

LESSONS FOR LIVING A MORE HOLY AND HAPPY LIFE

FINDING CHRIST

IN THE TEMPLE



ALONZO L. GASKILL

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Paperback ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-5058-8
eBook ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-5059-5

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.
2373 W. 700 S., Suite 100, Springville, UT 84663
Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

Library of Congress Cataloging Number: 2025949842

Cover design by Kevin Jorgensen and Shawnda T. Craig
Cover design © 2026 Cedar Fort, Inc.
Edited by Kathy Jenkins
Typeset by Aundrea Esplin

Printed in the United States of America

1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

Dedication

In gratitude for a Savior
who has more grace and mercy
than you and I have sins.

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Evolution of the Ordinances

Restoration Means “Change”

IN ADDITION TO THE OTHER TEMPLE ORDINANCES, THE PRESENTATION OF THE endowment has changed *many* times since the beginning of the Restoration. For example, when baptism for the dead was first introduced, members could be baptized for *anyone*, even if they weren't related to the deceased and regardless of whether the proxy was of the same gender as the departed person. There are also historical accounts of endowment sessions in Nauvoo taking more than four hours to perform. Early temple garments were always one piece, had a collar, covered the body from wrist to ankle, and had tie strings down the front. And in the nineteenth century, it was common to sing a hymn as part of the endowment ceremony. This is but a miniscule sampling of things that have changed in the decades since God reopened the heavens and began to reveal the ordinances of the House of the Lord. The term *restoration* ultimately implies “change,” doing away with what *is* and bringing back what *was* or what *will be* needed.

The evolution in the temple ordinances is actually one of the signs that Jesus is still presiding over His Church and still speaking to and through living prophets. Jesus has *always* been a restorer of ancient truths, including revealing ordinances necessary for exaltation. Throughout the history of the world, and in *every* dispensation, He has revealed ordinances that were different from those in previous dispensations. That is the pattern that Christ Himself has set. If the policies, practices, and ordinances of this dispensation did not evolve, we might rightly question if Christ was still guiding His Church. Since what one dispensation needs is *not* what another requires, the evolution in temple ordinances not only meets crucial needs associated with salvation, but it also

teaches us that Christ was and is a revealer and restorer of sacred things.

The evolution of how our rites are performed is a sign of the “ongoing restoration.” Just as Christ has restored His gospel in this dispensation, He did the same in the first century. During His mortal mission, Jesus took sacred things He Himself had revealed to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, and others and updated them for the dispensation of the meridian of times. Thus, the evolution of sacred ordinances actually points our attention to one of Christ’s central roles in the plan of salvation, which is to be the One to reveal and update the saving rites, rituals, and ordinances through which we more fully access His Atonement and enter His eternal kingdom. So, in Eden, He gave Adam and Eve a form of the endowment that almost certainly *didn’t* tell the story of the Fall. Later, He gave Moses temple rites that required the sacrifice of animals. During His forty-day (post-resurrection) ministry, He gave to His closest followers a version of temple ordinances so sacred, they apparently felt they could not be recorded in scripture—but were no doubt significantly different than the Mosaic version. In the dispensation of the fullness of times, Christ revealed through Joseph Smith a set of very symbolic temple rites, utilizing mostly primitive symbols from past cultures and peoples. And during the tenure of President Russell M. Nelson, Christ has updated these same ordinances so that they would have meaning for modern minds who were not literate in the things of the ancients. Jesus has *always* been a restorer of eternal truths and an “updater” of ancient rites. This is a crucial part of His mission, as directed by the Father. And this constant “updating” stands as a testament to His desire to speak to and be understood by His faithful followers.

As we have suggested, the needs of God’s children change from dispensation to dispensation and, accordingly, Jesus gives truth anew and packages it according to the dispensation in which it is revealed. Joseph Smith taught that God’s revelations to Noah and his family were not what Abraham and his people would need. And what God gave to Abraham was different from what He revealed to those who would come after him. Joseph explained, “This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by *revelation* adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed.” Because the needs of His people change, Christ updates His revelations accordingly. And, just as “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52), the ordinances of the House of

the Lord should evolve in meaning and impact as we too “increase in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man”—through what those ordinances do to us.

All of this is simply evidence of the nature of the Christ whom we worship. He is constantly aware of us, continually updating His messages to us, and everlastingly revealing the things we need to be saved. He is, by nature, One who does not personally change, but who is ever aware of our need for change—and He meets that need in every dispensation and even in every generation. And so He has with the evolution of His ordinances in our day.

Engaging in Temple Worship

The Best Commentary on the Temple

PRESIDENT DALLIN H. OAKS ONCE COMMENTED THAT HE FELT THE BEST commentary on scripture was the Holy Ghost because He could reveal to the reader the very application that was needed at that moment in his or her life. This seems true of the temple's ordinances as well. It is less important for you or me to know what the ancients thought about a given symbol, and more vital for us to discover what the Spirit is trying to reveal about those sacred rites and their application for our personal lives *right now*.

Accordingly, at the very beginning of the current temple endowment, we are told that the endowment was given through revelation and, thus, it can be understood *only* through personal revelation, prayerfully sought. This is *exactly* how Christ lived His entire life. Because He came here with the intent of *always* doing the will of His Father in Heaven, it was crucial for Him to *always* prayerfully seek to know the Father's will. (See John 4:34, 6:38.) In this, Jesus has set an example for us. During the temple endowment, you and I are invited to be like Christ by being seekers of revelation who discern what the Father is trying to teach and by then acting in accordance with the revelations He gives. This applies to the doctrine taught and the covenants entered into, as well as the symbols employed throughout the ordinances of the House of the Lord.

