

seek to bless the lives of others, the Lord takes mercy upon us even more; He strengthens us and helps us in our lives.

Please remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is your Savior and understands you personally. He knows what it is to have to fulfill a calling and leave things behind to help the children of God. He has the power to bless you in everything if you believe in Him and do not doubt.<sup>6</sup>

My dear brothers and sisters, on that day when a priesthood leader felt impressed for us to visit a mother and a son that we did not have on our agenda, I proclaim that God knew they needed us. And at the end, I was the one who was ministered to. On that day, I received one of the greatest lessons of the Savior's love for us.

I testify that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that He lives, that He lived and died for you and me, and that He was resurrected for you and me so that we can aspire to celestial reunions full of joy with those who are already on the other side of the veil. I know that He understands you and me perfectly. He understands each of our difficult moments, and He has the power to help us in those moments when we feel most vulnerable. I know that the Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father appeared to Joseph Smith to restore the gospel in these days. I know that our dear prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, is a prophet of the Lord, and I testify of these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Hope of Israel" (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), Gospel Library.
2. See John 10:2–4.
3. "Avoid comparing yourself to other missionaries and measuring the outward results of your efforts with theirs" (*Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ* [2023], 13).
4. Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 95.
5. Moroni 6:8.
6. See Alma 56:47; 57:26.



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## Following Christ

*As followers of Christ, we teach and testify of Jesus Christ, our Perfect Role Model. So let us follow Him by forgoing contention.*

This year millions have been inspired by the gospel study plan known by the Savior's invitation "Come, follow me."<sup>1</sup> Following Christ is not a casual or occasional practice. It is a continuous commitment and way of life that should guide us at all times and in all places. His teachings and His example define the path for every disciple of Jesus Christ. And all are invited to this path, for He invites all to come unto Him, "black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . and all are alike unto God."<sup>2</sup>

I.

The first step in following Christ is to obey what He defined as "the great commandment in the law":

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."<sup>3</sup>



Mexico



*Ivory Coast*

The commandments of God provide the guiding and steadying force in our lives. Our experiences in mortality are like the little boy and his father flying a kite on a windy day. As the kite rose higher, the winds caused it to tug on the connecting string in the little boy's hand. Inexperienced with the force of mortal winds, he proposed to cut the string so the kite could rise higher. His wise father counseled no, explaining that the string is what holds the kite in place against mortal winds. If we lose our hold on the string, the kite will not rise higher. It will be carried about by these winds and inevitably crash to the earth.

That essential string represents the covenants that connect us to God, our Heavenly Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. As we honor those covenants by keeping Their commandments and following Their plan of redemption, Their promised blessings enable us to soar to celestial heights.

The Book of Mormon frequently declares that Christ is “the light of the

world.”<sup>4</sup> During His appearance to the Nephites, the risen Lord explained that teaching by telling them: “I have set an example for you.”<sup>5</sup> “I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do.”<sup>6</sup> He is our role model. We learn what He has said and done by studying the scriptures and following prophetic teachings, as President Russell M. Nelson has urged us to do.<sup>7</sup> In the ordinance of the sacrament, we covenant each Sabbath day that we will “always remember him and keep his commandments.”<sup>8</sup>

## II.

In the Book of Mormon, the Lord gave us the fundamentals in what He called “the doctrine of Christ.” These are faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end, and becoming as a little child,<sup>9</sup> which means to trust the Lord and submit to all He requires of us.<sup>10</sup>

The Lord's commandments are of two types: permanent, like the doctrine

of Christ, and temporary. Temporary commandments are those necessary for the needs of the Lord's Church or the faithful in temporary circumstances, but to be set aside when the need has passed. An example of temporary commandments are the Lord's directions to the early leadership of the Church to move the Saints from New York to Ohio, to Missouri, and to Illinois and finally to lead the pioneer exodus to the Intermountain West. Though only temporary, when still in force these commandments were given to be obeyed.

Some permanent commandments have taken considerable time to be generally observed. For example, President Lorenzo Snow's famous sermon on the law of tithing emphasized a commandment given earlier but not yet generally observed by Church members.<sup>11</sup> It needed reemphasis in the circumstances then faced by the Church and its members. Recent examples of reemphases have also been needed because of current



circumstances faced by Latter-day Saints or the Church. These include the proclamation on the family, issued by President Gordon B. Hinckley a generation ago,<sup>12</sup> and President Russell M. Nelson's recent call for the Church to be known by its revealed name, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>13</sup>

### III.

Another of our Savior's teachings seems to require reemphasis in the circumstances of our day.

