



Joseph Fielding Smith

TRUE AND FAITHFUL

Inspiration from the Life and Teachings of JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH

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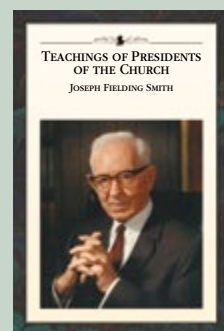
When 33-year-old Joseph Fielding Smith entered the Salt Lake Tabernacle on April 6, 1910, to attend general conference, an usher said to him, “Well Joseph, who is the new apostle to be?”

“I don’t know,” replied Joseph. “But it won’t be you and it won’t be me!”¹

As the names of the Twelve Apostles were being read for a sustaining vote, Joseph suddenly received an impression that his name might be the next one mentioned. It was, and he was then sustained as the 12th man in that esteemed quorum.

Joseph’s humility and sense of humor were demonstrated when he returned home from the conference to inform his family of his new calling. He greeted his wife with a puzzling statement: “I guess we’ll have to sell the cow,” he said. Undoubtedly, she was surprised as she waited for further explanation. His simple response was, “I haven’t time to take care of it any more!”² Thus commenced an apostolic ministry that lasted over six decades.

Grandson of Hyrum Smith, Joseph Fielding Smith was the 10th President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He served longer as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles before his call to serve as President of the Church than any other Church President. During his 60 years as a member of that quorum of special witnesses, he traveled first by horseback and wagon and later by automobile and jet plane to teach the Saints. His sermons and numerous writings blessed the Church and all who would listen to his inspired messages.



“Let us be true and faithful always, with a desire to keep the commandments of the Lord and honor Him and remember the covenants we have made with Him.”



I was invited to write this article because of my relationship to President Joseph Fielding Smith, whom I affectionately called Granddaddy. I was touched by his life from my birth, when he performed my name and blessing ordinance, until his death, when I was among the grandsons who served as pallbearers at his funeral.

A Foreordained Prophet

As with all of God’s prophets, Joseph Fielding Smith was foreordained to come to earth according to the divine timetable of the Lord (see Acts 17:26). Joseph was the fourth child but first son of Julina Lambson Smith. In the humble spirit of the faithful Old Testament mother Hannah (see 1 Samuel 1:11), Julina

vowed that if the Lord would give her a son, “she would do all in her power to help him be a credit to the Lord and to his father.”³ The Lord not only answered her petition but also manifested to her, before her son’s birth, that the child would one day be called to serve as one of His special witnesses in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁴

Joseph was born on July 19, 1876, to Joseph F. and Julina Lambson Smith. At the time of Joseph’s birth, his father was an Apostle and a counselor to President Brigham Young. When Joseph was nine months old, he was taken by his parents to the dedication of the St. George Utah Temple. He would later humorously remark, “My first church assignment was to accompany Brigham Young to the dedication of the St. George Temple.”⁵

When Joseph received his patriarchal blessing at age 19, an inspired patriarch placed his hands on Joseph’s head and declared: “It is thy privilege to live to a good old age and the will of the Lord that you should become a mighty man in Israel. . . . You will indeed stand in the midst of the people a prophet and a revelator to them, for the Lord has blessed you and ordained you to this calling.”⁶

Family Life: A Mixture of Love and Trials

To Joseph Fielding Smith, “family is the most important organization in time or in eternity.”⁷ He was raised

Above: This photograph of young Joseph Fielding Smith was placed in his parents’ family Bible. Right: Joseph enjoyed playing handball with his brother David. Below: Elder Smith (second from left) with fellow missionaries in England, 1901. The photograph on the opposite page also comes from his time as a missionary. Below, right: Elder Smith (left) with fellow Apostle George Albert Smith and Israel Smith, 1936.



in a family governed by love, faith, high moral standards, and diligent work ethic, and he sought consistently to bring those same principles into his own family. (See chapters 4, 15, and 16 of *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith.*)

He married Louie Emily Shurtliff in the Salt Lake Temple in 1898. One year later he was called on a mission to Great Britain for two years and was loyally supported by his wife. Upon his return, the two resumed their lives together and were blessed with the births of two daughters. Sadly, during a difficult third pregnancy Louie passed away.

