



By Elder
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Pioneers

AN ANCHOR FOR TODAY

Remember the pioneers, their stories, and the sustaining, saving, delivering power of God that came as a result of their faith and hope.



Moved by the power of his faith in God, Isaac Bartlett Nash (photo above and painting at right) left his Welsh homeland, sailed the Atlantic Ocean, and crossed the plains to join the Saints in Salt Lake City.

In 1832, Weltha Bradford Hatch—an ancestor of my wife, Shelley—and her husband, Ira, lived in the tiny town of Farmersville, New York, USA, near Lake Seneca. When missionaries Oliver Cowdery and Parley P. Pratt called at the Hatch home, Weltha purchased a Book of Mormon and read it right away. Convinced of its truthfulness, she asked for baptism.

Her husband, however, cautioned her to wait due to mounting persecutions and an approaching baby. Shortly after the delivery, Weltha was baptized—but only after a hole was cut in the ice on the river in which the ordinance was performed!¹

Ira was intrigued by the gospel message. He wanted to know more and also felt impressed to make a contribution to the building of the Kirtland Temple. So he and Weltha traveled by buggy to Kirtland, Ohio, USA, to meet the Prophet Joseph Smith. Upon arriving, they were told the Prophet could be found with a group of men cutting trees in a nearby grove.

After they reached the grove, one of the men set his axe into a tree, strode over to them, and said, “Brother Hatch, I have been expecting you for three days; the money which you have brought will be used to help build the pulpit in the temple.”

This man was Joseph Smith. Needless to say, Ira was baptized, and he and Weltha returned to their home, gathered their belongings, and joined the Saints in Kirtland.²

One of my ancestors, Isaac Bartlett Nash, joined the Church in Wales and crossed the Atlantic and the plains before joining the Saints in Salt Lake City. After his arrival he heard one of the presiding elders of the Church denounce the use of tobacco in these words: “There are Elders in this assembly who now have tobacco in their mouths, though even a hog would not chew the vile weed.” Isaac, with a chew of tobacco in his mouth, quietly slipped it out, dropped it to the ground, and said to the tobacco, “Now stay there until I come for you.” He never did.³

What drove Weltha to seek baptism in a frozen-over river rather than wait until summer? What motivated Ira to travel from New York to Ohio and then to donate money for a temple to be built by a church of which he was not yet a member? What enabled Isaac to abandon his homeland, sail the Atlantic Ocean, cross the plains, and then add chewing tobacco to the list of things he had given up?

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) observed: “The power that moved our gospel forebears was the power of faith in God. It





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was the same power which made possible the exodus from Egypt, the passage through the Red Sea, the long journey through the wilderness, and the establishment of Israel in the Promised Land.”⁴

Faith is both a principle of action and of power.⁵ It “is not to have a perfect knowledge of things” (Alma 32:21). Rather, it is an “assurance” of the Spirit (see Hebrews 11:1, footnote *b*) that moves us to act (see James 2:17–26; 2 Nephi 25:23; Alma 34:15–17), to follow the Savior, and to keep all of His commandments, even through times of sacrifice and trial (see Ether 12:4–6).⁶ As surely as the sun rises in the morning, faith produces hope—the expectation of good things to come (see Moroni 7:40–42)—and brings us the power of the Lord to sustain us.⁷

If faith was the power that moved our pioneer forebears, it was the hope produced by their faith that anchored them. Moroni wrote: “By faith all things are fulfilled—
“Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might

with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God” (Ether 12:3–4).

The pioneers’ bedrock faith in Christ moved them to act with the hope, the expectation of better things to come—not only for themselves but also for their posterity. Because of this hope, they were sure and steadfast, led to glorify God through any privation. For those who were steadfastly faithful, the power of God was manifest in miraculous ways.

How can those pioneers become an anchor for us today? I have three suggestions.

Remember the Pioneers

Remember the pioneers, their stories, and the sustaining, saving, delivering power of God that came as a result of their faith and hope. Our pioneer fathers and mothers help us know who we are as a covenant people

and confirm that our God—with whom we have covenanted and who “changeth not” (Mormon 9:19)—will bless us in times of difficulty and trial, just as He did our pioneer fathers and mothers.

