

# *Faith Still Precedes the Miracle*

MARK L. PACE

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, it is a pleasure and an honor to be with you here today. This is a remarkable institution with a worldwide influence for good—and you certainly make it even better because of your individual contributions. I pay tribute to President Kevin J Worthen and those who serve with him in guiding this university to fulfill its divine purpose. Thank you for your devoted and remarkable service.

Last spring my wife, Anne Marie, and I visited with President Russell M. Nelson in his office, where he extended to me the calling that I currently hold.

I asked him, “President Nelson, what would you like me to do as the Sunday School president?”

His reply included the humble request that I encourage an ever-increasing use of the *Come, Follow Me* resource by the members of the Church.

So I share with you that request from the prophet of God and thank you for your personal efforts this year in reading the New Testament. You may not realize this, but by accepting and acting on the prophet’s invitation, you are

strengthening the Church. How? As you study the scriptures throughout the week, you welcome the Holy Ghost into your life. This increased influence of the Holy Ghost builds your faith in the Savior Jesus Christ and deepens your conversion. The collective strength of the conversion of each member is, in a very real way, the strength of the Church. So we thank you for strengthening the Church by studying the New Testament this year.

I consider this a sacred opportunity to address you today, and I have prayed earnestly to know what the Lord would have me say. The promptings of the Spirit have led me to talk of the importance of acting in faith and to remind you that *faith still precedes the miracle*.

## **Inspiring Discourses on Faith**

In the Book of Mormon there is an absolute jewel in Ether 12. Most of the book of Ether is an account of the history of Jared and his people. We learn from Moroni’s abridged record how the Jaredites were brought to the American continent and became a great civilization, with periods of

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righteousness and prosperity as well as periods of wickedness, war, and apostasy.

In Ether 12, Moroni recorded the continued slide of the Jaredites. They rejected the prophets, and the blessings of heaven were withdrawn. One prophet in particular, Ether, prophesied “great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe, because they saw them not.”<sup>1</sup>

And with that phrase—“they did not believe, because they saw them not”—Moroni suddenly paused his historical narrative and launched into an inspiring discourse on faith. It was as if Moroni had just realized that faith could have been the antidote to the wickedness that led to the destruction of the Jaredite nation. If only they had been able to believe before seeing, maybe they would have repented and been spared. Of course Moroni knew that it was too late for the Jaredites, but he wasn’t writing to the Jaredites. He was writing to each of us, and it is not too late for us. Moroni wanted us to know that faith is the antidote to the wickedness of the world in which we live. So Moroni took the opportunity to teach us that

- “by faith all things are fulfilled.”<sup>2</sup>
- “faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.”<sup>3</sup>
- “if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them.”<sup>4</sup>
- “neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Moroni taught that faith precedes the miracle. He gave multiple examples in support of this truth. When Alma and Amulek were in prison and the walls tumbled to the earth, that miracle was preceded by their faith.<sup>6</sup> When Ammon and Nephi and Lehi converted thousands of Lamanites, those miracles were preceded by faith.<sup>7</sup> Even the appearance of Christ among the people could not have happened “until after they had faith in him.”<sup>8</sup>

To Moroni’s list we could add another example. In Mosiah 24 we read of the great faith of the people of Alma, who were, at that time, in bondage to

the Lamanites. The Lamanites persecuted them, forced them into hard labor, “and put task-masters over them.”<sup>9</sup>

“So great were their afflictions,” the scriptures say, “that they began to cry mightily to God.”<sup>10</sup> But the Lamanites decreed “that whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death.”<sup>11</sup> This, of course, did not stop Alma and his people, who

*did pour out their hearts to [God]; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.*

*And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort . . . ; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.*<sup>12</sup>

Note that the Lord did not say *when* they would be delivered. In the meantime, however, He promised that their burdens would be

*made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them . . . , and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.*

*And it came to pass that so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage.*<sup>13</sup>

Note again that the Lord did not say *how* He would deliver them, just that it would happen “on the morrow.” But that was enough for Alma and his people. They spent all night gathering “their flocks together,”<sup>14</sup> preparing for their promised deliverance.

