

AMERICAN FORK 26TH WARD

LESSON FOR INITIAL VISITS TO FAMILIES BY FAMILY HISTORY CONSULTANTS

version: 19 Oct 2014

Note: Generally, the length of the prepared presentation (below under “Introduction”) could be as short as 5 minutes and probably should not exceed 15 or 20 minutes, depending on the family. The emphasis should be on the later discussion of where the family is in their family history work, what they would like to do (and what fits their circumstances), and how (if at all) the ward may help them.

Feel free to adapt this material to suit the people you are visiting, especially if the family includes youth or children – or young parents.

PREPARATION

1. Distribute a few copies of Handout One, if they don’t already have it.
2. Make sure everyone knows everyone’s name.
3. Begin with prayer. (Invite the head of the household to call on someone to pray.)

INTRODUCTION

Note: Please be familiar with this material. However, the quotations included here need not be used in their entirety or used at all to make the points. Use whatever scriptures and teachings you are comfortable using to teach a given individual or family. That said, Elder Oaks’ point (#5a below) is crucial to our approach.

4. Temple and family history work bears witness that Jesus is the Christ and will come again.

a. Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught:

The doctrine that the living can provide baptism and other essential ordinances to the dead, vicariously, was revealed anew to the Prophet Joseph Smith. (See D&C 124, 128, 132.) He learned that the spirits awaiting resurrection are not only offered individual salvation but that they can be bound in heaven as husband and wife and be sealed to their fathers and mothers of all generations past and have sealed to them their children of all generations future. The Lord instructed the Prophet that these sacred rites are appropriately performed only in a house built to His name, a temple. (See D&C 124:29-36.) . . .

Our anxiety to redeem the dead, and the time and resources we put behind that commitment, are, above all, an expression of our witness concerning Jesus Christ. It constitutes as powerful a statement as we can make concerning His divine character and mission. It testifies, first, of Christ’s Resurrection; second, of the infinite reach of His Atonement; third, that He is the sole source of salvation; fourth, that He has established the conditions for salvation; and, fifth, that He will come again.

. . . Our charge extends as far and as deep as the love of God to encompass His children of every time and place. Our efforts on behalf of the dead bear eloquent witness that Jesus Christ is the divine Redeemer.

5. Members of the Church should not try to do more than their circumstances permit, but almost everyone can do something.

a. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught:

Members of this church have many individual circumstances—age, health, education, place of residence, family responsibilities, financial circumstances, accessibility to sources for individual or library research, and many others. If we encourage members in this work without taking these individual circumstances into account, we may do more to impose guilt than to further the work.

. . . in the work of redeeming the dead there are many tasks to be performed, and . . . all members should participate by prayerfully selecting those ways that fit their personal circumstances at a particular time. . . . Our effort is not to compel everyone to do everything, but to encourage everyone to do something.

There are many different things our members can do to help in the redeeming of the dead, in temple and family history work. Some involve callings. Others are personal. All are expressions of devotion and discipleship. All present opportunities for sacrifice and service.

We think first of submitting names and going to the temple to perform proxy ordinances for those who are dead. But there is much more to this work. There are ward family history consultants, missionaries in records centers, and workers in microfilming, libraries, data entry, and name extraction. There are temple missionaries, ordinance workers, clerks, and receptionists. And there are the unsung people who work behind the scenes in the kitchens and laundries and nurseries. Behind all of these are the family members and friends who facilitate the service of others by support and encouragement. For example, a young woman who baby-sits or a couple who provide overnight accommodations for those who are attending the temple should understand that they are also making an important contribution to temple work. . . .

Some of the most important efforts toward fulfilling the mission of the Church will be those of parents who teach their children the doctrines and practice of the Church by precept and example. Young parents who are fulfilling that responsibility ought not to feel guilty if they are not submitting as many [names] or attending the temple as frequently as their parents who are retired.

Some members may feel guilty about not furthering the mission of the Church when they are actually doing so. This kind of guilt comes not from insufficient efforts, but from insufficient vision. For example, a mother with several young children may be furthering the mission of the Church most profoundly . . . when she helps her children to prepare for missions, when she teaches them to revere the temple and prepare to make covenants there, and when she shows them how to strive for perfection in their personal lives.

