

# *It Still Takes Faith*

BRENT L. TOP

**M**y brothers and sisters, I am honored to have been invited to address you in this devotional setting today. As you well know, this year we are celebrating the sesquicentennial of the arrival of the Mormon pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley. The high point of this yearlong commemoration will be witnessed this week not only in Salt Lake City and here in Provo, but throughout the Church all over the world. In conjunction with that commemoration, I have been asked to pay tribute today to those faithful pioneers.

I feel grossly inadequate to pay proper homage to the pioneers, for I am not a very good historian, nor do I have much pioneer ancestry. I'm quite sure there were no Tops among those pioneer companies of the last century. I do, however, have enormous feelings of reverence and respect for their faith, sacrifice, dedication, and perseverance. It is in that spirit of reverence that I desire to speak to you today in their honor, and I pray that the Spirit of the Lord will attend my words and that we may feel, through a thin veil, a special closeness to those faithful Saints of yesteryear.

Growing up in Idaho I often viewed the 24th of July as merely a Utah holiday. In addition, my father was a convert to the Church, and so I felt little kinship to the pioneers who

crossed the plains. It wasn't until I started to study Church history in depth that I learned that Pioneer Day is not just a Utah holiday and that even I as an Idahoan share a pioneer heritage.

One hundred and fifty years ago this very day—July 22, *not* July 24—the advance party of pioneers led by Elder Orson Pratt entered the Salt Lake Valley to make preparations for the rest, who would enter the valley two days later. They dammed a stream and planted the first crops in the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Today we celebrate the 150th anniversary of that landmark event—an event often overshadowed by the events of the 24th of July. Today I stand before you to honor that first group—the July 22 advance party. As a proud Idahoan I am eternally grateful that the first crop those pioneers planted in the soil of the Salt Lake Valley was *potatoes*. Yes, that's right—potatoes. Now I have a special kinship to those pioneers and a very important reason to celebrate this significant sesquicentennial—July 22—the 150th anniversary of the planting of potatoes

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by those Mormon pioneers. July 22 should be an Idaho state holiday!

I stand in awe of the faith and fortitude of those early pioneers. I am truly humbled as I read of their sacrifices and sorrows, and I am inspired by their examples of commitment and consecration. But it actually dishonors them to celebrate their accomplishments and yet fail to learn from them.

After the death of the Prophet Joseph, the Saints were directed by President Brigham Young to redouble their efforts in working on the temple so they could receive the saving ordinances of the gospel therein. These covenants and blessings would be a guiding influence and a strengthening and sustaining power to the Saints as they faced the hardships of their journey. “Let the fire of the covenant which you made in the House of the Lord burn in your hearts,” President Brigham Young urged the pioneers (“*Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*,” 28 September 1846, p. 5). Those pioneers we honor this sesquicentennial year had a “fire of faith” and a commitment to covenants that led them across the plains to a promised land just as surely as the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night led the ancient Israelites on their journey.

One such pioneer who was guided by the “fire of the covenant” was Stillman Pond. He and his family were among the last to leave Nauvoo in September 1846. Having already endured much persecution and harassment from the enemies of the Church, the Pond family was ultimately driven from their Nauvoo home at the point of a bayonet. Without adequate preparation for their trek, they were left without proper food, clothing, and shelter. Their trek across Iowa to Winter Quarters was fraught with almost unimaginable suffering and heartache.

Snow came early to the Iowa territory that year, making travel extremely difficult. Weakened from trudging through the deep snow, Stillman’s pregnant wife, Maria, who

had already been afflicted with consumption, then contracted malaria. She, along with every member of her family, suffered greatly from this sickness. Bowed down with grief and aching from the pain and fever of malaria, Maria could no longer walk. Amidst these grim circumstances she gave birth to twin boys who were named Joseph and Hyrum. They both died only a few days later. The deaths of these children coming across the plains from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters were only the beginning of the sacrifice and trials of Stillman Pond.

