

Episode 10

Stories from General Conference

EXAMPLE

NARRATOR: **The topic of this collection of “Stories from General Conference”, is the power of example. This topic is introduced by a story told by President Thomas S. Monson during the April 2008 Priesthood Session of General Conference.**

(President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, April 2008)

My brethren, I reiterate that, as holders of the priesthood of God, it is our duty to live our lives in such a way that we may be examples of righteousness for others to follow. As I have pondered how we might best provide such examples, I have thought of an experience I had some years ago while attending a stake conference. During the general session, I observed a young boy sitting with his family on the front row of the stake center. I was seated on the stand. As the meeting progressed, I began to notice that if I crossed one leg over the other, the young boy would do the same thing. If I reversed the motion and crossed the other leg, he would follow suit. I would put my hands in my lap, and he would do the same. I rested my chin in my hand, and he also did so. Whatever I did, he would imitate my actions. This continued until the time approached for me to address the congregation. I decided to put him to the test. I looked squarely at him, certain I had his attention, and then I wiggled my ears. He made a vain attempt to do the same, but I had him! He just couldn't quite get his ears to wiggle. He turned to his father, who was sitting next to him, and whispered something to him. He pointed to his ears and then to me. As his father looked in my direction, obviously to see my ears wiggle, I sat solemnly with my arms folded, not moving a muscle. The father glanced back skeptically at his son, who looked slightly defeated. He finally gave me a sheepish grin and shrugged his shoulders.

I have thought about that experience over the years as I've contemplated how, particularly when we're young, we tend to imitate the example of our parents, our leaders, our peers. The prophet Brigham Young said: "We should never permit ourselves to do anything that we are not willing to see our children do. We should set them an example that we wish them to imitate."

NARRATOR: **President Monson suggested the importance of being a good example to our children. But it is not just for our children. Those around us notice the little things**

we do each day whether by our actions, or our words. President Boyd K. Packer shared a personal story in the April 1997, Saturday Morning Session of conference which reminds us that people are watching.

(President Boyd K. Packer, Saturday Morning Session, April 1997)

“More than 50 years ago during World War II, I had an experience. Our bomber crew had been trained at Langley Field, Virginia, to use the latest invention--radar. We were ordered to the West Coast and then on to the Pacific.

We were transported on a freight train with boxcars fitted with narrow bedsprings that could be pulled down from the wall at night. There were no dining cars. Instead, camp kitchens were set up in boxcars with dirt floors.

We were dressed in light-colored summer uniforms. The baggage car got sidetracked, so we had no change of clothing during the six-day trip. It was very hot crossing Texas and Arizona. Smoke and cinders from the engine made it very uncomfortable. There was no way to bathe or wash our uniforms. We rolled into Los Angeles one morning--a grubby-looking outfit--and were told to return to the train that evening.

We thought first of food. The 10 of us in our crew pooled our money and headed for the best restaurant we could find.

It was crowded, and so we joined a long line waiting to be seated. I was first, just behind some well-dressed women. Even without turning around, the stately woman in front of me soon became aware that we were there.

She turned and looked at us. Then she turned and looked me over from head to toe. There I stood in that sweaty, dirty, sooty, wrinkled uniform. She said in a tone of disgust, "My, what untidy men!" All eyes turned to us.

No doubt she wished we were not there; I shared her wish. I felt as dirty as I was, uncomfortable, and ashamed.

Later, when I began a serious study of the scriptures, I noticed references to being spiritually clean. One verse says, "Ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell."

I could understand that. I remembered how I felt that day in Los Angeles. I reasoned that to be spiritually unclean would bring shame and humiliation immeasurably more intense than I felt then. I found references--there are at least eight of them--which say that no unclean thing can enter the presence of God. While I realized those references had little to do with dirty clothes or soiled hands, I decided I wanted to stay spiritually clean.”

NARRATOR:

Everyone learns from the example of others. Elder William D. Oswald, in the Sunday Afternoon session of the October 2008 General Conference, shared the following story about the influence of an example in his own life.

(Elder William D. Oswald, Sunday Afternoon Session, October 2008)

Recently Sister Oswald and I decided to teach our five-year-old twin granddaughters how to jump the rope. Jumping the rope is a children's game in which participants jump over a rope as it passes under their feet and then over their heads. After receiving some simple instructions, both girls tried but failed on several attempts.

Just as we were ready to give up, two older neighbor children walked by, and we enlisted their help. Both of the neighbor girls were experienced rope jumpers and were able to show our granddaughters how to jump the rope. As they jumped the rope, I noticed that the neighbor girls sang a song that helped them jump to the rhythm of the swinging rope.