Alma taught that God “will fulfil all his promises which he shall make unto [us], for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers” (Alma 37:17). Knowing this, we will be inspired by the pioneers to likewise act in faith and be anchored by hope.

This is the anchor we seek in our morally, spiritually, and temporally tumultuous world: living, moving faith in Christ and the hope that anchors us in His ways.

The story of the Willie and Martin handcart companies has become symbolic of the faith and hope of the early pioneers. It is a miracle that only about 200 of approximately 1,000 company members died.⁸ The faith-filled and hope-filled effort of their rescuers, accompanied by divine assistance, saved the handcart companies.⁹

After leaving the Salt Lake Valley, the rescuers were hit by the same early, severe, and unrelenting winter storms that engulfed the handcart companies. In the face of nature’s ferocity, some of the rescuers faltered in their faith, lost hope, and turned back.

In contrast, Reddick Allred steadfastly manned a rescue station for three weeks in hazardous winter weather. When another rescuer tried to persuade Brother Allred to join him in turning back, Reddick refused:

“I declined his proposition, and . . . advised him to stay, for the lives of the company depended up[on] us,” he wrote in his journal. “He then . . . moved that as I was president of the station, they center their faith in me, that I

should get the word of the Lord to know what we must do. To this I objected as [the Lord] already said what he would [have us] do.”¹⁰

Such unwavering faith in times of trial creates steadfast men and women and gives sure, steady direction when potentially disorienting storms rage. One of the fruits of such faith is that those who possess it will be in a position to nurture, rescue, and bless others. Imagine the warmth Reddick Allred felt as he saw the handcart company come into his station. Imagine the joy the company felt when they saw him!

Remember Their Unity

Remember that the pioneers, in general, were unified. Historians have observed that the western migration of the Latter-day Saints was different from other migrations of the American West.

“They were literally villages on the march, villages of a sobriety, solidarity, and discipline unheard of anywhere else on the western trails. . . .

“Few California or Oregon emigrants gave a thought to people coming after them. . . . Not so the Mormons. The first thought of the pioneer company was to note good campgrounds, wood, water, grass, to measure distances and set up mileposts. They and succeeding companies bent their backs to build bridges and dig down the steep approaches of fords. They made rafts and ferry boats and left them for the use of later companies.”¹¹

The reason for this difference was that members of the Church came to build up Zion. In practical terms, Zion is “every man esteem[ing] his brother as himself, and practic[ing] virtue and holiness before [the



THE WORLD NEEDS PIONEERS

“Can we somehow muster the courage and steadfastness of purpose that characterized the pioneers of a former generation? Can you and I, in actual fact, be pioneers? I know we can be. Oh, how the world needs pioneers today!”

President Thomas S. Monson, “The World Needs Pioneers Today,” *Ensign*, July 2013, 5.



“The money which you have brought will be used to help build the pulpit in the temple,” the Prophet Joseph Smith told Ira Hatch upon their first meeting. Impressed by the Prophet, Ira was baptized and moved with his wife from New York to Kirtland, Ohio.

Lord]” (D&C 38:24). Zion—a society with people of one heart and one mind, dwelling in righteousness, with no poor among them (see Moses 7:18)—was and is to be the result of “every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God” (D&C 82:19).

This sense of community and mutually shared responsibility produced a unified effort to follow God’s prophet. That is a major reason the pioneers succeeded as they did, and it is an important part of the legacy they pass to us. They whisper that we too will prosper through the Lord’s power only to the degree we act as one with a sense of community and mutual responsibility in following the Lord’s prophet.

Pass On the Pioneer Spirit

We are responsible to instill in our children and grandchildren the same spirit that drove the footsteps of the pioneers. A simple lesson of how this is done can be seen in the Muñoz family of Otavalo, Ecuador. In March 2013,

I met with Brother Juan José Muñoz Otavalo, his wife, Laura, and one of their sons, Juan Amado, to learn about their time in the Church. I learned that Brother Muñoz was one of the earliest converts in Otavalo.

When he was a boy, Brother Muñoz was given a copy of the Book of Mormon in Spanish. He could not read it, but he felt a profound power and spirit when he held it. He hid it in his home, for he knew that his brothers would destroy it.