With all of the members of the Pond family sick with malaria, Stillman, who was unable to walk or even sit up, lay on his stomach in the bed of his wagon. Bracing himself with one arm and extending his other over the dashboard to hold the reins, he drove his team the last 150 miles. On October 16, 1846, they arrived at Winter Quarters. During the winter there the Pond family continued to suffer. In the space of five days, three more children died. A sixth died a few weeks later:

Laura Jane Pond, age 14, died of “chills and fever” on December 2, 1846.

Harriet M. Pond, age 11, died “with chills” on December 4.

Abigail A. Pond, age 18, died “with chills” on December 7.

Lyman Pond, age 6, died with “chills and fever” on January 15, 1847.

Having survived the heartache of burying all of her children, the hardships of the trek across Iowa, and the hunger and privations of a long, hard winter, Stillman’s beloved wife, Maria, finally succumbed to her sicknesses on May 17 at Winter Quarters. Yet despite all this, Stillman Pond journeyed onward in the pioneer company led by Elder John Taylor, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in the early fall of 1847. His testimony of the gospel, his faith in the Lord, and the fire of the covenant that burned in his soul gave him the strength to go on. “I am perfectly satisfied with the authorities of the Church,” he wrote in February 1846,

“and consider it my indispensable duty to give heed to all things.” (See Leon Y. Pond and H. Ray Pond, “Stillman Pond: A Biographical Sketch,” typescript copy, LDS Historical Department, pp. 4–5.)

These early pioneers and the thousands upon thousands of others who followed in the months, years, and decades after 1847 were guided and strengthened by their testimonies of the restored gospel and by the sacred covenants they had made with the Lord. Although the circumstances of our lives today are much different than those of the Saints of 150 years ago, the covenants we have made are the same. We, like they, have covenanted to sacrifice all we have for the cause of Christ and to consecrate all of our means, time, and talents—our very hearts and souls—for the building of the kingdom of God on earth. It still takes faith to be true to those covenants! President Harold B. Lee testified:

*I bear witness that until a person has been willing to sacrifice all he possesses in the world, not even withholding his own life if it were necessary for the upbuilding of the kingdom, then only can he claim kinship to Him who gave his life that men might be. [CR, October 1965, p. 131]*

Our challenges and tests today may come in different packaging, but giving *all* you have to the Lord is still *all* you have. It still takes faith—the same faith of our pioneer forebears—to keep our covenants: to love God with *all* our heart, might, mind, and strength. It takes the same faith and commitment today to love God more than mammon and to willingly lay our *all* on the altar. Being a disciple of Christ today still requires the fire of covenant burning in our hearts and guiding us through our own individual wildernesses of life.

Many of these pioneers not only had walked away from comfortable homes and farms in Nauvoo and had buried babies in shallow graves on the plains, but they had also made

other painful sacrifices because of the fire of faith and the commitment to their covenants that burned within their souls. One such was Catherine Spencer. When she joined the Church, her parents became embittered and angry, disowning her and refusing to allow her to ever return to their home or even to correspond with them. During the Saints’ final days in Nauvoo, Catherine became extremely ill. Fearing that she would not be able to survive the difficult journey west, her husband Orson Spencer wrote to her parents asking if they would not take her back into their home and nurse her back to health and care for her until Orson could establish a home in the west with the Church. No answer came to this heartfelt plea.

At last the time arrived for the Spencers to leave Nauvoo. A bed was made for Catherine in Orson’s wagon. As they traveled in the miserable conditions of March 1846, Catherine became sicker and increasingly weak. About five days out from Sugar Camp, they encountered a torrential freezing rainstorm that poured down through the canvas that covered their wagon. It was apparent that Catherine was failing fast. At this discouraging moment a messenger with the latest mail that had earlier arrived at Nauvoo found the couple. In his hand was a letter from Catherine’s parents. In the letter they expressed no interest in allowing her to come home or in caring for her unless, as they declared, she “renounce her degrading faith, and she can come back, but never until she does.” Without a murmur or complaint, the letter was folded up and put away, and Catherine asked Orson to get his Bible and read to her Ruth 1:16:

*And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.*

As Orson finished reading this passage, a calm, peaceful smile spread over Catherine’s

face as she closed her eyes and lapsed into the quiet sleep of death. (See Nicholas G. Morgan, “And Thus History Was Made,” *Improvement Era*, July 1940, p. 399.)