*And in the morning the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites, yea, and all their task-masters were in a profound sleep.*

*And Alma and his people departed into the wilderness.*<sup>15</sup>

It was a miracle, and it came after the people of Alma had submitted cheerfully and with patience, preparing all night long without knowing how the miracle would happen, only that God had promised that it would. You see, they didn’t need to see

the miracle before they would believe it. That is faith, and *faith still precedes the miracle.*

### Patterns of Faith

My dear friends, examples of faith are not confined solely to the scriptures. Great faith was also demonstrated by Saints early in this dispensation. And it is clearly evident among our fellow Saints with whom we live day to day. Your lives are full of such faith and devotion. I wish I could talk to each of you and hear about the patterns of faith that have brought you to this point in your life. Even though that isn't possible, you can rest assured that your Father in Heaven knows of your faith and is blessing you accordingly.

I would like to suggest five patterns of faith that you can make a part of your day-to-day lives to demonstrate your faith in Jesus Christ and qualify you for the miracles that God has prepared for you:

1. Following the Lord's living prophet
2. Attending our Sunday meetings
3. Participating in home-centered gospel learning
4. Paying tithes and offerings
5. Attending the temple

#### *Pattern Number 1: Following the Lord's Living Prophet*

An inspiring example of following the prophet comes from the life of Charles Lowell Walker. Brother Walker was born in England in 1832. He was baptized as a teenager and emigrated to the United States. He came to Salt Lake City in 1855 and was married in 1861. On Sunday, October 19, 1862, at the end of Sabbath meetings, Charles heard his name read among a list of 250 others who had been called to help settle the "Cotton Country" in southwestern Utah.

Brother Walker wrote in his journal that evening:

*Obedience [is] a great principle in heaven and on earth. Well, here I have worked for the last 7 years through heat and cold, hunger and adverse circumstances, and at last have got me a home, a lot with fruit trees just*

*beginning to bear [that] look pretty. Well, I must leave it and go and do the will of my Father in Heaven, who overrules all for the good of them that love and fear him, and I pray God to give me strength to accomplish that which is required of me in an acceptable manner before him.*<sup>16</sup>

On November 13, only twenty-five days after having received his call, Charles Walker and his wife left Salt Lake City and began their journey to what we now know as St. George. In his journal he wrote:

*This was the hardest trial I ever had, and had it not been for the gospel and those that were placed over me, I should never [have] moved a foot to go on such a trip, but then I came here not to do my will but the will of those that are over me, and I know it will all be right if I do right.*<sup>17</sup>

Charles Walker lived a life of devotion to the Lord and His work. His actions matched his words—including these words (now included as hymn number 96 in our hymnbook) that he wrote to describe the blessings available to those who are faithful:

*Dearest children, God is near you,  
Watching o'er you day and night,  
And delights to own and bless you,  
If you strive to do what's right.  
He will bless you, He will bless you,  
If you put your trust in him.*<sup>18</sup>

Charles Walker put his trust in God, and he was blessed. He remained faithful to his call from the prophet all his days. He lived in St. George from 1862 until his passing in 1904.

I am confident that within this audience are many descendants of Charles Walker. The faithfulness of Charles Walker preceded the miracle of a righteous posterity. Your faith in following the living prophet throughout your lives will have the same result.

*The faith to follow the living prophet still precedes the miracle.*

***Pattern Number 2: Attending Our Sunday Meetings***

To illustrate this pattern of faith, I would like to share the story of the Merchan family from the Barcelona Spain Stake.

Melvin and Teresa Merchan, with their two children, Bryan and Carol, moved from Ecuador to Spain in 2001. They settled in the village of Ripoll.

