



*The Mesa Arizona Temple, where President Howard W. Hunter was sealed to his parents in 1953*



# The Temple—The Great Symbol of Our Membership

*“It is the deepest desire of my heart to have every member of the Church worthy to enter the temple.”*

## **From the Life of Howard W. Hunter**

**H**oward W. Hunter’s mother was a faithful member of the Church throughout her life, but his father was not baptized until Howard was 19. Years later, when Howard was a stake president in California, stake members traveled to the Mesa Arizona Temple to do temple work. Before a session began, the temple president asked him to address those who were assembled in the chapel. It was President Hunter’s 46th birthday. He later wrote of that experience:

“While I was speaking to the congregation, . . . my father and mother came into the chapel dressed in white. I had no idea my father was prepared for his temple blessings, although Mother had been anxious about it for some time. I was so overcome with emotion that I was unable to continue to speak. President Pierce [the temple president] came to my side and explained the reason for the interruption. When my father and mother came to the temple that morning they asked the president not to mention to me that they were there because they wanted it to be a birthday surprise. This was a birthday I have never forgotten because on that day they were endowed and I had the privilege of witnessing their sealing, following which I was sealed to them.”<sup>1</sup>

A little more than 40 years later, when Howard W. Hunter made his first public statement as President of the Church, one of his primary messages was for members to seek the blessings of the temple with greater devotion.<sup>2</sup> He continued to emphasize that message throughout his service as President. Speaking at the site of the Nauvoo Temple in June 1994, he said:

“Earlier this month I began my ministry by expressing a deep desire to have more and more Church members become temple worthy. As in [Joseph Smith’s] day, having worthy and endowed members is the key to building the kingdom in all the world. Temple worthiness ensures that our lives are in harmony with the will of the Lord, and we are attuned to receive His guidance in our lives.”<sup>3</sup>

Several months later, in January 1995, President Hunter’s last public activity was the dedication of the Bountiful Utah Temple. In the dedicatory prayer, he asked that the blessings of the temple would enrich the lives of all who entered:

“We humbly pray that thou wilt accept this edifice and let thy blessings be upon it. Let thy spirit attend and guide all who officiate herein, that holiness will prevail in every room. May all who enter have clean hands and pure hearts. May they be built up in their faith and depart with a feeling of peace, praising thy holy name. . . .

“May this House provide a spirit of peace to all who observe its majesty, and especially to those who enter for their own sacred ordinances and to perform the work for their loved ones beyond the veil. Let them feel of thy divine love and mercy. May they be privileged to say, as did the Psalmist of old, ‘We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.’

“As we dedicate this sacred edifice, we rededicate our very lives to thee and to thy work.”<sup>4</sup>

## Teachings of Howard W. Hunter



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### **We are encouraged to establish the temple as the great symbol of our membership.**

At the time of my call to this sacred office [President of the Church], an invitation was given for all members of the Church to establish the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of their membership and the supernal setting for their most sacred covenants.

When I contemplate the temple, I think of these words:

“The temple is a place of instruction where profound truths pertaining to the Kingdom of God are unfolded. It is a place of peace where minds can be centered upon things of the spirit and the worries of the world can be laid aside. In the temple we make covenants to obey the laws of God, and promises are made to us, conditioned always on our faithfulness, which extend into eternity” (*The Priesthood and You*, Melchizedek Priesthood Lessons—1966, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1966, p. 293).

It is the Lord Himself who, in His revelations to us, has made the temple the great symbol for members of the Church. Think of the attitudes and righteous behaviors that the Lord pointed us toward in the counsel He gave to the Kirtland Saints through the Prophet Joseph Smith as they were preparing to build a temple. This counsel is still applicable:

“Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 88:119). Are these attitudes and behaviors indeed reflective of what each of us desires and seeks to be? . . .

. . . To have the temple indeed be a symbol unto us, we must desire it to be so. We must live worthy to enter the temple. We must keep the commandments of our Lord. If we can pattern our life after the Master, and take His teaching and example as the supreme pattern for our own, we will not find it difficult to be temple worthy, to be consistent and loyal in every walk of life, for we will be committed to a single, sacred standard of conduct and belief. Whether at home or in the marketplace, whether at school or long after school is behind us, whether we are acting totally alone or in concert with a host of other people, our course will be clear and our standards will be obvious.

The ability to stand by one’s principles, to live with integrity and faith according to one’s belief—that is what matters. That devotion to true principle—in our individual lives, in our homes and families, and in all places that we meet and influence other people—that devotion is what God is ultimately requesting of us. It requires

commitment—whole-souled, deeply held, eternally cherished commitment to the principles we know to be true in the commandments God has given. If we will be true and faithful to the Lord’s principles, then we will always be temple worthy, and the Lord and His holy temples will be the great symbols of our discipleship with Him.<sup>5</sup>

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**Each of us should strive to be worthy  
to receive a temple recommend.**

It is the deepest desire of my heart to have every member of the Church worthy to enter the temple. It would please the Lord if every adult member would be worthy of—and carry—a current temple recommend. The things that we must do and not do to be worthy of a temple recommend are the very things that ensure we will be happy as individuals and as families.<sup>6</sup>

Our Heavenly Father has clearly outlined that those who enter the temple must be clean and free from the sins of the world. He said, “And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; . . . But if it be defiled I will not come into it, and my glory shall not be there; for I will not come into unholy temples” (D&C 97:15, 17).

