




A Temple-Going People

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Gary and Jennifer Tucker had a dream. They both wanted an eternal family. But Jennifer had almost lost hope. The path to achieving that dream leads through the temple, something for which Gary wasn't ready.

Then their bishop was inspired with an idea that would help the Tuckers—as well as many others in the Three Forks Ward, Bozeman Montana Stake—achieve the dream of an eternal family. A few years ago Bishop Aaron Baczuk was in a meeting for bishops and new converts in the stake. The Area Seventy who was presiding asked a new member, “Have you been to the temple to perform baptisms for the dead?” He had.

Bishop Baczuk had never considered taking unendowed adults to the temple. The following week he made an appointment with the Billings Montana Temple for adults in his ward to perform baptisms for the dead. The visit to the temple was a success, and in the months that followed, elders and high priests in the ward accompanied more unendowed adults to the temple. “It proved to be a very



Family history, fellowshipping, and baptisms for the dead inspire adult members to receive their temple endowments.

spiritual experience for them, compounding their desire and commitment to receive their endowments,” says Bishop Baczuk.

Preparing

To prepare, adult members work with the bishop to become worthy to attend the temple. Then they take the temple-preparation class. Their interest in the class really peaks after they perform baptisms for the dead. They find that talking about the temple in class is one thing, but actually

feeling the Lord's Spirit *in* the temple is another.

“Having the option to take someone to the temple who may not be prepared for additional covenants but can still have an experience participating in ordinances is huge,” says Bishop Baczuk. “I think it fits with the sentiment the Church is trying to convey in its temple-preparation booklet: ‘Come to the temple!’”¹

Three Forks Ward elders quorum president David Boyd says attending the temple to perform baptisms makes a goal tangible: “They begin to see the possibility that they can receive their own endowments. Many of them have



not even stepped foot on temple grounds before, so these adult baptism trips give members that opportunity.”

Many recently activated members in the ward perform baptisms for the dead before receiving their own endowments. “It was never a question of worthiness,” says Bishop Baczuk. “It was a question of preparedness. Some were worthy and prepared to do baptisms but were not prepared mentally or spiritually to take on the covenants of the endowment.” For the men, it’s also a time to prepare to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Family history also propels the temple work. Ward members, such as Larry and Carolyn Isom, work in the ward’s family history center to provide hundreds of family names. These three efforts—the

temple-preparation class, family history, and worshipping in the temple—work together. Those doing family history get excited to provide names for those going to the temple. Members going to the temple are excited to do temple work for their own ancestors and for those of their fellow ward members. And being in the temple motivates the members to prepare to return to the temple.

In the past few years, 22 members of the Three Forks Ward have taken the temple-preparation class, and 14 of them began attending the temple regularly to perform baptisms for the dead. Then, upon finishing the class, 13 of those 14 received their own endowments. Some of them were single or widowed, but others, like Gary and Jennifer Tucker, were sealed as a family.

Happy to be at the Billings Montana Temple on the day of their sealing are Gary, Jennifer, Cody, and Garrett Tucker.

Fellowshipping

Gary joined the Church in 1992, a couple of months before he and Jennifer were married. She was already a member. But working long hours and associating with the wrong friends made it hard for Gary to stay active in the Church, even with his wife's support. He says he spent many years "chewin' and cussin'."

When their daughter, Cody, was born, Sister Tucker tried to raise her in the gospel by taking her to church, even though Brother Tucker didn't want any Church materials at home. Although he encouraged his family to attend church, he didn't attend. When Cody turned eight, she was baptized by a missionary, not by her father. Brother Tucker says, "I'm very happy I was there, but that's a huge regret—watching instead of participating in it."

In the following years, fellowshipping helped Gary return to Church activity. Jennifer would invite ward members or the missionaries over for dinner, knowing that would give them a chance to talk with Gary. He is grateful

to those members and missionaries for being a good influence on him.

Dale Price, for example, home taught Jennifer's mother and got to know Gary and Jennifer that way. When Brother Price visited with Brother Tucker, they didn't talk about the gospel at first. They talked about a common interest: hunting. The Prices also sat with the Tuckers at ward activities, brought them food from their food storage when Brother Tucker was out of work, and gave them honey produced by their own honeybees. Honey is the Tuckers' favorite topping on toast. That little gift, as Brother Price describes it, was "to sweeten the relationship."

