

Episode 35

Stories from General Conference

MISSIONARY WORK, Volume 2

NARRATOR: President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “We are here to assist our Father in His work and His glory, ‘to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man’ (Moses 1:39). (in CR, Apr 1995, 94) Let there be cultivated an awareness in every member’s heart of his own potential for bringing others to a knowledge of the truth. Let him work at it. Let him pray with great earnestness about it.” (“Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” Ensign, May 1999, 106)

This is “Stories from General Conference’ here on the Mormon Channel. The topic of this episode is missionary work – the second volume in this series on this topic.

Because this is the Lord’s work, He will always help us in missionary efforts. President Thomas S. Monson told the following story in General Conference in April 1997.

(8. President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, April 1997)

“The Unseen Hand of the Lord”

“The unseen hand of the Lord guides the efforts of those who strive to learn and live the truth of the gospel. As a mission president, I received a weekly letter from each missionary. One that pleased me greatly came from a young elder serving in Hamilton. He and his companion were working with a lovely family, a young couple with two children. The couple felt that the message was true, and they could not deny their desire to be baptized. The wife, however, worried about her mother and father in faraway western Canada, fearing she and her husband would be disowned by her parents for joining the Church. She took pen in hand and jotted a note to her parents in Vancouver. The note read something like this:

"Dear Mother and Father,

"I want to thank you with all of my heart for your kindness and for your understanding and for the teachings which you gave me in my youth. John and I have come across a great truth, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We have studied the discussions, and our baptism will take place next Saturday night. We hope you will understand. In fact, we hope that you will welcome the missionaries in your home as we welcomed them in ours."

The letter was sealed with a tear, a stamp was affixed, and it was mailed to Vancouver. On the very day it was received in Vancouver, the couple in Hamilton received a letter from the wife's mother and father. They wrote:

"We are far away from you, or we would surely talk to you in person. We want you to know that missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have called at our home, and we cannot deny the validity of their message. We have set a date for our baptism to take place next week. We hope you will understand and not be unduly critical of our decision. This gospel means so much to us and has brought such happiness into our lives that we pray someday you might also agree to learn more about it."

Can you imagine what happened when the couple in Hamilton received that letter from the wife's parents? They phoned Mother and Dad, and there were many tears of joy shed. I am sure there was a long-distance embrace, for both families became members of the Church.

You see, our Heavenly Father knows who we are, His sons and His daughters. He wants to bring into our lives the blessings for which we qualify, and He can do it. He can accomplish anything."

NARRATOR: Two families independently blessed, but rejoicing together!

The need for those who are willing to share the good news of the gospel is great, and the time is short. Elder M. Russell Ballard shared this story in the October 1998 General Conference.

(27. Elder M. Russell Ballard, Saturday Morning Session, October 1998)

"The Urgency and Momentum of the Work"

There is an urgency in this work that motivates us to extend the blessings of the temple to as many of our Heavenly Father's children as possible. I was impressed with an experience of President Wilford Woodruff when he told of a visitation he received from the Prophet Joseph Smith some time after the Prophet was martyred. According to President Woodruff's own account: "[Joseph Smith] came to me and spoke to me. He said he could not stop to talk with me because he was in a hurry. The next man I met was Father Smith; he could not talk with me because he was in a hurry. I met half a dozen brethren who had held high positions on earth, and none of them could stop to talk with me because they were in a hurry. I was much astonished. By and by I saw the Prophet again and I got the privilege of asking him a question.

"Now," said I, "I want to know why you are in a hurry. I have been in a hurry all my life; but I expected my hurry would be over when I got into the kingdom of heaven, if I ever did."

"Joseph said: 'I will tell you, Brother Woodruff. Every dispensation that has had the priesthood on the earth and has gone into the celestial kingdom has had a certain amount of work to do to prepare to go to the earth with the Savior when he goes to reign on the earth. Each dispensation

has had ample time to do this work. We have not. We are the last dispensation, and so much work has to be done, and we need to be in a hurry to accomplish it.'

