

Ponder the Path of Thy Feet

By President Thomas S. Monson



As we look to Jesus as our Exemplar and as we follow in His footsteps, we can return safely to our Heavenly Father.

My beloved brothers and sisters, I am humbled as I stand before you this morning. I ask for your faith and prayers in my behalf as I share with you my message.

All of us commenced a wonderful and essential journey when we left the spirit world and entered this often-challenging stage called mortality. The primary purposes of our existence upon the earth are to obtain a body of flesh and bones, to gain experience that could come only through separation from our heavenly parents, and to see if we would keep the commandments. In the book of Abraham chapter 3 we read: “And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”¹

When we came to the earth, we brought with us that great gift from God—even our agency. In thousands of ways we are privileged to choose for ourselves. Here we learn from the hard taskmaster of experience. We discern between good and evil. We differentiate as to the bitter and the sweet. We learn that decisions determine destiny.

I am certain we left our Father with an overwhelming desire to return to Him, that we might gain the exaltation He planned for us and which we ourselves so much wanted. Although we are left to find and follow that path which will lead us back to our Father in Heaven, He did not send us here without direction and guidance. Rather, He has given us the tools we need, and He will assist us as we seek His help and strive to do all in our power to endure to the end and gain eternal life.

To help guide us we have the words of God and of His Son found in our holy scriptures. We have the counsel and teachings of God’s prophets. Of paramount importance, we have been provided with a perfect example to follow—even the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—and we have been instructed to follow that example. Said the Savior Himself: “Come, follow me.”² “The works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do.”³ He posed the question, “What manner of men ought ye to be?” And then He answered, “Verily I say unto you, even as I am.”⁴ “He marked the path and led the way.”⁵

As we look to Jesus as our Exemplar and as we follow in His footsteps, we can return safely to our Heavenly Father to live with Him forever. Said the prophet Nephi, “Unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved.”⁶

One woman, each time she related experiences she had during a visit to the Holy Land, would exclaim, “I walked where Jesus walked!”

She had been in the vicinity where Jesus lived and taught. Perhaps she stood on a rock on which He had once stood or

looked at a mountain range He had once gazed upon. The experiences, in and of themselves, were thrilling to her; but physically walking *where* Jesus walked is less important than walking *as* He walked. Emulating His actions and following His example are far more important than trying to retrace the remnants of the trails He traversed in mortality.

When Jesus extended to a certain rich man the invitation, “Come, follow me,”⁷ He did not intend merely that the rich man follow Him up and down the hills and valleys of the countryside.

We need not walk by the shores of Galilee or among the Judean hills to walk where Jesus walked. All of us can walk the path He walked when, with His words ringing in our ears, His Spirit filling our hearts, and His teachings guiding our lives, we choose to follow Him as we journey through mortality. His example lights the way. Said He, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”⁸

As we examine the path Jesus walked, we will see that it took Him through many of the same challenges we ourselves will face in life.

For example, Jesus walked the path of disappointment. Although He experienced many disappointments, one of the most poignant was depicted in His lament over Jerusalem as He closed His public ministry. The children of Israel had rejected the safety of the protecting wing which He had offered them. As He looked out over the city soon to be abandoned to destruction, He was overcome by emotions of deep sorrow. In anguish He cried out, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!”⁹

Jesus walked the path of temptation. Lucifer, that evil one, amassing his greatest strength, his most inviting sophistry, tempted Him who had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Jesus did not succumb; rather, He resisted each temptation. His parting words: “Get thee hence, Satan.”¹⁰

Jesus walked the path of pain. Consider Gethsemane, where He was “in an agony ... and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”¹¹ And none can forget His suffering on the cruel cross.

Each of us will walk the path of disappointment, perhaps because of an opportunity lost, a power misused, a loved one’s choices, or a choice we ourselves make. The path of temptation too will be the path of each. We read in the 29th section of the Doctrine and Covenants: “And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves.”¹²

Likewise shall we walk the path of pain. We, as servants, can expect no more than the Master, who left mortality only after great pain and suffering.