Caroline Hopkins Clark and her husband, John, had joined the Church in Great Britain and responded to the call of the prophet to gather with the Saints in Zion. The journey by ship was marked by unusually cold and wet weather, poor food, and unsanitary living conditions—all accentuated by severe seasickness. Her journal is laced with many comments such as: “Very wet and cold” (2 May 1866). “We remain very sick. Martha hasn’t been able to eat anything since she came” (8 May). After several weeks on the sea, they arrived in New York and began the trek by land to Zion. More hardships and heartaches awaited them. Her diary entry for June 14 reads: “Today’s journey is a sad one to us, on account of the death of our dear baby. It grieved us much. . . . John stayed behind to bury her.” After finally being united with the Saints in the Salt Lake Valley, Caroline sent a record of their journey along with a letter to the family she left behind in England. To the family and friends who thought her crazy to join with the Mormons and follow them to a desert valley on the American frontier, she wrote:

*I have no doubt that when my sisters know that I have lost the baby, they will say, that it would not have died if I had stayed home. There is the same good here as there. . . . She was so well the beginning of the journey, but we know she is safe and that if we prove true to the gospel that we have embraced, that we shall have her again with the others at the resurrection. . . .*

*I dare say you would like to know if we have regretted our journeying. As yet we do not regret the time we left England. If we had the privilege to come back we would not accept it. [Voices from the Past: Diaries, Journals, and Autobiographies (Provo: Campus Education Week, 1980), pp. 69–74]*

The Savior declared: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). Thousands upon thousands of other “pioneers” have demonstrated their discipleship by sacrificing friends and family to follow the Lord and join the Church. It still takes that kind of commitment—that fire of faith—to be disciples of Christ. I stand in admiration of and feel the utmost respect for those pioneers—both in the early days of the Restoration and today—who are true to the testimony of the gospel they have received even when they are turned away by their loved ones. My own father is one of those pioneers I honor today. I will be eternally indebted to the fire of faith that led him to join the Church despite much opposition and persecution from his own family.

Most of us here today have not had to make those kinds of sacrifices. Most of us are here in these favored circumstances *because* of our families, not *in spite of* them. But it still takes faith—pioneer-like faith—to be true to our covenants today.

William Wilson Sterrett was a different kind of pioneer. He was not driven from his home, nor did he suffer with the Saints at Winter Quarters. He was a pioneer, nonetheless, that we honor and can learn from. Full of gold fever and a spirit of adventure, young William arrived in Salt Lake City on his way to seek his fortune in the goldfields of California. It was during his stay in the valley that he was introduced to Mormonism. “During the winter of 1850,” William recorded, “I read the Book of Mormon, *Voice of Warning*, and some other works, and I became convinced of the truth. The Holy Ghost enlightened my mind to the extent that I knew for myself of the truth, that it was of God.” Sterrett explained that many Gentiles wintered over in Salt Lake City before venturing onward to California. Many of these Gentiles, in a desire to fit in and benefit from

the hospitality of the Saints, joined the Church during the winter. They were known as “Winter Mormons,” for in the spring they bade farewell not only to Salt Lake City but also to their professed beliefs in Mormonism. Despite a burning testimony, William Sterrett purposely delayed his baptism until early May. “I held off,” he recalled, “not wishing to be called a ‘Winter Mormon’ ” (*Voices from the Past*, pp. 53–54).

It still takes faith to not be a “Winter Mormon.” It still takes faith, obedience, and commitment “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death” (Mosiah 18:9). It still takes faith and testimony and the fire of the covenant to be true disciples today, not “cultural converts” or “social Saints.” It still takes pioneer-like commitment to not only live the gospel in the comforts of “Happy Valley” but also amidst the summer heat of our sinful society—with its many fiery darts. It still takes faith to remain steadfast in Zion—where live “the pure in heart”—when the glittering gold-fields of the world beckon us.

