

The Roots of Family History  
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The subject of family history is increasingly popular. I am confident the world has never before seen the level of interest that exists today in tracing roots and discovering one's heritage. A Time magazine cover story of April last year titled "Roots Mania," is but one example of the extensive media attention being given the subject of genealogy. The Time article observed that, "Once the hobby of self-satisfied blue bloods tracing their families back to the Mayflower, genealogy is fast becoming a national obsession" (Time, April 19, 1999, 55). As one piece of evidence to support that assertion, it noted that "Each year 800,000 people visit the Mormons' Family History Library in Salt Lake City" (Ibid at 56). I have been interviewed about family history in the past few months by media outlets as diverse as CNN, Business Week, and the Canadian national news magazine, Maclean's. Others in the Family History Department are asked to respond to many more inquiries by the media who recognize the widespread and growing interest among the general population. Even Wired magazine has covered the subject in its own irreverent way.

Part of this interest is generated by the availability of exciting new tools for family history research. The computer and now the Internet are increasing access, and the speed of that access, to vital information wherever it is found. They are also making possible a level of collaboration and cooperation among family members in learning about ancestors that was difficult or even impossible to achieve in the past. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Brigham Young University are at the cutting edge. The family history course work offered here is unexcelled. The KBYU/PBS Ancestors production of 1997 was a milestone, and as you know, BYU is planning an even more extensive second round of Ancestors coming soon.

The Church's web site, "familysearch.org," continues to generate about 8 million hits a day. I can tell you in whispered voice that we have just added an index to the Pedigree Resource File, the lineage-linked family history information that people around the world are sending us via the Internet at the rate of a million names a month. I whisper because this is a "soft launch;" the official announcement will be made on March 13th. You may be aware that the Family History Department is currently publishing these pedigrees on CD.

Looking ahead, without predicting dates, we see an Ancestral File on "familysearch.org" that users can correct and add information to on-line. The Personal Ancestral File family history records manager is now available for download from the Internet in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and German. Next year, we expect to publish a PAF 5.0 version that will handle non-Roman languages such as Japanese and Russian.

At the same time, we are working to put in place the technology and processes at Church headquarters that will work behind the scenes to make it possible for those with no access

to computers to prepare names and perform ordinances for their ancestors. We wish to make it as simple as possible both for those with the most sophisticated technological tools and for those who consider themselves fortunate to have paper and pencil. When a temple is dedicated in Accra, we want to be ready to support family history research and temple ordinances in a culture that does not keep written records of birth dates and places, but rather identifies a person by his or her family relationships.

Now, having talked by way of introduction about these exciting developments and future possibilities, let me talk about what is really behind "roots mania." I think you know. It is the Holy Spirit moving in the hearts of people across the earth, turning their hearts to their forebears. This divine influence leads people, in a spirit of love and without their fully understanding why, to prepare what will be needed to open the door to salvation for their predecessors. The fact that this influence is now being so widely felt simply means that the Lord is hastening His work in its time (see D&C 88:73).

It is vital that we maintain a firm doctrinal foundation in family history. Otherwise, we might focus only on tools and techniques and become simply hobbyists. The spirit and divine purposes that underlie family history must, for us, guide what we do and how we do it. By analogy, in archeology, the tools of the trade, the pick and shovel, trowels and brushes, have been supplemented with the camera (film, digital, and video), computers, infrared technology for looking under the surface, and satellite locating and mapping capabilities. Still, the fundamentals do not change. A dig must proceed with a certain order and care. A record must be kept. Artifacts as they are discovered, must be identified and labeled, their characteristics and location in relation to other things carefully noted. So in family history and temple work, the standard tools of pen and paper, heavy deed books and musty records, have been supplemented with microfilm and computers and the Internet and e-mail. Yet the fundamentals remain. There should be an order to research and a focus on one's own progenitors. A careful record must be kept. Accuracy, insofar as humanly possible to attain, is essential to the integrity of our work. And the doctrines of redemption must be both our motivation and our control.

At the official launch ceremonies for "familysearch.org" last May, President Gordon B. Hinckley made some brief but profound comments that I would like you to listen to now:

From the very beginnings of this Church, its members have been under religious obligation to identify their ancestors. For Latter-day Saints, families do not end at death. They are the basis of society even in the world to come. With that understanding, members of the Church regard it as both a privilege and an obligation to seek out their forebears.

Recognizing the importance of accurate information to family history research, the Church began in 1894 more than a century ago to gather significant records. With the adoption of microfilm technology in 1938, it became possible for the Church to film records all over the world. We have worked with churches and governments in more than a hundred nations to gather and preserve this priceless part of the world's heritage—the records of its diverse people.

