



They Marked the Path to Follow

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Many years ago I marveled at the cover of one of our Church publications which featured a magnificent reproduction of a Carl Bloch painting. The scene which the artist captured in his mind and then—with a touch of the Master's hand—transferred to canvas depicted Elisabeth, wife of Zacharias, welcoming Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both were to bear sons—miracle births.

The son born of Elisabeth became known as John the Baptist. As with Jesus, son of Mary, so with John—precious little is recorded of their years of youth. A single sentence tells us all that we know of John's life from his birth to his public ministry: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel."¹

John's message was brief. He preached faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, and the bestowal of the Holy Ghost by an authority greater than that possessed by himself. "I am not the Christ," he told his faithful disciples, "but . . . I am sent before him."² "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh . . . : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."³

Then occurred the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. Later Jesus testified, "Among

them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."⁴

All of us need points of reference—even models to follow. John the Baptist provides for us a flawless example of unfeigned humility, as he deferred always to the One who was to come—the Savior of mankind.

Models of Faith

Learning of others who trusted God and followed His teachings whispers to our souls, "Be still, and know that I am God."⁵ As they resolutely kept His commandments and trusted in Him, they were blessed. When we follow their examples, we too will be similarly blessed in our day. Each one becomes a model to follow.

All of us love the beautiful account from the Holy Bible of Abraham and Isaac. How exceedingly difficult it must have been for Abraham, in obedience to God's command, to take his beloved Isaac into the land of Moriah, there to present him as a burnt offering. Can you imagine the heaviness of his heart as he gathered the wood for the fire and journeyed to the appointed place? Surely pain must have racked his body and tortured his mind as he "bound Isaac . . . and laid him on the altar upon the wood.



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“And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” How glorious was the pronouncement and with what wondered welcome did it come: “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.”⁶

Abraham qualifies as a model of unquestioning obedience.

If any of us feels our challenges are beyond our capacity to meet them, let us read of Job. By so doing, there comes the feeling, “If Job could endure and overcome, so will I.”

Job was a “perfect and upright” man who “feared God, and eschewed evil.”⁷ Pious in his conduct, prosperous in his fortune, Job was

heaven, and my record is on high.”⁹ “I know that my redeemer liveth.”¹⁰

Job became a model of unlimited patience. To this day we refer to those who are long-suffering as having the patience of Job. He provides an example for us to follow.

To Obey and to Live

“A just man and perfect in his generations,” one who “walked with God,”¹¹ was the prophet Noah. Ordained to the priesthood at an early age, “he became a preacher of righteousness and declared the gospel of Jesus Christ, . . . teaching faith, repentance, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Ghost.”¹² He warned that failure to heed his message would bring floods upon those who heard his voice, and yet they

hearkened not to his words.

Noah heeded God’s command to build an ark that he and his family might be spared destruction. He followed God’s instructions to gather into the ark two or more of every living creature that they also might be saved from the floodwaters.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught in general conference more than half a century ago: “As yet there was no evidence of rain and flood. . . . [Noah’s] warnings were considered irrational. . . . How foolish to build an ark on dry ground with the sun shining and life

moving forward as usual! But time ran out. . . . The floods came. The disobedient . . . were drowned. The miracle of the ark followed the faith manifested in its building.”¹³

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to face a test which could have destroyed anyone. Shorn of his possessions, scorned by his friends, afflicted by his suffering, shattered by the loss of his family, he was urged to “curse God, and die.”⁸ He resisted this temptation and declared from the depths of his noble soul, “Behold, my witness is in

God oftentimes appears as foolishness to men; but the greatest lesson we can learn in mortality is that when God speaks and we obey, we will always be right.

A model of ideal womanhood is Ruth. Sensing the grief-stricken heart of her mother-in-law Naomi—who suffered the loss of each of her two fine sons—feeling perhaps the pangs of despair and loneliness that plagued the very soul of Naomi, Ruth uttered what has become that classic statement of loyalty: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”¹⁴ Ruth’s actions demonstrated the sincerity of her words.

Through Ruth’s undeviating loyalty to Naomi, she was to marry Boaz, by which she—the foreigner and Moabite convert—became a great-grandmother of David and, therefore, an ancestor of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Models of Obedience

I now turn to a mighty Book of Mormon prophet—even Nephi, son of Lehi and Sariah. He was faithful and obedient to God, courageous and bold. When given the difficult assignment to obtain the plates of brass from Laban, he did not murmur but declared, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.”¹⁵ Perhaps this act of courage prompted a verse of counsel for us found in the hymn “The Iron Rod”:



*To Nephi, seer of olden time,
A vision came from God. . . .
Hold to the rod, the iron rod;
'Tis strong, and bright, and true.
The iron rod is the word of God;
'Twill safely guide us through.¹⁶*

Nephi personified unflagging determination.

No description of models for us to follow would be complete without including Joseph Smith, the first prophet of this dispensation. When but 14 years of age, this courageous young man entered a grove of trees, which later would be called sacred, and received an answer to his sincere prayer.

There followed for Joseph unrelenting persecution as he related to others the account of the glorious vision he received in that grove. Although he was ridiculed and scorned, he stood firm. Said he, “I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it.”¹⁷

Step by step, facing opposition at nearly every turn and yet always guided by the hand of the Lord, Joseph organized The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He proved courageous in all that he did.

Toward the end of his life, as he was led

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away with his brother Hyrum to Carthage Jail, he bravely faced what he undoubtedly knew lay ahead for him, and he sealed his testimony with his blood.

