

Episode 21

Stories from General Conference

SACRIFICE, VOL 2

NARRATOR: Sacrifice, Volume 2 is the topic of this episode of “Stories from General Conference.” This is the Mormon Channel.

What does it really mean to sacrifice? There are many ways each of us have or *could* be asked to sacrifice. Sacrifices are often not easy, but as we are willing to give up something great, we will receive something even greater in return.

The scriptures teach us one of the most important sacrifices we can offer to God is a broken heart and contrite spirit. This means we must be willing to do everything God asks of us.

In the October 1997 General Conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks related a story about a group of boys in the early days of the Church who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice if necessary.

(Elder Dallin H. Oaks, Sunday Afternoon Session, October 1997)

“Here I recall a pioneer example of faith, commitment, and courage by some young men just about the age of our missionaries. A few months before the Prophet Joseph Smith was murdered at Carthage, some of his enemies plotted to kill him. As part of their plan, they sought to enlist others in their conspiracy. Among those they invited to a meeting in Nauvoo were two young men still in their teens, Robert Scott and Dennison L. Harris. Dennison's father, Emer, was the older brother of Martin Harris, one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Being loyal to the Prophet, these young men immediately reported the invitation to Dennison's father, who advised the Prophet Joseph and sought his advice. Joseph asked Emer Harris to request that the young men attend the meeting, pay strict attention to what was said, make no commitments, and report the entire matter to the Prophet.

As events proceeded, there were three meetings. They began by denouncing Joseph as a fallen prophet, proceeded to considering how Joseph could be overthrown, and concluded with specific planning to kill him. All of this the two young men reported to the Prophet Joseph after each meeting.

Before the third meeting, the Prophet foresaw what would happen and told the young men this would be the last meeting. He warned them that the conspirators might kill them

when they refused the required oath to participate in the murderous scheme. He said he did not think the conspirators would shed their blood because they were so young, but he called upon their loyalty and courage in these words: "Don't flinch. If you have to die, die like men, you will be martyrs to the cause, and your crowns can be no greater." He renewed his original caution that they should not make any promises or enter into any covenants with the conspirators. Then he blessed them and expressed his love for their willingness to risk their lives for him.

As Joseph had foreseen, the third and final meeting required all present to unite in a solemn oath to destroy Joseph Smith. When the two boys refused, explaining that Joseph had never harmed them and they were unwilling to participate in his destruction, the leaders declared that since the boys knew the group's plans, they must agree to join them or they must die on the spot. Knives were drawn.

Some protested killing the boys, especially since their parents knew of their presence, so their failure to return would cast suspicion on some of the conspirators. By the barest margin, the cautious course was chosen, and those who opposed killing prevailed. The boys were threatened with certain death if they ever revealed what had transpired in the meetings or who had participated, and they were then allowed to leave unharmed.

As the boys passed beyond the view of the guards, they were met by the Prophet, who was anxiously watching and praying for their safe return. They reported everything to him. He thanked and praised them, and then, for their safety, counseled them not to speak of this to anyone for 20 years or more.

The faith, commitment, and courage of these young men is an example to all of us.”

NARRATOR: No matter what our sacrifice, they make a difference for others. In the Priesthood session of the October 2001 General Conference, Elder Steven E. Snow shared a historical account about a group of Latter-day Saints whose sacrifices were made through enduring hardships.

(Elder Steven E. Snow, Priesthood Session, October 2001)

In October of 1879 a group of 237 Latter-day Saints from several small southwestern Utah settlements was called to blaze a new route and colonize what is today known as San Juan County in southeastern Utah. The journey was to have taken six weeks but instead took nearly six months. Their struggles and heroics are well documented, particularly their seemingly impossible task of crossing the Colorado River at a place called Hole-in-the-Rock. Those who have visited this place marvel that wagons and teams could have been lowered through this narrow crack in the red rock canyon walls to reach the Colorado River far below. Once the Colorado was crossed, however, many other severe tests awaited them on the trail to San Juan County. Tired and worn out, early in April 1880 they faced their final obstacle, Comb Ridge. The Comb is a ridge of solid sandstone forming a steep wall nearly 1,000 feet high.