The vast collection at this library is due in part to this painstaking process of microfilming over many decades. Microfilmed copies of most of these records can now be examined by anyone who wishes to see them at Family History satellite libraries throughout the United States and in many other nations.

In recent years, computer technology has made it possible to transfer genealogical records to large databases and to publish the information on-line or on compact discs. Today, however, we take the long-awaited step of allowing home access via the Internet to some of the most significant materials in the Family History Library.

We began testing this Web site on April 1, and the response has been overwhelming. Users are profuse in expressing thanks. Since then, without any promotion or requested publicity, the site has had more than 200 million hits, making it one of the most sought-after sites on the Internet even before its formal launch.

Now let me emphasize that we did not get involved in this undertaking for monetary gain of any kind. Our motives are to help members of the Church and others find their roots. The doctrine of the eternal nature of the family is one of the most important and sacred teachings for us. As I learn more about my own ancestors, who worked so hard and sacrificed so much, it increases my sense of identity and deepens my commitment to honor their memory. Perhaps there has never been a time when a sense of family, of identity and self-worth, has been more important to our world.

Seeking to understand our family history can change our lives. It helps bring unity and cohesion to families. There is something about understanding the past that helps give our young people something to live up to, a legacy to respect. We're grateful to be able to make a significant contribution to that (FamilySearch Internet Genealogy Service Launch, Monday, May 24, 1999, unpublished remarks).

In these remarks, President Hinckley stated with elegant simplicity the fundamental principles of family history. He spoke of the importance of records, of careful research, and accurate information. He explained the efforts we have gone to as a Church to facilitate genealogical research including the microfilm acquisition of records around the world and the use of computer and other technologies to make information available. These are essential matters and relate directly to the skills and principles one can learn in the excellent family history courses offered at this university.

Then President Hinckley drew attention to the doctrines that underlie this effort, speaking not only of families as the basis of society "in the world to come," but also of the effect that a knowledge of our ancestors has upon us in the present. He is touching on the broader significance of being sealed in our marriages and linked in our generations. It is a doctrine that we know, but one that merits extended study. It is a doctrine that I have studied, but do not yet fully comprehend. It means something in the hereafter, in eternity, that few have had revealed to them in full. And as President Hinckley stated, it means something very significant here and now. Let's talk about this for a moment.

In his first appearance to Joseph Smith, Moroni quoted, with some revision from the Old Testament record, the statement of Malachi. Moroni said:

Behold, I will reveal unto you the priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming (D&C 2).

Commenting on Malachi's statement years later, the Prophet wrote:

It is sufficient to know in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other-and behold what is that subject. It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect,' neither can they without us be made perfect (D&C 128:18).

Baptism for the dead is used here to represent the doctrine that baptism, and all other essential ordinances, can be provided to those who did not receive them in mortal life-the "fathers." These ordinances, required for salvation, can be effected for these ancestors by those who live in mortality-the "children." This seems so evident to us now because most of us have grown up knowing it, but when first revealed, it was like turning on a great light. What excitement; what a beautiful doctrine! God has provided the way for those we love to be redeemed no matter where or when they lived and no matter what their circumstances. It's so simple! We can do it for them. Think of all they did for us, and now we can do this for them, and we will be together in the kingdom of God. It is justice and mercy all wrapped together.

Wilford Woodruff remembered that when this doctrine first became known, but before it was fully understood, the Prophet Joseph and he and others rushed to perform baptisms for the dead in the nearest river, in their excitement not recording anything they did. He said:

When the Prophet Joseph had this revelation from heaven, what did he do?...

He never stopped till he got the fulness of the word of God to him concerning the baptism for the dead. But before doing so he went into the Mississippi River, and so did I, as well as others, and we each baptized a hundred for the dead, without a man to record a single act that we performed. Why did we do it? Because of the feeling of joy that we had, to think that we in the flesh could stand and redeem our dead. We did not wait to know what the whole of it should be. Finally the Lord told the Prophet: "When any of you are baptized for our dead, let there be a recorder, and let him be eyewitness of your baptisms; let him hear with his ears, that he may testify of a truth, saith the Lord; that in all your recordings it may be recorded in heaven; whatsoever you bind on earth, may be bound in heaven; whatsoever you loose on earth, may be loosed in heaven." That was the

beginning of this work (The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, ed. G. Homer Durham, Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1946, 153).

