

THE VALUE OF A GOOD NAME



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Your good name connects you with your past family history. Your righteous living, your example, your teachings, and your worthwhile service will bless numerous people with your vision.

We experienced a special day in our family on January 4, 1997. My brother organized a party honoring the 200th birthday of Gustavus Adolphus Perry. He was an important member of our family tree. He was baptized in 1832 and became the first of our family to embrace the gospel. The Perry family history records this remarkable event:

“On a beautiful farm in the state of New York, Gustavus Adolphus Perry and his good wife, Eunice Wing, with their three sons, Orrin Alonzo, Lorenzo, and Henry Elisha, and their four daughters, Rosalie Alvira, Alvina, Amanda, and Lucy, were living very peacefully and happily. Close to the year of 1830 (we do not know the exact date) one evening after a light snow had fallen, the family was all in for the night. It was dark and the latchstring was drawn in so no one could enter the house. Then suddenly without warning, a stranger walked into the home and greeted them with these words: ‘God bless you.’ He spent the night with

them explaining the principles of the gospel and told them of a new book called the Book of Mormon and quoted passages from the same. He then told them on what pages they were to find the quotations and that elders would soon visit them. The messenger disappeared in the morning just as suddenly as he had appeared the night before, leaving no tracks in the freshly fallen snow. They inquired of their neighbors to see if anyone had seen him. They had not, and no trace of him could be found.”

This good family was ready for the gospel when it came to them, and they joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1832.

The Perrys were like other families who joined the Church in the early 1800s. They moved from their home in upstate New York to Ohio, and then on to the gathering in Missouri. Forced from their Missouri home, they moved to Illinois. Again driven from their home, in the very cold winter of 1846, they made the painful trip across Iowa to



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settle in the Lake Branch at Winter Quarters. Here Gustavus served as a counselor in the bishopric until they were instructed in 1852 by Brigham Young to close the ward, join a wagon train, and make the long trek across the plains.

As a part of the birthday celebration, my brother spent a year searching for the descendants of Gustavus Adolphus Perry. We were amazed at the record he had on the table before us as we celebrated. He had found more than 10,000 descendants of this good man. The number overwhelmed me. Suddenly I realized the value of a good name. In seven to eight generations, his family had sufficient numbers to organize three stakes of Zion.

Each of us has these special accounts in our family histories of the sacrifices that were made for us to be blessed with a knowledge of the gospel. In some families, you may be the first member to join. You become its pioneer family. Therefore you have the obligation to record in your history who brought the converting power of the gospel to you.

A Name and a Birthright

We should pause to consider the value of a good name. A study of the scriptures certainly demonstrates the importance the Lord places on a name and the value it can have for succeeding generations. The most exciting example I can think of is contained in Genesis 17:

“And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . .

“Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee” (vv. 2, 5).

The same promise was given to Abraham’s son, Isaac. Later the blessing that was promised to Abraham and Isaac was given to Jacob. The honor given Jacob was that

the Lord caused that his name be changed to Israel—“one who prevails with God” (see Genesis 35:10–12).

Later, as the time drew near for Jacob (or Israel) to die, he called his sons together to bless them and their seed. It was to Joseph that the birthright blessing was given (see Genesis 49:22, 26).

To Joseph the blessing was also given that his descendants would spread unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills. This blessing would extend into the latter days, when one named Joseph would be called to bring about a restoration of the fulness of the gospel.

It has always been interesting to me that the Prophet Joseph Smith was the third son of Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith. He had two older brothers, yet the name of Joseph was preserved for him. Who could doubt that his life was the fulfillment of the great promise made to Joseph of old that through his lineage would come that great saving power of the gospel of our Lord and Savior.

The Prophet’s life was all too short, but the contribution he made will last into the eternities. His life was taken from him by a cruel mob on the 27th day of June of 1844. He had fulfilled the prophecy. Joseph, son of Joseph, as had been prophesied in the scriptures, had brought forth the remarkable work in these, the latter days (see 2 Nephi 3:7, 15). Thus we see how the Lord has fulfilled his promise to Abraham’s seed.

The name we have been given is special because it blesses us with a heritage by which we can receive the great promise of the Lord to his children, even the gift of life eternal.

The Spirit of Elijah

It has always been of profound interest to me that the first lesson taught to the Prophet Joseph Smith by Moroni was the absolute necessity of families being sealed together.



That message was recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 2:

“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” (vv. 1–3).

The purpose of Elijah’s mission was the restoration of the sealing power to bind on earth that which will be bound in the eternities to come, thus making operative on earth the ability to perform the ordinances of the gospel for both the living and the dead. This made it possible for the eternal linking of families together.

I have always marveled how the Spirit of Elijah works on men and women when they understand the blessings of an eternal unit. It even spreads to those who do not understand this doctrine. Genealogy, they tell me, has become the number-one hobby in the nation. The Spirit of

Elijah almost becomes a contagion among the people as it moves to unite family units together. It is only natural that our thoughts are turned to the history of our families and the sacrifices they made to embrace the gospel of our Lord and Savior.

In addition, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught about the personal benefit of keeping a book of remembrance. He said:

“Keeping journals reminds us of blessings. Those who keep a book of remembrance are more likely to keep the Lord in remembrance in their daily lives. Journals are a way of counting our blessings and of leaving an inventory of these blessings for our posterity” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 349).

What Is the Value of Your Name?

As I have studied the history of my family and have learned how much they sacrificed for the gospel, I have grown to appreciate the value of a good name. It has built within me a greater desire to do what I can do to bring

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ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL MANN

honor to this good family name. It has also impressed upon me the responsibility I have to future generations. If I were to bring dishonor to the name, and if our family continues to grow as it has in the past generations, that influence could cause many to fall away, thus limiting their eternal blessings.

In Proverbs we find that “a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold” (Proverbs 22:1).

We cannot isolate ourselves from those around us. Our good name can be a special valued asset worth more than the riches of the world.

Your good name connects you with your past family history. Your righteous living,

your example, your teachings, and your worthwhile service will bless numerous people with your vision. It is almost impossible to comprehend the number. May the Lord bless you with a greater understanding of his great plan of happiness and your special role in it. I add my witness that families are important. Your name is special. It is recorded in the histories of our Father in Heaven, and how you value that, how you treat it, will literally affect generations to come. God bless you with the vision that is yours of who you are and the great privilege that is yours to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ.

From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University on February 11, 1997.