- b. Related scriptures:
 - i. Mosiah 4:27
 - ii. D&C 10:4
 - iii. Ecclesiastes 3:16

6. (If appropriate) – Youth have an important role in family history work

- a. Elder David A. Bednar has said:

Many of you may think family history work is to be performed primarily by older people. But I know of no age limit described in the scriptures or guidelines announced by Church leaders restricting this important service to mature adults. You are sons and daughters of God, children of the covenant, and builders of the kingdom. You need not wait until you reach an arbitrary age to fulfill your responsibility to assist in the work of salvation for the human family. . . .

It is no coincidence that FamilySearch and other tools have come forth at a time when young people are so familiar with a wide range of information and communication technologies. Your fingers have been trained to text and tweet to accelerate and advance the work of the Lord—not just to communicate quickly with your friends. The skills and aptitude evident among many young people today are a preparation to contribute to the work of salvation.

My beloved young brothers and sisters, family history is not simply an interesting program or activity sponsored by the Church; rather, it is a vital part of the work of salvation and exaltation. You have been prepared for this day and to build up the kingdom of God. You are here upon the earth now to assist in this glorious work.

- b. Elder Richard G. Scott has taught:

Do you young people want a sure way to eliminate the influence of the adversary in your life? Immerse yourself in searching for your ancestors, prepare their names for the sacred vicarious ordinances available in the temple, and then go to the temple to stand as proxy for them to receive the ordinances of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. As you grow older, you will be able to participate in receiving the other ordinances as well. I can think of no greater protection from the influence of the adversary in your life.

7. Pray for help; receive blessings

- a. Elder Richard G. Scott said:

Any work you do in the temple is time well spent, but receiving ordinances vicariously for one of your own ancestors will make the time in the temple more sacred, and even greater blessings will be received. The First Presidency has declared, “Our preeminent

obligation is to seek out and identify *our own* ancestors.” (First Presidency letter, Feb. 29, 2012; emphasis added.) . . .

But what about you? Have you prayed about your own ancestors’ work? Set aside those things in your life that don’t really matter. Decide to do something that will have eternal consequences. Perhaps you have been prompted to look for ancestors but feel you are not a genealogist. Can you see that you don’t have to be anymore? It all begins with love and a sincere desire to help those beyond the veil who can’t help themselves. Check around. There will be someone in your area who can help you have success.

This work is a spiritual work, a monumental effort of cooperation on both sides of the veil, where help is given in both directions. Anywhere you are in the world, with prayer, faith, determination, diligence, and some sacrifice, you can make a powerful contribution. Begin now. I promise you that the Lord will help you find a way. And it will make you feel wonderful.

- b. Alma 34:17-27
 - i. Read
 - ii. Can we not pray over our efforts to do family history and temple work – even pray over individual relatives, whose work we wish to do, or who history we wish to record?

DISCUSSION

- What work is done? What needs to be done?
- What are the members passionate about? What do they feel inspired to do?
- What are their computer skills? Is the Internet available?
- Do they have LDS.org accounts, know how to log in, and remember their passwords?
- Are they interested in training available online or at family history centers? (Numerous classes, including some for beginners, are available in nearby family history centers.)

POSSIBLE STARTING POINTS

- Create an account and look at your tree
- Make sure the information is correct for you and your immediate family
- Enter photos and stories for people in your tree.
- Enter your tree far enough back that you get to deceased people, after which FamilySearch can often connect numerous earlier generations immediately
- Can we have someone help them attend the temple (ride, company, encouragement, whatever)?
- Start indexing
- Share a favorite family photo or story, or both, on Facebook.
- Make audio or video recordings about your life or family stories. (The Family History Library near Temple Square has a sound booth. You can take a thumb drive and record oral history there.) Someone in the family or ward may be able to help transcribe them into written form, too.
- What talents or interests does the family have which might be useful to others doing family history and temple work, and which they are willing to share.

- Would they like us to check in with them regularly?

