



TEMPLES, TAPROOTS, AND FAMILY TREES



TURNING THE HEARTS, BY ANNIE HENRIE NADER © 2013. MAY NOT BE COPIED; BACKGROUND FROM GETTY IMAGES

To anchor our children against the winds of the world, we must help them to see themselves in God's great plan of salvation.



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Several years ago an Apostle of the Lord asked me this searching question: “What is the taproot that will anchor a child in the wind?”

To answer, we need to know that a taproot is the first and largest root that springs from a seed. It grows downward and provides stability. Plants with taproots tend to be drought tolerant and can even store reserves of food, making them self-sufficient and resilient.

With that description in mind, I thought of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies in the Book of Mormon. They talked about being taught truth that caused them to turn their hearts to Christ. They said, “God . . . has made these things known unto us . . . because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children; . . . he doth visit us . . . that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations” (Alma 24:14).

I believe that the taproot that will anchor our children in the wind is helping them to see themselves in the great plan of salvation, as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies did. When children know who they are, where they came from, why they are here, and where they are going, their lives take on a sense of purpose, enabling them to grasp tightly to truth.

When it comes to anchoring our children against the winds of the world, we must devote our best efforts. We all want our children and grandchildren to have access to this taproot. When they understand God's plan for them, they will be stable, drought tolerant, self-sufficient, and resilient!

Helping our children be grounded in truth must become a priority for all of us—not only fathers and mothers but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, leaders, and teachers.

Anchored to the Taproot

How does family history relate to this idea of anchoring to the taproot of our Heavenly Father's plan? Let's go to the tree that grows from the taproot.

Consider the beautiful painting by Annie Henrie Nader titled *Turning the Hearts* (left). The artist said the tree represents the tree of life and the fruit of the gospel. “It also represents a family tree,” and “the fruit embodies those *precious pieces of information* we pass down through . . . generations.”¹

When I first saw this painting, I thought, “I want to do that!” I want to stand under that beautiful tree and pick those precious pieces of fruit from its branches to pass down to my

children and grandchildren. I want them to see themselves surrounding that tree. I want them to turn their hearts to their roots. I want them to know their progenitors—their positive attributes and their struggles. Where did their ancestors get the strength to endure? What are their stories of exercising faith in Jesus Christ that enabled them to live Heavenly Father’s plan?

I love family history! I love learning my ancestors’ stories. Those stories create a connection. But I don’t always feel like a family historian, because I haven’t done all we think of as “family history.” So, here are two confessions:

First, I am a beginner in doing research. My contribution right now is serving my husband, Jack, cookies while he does family history research on the computer.

Second, I am not into scrapbooking.

But am I still creating a connection to the taproot for my children and grandchildren? Here is how I am helping them to see the fruit of the tree:

When I discovered Annie Henrie Nader’s painting, I thought of my mother. She is 97 years old. She remembers her mother and grandmother. It occurred to me that I must seize *this* moment. My mother has picked fruit from the tree. She holds in her hand precious pieces of information she can share with my grandchildren. They could *personally* learn from her about their second- and third-great-grandmothers.

I could hardly wait to create a family gathering. It happened on Christmas Day. The children gathered around my mother and attentively listened to her describe the precious memories she loves about her mother and grandmother, who lived more than a hundred years ago. The children heard stories of faith, and they learned how these women endured trials. They learned that these great-grandmothers loved, laughed, and cried throughout their earth lives.

I began to think, “What more could I do?” When my grandchildren see the names of their ancestors on a printed page or on a computer screen, I want them to see more than just a name. I want them to see real people who dealt with many of the same challenges we experience today.

We can anchor all generations to the taproot as we share precious pieces of information about wonderful men and women, perform sacred temple ordinances for them, and seal our families together forever.

The veil is thin, and when we know about those who have gone before, they become real people with “real-life situations”² who can help us in times of need—especially when the wind is blowing. Joseph Smith said, “They are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith.”³

Making Our Ancestors Real

How do we make our ancestors real? We tell their stories. Too much courage, faith, and real-life challenges went into their lives for us to let their examples dissolve like faded ink on paper.

I started with a two-minute exercise. For two minutes I wrote everything I could remember about my deceased father that I could use to introduce him to my grandchildren. That got me thinking: “What if I were to do this exercise with other progenitors? And what if I made it an ongoing process? What if I collected that information? What if I took a simple notebook and titled it ‘Precious Pieces of Information?’ Could I also use my mobile device to record insights about each ancestor I have known?”

We can never tell when a memory will surface. I could take notes at funerals when we, as a family, celebrate

another life well lived. Is the Sabbath day not a perfect time to gather our children, talk about the stories of those who have gone before, and record all we can remember about those ancestors we love?

As my grandchildren's lives unfold, they could learn from:

- A great-grandmother who lost two babies at birth and later watched four of her boys go off to war—and only three return. Yet she lived a life of unusual optimism and cheerfulness.
- A great-grandfather who ran away from an orphanage at age 16 to make a life for himself. How did he find the self-discipline to become an inventor and an engineer?
- A great-grandfather whose quarantine for scarlet fever prevented him from graduating from high school. But he didn't give up. While working three jobs to provide for his family, he sat at the kitchen table late at night with his son, and they worked together toward high school graduation.
- A grandfather who taught thriftiness when he would tell his children, "I hope you can eat that between two slices of bread." Or after seeing a neighbor repair his car in the rain, he would teach them perseverance when he would say, "The rain never stopped Bill Black."
- A great-aunt in her 80s who paused her life many times to go to the homes of her siblings and care for them in their last days on earth. She is a legend, an example of unselfishness in our family.

Memories and Ordinances

These stories will be lost, however, unless I find ways to preserve and share them. I must also provide temple ordinances for those who are waiting. So, I've discovered two ways I can incorporate sharing into my life:

First, I can take opportunities to share these pieces of information with my children and grandchildren. I can say, "Katie, look how you are finding humor despite your trials. You're just like your Grandma Nancy."

Or I can compare examples of the past to the present when I speak of an ancestor's self-discipline in giving up tobacco. Might this be an example to help a grandchild step away from the addictive draw of video games?

Would knowing how a grandmother dealt with symptoms of depression help a young mother today with the same symptoms?

Second, I can share my information on the FamilySearch Memories app.⁴ I can attach photos and stories. As I submit these precious pieces of information online, others may connect the past to the present and continue to create an unbroken chain of memories.

To know these pieces of information about our immediate family members who have gone before is one step, but to climb into the branches of our family tree and discover names of those who are waiting for their saving ordinances is another step. In Annie Henrie Nader's painting, passing the fruit may also represent discovering names of ancestors and performing their ordinances. We can do it as a family. As we pass the fruit, we not only see ourselves in the plan of salvation, but we also offer salvation to those who have gone before. Both are important elements of family history.

So, I say to my husband: "Jack, move over. I want to sit next to you at the computer and learn family history! I want to take the next step in my family history journey and feel that same joy you feel when I see you run upstairs exclaiming, 'Look! I found another name to take to the temple!'"

Better yet, we'll do family history together. We can anchor all generations to the taproot as we share precious pieces of information about wonderful men and women, perform sacred temple ordinances for them, and seal our families together forever. ■

From a presentation at the RootsTech 2016 Family History Conference in Salt Lake City on February 6, 2016. To watch a recording of the presentation, go to lds.org/topics/family-history/familydiscoveryday/wixom.

NOTES

1. Annie Henrie Nader, description of painting on back of print.
2. Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants.
3. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 6:52.
4. See familysearch.org/mobile/memories; familysearch.org/blog/en/familysearch-memories-app.