It might be interesting for you to know that the President of the Church used to sign each temple recommend. That’s how strongly the early presidents felt about worthiness to enter the temple. In 1891 the responsibility was placed on bishops and stake presidents, who ask you several questions concerning your worthiness to qualify for a temple recommend. You should know what is expected of you in order to qualify for a temple recommend.

*You must believe in God the Eternal Father, in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.* You must believe that this is their sacred and divine work. We encourage you to work daily on building your testimony of our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit that you feel is the Holy Ghost testifying to you of their reality. Later, in the temple, you will learn more about the Godhead through the revealed instruction and ordinances.



*“Bishops and stake presidents . . . ask you several questions concerning your worthiness to qualify for a temple recommend.”*

*You must sustain the General Authorities and local authorities of the Church.* When you raise your arm to the square when these leaders’ names are presented, you signify that you will sustain them in their responsibilities and in the counsel they give you.

This is not an exercise in paying homage to those whom the Lord has called to preside. Rather, it is a recognition of the fact that God has called prophets, seers, and revelators, and others as General Authorities. It is a commitment that you will follow the instructions that come from the presiding officers of the Church. Likewise you should feel loyalty toward the bishop and stake president and other Church leaders. Failure to sustain those in authority is incompatible with service in the temple.

*You must be morally clean to enter into the holy temple.* The law of chastity requires that you not have sexual relations with anyone other than your husband or wife. We especially encourage you to guard against the enticements of Satan to sully your moral cleanliness.

*You must ensure that there is nothing in your relationship with family members that is out of harmony with the teachings of the*

*Church.* We especially encourage [youth] to obey [their] parents in righteousness. Parents must be vigilant to ensure that their relationships with family members are in harmony with the teachings of the gospel and never involve abuse or neglect.

*To enter the temple you must be honest in all of your dealings with others.* As Latter-day Saints we have a sacred obligation to never be deceitful or dishonest. Our basic integrity is at stake when we violate this covenant.

*To qualify for a temple recommend, you should strive to do your duty in the Church, attending your sacrament, priesthood, and other meetings.* You must also strive to obey the rules, laws, and commandments of the gospel. Learn . . . to accept callings and other responsibilities that come to you. Be active participants in your wards and branches, and be one your leaders can depend on.

*To enter the temple you must be a full-tithe payer and live the Word of Wisdom.* These two commandments, simple in their instruction but enormously important in our spiritual growth, are essential in certifying our personal worthiness. Observation over many years has shown that those who faithfully pay their tithing and observe the Word of Wisdom are usually faithful in all other matters that relate to entering the holy temple.

These are not matters to be taken lightly. Once having been found worthy to enter the temple, we perform ordinances that are the most sacred administered anywhere on the earth. These ordinances are concerned with the things of eternity.<sup>7</sup>



**Doing temple work brings great blessings to individuals and families.**

What a glorious thing it is for us to have the privilege of going to the temple for our own blessings. Then after going to the temple for our own blessings, what a glorious privilege to do the work for those who have gone on before us. This aspect of temple work is an unselfish work. Yet whenever we do temple work for other people, there is a blessing that comes back to us. Thus it should be no surprise to us that the Lord does desire that his people be a temple-motivated people. . . .

. . . We should go not only for our kindred dead but also for the personal blessing of temple worship, for the sanctity and safety that are within those hallowed and consecrated walls. As we attend the temple, we learn more richly and deeply the purpose of life and the significance of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us make the temple, with temple worship and temple covenants and temple marriage, our ultimate earthly goal and the supreme mortal experience.<sup>8</sup>

Several things are accomplished by our attendance at the temple—we comply with the instructions of the Lord to accomplish our own ordinance work, we bless our families by the sealing ordinances, and we share our blessings with others by doing for them what they cannot do for themselves. In addition to these, we lift our own thoughts, grow closer to the Lord, honor [the] priesthood, and spiritualize our lives.<sup>9</sup>

We receive personal blessings as we attend the temple. Commenting on how our lives are blessed by temple attendance Elder John A. Widtsoe stated:

“Temple work . . . gives a wonderful opportunity for keeping alive our spiritual knowledge and strength. . . . The mighty perspective of eternity is unraveled before us in the holy temples; we see time from its infinite beginning to its endless end; and the drama of eternal life is unfolded before us. Then I see more clearly my place amidst the things of the universe, my place among the purposes of God; I am better able to place myself where I belong, and I am better able to value and to weigh, to separate and to organize the common, ordinary duties of my life so that the little things shall not oppress me or take away my vision of the greater things that God has given us” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1922, pp. 97–98).<sup>10</sup>

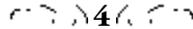
Consider the majestic teachings in the great dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, a prayer the Prophet Joseph Smith said was given to him by revelation. It is a prayer that continues to be answered upon us individually, upon us as families, and upon us as a people because of the priesthood power the Lord has given us to use in His holy temples.

