

How Studying Church History Strengthens My Faith

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As a high school student in South Africa, I enjoyed studying history. When I went to university, I received my degree in history. As a seminary and then an institute student, I enjoyed all my courses, but I particularly enjoyed the Doctrine and Covenants because it introduced me to Church history. Over the years, I have enjoyed reading books on Church history—even those that addressed difficult topics in our history. As I continue to learn Church history from various sources, my own faith is strengthened. Here are three ways that happens.

Church history provides PERSPECTIVE for me, especially when it comes to past practices, including restrictions on priesthood and temple blessings. When I first learned there was a time when black men were restricted from holding the priesthood, my faith was shaken. How could the Church I loved have withheld the priesthood from blacks? Some people tried to show me explanations that they claimed were doctrinal or scriptural. These were confusing and very troubling.

Church history helps me APPRECIATE THOSE who have GONE BEFORE. This is especially true when one considers the contributions that seemingly “ordinary” members have made. For example, the first chapels built throughout South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia in the 1950s and 1960s were made possible by the contributions of members. Receiving temple ordinances required even greater sacrifice. Knowing it would take

Over time, it was the historical explanation that made sense and provided comfort. The historical introduction to Official Declaration 2, for example, explains that Joseph Smith did ordain a few black men but that Church leaders stopped conferring the priesthood on blacks early in the Church’s history. It then makes this important statement: “Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice.”¹ Gospel Topics essays² and other Church manuals provide more detail and additional historical context.³ These historical explanations resonated with me and strengthened my faith.



decades before they could have temples in Africa, many members sold their possessions, including their homes, in order to have money to travel to the temple and participate in those sacred ordinances. The Church on the African continent is built on the faith of these early members who had little but sacrificed so much. When I read their records, my faith is fortified and my willingness to sacrifice is increased.

Church history encourages me to be a BETTER RECORD KEEPER. Church leaders have encouraged journal keeping. Why? Because the history of the Church is a record of the “manner of life, . . . faith, and works” of its members (see Doctrine and Covenants 85:2). Whenever I read

Church history, such as the new history, *Saints*, I am impressed that these volumes are possible only because of the journals, letters, and other records of ordinary members of the Church. Their candid first-person accounts encourage me to be a better journal keeper, thereby helping future historians to document a truthful history of the Church in Africa.

There is also a more personal blessing from reading Church history and striving to keep my own record. As President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has taught, I am blessed to see and remember the Lord’s hand in my life and the lives of my family members.⁴ This remembrance strengthens my testimony and increases my capacity to face challenges in my life.

When I keep my own record and think about other Church members’ careful records, I begin to see the grand patterns of the Lord as He restores His Church and kingdom in the latter days.

These and many other lessons learned from studying the Church’s history have contributed greatly to my own spiritual development. These lessons have also given me courage to defend my faith because I understand why we do what we do. Being aware of the historical context of many of our practices and beliefs has made me a better teacher and a better disciple. ■

NOTES

1. See introduction to Official Declaration 2.
2. See “Race and the Priesthood,” Gospel Topics, [topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
3. See, for example, *Foundations of the Restoration* (Church Educational System manual), 2016, chapter 26.
4. See Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 66–69.