"Of course, that was satisfactory," President Woodruff concluded, "but it was new doctrine to me."

Other latter-day prophets have been similarly motivated to move us along more quickly in accomplishing the significant work of this last great dispensation. President David O. McKay encouraged every member to be a missionary. President Spencer W. Kimball urged us to "lengthen our stride." President Howard W. Hunter affirmed, "We are at a time in the history of the world and the growth of the Church when we must think more of holy things and act more like the Savior would expect his disciples to act."

And now President Gordon B. Hinckley is asking us to carry on, to do better, to do more. He said: "We have work to do, you and I, so very much of it. Let us roll up our sleeves and get at it, with a new commitment, putting our trust in the Lord. . . . We can do it, if we will be prayerful and faithful."

NARRATOR: The apostle Paul counseled, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" (Timothy 1:8). In April 1999 General Conference Elder Henry B. Eyring shared a story of one woman – his great-grandmother – who was not ashamed, nor afraid to share her testimony, even in extreme circumstances.

(49. Elder Henry B. Eyring, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 1999)

"Mary Bommeli"

Mary Bommeli was my great-grandmother. I never met her. Her granddaughter heard her tell her story and wrote it down.

Mary was born in 1830. The missionaries taught her family in Switzerland when she was 24. She was still living at home, weaving and selling cloth to help support her family on their small farm. When the family heard the doctrine of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, they knew it was true. They were baptized. Mary's brothers were called on missions, going without purse or scrip. The rest of the family sold their possessions to go to America to gather with the Saints.

There was not enough money for all to go. Mary volunteered to stay behind because she felt she could earn enough from her weaving to support herself and save for her passage. She found her way to Berlin and to the home of a woman who hired her to weave cloth for the family's clothing. She lived in a servant's room and set up her loom in the living area of the home.

It was against the law then to teach the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Berlin. But Mary could not keep the good news to herself. The woman of the house and her friends would gather around the loom to hear the Swiss girl teach. She talked about the

appearance of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith, of the visitation of angels, and of the Book of Mormon. When she came to the accounts of Alma, she taught the doctrine of the Resurrection.

That caused some problems with her weaving. In those days, many children died very young. The women around the loom had lost children in death, some of them several children. When Mary taught the truth that little children were heirs of the celestial kingdom and that those women might again be with them and with the Savior and our Heavenly Father, tears rolled down the faces of the women. Mary cried too. All those tears falling got the cloth wet that Mary had woven.

Mary's teaching created a more serious problem. Even though Mary begged the women not to talk about what she told them, they did. They shared the joyous doctrine with their friends. So one night there was a knock at the door. It was the police. They took Mary off to jail. On the way, she asked the policeman for the name of the judge she was to appear before the next morning. She asked if he had a family. She asked if he was a good father and a good husband. The policeman smiled as he described the judge as a man of the world.

At the jail, Mary asked for a pencil and some paper. She wrote a letter to the judge. She wrote about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as described in the Book of Mormon, about the spirit world, and about how long the judge would have to think and to consider his life before facing the final judgment. She wrote that she knew he had much to repent of which would break his family's heart and bring him great sorrow. She wrote through the night. In the morning she asked the policeman to take her letter to the judge. He did.

Later, the policeman was summoned by the judge to his office. The letter Mary had written was irrefutable evidence that she was teaching the gospel and so breaking the law. Nevertheless, it wasn't long until the policeman came back to Mary's cell. He told her that all charges were dismissed and that she was free to go, on the conditions she had stated in her letter. Her teaching the doctrine of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ had opened eyes and hearts enough to get her cast into jail. And her declaring the doctrine of repentance to the judge got her cast out of jail (see Theresa Snow Hill, *Life and Times of Henry Eyring and Mary Bommeli* [1997], 1522).

NARRATOR: You are listening to “Stories from General Conference” on the Mormon Channel. This episode is Volume 2 on Missionary Work.