Niels Johnson first heard about the Mormons when his father one day declared to his mother that he had heard the Mormons preach in their village in Denmark. With his breath reeking of liquor, as was often the case, Niels’ father informed his wife that he wanted to join the Mormon Church if she was willing. She told him that she would do just about anything if he would quit drinking. He promised he would if she, too, would join the Church. In January 1857 they were both baptized. Niels Johnson’s father kept his promise and never touched tobacco or liquor ever again. This remarkable transformation made such a powerful impression upon their family that 11-year-old Niels desired to join with the Mormons as well. In 1862 the Johnson family left their Danish homeland to join with the Saints in Zion. (See *History of Bear Lake Pioneers*, comps. Edith Parker Haddock and Dorothy Hardy

Matthews [Paris, Idaho: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Bear Lake County, Idaho, 1968], pp. 324–25.) It took faith for the Johnsons to join the Church. It took consecration and sacrifice to leave behind their Danish home and friends and family members to journey to Zion. It took trust in God and hope in Christ as they buried a son at sea. But perhaps in some way even greater than this, it took the fire of faith and commitment to covenant for Brother Johnson to give up drinking and smoking. As Jesus stated, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

It still takes faith today to take up our crosses. To “take up”—“to pick up, hold aloft, and carry proudly”—the cross of Christ requires that we lay down those things that prevent us from faithfully following Christ. The Joseph Smith Translation provides us with this additional insight: “And now for a man to take up his cross, is to *deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust*, and keep my commandments” (JST Matthew 16:26; emphasis added). Just as it took faith for our pioneer forebears to make their required sacrifices and endure the hardships they faced, it still takes faith today to turn our backs on “all ungodliness” and “every worldly lust.” Today we rightfully honor and revere the examples of faith, determination, and commitment exhibited by these early pioneers.

It may be, however, that they would not want to trade places with us today. They faced enormous physical hardships, persecution, and opposition that tried their faith and challenged their commitment to the very uttermost. Yet we are not exempt from such tests of faith today. President George Q. Cannon declared:

*We may wade through sorrow. We may have to endure persecution. We may have to meet with death. We may have to endure imprisonment and many other things that our predecessors had to endure. God may test us in this manner.*

*Every human being that is connected with this work will have to be tested before he can enter into the Celestial Kingdom of our God. He will try us to the uttermost. If we have any spot more tender than another, He will feel after it. He will test all in some way or other.*

President Cannon then further testified:

*There is one thing certain, every Latter-day Saint who is faithful to the truth and who lives to the ordinary age of man will have all the opportunities of this kind he or she can desire to gain experience and to have his or her zeal, integrity, courage and devotion to the truth fully exhibited. [Gospel Truth, ed. Jerreld L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1987), pp. 301–2]*

Today our challenge in taking up the cross does not involve pulling a heavy handcart over plains and mountains through snowstorms and scorching sun. But “the path of modern pioneers is not easy,” as Elder Dallin H. Oaks said. “Burdens carried in the heart can be just as heavy as those pulled in a handcart” (“Modern Pioneers,” *Ensign*, November 1989, p. 66). It still takes faith to pull our handcarts, figuratively speaking, through the sleaze and slime of today’s sex-saturated society and not become mired in the mud of immorality. It still takes sacrifice—supreme self-sacrifice—to “deny [ourselves] all ungodliness,” when all around us seem to delight in wallowing in this mud. I have often felt that these pioneers we honor and admire will someday likewise honor and admire us—this latter-day generation—if we can endure the wickedness of the world and remain morally clean. Personal purity today requires just as much faith, commitment, and dedicated discipleship as crossing the plains required of those “blessed, honored, pioneer[s]” (“They, the Builders of the Nation,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 36).

Unfortunately, there are many among our “Saturday’s warriors”—far, far too many—who

have become muddied with immorality. When stuck in the mud, the pioneers didn’t remain there. They pushed and pulled and tugged and towed until the wagon was steadied and securely on the path again. Today it still takes faith—faith in the cleansing power of Christ—to submit to the Savior through real repentance, as painful as it might be, so our garments may be “washed white through the blood of the Lamb” (see Alma 13:11–13). It took faith on the part of the pioneers to leave home behind and face an uncertain and difficult journey. Today it takes just as much faith and sacrifice to leave our sins behind us and not give up or give in during the demanding journey of repentance. It takes faith to *become* clean, and it takes faith to *stay* clean. Alma admonished his son to teach the people to “withstand every temptation of the devil, *with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Alma 37:33; emphasis added). It still takes pioneer-like faith—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—to be clean today. To do otherwise is to become swallowed up and to perish in the muddy quicksands of sin.