PLAN TO FOLLOW UP

- In two weeks, I'll call you to see how it's going (for example).
- May I share your goal with your home or visiting teachers? (They're a resource.)
- **WRITE DOWN WHAT THEY'RE DOING AND YOUR PLANNED FOLLOW-UP, FOR REPORTING!**

AMERICAN FORK 26TH WARD

LESSON FOR INITIAL VISITS TO FAMILIES BY FAMILY HISTORY CONSULTANTS – ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

(Quotations suggested in the lesson are included here, mostly in longer excerpts. These may be used, if you find them useful in the lesson, or given to the family for further study. All are at LDS.org.)

Dallin H. Oaks, “Family History: ‘In Wisdom and Order,’” *Ensign*, June 1989

(Crucial instruction about doing what we can, when we can, and not going on or sending people on guilt trips for not doing more.)

The first principle is that our efforts to promote temple and family history work should be such as to accomplish the work of the Lord, not to impose guilt on his children. Members of this church have many individual circumstances—age, health, education, place of residence, family responsibilities, financial circumstances, accessibility to sources for individual or library research, and many others. If we encourage members in this work without taking these individual circumstances into account, we may do more to impose guilt than to further the work.

The second principle is that we should understand that in the work of redeeming the dead there are many tasks to be performed, and that all members should participate by prayerfully selecting those ways that fit their personal circumstances at a particular time. This should be done under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord and with the guidance of priesthood leaders who issue calls and direct the Church-administered portions of this work. Our effort is not to compel everyone to do everything, but to encourage everyone to do something.

There are many different things our members can do to help in the redeeming of the dead, in temple and family history work. Some involve callings. Others are personal. All are expressions of devotion and discipleship. All present opportunities for sacrifice and service.

We think first of submitting names and going to the temple to perform proxy ordinances for those who are dead. But there is much more to this work. There are ward family history consultants, missionaries in records centers, and workers in microfilming, libraries, data entry, and name extraction. There are temple missionaries, ordinance workers, clerks, and receptionists. And there are the unsung people who work behind the scenes in the kitchens and laundries and nurseries. Behind all of these are the family members and friends who facilitate the service of others by support and encouragement. For example, a young woman who baby-sits or a couple who provide overnight accommodations for those who are attending the temple should understand that they are also making an important contribution to temple work.

Some of the most important temple and family history work is done at home. I do not refer just to the important work of keeping family genealogies up-to-date and the much-needed verifying that all sealings have been performed. At home we can keep our journals and gather pictures and data for the books of remembrances of our family members. We can gather and record information available through living relatives. We can write family histories and share their great lessons with our children.

We know that some of the greatest work we will ever do will be within the walls of our own homes. President Ezra Taft Benson has taught: “The family is the most effective place to instill lasting values in its members.” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1982, p. 59.) Some of the most important efforts toward fulfilling the

mission of the Church will be those of parents who teach their children the doctrines and practice of the Church by precept and example. Young parents who are fulfilling that responsibility ought not to feel guilty if they are not submitting as many group sheets or attending the temple as frequently as their parents who are retired.

Some members may feel guilty about not furthering the mission of the Church when they are actually doing so. This kind of guilt comes not from insufficient efforts, but from insufficient vision. For example, a mother with several young children may be furthering the mission of the Church most profoundly in all three of its dimensions in her own home when she helps her children to prepare for missions, when she teaches them to revere the temple and prepare to make covenants there, and when she shows them how to strive for perfection in their personal lives.

The third principle is that it would be desirable for each member of the Church to think about the work of proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming the dead not only as an expression of the mission of the Church, but also as a personal assignment. Every member should have some ongoing activity in each of these three dimensions, with a total personal activity that does not exceed what is wise for his or her current circumstances and resources.

...

In summary, we should understand and apply these principles:

(1) All things should be done in wisdom and order. We should recognize that our members have many individual circumstances. Considering these, we should promote the mission of the Church in such a way as to accomplish the work of the Lord, not to impose guilt on his children.

(2) There is a time to every purpose under the heaven. There are many tasks to be performed in temple and family history work. We should encourage our members to make prayerful selection of the things they can do in their individual circumstances and in view of their current Church callings, being “diligent unto the end.”

(3) Each member should think about the three dimensions of the mission of the Church—proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, redeeming the dead—as a lifelong personal assignment and privilege. Each should gauge his or her personal participation from time to time according to his or her own circumstances and resources, as guided by the Spirit of the Lord and the direction of priesthood leaders.

There are family organizations to be formed, family projects to be planned, hearts to be touched, prayers to be offered, doctrines to be learned, children to be taught, living and dead relatives to be identified, recommends to be obtained, temples to be visited, covenants to be made, and ordinances to be received.

Richard G. Scott, “The Joy of Redeeming the Dead,” October 2012 General Conference

(On the importance of family history and indexing work, and the blessings available to those who do it.)

Any work you do in the temple is time well spent, but receiving ordinances vicariously for one of your own ancestors will make the time in the temple more sacred, and even greater blessings will be

received. The First Presidency has declared, "Our preeminent obligation is to seek out and identify *our own* ancestors." (First Presidency letter, Feb. 29, 2012; emphasis added.)

Do you young people want a sure way to eliminate the influence of the adversary in your life? Immerse yourself in searching for your ancestors, prepare their names for the sacred vicarious ordinances available in the temple, and then go to the temple to stand as proxy for them to receive the ordinances of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. As you grow older, you will be able to participate in receiving the other ordinances as well. I can think of no greater protection from the influence of the adversary in your life.

...

But what about you? Have you prayed about your own ancestors' work? Set aside those things in your life that don't really matter. Decide to do something that will have eternal consequences. Perhaps you have been prompted to look for ancestors but feel you are not a genealogist. Can you see that you don't have to be anymore? It all begins with love and a sincere desire to help those beyond the veil who can't help themselves. Check around. There will be someone in your area who can help you have success.

This work is a spiritual work, a monumental effort of cooperation on both sides of the veil, where help is given in both directions. Anywhere you are in the world, with prayer, faith, determination, diligence, and some sacrifice, you can make a powerful contribution. Begin now. I promise you that the Lord will help you find a way. And it will make you feel wonderful.

D. Todd Christofferson, "The Redemption of the Dead and the Testimony of Jesus," October 2000 General Conference

(A superb summary of the doctrinal reasons for family history work and vicarious temple ordinances.)

The doctrine that the living can provide baptism and other essential ordinances to the dead, vicariously, was revealed anew to the Prophet Joseph Smith. (See D&C 124, 128, 132.) He learned that the spirits awaiting resurrection are not only offered individual salvation but that they can be bound in heaven as husband and wife and be sealed to their fathers and mothers of all generations past and have sealed to them their children of all generations future. The Lord instructed the Prophet that these sacred rites are appropriately performed only in a house built to His name, a temple. (See D&C 124:29-36.)

... As President Gordon B. Hinckley has expressed: "I think that vicarious work for the dead more nearly approaches the vicarious sacrifice of the Savior Himself than any other work of which I know. It is given with love, without hope of compensation, or repayment or anything of the kind. What a glorious principle." (*Ensign*, January 1998, p. 73.)

Some have misunderstood and suppose that deceased souls "are being baptised into the Mormon faith without their knowledge" or that "people who once belonged to other faiths can have the Mormon faith retroactively imposed on them." They assume that we somehow have power to force a soul in matters of faith. Of course, we do not. God gave man his agency from the beginning. (See Moses 7:32; see also Alma 5:33-36; 42:27.) "The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God" (D&C 138:58), but only if they accept those ordinances. The Church does not list them on its rolls or count them in its membership.

Our anxiety to redeem the dead, and the time and resources we put behind that commitment, are, above all, an expression of our witness concerning Jesus Christ. It constitutes as powerful a statement as we can make concerning His divine character and mission. It testifies, first, of Christ's Resurrection; second, of the infinite reach of His Atonement; third, that He is the sole source of salvation; fourth, that He has established the conditions for salvation; and, fifth, that He will come again.

...

Our work for the dead bears witness that Jesus Christ will come again to this earth.

...

