

Episode 30

Stories from General Conference SERVICE THROUGH CALLINGS

NARRATOR: The words to a popular Latter-day Saint hymn, “Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel” declare...*The Church has need of helping hands, and hearts that know and feel. The work to do is here for you.* And indeed it is. The work of the Lord is lifting, helping, encouraging, and serving his children. This episode of “Stories from General Conference” is about accepting and serving faithfully in callings -- here on the Mormon Channel.

In the context of the Church, “callings” refer to inspired assignments made by leaders of local Church organizations. Elder Dallin H. Oaks shared a humorous story in the April 1997 General Conference that illustrates even the youngest church-attenders are aware of the help available from those who are called to serve.

(Elder Dallin H. Oaks, Saturday Afternoon Session, April 1997)

“My brothers and sisters, I begin by sharing an event from a large ward in Provo about 20 years ago. During a sacrament meeting, a little boy made a big disturbance. After several minutes of trying to quiet this noisy three-year-old, the mother desperately handed him to the father, who was seated on the aisle close to the front of the chapel. By this time the noise distracted the speaker and audience, and everyone was very conscious of the parents' plight. The father's patience was much shorter than the mother's. In a few moments he put the little boy over his shoulder, stood up, and started for the back door. Looking back over his father's shoulder and sensing his determined steps, the little boy became quiet and apprehensive. Just as the father approached the rear door of the chapel, the little fellow reached his arms out toward the stand and shouted, “Bishop, help!”

There are times in the lives of all of us when we must reach out to our bishop or his counselors for help. Perhaps we need inspired counsel and direction to help with our families or our occupations. Perhaps we seek increased understanding of the gospel or the duties of our callings. We may need temporal assistance in a time of stress. We may even reach out for discipline to assist us in getting back on the path of growth. Always we benefit from their stalwart examples. Thank heaven for faithful and inspired bishops and branch presidents and their counselors!”

NARRATOR: **As we serve faithfully, regardless of our calling, we can come to know and emulate the Savior as well as deepen our love for Him and for others. As we strive to bless the lives of those around us, our own lives are blessed. In General Conference of**

April 2009, Bishop Richard C. Edgley, first counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, told two stories about men who benefitted from service rendered in their priesthood quorums, one from *giving* service and one from *receiving* it.

(Bishop Richard C. Edgley, Priesthood Session, April 2009)

President Monson tells the story of a retired executive named Ed who lived the example of a quorum member. On one occasion President Monson was speaking with Ed and asked him, “Ed, what are you doing in the Church?” He replied, “I have the best assignment in the ward. My responsibility is to help men who are unemployed find permanent employment. This year I have helped 12 of my brethren who were out of work to obtain good jobs. I have never been happier in my entire life.” President Monson continues, “Short in stature, ‘Little Ed,’ as we affectionately called him, stood tall that evening as his eyes glistened and his voice quavered. He showed his love by helping those in need. He restored human dignity. He opened doors for those who knew not how to do so themselves.”

There are many ways bishops and quorum members can help to relieve the suffering and anxiety of the unemployed. Phil’s Auto of Centerville, Utah, is a testament of what priesthood leadership and a quorum can accomplish. Phil was a member of an elders quorum and worked as a mechanic at a local automobile repair shop. Unfortunately, the repair shop where Phil worked experienced economic trouble and had to let Phil go from his job. He was devastated by this turn of events.

On hearing about Phil’s job loss, his bishop, Leon Olson, and his elders quorum presidency prayerfully considered ways they could help Phil get back on his feet. After all, he was a fellow quorum member, a brother, and he needed help. They concluded that Phil had the skills to run his own business. One of the quorum members offered that he had an old barn that perhaps could be used as a repair shop. Other quorum members could help gather needed tools and supplies to equip the new shop. Almost everyone in the quorum could at least help clean the old barn.

They shared their ideas with Phil; then they shared their plan with the members of their quorum. The barn was cleaned and renovated, the tools gathered, and all was put in order. Phil’s Auto was a success and eventually moved to better and more permanent quarters—all because his quorum brothers offered help in a time of crisis. Priesthood quorums can and must make a difference.

