

Follow Jesus Christ with Footsteps of Faith

By President M. Russell Ballard

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Christ can carry us today through difficult times. He did it for the early pioneers, and He will do it now for each one of us.

Thank you, choir, for singing “Faith in Every Footstep.” The music and words of that song were written in 1996 by Brother Newell Dayley¹ in preparation for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the early pioneers to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.

Although this song was written in preparation for that celebration, its message applies to the whole world.

I have always loved the chorus:

With faith in ev'ry footstep, we follow Christ, the Lord;
And filled with hope through his pure love, we sing with one accord.²

Brothers and sisters, I testify that as we follow Jesus Christ with footsteps of faith, there is hope. There is hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is hope for all in this life. There is hope to overcome our mistakes, our sorrows, our struggles, and our trials and our troubles. There is hope in repentance and being forgiven and in forgiving others. I testify that there is hope and peace in Christ. He can carry us today through difficult times. He did it for the early pioneers, and He will do it now for each one of us.

This year marks the 175th anniversary of the arrival of the early pioneers to the Salt Lake Valley, which has caused me to reflect on my ancestors, some of whom walked from Nauvoo to the Salt Lake Valley. I have great-grandparents who walked the plains in their youth. Henry Ballard was 20 years old;³ Margaret McNeil was 13;⁴ and Joseph F. Smith, who later became the sixth President of the Church, was just 9 when he arrived in the Salt Lake Valley.⁵

They faced deprivations of every kind along the trail, such as cold winters, illness, and lack of adequate food and clothing. For instance, when Henry Ballard entered the Salt Lake Valley, he rejoiced in seeing the “Promised Land” but lived in fear that someone might see him

because the clothing he was wearing was so worn out that it did not completely cover his body. He hid himself behind bushes all day until after dark. He then went to a house and begged for clothing so that he could continue his journey and locate his parents. He was thankful to God that he had reached his future home in safety.⁶

My great-grandparents followed Jesus Christ with footsteps of faith throughout each of their trials. I am grateful to them for never giving up. Their footsteps of faith have blessed me and subsequent generations, just as your footsteps of faith today will bless your posterity.

The word *pioneer* is both a noun and a verb. As a noun it can mean a person who is among the first to explore or settle a new territory. As a verb, it can mean to open or prepare the way for others to follow.⁷

As I think about pioneers who have prepared the way for others, I first think of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Joseph was a pioneer because his footsteps of faith led him to a grove of trees, where he knelt in prayer and opened the way for us to have the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Joseph's faith to "ask of God"⁸ on that spring morning in 1820 opened the way for the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which included prophets and apostles called to serve on earth once again.⁹ I know Joseph Smith is a prophet of God. I know his faith-filled footsteps led him to kneel in the presence of God the Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

The Prophet Joseph's footsteps of faith enabled him to be the Lord's instrument in bringing forth the Book of Mormon, which is another testament of Jesus Christ and His atoning grace.

Through Joseph Smith's faith and perseverance in the face of incredible hardship and opposition, he was able to be an instrument in the hands of the Lord in establishing the Church of Jesus Christ once again on the earth.

During the last general conference, I spoke about how my full-time missionary service blessed me. I was blessed as I taught about our Heavenly Father's glorious plan of salvation, Joseph Smith's First Vision, and his translation of the Book of Mormon. These restored teachings and doctrine guided my footsteps of faith in teaching those who were willing to listen to the message of the Restoration of the gospel.

Our missionaries today are modern-day pioneers because they share this glorious message with people around the world, thus opening the way for our Heavenly Father's children to know Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. Accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ opens the way for everyone

to prepare for and receive ordinances and the blessings of the Church and the temple.

Last general conference, President Russell M. Nelson reaffirmed “that the Lord has asked every worthy, able young man to prepare for and serve a mission” and that “a mission is also a powerful, but optional, opportunity” for “young and able sisters.”¹⁰

Dear young men and young women, your footsteps of faith will help you to follow the Lord’s invitation to serve missions—to be modern-day pioneers—by opening the way for God’s children to find and stay on the covenant path leading back to His glorious presence.

President Nelson has been a pioneer in the Church. As an Apostle he has traveled to and opened many lands for the preaching of the gospel. Shortly after becoming the prophet and President of the Church, he pled with us to “increase [our] spiritual capacity to receive revelation.”¹¹ He continues to teach us to strengthen our testimonies. In a devotional for young adults, he said:

“I plead with you to take charge of your testimony. Work for it. Own it. Care for it. Nurture it so that it will grow. ...

“[Then] watch for miracles to happen in your life.”¹²

He is teaching us how to become more spiritually self-reliant. He has said that “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”¹³

I testify that President Russell M. Nelson is the prophet of God on the earth today.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, is the ultimate pioneer in preparing the way. Indeed, He *is* “the way”¹⁴ for the plan of salvation to be accomplished so that we can repent and, through faith in Him, return to our Heavenly Father.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”¹⁵ He has promised to not leave us comfortless; He will come to us in our trials.¹⁶ He has invited us to “come unto [Him] with full purpose of heart, and [He] shall heal [us].”¹⁷

I testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior and our Redeemer, our Advocate with the Father. Our Heavenly Father has opened the way for us to return to Him by following His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, with faith in every footstep.

My great-grandparents and other early pioneers faced many obstacles as they came by wagons, handcarts, and walking to the Salt Lake Valley.

We too will face challenges in our individual journeys through our lives. We are not pushing handcarts or driving covered wagons over steep mountains and through deep snowdrifts; we are trying as they did to spiritually overcome the temptations and challenges of our day. We have trails to walk; we have hills—and sometimes mountains—to climb. Although the trials today are different than those of the early pioneers, they are no less challenging for us.

It is important to follow the prophet and keep our feet firmly planted on the covenant path of faithfulness, as it was for the early pioneers.

Let us follow Jesus Christ with faith in every footstep. We need to serve the Lord and serve one another. We need to strengthen ourselves spiritually by keeping and honoring our covenants. We should not lose the sense of urgency to keep the commandments. Satan tries to dull our commitment and our love for God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Please remember that if anyone should lose their way, we will never be lost to our Savior. With the blessing of repentance, we can turn to Him. He will help us learn, grow, and change as we strive to stay on the covenant path.

May we ever follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and, with faith in our every footstep, focus on Him, keeping our feet firmly planted on the covenant path, is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See K. Newell Dayley, “Faith in Every Footstep,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1997, 15; *Liahona*, Feb. 1997, 22–23.
2. Dayley, “Faith in Every Footstep,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1997, 15; *Liahona*, Feb. 1997, 23.
3. See Henry Ballard diary, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, archives.lib.byu.edu/repositories/ltpsc/resources/upb_msssc998.
4. See “A ‘Small Glimpse’ into Pioneer Experiences,” *Church News*, June 15, 1996, thechurchnews.com.
5. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), xiv.
6. See Douglas O. Crookston, ed., *Henry Ballard: The Story of a Courageous Pioneer, 1832–1908* (1994), 14–15.
7. See *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, “pioneer.”
8. James 1:5.
9. See Joseph Smith—History 1:5–20.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Preaching the Gospel of Peace,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 6; original emphasis removed.
11. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 96.
12. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
13. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” 96.
14. John 14:6.
15. John 14:6.
16. See John 14:16–18.
17. 3 Nephi 18:32.