This is a time of many harsh and hurtful words in public communications and sometimes even in our families. Sharp differences on issues of public policy often result in actions of hostility—even hatred—in public and personal relationships. This atmosphere of enmity sometimes even paralyzes capacities for lawmaking on matters of importance where most citizens see an urgent need for some action in the public interest.

What should followers of Christ teach and do in this time of toxic communications? What were His teachings and examples?

It is significant that among the first principles Jesus taught when He appeared to the Nephites was to avoid contention. While He taught this in the context of disputes over religious doctrine, the reasons He gave clearly apply to communications and relationships in politics, public policy, and family relationships. Jesus taught:

"He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

"Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away."<sup>14</sup>

In His remaining ministry among the Nephites, Jesus taught other commandments closely related to His prohibition of contention. We know from the Bible that He had previously taught each of these in His great Sermon on the Mount, usually in precisely the

same language He later used with the Nephites. I will quote the familiar Bible language:

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."<sup>15</sup>

This is one of Christ's best-known commandments—most revolutionary and most difficult to follow. Yet it is a most fundamental part of His invitation for all to follow Him. As President David O. McKay taught, "There is no better way to manifest love for God than to show an unselfish love for one's fellowmen."<sup>16</sup>

Here is another fundamental teaching by Him who is our role model: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."<sup>17</sup>

Peacemakers! How it would change personal relationships if followers of Christ would forgo harsh and hurtful words in all their communications.

In general conference last year, President Russell M. Nelson gave us these challenges:

"One of the easiest ways to identify a *true follower* of Jesus Christ is how compassionately that person treats other people. . . .

". . . True disciples of Jesus Christ are peacemakers.

". . . One of the best ways we can honor the Savior is to become a peacemaker."

Concluding his teachings:

"Contention is a choice. Peacemaking is a choice. You have your agency to choose contention or reconciliation. I

urge you to *choose* to be a peacemaker, now and always."<sup>18</sup>

Potential adversaries should begin their discussions by identifying common ground on which all agree.

To follow our Perfect Role Model and His prophet, we need to practice what is popularly known as the Golden Rule: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."<sup>19</sup> We need to love and do good to all. We need to avoid contention and be peacemakers in all our communications. This does not mean to compromise our principles and priorities but to cease harshly attacking others for theirs. That is what our Perfect Role Model did in His ministry. That is the example He set for us as He invited us to follow Him.

In this conference four years ago, President Nelson gave us a prophetic challenge for our own day:

"Are *you* willing to let God prevail in your life? Are *you* willing to let God be the most important influence in your life? Will you allow His words, His commandments, and His covenants to influence what you do each day? Will you allow His voice to take priority over any other?"<sup>20</sup>

As followers of Christ, we teach and testify of Jesus Christ, our Perfect Role Model. So let us follow Him by forgoing contention. As we pursue our preferred policies in public actions, let us qualify for His blessings by using the language and methods of peacemakers. In our families and other personal



relationships, let us avoid what is harsh and hateful. Let us seek to be holy, like our Savior, in whose holy name I testify and invoke His blessing to help us be Saints. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. Luke 18:22.
2. 2 Nephi 26:33.
3. Matthew 22:36–40.
4. Alma 38:9; see also Mosiah 16:9; 3 Nephi 9:18.
5. 3 Nephi 18:16.
6. 3 Nephi 18:24; see also 3 Nephi 27:21.
7. See Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 39–40.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
9. See 3 Nephi 11:32–33, 38; see also 2 Nephi 31:13–21; 3 Nephi 27:13–22.
10. See Mosiah 3:19.
11. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 3, *Boldly, Nobly, and Independently, 1893–1955* (2022), 73–77.
12. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library.
13. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Correct Name of the Church,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 87–89.
14. 3 Nephi 11:29–30.
15. Matthew 5:44; see also 3 Nephi 12:44.
16. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (2003), 181.
17. Matthew 5:9; see also 3 Nephi 12:9.
18. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 98, 99, 100.
19. Matthew 7:12.
20. Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 94.