We can always *choose* to share the sweet message of the gospel and our testimony of Jesus Christ, even when others may not be receptive. Bishop Richard C. Edgley shared such an experience in the April 1998 General Conference.

(18. Bishop Richard C. Edgley, Saturday Morning, April 1998)

“My Minister Has Spoken”

“Some years ago when I was working in a different organization, our personnel director, a devout Catholic, came into my office with his secretary, Darlene. I could readily see that Darlene

was not there of her own free will and would rather be elsewhere. The personnel director's greeting words to me were, "Will you please tell Darlene that Mormons are Christian. I have been arguing with her for over half an hour, and I cannot convince her of that fact. She needs to hear it from you."

My first concern was, have I done something in my own life that would cause Darlene to question my faith in and loyalty to the Savior? But then I quickly recognized that her doubts were not directed to me personally.

After inviting them to sit down, I asked Darlene why she thought we were not Christians. Her answer was that her minister had told her so. I asked her if she knew the official name of the Church. She did not. She knew the Church only by the name of Mormon. I explained the name to be The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and then asked if it did not seem like a rather odd name for a church that supposedly was not Christian. I next asked my Catholic friend if he would explain from our many hours of discussions on airplanes, in hotels, at dinners, and during other private occasions some of the things he had learned about us as they related to Christ, His teachings, and our beliefs. He explained them with perhaps more credibility than I could have done.

Darlene's response was that her minister had told her that we did not believe in the Bible, which we had replaced with the Book of Mormon. I replied by sharing the eighth article of faith: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God."

I then explained that the Book of Mormon was further scripture complementing the Bible and providing another witness of Christ. It expounded and clarified many of Christ's most sacred and important teachings. Her response was, "My minister says the Book of Mormon cannot contain the teachings of Christ because there could be no more revelations after the death of the Apostles; thus, no more scripture after the Bible." My query to her was, "At a time of such rapid change in a turbulent and troubled world, with so many perplexing problems, wouldn't it make you wonder why a loving Father would cease to communicate with His children, whom He loved enough that He sacrificed His Only Begotten Son for them?" The discussion continued for the next 15 to 20 minutes, with my attempting to explain our literal interpretation of the Atonement, the Resurrection, and other important doctrines of the Savior. I ended with the strongest testimony I could give of a loving Father and a willing Son.

At the conclusion of our discussion her response was the same, "My minister has spoken, and that is the way it is." And that is the way the matter was left, leaving me both disappointed and somewhat bothered by the misunderstanding."

NARRATOR: The following personal story, which Sister Patricia P. Pinegar shared in the October 1999 General Conference, illustrates her belief that the Lord blesses those who labor to share His message in ways that may not be obvious to others.

(59. Sister Patricia P. Pinegar, Saturday Afternoon Session, October 1999)

“Cory Pinegar

While we were serving a mission in England, our 17-year-old son, Cory, was killed in a car accident. We were able to come home to Utah for his funeral, and then we immediately returned to England to finish our mission. It was a very tender time for our entire family.

One day, shortly after returning to England, I was walking down the street and an acquaintance who had heard of the death of our son said to me: "Well, what do you think of your God now? You are serving a full-time mission for Him, and He has taken your son." I was both shocked and hurt. I felt so sorry for this person who did not understand Heavenly Father's plan.

The difficult experience of my son's death helped me identify and rejoice in the blessings of peace, hope, and direction--blessings that all who truly accept and live the gospel of Jesus Christ may enjoy. I can bear witness to the words of Elder Richard G. Scott: "Please learn that as you wrestle with a challenge and feel sadness because of it, you can simultaneously have peace and rejoicing" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 20; or ENSIGN, Nov. 1995, 17).

NARRATOR: As we live true principles of the gospel, it becomes easier for us to share our testimonies of those principles with others, because we have experienced the resultant blessings. This message is demonstrated in the next story, which was told by Elder Robert D. Hales in the October 2002 General Conference.