One hundred and twenty years later, our family climbed Comb Ridge on a bright spring day. The ridge is steep and treacherous. It was difficult to imagine that wagons, teams, men, women, and children could make such an ascent. But beneath our feet were the scars from the wagon wheels, left as evidence of their struggles so long ago. How did they feel after enduring so much? Were they bitter after the many months of toil and privation? Did they criticize their leaders for sending them on such an arduous journey, asking them to give up so much? Our questions were answered as we reached the top of Comb Ridge. There inscribed in the red sandstone so long ago were the words, "We thank Thee, O God."

NARRATOR: Heavenly Father will help us endure sacrifices. Sometimes the sacrifices we are asked to make may not seem worth the effort. In the Priesthood session of the April 1994 General Conference, Elder Richard P. Lindsay shared a personal story illustrating how this lesson was learned in a difficult manner.

(Elder Richard P. Lindsay, Priesthood Session, April 1994)

Since recently returning from a three-year Church assignment in Africa and becoming reacquainted with our twenty-three grandchildren, Sister Lindsay and I have often been requested on such visits to tell these grandchildren a bedtime story that is, first, true; second, exciting; and third, one they have never heard before. All you grandpas here tonight can understand the challenge which such a request represents. One such true story did come to my mind, however, as we visited recently in the home of a son and his wife who live in a midwestern city with their five children, including three bearers of the Aaronic Priesthood, a priest, teacher, and a deacon. This story concerned their own father when he was a six-year-old boy.

I grew up in rural Salt Lake County when it was an economic necessity to care for a variety of barnyard animals. My favorite animals were sheep—prompted perhaps by the fact that sheep do not require being milked twice a day, seven days a week.

I wanted our own sons to have the blessing of being shepherds to such farm animals. Our older sons were each provided with a ewe to teach them the responsibility of caring for these sheep and the lambs that would hopefully follow.

Our second son, newly turned six years of age, called me excitedly at my office one cold March morning on the phone and said, "Daddy, guess what? Esther [Esther was his mother ewe]—Esther has just had two baby lambs. Please come home and help me take care of them." I instructed Gordon to watch the lambs carefully and make sure they received the mother's milk and they would be fine. I was interrupted by a second phone call later in the morning with the same little voice on the other end saying, "Daddy, these lambs aren't doing very well. They haven't been able to get milk from the mother, and they are very cold. Please come home."

My response likely reflected some of the distress I felt by being distracted from my busy work schedule. I responded, “Gordon, the lambs will be all right. You just watch them, and when Daddy comes home we will make sure they get mother’s milk and everything will be fine.” Again, later in the afternoon I received a third, more urgent call. Now the voice on the other end was pleading. “Daddy, you’ve got to come home now. Those lambs are lying down, and one of them looks very cold.” Despite work pressures, I now felt some real concern and tried to reassure the six-year-old owner of the mother sheep by saying, “Gordon, bring the lambs into the house. Rub them with a gunnysack to make them warm. When Daddy comes home in a little while, we will milk the mother, feed the lambs, and they will be fine.”

Two hours later I drove into the driveway of our home and was met by a boy with tear-stained eyes, carrying a dead lamb in his arms. His grief was overwhelming. Now I tried to make amends by quickly milking the mother sheep and trying to force the milk from a bottle down the throat of the now weak, surviving lamb. At this point, Gordon walked out of the room and came back with a hopeful look in his eyes. He said, “Daddy, I’ve prayed that we will be able to save this lamb, and I feel it will be all right.”

The sad note to this story, brethren, is that within a few minutes the second lamb was dead. Then with a look that I will remember forever, this little six-year-old boy who had lost both of his lambs looked up into his father’s face and with tears running down his cheeks said, “Daddy, if you had come home when I first called you, we could have saved them both.”

Dear brethren of the priesthood, those who are entrusted as keepers of the Lord’s precious flock—we must be there with the lambs when we are needed.

NARRATOR: Our Heavenly Father needs each of us to be obedient and willing to sacrifice. In the October 2003 General Conference, Sister Anne C. Pingree related an experience she had in Africa about two women who were willing obey and sacrifice even when no immediate reward was possible.

(Sister Anne C. Pingree, Saturday Morning Session, October 2003)

I will never forget a sauna-hot day in the lush rain forest of southeastern Nigeria. My husband and I had traveled to one of the most remote locations in our mission so he could conduct temple recommend interviews with members in the Ikot Eyo district. Some in this growing district had been Church members less than two years. All the members lived 3,000 miles away from the nearest temple in Johannesburg, South Africa. None had received their temple endowment.

