

## Episode 40

# Stories from General Conference REPENTANCE

**NARRATOR:** From the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, this is *Stories from General Conference*. The topic of this collection is repentance.

**Any airplane pilot can tell you that vertigo is a dangerous situation to encounter while flying. It occurs when the brain has no visual references to orient its direction. You can't tell if you're facing up or down. In this first story, Elder Robert D. Hales uses his experience with vertigo to explain why it's important to repent constantly. This is from the October 1985 general conference.**

(Robert D. Hales, October 1985 General Conference, Saturday afternoon)

Some years ago, as a pilot, I was taken up by an instructor in an airplane. And by turning the airplane over at less than two degrees at a time, my inner ear could not detect because he kept positive gravity, and G's upon me, as it's called. So I did not know and when he gave me the airplane the airplane was upside down and everything on the airplane, every instrument was exactly right, except for the landing gear which was upside down; and every reaction I gave, gave an opposite reaction from what I thought. That was a great lesson. It is called vertigo.

I would like to talk for a moment on spiritual vertigo. Knowing what we know about the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, of His obedience, of His willingness to serve and to be an example to us, and of His message to "come, follow me." There are times in our lives that we get off course, less than a degree at a time, and do not know that we turn totally upside down.

**NARRATOR:** If we aren't constantly checking the direction we're headed in life, it's easy to get spiritual vertigo. Small course corrections, or repentance —can help us pilot our lives on a correct course. The gospel should be our main reference point.

**When things start to come apart in our lives, patience and additional repentance may be required to get back on course. In the April 1990 general conference, Elder Richard G. Scott related a personal experience that shows how repentance can repair our lives.**

(Richard G. Scott, 1990 April General Conference, Sunday afternoon)

Once I had a measuring tape that didn't work. I decided to fix it. I began to remove the side cover plate to find out what was wrong. In a few moments into that process, and I knew I was in trouble. Suddenly, the whole mechanism exploded in my hands. There were tape and spring flying in all directions. My efforts to put it all back together were frustrating and often painful. Irritated, I was just about to throw the whole thing away. Then I thought, "Someone designed this tape. If I can discover the principles that make it function, I can fix it." With greater patience, I began to examine the mainspring and found that if coiled in a certain way, instead of resisting and complaining, it easily responded. Soon the spring was coiled, carefully placed in its housing, the tape joined, the cover replaced, and it worked perfectly.

So it is with you. When, through violation of God's laws, you cease to function properly, force and compulsion will not restore you. You must search out the Designer's plan. As you follow it, you will become more pliable. You can be "repaired" more easily, and you will function well again under His divine influence.

**NARRATOR: Repentance requires a lot of patience. We may get frustrated and want to give up, but the Lord is always there to help. In the October 1986 general conference, Elder F. Burton Howard illustrated this with a personal example.**

(F. Burton Howard, October 1986 General Conference, Sunday afternoon)

When I was first called to be a bishop, I inherited a large ward. Many of the eight hundred or so members did not come out to church. I had never met them and resolved to do so.

One Sunday afternoon in November, I went to visit an inactive family. As I came up to the house, a woman was sweeping the porch. I introduced myself as the new bishop and asked if her husband was home. "Yes," she said, "but he won't talk to you. We are tired of being bothered. My husband asked the other bishop to take our names off the records of the Church. We don't want home teachers. We don't want people collecting fast offerings. We just want to be left alone."

She changed her grip on the broom. "Now get out," she said. "Get off my porch, get out of my yard, and don't come back." The broom was coming at me as I backed down the steps. I stammered a few words of apology, which were ignored. "Git," she said, and I did.

I didn't sleep well that night. I had been humiliated. Worse still, it seemed, my office had been treated with disrespect. By Tuesday night, I had almost decided that the woman and her husband should be excommunicated. A wise counselor, and a careful reading of the instructions from Church headquarters, persuaded me otherwise.

I said hello to them on the street after that occasionally, but I never returned to the home. However, we did assign a relative to visit there each month to watch over them. As far as I know, no gospel message was given, and no other significant Church contact was had with that family during the years I served as bishop. After a time the ward was divided. I was released and was called to be stake president. On another Tuesday night some years later, one of our bishops came to the stake office and asked if I would be available later in the evening to interview an older couple for a temple recommend. He had been working with them for months, and they were finally ready to go to the temple.

He said, "You may know them, President," and he mentioned the name of the woman with the broom. I could hardly wait for that interview. About nine o'clock the bishop brought a well-dressed, elderly couple to my office and introduced them. I recognized them as the same people I had known before, but they were different somehow. I invited the good sister to come into the office first. I asked her if she knew who I was, and she replied, "Oh yes, you're the stake president."

"Do you remember a Sunday afternoon in November, thirteen years ago?" I asked. "A young bishop came to your door and wanted to know if you and your husband would like to become more active in the Church. Do you remember turning him away?"

"I don't remember anything like that," she said. "I'm sure I would never have done such a thing."

