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Following the Example of Jesus Christ

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‘What would Jesus do?’ and then be more
courageous to act upon the answer.”*

From the Life of Howard W. Hunter

President Thomas S. Monson, who served as second counselor to President Hunter, said that he “lived as he taught, after the pattern of the Savior whom he served.”¹

A close friend observed that “the traits embodied by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, were beautifully characterized in President Hunter’s remarkable and selfless life. All mankind were his friends.”²

Another associate who worked closely with President Hunter for more than three decades said, “[He] knew instinctively the course he would follow. That course would be to emulate the character of his Savior Jesus Christ.”³

Throughout his ministry, President Hunter lovingly encouraged Church members to follow the Savior’s example. In his first statement as President of the Church, he said:

“I would invite all members of the Church to live with ever more attention to the life and example of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially the love and hope and compassion He displayed.

“I pray that we might treat each other with more kindness, more courtesy, more humility and patience and forgiveness. We do have high expectations of one another, and all can improve. Our world cries out for more disciplined living of the commandments of God. But the way we are to encourage that, as the Lord told the Prophet Joseph in the wintry depths of Liberty Jail, is ‘by persuasion, by

long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; . . . without hypocrisy, and without guile' (D&C 121:41–42)."⁴

Teachings of Howard W. Hunter

Jesus Christ set the perfect example for us.

To be a light is to be an exemplar—one who sets an example and is a model for others to follow. . . . [We have covenanted] to follow Christ, the great exemplar. We have the responsibility to learn of him, the things he taught and the things he did during his earthly ministry. Having learned these lessons, we are under commandment to follow his example, and these are some of the examples he set for us:

1. Christ was obedient and valiant in the premortal life, thus gaining the privilege of coming into mortality and receiving a body of flesh and bones.

2. He was baptized in order that the door to the celestial kingdom would be opened.

3. He held the priesthood and received all the saving and exalting ordinances of the gospel.

4. Jesus served for about three years in a ministry of teaching the gospel, bearing witness of the truth, and teaching men what they must do to find joy and happiness in this life and eternal glory in the world to come.

5. He performed ordinances including the blessing of children, baptisms, administering to the sick, and ordinations to the priesthood.

6. He performed miracles. At his command the blind were given sight, the deaf heard, the lame leaped, and the dead returned to life.

7. In conformity with the mind and will of the Father, Jesus lived a perfect life without sin and acquired all of the attributes of Godliness.

8. He overcame the world; that is, he bridled every passion and has risen above the carnal and sensual plane so that he lived and walked as guided by the Spirit.

9. He brought to pass the Atonement, thereby ransoming men from the [spiritual and physical] death caused by the fall of Adam.

10. Now, resurrected and glorified, he has gained all power in heaven and in earth, has received the fullness of and is one with the Father.

If we are to follow the example of Christ and walk in his footsteps, we must seek to do the same things after the pattern he set.⁵

It is important to remember that Jesus was capable of sinning, that he could have succumbed, that the plan of life and salvation could have been foiled, but that he remained true. Had there been no possibility of his yielding to the enticement of Satan, there would have been no real test, no genuine victory in the result. If he had been stripped of the faculty to sin, he would have been stripped of his very agency. It was he who had come to safeguard and ensure the agency of man. He had to retain the capacity and ability to sin had he willed so to do.⁶

To the very end of his mortal life Jesus was demonstrating the grandeur of his spirit and the magnitude of his strength. He was not, even at this late hour, selfishly engrossed with his own sorrows or contemplating the impending pain. He was anxiously attending to the present and future needs of his beloved followers. He knew their own safety, individually and as a church, lay only in their unconditional love one for another. His entire energies seem to have been directed toward their needs, thus teaching by example what he was teaching by precept. He gave them words of comfort and commandment and caution.⁷

During both his mortal ministry among his flock in the Holy Land and in his postmortal ministry among his scattered sheep in the Western Hemisphere, the Lord demonstrated his love and concern for the individual.

In the press of a multitude, he sensed the singular touch of a woman who sought relief for an ailment from which she had suffered for some twelve years. (See Luke 8:43–48.) On another occasion, he saw beyond the narrowly focused prejudice of a condemning crowd and the sin of her who stood accused. Perhaps sensing her willingness to repent, Christ chose to see the worth of the individual

and sent her forth to sin no more. (See John 8:1–11.) On another occasion, “he took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.” (3 Ne. 17:21; italics added.)

As the trials of Gethsemane and Calvary fast approached, with much weighing heavily upon his mind, the Savior took time to notice the widow casting in her mite. (See Mark 12:41–44.) Similarly, his gaze took in the small-statured Zacchaeus who, unable to see because of the size of those congregating around the Savior, had climbed a sycamore tree for a view of the Son of God. (See Luke 19:1–5.) While hanging in agony upon the cross, he overlooked his own suffering and reached out in caring concern to the weeping woman who had given him life. (See John 19:25–27.)