(117. Elder Robert D. Hales, Saturday Afternoon, October 2002)

A Very Poor Family

I plead that we will not procrastinate and that we will heed our Lord's commandment to live the law of the tithe. I know of two missionaries who visited a very poor family. The family's home was made of pressboard and sticks, with a dirt floor and no electricity or beds. Each evening the father, a farm laborer, spent his entire day's wages on groceries for dinner. Departing from their humble home, the senior companion thought to himself, "The law of tithing will surely be a stumbling block to this family. Perhaps we shouldn't bring it up for a while." A few moments later, the junior companion, who had grown up in similar circumstances in his own country, voiced his own thoughts aloud: "I know the principle of tithing isn't taught for four more discussions, but can we please teach it the next time we visit? They need to know about tithing now because they need the help and the blessing of the Lord so much."

This missionary understood that "there is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated." The Lord wants to bless this family and anxiously awaits their obedience so He can.

NARRATOR: Another story about blessings resulting from living true principles was told by Elder Benjamin De Hoyos in the October 2005 General Conference.

(169. Elder Benjamin De Hoyos, Saturday Afternoon, October 2005)

Brother Valdez

When I was serving as a missionary in northern Mexico, a few days after the baptismal service of the Valdez family, we received a telephone call from Brother Valdez asking us to come to his house. He had an important question for us. Now that he knew the will of the Lord regarding the Word of Wisdom, and even though it would be difficult to find a new job, he wondered if he should continue to work for the cigarette company where he had worked for many years. Only a few days later Brother Valdez again asked us to come by and visit him. He had decided to quit his job because he was not willing to go against his convictions. Then with a smile and emotion in his voice, he told us that the very day he quit his old job, another company had called to offer him a much better position.

Yes, we find happiness in the midst of the trial of our faith. The Lord manifests Himself to us through His tender mercies, which we find along the road of happiness. We see with increased clarity His hand in our lives.

Happiness is a condition of the soul. This joyous state comes as a result of righteous living.³

NARRATOR: Successful missionary work can be done more effectively when we are living true principles and can testify of the resultant blessings.

President David O. McKay taught, “True Christianity is love in action. There is no better way to manifest love for God than to show an unselfish love for your fellow men. This is the spirit of missionary work.” (*Gospel Ideals* [1954], 129)

Our final story in this episode of Stories from General Conference illustrates this principle and was told by Elder Neil L. Andersen in General Conference, October 2008.

(247. Elder Neil L. Andersen, October 2008, Saturday Morning Session)

GOD’S LOVE

He Does Know

I once visited a mission in southern Europe. I arrived on the day a new missionary was preparing to return home at his own insistence. He had his ticket to leave the next day.

We sat together in the mission president's home. The missionary told me about his challenging childhood, of learning disorders, of moving from one family to another. He spoke sincerely of his inability to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture. Then he added, "Brother Andersen, I don't even know if God loves me." As he said those words, I felt a sure and forceful feeling come into my spirit: "He does know I love him. He knows it."

I let him continue for a few more minutes, and then I said, "Elder, I'm sympathetic to much of what you've said, but I must correct you on one thing: you do know God loves you. You know He does."

As I said those words to him, the same Spirit that had spoken to me spoke to him. He bowed his head and began to cry. He apologized. "Brother Andersen," he said, "I do know God loves me; I do know it." He didn't know everything, but he knew enough. He knew God loved him. That priceless piece of spiritual knowledge was sufficient for his doubt to be replaced with faith. He found the strength to stay on his mission.

NARRATOR: We are all missionaries. Said President Brigham Young, "There is neither man nor woman in this Church who is not on a mission. That mission will last as long as they live, and it is to do good, to promote righteousness, to teach the principles of truth, and to prevail upon themselves and everybody around them to live those principles that they may obtain eternal life." (*Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widstoe [1954], 322*)

May we all search our hearts and lives for the courage and opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This has been "Stories from General Conference" on the topic of "Missionary Work, Volume 2." Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel. Learn more about the Mormon Channel at radio.lds.org.