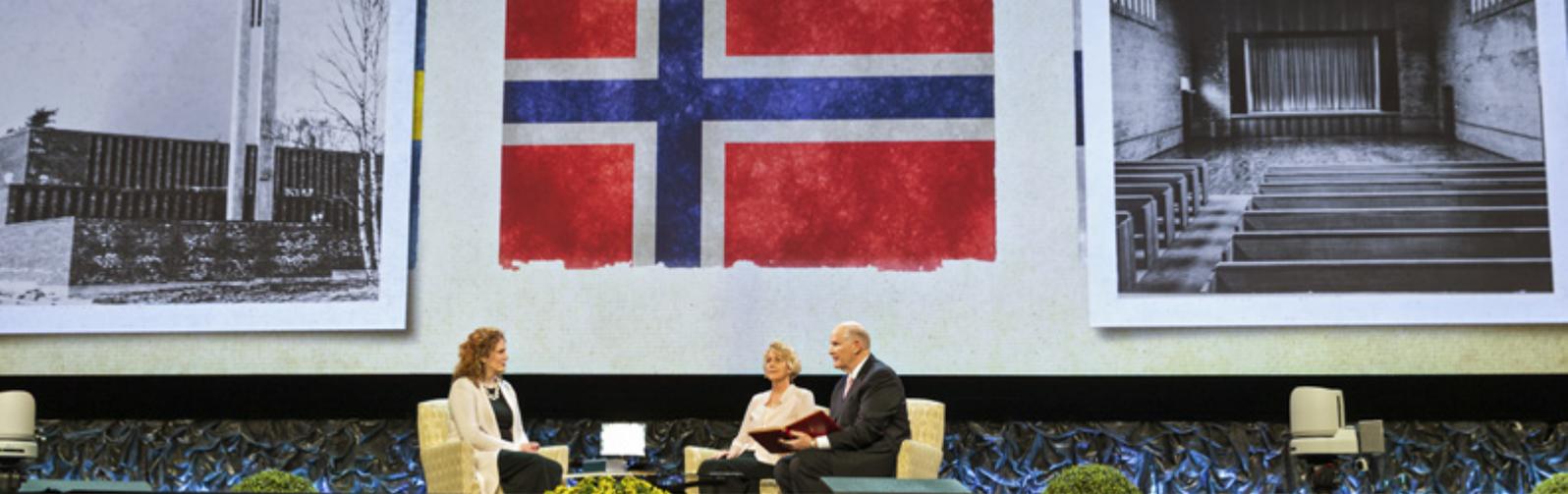
**ELDER RENLUND:** The Lord has a plan to overcome Lena Sofia's personal misfortune, our loss, your tragedy—in fact, everyone's calamity. He restored to the earth His priesthood and His sealing authority. Lena Sofia knew that, and so did my mom, Mariana.

**SISTER RENLUND:** You mean how she submitted Lena Sofia's name for temple work?

**ASHLEY:** I love that story. Shortly after Lena Sofia died in 1966, Grandma Mariana took her name in person to the Genealogy Department.<sup>3</sup> The man behind the counter told her that Church policy stated that someone had to have been dead for at least a year before temple work could be done for that person. Grandma Mariana replied, "I don't like that answer. Let me talk to someone who can give a different one. She's waited long enough."

Grandpa Åke said that he tried to reason with her, but she gave him a look he knew very well—that another word on the subject would be pointless. Grandpa wrote in his journal: "I probably should feel sorry for the man downtown who said that nothing could be done for at least a year. That man just didn't know what he was up against. I could have told him, but he didn't ask."<sup>4</sup>

**ELDER RENLUND:** Less than two months later, with the authorization of the President of the Church, Lena Sofia's



and Leander's temple work was completed. Grandma Mariana and Grandpa Åke acted as proxies for Lena Sofia and Leander, who were sealed for time and all eternity in the Salt Lake Temple. And did you know that now it is Church policy that a person who has not been able to enjoy the blessings of the temple because of distance doesn't have to wait a whole year? That way, others like Lena Sofia can receive those blessings as quickly as possible. As Grandma Mariana told the man in the Genealogy Department, "They have waited long enough."

**SISTER RENLUND:** What a great day that was for your family! Think of the joy Leander and Lena Sofia felt, not to mention the joy their children felt. These blessings are the culmination of family history and temple work coming together, igniting the power we have talked about today.

I was recently reminded that Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles talked about this power. Years ago he started trying to encourage people to recognize the blessing of combining the two divine aspects of temple and family history.

Elder Bednar said: "Family history is not a program—and then we also worship in the temple. It's all gathered together in one in Christ. And there is a power in finding [your] own ancestors and taking your own family names to the house of the Lord. I've done that. I have worked with and spoken with hundreds and thousands of people who have done that work. And as good as it is as we're in the temple, it's even better when we have done the work to be able to perform those ordinances for our own kindred dead."<sup>5</sup>

**ASHLEY:** President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, also promised that we can see this power in our lives. He said: "While temple and family history work has the power to bless those beyond

the veil, it has an equal power to bless the living. It has a refining influence on those who are engaged in it. They are literally helping to exalt their families."<sup>6</sup>

## A Promise of Protection

**ELDER RENLUND:** I feel grateful to add my testimony to theirs—to be one more apostolic voice in support of this temple challenge. I extend the promise of protection that has been offered in the past. Brothers and sisters, I promise protection for you and your family as you take this challenge to find as many names to take to the temple as ordinances you perform in the temple and to teach others to do the same.

If you accept this challenge, blessings will begin to flow to you and your family like the power of the river spoken of by Ezekiel. And the river will grow as you continue to perform this work and teach others to do the same. You will find not only protection from the temptation and ills of the world, but you will also find personal power—power to change, power to repent, power to learn, power to be sanctified, and power to turn the hearts of your family members to each other and heal that which needs healing. ■

*From a presentation at the RootsTech 2016 Family History Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, on February 6, 2016. To watch a recording of the presentation, visit [lds.org/go/217Renlund](https://lds.org/go/217Renlund).*

### NOTES

1. Neil L. Andersen, "My Days' of Temples and Technology," *Ensign*, Feb. 2015, 33.
2. Neil L. Andersen, in Ryan Morgenegg, "RootsTech 2015: Elder Andersen Adds to Temple Challenge," [lds.org/church/news/rootstech-2015-elder-andersen-adds-to-temple-challenge](https://lds.org/church/news/rootstech-2015-elder-andersen-adds-to-temple-challenge).
3. Now known as the Family History Department.
4. Mats Åke Renlund, "Reflections," personal journal, 119.
5. David A. Bednar, in "The Turning of Our Hearts" (video), [lds.org/topics/family-history/turn-our-hearts](https://lds.org/topics/family-history/turn-our-hearts).
6. Russell M. Nelson, "Generations Linked in Love," *Ensign*, May 2010, 93.