

Followers of Christ

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Following Christ is not a casual or occasional practice but a continuous commitment and way of life that applies at all times and in all places.

One of our most beloved hymns, performed by the Tabernacle Choir this morning, begins with these words:

“Come, follow me,” the Savior said.
Then let us in his footsteps tread,
For thus alone can we be one
With God’s own loved, begotten Son.¹

Those words, inspired by the Savior’s earliest invitation to His disciples (see Matthew 4:19), were written by John Nicholson, a Scottish convert. Like many of our early leaders, he had little formal schooling but a profound love for our Savior and the plan of salvation.²

All of the messages of this conference help us follow in the footsteps of our Savior, whose example and teachings define the path for every follower of Jesus Christ.

Like all other Christians, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints study the life of our Savior as reported in the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I will review examples and teachings contained in these four books of the Holy Bible and invite each of us and all other Christians to consider how this restored Church and each of us qualify as followers of Christ.

Jesus taught that baptism was necessary to enter the kingdom of God (see John 3:5). He began His ministry by being baptized (see Mark 1:9), and He and His followers baptized others (see John 3:22–26). We do likewise.

Jesus began His preaching by inviting His listeners to repent (see Matthew 4:17). That is still His servants’ message to the world.

Throughout His ministry Jesus gave commandments. And He taught, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15; see also verses 21, 23). He affirmed that keeping His commandments would require His followers to leave what He called “that which is highly esteemed among men” (Luke 16:15) and “the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8; see also verse 13). He also warned, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). As the Apostle Peter later declared, the followers of Jesus were to be “a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9).

Latter-day Saints understand that we should not be “of the world” or bound to “the tradition of men,” but like other followers of Christ, we sometimes find it difficult to separate ourselves from the world and its traditions.

Some model themselves after worldly ways because, as Jesus said of some whom He taught, “they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). These failures to follow Christ are too numerous and too sensitive to list here. They range all the way from worldly practices like political correctness and extremes in dress and grooming to deviations from basic values like the eternal nature and function of the family.

Jesus’s teachings were not meant to be theoretical. Always they were to be acted upon. Jesus taught, “Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man” (Matthew 7:24; see also Luke 11:28) and “Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (Matthew 24:46). In another beloved hymn we sing:

Savior, may I learn to love thee,
Walk the path that thou hast shown. ...
Savior, may I learn to love thee—
Lord, I would follow thee.³

As Jesus taught, those who love Him will keep His commandments. They will be obedient, as President Thomas S. Monson taught this morning. Following Christ is not a casual or occasional practice but a continuous commitment and way of life that applies at all times and in all places. The Savior taught this principle and how we should be reminded and strengthened to follow it when He instituted the ordinance of the sacrament (communion, as others call it). We know from modern revelation that He commanded His followers to partake of the emblems in remembrance of Him (see Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 26:22 [in Matthew 26:26, footnote c], 24 [in the Bible appendix]; Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 14:21–24 [in the Bible appendix]). Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints follow that commandment each week by attending a worship service in which we partake of the bread and water and covenant that we will always remember Him and keep His commandments.

Jesus taught that “men ought always to pray” (Luke 18:1). He also set that example, such as when He “continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12) before He called His Twelve Apostles. Like other Christians, we pray in all our worship services. We also pray for guidance, and we teach that we should have frequent personal prayers and daily kneeling prayers as a family. Like Jesus, we pray to our Father in Heaven, and we do so in the sacred name of Jesus Christ.

The Savior called Twelve Apostles to assist in His Church and gave them the keys and authority to carry on after His death (see Matthew 16:18–19; Mark 3:14–15; 6:7; Luke 6:13). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as the restored Church of Jesus Christ, follows this example in its organization and in its conferral of keys and authority on Apostles.

Some whom Jesus called to follow Him did not respond immediately but sought a delay to attend to proper family obligations. Jesus replied, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Many Latter-day Saints practice the priority Jesus taught. This includes the wonderful example of thousands of senior missionaries and others who have left children and grandchildren to perform the missionary duties to which they have been called.

Jesus taught that God created male and female and that a *man* should leave his parents and cleave to his *wife* (see Mark 10:6–8). Our commitment to this teaching is well known.

In the familiar parable of the lost sheep, Jesus taught that we should go out of our way to seek after any of the flock who have strayed (see Matthew 18:11–14; Luke 15:3–7). As we know, President Thomas S. Monson has given great emphasis to this direction in his memorable example and teachings about rescuing our fellow men and women.⁴

In our efforts to rescue and serve, we follow our Savior’s unique example and tender teachings about love: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). He even commanded us to love our enemies (see Luke 6:27–28). And in His great teachings at the end of His mortal ministry, He said:

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34–35).

