

# Temple and Family History Work

BOWS Stake Conference

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## Intro – President Nelson pleads, urges and promises

- I'm going start my talk by quoting some of the words of President Nelson from last general conference.
- Russell M Nelson:  
" My dear brothers and sisters, the assaults of the adversary are increasing exponentially, in intensity and in variety. Our need to be in the temple on a regular basis has never been greater. I *plead* with you to take a prayerful look at how you spend your time. Invest time in your future and in that of your family. If you have reasonable access to a temple, I *urge* you to find a way to make an appointment *regularly* with the Lord—to be in His holy house—then *keep* that appointment with exactness and joy. I *promise* you that the Lord will bring the miracles He knows you need as you make sacrifices to serve and worship in His temples." ("Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints", General Conference, October 2018)
- As the prophet spoke these words to you just now – what thoughts came to your mind?
- I have parsed the words of this paragraph from our Prophet over and over
- "I plead", "I urge", "I promise"
  - The prophet pleads with you and me to look at how we spend our time
  - The prophet urges you and me to make and keep a regular appointment to be in the temple
  - The prophet promises you and me the Lord will bring the miracles He knows we need
- I personally urge you to consider these words of our prophet and what they mean to us each individually
  - In particular I urge those who do not have a recommend at this time to get one
    - Be you old, young, single or married – get a recommend and go to the house of the Lord

## Howard W Hunter – Take your ancestors to the Temple

- Howard W Hunter:  
"...there are some members who engage in temple work but fail to do family history research on their own family lines. Although they perform a divine service in assisting others, they *lose* a blessing by not seeking their own kindred dead as divinely directed by latter-day prophets.... I have learned that those who engage in family history research and then perform the temple ordinance work for those whose names they have found will know the additional joy of receiving both halves of the blessing." ("A Temple-Motivated People, General Conference, April 1995)
- I personally know this additional joy President Hunter mentioned
- I have a love of Family History work that I have shared with many in our stake.
- This really began for me about 20 years ago when I was moved upon by the spirit to research my Norwegian ancestors.
- Before that time I was perhaps like many of you. Not that comfortable or knowledgeable about family history work. Or didn't feel like I had the time.
- I was going to the temple but doing the work for a non-relative
- Since I received the direction from the Spirit that I needed to do the work for my ancestors I have spent countless hours doing family history research, found thousands of ancestral names in Norway and have always had some relative to do the work for when I attend the temple.
  - I supply my extended family with names for us all to do work for our ancestors
- Because of this I can testify of some very specific things
  - 1<sup>st</sup> – I can testify there is an extra measure of something you receive when you do temple work for your ancestors
    - Hard to describe: Joy, peace, a sense of connection to these ancestors
    - As you research, learn of them and then do for them what they can not do for themselves – you love them and have a connection to them
    - I think this is some of what President Hunter meant by the other half of the blessing
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> – I can testify that If you will just put in the effort, things will happen
    - Miracles – I have experienced miracles
    - Doors open
    - You will find joy, peace and a connection to your ancestors

## **Finding Peace with Bitte Hallberg**

- I could literally spend several hours with you sharing different experiences – but of course I don't have that kind of time
- what I do feel to share is really a series of related experiences
- To set the background I have to go back to my mission in Sweden from 1976-78
- Bitte Hallberg was a young lady about 23 years old at the time whom we met, taught and baptized
- She made large lifestyle changes in her life to be baptized.
  - Word of wisdom – smoking and drinking
- Life for her had been difficult
  - Her parents were divorced when she was young
  - 6 months before she met us missionaries, she made an attempt to take her own life
- As she made changes and became baptized the light of the gospel bloomed in her and she just plain glowed.
- She was so happy to find the gospel.
- One thing of note was her dad was a member but was divorced from Bitte's mother and didn't see Bitte often.
- The experience of teaching and baptizing her touched me deeply because of the happiness that had come into her life.
- She became a primary teacher and was doing well.
- As missionaries do I transferred and only saw her one more time on a visit to her ward.
- Sometime after I returned home from my mission some of her struggles returned and she fell into inactivity.
- I remember wishing that somehow, I could help her
- After that I didn't ever have any more correspondence with her – no facebook, email etc. then
  - I had no way to find her or get in touch with her
- About 30 years later, in 2008, through a different type of miracle I got back in touch with another convert that I taught and was baptized named Maria.
- My wife and I visited Maria and her family in Sweden and developed a friendship with her and her family.
- Maria was from the same ward that Bitte was baptized into.
- On a visit to Sweden I asked about Bitte.