Ephraim Hanks was one of those early pioneers, but his pioneering continued long after his arrival in the valley. On a fall morning in 1848, President Brigham Young drove to where Ephraim was building an adobe house inside the old fort in Salt Lake City. Looking over the completed foundation, Brigham quizzed Ephraim concerning the thickness of the rock wall.

“Eight inches,” replied Brother Hanks.

“Tear it down and build it twice that thick,” Brigham declared and then promptly drove away before Ephraim could respond. To do as President Young requested would mean hauling in more rock and doing twice as much work as Ephraim thought necessary. Nevertheless, Ephraim widened the foundation to 16 inches, as the prophet had suggested. A month later a heavy rainstorm caused widespread flooding in the valley, resulting in considerable damage. Hanks’ reinforced

foundation and walls, however, stood firm against this deluge, preventing a possible collapse of the entire structure. Many other homes in the valley were not so fortunate. From this experience Ephraim learned that when the prophet spoke, he would listen.

Not long after this incident, Ephraim once again received unsolicited counsel from President Young. At a dance in Salt Lake City, Brother Brigham saw Ephraim and told him to go home and shave his face. Ephraim, like most of the men of his day, had worn a beard virtually his entire adult life. His beard extended almost down to his waist. Somewhat puzzled by this strange request, he left the social and rode home, where he shaved off his beard. Ephraim returned to the dance wearing a newly trimmed moustache. When Brigham saw him, he brushed his hand across Ephraim's face and said he had meant a clean shave. Excusing himself a second time, Brother Hanks complied with the prophet's strange command and shaved off the moustache as well. It was perhaps this type of obedience to counsel that prompted President Brigham Young to later say of Ephraim Hanks, "Here was a man always ready to lay down his life for the authorities of the Church as well as for the cause of Zion and her people." (From Richard K. Hanks, "Eph Hanks, Pioneer Scout" [master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1973], pp. 26–27.)

It still takes faith—Ephraim Hanks—like faith—to obey the words of the prophets of God. Concerning our relationship with the prophet, in our dispensation the Lord commanded:

*Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;*

*For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith. [D&C 21:4–5]*

It still takes faith, and especially patience, to obey the counsel and direction given by the Lord's anointed servants to us today—particularly when we don't fully understand or agree with the counsel that comes to us. When the counsel of living prophets "steps on our toes" or inconveniences us in some way, it still takes faith not to "pick and choose" those prophetic counsels we will obey and those we will ignore. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell insightfully observed:

*Our relationship to living prophets is not one in which their sayings are a smorgasbord from which we may take only that which pleases us. We are to partake of all that is placed before us, including the spinach, and to leave a clean plate! [Things As They Really Are (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), p. 74; emphasis in original]*

I find it significant that the vast majority of journal entries of these early pioneers did not deal with accounts of the life-threatening experiences or the sacrifices and hardships that we often hear about. Most of the entries dealt with the mundane, even boring, parts of the journey when nothing eventful happened. I have tried to imagine how difficult it must have been to journey through Nebraska and parts of Wyoming—difficult, in part, because day after day, mile after mile, the scenery remained the same. These pioneers could see far off into the horizon, yet every day it looked as if there had been no progress made. Sometimes it's easier to "gird up our loins" when faced with danger and obvious difficulties than to faithfully keep putting one foot in front of the other when it seems like we are making no progress or when the goal still seems so far away. It took faith and perseverance for those Saints to keep plugging along. It still takes faith to "press forward with a steadfastness in Christ" (2 Nephi 31:20) when our own journey does not seem very eventful or exciting. It still takes pioneer-like faith to do the little things: things such as daily

prayer and scripture study, fulfilling a Church calling that we may not think is so important or we don't care for much, or getting out of bed early on Sunday morning to attend our meetings when we've been out late—really late—on Saturday night. It still takes faith to keep nurturing a testimony when we don't seem to have any sensational, spiritual experiences. It still takes faith, like that of those early pioneers, to keep plugging along day by day, step by step—doing the best we can in living the gospel and loving the Lord and our fellowmen.