Finally, Christ's teaching that the endowment can be understood *only* through personal revelation—earnestly sought by the patron— suggests that the Lord would never be happy with an approach to temple worship that consists of little more than “doing the work” for one's “kindred dead.” He has established and organized temple ordinances in the way that He has because

He's trying to teach us certain life-altering truths. Yet, mindlessly engaging in temple "work" will not reveal those truths. They must be "prayerfully sought" through personal revelation. To not "seek after" them is to break one of His commandments and miss the point of why He has made temple worship one of our earthly duties as part of covenant Israel.

Worshipping in the House of the Lord

For many years, the temple endowment began with a wish that patrons would "find joy in *servicing* in the House of the Lord." However, very recently, that was changed to a hope that those in attendance would "find joy in *servicing and worshipping* in the House of the Lord." This change contains an important message about what our temple experience should be like. We're not there simply to serve Christ or our kindred dead. We are there to worship God and Christ. Temple "work" must be done; but temple "worship" should be the priority of each patron. Our ancestors on the other side of the veil have a duty to hear and accept the covenants made on their behalf. You and I, on the other hand, have a duty to worship the very Being that has made our salvation and exaltation possible—indeed, the very Being who is central to the *entire* message of the endowment.

So, ask yourself how much "worshipping" you're doing in the temple each time you attend, regardless of what ordinance you're participating in. What specific acts of worship do you engage in while within those sacred walls? Is your current practice all that it should be? Are there things you could do to be consciously more worshipful (in your heart and mind) while in the temple? The change in the wording of the endowment is a change in the invitation being extended to you by Christ. Make sure you do not neglect this important invitation and commandment.

Attending Often

If you survey the New Testament, you see that from the time Jesus was a child and until He left this mortal world, He spent time in the temple. Indeed, we see evidence of this throughout the standard works. In the Hebrew Bible (what we know as the Old Testament), the premortal Jehovah appeared to

several prophets in His temples, including the prophet Isaiah. (See Isaiah 6:1–8; see also Ezekiel 8–11; Exodus 33–34; and Numbers 7:89.) Jesus’s parents brought Him to the temple in Jerusalem as a newborn (see Luke 2:22–24). According to the requirements of Jewish law, He would have gone to Herod’s Temple at least three times a year from that time forward (see Exodus 23:17, 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16). We know He was there at twelve years of age, discussing sacred things with those who supposedly knew the most about God and His words (see Luke 2:41–52). As an adult, Jesus made the temple part of His mortal ministry. Not only did He visit various structures used as temples in order to commune with prophets, during His premortal ministry, but during His forty-day (post-resurrection) ministry, He conveyed temple truths and ordinances to His apostles (and others) as well. He appeared to the Nephites at the temple in the Land of Bountiful (see 3 Nephi 11). To Joseph Smith and certain of Joseph’s associates, Jesus appeared in numerous places and at diverse times, but most notably in the Kirtland Temple (see D&C 76:11–14, 20–24; D&C 110:1–10; D&C 137). Thus, Jesus was a temple-attending Son of God—before, during, and after His mortal life.

Why would Jesus spend so much of His premortal, mortal, and postmortal ministries at or in temples? One can only assume Jesus knew that something deeply important and impactful happens there—something that neither He nor we can afford to neglect. So willing was He to make the sacrifices necessary to be in His holy house that Jesus walked—yes *walked*—many miles back and forth in order to be there, and to be there regularly. For example, the round trip from Capernaum to Jerusalem was about 110 to 125 miles (following the established roads and paths that existed in His day), and Jesus made that trek repeatedly so that He could be in the temple. It was *always* a sacrifice for Him to attend. And yet, He made that sacrifice and, in doing so, He has set an example for *all*, reminding us of our need to be there, to be there often, and to be willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary in order to do so.

Cleansing the Temple

At least once, and perhaps twice during His mortal ministry, Jesus cleansed the temple at Jerusalem. The Gospel of John describes a cleansing by

Jesus at the *beginning* of His three-year mortal ministry (see John 2:13–16), but Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe a cleansing of the temple by Jesus during the last week of His life (see Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; and Luke 19:45–46). Jesus purified the temple because He knew defilements would prevent God’s Spirit from being fully present in the House of the Lord. Indeed, allowing that which defiles to enter the holy temple sends a message of disrespect to our Father in Heaven—something Jesus could not condone.

Jesus’s cleansing of the temple, however many times He did it, is instructive for you and me. No, we can’t braid a whip and use that to remove other patrons. However, we do know our own hearts. We know the degree to which we are worthy of being there. We know that we can dampen the presence of God’s Spirit in the temple if we are not sufficiently clean or worthy to be in His house or if we’re really focused on the things of the world (instead of on the things of God) while there. Thus, there may be times when we need to “cleanse” the temple of our soul until we are sufficiently prepared to engage in genuine temple worship. We may have things we need to resolve (with the help of our bishop if necessary) or things we need to set aside (from our minds and hearts) so that we’re fully there and, thus, the Spirit is fully present as well.

Jesus knew that if the temple was defiled, the Spirit of God would be grieved. The book of Mosiah informs us, “I cannot tell you all the things” which grieve the Spirit and, thus, constitute sin; “for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them” (Mosiah 4:29). In other words, there may be many ways at different times in our lives that we need to “cleanse” these “temples of the Holy Spirit,” which temples we are (see 1 Corinthians 3:16–17), so that the Spirit of the Lord can be fully present in His holy house and so that it can teach, sanctify, and inspire us while we are there.

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