- Longtime members remembered her but hadn't heard or seen her for a long time
- I requested of Maria if she could track down Bitte for me. My thoughts were that I would reach out to Bitte, perhaps see her on my next visit to Sweden and see if I could help her.
- The news I got back several weeks later was devastating:
  - Bitte had died just a few years earlier
  - Everything pointed to her having a very tough life, never reactivating in the church
  - She had died at the age of 49
- When I got the news it hit me very, very hard.
- Nancy will tell you she has not seen me so devastated by any news before.
- I was so sad. Bitte had a tough life before we missionaries met her and was so happy in finding the gospel and yet she fell away from the gospel and never returned and had a very hard life.
- I was worried for her eternal salvation
- I was hiking in forest park shortly after this
  - I was contemplating Bitte and the feelings of sorrow that I had since hearing the news about her
  - I was thinking how I should have done more, kept in touch with her better, how I wished she was still alive and perhaps I could do something to help her
- As I was hiking along I all of a sudden felt the sorrow lifted and I received that peace and comfort that only comes through the Spirit.
- This is what I wrote of that experience in my journal:

Comfort came as I received a witness that I had done all that was asked of me in helping Bitte find the gospel and be baptized. I know that if Bitte had needed anything more from me it would have happened.

I find comfort from knowing that Bitte is in a better place.

I feel peace in knowing that in this life she obtained faith in Christ, repented and was baptized and received the Gift of the Holy Ghost... I'm comforted to know that God knows our hearts and the circumstances of our lives and will judge us with mercy. Instead of sorrow for Bitte and her life I feel impressed to remember instead the joy and happiness that I helped bring into her life and to rejoice in the privilege of being one of the missionaries to teach her and the one to baptize her.

- I also felt impressed to go to FamilySearch.org and look her up. I did and found that someone had done her temple work for her! This brought an additional measure of peace to me
- The very next day I was in the temple and while I was waiting in the chapel for the endowment session to begin, I felt impressed to read D&C 138, President Joseph F Smith's vision of the redemption of the dead.
- This is the section that Elder Ballard talked about in this last general conference
- As I was reading, the words in verse 58 leapt out to me:  
D&C 138:58  
the dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God.
- I don't know how exactly these words apply to Bitte, but they brought a further measure of peace to me as I have not only faith and trust in God but faith and confidence in Bitte herself.
- Being in the Temple that day brought peace and hope to me regarding Bitte.
- Every since then, every time I go to the temple while I'm waiting in the chapel I read from D&C section 138
- As I have pondered the verses in this section over and over again I have come to understand better God's love for his children and the meaning of all the family history work I do
- To understand why I feel the connection to my ancestors that I do.
- Why I feel so driven to do family history work and seek out my kindred dead

## Bitte Hallberg and her ancestors

- But that is not the end of the story... about 18 months ago seemingly out of nowhere – I know where of course, I received a prompting that I should contact those who did the Temple work for Bitte.
- As you know that information is not listed in FamilySearch
- So I looked up on Bitte's and her parent's records to see who had contributed information about them and sent messages to them.
- I received a reply from someone named Birgitta Eldridge who as it turned out she was Bitte's cousin and she had done Bitte's temple work!
- Birgitta grew up a member of the church in Sweden, in the same town as Bitte and Maria but had moved to Utah before Bitte was baptized.
- As I was in the middle of emailing my friend Maria in Sweden about contacting Birgitta, I was struck by a thought wondering when Bitte's father was baptized as I knew from Bitte that he was a member.
- As I researched this in FamilySearch I found Bitte's father's record. It showed someone had been baptized for him – But I knew he was baptized when he lived
- So with Birgitta's help I researched and worked and found another record for him.
- After merging and straightening things I sat back in amazement as it all of a sudden became very clear that there was family history and temple work to be done on Bitte's father's line.
  - Bitte's grandparents didn't have their temple work done
- As I sat there, I felt the Spirit bring peace and joy to me, I received confirmation of several things

Again let me read from my journal what I wrote about those confirmations of the Spirit:

I received confirmation from the Spirit on two things. First that Bitte is OK. She is doing good and again I need not worry about her. This gave me a feeling of joy and peace. Second the reason I had received the prompting to follow up on those who had done Bitte's family history work is because the work needed to be done on Bitte's father's line and the Spirit knew I would follow up on the prompting. The resulting chain of events is both a blessing to me and to Bitte's family.

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I feel almost as if I could envision Bitte discussing with her ancestors how they will get their temple work done and Bitte saying : "Let's contact my missionary Michael about this, he will follow up and see that it gets done." I feel just a small part of a bigger thing in this and am grateful to be so. I am grateful to my Heavenly father for this is a tender mercy to me I feel.

- I wrote to Bitte's cousin Birgitta and since it was her relatives and not even remotely mine she agreed to do the temple work for Bitte's father's ancestors
- I looked the other day and Birgitta has done most of the work with some more reserved yet to do.

## **Closing**

- I marvel how my service as a missionary keeps blessing my life
- I marvel how blessed I am in serving my ancestors by finding them and doing for them
- I marvel at the feelings of love and connection I feel to my ancestors
- Elder Watkins mentioned last night that we receive help from the other side of the veil from our ancestors
  - Of this I have no doubt
- These things are tender mercies in my life.
- I have no doubt if you too will be in the temple regularly and will do family history work that you will receive blessings and tender mercies in your lives.