

Becoming True Disciples of Jesus Christ

Neill F. Marriott

When I was fifteen years old, my parents and I attended an Easter revival service at our Protestant church in Louisiana. We had a guest minister who gave a sermon, which I don't remember, and then introduced the last hymn, entitled "Just As I Am," which I vividly remember. The first verse says:

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"*
(*"Just As I Am," Charlotte Elliott, 1835*)

Each of the five verses ends with the words "O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"

As I sang, I wanted to come unto Christ. Our minister stopped the hymn momentarily and invited any and all to come down to the

altar as we sang the last verse, to witness that we were coming to Christ. So, as the last verse was being sung, several members of our congregation began to slowly walk down to the altar railing. I walked to the altar too.

When the hymn ended, we milled around for a moment. The minister heartily shook our hands, and then my parents and I went home. *Was that it?* I thought. *Did I come to Christ?* It felt like I had only gotten as far as the altar.

That walk did have a form of godliness—we walkers were witnessing as best we knew—but it denied the power needed to enter a binding covenant with God. The preacher did his best too, but he simply didn't have the authority to offer us an ordinance and covenant with the Lord. And we didn't have the ability to enter such a covenant without the sanction of godly power—priesthood power.

I was to learn some years later that to truly come unto Christ, we must come by the strait and narrow way, by the Lord's authorized ordinances and covenants. True it is that many believing people the world over are living by the light of Christ and doing good. They are following Jesus Christ with all their hearts, and they will be blessed. However, our conversion to the Lord must go farther than the altar and even farther than good deeds and loving service if it is to open an eternal path back to the Father's presence. He is a God of order, and His kingdom is orderly in its commandments, justice, mercy, forgiveness, and organization. It is not randomly created by men, even well-meaning believers or highly educated teachers. God's true church is established by our Eternal Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, according to eternal law.

Soon after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the apostle Peter taught, "Let all . . . know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The listeners were stricken in their hearts and asked Peter and the others, "Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy

Ghost” (Acts 2:36–38). And they subsequently obeyed Peter’s teachings with gladness. As I ponder my own desire that each of us come unto Christ, I ask, “Sisters and brothers, what shall we do?” True disciples follow the Savior’s commandments and teach his truths.

I have watched examples, heard testimonies, and felt of sisters’ faith from Brazil to Botswana. Women of the Church carry a circle of influence with them wherever they go. I’ve even described it as a hula hoop that circles around us and is constantly touching those nearby. Are we radiating goodness and charity to others? We can. The Lord’s Church needs Spirit-directed women who use their unique gifts to nurture, to speak up, and to defend gospel truth. Our inspiration and intuition are necessary parts of building the kingdom of God, which really means doing our part to bring salvation to God’s children.

Women in the workplace and mothers in the home, if watching for opportunities to teach truth, will find ample time to speak of faith in Jesus Christ and his restored gospel. Surely a mother’s prayer to teach her children the gospel will be answered swiftly. Surely colleagues in a work environment will be uplifted and even blessed by a converted, faithful sister’s words and actions.

As the apostle Peter was charged, “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32), so we must become converted ourselves and then reach out to strengthen others. In that regard, the background of the word *convert* is exquisitely right. It comes from the Latin *con*, which means “with,” and *vert*, which means “to turn.” We come unto Jesus Christ with the action of turning to him—and that means turning away from the world and worldliness.

As I ponder the embarking on this journey of conversion, I picture a bayou behind my parents’ home in Louisiana, where my father built a house for wood ducks and positioned it on a ten-foot pole. From the back porch we could watch the freshly hatched ducklings launch themselves from the door of their little home. The mother duck circled below in the water, watching and calling as duckling after duckling jumped off the edge and plummeted straight into the water.

It wasn't always a pretty sight: baby ducks falling out of the duck house and landing unceremoniously in the small stream. It wasn't entirely safe, either, because once in the water, the ducklings had to evade predators. Nevertheless, their focus and desire was to get to the mother, and that required leaving the nest. They embarked from the house and immediately began moving through the bayou, purposefully following the mother duck.

When we decide to follow Jesus Christ, do we continue with our allegiance past the planning stage or the baptismal day? The ducklings, driven by instinct, commit to their way of life by leaping into the bayou. Our commitment, on the other hand, as spirit sons and daughters of God is made thoughtfully as we take upon us sacred ordinances and covenants that draw us close to our Heavenly Father and put upon us responsibilities that we promise to fulfill.