Doing Small and Simple Things

Counsel from their stake president also helped the Tuckers. President David Heap asked stake members to do "seven small and simple things": (1) Read the scriptures personally every day; (2) read the scriptures at least

Members of the Three Forks Ward regularly drive two-and-a-half hours to serve in the Billings Montana Temple. Several who attend are adults who perform baptisms for the dead as they and their spouses prepare to receive their endowments and be sealed.



LEFT: PHOTOGRAPH OF BILLINGS MONTANA TEMPLE BY STEVE BUNDERSON; PHOTOGRAPH OF BILLINGS MONTANA TEMPLE BAPTISTRY BY NORMAN CHILDS; RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH BY DRAKE BUSATH, © BUSATH PHOTOGRAPHY

five days a week as a family; (3) have personal prayer every morning and night; (4) have family prayer every morning and night; (5) attend church every Sunday as a family; (6) hold family home evening every Monday night; and (7) attend the temple every month.

Gary could see that these things would help his family be closer—something he very much desired—so the Tuckers began having family prayer, scripture study, and home evening. These efforts helped prepare Gary to be receptive to his bishop's invitation to prepare to go to the temple.

In January 2006 the Tuckers were attending a fireside at the bishop's home. Bishop Baczuk pulled Gary aside and talked to him about the temple. Right there, Gary gave the bishop his can of chewing tobacco so it wouldn't continue to be a temptation to him. He had many questions for the bishop then and in subsequent interviews. The bishop emphasized living the covenants that Gary had made at baptism so he could be worthy of the Spirit.

The Tuckers began taking the temple-preparation class, and Jennifer began attending the temple with her ward each month to perform baptisms for the dead. Gary was working on becoming worthy to go. Their daughter, Cody, who was 11 then, was excited to be able to go to the temple soon to perform baptisms. By the time she turned 12, Gary was able to go to the temple with her. It was the first time either of them had been in the temple.

Cody says, "It was wonderful. It's very peaceful there. My dad went, so that was even a bigger deal." Gary says he felt "unbelievable peace and joy that first time."

The next Sunday in the temple-preparation class, Gary was a different person. "A light had gone on," says Sister Elna Scoffield, who has taught the class for several years.



WE WILL BE A BETTER PEOPLE

"I hope that everyone gets to the temple on a regular basis. I hope your children over 12 years of age have the opportunity of going to the temple to be baptized for the dead. If we are a temple-going people, we will be a better people, we will be better fathers and husbands, we will be better wives and mothers. I know your lives are busy. I know that you have much to do. But I make you a promise that if you will go to the house of the Lord, you will be blessed, life will be better for you."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley," *Ensign*, July 1997, 73.

Gary stayed after class to ask questions. He had felt the Spirit at the temple and wanted to return—not just to perform baptisms but to receive his endowment and to have his family sealed to him.

The next month the Tuckers again attended the temple with the bishop and other ward members.

Overcoming Trials

In the weeks before Brother and Sister Tucker received their endowments and were sealed, they felt the adversary's opposition. Gary was making progress, but he still had doubts about his worthiness to be in the temple. Their dream of an eternal family was close, but it felt just out of reach. The Tuckers knew they had to pray together more often, asking for

strength. "We always received it in the form of calming peace and reassurance that all things are in the Lord's hands," says Sister Tucker. "Even up to the time we walked inside the temple, His calming Spirit was with our whole family."

After Gary and Jennifer received their endowments, they knelt in the sealing room with their children, Cody and Garrett, dressed in white. When six-year-old Garrett saw his mom crying, he reached up to wipe the tears from her cheeks. Gary and Cody were crying for joy too. Even the sealer was emotional.

The Tuckers say their family now enjoys stronger relationships and better communication. Gary says, "We are happier. My wife and I are closer, and our children see that." Gary feels like he's a better example to his family members who are not members of the Church, and he hopes that other families in his ward will want the same blessings that the Lord has given the Tuckers through the temple. ■

NOTE

1. See *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple* (booklet, 2002), 1.