

Women's Pull Devotional

This one is the one we did Friday Am of the trek, just before the trekkers set out on the trail... right before the women's pull. The women's pull was a silent pull so after the devotional, there was no more talking until after the women's pull was complete. (Before the reading, we had prayer, then went right into the narratives with the music of "Sisters In Zion/Army of Helaman" medley playing in the background)

This devotional was presented by one young woman and one young man... during the young woman's reading, in the background we had a sound system set up with a quiet generator and played the song "As Sisters In Zion – Medley" and when the young man read his part, the song led into the "Army of Helaman" portion of the medley. Between the music and the beautiful narratives, the spirit brought tears to many eyes. It was the perfect lead into the women's pull.

Young Woman's Narrative

My message this morning is directed specifically to the women in this group....

In 1856, Julia and Emily Hill, sisters who had joined the Church as teenagers in England and been disowned by their family, had finally earned passage for their way to America and had almost reached their longed-for Zion. They were crossing the American plains with the Willie handcart company when they and many others were stranded on the trail by an early October storm. Sister Deborah Christensen, a great-granddaughter of Julia Hill, experienced this touching dream about them. She said:

"I could see Julia and Emily stranded in the snow on the windy summit of Rocky Ridge with the rest of the Willie handcart company. They had no heavy clothing to keep them warm. Julia was sitting in the snow, shaking. She could not carry on. Emily, who was freezing as well, knew that if she did not help Julia stand up, Julia would die. As Emily wrapped her arms around her sister to help her up, Julia began to cry—but no tears came, only soft whimpering sounds. Together they walked slowly to their handcart. Thirteen died that terrible night. Julia and Emily survived."

Without each other, these two women probably would not have lived. In addition, they helped others survive this devastating portion of the journey, including a young mother and her children. It was Emily Hill Woodmansee who later wrote the beautiful words to the song "As Sisters in Zion." The verse "We'll comfort the weary and strengthen the weak" takes on new meaning when you imagine her experience on the snow-packed plains.

As with the Hill sisters, many of us will not survive our tests in mortality without help from others. And just as true: in helping others we keep our own spirits alive. It is my prayer, that as we embark on today's journey and the many journeys we face throughout the rest of our lives, this message will burn in our hearts and know that no matter how difficult our own struggle might be, when we help others, our power and abilities increase and we become stronger.

Young Man's Narrative...

Brethren, we are the inheritors of a tremendous heritage. Now it is our privilege and responsibility to be

part of the Restoration's continuing drama, and there are great and heroic stories of faith to be written in our day. It will require every bit of our strength, wisdom, and energy to overcome the obstacles that will confront us. But even that will not be enough. We will learn, as did our pioneer ancestors, that it is only in faith—real faith, whole-souled, tested and tried—that we will find safety and confidence as we walk our own perilous pathways through life.

No matter how difficult the trail, and regardless of how heavy our load, we can take comfort in knowing that others before us have borne life's most grievous trials and tragedies by looking to heaven for peace, comfort, and hopeful assurance. We can know as they knew that God is our Father, that He cares about us individually and collectively, and that as long as we continue to exercise our faith and trust in Him there is nothing to fear in the journey.

Big Feast Devotional

On Day 2 of our trek, the handcarts arrived at camp in mid afternoon, and commenced a big celebration. They played games, had pioneer workshops, a hoedown and of course a wonderful feast. Prior to the blessing on the food of the feast, we had a very brief devotional presented by one of our Youth Council members. She read the following journal entry for the devotional...

Narrative:

Louisa Rowley crossed the plains with her mother Ann and her seven siblings in the Willie Handcart Company. "it hurt me to see my children go hungry." Ann Rowley wrote, "There came a time when there seemed to be no food at all." After "asking God's help." She remembered two hard sea biscuits in her trunk. "Surely, that was not enough to feed eight people, but five loaves and two fishes were not enough to feed 5,000 people either," she mused. She put the biscuits in a dutch oven and covered them with water, "asked God's blessing," and put the pan on the coals. "When I took off the lid a little later," she said, "I found the pan filled with food."

This narrative is followed by a blessing on the food.

Devotional Before Testimony Meeting

This was our Saturday AM Devotional.... just before the "forced march without carts" up the hill to the Grand Canyon Rim – which was our testimony site:

Youth Council Narrative:

I refer to a testimony given by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland.

When Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum started for Carthage to face what they knew would be an imminent martyrdom, Hyrum read these words to comfort the heart of his brother:

"Thou hast been faithful; wherefore . . . thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father.

A few short verses from the 12th chapter of Ether in the Book of Mormon. Before closing the book, Hyrum turned down the corner of the page from which he had read, marking it as part of the everlasting testimony for which these two brothers were about to die. Later, when actually incarcerated in the jail, Joseph the Prophet turned to the guards who held him captive and bore a powerful testimony of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Shortly thereafter pistol and ball would take the lives of these two testators.

In this their greatest—and last—hour of need, I ask you: would these men blaspheme before God by continuing to fix their lives, their honor, and their own search for eternal salvation on a book (and by implication a church and a ministry) they had fictitiously created out of whole cloth?

Never mind that their wives are about to be widows and their children fatherless. Never mind that their little band of followers will yet be "houseless, friendless and homeless" and that their children will leave footprints of blood across frozen rivers and an untamed prairie floor. Never mind that legions will die and other legions live declaring in the four quarters of this earth that they know the Book of Mormon and the Church which espouses it to be true. Disregard all of that, and tell me whether in this hour of death these two men would enter the presence of their Eternal Judge quoting from and finding solace in a book which, if not the very word of God, would brand them as imposters and charlatans until the end of time? They would not do that! They were willing to die rather than deny the divine origin and the eternal truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon is true, it came forth the way Joseph said it came forth and was given to bring happiness and hope to the faithful in the travail of the latter days.

Brothers and sisters, God always provides safety for the soul, and with the Book of Mormon, He has again done that in our time. Remember this declaration by Jesus Himself: "Whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived"¹⁵—and in the last days neither your heart nor your faith will fail you. Of this I earnestly testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Chapel Devotional Before Departing To Trek

Devotional - Thursday AM at the Stake before departing to trailhead:

This devotional we often refer to as our Chapel Session. We chose to do this to avoid the parking lot chaos that typically goes with youth events.

We had all the trekkers meet at the Stake Center at 6:45 am, dressed in their pioneer clothing, and sit in the chapel. On the stand were the youth council members who were conducting this session, and Stake Presidency members who were trekking. A youth council member played prelude music. We sang a pioneer hymn, had a prayer, and then one of the youth council members did a brief presentation. For this one, one of our young women brought a wedding dress worn by her gr. gr. grandmother (not a handcart pioneer, but in her eyes, a pioneer nonetheless) she told a story about her grandmother, and why in her eyes she was a pioneer and related it to us today... and how we are pioneers in spirit and action.

When she finished, the Stake Pres. 2nd counselor gave car loading instructions and then we departed.

You can do this however you want. On our previous first trek, we simply had a member of the Stake Presidency give a brief message instead of the youth message. Either way, it will work. It's all about setting the tone for the day.

Intro/Welcome Devotional at the trailhead, just prior to announcing trek families...

Youth Council Message:

163 years ago the pioneers, under the inspired leadership of Brigham Young, entered the Great valley of Salt Lake and proclaimed: "This is the right place. Drive on."

And ever since then, we've honored the great leaders and followers on this historic journey, and we realize that heroic pioneer feet are still blazing the trail of courage. That's because we are all required to make journeys of faith. Our feet, worn and weary, may not be crossing ice covered rivers or climbing snow crusted rocky ridges in worn out shoes . But whatever it is, it will demand faith in every footstep. And with that testimony burning in our hearts today, we begin our amazing trek and we remember and respond to the Lord's comforting council in which he said... "Be strong and be of good courage; be not afraid neither be thou not dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee withsoever thou goest. Welcome, pioneers... to trek 2010!

Prayer: _____

Time is turned over to trek leaders for cart handling instruction, medical team, and registration team to announce trek families.... following which, families have about 15-30 minutes to get to know each other and load their carts before setting out on trail.

First Camp Evening Devotional

We had a Thursday evening devotional - but that was a little different... more like a 'family home evening'. Basically after dinner, all the families gathered around the campfire in a big group. We had each family tell a little about the handcart company they were trekking in honor of. After that, because our Stake President was actually trekking with us (he was a Pa), we asked him to give a brief message and then offer a very special blessing on the entire group. This served a 2 fold purpose... obviously an opportunity for a wonderful and very unique and memorable blessing, but also to parallel the experience at Martin's Cove when the rescuers arrived at the camp and went about blessing and administering to the immigrants.