NARRATOR:

When we are baptized, we are called as a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ to do as He would do. We have a sacred responsibility to reach out in friendship and care for the one. President Gordon B. Hinckley shared the following story in April 1997 General Conference.

(President Gordon B. Hinckley, Priesthood Session, April 1997)

“Sixty-three years ago, while serving as a missionary in the British Isles, my companion and I taught, and it was my pleasure to baptize, a young man. He was well educated. He was refined. He was studious. I was so proud of this gifted young man who had come into the Church. I felt he had all of the qualifications someday to become a leader among our people.

He was in the course of making the big adjustment from convert to member. For a short period before I was released, mine was the opportunity to be his friend. Then I was released to return home. He was given a small responsibility in the branch in London. He knew nothing of what was expected of him. He made a mistake. The head of the organization where he served was a man I can best describe as being short on love and strong on criticism. In a rather unmerciful way, he went after my friend who had made the simple mistake.

The young man left our rented hall that night smarting and hurt by his superior officer. He said to himself, "If that is the kind of people they are, then I am not going back."

He drifted into inactivity. The years passed. The war came on, and he served in the British forces. His first wife died. After the war he married a woman whose father was a Protestant minister. That did not help his belief.

When I was in England, I tried desperately to find him. His file contained no record of a current address. I came home and finally, after a long search, was able to track him down.

I wrote to him. He responded but with no mention of the gospel.

When next I was in London, I again searched for him. The day I was to leave, I found him. I called him, and we met in the underground station. He threw his arms around me as I did around him. I had very little time before I had to catch my plane, but we talked briefly and with what I think was a true regard for one another. He gave me another embrace before I left. I determined that I would never lose track of him again. Through the years I wrote to him, letters that I hoped would give encouragement and incentive to return to the Church. He wrote in reply without mentioning the Church.

The years passed. I grew older as did he. He retired from his work and moved to Switzerland. On one occasion when I was in Switzerland, I went out of my way to find the village where he lived. We spent the better part of a day together--he, his wife, my wife, and myself. We had a wonderful time, but it was evident that the fire of faith had long since died. I tried every way I knew, but I could not find a way to rekindle it. I continued my correspondence. I sent him books, magazines, recordings of the Tabernacle Choir, and other things for which he expressed appreciation.

He died a few months ago. His wife wrote me to inform me of this. She said, "You were the best friend he ever had."

Tears coursed my cheeks when I read that letter. I knew I had failed. Perhaps if I had been there to pick him up when he was first knocked down, he might have made a

different thing of his life. I think I could have helped him then. I think I could have dressed the wound from which he suffered. I have only one comfort: I tried. I have only one sorrow: I failed.

The challenge now is greater than it has ever been because the number of converts is greater than we have ever before known. A program for retaining and strengthening the convert will soon go out to all the Church. I plead with you, brethren; I ask of you, each of you, to become a part of this great effort. Every convert is precious. Every convert is a son or daughter of God. Every convert is a great and serious responsibility.”

NARRATOR: **You are listening to the “Stories from General Conference” on the Mormon Channel. The topic of this episode is service through callings.**

Faithful service today can prepare us to face future trials, as Elder Walter F. González of the Seventy explains in the following story which he told at General Conference in October of 2007.

(Elder Walter F. González, Priesthood Session, October 2007)

When President James E. Faust informed my wife and me that we would be transferred to Lima, Peru, we had no clue that on August 15, 2007, only a few days after our arrival, we would witness a devastating earthquake. More than 52,000 houses were destroyed by its sheer strength. Worse yet, it left more than 500 dead. Nine of them were members of the Church. Members in the Ica and Pisco stakes and the Cañete and Chincha districts suffered the brunt of the tremor’s aftermath.

The Church provided immediate relief to its members and those of other faiths. The morning after the quake, our members in the disaster area were receiving food and clothing, and before noon the Church was donating humanitarian aid to the nation’s civil defense. Many members who were left homeless were sheltered in our meetinghouses. Despite how unexpected the catastrophe was, the priesthood organization functioned very well to bring relief to those less fortunate.