As part of loving one another, Jesus taught that when we are wronged by persons, we should forgive them (see Matthew 18:21–35; Mark 11:25–26; Luke 6:37). While many struggle with this difficult commandment, we all know of inspiring examples of Latter-day Saints who have given loving forgiveness, even for the most serious wrongs. For example, Chris Williams drew upon his faith in Jesus Christ to forgive the drunken driver who caused the death of his wife and two of their children. Only two days after the tragedy and still deeply distraught, this forgiving man, then serving as one of our bishops, said, “As a disciple of Christ, I had no other choice.”⁵

Most Christians give to the poor and the needy, as Jesus taught (see Matthew 25:31–46; Mark 14:7). In following this teaching of our Savior, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members excel. Our members make generous contributions to charities and give personal service and other gifts to the poor and needy. In addition, our members fast for two meals each month and donate at least the cost of these meals as a fast offering, which our bishops and branch presidents use to help our needy members. Our fasting to help the hungry is an act of charity and, when done with pure intent, is a spiritual feast.

Less well known is our Church’s global humanitarian service. Using funds donated by generous members, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sends food, clothing, and other essentials to relieve the suffering of adults and children all over the world. These humanitarian donations, totaling hundreds of millions of dollars in the last decade, are made without any consideration of religion, race, or nationality.

Our massive relief effort following the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami provided \$13 million in cash and relief supplies. In addition, more than 31,000 Church-sponsored volunteers gave more than 600,000 hours of service. Our humanitarian assistance to the victims of Hurricane Sandy in the eastern United States included large donations of various resources, plus almost 300,000 hours of service in cleanup efforts by about 28,000 Church members. Among many other examples last year, we provided 300,000 pounds (136,000 kg) of clothing and shoes for the refugees in the African nation of Chad. During the last quarter century we have assisted nearly 30 million people in 179 countries.⁶ Truly, the people called “Mormons” know how to give to the poor and needy.

In His last biblical teaching, our Savior directed His followers to take His teachings to every nation and every creature. From the beginning of the Restoration, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has sought to follow that teaching. Even when we were a poor and struggling new church with only a few thousand members, our early leaders sent missionaries across the oceans, east and west. As a people, we have continued to teach the

Christian message until today our unique missionary program has more than 60,000 full-time missionaries, plus thousands more who serve part-time. We have missionaries in over 150 countries and territories worldwide.

As part of His great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The purpose of this teaching and the purpose of following our Savior is to come to the Father, whom our Savior referred to as “my Father, and your Father; and ... my God, and your God” (John 20:17).

From modern revelation, unique to the restored gospel, we know that the commandment to seek perfection is part of God the Father’s plan for the salvation of His children. Under that plan we are all *heirs* of our heavenly parents. “We are the children of God,” the Apostle Paul taught, “and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17). This means, as we are told in the New Testament, that we are “heirs ... of eternal life” (Titus 3:7) and that if we come to the Father, we are to “inherit all things” (Revelation 21:7)—all that He has—a concept our mortal minds can hardly grasp. But at least we can understand that achieving this ultimate destiny in eternity is possible only if we follow our Savior, Jesus Christ, who taught that “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). We seek to follow Him and become more like Him, here and hereafter. So it is that in the final verses of our hymn “Come, Follow Me,” we sing:

Is it enough alone to know
That we must follow him below,
While trav’ling thru this vale of tears?
No, this extends to holier spheres. ...

For thrones, dominions, kingdoms, pow’rs,
And glory great and bliss are ours,
If we, throughout eternity,
Obey his words, “Come, follow me.”⁷

I testify of our Savior, Jesus Christ, whose teachings and example we seek to follow. He invites all of us who are heavy laden to come unto Him, to learn of Him, to follow Him, and thus to find rest to our souls (see Matthew 4:19; 11:28). I testify of the truth of His message and of the divine mission and authority of His restored Church in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. “Come, Follow Me,” *Hymns*, no. 116.

2. See Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (1988), 142–43, 419.

3. “Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 220.

4. See, for example, Heidi S. Swinton, *To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson* (2010), 149–61; Thomas S. Monson, “To the Rescue,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 48–50; *Liahona*, July 2001, 57–60.

5. Chris Williams, in Jessica Henrie, “Father Relies on Faith to Forgive Intoxicated Teen Driver,” *Deseret News*, Aug. 1, 2012, deseretnews.com/article/865559847/Let-It-Go-Chris-Williams-shares-his-story-of-tragedy-and-forgiveness.html; see also Chris Williams, *Let It Go: A True Story of Tragedy and Forgiveness* (2012).

6. See “Emergency Response: Church Assists Worldwide,” *Church News*, Mar. 9, 2013, 9; Welfare Services Emergency Response, “2012 Year in Review,” 8.

7. *Hymns*, no. 116.