In his sorrow Joseph prayed, “Help me, I pray Thee, to so live that I shall be worthy to meet her in eternal glory, to be united again with her, never again to be separated. . . . Help me to rear my precious babies that they shall remain pure and spotless throughout their lives.”⁸

At the urging of his father, the bereaved father of two prayerfully sought for a wife and a mother for his young children. His righteous desires were blessed in having Ethel Georgina Reynolds brought into his life. They were married in November 1908 in the Salt Lake Temple. This marvelous woman became the mother of Joseph’s first two daughters and later gave birth to nine additional children.

On one occasion, his wife’s burdens weighed heavily on the Apostle’s mind as he traveled to a stake conference. He wrote her a letter in which he said: “I am thinking of you and wish I could be with you constantly for the next few weeks, to help take care of you. I will help you all I can as it is, and hope you will be able to *feel* my influence. Tell



the children to be kind to you and to each other.”⁹ He then shared with her the deep feelings of his heart in the form of a poem, which later became one of our hymns, “Does the Journey Seem Long?” (no. 127).

Sadly, Ethel passed away in 1937. At the time of her death, there were five unmarried children in the home. Elder Smith felt impressed to seek another wife and companion. In 1938 he married Jessie Evans Smith in the Salt Lake Temple.

One who knew them well wrote: “Despite a difference of twenty-six years in their ages

and differences in temperament, background, and training, Joseph Fielding and Jessie Evans Smith were remarkably compatible. . . . The thing that bridged the wide gulf between these two disparate personalities was the genuine love and respect they had for each other.”¹⁰ (See pages 6–23 of the manual.)

A Seeker of Learning by Study and also by Faith

Joseph Fielding Smith was renowned in the Church as a scribe and gospel scholar. Beginning in his youth, he had an unquenchable desire to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). He read the Book of Mormon twice before he was 10. When his friends missed him, they would often find him in the hayloft reading the scriptures.¹¹

He told a congregation some years later that “from the time I first could read, I have received more pleasure and greater satisfaction out of the study of the scriptures . . . than from anything else in all the world.”¹² (See chapters 10 and 18.)



Above: President Smith with his sons. Above right: Elder Smith is greeted by President David O. McKay, 1961. Right: President Smith seated on the stand in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. Below: President Smith poses for a photograph at a baseball game, a sport he enjoyed playing as a youth.



On one occasion President Heber J. Grant (1856–1945) complimented President Smith’s scholarship by stating, “I consider you the best posted man on the scriptures of the General Authorities of the church that we have.”¹³

His thirst for learning does not imply that he did not participate in sports and games as a boy or even as an adult. He enjoyed playing baseball and the many games that the youth living in an agricultural society played. As an adult he became an avid handball player and regularly attended his own children’s sporting events. He also participated in sports at family reunions. I fondly remember a softball game when my grandfather hit a line drive that hit the camera of an uncle who was taking pictures from left field.

A Compassionate Defender of the Faith

Even before his calling as an Apostle, Joseph Fielding Smith was known as a defender of the faith, which

occasionally caused some to misjudge him as an austere man. Although he was unrelenting in his desire to be true to his covenants and to encourage all to embrace the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, there was a gentler side to him that was readily recognized by his family and associates. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) remarked: “Many times we have said that since the Twelve will be judges of Israel, any of us would be happy to fall into his hands, for his judgment would be kind, merciful, just, and holy.”¹⁴

President Smith showed an example of such kindness in a meeting where an accident involving a Church-owned automobile was discussed. An elderly man driving a vegetable truck with no insurance had caused the mishap. After some discussion, it was recommended that the Church pursue the matter in a court of law. However, President Smith spoke up: “Yes, we could do that. And if we press with all vigor, we might even succeed in taking the truck away from the poor man; then how would he make a living?” The committee reversed its recommendation and let the matter rest.¹⁵

I experienced the love others had for him as I approached President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) in the Salt Lake Cemetery following the dedication of President Smith’s grave. I said to him, “President Lee, as a member of the family I want you to know how much I appreciate the kindness you have shown my grandfather.” In



response he looked me in the eyes and tenderly said, “I loved that man!”