These members knew the appointed day each month we would come to their district, but even we didn’t know the exact hour we would arrive; nor could we call, for telephones were rare in that part of West Africa. So these committed African Saints gathered early in the morning to wait all day if necessary for their temple recommend interviews. When we

arrived, I noticed among those waiting in the searing heat were two Relief Society sisters dressed in bold-patterned wrappers, white blouses, and the traditional African head-ties.

Many hours later, after all the interviews were completed, as my husband and I drove back along that sandy jungle trail, we were stunned when we saw these two sisters still walking. We realized they had trekked from their village—a distance of 18 miles round trip—just to obtain a temple recommend they knew they would never have the privilege of using.

These Nigerian Saints believed the counsel of President Howard W. Hunter: "It would please the Lord for every adult member to be worthy of—and to carry—a current temple recommend, even if proximity to a temple does not allow immediate or frequent use of it." In her hand, carefully wrapped in a clean handkerchief, each sister carried her precious temple recommend. I carry their examples of faith carefully wrapped in my heart.

NARRATOR: These women made a sacrifice by simply being obedient. We don't know the end of this story, but we are taught in Alma 37:6, "by small and simple things are great things brought to pass;"

Sacrifices can be caused by circumstances out of our control. If proper priorities are set, it can diminish the impact of the sacrifice. This was illustrated in the April 2009 General Conference in an account given by Elder D. Todd Christofferson.

(Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2009)

On August 15, 2007, Peru suffered a massive earthquake that all but destroyed the coastal cities of Pisco and Chincha. Like many other Church leaders and members, Wenceslao Conde, the president of the Balconcito Branch of the Church in Chincha, immediately set about helping others whose homes were damaged.

Four days after the earthquake, Elder Marcus B. Nash of the Seventy was in Chincha helping to coordinate the Church's relief efforts there and met President Conde. As they talked about the destruction that had occurred and what was being done to help the victims, President Conde's wife, Pamela, approached carrying one of her small children. Elder Nash asked Sister Conde how her children were. With a smile, she replied that through the goodness of God they were all safe and well. He asked about the Condes' home.

"It's gone," she said simply.

"What about your belongings?" he inquired.

"Everything was buried in the rubble of our home," Sister Conde replied.

"And yet," Elder Nash noted, "you are smiling as we talk."

“Yes,” she said, “I have prayed and I am at peace. We have all we need. We have each other, we have our children, we are sealed in the temple, we have this marvelous Church, and we have the Lord. We can build again with the Lord’s help.”

NARRATOR: This is the eternal perspective we should all try to obtain. Sister Conde knew what’s really important in this life.

The sacrifice of worldly things tends to bring us closer to God and can provide valuable insight into what is really important. Elder Robert D. Hales, in the April 2009 General Conference, shared a story from his own life about this principle.

(Elder Robert D. Hales, Saturday Morning Session, April 2009)

The first lesson was learned when we were newly married and had very little money. I was in the air force, and we had missed Christmas together. I was on assignment overseas. When I got home, I saw a beautiful dress in a store window and suggested to my wife that if she liked it, we would buy it. Mary went into the dressing room of the store. After a moment the salesclerk came out, brushed by me, and returned the dress to its place in the store window. As we left the store, I asked, “What happened?” She replied, “It was a beautiful dress, but *we can’t afford it!*” Those words went straight to my heart. I have learned that the three most loving words are “I love you,” and the four most caring words for those we love are “We can’t afford it.”

The second lesson was learned several years later when we were more financially secure. Our wedding anniversary was approaching, and I wanted to buy Mary a fancy coat to show my love and appreciation for our many happy years together. When I asked what she thought of the coat I had in mind, she replied with words that again penetrated my heart and mind. “Where would I wear it?” she asked. (At the time she was a ward Relief Society president helping to minister to needy families.)

Then she taught me an unforgettable lesson. She looked me in the eyes and sweetly asked, “Are you buying this for me or for you?” In other words, she was asking, “Is the purpose of this gift to show your love for me or to show me that you are a good provider or to prove something to the world?” I pondered her question and realized I was thinking less about her and our family and more about me.

After that we had a serious, life-changing discussion about provident living, and both of us agreed that our money would be better spent in paying down our home mortgage and adding to our children’s education fund.

