

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Gratitude for family love

Family love is wonderful. Nothing is as specific as the love of a baby for its mother. Nothing is as predictable as the love of children for their parents or the love of parents for their children.

Recently I was tenderly hugging one of our precious little five-year-old granddaughters and said to her, "I love you, sweetheart."

She responded rather blandly, "I know."

I asked, "How do you know that I love you?"

"Because! You're my grandfather!"

That was reason enough for her. Indeed, we do love our grandchildren. We also love our grandparents. I cherish the memories of life with three of my four grandparents. I never met my Grandfather Nelson.¹ He died when my father was only 16 years old. At the time of Grandfather's passing, he was superintendent of public instruction for the state of Utah. He owned a handsome pocket watch, which my father later gave to me. Now that watch is a tangible link between us.

I think of my Grandfather Nelson with deep feelings of gratitude. I received much of my early education in schools he helped to develop. And I cherish my membership in this Church, to which both of his parents were converted in Denmark about a century and a half ago. In fact, all eight of my great-grandparents were converts to the Church in Europe. Of the others, one joined the Church in Sweden, two in England, and three in Norway. How grateful I am to these pioneer predecessors! My debt to them is reflected in these biblical verses: "One soweth, and another reapeth" that "both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."²

Priesthood keys restored by Elijah

Today we are reaping a harvest of family love from seeds sown years ago. Preparations to strengthen family ties came in 1823, when the angel Moroni first appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Moroni announced the coming of Elijah, who would cause the hearts of children to be turned to their fathers.³

Elijah's return to earth occurred at the first temple built in this dispensation, where he and other heavenly messengers, under direction of the Lord,⁴ entrusted special keys of priesthood authority to the restored Church:

- Moses committed the keys of the gathering of Israel;⁵

- Elias committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham;⁶ and

- Elijah came to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the children to the fathers.⁷

With that, natural affection between generations began to be enriched. This restoration was accompanied by what is sometimes called the Spirit of Elijah—a manifestation of the Holy Ghost bearing witness of the divine nature of the family.⁸ Hence, people throughout the world, regardless of religious affiliation, are gathering records of deceased relatives at an ever-increasing rate.⁹

Elijah came not only to stimulate research for ancestors. He also enabled families to be eternally linked beyond the bounds of mortality. Indeed, the opportunity for families to be sealed forever is the real reason for our research. The Lord declared through the Prophet Joseph Smith: "These are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, . . . they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect."¹⁰

Background of family history work

Among the first in this dispensation to sow seeds of interest in family history were the brothers Orson and Parley P. Pratt, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Their efforts resulted in a Pratt family genealogy and the performance of temple ordinances for about 3,000 of their ancestors.¹¹

Yet there were many Church members who did not fully understand the responsibility for their own kindred. President Wilford Woodruff was so concerned that he made the issue a matter of fervent prayer. Then, at April 1894 general conference,¹² he presented a revelation to the membership of the Church. From it I quote: "We want the Latter-day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it. . . . This is the will of the Lord to his people."¹³

Later that year, the First Presidency and the Twelve established the Genealogical Society of Utah.¹⁴ From modest beginnings in an upstairs room of the Church historian's office,¹⁵ its collection and facilities have grown. Today the Family History Library™ occupies a modern five-story building with access to 280,000 books, 700,000 microfiches, and more than 2 million rolls of microfilm, making it the largest library of its kind in the world.

In 1964 the department began to establish branch libraries. Today more than 3,000 Family History Centers™¹⁶ dot the globe.

Technology supports this work

Technology used to support this important work has changed greatly over the years. In 1927 a card file was instituted to index all endowments performed.¹⁷ The index was maintained

through 1969, when new endowments were recorded in the first major computer system, identified by the acronym GIANT.¹⁸ It was used for more than two decades.¹⁹

The Society's extensive microfilming has permitted the gathering of records at their sources, with copies made available later at the Family History Library and Family History Centers. Microfilming has been done in 110 countries, accumulating more than 2 billion exposures with approximately 13 billion names. Microfilming has enabled the Family History Library to expand its collections dramatically and provide resources for an explosive growth of genealogical research worldwide. These microfilms comprise the core of information contained in our present automated systems.

