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To be a Latter-day Saint is to be a pioneer.

# YOUR PIONEER JOURNEY—

## FOR REAL, NOT PRETEND

By Aaron L. West  
Church History Department

When I was a little boy, I sometimes pretended to be a sports star. I pretended I could fly. I pretended I was a giant. I was happy with my life, even though I was short, earthbound, and only mildly athletic. But pretending was fun. I enjoyed experiencing something different, even if it was just in my imagination. I guess that's why a lot of people like to pretend.

Speaking of pretending, we Latter-day Saints love to go on pioneer treks. We wear pioneer clothes (sort of). We pull pioneer handcarts (kind of). We eat pioneer food (well, not exactly). We make a huge effort to pretend to be pioneers. The amazing thing is that we don't need to pretend. *We already are pioneers.*

President Thomas S. Monson has said, "To be a Latter-day Saint is to be a pioneer, for the definition of a pioneer is 'one who goes before to prepare or open up the way for others to follow.'"<sup>1</sup> President Monson has taught us, by his words and his actions, how to be true pioneers:

"We follow in the footsteps of the ultimate Pioneer—even the Savior—who went before, showing us the way to follow.

"'Come, follow me,' He invited."<sup>2</sup>

*Come . . . follow . . . me.* These simple words can help us be true pioneers.

Let's look at these words from the perspective of a few modern-day pioneers who recently went on a stake pioneer trek.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BROOKE SMART  
TREK PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF AARON WEST



Taylor A.



Ethan G.



Harmony C.

## “COME, FOLLOW ME”

The word *come* is an invitation. It suggests movement from one place to another. Taylor A. knows well the meaning of this word.

Taylor is bright, joyful, and full of the Spirit, but she would be quick to tell you that those words did not describe her two years ago. She has moved to a different place now, spiritually and physically. She is a pioneer.

“I’ve been a pioneer in my life,” she said, “because I’m a recent convert. And my journey has just been amazing. I just feel like it’s a whole new life. And once we take that first step in our journey, miracles happen.”

Not only does Taylor understand the invitation to come—she knows the source of the invitation. She observed, “In our world, we’re so disconnected with what got us here, right? We are so caught up in our jobs and technology, and a message that’s really been hitting me lately is putting Christ first. If we just connect to really what the pioneers did—[they were] centered in Christ.”

*Follow* is another invitation. On the pioneer trek, Ethan G. gained a greater understanding of this word. “Sometimes I haven’t felt the best on trek, or I’ve felt kind of discouraged,” he admitted. “But I realize that the pioneers also felt that way.”

Ethan used to wonder why the early pioneers were willing to do what they did. He said, “I feel like I might have just given up. But as I’ve thought about that, I kind of realized that it’s because they loved the Savior, and they have a hope they can become better through Him. I want to try that too.”

Before Ethan went on the trek, he read about pioneers from the past, felt a connection with them, and was inspired by their faith to follow Jesus Christ. And what is Ethan doing now? He is preparing to receive a call to serve as a full-time missionary. True to President Monson’s counsel, he is getting ready to show others the way to follow.

Where should we come? Who should we follow? The Savior tells us: “Come, follow *me*” (Luke 18:22;

emphasis added). When Harmony left home for trek, she saw the Lord’s hand in her experience. She knew she was following Him.

Harmony’s path to her stake trek was different from others’ paths. At age 15 she learned that she had a rare form of skin cancer. She wasn’t able to participate in her stake trek. “I was devastated,” she recalled.

Four years later, when her stake announced another trek, Harmony was free of cancer. But at age 19, she thought she wouldn’t be able to go. Then she received a calling to participate as a leader. She said, “It’s a testimony to me that the Lord knows who we are, and He knows the desires of our hearts, and if they’re righteous and good, He’ll bless us.”

Harmony offered advice to help us when we face trials: “To anyone who’s struggling, I’d say just to lean on the Lord. He’s always there for you. He loves us, and He won’t let us fall. We just need to reach out our hand to Him, and He will help us on our pioneer journey.”



### PIONEERS— OUR SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS

“I have no ancestors among the 19th-century pioneers. However, since the first days of my Church membership, I have felt a close kinship to those early pioneers who crossed the plains. They are my spiritual ancestry, as they are for each and every member of the Church.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “The Global Church Blessed by the Voice of the Prophets,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2002, 10.

### YOU CAN BE A PIONEER

If you never go on a pioneer trek, you can still be a pioneer. You don’t have to wear a bonnet or pull a handcart. You just need to follow Jesus Christ, as the early pioneers did. In doing so, you will be, as President Monson said, “one who goes before to prepare or open up the way for others to follow.”

If you do have an opportunity to go on a pioneer trek, enjoy it! And when it’s over and you leave your handcart behind, don’t leave your pioneer testimony inside it. Bring that testimony with you.

You are a real-life, modern-day pioneer. With the ultimate Pioneer—the Savior—as your guide, you are sure to succeed! ■

#### NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “True to the Faith of Our Forefathers,” *Ensign or Liahona*, July 2016, 4; quoting *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (1971), “pioneer.”
2. Thomas S. Monson, “True to the Faith of Our Forefathers,” 4–5.

To meet Taylor, Ethan, Harmony, and other modern-day pioneers, watch this video at [lds.org/go/pioneer717](https://www.lds.org/go/pioneer717).

You can read pioneer stories at [lds.org/go/handcart717](https://www.lds.org/go/handcart717).