Just as those pioneers often felt they were making no real progress on their journey, modern pioneer parents sometimes feel like their efforts are having no real effect on their children. It still takes faith and pioneer-like dogged determination to keep holding meaningful family home evenings when the kids seem inattentive or are fighting with each other or are obnoxiously counting the seconds until they can go out with their friends. It still takes faith to not give up on family prayer and scripture study and teaching the gospel to our families. It still takes faith to *know* that these little things at home can and do and will make big differences someday.

On Sunday, November 30, 1856, the Saints gathered in the Tabernacle and heard President Brigham Young apprise them of the dire circumstances of the beleaguered emigrants of the Martin Handcart Company, who were suffering on the plains of Wyoming. This group of handcart pioneers had suffered unspeakable hardships and difficulties on their trek to Zion. Hundreds had died from starvation and exposure. "Some you will find with their feet frozen to their ankles," President Young described for the Saints, and "some are frozen to their knees and some have their hands frosted" (*Deseret News*, 10 December 1856, p. 320). Upon hearing of the terrible plight of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies, many of the men in Salt Lake City risked their own lives to come to the assistance of their suffering brothers and

sisters. One of the first to reach them was our friend Ephraim Hanks. Upon reaching the handcart companies, these rescuers were shocked by the pitiful conditions in which they found these suffering Saints. Captain George D. Grant, who headed one of the rescue parties, reported to President Young:

*It is not of much use for me to attempt to give a description of the situation of these people, for this you will learn from [others]; but you can imagine between five and six hundred men, women and children, worn down by drawing hand carts through snow and mud; fainting by the wayside; falling, chilled by the cold; children crying, their limbs stiffened by cold, their feet bleeding and some of them bare to snow and frost. The sight is almost too much for the stoutest of us; but we go on doing all we can, not doubting nor despairing. [LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1960), p. 228; emphasis added]*

Today there are still people suffering on the plains, as it were. We cannot always see their sorrows and hardships. It may not be frostbite, exhaustion, or starvation, as it was then. It may be, however, loneliness, discouragement, and depression. It still takes faith to reach out to those in need, to smile, to be a friend, and to be kind. It still takes faith to do more for those who are silently suffering around us, even as we speak, than periodic token participation in "service projects." Living our religion requires kindness, compassion, and sensitivity to others—living the Golden Rule—just as much as it requires prayer, scripture study, fulfilling a Church calling, or even attending the temple.

Today the suffering and needs of those around us may not be as visible, but there is as much need today for "rescuers" as there was when the handcart pioneers were freezing at Martin's Cove. There is just as much need today for us to be true to our covenant to "bear one another's burdens, . . . mourn with those

that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8–9). It still takes faith to respond to the need to "succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees" (D&C 81:5). Today it still takes commitment to covenants to leave behind the "ninety and nine" and go out into the wilderness of the world and rescue the one who has lost his or her way—spiritually speaking. It still takes sacrifice to remove the spiritual blinders that often cause us to be so self-absorbed that we are unaware of and insensitive to those around us who outwardly look like they know where they are going and what they are doing but who are lost and wandering in a spiritual fog. It still takes faith and perseverance to search for the prodigal—whether it be a friend or neighbor, a brother or sister, a son or daughter, or even a mom or dad. It still takes faith, hope, and charity to rescue the lost—wherever and whomever they may be—and lovingly wrap them in the warmth of the Savior's love and mercy. When it comes to service, sacrifice, and consecration today, it still takes faith to "walk the walk," not just "talk the talk." It still takes faith to go forth—like the pioneer rescuers on the Wyoming plains—"doing all we can, not doubting nor despairing."

