



Preparing Youth for the Temple:

Seven Simple Steps

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On a Monday morning, long before sunrise, I walked into the baptistry at the Provo Utah Temple to find the waiting area jam-packed with youth, all of them dressed in white jumpsuits and eager to get to work. As a temple ordinance worker, I had seen my share of large youth groups, but this was by far the biggest.

And on a school day, no less!

Part of the Greatest Work

I knew at once why they were there. The night before, President Russell M. Nelson had addressed the youth of the Church and told them they had an important work to do in helping to gather scattered Israel, both among the living and beyond the veil. He said, “My question tonight to every one of you between the ages of 12 and 18 is this: Would you like to be a big part of *the greatest* challenge, *the greatest* cause, and *the greatest* work on earth today?”¹

Judging by the size of the group in the baptistry that morning, the answer was a resounding yes!

As I watched the youth file into the baptistry that morning, eager to accept the prophet’s invitation, a thought struck me: “The youth are clearly willing, but are we, as parents and leaders, doing all we can to prepare them?”

Here are seven steps to help us rise to the challenge.

Now that youth as young as 11 can enter the temple, parents and leaders have an even greater responsibility to prepare them early for temple service.

1. Instill a love for the temple.

When I was a child, I lived with my family in Germany. My parents often made the long, arduous, and expensive journey to the temple in Bern, Switzerland, far to the south. To make the most of these trips, my parents would spend several days at the temple, while my sister and I stayed with neighbors and friends.

My parents’ commitment to attend the temple, despite the sacrifices required, taught me more about the special and sacred nature of the temple than any sermon ever could. They returned from the temple all aglow, fortified in the Spirit and grateful to the Lord. How could I not notice the spirit of the temple as it filled our home?

As parents and leaders, our love for the temple can be contagious. When we attend regularly, our children and youth notice. As we hang a picture of the temple in our home, testify of the temple during home evening and gospel study, sing “I Love to See the Temple” with our children, and share the feelings of gratitude and peace we experience in the temple, we plant a seed of faith in their hearts. If nourished, that seed will grow into their own love for the house of the Lord (see Alma 32:28–43).

As President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) counseled parents, “Let us share with our children the spiritual feelings we have in the temple.”²

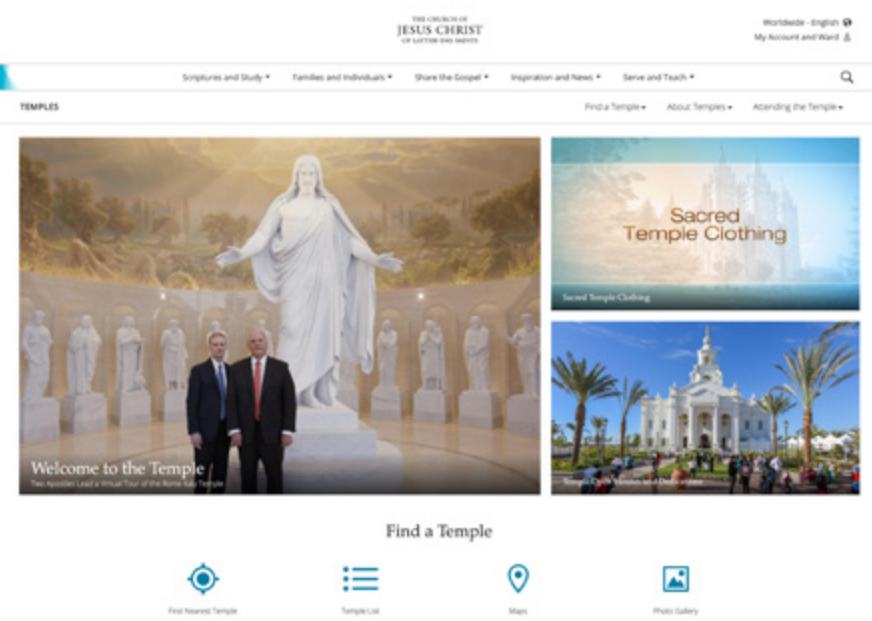


2. Teach the commandments.

During the interview for a limited-use temple recommend, bishops ask youth if they live the law of chastity and keep the Word of Wisdom. When I was a bishop and asked these questions to new deacons and Beehives, I was surprised to discover that some of them didn't know what the law of chastity or Word of Wisdom were.