Our charge extends as far and as deep as the love of God to encompass His children of every time and place. Our efforts on behalf of the dead bear eloquent witness that Jesus Christ is the divine Redeemer of all mankind. His grace and promises reach even those who in life do not find Him. Because of Him, the prisoners shall indeed go free.

Quentin L. Cook, "Roots and Branches," April 2014 General Conference

(Restoration of keys by Elijah; the doctrine of temple and family history work.)

On October 11, 1840, in Nauvoo, Vilate Kimball wrote a letter to her husband, Elder Heber C. Kimball, who with other members of the Twelve was serving a mission in Great Britain. The October general conference had been held a few days before.

I quote from parts of Vilate's personal letter: "We had the largest and most interesting conference that ever has been since the Church was organized. ... President [Joseph] Smith has opened a new and glorious subject. ... That is, being baptized for the dead. Paul speaks of it, in First Corinthians 15th chapter 29th verse. Joseph has received a more full explanation of it by revelation. He says it is the privilege of [members of] this Church to be baptized for all their kinsfolk that have died before this gospel came forth. ... By so doing, we act as agents for them, and give them the privilege of coming forth in the First Resurrection. He says they will have the gospel preached to them in prison."

Vilate added: "I want to be baptized for my mother. ... Is not this a glorious doctrine?" (October 11, 1840)

...

The doctrine of the family in relation to family history and temple work is clear. The Lord in initial revelatory instructions referred to "baptism for your dead" (D&C 127:5). Our doctrinal obligation is to our own ancestors. This is because the celestial organization of heaven is based on families. (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith*, p. 68). The First Presidency has encouraged members, especially youth and young single adults, to emphasize family history work and ordinances for their own family names or the names of ancestors of their ward and stake members (First Presidency letter, October 8, 2012). We need to be connected to both our roots and branches. The thought of being associated in the eternal realm is indeed glorious.

...

Brothers and sisters, family history centers are now in our homes.

...

The leadership of the Church has issued a clarion call to the rising generation to lead the way in the use of technology to experience the spirit of Elijah, to search out their ancestors, and to perform temple ordinances for them (First Presidency letter, October 8, 2012). Much of the heavy lifting in hastening the work of salvation for both the living and the dead will be done by you young people.

If the youth in each ward will not only go to the temple and do baptisms for their dead but also work with their families and other ward members to provide the family names for the ordinance work they perform, both they and the Church will be greatly blessed. Don't underestimate the influence of the deceased in assisting your efforts and the joy of ultimately meeting those you serve. The eternally significant blessing of uniting our own families is almost beyond comprehension. (See Howard W. Hunter, "A Temple-Motivated People," *Ensign*, February 1995, pp. 2-5.)

...

Family commitments and expectations should be at the top of our priorities to protect our divine destiny. For those who are looking for more fruitful use of the Sabbath day for the family as a whole, the hastening of this work is fertile ground.

David A. Bednar, "The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn," October 2011 General Conference.

(Elder Bednar speaks to youth about their important role in family history work.)

Many of you may think family history work is to be performed primarily by older people. But I know of no age limit described in the scriptures or guidelines announced by Church leaders restricting this important service to mature adults. You are sons and daughters of God, children of the covenant, and builders of the kingdom. You need not wait until you reach an arbitrary age to fulfill your responsibility to assist in the work of salvation for the human family.

The Lord has made available in our day remarkable resources that enable you to learn about and love this work that is sparked by the Spirit of Elijah. For example, FamilySearch is a collection of records, resources, and services easily accessible with personal computers and a variety of handheld devices, designed to help people discover and document their family history. These resources also are available in the family history centers located in many of our Church buildings throughout the world.

It is no coincidence that FamilySearch and other tools have come forth at a time when young people are so familiar with a wide range of information and communication technologies. Your fingers have been trained to text and tweet to accelerate and advance the work of the Lord—not just to communicate quickly with your friends. The skills and aptitude evident among many young people today are a preparation to contribute to the work of salvation. . . .

My beloved young brothers and sisters, family history is not simply an interesting program or activity sponsored by the Church; rather, it is a vital part of the work of salvation and exaltation. You have been prepared for this day and to build up the kingdom of God. You are here upon the earth now to assist in this glorious work.