Once our granddaughters understood the principles of rope jumping and were shown how to jump the rope, the rest of the lesson was easy. With a little practice, both of the twins were well on their way to mastering the fundamentals of rope jumping.

During the rope-jumping lesson, another granddaughter, only three years old, was sitting quietly on the lawn observing. When someone asked her if she wanted to try to jump the rope, she nodded, came forward, and stood next to the rope. As we turned the rope, to our great surprise she jumped just as she had seen her sisters do. She jumped once, then twice, and then again and again, repeating aloud the same song the older children had sung.

All three granddaughters had observed that there was an art to jumping the rope. It was a simple thing that all of them could do after learning a few basic principles and being shown how. So it is with gospel teaching. When we learn a few fundamental principles about teaching and are shown how to teach, all of us can do it.

NARRATOR:

The girls learned to jump rope from the example and teachings of others. Likewise, people notice when we live principles of the gospel. Following are three stories that portray the effects of being a good example. Sister Carol B. Thomas shared the first story in the April 2001, Sunday Morning Session of General Conference.

(Sister Carol B. Thomas, Sunday Morning Session, April 2001)

My grandfather Isaac Jacob was a great example to me. Grandpa was a sheep rancher who sent four sons on missions. During the Depression, it became my mother's opportunity to serve, and she received her call to Canada.

Grandpa's situation became critical when he was called in by his bank and asked just what was the \$50 a month going out for Mom's mission. He had taken out a loan and was paying a high rate of 12 percent interest. The bankers were not satisfied and told him to bring Mom home from her mission.

The following day Grandpa gave his answer: "If that girl comes home, the sheep are yours—and I'll bring them right up to your door." This caught the bankers by surprise. They were already using Grandpa to care for other sheep outfits which they had acquired, and they would have no one else to take care of all those sheep. Mom completed her mission, and Grandpa's example taught his family the importance of sacrifice.

NARRATOR: Elder Quentin L. Cook shared another example in the October 2003, Sunday Afternoon Session of General Conference.

(Elder Quentin L. Cook, Sunday Afternoon Session, October 2003)

A number of years ago I was in Atlanta, Georgia, as an attorney representing a man who was buying a business. After several days of negotiations we reached an agreement and signed the closing documents. That evening one of the sellers invited us to a dinner to celebrate the closing. When I arrived, he offered me an alcoholic drink, which I declined. He then said, "Are you a Saint?" I didn't fully understand what he meant, and he repeated, "Are you a Latter-day Saint?" I responded, "Yes, I am," and he said he had been observing my personal habits during our negotiations and had concluded that I was either LDS or had a stomach problem. We both chuckled. He then informed me that he had only known one member of the Church on a personal basis, David B. Haight. They were both executives in Chicago with a large retail chain following World War II. He told me of the significant influence Elder Haight had been in his life and that he held him in the highest regard.

As I flew back home to San Francisco, I thought about what had occurred, especially in two respects: I was surprised at how it felt to be asked if I was a Saint, and I was impressed with the positive influence one outstanding example—Elder Haight—had on this good man.

NARRATOR: President James E. Faust recounted another story of example in the Saturday morning session of the October 2005 General Conference.

(President James E. Faust, Saturday Morning Session, October 2005)

Some years ago, Constance, a student nurse, was assigned to try and help a woman who had injured her leg in an accident. The woman refused medical help because she had had a negative experience with someone at the hospital. She was afraid and had become

something of a recluse. The first time Constance dropped by, the injured woman ordered her out. On the second try, she did let Constance in. By now the woman's leg was covered with large ulcers, and some of the flesh was rotting. But still she didn't want to be treated.

Constance made it a matter of prayer, and in a day or two the answer came. She took some foaming hydrogen peroxide with her for the next visit. As this was painless, the old woman let her use it on her leg. Then they talked about more serious treatment at the hospital. Constance assured her the hospital would make her stay as pleasant as possible. In a day or two the woman did get the courage to enter the hospital. When Constance visited her, the woman smiled as she said, "You convinced me." Then, quite unexpectedly, she asked Constance, "What church do you belong to?" Constance told her she was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The woman said: "I knew it. I knew you were sent to me from the first day that I saw you. There was a light in your face that I had noticed in others of your faith. I had to put my trust in you."

In three months' time that festering leg was completely healed. Members of the ward where the old woman lived remodeled her house and fixed up her yard. The missionaries met with her, and she was baptized soon after. All of this because she noticed the light in that young student nurse's face.