Just outside Omaha, Nebraska, in the Mormon Pioneer Cemetery stands a monument commemorating the suffering of the Saints at Winter Quarters and honoring the faith and dedication of these Mormon pioneers. These statues portray a grieving father and mother holding each other in their arms looking down at the tiny grave of their child. There were many such graves along the trail—graves of babies, little children, young adults, even mothers and fathers who were laid to rest in often hurriedly dug shallow graves or just beneath the snow when the ground was too frozen to break.

Caroline and Jedediah Grant buried their four-month-old daughter, Margaret, near the Sweetwater River in Wyoming. With the grief

over the loss of her baby weighing heavily on her soul, Caroline's health soon began to decline. Suffering from the effects of cholera, her condition rapidly became critical. The camp fasted and prayed in her behalf, but it was apparent that Sister Grant would not recover. About midnight she rallied a little and called for her husband and daughter. Susan Noble remembered that Caroline looked at her husband, Jedediah, and whispered:

*"All is well! All is well! Please take me to the valley—Jeddy. Get Margaret—bring her—to me!" Brother Grant answered tenderly and meaningfully as he sobbed with sorrow, "Yes, yes, Caroline. I'll do my best. I'll do my best."* [Gene A. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 68]

Jedediah built a coffin, placed the body of his wife in it, and then drove day and night the last 75 miles to the Salt Lake Valley. On September 30, 1847, he buried her a short distance from the pioneer fort then under construction. The next day Jedediah Grant took with him his friend Bates Noble and headed east on his promised mission to retrieve the body of his baby daughter, Margaret, and return her for burial next to her mother. After several days on the trail they arrived in the Sweetwater region where Margaret had been buried. Bates Noble recorded:

*Another day or so and we were at the end of our eastward journey. As we intended making it back to Sweet Water for the night, we stopped our rig [near the campsite] where just a month previous a terrible night had been spent [digging a grave] in a driving thunder storm. We now stepped forward, carrying the box and shovels. A few paces from the little grave we stopped hesitatingly, set down our things and stood with eyes fixed before us. Neither tried to speak. An ugly hole replaced the small mound; and so recently had the wolves departed*

*that every sign was fresh before us. I dared not raise my eyes to look at Jedediah. From the way I felt, I could but guess his feelings. Like statues of the wilderness we stood, grown to the spot, each fully realizing that nothing more could be done. After several minutes of silent tears, we quietly withdrew, carrying away again only that which we had brought.* [Sessions, *Mormon Thunder*, p. 69]

Jedediah Grant could do no more. He had done his best, as he had promised. But now all he had left was his faith and hope in Christ.

Losing a loved one—whether suddenly by a tragic accident, after a long struggle with a terminal illness, or even by natural causes—is no less painful for us today than it was for those pioneers. It still takes faith when a casket is closed to look forward to a happy reunion someday beyond the veil. It still takes faith in Christ’s victory over death and the hope of a glorious resurrection. It still takes hope in Christ’s promise that he “shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7:17).

Many of these early pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley after the arduous trek only to find that they were not done pioneering yet. Responding to the call of the prophet of God, many once again packed up their wagons and moved to other frontier areas of the Great Basin to establish additional Mormon settlements. Joseph Stanford Smith was called to settle in the Colorado River basin. He had been one of the most active leaders in helping blaze a trail through a treacherous canyon in southern Utah that became known as “Hole-in-the-Rock.” On January 26, 1880, Stanford spent the day helping all of the wagons in the company get down through the notch in the rocky canyon. Using ropes and pulleys as well as logs tied to the backs of wagons as a braking system, each wagon was carefully lowered through the rocky crevice and driven to the banks of the river and then ferried across. When word came that all of the wagons were safely down and across the river, Stanford looked for his

wagon—but it was nowhere to be found. It was still up at the top of the canyon. It had been moved back while the others were being taken down, and now it had been overlooked. His wife, Arabella, and his children were waiting for him at the top of the canyon.

*For a moment Stanford’s face flushed with rage. He threw his hat on the ground and stomped it—as was his habit when he was angry.*

*“With me down there helping get their wagons on the raft, I thought some one would bring my wagon down. Drat ‘em!”*

*“I’ve got the horses harnessed and things all packed,” Belle breathlessly assured him as they ran toward the wagon.*

Stanford unlocked the brakes; checked the team; tied old Nig, the mule, to the back axle as a brake; and cross-locked the wheels with chains.

