

A Good Foundation against the Time to Come

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During the coming years, may we allow the improvements made to the Salt Lake Temple to move and inspire us.

History of the Salt Lake Temple

Let's travel back to a hot afternoon on July 24, 1847, around 2:00 p.m. Following an arduous 111-day journey with 148 members of the Church who comprised the first party to head west, Brigham Young, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, sick and weak from mountain fever, entered the Salt Lake Valley.

Two days later, while recovering from his illness, Brigham Young led several members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and others on an exploring expedition. William Clayton recorded, "About three-quarters of a mile north of the camp, we arrived on a beautiful table of land, level and nicely sloping to the west."¹

While surveying the spot with the group, Brigham Young suddenly stopped and stuck his cane in the ground, exclaiming, "Here shall stand the Temple of our God." One of his companions was Elder Wilford Woodruff, who said this statement "went through [him] like lightning," and he drove a branch into the ground to mark the spot made by President Young's cane. Forty acres (16 ha) were selected for the temple, and it was decided that the city should be laid out "perfectly square North & South, east & west" with the temple being the center spot.²

At general conference in April 1851, members of the Church voted unanimously to sustain a motion to build a temple "to the name of the Lord."³ Two years later, on February 14, 1853, the site was dedicated by Heber C. Kimball in a public ceremony attended by several thousand Saints, and ground was broken for the foundation of the Salt Lake Temple. A few months later, on April 6, the massive cornerstones of the temple were laid and dedicated with elaborate ceremonies that included a color guard and bands and a procession led by Church leaders from the old tabernacle to the temple site, where remarks and prayers were offered at each of the four stones.⁴

At the groundbreaking ceremony, President Young recalled that he had seen a vision when he first set foot upon the ground as they surveyed the valley floor, stating, "I knew [then], just as well as I now know, that this was the ground on which to erect a temple—it was before me."⁵

Ten years later, Brigham Young offered the following prophetic insight at general conference in October 1863: "I want to see [the] temple built in a manner that it

will endure through the millennium. This is not the only temple we shall build; there will be hundreds of them built and dedicated to the Lord. This temple will be known as the first temple built in the mountains by the Latter Day Saints. ... I want that temple ... to stand as a proud monument of the faith, perseverance and industry of the saints of God in the mountains.”⁶

In reviewing this brief history, I am in awe of the seership of Brigham Young—first, his ensuring that, to the extent possible and, using construction methods available at that time and place, the Salt Lake Temple would be built in a manner to endure throughout the Millennium and, second, his prophesying of the growth of future temples worldwide, *even to number them in the hundreds*.

Salt Lake Temple Renovation

Like Brigham Young, our prophet of today looks over the Salt Lake Temple and all others with great care. Through the years, the First Presidency has, from time to time, counseled the Presiding Bishopric to ensure that the foundation of the Salt Lake Temple is solid. When I served in the Presiding Bishopric, at the request of the First Presidency, we did an overall facility review of the Salt Lake Temple, including an evaluation of the most recent advancements in seismic design and construction techniques.

Here are portions of the review provided to the First Presidency at that time: “In the design and construction of the Salt Lake Temple, the best engineering, skilled labor, construction materials, furnishings, and other period-available resources were used. Since its dedication in 1893, the temple has stood firm and served as a beacon of faith [and] hope and as a light unto the people. Great care has been taken to operate, clean, and maintain the temple in good condition. The granite exterior and interior floor joists and support beams are in good condition. Recent studies confirm that the location chosen by Brigham Young for the temple has very good soils and excellent compaction qualities.”⁷

The review concluded that normal repairs and improvements were needed to renew and update the temple, including the exterior deck and surface areas, obsolete utility systems, and baptistry areas. However, consideration of a separate, more comprehensive seismic upgrade beginning from the temple foundation on upward was also recommended.

The Temple Foundation

As you may recall, President Brigham Young himself was involved in great detail in the construction of the original temple foundation, which has served the temple well since its completion 127 years ago. The newly proposed seismic upgrade package for the temple would utilize base isolation technology, which was not even imagined at the time of its construction. This is considered the latest, most state-of-the-art engineering for earthquake protection.

This technology, recent in its development, begins at the very foundation of the temple, providing a robust defense against damage from an earthquake. In essence, it structurally strengthens the temple to stand steadfast, even as the earth and environment around it undergo an earthshaking seismic event.

The temple renovation that would employ this technology was announced by the First Presidency last year. Under the direction of the Presiding Bishopric, construction commenced a few months ago, in January 2020. It is estimated to be completed in approximately four years.

Ensuring Your Personal Foundation

As I contemplate the next four years of the life of this beautiful, noble, exalted, and awe-inspiring Salt Lake Temple, I envision it more as a time of *renewal* rather than a time of closure! In a similar way, we might ask ourselves, “How could this extensive renewal of the Salt Lake Temple inspire us to undergo our own spiritual *renewal, reconstruction, rebirth, revitalization, or restoration?*”

An introspective look may reveal that we too and our families could benefit from our doing some needed maintenance and renovation work, even a seismic upgrade! We might start such a process by asking:

“What does my foundation look like?”

