

# Pilgrimages

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In 2002 my wife and I directed a Study Abroad program to Madrid. As part of the program's activities we organized a trip to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. This city became famous in the Middle Ages when it was assumed to be the resting place for the remains of the Apostle James. As a result it flourished as one of Christianity's most-frequented pilgrimage sites. For pilgrims the Santiago trail symbolized every man's search for forgiveness, identity, and purpose. Because of these strong spiritual corollaries, we felt that it would be good for the students to experience a four-kilometer portion of the trail. We started at the Monte do Gozo, or Mount of Joy—the point at which the pilgrims catch their first glimpse of the city—and walked to the cathedral.

While we walked we conversed with pilgrims—many of them having already traveled hundreds of kilometers on foot. We learned that each one had a unique story and purpose for pursuing their journey. All of them held in common a sense of belonging to a community of believers, a connection to the earth, a place in history, and a spiritual legacy embodied in the trail. Though there were a multitude of reasons for undertaking the journey, the joy the pilgrims experienced at its completion

was singular. This fact became clear when we attended the pilgrims' mass in the cathedral and witnessed the humility and gratitude they expressed as they closed this chapter of their life. It became apparent from the look in their eyes and the expression on their face that they would walk away from their experience with renewed hope and a deeper faith. What we noted in their countenance and what they felt upon completing their journey is humankind's universal need to find fulfillment and joy in having reached a desired goal, for God has declared: "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."<sup>1</sup>

Pilgrimages allow you to pause, to meditate, to listen, and to learn. As a result, you may discover peace, hope, and new possibilities. Key to a successful journey is your attitude. You must be teachable, humble, obedient, selfless, diligent, and persistent. These qualities produce a singleness of heart, mind, and will and prepare you to receive divine instruction.

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The Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith:

*And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.*<sup>2</sup>

In Proverbs the poet declared, “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”<sup>3</sup> King David implored, “Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?”<sup>4</sup> The path of righteousness is always present to those of us who look for it. Unfortunately, many travelers ignore it and are tempted by the easy way. Your success along life’s path depends on the choices that you make, whether to walk the “strait” and “narrow” road that leads to eternal joy or to wander the “wide” and “broad” way that brings sorrow. Job was cautioned that the disobedient will “rebel against the light” because “they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof.”<sup>5</sup>

In a recent stake conference Elder Donald J. Butler referred to a sign he saw outside of Juneau, Alaska, that read: “Choose your rut, for you will be in it the next 20 miles.”

There are two ways that you can see the ruts in your life. There are those ruts that are unproductive, dull, and, most important, mundane. These roads lead nowhere and become traps that inhibit movement and destroy your agency. Some of these ruts you will carve out for yourself throughout a lifetime of passiveness or disobedience; others will be traps laid by the wicked and divisive. On the other hand, there are the ruts that resemble those left by our pioneer forefathers. Those ruts represent the sure, unwavering path that leads to a newness of life and hope.

Along these roads you will meet other travelers. Some of these encounters will be instructive, edifying, and inspiring. Others will weaken your soul by undermining your values

and challenging your most sacred beliefs. Where you go and what you do depends on the path you choose and the associations you willingly embrace.

President Spencer W. Kimball warned:

*In these days directly ahead of you is the decisive decision. Are you going to yield to the easy urge to follow the crowd, or are you going to raise your head above the crowd and let them follow you? Are you going to slip off into mediocrity, or are you going to rise to the heights which your Heavenly Father set for you? You could stand above the crowd and become a leader among your people so that some day they would call your name blessed, or you can follow the usual demands and urges and desires and lose yourself in the herd of millions of folks who do not rise to their potential. The decision is yours and yours only. No one else can fashion and order your life.*<sup>6</sup>

Cleopas and his traveling companion learned this important lesson on the road to Emmaus. While the two men walked and talked of the things that had transpired in Jerusalem after the death of the Savior, the Lord drew near and asked, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?”<sup>7</sup>

After Cleopas recapped the events of the day, the Savior began to teach them. He rehearsed to them the scriptures that foretold His mission and death. Both men listened intently, drawn to the stranger and His message. As the small group approached a nearby village, the Savior

*made as though he would have gone further.*

*But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.*

*And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.*

*And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.*

*And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?<sup>8</sup>*

On that road two men traveled and communed with one another. While they walked they met another traveler who opened their eyes that they might see more clearly and understand more deeply eternal truth. They learned on the road to Emmaus that the truth they sought was not to be found solely in the things that they had seen but in the feelings they experienced when touched by the spirit of testimony. During their brief encounter with the Savior, He opened their mind, engaged their spirit, and confirmed the reality of what they had witnessed concerning His life. Not only was the truth confirmed to their mind but to their soul.

Let's consider the Lord's counsel to Oliver Cowdery when he hoped to translate portions of the Book of Mormon. The Lord declared:

*You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.<sup>9</sup>*

Elder Bruce R. McConkie affirmed:

*Logic and reason lead truth seekers along the path to a testimony, and they are aids in strengthening the revealed assurances of which a testimony is composed. But the actual sure knowledge which constitutes "the testimony of Jesus" must come by "the spirit of prophecy." This is received when the Holy Spirit speaks to the spirit within men; it comes when the whisperings of the still small voice are heard by the inner man. Receipt of a testimony is accompanied by a feeling of calm, unwavering certainty.<sup>10</sup>*

When you open your heart and mind to the whisperings of the Holy Ghost, your spirit vibrates and responds to its promptings. Then, and only then, can true spiritual progress occur as you take that next step along life's path.

Elder Boyd K. Packer declared:

*Oh, if I could teach you this one principle! A testimony is to be found in the bearing of it. Somewhere in your quest for spiritual knowledge, there is that "leap of faith," as the philosophers call it. It is the moment when you have gone to the edge of the light and step into the darkness to discover that the way is lighted ahead for just a footstep or two.<sup>11</sup>*

Unfortunately those who reject these whisperings "wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light."<sup>12</sup>

As each of you walk the path of life, take care to harmonize the *feeling* of the Spirit with the *doing*. In the Epistle of James we read:

*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

*For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:*

*For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*

*But whoso . . . continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.<sup>13</sup>*

Joseph Smith learned this principle when, feeling the need to satisfy a spiritual longing, he studied the scriptures, found his answer, and then acted on God's promise. He recorded:

*After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God.<sup>14</sup>*

The knowledge he sought came because he studied it out in his mind, exercised faith, and exerted the physical effort required to get his answer. Joseph's answer was a glorious one, and, as a result, he embarked on a path that would lead to revelations, restorations, and the fulfillment of prophecy. Not all of us will experience such great and glorious manifestations of divine intervention, but the Lord has promised the humble seeker of truth:

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

*For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*<sup>15</sup>

In 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi we read the story of Lehi and his family and their journeys in the wilderness. Through Lehi, Sariah, Nephi, Jacob, Laman, and Lemuel, the Lord reveals patterns of behavior that lead either along the path of righteousness or to a path wandering aimlessly toward self-destruction. Key to understanding how they reacted to Lehi, to his visions, and to his teachings is the level of commitment, desire, and obedience individually exercised toward God. Therefore, Lehi's vision of the tree of life provides a significant model—and revelation—regarding the consequences of choice and action on your individual pilgrimage toward salvation.

The core of Lehi's dream centers on the redemption of his children and their eternal progress. This fundamental concept becomes the nucleus of all the subsequent journeys in the Book of Mormon as prophets strove to set their descendants' feet on the true path that leads to salvation.

In Lehi's account a man in white robes motioned to the prophet to accompany him.<sup>16</sup> He led Lehi through "a dark and dreary waste,"<sup>17</sup> yet the prophet trusted the messenger and pressed on in his journey. Lehi declared:

*And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.*<sup>18</sup>

Soon he entered "a large and spacious field"<sup>19</sup> and saw "a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy."<sup>20</sup> He ate the fruit that was "sweet, above all that [he] ever before tasted" and "white, to exceed all the whiteness that [he] had ever seen"<sup>21</sup> to the point that it "filled [his] soul with exceedingly great joy."<sup>22</sup>

Later in the Book of Mormon, Ammon taught that this joy is the "everlasting light" that is the "everlasting salvation" enjoyed by all those who "are encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love."<sup>23</sup>

In subsequent verses in chapter 8 of 1 Nephi, Lehi described the path that he desired his family to travel. Ultimately, he hoped that they would also eat of the fruit. Lehi also warned his family of the pitfalls that would await them along way.

Integral to Lehi's dream is his description of the travelers moving toward the tree of life. Among them are those who press forward "that they might obtain the path" and who "commence in the path" but are lost in the "mist of darkness" and "lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost."<sup>24</sup> These are those who hear the word and do not understand it, and "then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart."<sup>25</sup> Others catch "hold of the end of the rod of iron" and "press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they . . . come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree."<sup>26</sup> However, they soon "cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed,"<sup>27</sup> being overcome by the contempt of the world, and they fall away to wander along "forbidden paths" and become lost.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, these are those who at first received the word with joy, but when difficulties arose they

vacillated in their commitment to the gospel and were offended because of the word.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Lehi described the faithful who “caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and . . . press[ed] their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down [to worship] and partook of the fruit of the tree.”<sup>30</sup> This person hears, understands, and applies the word and bears fruit.<sup>31</sup>

The dream introduced a fourth group of travelers made up of those who choose to ignore the rod of iron and, instead, feel their way toward the “great and spacious building.”<sup>32</sup> Some of them wander along “strange roads” while others drown “in the depths of the fountain” and are lost from view.<sup>33</sup> This group represents those who hear the word but because of the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches close their hearts.<sup>34</sup>

Later, in chapter 15, Nephi expanded on this vision and taught his brothers:

*Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.*<sup>35</sup>

As a second witness, Nephi was privileged to see his father’s vision. His account elucidates Lehi’s experience by providing an interpretation of the signs and symbols found in the dream that can lead the determined traveler to enjoy the fruit of Jesus Christ’s infinite Atonement. Because Nephi had sufficient faith to believe, to accept the words of his father, and to take that step forward in his progression, he received a personal witness of the Savior’s birth to Mary,<sup>36</sup> His baptism at the hands of John,<sup>37</sup> the calling of the Twelve Apostles,<sup>38</sup> Christ’s miracles,<sup>39</sup> and His Crucifixion.<sup>40</sup> Nephi’s vision carried him forward to witness the persecution of the Saints of God<sup>41</sup> and the destruction of his people because of sin.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, Nephi saw the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.<sup>43</sup>

Both iterations of the dream blend into a single testimony of the divine nature of humanity’s pilgrimage through mortality. As disciples, we are invited to turn our gaze away from worldliness, to hold tight to the revealed word, to receive God’s love, and to seek after Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and Redeemer.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, Nephi has become your exemplar of the humble pilgrim. His willingness to listen to his father and to seek a personal witness of the truth set him apart from his brothers and kept him on the strait and narrow path of righteousness. Because Nephi never doubted, he learned obedience through the recovery of the plates of Laban, patience through affliction and hardship, wisdom when he was commanded to build a ship, and recognition of the reality of priesthood power and authority when he learned to trust in God.

On the other hand, Laman and Lemuel dutifully “followed” their father into the wilderness yet allowed themselves to succumb to petty complaining, jealousy, and rebellion. Because of their unwillingness to learn for themselves the truthfulness of Lehi’s words, they undervalued the journey, and, as a result, the physical discomfort they experienced overshadowed the multitude of blessings that awaited them. It is interesting to note that Laman and Lemuel had digressed in their spiritual aptitude to the point that they were unable to recognize God’s power to inspire, to direct, and to sustain them. Instead, they fell prey to vanity and pride, which led them into a state of resentment and bitterness.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell warned:

*Failing to understand the “dealings” of the Lord with His children—meaning His relations with and treatment of His children—is very fundamental. Murmuring is but one of the symptoms, and not the only consequence either; in fact, brothers and sisters, this failure affects everything else!*

*To misread something so crucial constitutes a failure to know God, who then ends up being wrongly seen as unreachable, uninvolved, uncar- ing, and unable—a disabled and diminished Deity, really—about whose seeming limitations, ironically, some then quickly complain.<sup>45</sup>*

Nephi told his brothers:

*Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?—If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you.<sup>46</sup>*

As Nephi began to wrap up his record and close it with his witness of Christ, he returned to his experience with his father’s vision and declared:

*After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.*

*Wherefore, ye must press forward with a stead- fastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.<sup>47</sup>*

In 1855, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Jedediah M. Grant invited Church mem- bers to

*seek continually unto the Lord for wisdom . . . that when we shall have finished our pilgrimage upon the earth, we may go hence in peace, hav- ing wrought righteousness and established justice thereon, and, through having fought the good fight and kept the faith, be prepared to come forth with a glorious resurrection to inherit eternal lives and exaltation.<sup>48</sup>*

Last year my stake took the youth to Martin’s Cove. Each participant was to trek in the name of either a rescuer or a handcart pioneer. Part of our preparation was to learn as much as we could about their experience. Our goal was to “walk in their footsteps.” Through my research I discovered that two of my great-grandfather’s brothers had been involved in this pioneer tragedy. Moses Cluff, who had just returned from a mission to England, joined the Hodgett Wagon Company that accompanied the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies. His younger brother, Harvey Cluff, who was only 20 years old, was one of the “valley boys” who formed the first wave of rescuers to meet up with the stranded pioneers. As I learned about their experiences, one interesting detail stood out. Harvey’s history reads:

*[The] raging blizzard from the north compelled the relief party to seek shelter some miles down the river where the growth of willows was dense enough to break the force of the wind and afford shelter to animals and some protection to the camp. While encamped in this retired spot, three miles from the road, Harvey was called upon by the captain to take a sign board to the road, in case there were any who might pass along the road and thereby miss the camp. . . . In a few hours after the board was up, two men, Captain Willie and his companion, rode horseback into camp. . . . These two men, without bedding, could not have survived through the night, had they not been directed to the relief camp by the sign board.<sup>49</sup>*

Harvey’s obedience and willingness to make the appropriate sacrifice of self not only saved Captain Willie and his companion but facili- tated the rescue of all those who were stranded along the trail. Like those who were search- ing for relief and rescue from the storm, you must scan the horizon for signs along the path that will guide you to shelter and safety. You must press forward with faith, and, by and by,

the path will appear and the destination will become evident to you.

My pilgrimage into the Wyoming prairie—through wind, sand, and rain—taught me to appreciate more deeply the faith and endurance of those who embarked on the long and arduous journey that led them to Zion. Throughout the experience I realized more fully that the challenges found along life's journey are often tempered by the rewards you receive because of diligence, persistence, obedience, and all those other qualities that make for a dedicated pilgrim. There was an added blessing that came from the trek. I was allowed to experience briefly the sweetness of peace that comes from completing a journey and enduring to the end.

Paul reminded us:

*Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,*

*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.<sup>50</sup>*

The most significant pilgrimage that you will experience in your life will be the one that moves you to seek truth, to exercise faith, and to gain a firm testimony that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

I testify that you and I are where we should be, marking a path toward our eternal goal. We have been given the charge to improve our minds and deepen our testimony through study, faith, and prayer. Inasmuch as we have accepted this responsibility and have set our foot upon the path of learning, we must make it our primary obligation to prepare ourselves to be effective instruments in the hands of God.

I testify that this gospel is true, that it is the great source of all knowledge. The greatest knowledge of all is that God lives, that Jesus

is the Christ, that the gospel has been restored in these latter days through prophets who are divinely called, and that all this is accomplished and sustained by modern-day revelation. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Moses 1:39.
2. D&C 88:67.
3. Proverbs 4:18.
4. Psalm 56:13.
5. Job 24:13.
6. TSWK, 147.
7. Luke 24:17.
8. Luke 24:28–32.
9. D&C 9:8.
10. MD, s.v. “testimony,” 785.
11. Boyd K. Packer, “*That All May Be Edified*” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 340; emphasis in original.
12. Job 12:24–25.
13. James 1:22–25.
14. JS—H 1:15.
15. Luke 11:9–10.
16. See 1 Nephi 8:5–6.
17. 1 Nephi 8:7.
18. 1 Nephi 8:8.
19. 1 Nephi 8:9.
20. 1 Nephi 8:10.
21. 1 Nephi 8:11.
22. 1 Nephi 8:12.
23. Alma 26:15.
24. 1 Nephi 8:21–23.
25. Matthew 13:19.
26. 1 Nephi 8:24.
27. 1 Nephi 8:25.
28. 1 Nephi 8:28.
29. See Matthew 13:20–21.
30. 1 Nephi 8:30.
31. See Matthew 13:23.
32. 1 Nephi 8:31.
33. 1 Nephi 8:32.
34. See Matthew 13:22.
35. 1 Nephi 15:24.

36. See 1 Nephi 11:18.
37. See 1 Nephi 11:27.
38. See 1 Nephi 11:29.
39. See 1 Nephi 11:31.
40. See 1 Nephi 11:32–33.
41. See 1 Nephi 11:34–36.
42. See 1 Nephi 12:19–23.
43. See 1 Nephi 13.
44. See John 3:16.
45. Neal A. Maxwell, “Lessons from Laman and Lemuel,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 6.
46. 1 Nephi 15:11.
47. 2 Nephi 31:19–20.
48. “Thirteenth General Epistle” (29 October 1855), in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966–75), 2:187.
49. *The Cluff Family Journal* (Provo: Cluff Family Reunion, 1899–1904), 169–70.
50. Hebrews 12:1–2.