*They walked to the top of the crevice, where hand in hand they looked down—10 feet of loose sand, then a rocky pitch as steep as the roof of a house and barely as wide as the wagon—below that a dizzy chute down to the landing place. . . . It was that first drop of 150 feet that frightened him.*

*“I am afraid we can’t make it,” he exclaimed.*

*“But we’ve got to make it,” she answered calmly. . . .*

*“If we only had a few men to hold the wagon back we might make it, Belle.”*

*“I’ll do the holding back,” said Belle, “on old Nig’s lines.”*

She then busied herself getting the children to a safe place back from the crevice. Three-year-old Roy held the baby, and sister Ada sat in front of them and said a little prayer as Belle kissed each of them and tucked quilts snugly around them. “Don’t move, dears. Don’t even stand up. As soon as we get the wagon down, Papa will come back for you!”

Stanford braced his legs against the dashboard and they started down through the Hole-in-the-Rock. The first lurch nearly pulled Belle off her feet. She dug her heels in to hold her balance. Old Nig was thrown to his haunches. Arabella raced after him and the wagon holding to the lines with desperate strength. Nig rolled to his side and gave a shrill neigh of terror. . . .

[Belle] lost her balance and went sprawling after old Nig. She was blinded by the sand which streamed after her. She gritted her teeth and hung on to the lines. A jagged rock tore her flesh and hot pain ran up her leg from heel to hip. The wagon struck a huge boulder. The impact jerked her to her feet and flung her against the side of the cliff.

The wagon stopped at the end of the chute. Stanford jumped off the wagon and first noticed the bloodied, bruised, and almost lifeless mule that had been dragged most of the way down. There, holding onto the reins, blood streaming from her leg, and covered from head to foot with dirt, was Arabella. She had been dragged down along with the mule—but she wouldn't let go. She had hung on for all she was worth. Miraculously they made it down and were safe.

*"Darling, will you be all right?"*

*"Of course I will. Just leave me here and go as fast as you can for the children."*

*"I'll hurry," he flung over his shoulder and began the steep climb up the incline they had just come down.*

*. . . He slowed down, and looked around. He had driven a wagon down that fearful crevice, and dragged his wife behind. . . . God bless her gallant heart! He kicked the rocks at his feet and with tears streaming down his face lifted his hat in salute to Arabella, his wife. [As told by a grandson, Raymond Smith Jones, in David E. Miller, *Hole-in-the-Rock: An Epic in the Colonization of the Great American West* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1966), pp. 111–14]*

President Harold B. Lee said:

*We have some tight places to go before the Lord is through with this church and the world in this dispensation. . . . The power of Satan will increase; we see it in evidence on every hand. [CR, October 1970, p. 152]*

Whether the "tight places" are *institutional* or *individual*, it will still take faith and courage to hang on like Arabella Smith. As Lehi and Nephi saw, we are only able to withstand the "mists of darkness" and ignore the scornful mockings from the "great and spacious building" if we will hold fast—"clinging to the rod of iron" (see 1 Nephi 8:19–34, 11:25, 12:17, 15:22–25). The iron rod is the word of God—the scriptures, the gospel, the words of the prophets—but it is also much more. John the Revelator saw in vision the Son of God, whom he described as "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God" (Revelation 19:13; see also John 1:1–3, 18). Christ is the iron rod to which we must cling—never loosening our grip, never letting go. Never. For if we will continually hang on to him, he will never let go of us. Never. No, not ever!

May we demonstrate in our own lives the fire of the covenants that those we honor today so valiantly demonstrated. May we hold onto the iron rod—hanging on with both hands for all we are worth throughout our entire lives—in times of trial and tribulation as well as when life is smooth sailing. It still takes faith to be

*True to the faith that our parents have cherished,  
True to the truth for which martyrs have perished,  
To God's command,  
Soul, heart, and hand,  
Faithful and true we will ever stand.  
["True to the Faith," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 254]*

May we be filled with such faith today, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.