

Elder Walter F. González

Followers of Christ

Last October my wife and I accompanied Elder and Sister Neil L. Andersen for the groundbreaking of a new temple in Córdoba, Argentina. As is customary, a press conference followed the ceremony. A journalist, not a member of our Church, commented that she had observed how well the men treated their wives. Then she unexpectedly asked, “Is that real or fiction?” I am sure that she saw and felt something different among our members. She might have perceived the desire of our members to follow Christ. Members all over the world have such a desire. At the same time, millions who are not members of the Church also have a desire to follow Him.

Recently my wife and I were impressed by the people we saw in Ghana and Nigeria. Most were not members of our Church. We were happy to see their desire to follow Christ expressed in many of their conversations in their houses, on their cars, on their walls, and on their billboards. We had never seen so many Christian churches next to one another.

As Latter-day Saints, ours is the duty to invite millions such as these to come and see what our Church can add to the good things that they already have. Any person from any continent, climate, or culture can know for himself or herself that the Prophet Joseph Smith saw the Father and the Son in a vision. He or she can know that heavenly messengers restored the priesthood and that the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ. In the words of the Lord to Enoch, “Righteousness [has been sent] down out of heaven; and truth [has been sent] forth out of the earth, to [testify of the] Only Begotten [of the Father].”¹

The Savior has promised, “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”² Followers of Christ pattern their lives after the Savior to walk in the light. Two characteristics

can help us recognize to what extent we follow Him. First, followers of Christ are loving people. Second, followers of Christ make and keep covenants.

Being loving

The first characteristic, being loving, is probably one thing the journalist in Córdoba noticed among our Church members. We follow Christ because we love Him. When we follow the Redeemer out of love, we are following His own example. Through love the Savior was obedient to the will of the Father under any circumstance. Our Savior was obedient even when it meant great physical and emotional pain, even when it meant being whipped and mocked, even when it meant that His enemies would torture Him while His friends abandoned Him. The atoning sacrifice, which is unique to the mission of the Savior, is the greatest expression of love ever. “The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”³

As Christ followed the Father under any circumstance, we should follow His Son. If we do so, it matters not what kind of persecution, suffering, grief, or “thorn in the flesh”⁴ we face. We are not alone. Christ will assist us. His tender mercies will make us mighty under any circumstance.⁵

Following Christ may mean forsaking many dear things, as Ruth the Moabite did. As a new convert, out of love for God and Naomi, she left everything behind to live her religion.⁶

It may also mean withstanding adversity and temptation. In his youth Joseph was sold into slavery. He was taken away from everything he loved. Later he was tempted to be unchaste. He resisted the temptation and said, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”⁷ His love for God was more powerful than any adversity or temptation.

Today we have modern Ruths and Josephs all over the world. When Brother Jimmy Olvera from Guayaquil, Ecuador, received his mission call, his family was struggling greatly. The day he was leaving, he was told that if he walked out the door, he would lose his family. With a broken heart he walked out that door. While he was on his mission, his mother asked him to stay longer in the field because they were receiving so many blessings. Today Brother Olvera serves as a stake patriarch.

Truly loving Christ provides the required strength to follow Him. The Lord Himself showed this when He asked Peter three times, “Lovest thou me?” After Peter reaffirmed his love for Him out loud, the Lord told Peter about upcoming difficulties. Then the admonition came: “Follow me.” The Savior’s question to Peter can also be asked of us: “Lovest thou me?” followed by the call to action: “Follow me.”⁸

Love is a powerful influence in our hearts in our effort to be obedient. Love for our Savior inspires us to keep His commandments. Love for a mother, father, or spouse can also inspire our obedience to gospel principles. The way we treat others reflects to what extent we follow our Savior in loving one another.⁹ We show our love for Him when we stop to assist others, when we are “perfectly honest and upright in all things,”¹⁰ and when we make and keep covenants.

