

# Walking in Covenant Relationship with Christ

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The One who was bruised and broken for us will allow mortality to do its work in us, but He doesn't ask us to face those challenges alone.

I was introduced to a trail in Israel by my good friend Ilan. "It's called the Jesus Trail," he said, "because it's the path from Nazareth to Capernaum that many believe Jesus walked." I decided right then and there I wanted to walk that trail, so I began planning a trip to Israel.

Six weeks before the trip, I broke my ankle. My husband worried about the injury; my greatest concern was how I would walk the Jesus Trail one month later. I am stubborn by nature, so I didn't cancel the plane tickets.

I remember meeting our Israeli guide that beautiful June morning. I hopped out of the van and then pulled out a set of crutches and a knee scooter. Mya, our guide, took one look at my cast and said, "Uh, I don't think you can walk this trail in that condition."

"Maybe not," I replied. "But there's nothing that prevents me from trying." She gave a slight nod, and we began. I love her for that, for believing I could walk the trail broken.

I navigated the steep path and the boulders for a time on my own. Then, moved by the sincerity of my commitment, Mya pulled out a thin rope, tied it to the handlebars of my scooter, and began to pull. She pulled me up the hills, through lemon orchards, and along the banks of the Sea of Galilee. At the journey's end, I expressed gratitude for my sweet guide, who had helped me accomplish something I could have never accomplished on my own.

When the Lord called Enoch to journey through the land and testify of Him, Enoch hesitated.<sup>1</sup> He was just a lad, slow of speech. How could he walk that path in his condition? He was blinded by what was broken in him. The Lord's answer to what hindered him was simple and immediate: "Walk with me."<sup>2</sup> Like Enoch, we must remember that the One who was bruised and broken for us<sup>3</sup> will allow mortality to do its work in us, but He doesn't ask us to face those challenges alone.<sup>4</sup> No matter the heaviness of our story or the current course of our path, He will invite us to walk with Him.<sup>5</sup>

Think of the young man in a spot of trouble who met the Lord in a wilderness place. Jacob had journeyed far from home. In the dark of night, he had a dream that not only contained a ladder but also held significant covenant promises, including what I like to call the five-finger promise.<sup>6</sup> On that night, the Lord stood beside Jacob, introduced Himself as the God of Jacob's father, and then promised:

- I am with you.

- I will keep you safe.
- I will bring you home again.
- I will not leave you.
- I will keep my promise to you.<sup>7</sup>

Jacob had a choice to make. He could choose to live his life simply acquainted with the God of his father, or he could choose to live life in committed covenant relationship with Him. Years later, Jacob testified of a life lived within the Lord's covenant promises: "God ... answered me in the day of my distress, and *was with me* in the way which I went."<sup>8</sup> Just as He did for Jacob, the Lord will answer each of us in our day of distress if we choose to tether our life with His. He has promised to walk *with us* in the way.

We call this walking the covenant path—a path that begins with the covenant of baptism and leads to deeper covenants we make in the temple. Perhaps you hear those words and think of checkboxes. Maybe all you see is a path of requirements. A closer look reveals something more compelling. A covenant is not only about a contract, although that is important. It's about a relationship. President Russell M. Nelson taught, "The covenant path is all about our relationship with God."<sup>9</sup>

Consider a marriage covenant. The wedding date is important, but equally important is the relationship forged through the life lived together afterward. The same is true with a covenant relationship with God. Conditions have been set, and there will be expectations along the way. And yet He invites each of us to come as we are able, with full purpose of heart, and to "press forward"<sup>10</sup> with Him at our side, trusting that His promised blessings will come. Scripture reminds us that often those blessings come in His own time and in His own way: 38 years,<sup>11</sup> 12 years,<sup>12</sup> immediately.<sup>13</sup> As your trial will demand, so His succor will be.<sup>14</sup>

His is a mission of condescension. Jesus Christ will meet us where we are as we are. This is the *why* of the garden, the cross, and the tomb. The Savior was sent to help us overcome.<sup>15</sup> But staying where we are won't bring the deliverance we seek. Just as He didn't leave Jacob there in the dirt, the Lord doesn't intend to leave any of us where we are.

His is also a mission of ascension. He will work within us<sup>16</sup> to lift us up to where He is and, in the process, enable us to become as He is. Jesus Christ came to lift us.<sup>17</sup> He wants to help us become. This is the *why* of the temple.

We must remember: it's not the course alone that will exalt us; it's the companion—our Savior. And *this* is the why of covenant relationship.

When I was in Israel, I visited the Western Wall. For the Jews, this is the most holy site in Israel. It is all that remains of their temple. Most wear their finest when they visit this sacred place; their choice of garment is a symbol of their devotion to their relationship with God. They visit the wall to read scripture, to worship, and to pour out their prayers. The plea for a temple in their midst consumes their every day, their every prayer, this longing for a house of covenant. I admire their devotion.

When I returned home from Israel, I listened more closely to the conversations around me regarding covenants. I noticed people asking, *Why should I walk a covenant path? Do I need to enter*

*a house for making covenants? Why do I wear the holy garment? Should I invest in a covenant relationship with the Lord?* The answer to these good and important questions is simple: it depends on what degree of relationship you want to experience with Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> Each of us will have to discover our own response to those deeply personal questions.

