

# THE BLESSINGS OF FOCUSING ON THE TEMPLE



"Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life."

**Alma 40:11**

*There is no greater work than building an eternal family—and that work finds fulfillment in the house of the Lord.*

**By Joshua J. Perkey**

Church Magazines

**F**ew things in life affect us more poignantly than the loss of a loved one. The lives of Bishop Richard Rodriguez and his wife, Ruth, have been punctuated by such a loss. Yet with eyes to see and ears to hear and through the sacred ordinances of the temple, they have faced this challenge with faith, which has led them closer to the Savior, to happiness, and to peace.

## **Dealing with Loss**

Richard and Ruth met while working at a cement production company in Azogues, a small town in the Andes Mountains not far from Cuenca, Ecuador. Richard was a convert to the Church, having joined with his mother and brother a few years before. At the time, Ruth was not a member.

"When I met Ruth, I couldn't leave her," he says, smiling.

They were married in 1996. Just a few months later, Ruth's father passed away.

"His death was the cause of a severe depression in my life," Ruth explains. "You never get over losing a loved one. You always feel the loss."

In 2001, Richard's mother died. Again, the loss brought much sorrow. But over the years, Richard had matured in his knowledge and testimony of the gospel, and that provided a comforting perspective.

"Because of the gospel," he says, "I understood a little bit about how my mom was doing. I shared Alma 40:11 with Ruth and explained what happens to the spirit when it leaves the body. This was a great comfort to us both."

## **Valuing Agency**

Nevertheless, Ruth was still not interested in the Church, though she was friendly to Church members and the missionaries. "I just didn't feel the need to change my religion," she says.

Richard decided not to press the issue. "Every time we talked



about the Church, the conversation ended badly,” he says. “And when I pressured her, it went badly. So I stopped. I didn’t want to do that to her.”

In the fall of 2001, the missionaries invited Ruth to a baptismal service. Her decision to accept the invitation changed everything.

At the service the sister who was being baptized shared her testimony. “She spoke about the miracles that had happened in her life since she had come to know the Church—miracles of health, well-being, and strength,” Ruth recalls. “This sister basically lived alone yet had this testimony.”

Ruth wondered how a woman who had faced such difficult trials could have that kind of faith. That question and acting on the invitation to attend the baptismal service touched Ruth’s heart and prepared her to receive a witness from the Spirit.

“That’s when I made the decision to be baptized. Later, when Richard and I were alone, I said, ‘Richard, what do you think about me getting baptized in December?’ And there you have it. I was already familiar with the Church and the gospel. But I still needed to hear the discussions from the missionaries.”

“God prepares the hearts of people,” Richard adds. “We can do some things on our own. I did many things, but it wasn’t until Ruth was prepared that this happened.”

Ruth agrees: “I had many challenges to overcome when we got married. When I finally overcame those challenges, that’s when I realized I didn’t need to wait for another miracle in my life. That’s when I was ready to be baptized.”





"Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ."

**"The Family: A Proclamation to the World,"** *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.

**Above:** Richard and Ruth Rodriguez with their children (from left): Maria Judith, Jorge, Richard Jr., and Freddy. They were sealed in the Guayaquil Ecuador Temple (right).

### Facing Challenges with Faith

Ruth's baptism in December 2001 marked a shift in their family focus. With that shift came spiritual strength and blessings that have guided them to this day.

"We were sealed in the temple on June 28, 2003," Richard says. "Because of that, many blessings have come into our lives. Our first two children were sealed to us, and our next two children were born in the covenant. Our children are a blessing."

Richard explains that serving faithfully in the Church has brought harmony into their home: "My wife and I are yoked together equally. We have faced challenges and trials, but we have been able to get through them



"The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally."

**"The Family: A Proclamation to the World,"** *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.

united. We believe in the same things. Being sealed in the temple, we know that if we endure faithfully, the Lord will help us.”

### Focusing on the Temple Changes the Ward

When Ruth was baptized, only 25 members lived in what was then the Azogues Branch. Now a ward, it often has 75 or more members at sacrament meeting.

“You strengthen individuals when you strengthen families,” Ruth says. “As members keep the commandments and listen to all that the leaders teach us, we strengthen our families and the ward. It is like each family is a part of the cement that holds the ward together so that it can grow.”

As bishop, Richard has promoted efforts to strengthen families through making and keeping temple covenants and frequent temple worship. One manifestation of this emphasis is ward temple trips to the Guayaquil Ecuador Temple, about five hours away.

“We attend as a ward as often as we can,” Ruth says. “Our goal is to have every family sealed in the temple.”

“Attending the temple to be sealed has helped families grow spiritually,” Richard adds. “In recent years a number of families have been sealed. And now they prepare their own family names and perform ordinances for their ancestors. Those who do have developed a greater commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ and found greater happiness. The temple has changed the vision of the members.”

### Focusing on the Temple Changes Individuals

Through sacred, personal experiences, the Rodriguez family has gained a powerful,

personalized testimony of temple covenants and of performing vicarious work for ancestors.

“We have performed the work for my uncles and aunts, siblings of my father,” Ruth says. “We have felt that we should do the work for our family ourselves. I know the vicarious work we do is true. I feel great peace in the work we have been able to do for our ancestors. This has been a most special work.”

Richard testifies, “I love doing temple work for those who are waiting. This is the work of our whole lives. This is what we want to do.”

Attending the temple has changed their family. “When we were sealed in the temple, things changed radically,” Ruth says. “Our spiritual strength has grown.”

Richard agrees: “For our family, it has meant greater family unity, knowing that the family bond, which ultimately is the beginning and end of everything, gives us the strength to move forward. In life there are always challenges. But with the focus that the temple gives us, we can face the future in a different way. Being able to share these blessings—and especially to help other families do the same—brings great joy to our lives. I feel greater commitment in our home.”

Richard feels that the family’s decision to prepare to go to the temple, receive ordinances, be sealed, and then return to perform vicarious work for their ancestors has been one of their greatest blessings. “When we exercise faith and accept the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and especially when we go to the temple to receive sealing and saving ordinances through the priesthood, lives are changed,” he says. “One who receives the covenants of the temple is no longer the same.” ■



### ACTING AS AGENTS

“In the grand division of all of God’s creations, there are ‘things to act and things to be acted upon’ (2 Nephi 2:14). As children of our Heavenly Father, we have been blessed with the gift of moral agency, the capacity and power of independent action. Endowed with agency, we are agents, and we primarily are to act and not merely be acted upon—especially as we ‘seek learning . . . by study and also by faith’ (D&C 88:118).”

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Watching with All Perseverance,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 42.