Making and keeping covenants

The second characteristic that followers of Christ have is making and keeping covenants, as He did. Moroni pointed out that “the shedding of the blood of Christ . . . is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.”¹¹

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that even before the organization of this earth, covenants were made in heaven.¹² Ancient prophets and patriarchs made covenants.

The Savior Himself gave the example. He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness

by one with the proper authority. Through His baptism, the Savior witnessed unto the Father that He would be obedient in keeping all the Father’s commandments.¹³ As in days of old, we also follow Christ and make covenants through priesthood ordinances.

Making covenants is something that millions who are not members of our Church can add to the very good things that they already have. Making covenants is an expression of love. It is a way of saying to Him, “Yes, I will follow Thee because I love Thee.”

Covenants include promises, “even of life eternal.”¹⁴ All things will work together for our good if we remember our covenants.¹⁵ They must be made and kept to fully receive the promises they provide. Love for the Savior and remembering our covenants will help us keep them. Partaking of the sacrament is one way to remember them.¹⁶ Another way is to attend the temple often. I remember a young married couple in South America who wanted to separate because they could not get along. A priesthood leader counseled them to attend the temple and pay specific attention to the words and promises of the covenants made there. They did so and their marriage was saved. The power of our covenants is greater than any challenge we face or we may face.

Invitation to obtain blessings

To those members who are not active in the gospel, please come back. Feel the blessing of remembering and renewing covenants through the sacrament and temple attendance. Doing so is an expression of love and shows a willingness to be a true follower of Christ. It will qualify you to receive all the promised blessings.

To those who are not members of our Church, I invite you to exercise faith, repent, and qualify to receive the covenant of baptism in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. By doing so, you will

show your love to our Heavenly Father and your willingness to follow Christ.

I testify that we are happier when we follow the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we strive to follow Him, the blessings of heaven will come unto us. I know His promises will be fulfilled as we make and keep covenants and become true followers of Christ. I testify of His great love for each one of us, and I do so in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Moses 7:62.
2. John 8:12.
3. Isaiah 53:5.
4. 2 Corinthians 12:7.
5. See 1 Nephi 1:20.
6. See Ruth 1:16.
7. See Genesis 39:7–9.
8. See John 21:15–19.
9. See John 13:35.
10. Alma 27:27.
11. Moroni 10:33.
12. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 42; see also Spencer W. Kimball, “Be Ye Therefore Perfect” (devotional address, Salt Lake Institute of Religion, Jan. 10,

1975): “We made vows, solemn vows, in the heavens before we came to this mortal life. . . . We have made covenants. We made them before we accepted our position here on the earth.”

13. See 2 Nephi 31:5–7.
14. Abraham 2:11; see also John A. Widtsoe, “Temple Worship” (lecture, Assembly Hall, Salt Lake City, Oct. 12, 1920), 10: “The covenant gives life to truth; and makes possible the blessings that reward all those who use knowledge properly.”
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 90:24.
16. See, for example, 3 Nephi 18:7–11.

President Uchtdorf

The choir and congregation will now join in singing “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.” Following the singing, Elder Kent F. Richards of the Seventy will address us. He will be followed by Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The choir will then sing “I Know That My Savior Loves Me.”

The choir and congregation sang “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.”

Elder Kent F. Richards

The purpose of pain

As a surgeon, I found that a significant portion of my professional time was taken up with the subject of pain. Of necessity I surgically inflicted it almost daily—and much of my effort was then spent trying to control and alleviate pain.

I have pondered about the purpose of pain. None of us is immune from experiencing pain. I have seen people cope with it very differently. Some turn away from God in anger, and others allow their suffering to bring them closer to God.

Like you, I have experienced pain myself. Pain is a gauge of the healing process.

It often teaches us patience. Perhaps that is why we use the term *patient* in referring to the sick.

Elder Orson F. Whitney wrote: “No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. . . . It is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire.”¹

Similarly, Elder Robert D. Hales has said:

“Pain brings you to a humility that allows you to ponder. It is an experience I am grateful to have endured.