NARRATOR: There are many things we can do to be good examples. This includes serving others. President Thomas S. Monson, in the April 2004 Saturday Morning Session, shared a personal experience from his boyhood about an example set by a memorable teacher in his life.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2004)

When I was a boy, our family lived in the Sixth-Seventh Ward of the Pioneer Stake. The ward population was rather transient, which resulted in an accelerated rate of turnover with respect to the teachers in the Sunday School. As boys and girls we would just become acquainted with a particular teacher and grow to appreciate him or her when the Sunday School superintendent would visit the class and introduce a new teacher. Disappointment filled each heart, and a breakdown of discipline resulted.

Prospective teachers, hearing of the unsavory reputation of our particular class, would graciously decline to serve or suggest the possibility of teaching a different class where the students were more manageable. We took delight in our newly found status and determined to live up to the fears of the faculty.

One Sunday morning, a lovely young lady accompanied the superintendent into the classroom and was presented to us as a teacher who requested the opportunity to teach us. We learned that she had been a missionary and loved young people. Her name was Lucy Gertsch. She was beautiful, soft-spoken, and interested in us. She asked each class member to introduce himself, and then she asked questions which gave her an

understanding and insight into the background of each. She told us of her girlhood in Midway, Utah, and as she described that beautiful valley she made its beauty live within us and we desired to visit the green fields she loved so much.

When Lucy taught, she made the scriptures actually live. We became personally acquainted with Samuel, David, Jacob, Nephi, Joseph Smith, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Our gospel scholarship grew. Our deportment improved. Our love for Lucy Gertsch knew no bounds.

We undertook a project to save nickels and dimes for what was to be a gigantic Christmas party. Sister Gertsch kept a careful record of our progress. As boys with typical appetites we converted in our minds the monetary totals to cakes, cookies, pies, and ice cream. This was to be a glorious event. Never before had any of our teachers even suggested a social event like this was to be.

The summer months faded into autumn. Autumn turned to winter. Our party goal had been achieved. The class had grown. A good spirit prevailed.

None of us will forget that gray morning when our beloved teacher announced to us that the mother of one of our classmates had passed away. We thought of our own mothers and how much they meant to us. We felt sincere sorrow for Billy Devenport in his great loss.

The lesson this Sunday was from the book of Acts, chapter 20, verse 35: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." At the conclusion of the presentation of a well-prepared lesson, Lucy Gertsch commented on the economic situation of Billy's family. These were Depression times, and money was scarce. With a twinkle in her eyes, she asked: "How would you like to follow this teaching of our Lord? How would you feel about taking our party fund and, as a class, giving it to the Devenports as an expression of our love?" The decision was unanimous. We counted so carefully each penny and placed the total sum in a large envelope. A beautiful card was purchased and inscribed with our names.

This simple act of kindness welded us together as one. We learned through our own experience that it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive.

The years have flown. The old chapel is gone, a victim of industrialization. The boys and girls who learned, who laughed, who grew under the direction of that inspired teacher of truth have never forgotten her love or her lessons. Her personal influence for good was contagious.

NARRATOR: The example of one can bring blessings for many. Elder Earl C. Tingey shared a story in the April 2004 Priesthood Session which illustrates how the example of members of the church opened doors for missionary service.

(Elder Earl C. Tingey, Priesthood Session, April 2004)

In the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, the following standards, among others, are like a North Star to you: choose friends with high standards, do not disfigure your body with tattoos or body piercings, avoid pornography, do not listen to music that contains offensive language, do not use profanity, date only those who have high standards, remain sexually pure, repent as necessary, be honest, keep the Sabbath day holy, pay tithing, keep the Word of Wisdom.

A dozen years ago, in one of the countries of Africa, we had faithful members of the Church who had been meeting in their homes for several years. I went to that country to see if we could receive permission from the government to bring in missionaries and establish the Church. I met with a high-ranking government minister. He gave me 20 minutes to explain our position.

When I finished he said, "I do not see where anything you have told me is any different from what is currently available in our country. I see no reason to approve your request to bring missionaries into our country."

He stood up to usher me out of his office. I was panic-stricken. I had failed. In a moment our meeting would be over. What could I do? I offered a silent prayer.

Then I had an inspired thought. I said to the minister, "Sir, if you will give me five more minutes, I would like to share one other thought with you. Then I will leave." He kindly consented.

I reached for my wallet and removed this small *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, which I have always carried.

I said, "This is a little booklet of standards we give all of the youth in our Church."