“And now, Holy Father,” pleaded the Prophet Joseph Smith, “we ask thee to assist us, thy people, with thy grace . . . that we may be found worthy, in thy sight, to secure a fulfilment of the promises which thou hast made unto us, thy people, in the revelations given unto us;

“That thy glory may rest down upon thy people. . . .

“And we ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them” [D&C 109:10–12, 22].<sup>11</sup>

Temple attendance creates spirituality. It is one of the finest programs we have in the Church to develop spirituality. This turns the hearts of the children to their fathers and the hearts of the fathers to their children (Malachi 4:6). This promotes family solidarity and unity.<sup>12</sup>



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**Let us hasten to the temple.**

Let us share with our children the spiritual feelings we have in the temple. And let us teach them more earnestly and more comfortably the things we can appropriately say about the purposes of the house of the Lord. Keep a picture of a temple in your home that your children may see it. Teach them about the purposes of the house of the Lord. Have them plan from their earliest years to go there and to remain worthy of that blessing. Let us prepare every missionary to go to the temple worthily and to make that experience an even greater highlight than receiving the mission call. Let us plan for and teach and plead with our children to marry in the house of the Lord. Let us reaffirm more vigorously than we ever have in the past that it does matter where you marry and by what authority you are pronounced man and wife.<sup>13</sup>

It is pleasing to the Lord for our youth to worthily go to the temple and perform vicarious baptism for those who did not have the opportunity to be baptized in life. It is pleasing to the Lord when we worthily go to the temple to personally make our own

covenants with Him and to be sealed as couples and as families. And it is pleasing to the Lord when we worthily go to the temple to perform these same saving ordinances for those who have died, many of whom eagerly await the completion of these ordinances in their behalf.<sup>14</sup>

To those who have not received their temple blessings, or who do not hold a current temple recommend, may I encourage you in humility and love to work towards the day that you can enter into the house of the Lord. He has promised those who are faithful to their covenants, “If my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place” (D&C 124:45). . . . I promise you that your personal spirituality, relationship with your husband or wife, and family relationships will be blessed and strengthened as you regularly attend the temple.<sup>15</sup>

Let us be a temple-attending and a temple-loving people. Let us hasten to the temple as frequently as time and means and personal circumstances allow. Let us go not only for our kindred dead, but let us also go for the personal blessing of temple worship, for the sanctity and safety which is provided within those hallowed and consecrated walls. The temple is a place of beauty, it is a place of revelation, it is a place of peace. It is the house of the Lord. It is holy unto the Lord. It should be holy unto us.<sup>16</sup>

## **Suggestions for Study and Teaching**

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### *Questions*

- Ponder President Hunter’s teachings in section 1. How can we “establish the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of [our] membership”?
- Review the requirements for a temple recommend as outlined in section 2. How has living by these requirements blessed you and your family? Why are we required to strive to be “clean and free from the sins of the world” as we enter the temple?

- Review President Hunter’s teachings about the blessings of doing temple work (see section 3). How has participating in temple ordinances blessed you and your family? How can you more fully benefit from the blessings of the temple? Can you share a time when you felt spiritual strength or direction in the temple? If you have not yet been to the temple, ponder how you can prepare to receive that blessing.
- What are some ways we can help children and youth learn about temples and develop a love for them? (See section 4.) How can we help children and youth desire to marry in the house of the Lord? Why is it important that we go to the temple “as frequently as time and means and personal circumstances allow”?

### *Related Scriptures*

Psalm 55:14; Isaiah 2:2–3; D&C 97:12–17; 110:6–10; 124:39–41; 138:53–54; Bible Dictionary, “Temple”

### *Teaching Help*

“Often a lesson will contain more material than you are able to teach in the time you are given. In such cases, you should select the material that will be most helpful for those you teach” (*Teaching, No Greater Call* [1999], 98).

### **Notes**

1. In Eleanor Knowles, *Howard W. Hunter* (1994), 135.
2. See Jay M. Todd, “President Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of the Church,” *Ensign*, July 1994, 4–5.
3. “The Temple of Nauvoo,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1994, 62–63.
4. Text of the Bountiful Utah Temple dedicatory prayer, in “Magnificent Edifice’ Consecrated to [the] Lord,” *Church News*, Jan. 14, 1995, 4.
5. “The Great Symbol of Our Membership,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1994, 2, 5.
6. “Exceeding Great and Precious Promises,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 8.
7. “Your Temple Recommend,” *New Era*, Apr. 1995, 6–9.
8. “A Temple-Motivated People,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1995, 5.
9. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 240.
10. “We Have a Work to Do,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1995, 65.
11. “The Great Symbol of Our Membership,” 4.
12. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 239–40.
13. “A Temple-Motivated People,” 5.
14. “The Great Symbol of Our Membership,” 5.
15. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 240–41.
16. “The Great Symbol of Our Membership,” 5.