

Temple Work and Family History

Chapter 40

Heavenly Father Wants His Children to Return to Him

The Atonement of Jesus Christ assures each of us that we will be resurrected and live forever. But if we are to live forever with our families in Heavenly Father's presence, we must do all that the Savior commands us to do. This includes being baptized and confirmed and receiving the ordinances of the temple.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have each been baptized and confirmed by one having the proper priesthood authority. Each of us may also go to the temple to receive the saving priesthood ordinances performed there. But many of God's children have not had these same opportunities. They lived at a time or place when the gospel was not available to them.

Heavenly Father wants all of His children to return and live with Him. For those who died without baptism or the temple ordinances, He has provided a way for this to happen. He has asked us to perform ordinances for our ancestors in the temples.

Temples of the Lord

- Why are temples important in our lives?

Temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are special buildings dedicated to the Lord. Worthy Church members may go there to receive sacred ordinances and make covenants with God. Like baptism, these ordinances and covenants are necessary for our salvation. They must be performed in the temples of the Lord.

For teachers: Pictures can generate interest and help learners increase their understanding. Consider asking class members or family members to ponder their feelings about temple work as they look at the picture of a temple in this chapter.



We also go to the temple to learn more about Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. We gain a better understanding of our purpose in life and our relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. We are taught about our premortal existence, the meaning of earth life, and life after death.

Temple Ordinances Seal Families Together Forever

- What does it mean to be sealed?

All temple ordinances are performed by the power of the priesthood. Through this power, ordinances performed on earth are sealed, or bound, in heaven. The Savior taught His Apostles, “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19; see also D&C 132:7).

Only in the temple can we be sealed together forever as families. Marriage in the temple joins a man and woman as husband and wife eternally if they honor their covenants. Baptism and all other ordinances prepare us for this sacred event.

When a man and woman are married in the temple, their children who are born thereafter also become part of their eternal family. Couples who have been married civilly can receive these blessings by preparing themselves and their children to go to the temple and be sealed to each other. Parents who adopt children legally may have those children sealed to them.

- What must a couple do to make the sealing power effective in their marriage?

Our Ancestors Need Our Help

- What responsibilities do we have toward our ancestors who have died without receiving priesthood ordinances?

Mario Cannamela married Maria Vitta in 1882. They lived in Tripani, Italy, where they raised a family and shared many wonderful years together. Mario and Maria did not hear the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ during their lifetimes. They were not baptized. They did not have the opportunity to go to the temple and be sealed together as an eternal family. At death, their marriage ended.

Over a century later a great reunion took place. Descendants of Mario and Maria went to the Los Angeles Temple, where a great-grandson and his wife knelt at an altar and served as proxies for the sealing of Mario and Maria. Tears filled their eyes as they shared in Mario and Maria's joy.

Many of our ancestors are among those who died without hearing about the gospel while on the earth. They now live in the spirit world (see chapter 41 in this book). There they are taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who have accepted the gospel are waiting for the temple ordinances to be performed for them. As we perform these ordinances in the temple for our ancestors, we can share their joy.

- How does the doctrine of salvation for the dead show God's justice, compassion, and mercy?
- What experiences have you had doing temple work for your ancestors?

Family History—How We Begin Helping Our Ancestors

- What are the basic steps of doing family history work?

Latter-day Saints are encouraged to participate in family history activities. Through these activities we learn about our ancestors so that we can perform ordinances for them. Family history involves three basic steps:

1. Identify our ancestors.
2. Find out which ancestors need temple ordinances performed.
3. Make certain that the ordinances are performed for them.

Most wards and branches have family history consultants who can answer questions and direct us to the resources we need. If a ward or branch does not have a family history consultant, the bishop or branch president can provide direction.

Identify Our Ancestors

To perform temple ordinances for our ancestors, we need to know their names. Many wonderful resources are available today to help us identify our ancestors' names.

A good way to begin gathering information about our ancestors is to see what we have in our own homes. We may have birth, marriage, or death certificates. We may also find family Bibles, obituaries, family histories, or diaries and journals. In addition, we can ask relatives for information they have. After gathering information in our homes and from our ancestors, we can search other resources, such as FamilySearch.org. We may also visit one of the Church's local family history centers.

How much we learn will depend on what information is available to us. We may have only a little family information and may be able to do no more than identify our parents and grandparents. If we already have a large collection of family records, we may be able to identify ancestors from generations further back in time.

We can keep track of the information we gather on family group records and pedigree charts.

Find Out Which Ancestors Need Temple Ordinances Performed

Temple ordinances have been performed for the dead since the early days of the Church. Consequently, some ordinances for our ancestors may have already been done. To find out which ancestors need temple ordinances, we can look in two places. Our own family records might have information about what has been done. If not, the Church has a record of all ordinances that have been performed in the temple. Your ward or branch family history consultant can help you in this effort.

Make Certain the Ordinances Are Performed

Many of our ancestors in the spirit world may be anxious to receive their temple ordinances. As soon as we identify these ancestors, we should arrange for this work to be done for them.

One of the blessings of family history work comes from going to the temple and performing ordinances in behalf of our ancestors. We should prepare ourselves to receive a temple recommend so that, when possible, we can do this work. If our children are 12 years old or older, they can share in these blessings by being baptized and confirmed for their ancestors.

If it is not possible for us to go to the temple to participate in the ordinances, the temple will arrange to have the ordinances performed by other Church members.

- How has the Lord helped you or members of your family find information about your ancestors?

Additional Family History Opportunities

- What are some simple ways for someone with many other responsibilities to participate in family history work?

In addition to providing temple ordinances for the ancestors we know about, we can help those in the spirit world in many other ways. We should seek the guidance of the Spirit as we prayerfully consider what we might do. Depending on our circumstances, we can do the following things:

1. Attend the temple as often as possible. After we have gone to the temple for ourselves, we can perform the saving ordinances for others waiting in the spirit world.
 2. Do research to identify ancestors who are more difficult to find. Family history consultants can guide us to helpful resources.
 3. Help with the Church's indexing program. Through this program, members prepare genealogical information for use in the Church's family history computer programs. These programs make it easier for us to identify our ancestors.
 4. Contribute family history information to the Church's current computer programs for family history. These programs contain genealogies contributed by people all over the world. They allow people to share their family information. Family history consultants can provide more information about the Church's computer programs.
 5. Participate in family organizations. We can accomplish much more for our ancestors as we work together with other family members.
- Think about what you can do to increase your participation in temple and family history work.
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Additional Scriptures

- 1 Peter 4:6 (gospel was preached to the dead)
- Malachi 4:5–6; D&C 2:2; 3 Nephi 25:5–6 (mission of Elijah)
- 1 Corinthians 15:29; D&C 128:15–18 (work for the dead)
- D&C 138 (redemption of the dead)