A True and Faithful Servant

President Smith’s ministry was marked by obedience to the scriptures’ charge to preach repentance (see, for example, D&C 6:9; 11:9). Said he: “It has been my mission, having been so impressed, I think, by the Spirit of the Lord in my travels in the stakes of Zion, to say unto the people that *now* is the day of repentance and to call upon the Latter-day Saints to remember their covenants, . . . urging them to be *true and faithful* in all things.”¹⁶ (See chapter 5.)

Throughout his almost 96 years of life, President Smith prayed that he would remain true and faithful and endure to the end. Indeed, President Boyd K. Packer, current President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, observed: “Even when he was past ninety he would pray that he would ‘keep his covenants and obligations and endure to the end.’”¹⁷

For President Smith, “true and faithful” was more than an often-repeated phrase. It was a heartfelt expression of his hope for all people—for members of the Church who had made covenants and indeed for all of our Father in Heaven’s children. “We should be first and foremost, . . .” President Smith implored, “for the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Let us be true and faithful always, with a desire to keep the commandments of the

Lord and honor Him and remember the covenants we have made with Him. This is my prayer in behalf of all Israel.”¹⁸ (See chapters 19–22.)

As you prayerfully ponder his inspired teachings, your testimony will be strengthened and you will be blessed with an increased understanding of the pure and simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This course of study will increase your desire to live to be “true and faithful.” ■

Note: The author’s mother, Naomi Smith Brewster, was born the year Joseph Fielding Smith was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and was the second child of Ethel Georgina Smith, whom President Smith married following the death of his first wife.

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith* (2013), 16.
2. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith* (1972), 176.
3. *Teachings: Joseph Fielding Smith*, 1; see also Bruce R. McConkie, “Joseph Fielding Smith: Apostle, Prophet, Father in Israel,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1972, 29.
4. See Bruce R. McConkie, “Joseph Fielding Smith,” 29.
5. Joseph Fielding Smith, quoted in Smith and Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 49.
6. Quoted in Smith and Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith*, vii.
7. *Teachings: Joseph Fielding Smith*, 76.
8. *Teachings: Joseph Fielding Smith*, 275.
9. Joseph Fielding Smith, quoted in Smith and Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 188–89.
10. *Teachings: Joseph Fielding Smith*, 22, 23.
11. See *Teachings: Joseph Fielding Smith*, 4.
12. *Teachings: Joseph Fielding Smith*, 4.
13. Heber J. Grant, in Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph Fielding Smith: Gospel Scholar, Prophet of God* (1992), 290.
14. Spencer W. Kimball, in Bruce R. McConkie, “Joseph Fielding Smith,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1972, 28.
15. See Lucile C. Tate, *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower* (1995), 176.
16. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, Oct. 1919, 88; emphasis added.
17. Boyd K. Packer, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 84.
18. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, Oct. 1912, 124–25.

2014 COURSE OF STUDY

This year, Relief Society sisters and Melchizedek Priesthood holders will study *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith*. This manual will help ensure that President Smith’s inspired teachings will be available for current and future generations, since he died in 1972 when Church membership was just over 3 million. Few who are now living will have a personal memory of President Smith’s exemplary life, but all may be lifted and inspired by the power of his teachings.

As you prayerfully study and ponder President Smith’s teachings, you will discern how the Lord used him as a spokesman to clearly teach principles that bring immeasurable blessings when they are applied. You will study subjects such as these:

- Our relationship to our Father in Heaven and our Savior
- The influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives
- The mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith
- The importance of temple covenants
- How to be in the world but not of the world
- How to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ by being true and faithful

The manual is available online at LDS.org and for mobile devices at mobile.lds.org.