What a marvelous example for us to follow! Even in the midst of great personal sorrow and pain, our Exemplar reached out to bless others. . . . His was not a life focused on the things he did not have. It was a life of reaching out in service to others.⁸



Let us follow the Son of God in all ways and walks of life.

One of the most important questions ever asked to mortal men was asked by the Son of God himself, the Savior of the world. To a group of disciples in the New World, a group anxious to be taught by him and even more anxious because he would soon be leaving them, he asked, “What manner of men ought ye to be?” Then in the same breath he gave this answer: “Even as I am” (3 Ne. 27:27).

The world is full of people who are willing to tell us, “Do as I say.” Surely we have no lack of advice givers on about every subject. But we have so few who are prepared to say, “Do as I do.” And, of course, only One in human history could rightfully and properly make that declaration. History provides many examples of good men and women, but even the best of mortals are flawed in some way or another. None could serve as a perfect model nor as an infallible pattern to follow, however well-intentioned they might be.

Only Christ can be our ideal, our “bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16). Only he can say without *any* reservation, “Follow me, learn

of me, [and] do the things you have seen me do. Drink of my water and eat of my bread. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the law and the light. Look unto me and ye shall live. Love one another as I have loved you” (see Matt. 11:29; 16:24; John 4:13–14; 6:35, 51; 7:37; 13:34; 14:6; 3 Ne. 15:9; 27:21).

My, what a clear and resonant call! What certainty and example in a day of uncertainty and absence of example. . . .

. . . How grateful we should be that God sent his Only Begotten Son to earth . . . to set a perfect example of right living, of kindness and mercy and compassion, in order that all of the rest of mankind might know how to live, know how to improve, and know how to become more godlike.

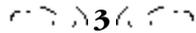
Let us follow the Son of God in all ways and in all walks of life. Let us make him our exemplar and our guide. We should at every opportunity ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?” and then be more courageous to act upon the answer. We must follow Christ, in the best sense of that word. We must be about his work as he was about his Father’s. We should try to be like him, even as the Primary children sing, “Try, try, try” (*Children’s Songbook*, p. 55). To the extent that our mortal powers permit, we should make every effort to become like Christ—the one perfect and sinless example this world has ever seen.⁹

Again and again during our Lord’s mortal ministry he issued a call that was at once an invitation and a challenge. To Peter and his brother Andrew, Christ said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matt. 4:19.) To the rich young man who asked what he must do to have eternal life, Jesus answered, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come and follow me.” (Matt. 19:21.) And to each of us Jesus says, “If any man serve me, let him follow me.” (John 12:26.)¹⁰

Let us study the Master’s every teaching and devote ourselves more fully to his example. He has given us “all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” He has “called us to glory and virtue” and has “given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these [we] might be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:3–4).¹¹

Those who follow Christ seek to follow his example. His suffering on behalf of our sins, shortcomings, sorrows, and sicknesses should motivate us to similarly reach out in charity and compassion to those around us. . . .

. . . Seek opportunities for service. Don't be overly concerned with status. Do you recall the counsel of the Savior regarding those who seek the "chief seats" or the "uppermost rooms"? "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." (Matt. 23:6, 11.) It is important to be appreciated. But our focus should be on righteousness, not recognition; on service, not status. The faithful visiting teacher, who quietly goes about her work month after month, is just as important to the work of the Lord as those who occupy what some see as more prominent positions in the Church. Visibility does not equate to value.¹²



**Our salvation depends on our commitment
to following the Savior.**

The Lord's invitation to follow him is individual and personal, and it is compelling. We cannot stand forever between two opinions. Each of us must at some time face the crucial question: "Whom say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15.) Our personal salvation depends on our answer to that question and our commitment to that answer. Peter's revealed answer was "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Many, many witnesses can give an identical answer by the same power, and I join with them in humble gratitude. But we must each answer the question for ourselves—if not now, then later; for at the last day, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is the Christ. Our challenge is to answer correctly and live accordingly before it is everlastingly too late. Since Jesus is indeed the Christ, what must we do?

Christ's supreme sacrifice can find full fruition in our lives only as we accept the invitation to follow him [see D&C 100:2]. This call is not irrelevant, unrealistic, or impossible. To follow an individual means to watch him or listen to him closely; to accept his authority, to take him as a leader, and to obey him; to support and advocate his ideas; and to take him as a model. Each of us can accept this



One way we can pattern our lives after the Savior's example is to follow His command to Peter: "Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep" (John 21:15–17).

challenge. Peter said, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Just as teachings that do not conform to Christ's doctrine are false, so a life that does not conform to Christ's example is misdirected, and may not achieve its high potential destiny. . . .

