

Holy Temples, Sacred Covenants

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The temples are sacred, holy places. They are a source of spiritual power and strength. They are a place of revelation.

My heart is full of joy and gratitude as I contemplate this unique gathering of women throughout the world. What a privilege it is to be part of this great sisterhood, united in our desire to strengthen our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and build up His kingdom. I pray that I may be guided by the Spirit as I speak to you on the very sacred subject of temple worship.

The most holy places on earth are the temples. In the temple, worthy members of the Church receive the greatest blessings anyone can aspire to as we make sacred covenants with God. We also help make those same blessings available to our ancestors who died without receiving the necessary ordinances of salvation.

I will address the deep significance of building temples, why the ordinances performed in temples are essential to our salvation, and how to prepare to enter the temple.

I have witnessed and been greatly impressed by the sacrifices many members endure to get to the temple. Let me share one such story.

In 1976, when we were living in Costa Rica, the mission president asked my husband to help organize the first trip from the mission to a temple. The Central America Mission then included Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras. The closest temple was the Mesa Arizona Temple. The trip required us to travel five days each way, crossing six borders. The financial sacrifice for most of those who went was great. They sold their television sets, bikes, skates, and anything else they could sell. We traveled in two uncomfortable buses day and night. Some of the members had used all their money to pay for the bus fare and had taken only crackers and margarine to eat on the way.

Why do members of the Church so willingly and happily make such great sacrifices to go to the temple?

I have never forgotten the great outpouring of the Spirit we experienced during the three days we spent at the Mesa Temple. I was deeply touched as I watched family members embrace each other with tears streaming down their faces after being sealed for the eternities.

Twenty-four years later the temple in San José, Costa Rica, was dedicated. Among those present at the session I attended were many of the families who had gone on that first temple excursion. They had waited faithfully and worthily for this sacred moment. They all can now attend the temple often because a temple in Panama was recently dedicated, and a temple in Honduras has been announced.

The Lord has always asked His people to build temples. The Lord commanded Moses: “Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.”¹ The portable tabernacle they built served as the central place of Israel’s worship during their pilgrimage to the promised land. Its pattern and structure were revealed by the Lord to Moses. It was to be the Lord’s holy house.

Later, King Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem using the finest building materials available.²

During His earthly ministry, the Lord regarded the temple as a sacred place and taught reverence for it.

The Nephites also built temples to the Lord in the Americas. They were gathered around the temple when Christ appeared to them after His Resurrection.³

Soon after the Church was restored in this dispensation, the Lord commanded the Saints to build a temple: “Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.”⁴

In response, the Saints built the Kirtland Temple at considerable sacrifice. In this holy temple, important priesthood keys were restored and the Savior Himself appeared.⁵

At present, there are 128 temples in operation throughout the world, and many more are being built.

We have been instructed to build temples so that holy ordinances may be performed for both the living and the dead. These ordinances include initiatory ordinances, endowments, marriages, sealings, baptisms for the dead, and ordinations.

The initiatory ordinances provide us with specific immediate and future blessings.

The endowment embodies sacred covenants. It includes receiving instruction, power from on high, and the promise of blessings on condition of our faithfulness to the covenants we make.

President Brigham Young defined the endowment the following way:

“Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father ... and gain your eternal exaltation.”⁶

The sealing ordinances, such as temple marriage, bind families eternally.

The covenants we make with the associated ordinances we receive in the temple become our credentials for admission into God’s presence. These covenants elevate us beyond the limits of our own power and perspective. We make covenants to show our devotion to build up the kingdom. We become covenant people as we are placed under covenant to God. All the promised blessings are ours through our faithfulness to these covenants.

The temple is a house of learning. Much of the instruction imparted in the temple is symbolic and learned by the Spirit. This means we are taught from on high. Temple covenants and ordinances are a powerful symbol of Christ and His Atonement. We all receive the same instruction, but our understanding of the meaning of the ordinances and covenants will increase as we return to the temple often with the attitude of learning and contemplating the eternal truths taught.

Temple worship provides opportunities to serve the dead by performing vicarious ordinances for them. Family history research may be done by anyone outside the temple walls, but the sacred ordinances our dead ancestors need for their exaltation can be administered only in the temple.

The temple is the house of the Lord. He directs the conditions under which it may be used, the ordinances that should be administered, and the standards that qualify us to enter and participate in temple worship.

The Lord told Moses, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”⁷ In Psalms we read: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

“He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”⁸ His house is holy, and no unclean thing may enter it.⁹

The Lord has designated the bishop and stake president to be responsible for determining the worthiness of individuals to receive a recommend to enter His holy house. We have to be completely honest with our bishop and stake president when they interview us before issuing a temple recommend. The gift we bring to the altar is a pure heart and a contrite spirit. Personal worthiness is an essential requirement to enjoy the blessings of the temple.

We prepare by obeying the commandments and seeking to do God’s will. If you have not gone to the temple, start preparing now, for when the opportunity presents itself you will be ready and worthy.

When we go to the temple, we clear our minds and hearts of thoughts and feelings which may not be in harmony with the sacred experiences of the temple. We also dress in a modest, proper, and dignified manner. Our dress and grooming for this sacred occasion are signs of reverence and respect for the Lord and His holy house. Once inside the temple, we change into white clothing, which symbolizes cleanliness and purity. We are then ready to participate in the quiet reverence of temple worship. This eternal blessing is available to all who are worthy to receive it.

What can the women of the Church do to claim the blessings of the temple?

Through His prophets, the Lord invites those who have not yet received the blessings of the temple to do whatever may be necessary to qualify to receive them. He invites those who have already received these blessings to return as often as possible to enjoy again the experience, to increase their vision and understanding of His eternal plan.

Let us be worthy to have a current temple recommend. Let us go to the temple to seal our families eternally. Let us return to the temple as often as our circumstances will permit. Let us give our kindred dead the opportunity to receive the ordinances of exaltation. Let us enjoy the spiritual strength and the revelation we receive as we attend the temple regularly. Let us be faithful and make and keep temple covenants to receive the full blessings of the Atonement.

I testify to you that the temples are sacred, holy places. They are a source of spiritual power and strength. They are a place of revelation. They are the house of the Lord. In the sacred name of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Exodus 25:8.
2. See 1 Kings 5:5–18; 6.
3. See 3 Nephi 11:1.
4. D&C 88:119.
5. See D&C 110.
6. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1971), 416.
7. Exodus 3:5.
8. Psalm 24:3–4.
9. See D&C 109:20.