These two lessons are the essence of provident living. When faced with the choice to buy, consume, or engage in worldly things and activities, we all need to learn to say to one another, “We *can’t* afford it, even though we want it!” or “We *can* afford it, but we don’t *need* it—and we really don’t even want it!”

NARRATOR: **What may at first seem like a sacrifice may become a great blessing in the future.**

One commandment the Lord has given us that may require considerable sacrifice is the law of tithing, but we are promised abundant blessings by obeying this ancient law. In the October 1998 General Conference, President James E. Faust shared a lesson of sacrifice he learned through his grandfather's example in obeying the law of tithing.

(President James E. Faust, Sunday Morning Session, October 1998)

I wish to speak about opening the windows of heaven. As a boy I learned a great lesson of faith and sacrifice as I worked on my grandfather's farm during the terrible economic depression of the 1930s. The taxes on the farm were delinquent, and Grandfather, like so many, had no money. There was a drought in the land, and some cows and horses were dying for lack of grass and hay. One day when we were harvesting what little hay there was in the field, Grandfather told us to take the wagon to the corner of the field where the best stand of hay stood and fill the wagon as full as we could and take it to the tithing yard as payment of his tithing in kind.

I wondered how Grandfather could use the hay to pay tithing when some of the cows that we were depending upon to sustain us might starve. I even questioned if the Lord expected that much sacrifice from him. Ultimately, I marveled at his great faith that somehow the Lord would provide. The legacy of faith he passed on to his posterity was far greater than money, because he established in the minds of his children and grandchildren that above all he loved the Lord and His holy work over other earthly things. He never became wealthy, but he died at peace with the Lord and with himself.

NARRATOR: **Often the blessings that follow our obedience to a commandment are not something we can physically touch or see. They usually are not what we expect or may not come in what we consider a timely manner. As we look back on our lives we will see that God knows best.**

We all will be asked to endure many trials in this life that may seem unfair and require great sacrifices. In the April 2009 General Conference, President Thomas S. Monson shared a story about his great-grandparents who were a great example of enduring sacrifices during hard times.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Sunday Morning Session, April 2009)

My maternal great-grandparents Gibson and Cecelia Sharp Condie lived in Clackmannan, Scotland. Their families were engaged in coal mining. They were at peace with the world, surrounded by relatives and friends, and were housed in fairly comfortable

quarters in a land they loved. Then they listened to the message of the missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and, to the depths of their very souls, were converted. They heard the call to gather to Zion and knew they must answer that call.

Sometime around 1848, they sold their possessions and prepared for the hazardous voyage across the mighty Atlantic Ocean. With five small children, they boarded a sailing vessel, all their worldly possessions in one tiny trunk. They traveled 3,000 miles (4,800 km) across the waters—eight long, weary weeks on a treacherous sea, watching and waiting, with poor food, poor water, and no help beyond the length and breadth of that small ship.

In the midst of this soul-trying situation, one of their young sons became ill. There were no doctors, no stores at which they might purchase medicine to ease his suffering. They watched, they prayed, they waited, and they wept as day by day his condition deteriorated. When his eyes were at last closed in death, their hearts were torn asunder. To add to their grief, the laws of the sea must be obeyed. Wrapped in a canvas weighed down with iron, the little body was consigned to a watery grave. As they sailed away, only those parents knew the crushing blow dealt to wounded hearts. However, with a faith born of their deep conviction of the truth and their love of the Lord, Gibson and Cecelia held on. They were comforted by the words of the Lord: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

NARRATOR: The Savior made the ultimate sacrifice for each of us, and can understand how we feel when called on to make sacrifices. During the April 2009 General Conference, President Thomas S. Monson shared a poignant story about a woman who sacrificed a great deal, and through it all remained strong in her faith.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Sunday Morning Session, April 2009)

In about March 1946, less than a year after the end of the war, Ezra Taft Benson, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, accompanied by Frederick W. Babbel, was assigned a special postwar tour of Europe for the express purpose of meeting with the Saints, assessing their needs, and providing assistance to them. Elder Benson and Brother Babbel later recounted, from a testimony they heard, the experience of a Church member who found herself in an area no longer controlled by the government under which she had resided.

She and her husband had lived an idyllic life in East Prussia. Then had come the second great world war within their lifetimes. Her beloved young husband was killed during the final days of the frightful battles in their homeland, leaving her alone to care for their four children.