By the 1980s, the personal computer had revolutionized the management of information. The Family History Department employed this technology in developing Personal Ancestral File® to help members organize data regarding their ancestors. In 1990, FamilySearch® was announced. At October conference that year, Elder Richard G. Scott described components of FamilySearch: Ancestral File™, Family History Library Catalog™, International Genealogical Index®, and more.²⁰ His message stimulated Sister Nelson and me to use these tools to organize information that we and our relatives had gathered over many years.

Meanwhile, objectives of decentralization and simplification led to record extraction programs, in which thousands of Church members have participated.²¹ Extraction projects have now produced records for more than 300 million individuals.²²

Many people have joined with members of the Church in efforts to index the burgeoning bank of genealogical information. An example is the 1881 British census. For this project, more than 8,000 volunteers from family history societies

throughout the British Isles have transcribed 30 million names. Gratefully, we announce that fruits of this labor are now on fiche and will soon be available on compact disc from the Church's distribution centers.

We are also pleased to announce that data from the 1880 census of the United States will soon be released on compact disc. Meanwhile, volunteers are working on other projects, such as arrival records for immigrants to the USA through Ellis Island.

May I express our deep appreciation to all valiant volunteers—past, present, and future—for their diligent work on these and other projects.

"The time of harvest is come"

In describing these achievements, I realize that for some who are less involved in this work, I may have intensified feelings of guilt. I apologize for that. I know that fear and unfamiliarity may stand in your way. For others, even the mention of a computer may be an additional intimidator. Some secretly hope that they can slip through their remaining days on earth without ever having to touch a computer. To those with access to computers, I say: "Reach out! Have hope! Try! I have exciting news for you!"

"The time of harvest is come."²³ A new era of family history work has arrived. As President Gordon B. Hinckley recently noted, "The Lord has inspired skilled men and women in developing new technologies which we can use to our great advantage in moving forward this sacred work."²⁴ Previously, efforts have focused on gathering names and dates and organizing that information. Now, computer products are available that can actually guide you to find your kindred.

New computer products guide members

May I introduce you to the new Family History SourceGuide™. This compact

disc is now available at the Church's distribution centers.²⁵ It can lead you to genealogical records in countries, states, and provinces around the world and shows how you can use these records to identify your ancestors. It includes other aids, such as maps, letter-writing guides, translations of words for several non-English-speaking countries, definitions, and terms often found in genealogical records. Family History SourceGuide puts at your fingertips much of the collected knowledge and experience of hundreds of genealogical experts. It can all be yours—at the touch of a button. Use it and rejoice!

A new Vital Records Index™ will make available on compact disc the results of extraction programs prepared from many civil and ecclesiastical records. Some overlap will exist between this resource and records in the International Genealogical Index, but most of the names in the Vital Records Index have not yet had temple ordinance work performed. The entire index will include approximately 25 million records. During the next few months, it will be released in segments by geographic area, such as the British Isles (5 million records) and North America (4.5 million records). This file represents years of work of many extraction workers.

I am excited about these and other developments. Tasks that once seemed beyond reach are now within our grasp. "With God nothing shall be impossible."²⁶ A new harvesttime has come. The way is opening by which we can obey His will²⁷ and provide welding links²⁸ between all dispensations and generations.

To get started, you do *not* need equipment. Begin with a pedigree chart and a family group record.²⁹ List the names of those you know. Add information learned from living relatives. This simple start at home will prepare you to receive additional help. And when you are baptized for a deceased ancestor,

you will sense a feeling of validation of this divine work that will bring great joy.

We are to be saviors on Mount Zion

As we ponder the importance of our ancestral responsibilities, we also need to be reminded of the Lord's vast ministry. I quote from President Joseph F. Smith: "Jesus had not finished his work when his body was slain, neither did he finish it after his resurrection from the dead; although he had accomplished the purpose for which he then came to the earth, he had not fulfilled all his work. And when will he? Not until he has redeemed and saved every son and daughter of our father Adam that have been or ever will be born upon this earth to the end of time. . . . That is his mission. We will not finish our work until we have saved ourselves, and then not until we shall have saved all depending upon us; for we are to become saviors upon Mount Zion, as well as Christ. We are called to this mission. The dead are not perfect without us, neither are we without them."³⁰

To this end, the will of the Lord has been impressed upon President Hinckley to build more temples.³¹ The Latter-day Saints are to be an endowed people, and they are to be sealed to their posterity and progenitors.