The wood ducklings instinctively understand that in order to survive, they must not get casual in their daily living and must look steadily to their leader. Occasionally we would see some of the young ducks swim away from the parent. Hawks circled, above, and snatched up the ducklings before they could return to the protection of the family group.

Are we, like the ducklings, following experienced leaders, or are we putting ourselves in danger by being too casual in our attention to prophets of God? A true disciple will follow the prophet, knowing he will lead us to do what the Lord wants of us at the present time.

Another danger that threatens our faithful discipleship is to look beyond the mark, to look past gospel doctrine and think that we have a special calling to achieve more than is required by our covenants with the Lord. A few ducklings would paddle ahead of the family group, often to their demise. When this attitude is found in humans, pride—that is, putting our own plans ahead of God's will—is at its center. Are we looking for “something more” than the doctrines of Christ? There is no happiness beyond the mark. As Elder Quentin L. Cook has taught, “Jesus Christ is the mark!”¹ Are we intrigued by someone who takes a different stand than the

prophets' on such things as how to seek God or administer the laws of the kingdom? Such "wolves in sheep's clothing" do exist, and we must be firmly determined to continue on the strait way and give them no heed.

A third danger is to turn back to ungodly ways after we have once left them behind. We may put our hand "to the plow" and then be tempted to step off the path of righteousness and return to former habits (see Luke 9:62). Using the analogy of the ducklings, once they have leapt from the nest, they cannot go back because they will not actually be able to fly for eight to ten more weeks. Once they are on the ground or in the water, they are committed to stay there until they are mature. We, unlike the ducklings, are free to "go back," and the choice is ever before us. Will we commit wholeheartedly to Christ, seeking his will and adding more and more light of his truth to ourselves, or will we follow the path of least resistance, diminishing in gospel understanding and capacity to recognize and follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost? President Ezra Taft Benson elaborated on the sort of tests we will encounter and spoke of our present day: "There is a real sifting going on in the Church, and it is going to become more pronounced with the passing of time. It will sift the wheat from the tares, because we face some difficult days, the like of which we have never experienced in our lives."² In order to gain eternal happiness, we must be steadfast in retaining our commitment, our conversion to God—in other words, "enduring to the end." And it follows that we, as ever-growing, ever-learning disciples of Jesus Christ, will seek to bring others to this same happiness.

When we ask ourselves, "What shall we do?" let's ponder this question: "What does the Savior do continually for us?" He nurtures. He creates. He encourages growth and goodness.

The Savior's creation of the earth, under the direction of his Father, was a mighty act of nurturing. He provided a place for us to be born into mortality, so that we can be tested in our obedience to him and develop faith in his atoning power. All of us need a spiritual and physical haven of belonging as we grow in the gospel. We, sisters and

brothers of all ages, can create this haven as we help build his kingdom; it is even a holy place.

We build the kingdom when we nurture others; however, the first child of God we must build up in the restored gospel is ourselves. Emma Smith, wife of the Prophet Joseph, said, "I desire the Spirit of God to know and understand myself, that I might be able to overcome whatever of tradition or nature that would not tend to my exaltation."³ Sometimes we go on "automatic pilot" as we live our daily lives. Do we have personal habits or traditions that limit our faith or our ability to nurture faith in others? Are we even aware of those limitations? How can we learn all that we need to know and do?

The few moments we spend partaking of the ordinance of the sacrament is a time of powerful connection to the Godhead. Here is a sacred gift for each of us. Knowing, as King Benjamin taught, that God has all wisdom and all power both in heaven and in earth (see Mosiah 4:9), we can turn with full confidence to him during this sacred time of covenant. "What do I need to change in my life, Father?" could be a powerful part of our prayer during the sacrament. Sunday after Sunday we have this opportunity, a priesthood ordinance, to point us to our baptismal covenant and other covenants and to open a channel of guidance through the Holy Ghost from God the Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ, to us.

There was a time in my life when, as the deacons passed the sanctified bread and the sanctified water, I looked around the chapel, paying attention to someone's new haircut or outfit. What a waste of opportunity! One Sunday I honestly felt these words summarily impressed upon my thoughts: "Bow your head." I was so surprised that I immediately bowed my head. It felt right; my thoughts moved from earthly things to the Savior's payment for my sins.