Parents need not wait until youth are in their teenage years to teach them the laws of God (see Proverbs 22:6; Alma 37:35). The booklet *For the Strength of Youth* may have the word *youth* in the title, but that doesn't mean we wait until our children are teenagers to teach them those standards. We must teach children the commandments when they are young, explaining God's laws in a way that's appropriate to their age. This "sacred duty"³ is a responsibility that we can't delegate to anyone else (see Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28).

But duty is not our only motivation. We teach because we love. We understand that youth who knowingly and willingly obey God's laws gain a testimony of their truthfulness (see John 7:17). They more readily recognize the blessings of obedience (see Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21) and take an active role in their own temple preparation.



3. Teach temple prep in the home.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught that “temple preparation is most effective in our homes” and that “all Church members should become familiar with the excellent materials available at temples.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.”⁴ Here parents will find a wealth of resources to share with their children, including videos, general conference addresses, photo galleries, and instructions on how to prepare for the temple.

Plan a special home evening or, even better, a series of family meetings or councils to share, view, and discuss together all this content. In these temple-prep lessons, consider discussing the symbolism found in temple baptistries. The twelve oxen that encircle many baptismal fonts, for example, represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the strength of the Saints when they gather together to engage in God’s work.⁵ As youth understand such symbols, they can more fully appreciate the beauty, ordinances, and spirit of the temple.

4. Help youth find temple names.

Speaking to the youth, Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “You are a special generation. . . . You, more than any other generation before you, are turning your hearts to your fathers [see Malachi 4:6].” He then invited the youth to “prepare as many names for the temple as baptisms you perform in the temple, and help someone else to do the same.”⁶

Elder Andersen promised that as youth find and prepare these names, they will receive incredible blessings: “You will feel purpose and strength that will help you to avoid the temptations that surround you. . . . The gift of the Holy Ghost will be a stronger influence upon you. Your belief in and appreciation for the Savior will increase. You will better understand the power of His Atonement, and you will be safeguarded from the distractions that can so easily pull you from His commandments.”⁷

5. Attend the Temple and Priesthood Preparation meeting.

Each year, under the direction of the bishopric, the ward Primary presidency holds a special meeting for those who will turn 12 years old during the coming year and thus will be eligible for a limited-use temple recommend beginning in January. The purpose of this meeting is to help children understand the blessings of temple service, including making and keeping sacred covenants. As parents attend this special meeting with their children, parents can help children strengthen their commitment to prepare for temple service.



6. Prepare youth for the limited-use temple recommend interview.

Youth who have never experienced an interview to obtain a limited-use temple recommend may feel some anxiety about it. Is this a test? What if I don't know the answers? Help!

Many times when I was a bishop, youth entered my office wide-eyed and worried, unsure of what to expect. I quickly reassured them that the interview was nothing to be afraid of. It was, more than anything, an opportunity for the youth to evaluate their own testimony and declare their obedience to certain commandments.

In fact, youth need not be surprised by any of the interview questions. Parents can explain in advance what the interview entails. Youth may also benefit from hearing parents' positive experiences with their own recommend interviews.

And remember, parents can attend the interview and support their youth if they wish. It should be a joyous and Spirit-filled experience.



7. Ready youth for the ordinances.

It may be reassuring to review some procedures with youth before they go to the temple. For example, go over what happens during a baptism and confirmation: "Here's where you place your right hand. Here's where you place your left. Here's how you bend your knees after the baptismal prayer to help the priesthood holder easily immerse you in the water and raise you up again," and so forth.

Explain to young men who are priests: "Here's how you baptize someone. Here's how you serve as a witness."

Even though we don't discuss the special symbols of the temple endowment outside the temple, it is appropriate, as Elder Bednar has taught, for families to "discuss the basic purposes of and the doctrine and principles associated with temple ordinances and covenants."⁸ This will help youth feel confident and comfortable when they enter the font or participate in confirmations.

Prepared for the House of the Lord

As we take these steps and others to prepare our youth for temple service, the Lord will bless our efforts and our youth. Every action we take will give the Holy Ghost an opportunity to touch the hearts of youth, give youth the courage to answer the prophet's invitation, and help youth prepare themselves to worthily enter the house of the Lord. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Hope of Israel" (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), [HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Howard W. Hunter* (2015), 184.
3. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
4. David A. Bednar, "Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing," *Ensign*, May 2019, 103–4.
5. See Edward J. Brandt, "Why are oxen used in the design of our temples' baptismal fonts?" *Ensign*, March 1993, 54–55.
6. Neil L. Andersen, "Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?" (address at RootsTech conference, Feb. 14, 2015), [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/family-history](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/family-history).
7. Neil L. Andersen, "Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?"
8. See David A. Bednar, "Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing," 103.