

Patterns of Discipleship

By Elder Joseph W. Sitati
Emeritus Member of the Seventy

Learning about Christ and His ways leads us to know and to love Him.

Pattern of Faith

This morning our two children and three grandchildren in North America, and about half of the world, saw the brightness of the sun rising majestically in the east. The other three children and seven grandchildren in Africa, and the other half of the world, saw darkness gradually creep upon them as the sun sank over the horizon in the west.

This timeless constancy of the onset of day and night is one daily reminder of realities that govern our lives that we cannot change. When we respect and align what we do with these eternal realities, we experience internal peace and harmony. When we don't, we are unsettled, and things do not work as we expect.

Day and night is one example of patterns that God has given to everyone who has ever lived on the earth, of things as they really are. It is an absolute truth of our human existence that we cannot negotiate around according to our own desires and get away with it. I am reminded of this every time I take a flight from Africa to come to general conference, resetting the body clock backward by 10 hours in one day.

Whenever we care to notice, we see that Heavenly Father has given us sufficient witnesses of truth to govern our lives so we will know Him and have the blessings of peace and joy.

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Spirit of the Lord affirms, "And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations."¹

Korihor the anti-Christ fell for such deception, disbelieving the existence of God and the coming of Christ. To him the prophet Alma testified, "All things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all

the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator.”²

When Korihor insisted to be given a sign before he could believe, Alma caused him to be struck dumb. Humbled by his affliction, Korihor freely confessed to having been deceived by the devil.

We do not need to be deceived. The miracle of intelligent life constantly plays before us. And a brief gaze and reflection upon the wonders of the heavens arrayed with numberless stars and galaxies prompt the soul of the believing heart to proclaim, “My God, how great thou art!”³

Yes, God our Heavenly Father lives, and He manifests Himself to us all the time in multiple ways.

Pattern of Humility

But to acknowledge, believe, and continue in God, our hearts need to be receptive to the Spirit of truth. Alma taught that faith is preceded by humility.⁴ Mormon added that it is impossible for anyone who is not “meek and lowly in heart” to have faith and hope and to receive the Spirit of God.⁵ King Benjamin declared that anyone who prioritizes the glory of the world is “an enemy to God.”⁶

By submitting to baptism to fulfill all righteousness, even though He was righteous and holy, Jesus Christ demonstrated that humility before God is a foundational attribute of His disciples.⁷

All new disciples are required to demonstrate humility before God through the ordinance of baptism. Thus, “all those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits ... shall be received by baptism into his church.”⁸

Humility inclines the heart of the disciple toward repentance and obedience. The Spirit of God is then able to bring truth to that heart, and it will find entry.⁹

It is a lack of humility that contributes most to the fulfillment of the Apostle Paul’s prophecy in these last days:

“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

“Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good.”¹⁰

The invitation of the Savior to learn of Him is an invitation to turn away from the enticings of worldliness and to become as He is—meek and

lowly of heart, humble. We are then able to take up His yoke and discover that it is easy—that discipleship is not a burden but a joy, as President Russell M. Nelson has so eloquently and repeatedly taught us.

Pattern of Love

Learning about Christ and His ways leads us to know and to love Him.

He showed by example that with an attitude of humility it is indeed possible to know and to love God the Father with all our being and to love others as we love ourselves, holding back nothing. His ministry on earth, during which He put both His will and His body on the altar, was a pattern for the application of these principles on which His gospel is founded. Both principles are outward looking and are about how we relate to others, not about seeking personal gratification or glory.

The miraculous irony of it is that when we focus our best efforts on loving God and others, we are enabled to discover our own true divine worth as sons and daughters of God, with the complete peace and joy that this experience brings.

We become one with God and with one another through love and service. Then we can receive the witness of the Holy Ghost of that pure love, the fruit which Lehi speaks about as “most sweet, above all that [he] ever before tasted.”¹¹

The crown that Christ received by giving and doing all in His ability to set the pattern of loving the Father and loving us was to receive all power, even all that the Father has, which is exaltation.¹²

Our opportunity to nurture in our souls a lasting love of God and of our neighbor starts at home with the holy habits of connecting with the Father daily in personal and family prayer in the name of His Only Begotten Son, learning together of Them through individual and family scripture study, observing the Sabbath day together, and individually holding a current temple recommend, using it together as often as we are able.

As we each individually grow in our knowledge and love of the Father and the Son, we grow in appreciation and love for one another. Our ability to love and serve others outside the home is greatly enhanced.

What we do at home is the true crucible of enduring and joyful discipleship. The sweetest blessings of the restored gospel that my wife, Gladys, and I have enjoyed in our household have come from learning to know and to honor God at home and to share His love with our posterity.

Pattern of Service

Love for God and service to one another nurtured at home and service to others outside the home in time grow into the attribute of charity.

This resonates with the pattern of consecrated service in the kingdom of God that is set before us by the Lord's living prophets and apostles. We become one with them.

We are then enabled to look, through them, unto the Lord "in every thought," so that we shall "doubt not" and "fear not."¹³

Like the Lord's living prophets and apostles, we can go forth with "bowels ... full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, [with] virtue [garnishing our] thoughts unceasingly; ... [and our] confidence [waxing] strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood ... [distilling] upon [our souls] as the dews from heaven."

With the Lord's living prophets and apostles, we too can join a virtuous circle of faith strengthened by consecrated service in which "the Holy Ghost [is our] constant companion, [our] scepter [is] an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and [our] dominion [is] an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it [flows] unto [us] forever and ever."¹⁴ For this is the promise of the Father's plan. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 52:14.
2. Alma 30:44.
3. “How Great Thou Art,” *Hymns*, no 86.
4. See Alma 32:14–21.
5. See Moroni 7:42–44.
6. Mosiah 3:19.
7. See 2 Nephi 31:6–7.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
9. See 2 Nephi 33:1.
10. 2 Timothy 3:2–3.
11. 1 Nephi 8:11.
12. See Matthew 28:18; Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46.