While we will find on our path bitter sorrow, we can also find great happiness.

We, with Jesus, can walk the path of obedience. It will not always be easy, but let our watchword be the heritage bequeathed us by Samuel: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”¹³ Let us remember that the end result of disobedience is captivity and death, while the reward for obedience is liberty and eternal life.

We, like Jesus, can walk the path of service. As a glowing searchlight of goodness is the life of Jesus as He ministered among men. He brought strength to the limbs of the cripple, sight to the eyes of the blind, hearing to the ears of the

deaf.

Jesus walked the path of prayer. He taught us how to pray by giving us the beautiful prayer we know as the Lord's Prayer. And who can forget His prayer in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but thine, be done"?¹⁴

Other instructions given to us by the Savior are at our fingertips, found in the holy scriptures. In His Sermon on the Mount, He tells us to be merciful, to be humble, to be righteous, to be pure in heart, to be peacemakers. He instructs us to stand up bravely for our beliefs, even when we are ridiculed and persecuted. He asks us to let our lights shine so that others may see them and may desire to glorify our Father in Heaven. He teaches us to be morally clean in both our thoughts and our actions. He tells us it is far more important to lay up treasures in heaven than on earth.¹⁵

His parables teach with power and authority. With the account of the good Samaritan, He teaches us to love and to serve our neighbors.¹⁶ In His parable of the talents, He teaches us to improve ourselves and to strive for perfection.¹⁷ With the parable of the lost sheep, He instructs us to go to the rescue of those who have left the path and have lost their way.¹⁸

As we strive to place Christ at the center of our lives by learning His words, by following His teachings, and by walking in His path, He has promised to share with us the eternal life that He died to gain. There is no higher end than this, that we should choose to accept His discipline and become His disciples and do His work throughout our lives. Nothing else, no other choice we make, can make of us what He can.

As I think of those who have truly tried to follow the example of the Savior and who have walked in His path, there comes readily to my mind the names of Gustav and Margarete Wacker—two of the most Christlike individuals I have ever known. They were native Germans who had immigrated to eastern Canada, and I met them when I served as a mission president there. Brother Wacker earned his living as a barber. Though their means were limited, they shared all they had. They were not blessed with children, but they nurtured all who entered their home. Men and women of learning and sophistication sought out these humble, unlettered servants of God and counted themselves fortunate if they could spend an hour in their presence.

Their appearance was ordinary, their English halting and somewhat difficult to understand, their home unpretentious. They didn't own a car or a television, nor did they do any of the things to which the world usually pays attention. Yet the faithful beat a path to their door in order to partake of the spirit that was there. Their home was a heaven on earth, and the spirit they radiated was of pure peace and goodness.

We too can have that spirit and can share it with the world as we walk the path of our Savior and follow His perfect example.

We read in Proverbs the admonition, "Ponder the path of thy feet."¹⁹ As we do, we will have the faith, even the desire, to walk the path which Jesus walked. We will have no doubt that we are on a path which our Father would have us follow. The Savior's example provides a framework for everything that we do, and His words provide an unfailing guide. His path will take us safely home. May this be our blessing, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whom I love, whom I serve, and of whom I testify, amen.

2. Luke 18:22.

3. 3 Nephi 27:21.

4. 3 Nephi 27:27.

5. Eliza R. Snow, "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," *Hymns*, no. 195.

6. 2 Nephi 31:16.

7. Luke 18:22.

8. John 14:6.

9. Luke 13:34.

10. Matthew 4:10.

11. Luke 22:44.

12. Doctrine and Covenants 29:39.

13. 1 Samuel 15:22.

14. Luke 22:42.

15. See Matthew 5; 6.

16. See Luke 10:30–37.

17. See Matthew 25:14–30.

18. See Luke 15:4–7.

19. Proverbs 4:26.