My grandfather's watch reminds me that our grandparents watch—and wait—for us to identify them, be linked to them, and provide temple ordinances for them. May God bless us all with success in this sacred service, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Andrew C. Nelson.
2. John 4:37, 36.
3. See D&C 2:1–3.
4. See D&C 110:2–10.
5. See D&C 110:11.
6. See D&C 110:12.
7. See D&C 110:13–16.

8. The Spirit of Elijah can be a powerful force for good in the conversion, retention, and activation of individuals.
9. Genealogy is now among the fastest growing applications for noncommercial use of computers in the home. The popularity of a recent television series titled *Ancestors* was unprecedented. It was subscribed to by 340 of 353 PBS television stations—the highest response rate in their history. In connection with that effort, a book was prepared titled *Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide to Family History and Genealogy*. More than 35,000 copies of it were sold in less than a year. Some experts have estimated that 20 percent of Internet use pertains to genealogy.
10. D&C 128:15; see also Matthew 5:48. There and in other New Testament scriptures, *perfect* was translated from the Greek *teleios*, meaning "brought to its end, finished; completed."
11. See Breck England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (1985), 183. In 1853, while serving a mission in Washington, D.C., Orson Pratt responded to a newspaper advertisement requesting information concerning the descendants of William Pratt of Massachusetts. From this contact, Elder Pratt obtained the connecting links between him and his earliest New England forebear. Twenty years later, Elder Pratt reported that his ancestry had been traced back 11 generations and that families of the Pratt brothers had been baptized for about 3,000 of their ancestors (see *Journal of Discourses*, 16:300).
12. President Woodruff discussed the revelation with the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on 5 April 1894. See *Journal of Wilford Woodruff*, 5 April 1894, Historical Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
13. *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, sel. G. Homer Durham (1946), 157; or *Millennial Star*, 28 May 1894, 339.

14. They approved the articles of incorporation and instructed Elder Franklin D. Richards to begin organizing the Society. He was also appointed to become its first president. See James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, and Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers: A History of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1894-1994* (1995), 45.
15. The collection was begun with about 300 books. See *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 47.
16. See *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 280. The name was changed in 1987 in connection with the renaming of the Genealogical Department to the Family History Department. See *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 278.
17. Called Temple Index Bureau (TIB) card index. It was employed also to help minimize duplication of ordinances. See *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 96-103.
18. Genealogical Information and Name Tabulation.
19. It also served to help minimize duplication of sacred ordinances. See *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 304-9. The department began processing names through TempleReady™ in May 1991.
20. In Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 6-7; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 5-7.
21. More than 50,000 members have sown seeds of labor in the Family Record Extraction Program (FREP). See *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 314-17.
22. As of 24 February 1998, 329,434,125 entries have been extracted.
23. D&C 101:64.
24. Unpublished statement, 29 Sept. 1997; used by permission.
25. The initial version has been prepared for use with Windows 95™.
26. Luke 1:37.
27. See D&C 128:15.
28. See D&C 128:18.
29. The helpful pamphlet *Where Do I Start?* (32916) is available from the ward family history consultant. All products discussed and computer support are available at Family History Centers.
30. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 442.
31. Including smaller temples more readily available to many members.

President Monson

We have just listened to Elders M. Russell Ballard and Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting, which will convene in the Tabernacle this evening at 6:00 P.M. mountain standard time.

Speaking of watches, we call your attention to the need to move your clocks ahead one hour before retiring tonight because of the change to daylight time.

The nationwide CBS Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 A.M. mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will immediately follow.

We wish to express appreciation to the BYU combined choirs for the beautiful music we have heard this afternoon. You're simply beautiful, members of the choir.

The choir will now sing in closing "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee." Following the singing the benediction will be offered by Elder L. Lionel Kendrick of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee."

The benediction was offered by Elder L. Lionel Kendrick.