From 2001 to 2004 they were not able to attend their Sunday meetings because they had to work on Sundays. It was not ideal, but they had no alternative. However, they continued to exercise faith. They asked their bishop to send home teachers to visit them, and they gave their tithing to the home teachers, who delivered it to the bishop. They received and treasured their temple recommends.

Starting in 2004, the situation improved for Brother and Sister Merchan. They were able to obtain better employment that gave them Sundays off. The nearest chapel, however, was in the city of Granollers, more than seventy kilometers away, and the Merchans did not have a car. Nevertheless, they attended their church meetings each Sunday.

From 2004 to 2010 their Sunday schedule was something like this:

6:15 a.m.: Leave the apartment.

6:30 a.m.: Take a train from Ripoll to Granollers, then walk from the train station and, generally, arrive early at the chapel.

10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.: Attend the three hours of meetings.

After the meetings, they would eat a lunch they had brought with them, or sometimes they were invited to eat with other families in the ward. Then they would walk back to the train station for a return trip to Ripoll. They generally arrived at their apartment around 5:15 p.m.

It took approximately eleven hours each Sunday for the Merchan family to attend church. This schedule was repeated week after week after week.

Earlier this summer I asked Brother and Sister Merchan, “Why did you do this for almost six years?”

Their reply was simple: “We desired that our children would grow up in the Church and remain active in the Church. That was our principal goal. The rest was of lesser importance to us.”

Contemplate the price Brother and Sister Merchan were willing to pay to establish faith and conversion in their lives and in the lives of their children. They exercised their faith and left the miracle in the hands of the Lord.

So what miracles were made possible through their faith?

- A branch of the Church was established in the nearby community of Vic.
- Brother and Sister Merchan have remained firm and steadfast in their testimonies of the Lord Jesus Christ and His restored gospel. They hold current temple recommends.
- Bryan, their son, served a full-time mission. He attends the ward in Granollers and has a calling in the Church and a current temple recommend.
- Carol, their daughter, was married in the Madrid temple. She also lives in Granollers and attends the ward there. She also has a current temple recommend.

Now it is not likely that you and I will be required to make an eleven-hour sacrifice to attend our Sunday meetings. But we might ask ourselves what price we are willing to pay for the conversion of ourselves and our posterity. That blessing will come as we exercise the faith to partake of the sacrament weekly.

*The faith to attend our Sunday meetings still precedes the miracle.*

***Pattern Number 3: Participating in Home-Centered Gospel Learning***

At the beginning of the October 2018 general conference, President Russell M. Nelson said:

*The adversary is increasing his attacks on faith and upon us and our families at an exponential rate. To survive spiritually, we need counterstrategies and proactive plans.*<sup>19</sup>

Then, approximately twenty-nine hours later, on Sunday afternoon, he closed the conference with this promise:

*As you diligently work to remodel your home into a center of gospel learning, . . . the influence of the adversary in **your** life and in **your** home will decrease.*<sup>20</sup>

How can the attacks of the adversary be increasing exponentially while at the same time the influence of the adversary is actually decreasing? That is the promise and the blessing from the Lord's living prophet.

The *Come, Follow Me* resource is the Lord's counterstrategy and proactive plan. As President Nelson taught, "The new home-centered, Church-supported integrated curriculum has the potential to unleash the power of families."<sup>21</sup> However, it does and will require our best efforts. We need to follow "through conscientiously and carefully to transform [our] home into a sanctuary of faith."<sup>22</sup>

In the April 2019 general conference, Elder David A. Bednar said:

*Making our homes sanctuaries wherein we can "stand in holy places" is essential in these latter days. And as important as home-centered and Church-supported learning is for our spiritual strength and protection today, it will be even more vital in the future.*<sup>23</sup>

Studying the scriptures with the *Come, Follow Me* resource as our guide is like painting the doorposts of our home with the blood of the sacrificial lamb, as the children of Israel did while in bondage. Their act of faith protected their families from the plague that took every firstborn son in Egypt.<sup>24</sup> Our act of faith in studying the scriptures daily protects us and our families from the influence of the adversary.