Righteousness must start in our own individual lives. It must be incorporated into family living. Parents have the responsibility to follow the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach them to their children [see D&C 68:25–28]. Religion must be part of our living. The gospel of Jesus Christ must become the motivating influence in all that we do. There must be more striving within in order to follow the great example set by the Savior if we are to become more like him. This becomes our great challenge.¹³

If we can pattern our life after the Master, and take his teachings and example as the supreme pattern for our own, we will not find it difficult to be consistent and loyal in every walk of life, for we will be committed to a single, sacred standard of conduct and belief.

Whether at home or in the marketplace, whether at school or long after school is behind us, whether we are acting totally alone or in concert with a host of other people, our course will be clear and our standards will be obvious. We will have determined, as the prophet Alma said, “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in, even until death.” (Mosiah 18:9.)¹⁴

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We should make room for Christ.

On that night in Bethlehem there was no room for him in the inn, and this was not the only time during the thirty-three years of his sojourn in mortality that there was no room for him. Herod sent soldiers to Bethlehem to slay the children. There was no room for Jesus in the domain of Herod, so his parents took him to Egypt. During his ministry, there were many who made no room for his teachings—no room for the gospel he taught. There was no room for his miracles, for his blessings, no room for the divine truths he spoke, no room for his love or faith. He said to them, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20).

Even in our day, although two thousand years have passed, there are many who say the same thing that was said on that night in Bethlehem. “There is no room, no room” (see Luke 2:7). We make room for the gifts, but sometimes no room is made for the giver. We have room for the commercialism of Christmas and even pleasure-seeking on the Sabbath day, but there are times when there is not room for worship. Our thoughts are filled with other things—there is no room.¹⁵

While it will be a beautiful sight to see the lights of Christmas . . . , it is more important to have human lives illuminated by an acceptance of him who is the light of the world [see Alma 38:9; D&C 10:70]. Truly we should hold him up as our guide and exemplar.

On the eve of his birth, angels sang, “And on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). If men would follow his example, it would be a world of peace and love toward all men.¹⁶

What is our responsibility today as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? It is to see that our individual lives reflect in word and deed the gospel as taught by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. All that we do and say should be patterned after the example of the one sinless person to walk the earth, even the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- Review the many ways the Savior has set the example for us, as outlined in section 1. How has the Savior’s example influenced you? What can we learn from His example during the last part of His mortal life?
- President Hunter counsels us to “ask ourselves, ‘What would Jesus do?’ and then be more courageous to act upon the answer” (section 2). Consider how you can be more courageous in following the Savior’s example. How can we teach this principle in our families?
- What can the teachings in section 3 help us understand about following Jesus Christ? How might your life be different if you did not have the influence of the Savior’s teachings and example? How can we make our religion more a part of our daily living?
- Ponder what President Hunter says about there being “no room” for the Savior (section 4). How can we make more room for the Savior in our lives? How have you been blessed as you have made more room for Him?

Related Scriptures

Matthew 16:24–27; John 10:27–28; 14:12–15; 1 Peter 2:21–25; 2 Nephi 31:12–13; 3 Nephi 12:48; 18:16; 27:20–22; D&C 19:23–24

Teaching Help

Provide hymnbooks for each person. Invite participants to find and share a hymn that relates to specific passages they read in the chapter.

Notes

1. Thomas S. Monson, "President Howard W. Hunter: A Man for All Seasons," *Ensign*, Apr. 1995, 33.
2. Jon M. Huntsman Sr., "A Remarkable and Selfless Life," *Ensign*, Apr. 1995, 24.
3. Francis M. Gibbons, *Howard W. Hunter: Man of Thought and Independence, Prophet of God* (2011), 152.
4. In Jay M. Todd, "President Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of the Church," *Ensign*, July 1994, 4–5.
5. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 40–41.
6. "The Temptations of Christ," *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 19.
7. "His Final Hours," *Ensign*, May 1974, 19.
8. "The Church Is for All People," *Ensign*, June 1989, 76–77.
9. "What Manner of Men Ought Ye to Be?" *Ensign*, May 1994, 64; see also "He Invites Us to Follow Him," *Ensign*, Sept. 1994, 2–5; "Follow the Son of God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 87.
10. "An Apostle's Witness of Christ," *Ensign*, Jan. 1984, 69.
11. "Exceeding Great and Precious Promises," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 8.
12. "To the Women of the Church," *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 96–97.
13. "He Invites Us to Follow Him," 2, 4; see also "An Apostle's Witness of Christ," 69–71; Conference Report, Oct. 1961, 109.
14. "Standing As Witnesses of God," *Ensign*, May 1990, 60.
15. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 41–42.
16. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 44–45.
17. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 45.