Our attitude about the symbols of the Savior's sacrifice and atonement will inevitably influence others. Adam, one of our grown sons, admitted that as a child he liked to cause mischief during sacrament meeting. (I might even call it havoc!) He then said, "But somehow, I didn't feel like misbehaving when I saw you with your

head bowed and your eyes closed during the passing of the sacrament. Even though I knew I could get away with misbehaving since you wouldn't see me, I just didn't want to." He also spoke of his father's solemn attitude as he presided on the stand. Honestly honoring Jesus Christ has an effect on those around us, even without words.

However, our words carry much influence too. We serve when we testify of our faith. When David and I were serving as missionaries in Brazil, my Portuguese was primitive. Especially at the outset, I could hardly cobble together one strong sentence. I sounded something like this: "You nice. Church true. I happy." If nothing else, my attempts got attention, and then the missionaries could fill in the gaps! But as I limped along, sharing my grammatically pathetic testimony, I began to realize something: the power of a testimony isn't in the grammar. It isn't in the well-turned phrase. And it isn't in the pronunciation. The power and authority of our testimonies is in the Spirit that accompanies them. The Holy Ghost is a perfect translator of wholehearted faith in any language, even in broken Portuguese sentences. I believe that as we speak truth, the light of the Spirit illuminates the humble hearts of listeners and testifies to their souls that Jesus is the Christ.

We, as daughters of God, have an essential part in the work of salvation. As we participate in the ordinances of baptism and the temple endowment, we are armed with power from God and can be significant in nurturing others' faith in the Redeemer.

I remember a lovely sister missionary from a remote town in Brazil. She, the only Church member in her family, worked under the direction of a zone leader who came from a long-established LDS family of Utah. The zone leader had had all the support possible throughout his life to be the great leader he was in the mission. However, he recognized the delegated priesthood power in this sister's testimony of the Savior, and he asked her to teach in zone meetings, to strengthen the elders and demonstrate how to bring souls to Christ.

As women, we can participate in the holy work of bringing God's spirit children into the world to gain a physical body, have earthly experience, and be eternally sealed in a family unit. We make a

difference—a major difference—by teaching a pattern of faith, especially within a family. Our daughter Paige, mother of five, says she asks herself often, “How would Mom or Dad teach truth in this moment?” Mothers’ gospel teachings affect generations.

President Russell M. Nelson reminds us, “Attacks against the Church, its doctrine, and our way of life are going to increase. Because of this, we need women who have a bedrock understanding of the doctrine of Christ and who will use that understanding to teach and help raise a sin-resistant generation. . . . We need women who have the courage and vision of our Mother Eve.”⁴

As we faithfully covenant with Father in Heaven, in the name of his Son, he will make us builders of his kingdom, and we will be his true disciples.

I have sought the Savior Jesus Christ for much of my life, and I believe, in my own weak and limited way, I have found him. He is my hope, my refuge, my teacher, my Redeemer. There is no other place to go for lasting help, direction, joy, and peace. Through toil and trouble, as well as reward and delight in my life, he stands bright and loving, constant in his mercy and grace. As I try to follow his commandments, even though I often fail, I still know of his love. I know of his steadiness. I know of his kindly wisdom. This knowledge began with years of seeking him, singing of him, and feeling his love on rare but real occasions. By the power of authorized priesthood ordinances and covenants restored to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith, I have gained more knowledge of God and felt his grace pour down upon me and my family through the gift of the Holy Ghost, especially in times of grief and pain. I have a testimony of the callings of modern-day prophets; I know, by the witness of the Spirit, these are men of God who continue to reveal God’s word to the world.

My keenly felt need for the Redeemer and his true Church grows as I see my weaknesses and reach for divine help. Here is the sweetest, deepest love I’ve ever known, a love that draws me in and binds me to him. This love is not just for me; it is continually flowing out to all on

earth, for we are all children of God. I have felt this flow and seen his image in the countenances of others who also know of his love.

I testify that the resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ, lives today. I trust, because of his atoning sacrifice for our sins, mistakes, and faults, that he will heal all our wounds and lead all who will humbly follow him and his ways back to Heavenly Father and to eternal life. Truly, as prophets and apostles have said, God be thanked for the matchless gift of his divine Son!

NEILL F. MARRIOTT served as the second counselor in the general presidency of the Young Women organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from April 2013 to April 2018.

Notes

Originally published as Neill Marriott, “Becoming True Disciples of Jesus Christ,” chapter 7 of *Seek This Jesus* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017). Reprinted by permission.

1. Quentin L. Cook, “Valiant in the Testimony of Jesus,” *Ensign*, November 2016.
2. *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 107.
3. *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 12.
4. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign*, November 2015.