*The faith to study the gospel in our home still precedes the miracle.*

#### **Pattern Number 4: Paying Tithes and Offerings**

In chapter 3 of the book of Malachi in the Old Testament, the Lord taught:

*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.*

*Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*

*Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

*And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.*<sup>25</sup>

We pay our tithing because we have faith, not because we have money. Like all acts of faith, paying tithing leads to miracles. Of this I can testify from my personal experience.

The day will come, if it hasn't come already, when your faith regarding tithing will be tested. Perhaps you will have some financial challenges, and you might wonder if you can pay your tithing and also meet your other financial commitments. The adversary will tempt you to put off the payment of tithing. That will be the moment when you show the Lord, and yourself, who you really are.

Almost twenty years ago I had the opportunity to serve as a bishop. We had several young married couples in our ward. I recall one summer in particular when two young couples moved in. They had both been recently married in the temple, they were both working and going to school, and they were both poor as church mice. They accepted callings to serve and strengthened our ward.

During tithing settlement that year, the first of these young couples came to see me. When I asked, "Are you full tithe payers?" the couple responded, "Well, this has been a difficult year. Between rent, food, gasoline for the car, and tuition for school—we are sorry, but it just wasn't possible to pay our tithing this year."

Oh, how my heart broke for them. Earlier in the year they had knelt at the altar in the temple.

They had entered into sacred covenants and had been promised all the blessings of eternity. Now, just eight months later, they were lacking the faith to live worthy of those promised blessings. What a tragedy! We made plans to meet again after the first of the year.

A week or so later, the second couple came in for tithing settlement. Again I asked the question “Are you full tithe payers?”

Oh, how my heart swelled with joy at their response: “Yes, Bishop, we are full tithe payers.”

I looked at them and smiled. There they were, seated together, hand in hand, worthy of all the blessings that had been promised to them in the house of the Lord eight months previously.

Then I thought, how did they do it? This couple also had to pay rent, buy food, buy gasoline, and pay tuition. They were still poor as church mice. When I examined their annual donation sheet, I saw that they had paid tithing nearly every week. The amounts were usually quite small, but they were consistent. I was impressed with how their humble donations added up to a magnificent miracle as the Lord provided for their family and they remained worthy of their temple blessings. Even now, many years later, I am in awe of their faith.

The blessings promised by Malachi in the Old Testament are still received today. We can show our faith by always being current in the payment of our tithes and offerings.

*The faith to pay our tithes and offerings still precedes the miracle.*

#### ***Pattern Number 5: Attending the Temple***

During the same general conference in which he warned of the exponential increase in the assaults of the adversary, President Russell M. Nelson shared an additional counterstrategy and proactive plan to protect us: spending more time in the temple:

*Our time in the temple is crucial to our salvation and exaltation and to that of our families.*

*. . . Each one of us needs the ongoing spiritual strengthening and tutoring that is possible **only** in the house of the Lord. . . .*

*. . . Our need to be in the temple on a regular basis has never been greater. I plead with you to take a prayerful look at how you spend your time. Invest time in your future and in that of your family. If you have reasonable access to a temple, I urge you to find a way to make an appointment regularly with the Lord—to be in His holy house—then keep that appointment with exactness and joy. I promise you that the Lord will bring the miracles He knows you need as you make sacrifices to serve and worship in His temples.<sup>26</sup>*

Many years ago, in a stake conference of the Salt Lake Valley View Stake, I heard a sister tell about her decision to attend the temple every week for the entire year. She testified of the marvelous experience it had been for her. As I listened, I realized that she had something I did not have: a spiritual witness of the temple. I desired such a witness and pondered how I could deepen my own testimony of the temple.

At that time Anne Marie and I had five children. We felt a desire to welcome more of our Father in Heaven’s children into our family, but that didn’t seem to be happening. So Anne Marie and I talked about what we could do or what we could sacrifice to be worthy of such a blessing.