From time to time he would take the book from its hiding place, just to hold it and feel its power. Enduring significant adversity and opposition, he joined the Church and became one of the very first missionaries called from the village of Otavalo. Later he married a returned sister missionary, and together they raised a faithful, gospel-centered family. He served faithfully as a leader in the Church and helped translate the Book of Mormon and the temple ordinances into his native language of Quichua.



Pioneers like Juan José Muñoz Otavalo and his wife, Laura, of Otavalo, Ecuador, teach us that we pass along a pioneer legacy by opening, showing, and living the gospel way for others to follow.

Juan Amado, a returned missionary, wept as we listened to Brother Muñoz recount his story of faith. When his father concluded, this good son said: “I have always appreciated the early pioneers who crossed the plains with their handcarts in North America. Their faith and devotion and dedication have inspired me and touched me deeply throughout my life. But until today, I did not realize that there are also pioneers here in Otavalo, and they are my parents! This fills me with joy.”

Brother and Sister Muñoz teach us that we pass along a pioneer legacy of faith by *being* a pioneer—by opening, showing, and living the gospel way for others to follow. When we consistently exercise faith in the Lord and anchor our souls with hope in Him, we become “sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God” (Ether 12:4). Then, like Reddick Allred, we will minister to those lost on the trail of life, and they—including future generations—will learn from us the power and peace of such a life.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has observed:

“Packing a few belongings into wagons or handcarts and walking 1,300 miles (2,090 km) isn’t the way most of us will be asked to demonstrate our faith and courage. We face different challenges today—different mountains to climb, different rivers to ford, different valleys to make ‘blossom as the rose’ (Isaiah 35:1). . . .

“Our struggle is found in living in a world steeped in sin and spiritual indifference, where self-indulgence, dishonesty, and greed seem to be present everywhere.

Today’s wilderness is one of confusion and conflicting messages.”

We must not be casual regarding God’s commandments, Elder Ballard added. “Avoiding the temptations and evils of the world requires the faith and fortitude of a real modern-day pioneer.”¹²

May each of us likewise resolve to be a pioneer and to go before and open the way for others who are buffeted by a world steeped in sin, confusion, and doubt. May we remember the pioneers and their stories, remember that they came to build Zion in a united effort, and then accept the responsibility to instill such faith

in all we meet—especially in the rising generation—and to do so through offering our own “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1) of a life moved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and anchored by the hope of good things to come through Him.

To be a pioneer means that we “be not weary in well-doing” (D&C 64:33). Weltha Hatch doubtless felt no special significance in being baptized in an icy river. Nor did Isaac Nash think it all that momentous to throw a chew of tobacco to the ground. And as for Reddick Allred, he simply did what the Lord said he should do.

From all of these small and simple things has come something great! So let us remember that there are no small things in great endeavors. As we live the gospel, follow the prophet, choose faith over doubt, and do the little things that grow faith and produce soul-anchoring hope, each of us will be a pioneer, preparing the way for others to follow. ■

From an address, “Pioneers—Anchors for the Future,” delivered in Salt Lake City at the Sons of Utah Pioneers Sunrise Service on July 24, 2013.

NOTES

1. See *Wandering Home: Stories and Memories of the Hatch Family* (1988), 3.
2. See *Wandering Home*, 3.
3. Isaac Bartlett Nash, *The Life-Story of Isaac B. Nash* [nd], 2.

4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Faith of the Pioneers,” *Ensign*, July 1984, 5.
5. See *Lectures on Faith* (1985); Hebrews 11:4–40; Jacob 4:6; Ether 12:7–22.
6. See also *Lectures on*

- Faith* (1985), 69.
7. See Bible Dictionary, “Faith”; see also Alma 57:19–27; 58:10–13; Mormon 9:8–21; Moroni 7:33–37; Doctrine and Covenants 27:17.
8. See Andrew D. Olsen,

- The Price We Paid: The Extraordinary Story of the Willie and Martin Handcart Pioneers* (2006), 470.
9. See Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 473–74.
10. In Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 160.

11. Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (1964), 11.
12. M. Russell Ballard, “Pioneer Faith and Fortitude Then and Now,” *Ensign*, July 2013, 28, 29.