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(Family Discovery Day 2015)

Today I would like to speak about people and ordinances both of which are at the very heart of family history. People become more real and relevant in our lives when we know their stories. Stories are a power means to convert a lifeless name to a living personality. They are an important part of finding in the family history process. Our stories have the power to be sermons without preaching. They can inspire us, entertain us, stir our emotions, connect our lives to others, bridge the gap of time and distance and serve as a power motivating source for good.

Stories of our ancestors can bind our hearts between generations, increase love and appreciation for those who paved the way and built our faith. They are an integral part of family history.

As a young married couple my wife and I learn that Elder Vaughn Featherstone, then a member of the presiding bishopric would be attending our upcoming stake conference. We thought our children might have a better appreciation for him if we could share a story about his family that would be appealing them. So we read his book entitled "A generation of excellence". We read of his 12 year old son Scott, now a stake president who had been in an accident. He had wanted to be in an upcoming stake track and sports meet, but with his injury he was unable to run in any of the sprinting events. Finally he learned they had a sit up contest and he decided to enter it. At one point during the tract meet Sister Featherstone came to her husband and said I want you to go and over and stop the boy, he's done over 500 sit-ups. Bishop Featherstone replied, "No, let the boy go."

Later his wife returned again, "He's done 750 sit-ups and his back is bleeding. Please get him to stop." Bishop Featherstone replied, "No Merlene, he'll know when to stop." A short while thereafter Scott approached his parents with a big grin and a blue ribbon in his hand; 1001 sit-ups.

As we told the story the eyes of our 9 year old boy were like silver dollars. He was entranced by every word. He had been training for the cub scout Olympics and sit-ups were one of the contest events. As soon as we finished the story he blurted out, "I want to beat that boys record." We said that was a good goal and maybe he could work on it every night until he accomplished it but he replied, "No, I want to beat it tonight."

So I held our son's ankles and he began. After about 250 sit-ups we remarked that it was bed time and he needed to go to bed. He said he didn't want to stop. After a little while his older sister got a wash cloth and started to wipe his head. We could see a blazing determination in this boys eyes. He was not going to stop. Recognizing this fact we got our super 8 camera and started filming. You are not seeing the actual footage.

His brothers and sisters walked in and out of the room watching and witnessing this heroic feat. Wondering whether he would stop or reach the seaming unattainable goal. When Rick reached various numbers his brothers and sisters would make charts designating how many he had done.

900 at that point....
1000....

1004 sit-ups

We could have given a hundred sermons from the pulpit on determination and it would have never had the power and influence this event had on our family on that particular family home evening. And it all started with a story. It bound everyone together rejoicing in the success of one and increasing the determination of all. That story is a legend in our family today. A drop of spiritual glue that binds us together and raises the sights of all. It is part of our family history.

In our home we have a wall that has a large map of the world with round circles designating the spots where my wife and I have visited. On each side of the map are pictures of key events that took place as we visited these various destinations. We've used these pictures to share with our family our own personal stories that have blessed us spiritually.

For example, I attending a district conference in a remote area in Papua New Guinea. This picture of the canoes helps us tell the story of the 464 saints who traveled down the river for 4 1/2 days to attend the district conference. They had access to no other means of transportation. They had no roads, no trains, no planes; only the river.

Then next picture is of a woman and man with their newborn babe. This woman gave birth to this baby on one of those canoes 3 1/2 days into the journey. During the conference weekend this couple approached me and said, "We have named our new child baby Callister".

At this next picture you will want to look closely at the man sitting on the chair with crutches beside him. This man also came down the river on one of those canoes and when he emerged on land I asked him why he was using crutches. To which he responded, "I was attacked by a crocodile, but I fought it off." I thought wow, he's raised the threshold of excuses for not attending church on Sunday. Staying up late the night before or a slight headache doesn't quite cut it when matched against this humble and vigilant saint.

These stories of faithful saints and our interaction with them have been a great influence for good in our family. They now are part of our family history.

My wife is particularly careful to see at our annual family vacations that we share and hand out faith promoting stories of our ancestors. As she does so she is helping fulfill Malachi's promise of turning the ... "heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." (Malachi 4:6).

As we preserve and share our own stories and those of our ancestors, we solidify the lengths of love, appreciation and faith with those who are now living as well as those who have gone before. We haven't just found names and dates, we've found our family. Likewise taking names of our deceased ancestors to the temple and performing ordinances on their behalf is at the core of family history. It helps us look beyond ourselves. It helps us realize that while salvation may be an individual process exaltation is a family one.

It helps us remember as Paul said, "...that they without us should not be made perfect." (Hebrews 11:40)

I was having a casual conversation one day with Sister Julie Beck, she mentioned that morning she had arisen early, picked up her granddaughter before school, taken her to do baptisms for some of their deceased ancestors. I thought to myself, what a great idea. I grew up in an active home, but never once as a boy did baptisms with my parents. We always went with our youth group.

It wasn't too long thereafter that I invited our 13 year old grandson Brigham who was visiting us in Salt Lake to go with me to the temple to do baptisms for the dead. Then I invited another grandson Chase and his father to do likewise. We did baptisms for our family members, I performed some of the baptisms with my grandson acting as the proxy and his father did the remainder. I found it was a wonderful opportunity on both occasions to teach our grandsons about the plan of salvation and how baptisms for the dead constitute a key part of that divine plan.

As parents and grandparents we have a sacred privilege to take our children and grandchildren to the temple to perform ordinances with them on behalf of our ancestors.

Family history is more than just searching out names of our ancestors, as important as that is. It is also sharing insights and stories of their lives and our lives that knit our hearts together. It is taking their names to the temple and performing saving ordinances for them that advance their spiritual opportunities and it is setting an example that is recorded in their hearts and reflected in their lives.

As we share these faith promoting stories with their children and grandchildren, participate with them in doing ordinances for our deceased ancestors and teach them through our examples. We give many worthy sermons without ever preaching. How grateful we can be for this divine work in family history that solidifies the meaning and purpose of family as an eternal unit. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen