

# The Greatest Leaders Are the Greatest Followers

By Stephen W. Owen  
Young Men General President

There will be times when the path ahead seems dark, but keep following the Savior. He knows the way; in fact, He *is* the way.

When I was 12 years old, my father took me hunting in the mountains. We woke up at 3:00 in the morning, saddled our horses, and set out up the forested mountainside in total darkness. As much as I loved hunting with my dad, at that moment I felt a little nervous. I had never been in these mountains before, and I couldn't see the trail—or much of anything else, for that matter! The only thing I could see was the small flashlight my dad was carrying as it cast a faint light on the pine trees ahead of us. What if my horse slipped and fell—could he even see where he was going? But this thought comforted me: “Dad knows where he’s going. If I follow him, everything will be OK.”

And everything was OK. Eventually the sun came out, and we had a wonderful day together. As we started toward home, my dad pointed to a majestic, sloping peak that stood out among the others. “That’s Windy Ridge,” he said. “That’s where the good hunting is.” Instantly, I knew that I wanted to come back and climb to Windy Ridge someday.

In the years that followed, I would often hear my father talk about Windy Ridge, but we never went back—until one day, 20 years later, I called my dad and said, “Let’s go to Windy.” Once again we saddled our horses and started up the mountainside. I was now an experienced rider in my 30s, yet I was surprised to feel the same nervousness I had felt as a 12-year-old boy. But my dad knew the way, and I followed him.

Finally we made it to the top of Windy. The view was exhilarating, and the overwhelming feeling I had was that I wanted to come back—not for me this time but for my wife and my children. I wanted them to experience what I had experienced.

Over the years, I've had many opportunities to lead my sons and other young men to mountaintops, just as my father led me. These experiences have prompted me to ponder what it means to lead—and what it means to follow.

## Jesus Christ, the Greatest Leader and the Greatest Follower

If I were to ask you, “Who is the greatest leader who ever lived?”—what would you say? The answer, of course, is Jesus Christ. He sets the perfect example of every imaginable leadership quality.

But what if I were to ask you, “Who is the greatest *follower* who ever lived?”—wouldn't the answer again be Jesus Christ? He is the greatest leader *because* He is the greatest follower—He follows His Father perfectly, in all things.

The world teaches that leaders must be mighty; the Lord teaches that they must be meek. Worldly leaders gain power and influence through their talent, skill, and wealth. Christlike leaders gain power and influence “by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned.”<sup>1</sup>

In God's eyes, the greatest leaders have always been the greatest followers.

Allow me to share two experiences from my recent interactions with the young men of the Church that have taught me about leading and following.

## We Are All Leaders

Recently my wife and I attended a sacrament meeting away from our home ward. Just before the meeting started, a young man approached me and asked if I would help pass the sacrament. I said, “I'd be happy to.”

I took my seat with the other deacons and asked one who was sitting next to me, “What is my assignment?” He told me I was to start passing at the back of the chapel in the middle section and that he would be on the other side of the same section, and together we would work our way to the front.

I said, “I haven't done this for a long time.”

He replied, “That's OK. You'll be fine. I felt the same way when I started.”

Later the youngest deacon in the quorum, ordained only weeks earlier, gave a talk in sacrament meeting. After the meeting, the other deacons rallied around

him to tell him how proud they were of their fellow quorum member.

As I visited with them that day, I found out that each week, members of all the Aaronic Priesthood quorums in that ward reach out to other young men and invite them to be part of their quorums.

These young men were all great leaders. And they clearly had some wonderful behind-the-scenes Melchizedek Priesthood holders, parents, and others who mentored them in their duties. Caring adults like these see young men not just as they are but as they can become. When they talk to or about the young men, they do not dwell on their shortcomings. Instead, they emphasize the great leadership qualities they are demonstrating.

Young men, this is how the Lord sees you. I invite you to see yourself this way. There will be times in your life when you are called upon to lead. At other times, you will be expected to follow. But my message to you today is that regardless of your calling, you are always a leader, and you are always a follower. Leadership is an expression of discipleship—it is simply a matter of helping others come unto Christ, which is what true disciples do. If you are striving to be a follower of Christ, then you can help others follow Him and you can be a leader.

Your ability to lead does not come from an outgoing personality, motivational skills, or even a talent for public speaking. It comes from your commitment to follow Jesus Christ. It comes from your desire to be, in Abraham's words, "a greater follower of righteousness."<sup>2</sup> If you can do that—even if you aren't perfect at it, but you're trying—then you *are* a leader.

## Priesthood Service Is Leadership

On another occasion, I was in New Zealand visiting the home of a single mother with three teenage children. The oldest son was 18 and had received the Melchizedek Priesthood just the previous Sunday. I asked if he had been able to exercise this priesthood yet. He said, "I'm not sure what that means."

I told him he now had the authority to give a priesthood blessing of comfort or healing. I looked at his mother, who had not had a Melchizedek Priesthood holder by her side for many years. "I think it would be wonderful," I said, "if you would give your mom a blessing."

He replied, "I don't know how."

I explained that he could put his hands on his mother's head, state her name, state that he is giving her a blessing by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, say whatever the Spirit puts in his mind and heart, and close in the

name of Jesus Christ.

The next day, I received an email from him. It read in part: “Tonight I blessed my mum. ... I felt very, very nervous and inadequate, so I prayed continually to ensure I had the Spirit with me, because I could not give a blessing without it. As I started, I completely forgot myself and my weaknesses. ... I [did not expect] the immense spiritual and emotional power I felt. ... Afterwards the spirit of love hit me so hard I could not contain my emotions, so I hugged my mum and wept like a baby. ... Even now as I write this, [I feel] the Spirit [so much that] I never want to sin again. ... I love this gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

Isn't it inspiring to see how a seemingly ordinary young man can accomplish great things through priesthood service, even when he feels inadequate? I recently learned that this young elder has received a mission call and will enter the missionary training center next month. I believe he will lead many souls to Christ because he has learned how to follow Christ in his priesthood service—beginning in his own home, where his example is having a profound influence on his 14-year-old brother.

Brethren, whether we realize it or not, people are looking up to us—family members, friends, even strangers. It is not enough for us as priesthood holders just to come unto Christ; our duty now is to “invite *all* to come unto Christ.”<sup>4</sup> We cannot be satisfied receiving spiritual blessings for ourselves; we must lead the people we love to those same blessings—and as disciples of Jesus Christ, we must love everyone. The Savior's charge to Peter is also a charge to us: “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”<sup>5</sup>

## Follow the Man of Galilee

There will be times when the path ahead seems dark, but keep following the Savior. He knows the way; in fact, He *is* the way.<sup>6</sup> The more earnestly you come unto Christ, the more deeply you will desire to help others experience what you have experienced. Another word for this feeling is charity, “which [the Father] hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup> Then you will find that in the very act of following Christ, you are also leading others to Him, for in the words of President Thomas S. Monson, “As we follow that Man of Galilee—even the Lord Jesus Christ—our personal influence will be felt for good wherever we are, whatever our callings.”<sup>8</sup>

I bear witness that this is Christ's true Church. We are led by a prophet of God, President Monson—a great leader who is also a true follower of the Savior. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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