In due course, this doctrine of hearts turning to the fathers and doing for them what they could not do for themselves, was further elaborated. We learned that the gospel is taught to our ancient fathers and mothers in the world of spirits, making it possible for them to accept these ordinances (see D&C 138; 1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6). And it was revealed that there was not only a baptism available, but a linking or sealing of dead and living to one another that bound them in love and loyalty through the eternities. Initially this was not fully understood. President Wilford Woodruff tells us that for many years people were sealed, or as they said in those days, "adopted," to prominent people rather than to their own fathers and mothers, grandparents, and so on. Here is what he said about the revelation that came to him as president of the Church on this matter:

We have not fully carried out those principles in fulfillment of the revelations of God to us, in sealing the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. I have not felt satisfied, neither did President Taylor, neither has any man since the Prophet Joseph who has attended to the ordinance of adoption in the temples of our God. We have felt that there was more to be revealed upon this subject than we had received. Revelations were given to us in the St. George Temple, which President Young presented to the Church of God. Changes were made there, and we still have more changes to make, in order to satisfy our Heavenly Father, satisfy our dead and ourselves. I will tell you what some of them are. I have prayed over this matter, and my brethren have. We have felt, as President Taylor said, that we have got to have more revelation concerning sealing under the law of adoption. Well, what are these changes? One of them is the principle of adoption. In the commencement of adopting men and women in the temple at Nauvoo, a great many persons were adopted to different men who were not of the lineage of their fathers, and there was a spirit manifested by some in that work that was not of God. Men would go out and electioneer and labor with all their power to get men adopted to them. One instance I will name here: A man went around Nauvoo asking every man he could, saying, "You come and be adopted to me, and I shall stand at the head of the kingdom, and you will be there with me." Now, what is the truth about this? Those who were adopted to that man, if they go with him, will have to go where he is. He was a [participant] in that horrible scene-the Mountain Meadow massacre. . . .

When I went before the Lord to know who I should be adopted to (we were then being adopted to prophets and apostles), the Spirit of God said to me, "Have you not a father, who begot you?"

"Yes, I have."

"Then why not honor him? Why not be adopted to him?"

"Yes," said I, "that is right."

I was adopted to my father, and should have had my father sealed to his father, and so on back; and the duty that I want every man who presides over a temple to see performed from this day henceforth and forever, unless the Lord Almighty commands otherwise, is, let every man be adopted to his father. When a man receives the endowments, adopt him

to his father; not to Wilford Woodruff, nor to any other man outside the lineage of his fathers. That is the will of God to this people... Elijah the prophet appeared unto Joseph Smith and told him that the day had come when this principle must be carried out. Joseph Smith did not live long enough to enter any further upon these things. His soul was wound up with this work before he was martyred for the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ. He told us that there must be a welding link of all dispensations and of the work of God from one generation to another. This was upon his mind more than most any other subject that was given to him.

In my prayers the Lord revealed to me that it was my duty to say to all Israel to carry this principle out, and in fulfilment of that revelation I lay it before this people.

I say to all men who are laboring in these temples, carry out this principle, and then we will make one step in advance of what we have had before.

Myself and counselors conversed upon this and were agreed upon it, and afterwards we laid it before all the apostles who were here..., and the Lord revealed to every one of these men-and they would bear testimony to it if they were to speak-that that was the word of the Lord to them. I never met with anything in my life in this Church that there was more unity upon than there was upon that principle. They all feel right about it, and that it is our duty. That is one principle that should be carried out from this time henceforth.

"But," says one, "suppose we come along to a man who perhaps is a murderer." Well, if he is a murderer, drop him out and connect with the next man beyond him. But the Spirit of God will be with us in this matter.

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. MS 56:335-339, May 28, 1894 (The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1946, 154-157).

I do not claim fully to comprehend the significance of this order of things, but I rejoice in the assurance that I may always be with those now around me, those I have loved who are now gone, and others of the past, unknown in person, but deeply appreciated for the legacy they left me. Even more, I rejoice in the assurance of eternal association with my wife and my children and my grandchildren. When I think of those yet to come, who will be a part of me, I feel a deep yearning never to lose any of them.

Remember, President Hinckley referred not only of the significance of vicarious ordinances for ancestors. He gave particular emphasis to the influence of family history on us, the living, in mortality. He spoke of identity, a sense of self-worth, cohesion in families, and a legacy to respect and commitment to honor. I believe that it is, in fact, the influence of knowing our history, and then the impact of our family associations, here and now, that teaches us why the celestial order is a perfect family structure. This impels us to act in a way to protect and preserve that family structure.