Stake and district presidents along with bishops went out to help their members only minutes after the earthquake. The terrible situation in which these priesthood leaders went out is worth highlighting: it was nighttime; the lights were out; destruction abounded; and the earth would not stop shaking. These magnificent priesthood leaders left their families secured and walked out into the darkness, among people who wept, surrounded by destroyed houses. Thus our leaders went out during the night and the following days, facing frequent, strong aftershocks and a tsunami warning. They searched among the rubble, in the midst of commotion, risking their own lives to get to all the members. A bishop declared, “Without as much as a second thought, I ran in search of my Church brothers and sisters and leaders.” He found them. That’s how he spent most of the night.

What motivated these leaders to go out and help others, even to the risking of their own lives? Certainly it was their great faith in the Savior and His Church. It was their understanding of their calling as leaders in the priesthood. It was gospel principles engraved in their lives before the earthquake, not during the crisis—engraved not with ink but with fire by the Spirit in the fleshy tablets of their hearts (see 2 Corinthians 3:3).

The possibility of an earthquake was always there. When or how it would hit no one knew. When it came, it was devastating. But under the direction of the priesthood, the moment's challenge was faced. In many cases, when members were unable, the Lord made up the difference. Some members tell of seeing men in white helping to save their lives. Others heard guiding voices. Years of Church service were a preparatory school to becoming organized and helping one another.

The same happens in our lives. We don't know when or how earthquakes will hit us. They likely won't be literal shakings of the earth, as happened in Peru, but rather quakes of temptations, sin, or trials, such as unemployment or serious sickness. Today is the time to prepare for when that type of quake comes. Today is the time to prepare—not during the crisis. What are we doing today to engraven in our souls the gospel principles that will uphold us in times of adversity?

NARRATOR:

The greatest service is often that which is given quietly – a kind word, a thoughtful gesture. And those who consistently extend this kind of service are truly loved by the Lord. Elder Claudio R. M. Costa of the Presidency of the Seventy told of such a couple in an address given during the April 2009 Priesthood Session of General Conference.

(Elder Claudio R. M. Costa, Priesthood Session, April 2009)

Celso and Irene lived quite far from the chapel. They walked 40 minutes each way to the church, and they never missed a meeting. They were always present with big smiles on their faces. It was their disposition to serve others. Celso and Irene have a son, Marcos, who was born mentally and physically handicapped. I remember well how they took such loving care of their son. In 1999 Celso had a cerebral brain hemorrhage that left his lower body paralyzed. Celso continued to come to church faithfully with his family. They were faithful in the payment of their tithing and paid generous fast offerings. Our son Moroni is now their bishop, and he shared with me that Celso and Irene continue to serve faithfully. Not only do they serve in their ward callings; they also serve faithfully as ordinance workers in the São Paulo Brazil Temple. They serve every Friday from early morning until night. They always contribute so willingly of their time and resources in faithfully fulfilling their Church responsibilities.

President Monson counseled: “Most service given by priesthood holders is accomplished quietly, without fanfare. A friendly smile, a warm handclasp, a sincere testimony of truth can literally lift lives, change human nature, and save precious souls.”

That is the kind of quiet service rendered by Celso and Irene.

NARRATOR: Our willingness to serve wherever the Lord calls us, to “go where [He] wants [us] to go, say what [He] wants [us] to say, and be what [He] wants [us] to be” will be an example to all. Such was the example set by Elder William R. Walker’s grandparents. He shared the following story in April 2008 General Conference.

(Elder William R. Walker, Saturday Afternoon Session, April 2008)

I first learned the importance of the First Presidency as a boy growing up in Western Canada. When I would go to Grandma and Grandpa Walker’s home, I was greeted in the entry by a framed photo of the First Presidency of the Church. I remember it well. It seemed that they stood as sentinels, greeting all who entered.

