Introduction to
LDS Family History

Student Syllabus

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Doctrinal Foundation of Family History
Chapter 1

Introduction to Temple and Family History Work

Course Purpose:

Religion 261 at Brigham Young University is an introductory course designed to help you gain an understanding of temple and family history work, including covenants made in holy temples, the mission of Elijah, basic member duties, and the various opportunities for service. You will gain a variety of skills needed to help redeem the dead throughout your life.

By taking Religion 261 you will:

- Understand the important doctrines, principles, and prophecies that are the foundation for temple and family history service.
- Acquire a testimony of how regular temple worship can bring spiritual strength, peace, and hope for eternal life.
- Provide ordinances for your kindred dead.
- Use the family history research process to identify ancestors.
- Use the many computer family history resources provided by the Church and other organizations.
- Use RootsMagic™ and Family Tree™.
- Locate and use basic genealogical research sources.
- Understand how FamilySearch Centers, the FamilySearch™ Indexing Program, Ward Family History Consultants, and FamilySearch™ work together under priesthood direction to accomplish the redemption of the dead.
- Write personal histories and journals.
- Understand the roles of immediate, grandparent, and ancestral family organizations.
- Understand how temple and family history services support the mission of the church—to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead.
- Participate in temple and family history service throughout your life.

Suggested Texts:

Reading assignments will be made from the following texts by your instructor and will correlate with class discussions. You should complete the reading assignments before the designated topic is presented in class and be prepared to ask questions or share insights about the topic.


You will also use the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Additional readings may be selected from the reference section found at the end of the syllabus.

**Chapter 1 Objectives:**

- Introduce you to the doctrinal underpinnings of temple and family history work.
- Illustrate how spiritual gifts are an important part of family history work.
- Understand how we each have a personal responsibility to do temple and family history work.

**Chapter 1 Outline:**

- What is Temple and Family History Work?
- Spiritual Gifts in Family History Work
- Accepting Personal Responsibility for Temple and Family History Work
What Is Temple and Family History Work?

Temple and family history work affects the living and the dead. The Member's Guide describes family history work as follows:

In the Church, doing family history work means identifying your ancestors and providing temple ordinances for them. This is not a onetime service. You should participate in some aspect of this work throughout your life. However, you should not attempt to do everything at once. Decide what to do by prayerfully considering your circumstances, resources, and abilities. (Mosiah 4:27 and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1993, 4).

Temple and family history work includes a variety of activities that assist with the redemption of the dead, our own ancestors and others. The following basic duties are just a few examples of how we can participate in the work.

Ways to Serve in Family History:

- Receive your own temple ordinances and help your immediate family receive them as well.
- Attend the temple regularly, when possible.
- Provide ordinances for your ancestors whose names are readily available (usually the first three to five generations as a start).
- Perform research to identify your ancestors.
- Participate in FamilySearch™ Indexing.
- Contribute genealogical information to Family Tree™.
- Serve in local temple and family history callings, such as temple worker, family history consultant, or FamilySearch Center specialist.
- Serve as a missionary with an additional assignment in temple or family history work.
- Participate in a family organization.
- Keep a personal journal.
- Write a personal or family history.

President Howard W. Hunter described the central role of temple and family history work with these words:

...I invite the Latter-day Saints to look to the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of your membership. It is the deepest desire of my heart to have every member of the Church worthy to enter the temple. It would please the Lord if every adult member would be worthy of—and carry—a current temple recommend. The things that we must do and not do to be worthy of a temple recommend are the very things that ensure we will be happy as individuals and as families.

Let us be a temple attending people. Attend the temple as frequently as personal circumstances allow. Keep a picture of a temple in your home that your children may see it. Teach them about the purposes of the house of the Lord. Have them plan from their earliest years to go there and to remain worthy of that blessing.

If proximity to a temple does not allow frequent attendance, gather in the history of your
family and prepare the names for the sacred ordinances performed only in the temple. This family research is essential to the work of the temples, and blessings surely will come to those who do that work ...

In the ordinances of the temple, the foundations of the eternal family are sealed in place. The Church has the responsibility—and the authority—to preserve and protect the family as the foundation of society. The pattern for family life, instituted from before the foundation of the world, provides for children to be born to and nurtured by a father and mother who are husband and wife, lawfully married. Parenthood is a sacred obligation and privilege, with children welcomed as a “heritage of the Lord” (Ps. 127:3 [Hunter 1994a, 7–9]).