Let me give you an example. I begin to understand a little more deeply this glorious doctrine when I consider the woman who stands with me. As you look at her seated here tonight, despite her being uncommonly lovely, you might suppose her to be an ordinary person. Yet she is to me exceptional. I see it more and more as time goes on. She studies almost constantly and thinks deeply. I can't tell you how many times she has asked me questions that have never occurred to me, and I have had to respond, "I don't know." She has an intuitive sense of what is wise and sound, and what is dangerous. More and more she looks outward and does what is within her power to meet a need.

She has, a number of times, undergone the challenge, discomfort, and risks of pregnancy, followed in five instances by the extreme pain of delivery. I know I do not comprehend it. When women begin to talk about these things, I know I have nothing to contribute, so I leave as quickly as I can. Nevertheless, it has been my privilege to be present at the birth of each of our children. I cannot express it in words, but in each case it has been a sacred experience. Despite Kathy's suffering, perhaps because of it, I have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. I am filled with awe and a sense of wonder by the miracle of life and my wife's unique role in it. I have felt a quiet and profound sense of reverence. The moment of birth is unique in all my experience, and this blessed woman is at the very center of it. I think I am only beginning to appreciate what she has done.

Not only has she given birth, but she has been a mother to these five children. She has dedicated her time and talents to caring for them and teaching them. She has been required to shoulder, at times, an unfair share of responsibility in raising and nurturing them, sometimes because of my negligence and sometimes because it simply could not be otherwise. She has known joy and grief. Her husband has sometimes been tender and appreciative, but has also at times been unthinking and insensitive. In all, she has loved the Lord and her family, and has never ceased to serve them.

With the passing of years and growing maturity, there is a growing peace about her that steadies all who come within her influence. Some of the old challenges are fading as children grow and leave home. New challenges have come such as travel and speaking assignments, things she would not choose for herself. She must deal with living in places she does not select and with languages she does not always understand. As each year begins, she does not know where she will live the next; she can only plan one year at a time. Because her husband belongs to the Church, in the sense that his life is the "property" of the Church, she also largely belongs to the Church.

I know Kathy is not happy I am talking about her like this. She is likely thinking, "If you feel this way, why don't you act better?" She would say, if I gave her an opportunity for rebuttal (which I will not) that others are more capable, more accomplished, or are called upon to face far greater challenges or make much greater sacrifices than she. She does not see herself as exceptional. Be that as it may, she is for me the woman of my dreams, and without her and her sacrifices, I would not be whole. In the Prophet Joseph Smith's phrase, I without her could not be made perfect. I say again, I truly begin to understand the doctrine of sealing on earth and in heaven when I look at her. And as my bond with

her becomes increasingly precious to me, so too do my links to family-past, present, and future.

There is one eternal relationship we must put first and work to establish above all others since it is the key to all the rest. It is our relationship with God through Christ. Concerning the Savior, Isaiah prophesied:

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand (Isaiah 53:8-10).

Who are the seed of Jesus Christ; who are his generation? Abinadi answered this way:

And now I say unto you, who shall declare his generation? Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed?

Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord-I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God.

For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed (Mosiah 15:10-12)?

The great King Benjamin explained:

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters (Mosiah 5:7).

This rebirth as the seed of Christ requires those essential ordinances by which we covenant with God to render obedience and by which God binds himself to each of us, separately and personally, to grant salvation. It has been so since the beginning. Herein is the beauty of that doctrine that permits all of humankind to be included, directly or by proxy, in the covenant.

And it came to pass, when the Lord had spoken with Adam, our father, that Adam cried unto the Lord, and he was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into the water, and was laid under the water, and was brought forth out of the water.

And thus he was baptized, and the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus he was born of the Spirit, and became quickened in the inner man.

And he heard a voice out of heaven, saying: Thou art baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost. This is the record of the Father, and the Son, from henceforth and forever;

And thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity.

Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God,' and thus may all become my sons. Amen (Moses 6:64-68).

I bear witness that whatever tools we may have, the powers of heaven will attend us in all we do to link our families here and hereafter. It is for us first to receive the ordinances and keep the covenants that we may be reborn as the seed of our Savior. It is for us then to do what lies in our power to afford the same privilege to our family members here as well as those who live in the world of spirits. It is for us to offer the same blessings to all around us, including strangers, whomever we can touch and teach. Having done so, it will not matter if circumstances have not permitted us to be linked with a husband or wife or into a perfect family structure in this imperfect mortal world. Such blessings will be ours in eternity; they cannot be denied to one so qualified.

The great plan of the Father will not be frustrated. He has sent his Only Begotten Son to bring it to pass, and the Son has given His life to make it a reality. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the head of this Church. Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the great family of man. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.