We determined to make an appointment with the Lord to be in His temple every week for the next twelve months. We prayed and told the Lord of our commitment. We asked for the blessing of additional children in our family. If we were blessed with another baby, we would be very grateful. But if that blessing was not granted, we would accept the Lord’s will without murmuring. For our part, our commitment was to be in the house of the Lord every week for the next year.

That was a marvelous year for us. Often Anne Marie and I would go to the temple together; at other times we went separately. I frequently attended the 5:45 a.m. session in the Salt Lake Temple, which made it possible for me to get to work on time. After several months, Anne Marie was no longer able to attend regularly because she was pregnant and struggling with morning sickness. I think the Lord understood.

But I continued to go, week after week after week. I had made a commitment to the Lord, and

I intended to keep my promise. I had to closely watch the Salt Lake and Jordan River temple closure schedules and attend a different temple when necessary. With effort I was able to keep my commitment. The only challenge was the week I was at Camp Steiner, in the High Uintas, while serving as Scoutmaster. On that occasion I went to the temple twice the week before.

In September 1992 I completed my one-year commitment of weekly temple attendance. It was a great experience, and it changed my life. My feelings for the house of the Lord and my devotion to the work performed there deepened in a profound way.

Now I am not suggesting that the Lord expects you to attend the temple every week, nor am I saying that doing so will mean you will be blessed with more children. What I am saying is that miracles come only after we exercise faith. I am saying that a love for the temple and sensitivity to the Spirit there comes from being in the temple. These blessings do not come by reading about the temple or thinking about the temple. They come from being *in* the temple.

As you exercise your faith to, in President Nelson's words, "make an appointment regularly with the Lord—to be in His holy house—then keep that appointment with exactness and joy," you will discover similar miracles in your lives.

*The faith to attend the temple still precedes the miracle.*

### **A Great Strength to the Lord's Work**

My dear brothers and sisters, I commend you for the goodness of your lives and your devotion to the Savior and His gospel. How noble you are and how valuable is your contribution. You are and will continue to be a great strength to the Lord's work.

I encourage you to establish now these patterns of faith that will bring miracles and blessings to you and your posterity:

1. Following the Lord's living prophet
2. Attending our Sunday meetings

3. Participating in home-centered gospel learning
4. Paying tithes and offerings
5. Attending the temple

I pray the Lord's blessings upon you. May you establish patterns of faith now that will precede the miracles you need in your life, because *faith still precedes the miracle*.

Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. His infinite atoning sacrifice makes possible our repentance and our eventual return to the presence of Heavenly Father. Joseph Smith was the Prophet of this dispensation. The Book of Mormon is the evidence of the Restoration. It is true. I know it is true. President Russell M. Nelson is the Lord's prophet today. Of this I testify, with great love and admiration for each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **Notes**

1. Ether 12:5.
2. Ether 12:3.
3. Ether 12:6.
4. Ether 12:12.
5. Ether 12:18.
6. See Ether 12:13.
7. See Ether 12:14–15.
8. Ether 12:7.
9. Mosiah 24:9.
10. Mosiah 24:10.
11. Mosiah 24:11.
12. Mosiah 24:12–13.
13. Mosiah 24:15–16.
14. Mosiah 24:18.
15. Mosiah 24:19–20.
16. Charles Lowell Walker (19 October 1862), in *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, ed. Andrew Karl Larson and Katharine Miles Larson (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1980), 1:239; text modernized.
17. Charles Walker (13 November 1862), in *Diary of Charles Walker*, 1:240; text modernized.
18. "Dearest Children, God Is Near You," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 96; see also Charles Walker (22 August 1877), in *Diary of Charles Walker*, 1:466.

19. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign*, November 2018.

20. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, November 2018; emphasis in original.

21. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary.”

22. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary.”

23. David A. Bednar, “Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing,” *Ensign*, May 2019; quoting D&C 101:22.

24. See Exodus 12:7, 12–13.

25. Malachi 3:8–11.

26. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary”; emphasis in original.