“What comprises the thick-walled, stable, strong cornerstones that are part of my personal foundation, upon which my testimony rests?”

“What are the foundational elements of my spiritual and emotional character that will allow me and my family to remain steadfast and immovable, even to withstand the earthshaking and tumultuous seismic events that will surely take place in our lives?”

These events, similar to an earthquake, are often difficult to predict and come in various levels of intensity—wrestling with questions or doubt, facing affliction or adversity, working through personal offenses with Church leaders, members, doctrine, or policy. The best defense against these lies in our spiritual foundation.

What might spiritual cornerstones of our personal and family lives be? They may be the simple, plain, and precious principles of gospel living—family prayer; scripture study, including the Book of Mormon; temple attendance; and gospel learning through *Come, Follow Me* and home evening. Other helpful resources to strengthen your spiritual foundation may include the Articles of Faith, the family proclamation, and “The Living Christ.”

For me, the principles included in the questions discussed as part of receiving a temple recommend serve as a strong basis for a spiritual foundation—particularly the first four questions. I see them as spiritual cornerstones.

We, of course, are familiar with these questions, as President Russell M. Nelson read them to us one by one in the last general conference.

1. Do you have faith in and a testimony of God, the Eternal Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost?
2. Do you have a testimony of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and of His role as your Savior and Redeemer?
3. Do you have a testimony of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
4. Do you sustain the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the prophet, seer, and revelator and as the only person on the earth authorized to exercise all priesthood keys?⁸

Can you see how you might consider these questions as valuable elements in your personal foundation to help you build and reinforce it? Paul taught the Ephesians of a church which was “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”⁹

One of the greatest joys of my life is becoming acquainted with and inspired by members of the Church all over the world who are living exemplars of faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel. They have strong personal foundations that allow them to withstand seismic events with steady understanding, despite their heartache and pain.

To display this on a more personal level, I recently spoke at the funeral of a beautiful, vibrant young wife and mother (also a family friend of ours). She was a scrappy Division 1 soccer player when she met and married her dental student husband. They were blessed with a beautiful, precocious daughter. She valiantly battled with various forms of cancer for six challenging years. Despite the ever-present emotional and physical distress that she experienced, she trusted in her loving Heavenly Father and was often quoted widely by her social media followers for her famous saying: “God is in the details.”

On one of her social media posts, she wrote that someone had asked her, “How do you still have faith with all the heartache that surrounds you?” She replied firmly with these words: “Because faith is what gets me through these dark times. Having faith doesn’t mean nothing bad is going to happen. Having faith allows me to believe that there will be light again. And that light will be even brighter because I have walked through the dark. As much darkness as I have witnessed over the years, I have witnessed far more light. I have seen miracles. I have felt angels. I have known that my Heavenly Father was carrying me. None of that would have been experienced if life was easy. The future of this life may be unknown, but my faith is not. If I choose to not have faith then I choose to only walk in darkness. Because without faith, darkness is all that is left.”¹⁰

Her unshakable testimony of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—in her words and in her actions—was an inspiration for others. Even though her body was *weak*, she lifted others to be *stronger*.

I think of countless other members of the Church, warriors like this sister, who walk each day in faith, striving to be true and undaunted disciples of our Savior, Jesus Christ. They learn of Christ. They preach of Christ. They strive to emulate Him. Whether the days of their lives face steady or unstable ground, their spiritual foundation is strong and immovable.

These are the devoted souls who understand the profound meaning of the lyrics “How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord” and “who unto the Savior for refuge have fled.”¹¹ I am grateful beyond measure to walk among those who have prepared a spiritual foundation worthy of the name of *Saints* and who are strong and secure enough to withstand the many tumults of life.

I don't think we can overstate the importance of such a firm foundation in our personal lives. Even at an early age, our Primary children are taught as they sing of this very truth:

The wise man built his house upon the rock,
And the rains came tumbling down. ...
The rains came down, and the floods came up,
And the house on the rock stood still.¹²

Scripture reinforces this foundational doctrine. The Savior taught the people of the Americas:

“And if ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are *built upon my rock*.

“But whoso among you shall do more or less than these are *not built upon my rock*, but are built upon a sandy foundation; and when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon them, they shall fall.”¹³

It is the sincere hope of Church leaders that the significant renovations to the Salt Lake Temple will contribute to the fulfillment of Brigham Young's desire to see “the temple built in a manner that it will endure through the millennium.” During the coming years, may we allow these improvements made to the Salt Lake Temple to move and inspire us, as individuals and families, so that we too—metaphorically—will “be built in a manner that will endure through the millennium.”

We will do so as we fulfill the charge of the Apostle Paul to “[lay] up in store for [ourselves] *a good foundation against the time to come*, that [we] may lay hold on eternal life.”¹⁴ It is my ardent prayer that our spiritual foundation will be sure and steadfast, that our testimony of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and of His role as our Savior and Redeemer will become for us our own chief cornerstone, of whom I testify in His name, even Jesus Christ, amen.