**Spiritual Gifts in Family History Work**

Spiritual gifts are an important part of doing temple and family history work. Frederick William Hurst’s story provides an example of revelation:

Frederick William Hurst and his brother Charles were New Zealanders who were baptized into the Church in Australia in 1854 and later emigrated to Utah. In 1875 they were called to return to New Zealand as missionaries. They tried to share the restored gospel with the rest of their family, but their efforts were rejected. No other family members ever joined the Church. Of this experience Fred wrote, “My heart was so sore I could not forbear shedding tears.” In 1892 Fred was called upon to use his talents as an artist, helping to engrave and paint the interior of the Salt Lake Temple. Although he was very ill at the time and “so sick with vomiting,” he believed the completion of the temple was of such importance that he never missed a day’s work until the project was finished. One of his last journal entries is a truly remarkable one and a testimony of the importance of every individual in family history and temple work. Fred recorded:

Along about the 1st of March, 1893, I found myself alone in the dining room, all had gone to bed. I was sitting at the table when to my great surprise my elder brother Alfred walked in and sat down opposite me at the table and smiled. I said to him (he looked so natural): “When did you arrive in Utah?” He said: “I have just come from the Spirit World, this is not my body that you see, it is lying in the tomb. I want to tell you that when you were on your mission you told me many things about the Gospel, and the hereafter, and about the Spirit World being as real and tangible as the earth. I could not believe you, but when I died and went there and saw for myself I realized that you had told the truth. I attended the Mormon meetings.” He raised his hand and said with much warmth: “I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart. I believe in faith, and repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, but that is as far as I can go. I look to you to do the work for me in the temple... We are all looking to you as our head in this great work” (Devitry-Smith 1993, 7–52).

Accordingly, Fred later arranged for the work to be done.

Here is another example of how someone received divine help in doing family history work:

In 1933, [my father] Collin L. Morse was courting his wife-to-be, Olivia Hatch, in Salt Lake City. The
grip of the depression was solid, and jobs were few. To earn a little money to meet the necessities of life and work toward their future, Collin traveled to Clinton [Montana] to top sugar beets.

He located a small flat where he could stay in the town, shared by several other workers. Every few days, he would walk to a small store several blocks away to purchase enough supplies to meet his needs. The path took him past a very small family cemetery in an open alfalfa field. Each time he walked by the cemetery he felt impressed to stop. On his last trip to the store he stopped and recorded the names and dates from each headstone. There were only five or six. They appeared to be from one family with the surname of Mitchell. He folded the paper and put it in his wallet.

He returned to Utah and on [December] 14, 1934, married his sweetheart in the Salt lake Temple. He and Olivia were blessed with four children. Over the next 22 years Collin worked to support his family.

On many occasions he cleaned out his wallet or replaced it. He always felt compelled to return the paper to his wallet. In 1954 Collin and Olivia moved their family to Independence [Oregon]. One Sunday, Collin was talking with a branch member who said he was eager to continue genealogical research but had encountered a roadblock. Collin listened intently to the member. He recognized the surname sought to be the one he copied from the gravestones years earlier. Collin pulled his wallet from his pocket and removed the folded list of names. He handed it to the branch member and asked if the information would help him. The man stared at the names in amazement and then responded that the names were precisely those he had been looking for.

Collin’s heart was filled with joy. He had listened to the still, small voice (Morse 1993, 16).

**Accepting Personal Responsibility for Temple and Family History Work**

On March 26, 1907, the First Presidency stated:

Our motives are not selfish; our purposes not petty and earthbound; we contemplate the human race—past, present, and yet to come—as immortal beings, for whose salvation it is our mission to labor; and to this work, broad as eternity and deep as the love of God, we devote ourselves, now and forever (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1907, 495).

Everybody can do something to assist with this work. When counseling leaders on how to promote temple and family history work, Elder Dallin Oaks said:

The first principle is that leaders’ 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 family 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....There are many different things our members can do to help in 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 (Oaks 1989, 6–8).

Helping with the redemption of the dead begins with caring. Elder Boyd K. Packer wrote:
Sometimes this work may become a little discouraging. How can we seek out all of our progenitors—and all the others? One day while pondering prayerfully on this matter I came to the realization that there is something that any one of us can do for all who have died. I came to see that any one of us, by himself, can care about them, all of them, and love them. That came as a great inspiration, for then I knew there was a starting point.

Whatever the number, we can love them and desire to redeem them. Any one of us has within him the power to expand his concern to include them all. If a billion more are added, we can care about them also. At least we can do that (Packer 1980, 238–239).

The Holy Ghost guides and softens our hearts when we care for our ancestors. Daily prayer with pleas for help in blessing the lives of ancestors and other family members will bring answers. As we follow these inspired answers, we will find ways to bless ourselves and our families.