The beautiful color photo was of President George Albert Smith with his counselors J. Reuben Clark Jr. and David O. McKay. The photo showed them standing together by a large world globe. I loved the picture. They were such handsome and dignified men; I knew them as the prophet of God and his counselors.

That picture hanging in the front foyer of my grandparents’ home had a powerful influence on me. I lived in the small prairie town of Raymond, where my grandparents lived. I could walk to their home, so I visited often. I remember frequently standing quietly alone in the foyer, reverently looking at that picture of the First Presidency. I remember thinking about why my grandparents thought it was so important to honor the First Presidency and have that picture prominently displayed in their home. All who entered would see it. Perhaps most importantly, for their children and grandchildren it was a constant reminder of what was deeply important in the hearts and lives of Grandma and Grandpa.

Years later I concluded that displaying the picture of the First Presidency was equivalent to Joshua’s beautiful expression: “Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

All who entered the home of James and Fannye Walker knew that written upon their hearts were the words “As for us and our house, we will serve the Lord.” As their grandson, I knew it, and I have never forgotten it.

NARRATOR: In April 2009 General Conference, Elder Steven E. Snow told the following story about a faithful man in the early days of the Church who was willing to serve faithfully in any calling, despite great inconvenience and tribulation.

(Elder Steven E. Snow, Sunday Morning Session, April 2009)

Robert Gardner Jr. was baptized into the Church in January of 1845 in a frozen pond in the backwoods of eastern Canada. Faithful and industrious, he made his way with his family to Nauvoo and, after much hardship, arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in October of 1847. After entering the valley, they camped at a place called Old Fort, located a few blocks from this Conference Center. In his handwritten history, he recorded, “I unyoked my oxen and sat down on my broken wagon tongue, and said I could not go another day’s journey” (“Robert Gardner Jr. Self History and Journal,” Church History Library, 23).

Starting with nothing, Robert began to create a new life for himself and his family. The first years were hard, but gradually things improved as he and his brother Archibald began to develop mills on Mill Creek and the Jordan River. A few years later he suffered a reversal of fortune. The water powering his mill was taken upstream, leaving his portion of the stream dry. An attempt to build a six-mile (10-km) canal to the mill failed.

Again from his history: “The canal kept breaking until it proved a failure. The failure caused me to lose all my crops and my mill would not run. My stock was all gone and I was flat broke” (“Robert Gardner Jr. Self History and Journal,” 26).

If that was not test enough, his next entry in his history informs us he has been called on a mission to Canada. A few months later he left his family and with a contingent of missionaries traveled by handcart, steamboat, and railroad to his field of labor.

He completed this mission, returned to his family, and through hard work and diligence once again established himself and began to prosper.

Just a few years later Brother Gardner was entertaining some friends at his farm in Millcreek in the Salt Lake Valley. One remarked, “I am glad to see you so well recovered from being broke. You are nearly as well off as you were before you lost your property and went on your mission.”

Robert’s history records: “My reply was; ‘Yes I was well off once and it all went off, and I am almost afraid of another [mission] call.’ Sure enough, a few hours later some of my neighbors, who had been to a meeting in Salt Lake City called in and told me that my name was amongst a number of names who were called today to go south on a mission to make a new settlement and raise cotton. We were to start right away.”

He records, “*I looked and spit, took off my hat and scratched [my head] and thought and said; ‘All right’*” (“Robert Gardner Jr. Self History and Journal,” 35; emphasis added).

Robert Gardner knew what it meant to deal with change in his life. He followed the counsel of the Brethren, accepting calls to serve when it was not convenient. He had a great love for the Lord and demonstrated strong, unbending faith with amazing good humor and grace. Robert Gardner Jr. went on to become a leading pioneer in the colonization effort of southern Utah. It is he and countless pioneers like him who give us inspiration to carry on and confront fearlessly the many changes and challenges which come into our lives. As we move forward and “get on with our lives,” may we be obedient, faithful, and cheerful.

NARRATOR: “Let us all press on in the work of the Lord”, as we faithfully provide needed service. This has been “Stories from General Conference” on the topic of “service through callings.” Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel. For more information, go to radio.lds.org.