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THE JOY OF Family History Work

Elijah's promise makes it clear that each of us has an obligation to the generations that precede us and to the generations that follow us.

Never forget that family history—and the temple ordinances enabled by it—is an essential part of the work of salvation and that participation in this sacred work for the dead blesses the lives of the living. It strengthens our faith in and commitment to the gospel, helps us resist temptation, draws our families closer together, and strengthens our wards and stakes.

I want to emphasize the “find, take, and teach” of family history work. By *find*, we mean use the FamilySearch website or the *My Family: Stories That Bring Us Together* booklet¹ to find the name of one or more of your ancestors or their descendants. Then *take* these names to the temple, or share them with others so they can take them. (When possible, go to the temple as a family.) Finally, *teach* your family and then teach others to do the same.

Our Father's plan is about families, symbolized by a great tree. For a tree to live and grow, it needs both roots and branches. We likewise need to be connected to our roots—our parents, grandparents, and other ancestors—as well as to our branches—our children, grandchildren, and other descendants. Several poignant scriptures use the analogy of a tree with roots and branches representing the family (see Isaiah 11:1; Jacob 5).



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The Mission of Elijah

The prophet Malachi, in the last book of the Old Testament, prophesied of a time when Elijah the prophet would return to the earth “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord . . . [to] turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest [He] come and smite the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5–6).

When the angel Moroni appeared to 17-year-old Joseph Smith in 1823, he quoted these same verses from Malachi but rendered them differently. Moroni said on that September night:

“Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

“. . . And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole

earth would be utterly wasted at his coming” (Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39).

Four times the angel Moroni repeated Malachi’s words to the boy Joseph.

Imagine if all we knew about this great prophet Elijah was what Joseph Smith knew from the Bible. From that book of scripture we know that Elijah lived during a troubled time, almost 900 years before Christ’s birth. The evil duo Ahab and Jezebel reigned in wickedness over Israel as king and queen, inducing subjects to worship the false god Baal and murdering the Lord’s prophets, among others.

Elijah was a remarkable prophet. Christians and Jews the world over accept the Old Testament account of Elijah.

The scriptures record how Elijah’s life was miraculously preserved and how he saved a widow from famine and raised her son from the dead (see 1 Kings 17). Elijah describes how “a still small voice” reassured him that he was not alone in his devotion to Jehovah

(see 1 Kings 19:4–14). Finally, Elijah was translated and carried into heaven without tasting death (see 2 Kings 2:7–12).

Only through modern revelation is Elijah’s complete role revealed. He was the last prophet to hold the sealing power of the Melchizedek Priesthood before the time of Jesus Christ. With Moses, he appeared to the Savior and Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration in the meridian of time (see Matthew 17:1–4; Mark 9:2–5). As a seminal element of the Restoration, Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in 1836 in the Kirtland Temple. There, he again restored the keys of the sealing power, this time for sealing families in this dispensation in fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy (see D&C 110:13–16). Because Elijah was sent in this dispensation, the fulness of salvation is available to both the living and the dead.

Elijah’s mission is facilitated by what is sometimes called the spirit of Elijah, which, as President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, is “a manifestation of the Holy Ghost bearing witness of the divine nature of the family.”² That is why we often call the manifestations of the Holy Ghost associated with family history and temple work the spirit of Elijah.

Of those who have passed on before us, we read in the Doctrine and Covenants that “we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect” (D&C 128:18). What does this mean? We find the answer in scripture:

“And now, my dearly beloved brethren and sisters, let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. *For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation*, as Paul says concerning the fathers—that they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect” (D&C 128:15; emphasis added).

“Their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation” means that the salvation of the whole human family is interdependent and interconnected—like the roots and branches of a great tree.

Hold a Family Tree Gathering

Family commitments and expectations should be at the top of our list of priorities. They will protect our divine destiny. For families to get started on their family history work, I challenge them to hold what I call a “Family Tree Gathering.” This should be a recurring effort. Everyone could bring to these gatherings existing family histories, stories, and photos, including cherished possessions of grandparents and parents. The *My Family* booklet could be utilized to help record family information, stories, and photos that could then be uploaded to Family Tree on FamilySearch.org.

However, this cannot be only a one-time effort. It requires a lifetime of diligence. For those who are looking for more fruitful ways to observe the Sabbath day as a family, the hastening of this sacred work is fertile ground.

The center of family history is the home. We need to help our young people develop a love for this work. Many of our youth have already had their hearts turned to their



fathers. Our young people are excited to learn about the lives of family members—where they came from and how they lived. Some become so excited about the work that they lose track of time and are disappointed when they have to stop.

Young people love stories and photos, and now they have easy access to the technological expertise to preserve those memories in Family Tree on FamilySearch.org. They can find family members who need temple ordinances through a newly released “record-hinting” experience on FamilySearch.org.³

These record hints about family members are powered by the indexing efforts of Church members worldwide. These records—and there are millions of them—will help you find more ancestors who may not yet be connected to your family and who need ordinances performed for them in temples. Other websites that use hinting technology with records from around the world include Ancestry.com,



Findmypast.com, and MyHeritage.com, which all Church members can access for free.

Although the center of family history is the home, the Church will continue to provide family history centers where families can discover their ancestors together and access the Internet if it isn't readily available at home.

All worthy members of the Church ages 12 and up can obtain a limited-use temple recommend to perform baptisms for the dead after an interview with one or two ecclesiastical leaders. This includes all new converts.

Having a signed recommend that you can present at any temple is a joy. A recommend also carries with it sacred protection. As President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015) said:

“No work is more of a protection to this Church than temple work and the family history research that supports it. No work is more spiritually refining. No work we do gives us more power. No work requires a higher standard of righteousness.

“Our labors in the temple cover us with a shield and a protection, both individually and as a people.”⁴

Our Obligation to Our Ancestors

Family history is a family affair, but not all family members face the same situation. Many of our ancestors have died without being married or having children. Some divorced, and some married several times. Many had children who were disabled or who died young. Everyone has a story.

Every soul, living or dead, who is accountable for his or her actions needs the blessing of sacred temple ordinances, and we can help our family members receive them. It doesn't matter if you are single, whether your husband or wife is less active, or whether you yourself are less active or even a member of the Church, you too can assist in the salvation of souls. There can be no more important, fulfilling, or glorious work.

The head of this work is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. After His death, He opened the door to the prison that held the dead captive:



“He organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men. . . .

“And the chosen messengers went forth to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel” (D&C 138:30–31).

Our message is simple, but it is profound. It does not require soaring rhetoric or complex doctrine. It is about having a broken heart and a contrite spirit and a commitment to follow our Savior.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I promise that if you look beyond the bonds of time and mortality and help those who cannot help themselves, you will be blessed

with more closeness and joy in your family and with the divine protection afforded those who are faithful in His service.

Elijah’s promise makes it clear that each of us has an obligation to the generations that precede us and to the generations that follow us. May you parents, youth, and children find joy and be blessed in every other aspect of your life as you fulfill the obligation that has been sent from heaven to participate in the sacred work for the dead. ■

From an address, “Our Father’s Plan Is about Families,” delivered at the RootsTech 2015 Family History Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, on February 14, 2015. Visit RootsTech.org to learn more about the 2016 RootsTech conference.

NOTES

1. For information on the *My Family* booklet, go to familysearch.org/myfamily.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “A New Harvest Time,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 34.
3. The Record Hints feature shows “the results of an extensive search of [FamilySearch’s] collection looking for your ancestors” (familysearch.org/blog/en/give-research-boost-record-hints/).
4. Boyd K. Packer, “The Holy Temple,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Oct. 2010, 35.

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