I then read some of the standards I have mentioned tonight. When I finished he said, "You mean to tell me you expect the youth of your church to live these standards?"

"Yes," I replied, "and they do."

"That is amazing," he said. "Could you send me some of these booklets so that I could distribute them to the youth of my church?"

I replied, "Yes," and I did.

Several months later we received official approval from the government of that country to come and establish the Church.

Young men, these standards you are privileged to keep are truly a pearl of great price. The world does not understand them. Many good people seek them. You have them.

NARRATOR: **Mary N. Cook, in the October 2007 Saturday Morning session of General Conference, related an example of her brother that had an eternal impact on her.**

(Mary N. Cook, Saturday Morning Session, October 2007)

Let me tell you an experience from my own life and how my brother's patterns of righteousness and example resulted in our family being blessed eternally.

My brother and I were "born of goodly parents" (1 Nephi 1:1) who loved and made great sacrifices for the two of us, but our family had not been blessed with the sacred ordinances of the temple.

Many years ago on a day in late December, we received a letter from my brother, who was serving in the California North Mission. The outside of the envelope cautioned, "*Do not open until you are all together!!*"

As my father, mother, and I gathered to open his seven-page typewritten letter, we read his testimony of prayer. He taught us the doctrine of eternal families from the scriptures. We read his experiences of how fasting and prayer helped his investigators prepare to receive the ordinance of baptism. He assured us that our family too could be blessed through fasting and prayer. Then came his challenge: "The bishop of the Stanford Ward spoke on a topic a couple of months ago which really hit home. . . . The bishop's talk made me stop and realize the goals I want to accomplish in life. Uppermost in my mind is the goal I want to achieve with my own family . . . that, of course, being sealed to you, Mom and Dad, for time and all eternity in the house of the Lord. I love you very much and want our family to be together in the eternities."

Then his closing words: "May the Lord guide you in this important decision and may you pray together as a family is my prayer."

As a teenager, I too had prayed for this blessing to come to my family. This letter now brought hope for my righteous desire.

The new year was an opportunity for our family to make some changes. In the many months that followed, we established family patterns of righteousness. We prayed together, studied about the ordinances of the temple, paid tithing, and attended our meetings regularly—as a family. Shortly after my brother returned from his mission, we were prepared to receive the ordinances of the temple. I knew the Lord had heard and answered our prayers as we surrounded the holy altar in the temple and were sealed as a family for time and all eternity.

Can you make a difference in your family? Yes, you can! I often wonder about my family's eternal progression if my brother had not written that powerful letter. His patterns of righteousness and example changed our lives.

NARRATOR: We can change lives by simply being a good example. Elder Henry B. Eyring, in the October 2007 Priesthood Session, shared a personal experience which illustrates that members of the church everywhere are making a difference by being an example.

(President Henry B. Eyring, Priesthood Session, October 2007)

Another time, I was sent to speak to leaders of churches in the United States and ministers of those churches who had met in Minneapolis to deal with the problem of competition among churches.

When I arrived, I found that I was assigned to be a speaker. My subject was to be: Why there was a need for a restoration of the true Church through Joseph Smith. I was a last-minute substitute for Elder Neal A. Maxwell.

When I arrived in the city the night before the meetings and looked at the program, I called President Hinckley. I told him that the meetings were to last three days, that many talks were to be given at the same time, that the crowd could choose which one to attend. I told him that I thought if I told the truth, I feared that no one would come to my second session and that I might be coming home very quickly. I asked him what he thought I should do. He said, “Use your best judgment.”

I prayed through the night. Somewhere near dawn, I was sure I was to say about the Restoration not, “This is what we believe happened to Joseph Smith and why we believe it happened,” but, “This is what happened to Joseph Smith, and this is why the Lord did it.” In the nighttime I was given no assurance of the outcome, just a clear direction—go forward.

To my amazement, after my talk the ministers lined up to speak to me. Every one of them, one after another coming to me, told essentially the same story. Each of them had met a member of the Church somewhere in their lives that they admired. Many of them said that they lived in a community where the stake president had come to the aid of not just his members but of the community in a disaster. They asked if I could take back their greeting and their thanks to people I not only didn’t know but had no hope of ever meeting.

By the end of the three days of meetings, larger and larger crowds were coming to hear the message of the Restoration of the gospel and the true Church of Jesus Christ not because they believed the message but because they had seen goodness in people’s lives—the fruits of that restoration.

NARRATOR: **This has been “Stories from General Conference” on the topic of “example”. May we choose to follow the example of the Savior, which will bless our lives as well as those around us. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel.**