The occupying forces determined that the Germans in East Prussia must go to Western Germany to seek a new home. The woman was German, and so it was necessary for her

to go. The journey was over a thousand miles (1,600 km), and she had no way to accomplish it but on foot. She was allowed to take only such bare necessities as she could load into her small wooden-wheeled wagon. Besides her children and these meager possessions, she took with her a strong faith in God and in the gospel as revealed to the latter-day prophet Joseph Smith.

She and the children began the journey in late summer. Having neither food nor money among her few possessions, she was forced to gather a daily subsistence from the fields and forests along the way. She was constantly faced with dangers from panic-stricken refugees and plundering troops.

As the days turned into weeks and the weeks to months, the temperatures dropped below freezing. Each day, she stumbled over the frozen ground, her smallest child—a baby—in her arms. Her three other children struggled along behind her, with the oldest—seven years old—pulling the tiny wooden wagon containing their belongings. Ragged and torn burlap was wrapped around their feet, providing the only protection for them, since their shoes had long since disintegrated. Their thin, tattered jackets covered their thin, tattered clothing, providing their only protection against the cold.

Soon the snows came, and the days and nights became a nightmare. In the evenings she and the children would try to find some kind of shelter—a barn or a shed—and would huddle together for warmth, with a few thin blankets from the wagon on top of them.

She constantly struggled to force from her mind overwhelming fears that they would perish before reaching their destination.

And then one morning the unthinkable happened. As she awakened, she felt a chill in her heart. The tiny form of her three-year-old daughter was cold and still, and she realized that death had claimed the child. Though overwhelmed with grief, she knew that she must take the other children and travel on. First, however, she used the only implement she had—a tablespoon—to dig a grave in the frozen ground for her tiny, precious child.

Death, however, was to be her companion again and again on the journey. Her seven-year-old son died, either from starvation or from freezing or both. Again her only shovel was the tablespoon, and again she dug hour after hour to lay his mortal remains gently into the earth. Next, her five-year-old son died, and again she used her tablespoon as a shovel.

Her despair was all consuming. She had only her tiny baby daughter left, and the poor thing was failing. Finally, as she was reaching the end of her journey, the baby died in her arms. The spoon was gone now, so hour after hour she dug a grave in the frozen earth with her bare fingers. Her grief became unbearable. How could she possibly be kneeling in the snow at the graveside of her last child? She had lost her husband and all her children. She had given up her earthly goods, her home, and even her homeland.

In this moment of overwhelming sorrow and complete bewilderment, she felt her heart would literally break. In despair she contemplated how she might end her own life, as so many of her fellow countrymen were doing. How easy it would be to jump off a nearby bridge, she thought, or to throw herself in front of an oncoming train.

And then, as these thoughts assailed her, something within her said, “Get down on your knees and pray.” She ignored the prompting until she could resist it no longer. She knelt and prayed more fervently than she had in her entire life:

“Dear Heavenly Father, I do not know how I can go on. I have nothing left—except my faith in Thee. I feel, Father, amidst the desolation of my soul, an overwhelming gratitude for the atoning sacrifice of Thy Son, Jesus Christ. I cannot express adequately my love for Him. I know that because He suffered and died, I shall live again with my family; that because He broke the chains of death, I shall see my children again and will have the joy of raising them. Though I do not at this moment wish to live, I will do so, that we may be reunited as a family and return—together—to Thee.”

When she finally reached her destination of Karlsruhe, Germany, she was emaciated. Brother Babbel said that her face was a purple-gray, her eyes red and swollen, her joints protruding. She was literally in the advanced stages of starvation. In a Church meeting shortly thereafter, she bore a glorious testimony, stating that of all the ailing people in her saddened land, she was one of the happiest because she knew that God lived, that Jesus is the Christ, and that He died and was resurrected so that we might live again. She testified that she knew if she continued faithful and true to the end, she would be reunited with those she had lost and would be saved in the celestial kingdom of God.

NARRATOR:

There is nothing more sustaining in time of need than the joy that comes from our conviction that the Savior lives and gave the ultimate sacrifice through his Atonement. He provided a way for each of us to have the opportunity to return to live with Heavenly Father. With that perspective, our sacrifices become small in the eternal scheme of things.

This has been “Stories from General Conference” on the topic of sacrifice, Volume 2. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel.

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