As we face life's tests, may we ever emulate that undaunted courage epitomized by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

A Model of Optimism

There stands before us today another prophet of God—even our beloved President Gordon B. Hinckley. He has presided over the largest expansion of the Church—both numerically and geographically—in our history. He has traversed frontiers not heretofore crossed by a Church President and has visited with government leaders and with members the world over. His love for the people transcends the barriers of language and culture.

With prophetic vision, he has instituted the Perpetual Education Fund, which breaks the cycle of poverty for our members in many areas of the world and provides skills and training which qualify young men and young women for gainful employment. This inspired plan has kindled the light of hope in the eyes of those who felt doomed to mediocrity but who now have an opportunity for a brighter future.

President Hinckley has labored unceasingly to bring sacred blessings to members of the Church worldwide by providing temples that are within the reach of all. He has the capacity to lift to a higher plane those from all walks of life, regardless of the faith to which they ascribe. He is a model of unfailing optimism, and we revere him as prophet, seer, and revelator.

The unique qualities possessed by these men and women whom I have mentioned can be of invaluable assistance to us as we face the problems and the trials which lie ahead. May I illustrate by mentioning the experience of the Pollard family of Oakland, California.

One Family's Faith

A few years ago, as Elder Taavili Joseph Samuel Pollard was traveling to the mission office on the last day of his mission in Zimbabwe, the mission car he was driving somehow spun out of control and hit a tree. A passerby was able to

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Have family members try to draw something unfamiliar (for example, a map of a faraway country or a unique flower). Then provide a picture of the object, and have them draw it again. How do models help us? Relate President Monson's statements on using prophets as models for life. Share a personal experience illustrating how a prophet's example helped you.

2. Ask, "Whom do people in the world follow today? What qualities do these men and women possess?" Compare the righteous examples mentioned in the article with the world's examples. Challenge the family to choose and emulate a spiritual trait exemplified by these righteous men and women.

3. If the family has young children, have them mimic your actions. Clap your hands, nod your head, and so on. Discuss the meaning of following someone's example. Ask family members to think of righteous examples, and use the article to complement their responses. Conclude with President Monson's testimony of Jesus Christ being the greatest example to follow.

rescue Elder Pollard's companion, but Elder Pollard, who was unconscious, was trapped in the car, which burst into flames. Elder Pollard perished. His mother had passed away eight years earlier; hence, his father was rearing the family alone. A brother was serving in the West Indies Mission.

When the news of Elder Pollard's death reached his father, this humble man—who had already lost his wife—called the son serving in the West Indies to let him know of his brother's death. Over that long-distance telephone line, Brother Pollard and his son, no doubt grief stricken and heartsick, sang together "I Am a Child of God."¹⁸ Before concluding the call, the father offered a prayer to Heavenly Father, thanking Him for His blessings and seeking His divine comfort.

Brother Pollard later commented that he knew his family would be all right, for they have strong testimonies of the gospel and of the plan of salvation.

My brothers and sisters, in this marvelous dispensation of the fulness of times, as we journey through mortality and face the trials and challenges of the future, may we

remember the examples of these models to follow. May we have the unfeigned humility of John the Baptist, the unquestioning obedience of Abraham, the unlimited patience of Job, the unwavering faith of Noah, the undeviating loyalty of Ruth, the unflagging determination of Nephi, the undaunted courage of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the unfailing optimism of President Hinckley. Such will be as a fortress of strength to us throughout our lives.

The Exemplar

May we ever be guided by the supreme Exemplar, even the son of Mary, the Savior Jesus Christ—whose very life provided a perfect model for us to follow.

Born in a stable, cradled in a manger, He came forth from heaven to live on earth as a mortal man and to establish the kingdom of God. During His earthly ministry, He taught men the higher law. His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world. He blessed the sick; He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead to life.

What was the reaction to His message of mercy, His words of wisdom, His lessons of life? There were a precious few who appreciated Him. They bathed His feet. They learned His word. They followed His example.

Then there were those who denied Him. When asked by Pilate, “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?”¹⁹ they cried, “Crucify him.”²⁰ They mocked Him. They gave Him vinegar to drink. They reviled Him. They smote Him with a reed. They spit upon Him. They crucified Him.

Down through the generations of time, the message from Jesus has been the same. To Peter and Andrew by the shores of the beautiful Sea of Galilee, He said, “Follow me.”²¹ To Philip of old came the call, “Follow me.”²² To the Levite who sat at receipt of customs came the instruction, “Follow me.”²³ And to you and to me, if we but listen, will come that same beckoning invitation, “Follow me.” May we all do so and reap the eternal rewards reserved for those who follow the path that He marked by His exemplary life. ■

NOTES

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Luke 1:80. 2. John 3:28. 3. Luke 3:16. 4. Matthew 11:11. 5. Psalm 46:10. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Ruth 1:16. 15. 1 Nephi 3:7. 16. Joseph L. Townsend (1849–1942), <i>Hymns</i>, no. 274. |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Genesis 22:9–10, 12. 7. Job 1:1. 8. Job 2:9. 9. Job 16:19. 10. Job 19:25. 11. Genesis 6:9. 12. Bible Dictionary, “Noah,” 738–39. 13. In Conference Report, Oct. 1952, 48. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Joseph Smith—History 1:25. 18. Naomi W. Randall (1908–2001), <i>Hymns</i>, no. 301. 19. Matthew 27:22. 20. Mark 15:13. 21. Matthew 4:19. 22. John 1:43. 23. Luke 5:27. |
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