

Latter-day Saints are taught that preparation is necessary if one is to communicate effectively with God. A tranquil time and place allow quiet contemplation on the specific requests one may make. Joseph Smith went to a nearby grove to pray for an answer to his question, and received his glorious vision. Job was told, "Prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him" (Job 11:13). Alma<sub>2</sub> listed the qualities of a heart prepared for prayer: "I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering . . . being diligent in keeping the commandments of God. . . . And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works" (Alma 7:23–24). MORONI<sub>2</sub> stressed the need for "a sincere heart, . . . real intent, . . . [and] faith in Christ" (Moro. 10:4).

Latter-day Saints believe that relationships with others must also harmonize with Christ's teachings. Christ taught that God's forgiveness could not be obtained unless the sinner were willing to forgive those who had sinned against him (Matt. 6:14–15; Mark 11:25–26). A prepared heart is also a giving heart. Amulek spoke of this quality: "I say unto you, do not suppose that [praying] is all; for . . . if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing" (Alma 34:28).

When one's heart is prepared, God promises answers. The elders of the early Church were promised that "if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done" (D&C 50:29). In even stronger terms this assurance is repeated to all who pray: "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (D&C 82:10). However, it is wise to pray that God's will be done, even if it means denial of a request. God warns that asking for what "is not expedient" will turn to one's "condemnation" (D&C 88:64–65).

One answer to a faithful prayer is illustrated through the experience of Oliver COWDERY, an early elder of the Church, when he attempted to help with translating the Book of Mormon. He was told to "study it out in [his] mind" and, if his translation were right, it would be confirmed with a burning in his bosom; if wrong, a "stupor of

thought" would come (D&C 9:8–9). When prayers are answered, one experiences peace of mind and assurance that God has heard, even though the answer may be no. The Savior's submissiveness as he prayed in GETHSEMANE shows the way: "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

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## PRAYER CIRCLE

The prayer circle is a part of Latter-day Saint TEMPLE WORSHIP, usually associated with the ENDOWMENT ceremony. Participants, an equal number of men and women dressed in temple clothing, surround an altar in a circle formation to participate unitedly in prayer.

The circle is an ancient and universal symbol of perfection. In a public discourse, Joseph SMITH once used a ring as an image of eternity, "one eternal round," without beginning or end (*TPJS*, p. 354). The formation of the prayer circle suggests wholeness and eternity, and the participants, having affirmed that they bear no negative feelings toward other members of the circle (cf. Matt. 5:23–24), evoke communal harmony in collective prayer—a harmony underscored by the linked formation, uniformity of dress, and the unison repetition of the words of the leader. The prayer has no set text, but is, among other things, an occasion for seeking the Lord's blessing upon those with particular needs whose names have been submitted for collective entreaty.

Prayer in circle formation can be traced to many early Christian sources. In the apocryphal Acts of John, for example, participants are bidden to "make as it were a ring, holding one another's hands, and [Jesus] standing in the midst" led the prayer (James, p. 253). Other texts require the participants to prepare by washing or reconciling

themselves, or to receive secret words and signs, or to dress in special clothing; some suggest a ritual ring dance.

"Prayer rings" were also common in nineteenth-century Protestant revivals, and Freemasons of the period arranged themselves in circular formation around an altar, repeating in unison the received Masonic signs (*see* FREEMASONRY AND THE TEMPLE).

Despite these analogues, the LDS prayer circle is a distinctive ceremony, integrally connected with temple worship. The ceremony may have been introduced in May 1842, when Joseph Smith taught the endowment to several of his closest associates; and a prayer circle group was formed on May 26, 1843, with Joseph Smith as its leader. This prayer circle, referred to in many early records as the "Quorum of the Anointed," to which others (including women) were gradually initiated, met and prayed together regularly during the last year of Joseph Smith's life and continued after his martyrdom in June 1844 until endowments began to be performed in the Nauvoo Temple in December 1845.

Although deriving in all instances from temple worship, some prayer circles were formally organized apart from the endowment ceremony. Membership in these special prayer circles, which began in 1851 and continued until 1929, did not depend upon Church position. Other prayer circles were formed for priesthood groups: stake presidencies and high councils, priesthood quorums, ward bishoprics—all of them formed under the authority of the First Presidency and generally in response to specific requests. On May 3, 1978, the First Presidency announced that all prayer circles outside the temple were to be discontinued. Apart from the endowment ceremony, the only prayer circles still held are part of the weekly meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve and the monthly meeting of all General Authorities in the Salt Lake Temple.

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## PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Prior to his ascension, the resurrected Savior charged his apostles to "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). This charge reiterates the call of Abraham (Abr. 2:6, 9–11) and has been unequivocally renewed in the latter days (D&C 110:12): "And the voice of warning shall be unto all people" (D&C 1:4). "This calling and commandment give I unto you concerning all men . . . [they] shall be ordained and sent forth to preach the everlasting gospel among the nations" (D&C 36:4–5). "For, verily, the sound must go forth from this place unto all the world, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth—the gospel must be preached unto every creature, with signs following them that believe" (D&C 58:64). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints responds to this charge by sending missionaries to people of all persuasions throughout the world (*see* MISSIONS).

The calling to preach the gospel has a distinctive meaning among Latter-day Saints. All who are in the Church are directly or indirectly indebted to missionaries for their introduction to the gospel. Historically, missionary labor has been carried out by members of the Church who have gone "two by two" (D&C 42:6; 52:10; cf. Luke 10:1; John 8:17) into every land and clime of the free world (*see* MISSIONARY, MISSIONARY LIFE). LDS missionary labor is not a profession or vocation. It is voluntary and unpaid. The majority of those who presently serve for an average of two years are young men and women, but many older couples of various professions or walks of life also serve. MISSION PRESIDENTS are themselves laymen called to serve usually for three years. At this writing (1991), some 40,000 LDS full-time missionaries are serving.

In addition, there are other modes of preaching the gospel. Members may be called to fulfill stake missions that are coordinated in time spent with their regular occupations or professions. They devote about ten hours per week (usually evenings) to missionary work in their own stake area. The "Every member a missionary" program emphasized by President David O. MCKAY involves members inviting friends or interested persons into their homes for discussions of gospel principles. A General Missionary Fund is maintained by member contributions, which help some persons