Here is mine: I walk this path as a “*beloved* daughter of heavenly parents,”<sup>19</sup> divinely *known*<sup>20</sup> and deeply *trusted*.<sup>21</sup> As a child of the covenant, I am eligible to receive *promised*<sup>22</sup> blessings. I have *chosen*<sup>23</sup> to walk with the Lord. I have been *called*<sup>24</sup> to stand as a witness of Christ. When the path feels overwhelming, I am *strengthened*<sup>25</sup> with enabling grace. Each time I cross the threshold of His house, I experience deeper covenant relationship with Him. I am *sanctified*<sup>26</sup> with His Spirit, *endowed*<sup>27</sup> with His power, and *set apart*<sup>28</sup> to build His kingdom. Through a process of daily repentance and weekly partaking of the sacrament, I am learning to become *steadfast*<sup>29</sup> and to go about doing *good*.<sup>30</sup> I walk this path with Jesus Christ, looking forward to the promised day when He will come again. Then I will be *sealed His*<sup>31</sup> and lifted up as a *holy*<sup>32</sup> daughter of God.

This is why I walk the covenant path.

This is why I cling to covenant promises.

This is why I enter His covenant house.

This is why I wear the holy garment as a constant reminder.

Because I want to live in committed covenant relationship with Him.

Perhaps you do too. Begin where you are.<sup>33</sup> Don’t let your condition hinder you. Remember, pace or placement on the path are not as important as progress.<sup>34</sup> Ask someone you trust who is on the covenant path to introduce you to the Savior they have come to know. Learn more of Him. Invest in the relationship by entering into covenant with Him. It doesn’t matter your age or your condition. You can walk with Him.

After we finished walking the Jesus Trail, Mya did not take back her rope. She left it tied to my scooter. For the next few days, my teenage nephews and their friend took turns pulling me through the streets of Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup> They made sure I did not miss out on the stories of Jesus. I was reminded of the strength of the rising generation. We can learn from you. You have a genuine desire to know the guide, Jesus Christ. You trust the strength of the rope that tethers us to Him. You are unusually gifted in gathering others to Him.<sup>36</sup>

Thankfully, we walk this path together, calling out encouragement along the way.<sup>37</sup> As we share our personal experience with Christ, we will strengthen personal devotion. Of this I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. The people of Enoch had gone astray, they had denied Christ, and they “sought their own counsels in the dark” (see Moses 6:27–28). In a time when he had lost faith in humanity, Enoch turned to the Lord for guidance. This call to Enoch is the same call the Lord extends to all of us: “Walk with me” (Moses 6:34; see also Matthew 11:28). But maybe, like Enoch, you are unsure if you can walk this path in your condition. Maybe you feel hindered in some way. Perhaps the very reason we need to walk the covenant path is because of our condition, because we are hindered in some way and we need His help.
2. See Moses 6:23–34.
3. See “Jesus of Nazareth, Savior and King,” *Hymns*, no. 181.
4. See Ether 12:27.
5. See Matthew 11:28–30.
6. My girls want to whisper this five-finger promise to their children (my grandchildren) every morning—a reminder of a Father in Heaven who is divinely aware of each of His children.
7. See Genesis 28:10–22. The Abrahamic covenant was also a significant emphasis of that night. These elements of the Abrahamic covenant play a central role in our lives and in the gospel of Jesus Christ: (1) the promise of an eternal inheritance (verse 13); (2) eternal posterity (verse 14); and (3) the blessing and responsibility to bless all nations of the earth (verse 14).
8. Genesis 35:3; emphasis added. Jacob’s parents directed him to leave home to distance himself from Esau, who had threatened to kill him, and to have the opportunity to meet someone whom he could marry in the covenant (see Genesis 27:41–45; 28:1–2, 5).
9. Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2022, 11.
10. 2 Nephi 31:20.
11. See John 5:5, the story of the pool of Bethesda.
12. See Mark 5:25, the story of the woman who touched Christ’s robe.
13. See Matthew 14:31, the story of Peter walking on water.
14. See “How Firm a Foundation,” *Hymns*, no. 85.
15. See 1 Nephi 11:16–33.
16. See Philippians 1:6; 2:13; Words of Mormon 1:7.
17. See John 12:32.

18. A path is often defined by key characteristics such as guideposts or mile markers. It is a way to make sure you are on the right trail or making progress in the right direction. A relationship also can be defined by key characteristics. Some of these include expectation (see Jeremiah 29:11; Doctrine and Covenants 132:7); submissiveness (see Mosiah 3:19; Alma 7:23; 13:28); humility; obedience; patience; yielding; trust (see Proverbs 3:5); and love (see Romans 8:31–39).
19. “Young Women Theme,” Gospel Library, emphasis added; see also Bonnie H. Cordon, “Beloved Daughters,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 67.
20. See John 4:1–29, the story of the woman at the well.
21. See Alma 38:1–3.
22. See Numbers 6:23–27.
23. See Joshua 24:22.
24. See Doctrine and Covenants 25:3, the story of Emma Smith.
25. See 1 Corinthians 15:9–10.
26. See 2 Chronicles 20:1–17, especially verse 14.
27. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:1–46.
28. See 1 Samuel 16:11–13.
29. See Esther 4:16, the story of Esther.
30. See Acts 10:38.
31. See Isaiah 43:1–5.
32. See Deuteronomy 28:1–9.
33. A good friend reminded me that a call to action is important in any relationship.
34. Conversation with Kristen Olsen, Sept. 2023.
35. To Mack Oswald, Camden Oswald, Ashton Matheny, and Jack Butler, thanks for pulling me along.
36. “You will remember that I have invited the youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to enlist in the Lord’s youth battalion to participate in the greatest cause on earth today—the gathering of Israel. I issued this invitation to our youth because they are unusually gifted in reaching out to others and sharing what they believe in a convincing fashion” (Russell M. Nelson, “Witnesses, Atonic Priesthood Quorums, and Young Women,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 39).

37. “The kingdom of God ... is like a besieged city surrounded on all sides by death. Each man has his place on the wall to defend and no one can stand where another stands, but ‘nothing prevents us from calling encouragement to one another’” (Martin Luther, in Lewis William Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements* [1987], 335).