Then I said, "I have another question. Why have you waited so long to come back to the Church?"

“Well, we always knew we would have to be active again someday,” she replied. “We wanted to. We just never got around to it. My husband used to smoke a lot; he didn’t feel comfortable going to church. I prayed for years that he would quit. When he started to have health problems a couple of years ago, it just seemed like a good time to go back.”

I finished the interview and talked with her husband as well. They were completely worthy. Shortly afterward, they went to the temple to be sealed.

Now, did you notice the elements of their return? It wasn’t easy. They had always known. She had prayed for years. There was a lot of wasted time. Finally, before it was too late, they talked to the bishop, repentance took place, old attitudes and habits were forgotten, and they came back.

**NARRATOR: In that same address, Elder Howard gave another example of one who enjoyed the fruits of repentance.**

(F. Burton Howard, October 1986 General Conference, Sunday afternoon)

Another who came back was Aminadab (see Helaman 5). He had once belonged to the church of God, but he became critical and contentious. He evidently sympathized with the opposition, because he was present when two young missionaries named Nephi and Lehi were taken captive by an army of Lamanites.

A cloud of darkness came upon him, and he heard a still, mild voice whisper, “Repent . . . and seek no more to destroy my servants” (vs. 29–30). Surprised, he turned around and looked at Nephi and Lehi. Their faces shone through the darkness, and they appeared to be lifting their voices to heaven (see v. 36).

Aminadab then recognized them for what they were. In a loud voice he told the Lamanites that the young men were servants of God. As the army turned to look, they too became aware of the darkness which surrounded them. They asked Aminadab how to dispel it, and he, drawing on truth learned, I believe, at another time, said: “You must repent, and cry unto the [Lord], even until ye shall have faith in Christ; . . . and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you” (v. 41).

Now notice again, the scripture speaks of darkness overshadowing those who have abandoned the faith. The effect of darkness is to prevent one from seeing clearly. To find the way back, as Aminadab discovered, one must repent and pray until doubt and darkness disappear and important things can be seen again.

**NARRATOR: You’re listening to *Stories from General Conference* here on the Mormon Channel. The topic of this collection is repentance.**

**In the 1986 general conference, Elder Marvin J. Ashton spoke about the binding chains of sin. He told about a man who was able to escape these chains through repentance. His story refers to 2 Nephi 1:23, which reads: “Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust.”**

(Marvin J. Ashton, October 1986 General Conference, Saturday morning)

Listen to the words of a friend who understands well the meaning of this scripture, a man who was bound by the chains of indifference. But when he sought God's help and turned to righteous principles, those chains were not only broken, but smashed. This letter was received a few weeks ago.

"I was baptized into the Church in March of 1974. At the time, I was employed in a job that required my having to work on Sundays. This, combined with my lack of strength in the gospel, prevented me from becoming an active and faithful member of the Church. Over the years I neglected my daily study and prayers. Throughout this time in my life I drifted farther and farther from the Church and the teachings of the gospel. This neglect brought disappointment after disappointment to myself and my family. I was discouraged, disillusioned, and I lacked self-respect and confidence.

"On the afternoon of April 6, 1986, my wife was scanning through the TV channels in search of something to pass away another lazy Sunday afternoon when she came across the Sunday afternoon session of general conference about to begin. We decided to watch and see what was going on as we had lost complete contact with the Church, and I, frankly, could not have told you who the prophet was at the time.

"The message I listened to was a gift from my Heavenly Father, one that would turn my life around. The message stayed with me for the next couple of days. I commented to my wife how much better I felt about myself and my relationship with others as a result of simply applying some recommended principles. We have since returned to a faithful and active involvement in our ward."

What a blessing it is to rise from the dust and the chains of indifference.

**NARRATOR: In the same address, Elder Ashton shared two contrasting accounts of people bound by addiction.**

(Marvin J. Ashton, October 1986 General Conference, Saturday morning)

Some years ago I had an acquaintance who had allowed himself to become a compulsive user of alcohol. He drank before he had dinner, and he would have what he called a "bracer" before involving himself in major business decisions. During a routine physical examination one day, a doctor told him that, for the good of his health, he should break the drinking habit. When I asked him what he intended to do, he said, "That's easy. I'll just change doctors."

Another acquaintance is a lovely, well-educated woman who has been a very heavy smoker. She now tells us of a few times she even woke her husband up in the middle of the night and insisted that he go to an all-night store to get her a pack of cigarettes. This couple came in contact with the missionaries, believed their message, and joined the Church. When she knew she had to quit smoking, the woman almost immediately threw off the chains of this habit and became free of tobacco addiction.

**NARRATOR: The woman in this story gave up her addictive habit quickly once she had a higher motivation. Repentance is not always easy. But no matter how difficult it seems, people like bishops, church leaders, and family members are there to help. In the priesthood session of the October 1988 general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley read a heartfelt letter of gratitude from a man to his bishop, who had helped him through the repentance process.**

(Gordon B. Hinckley, October 1988 General Conference, Priesthood session)

Permit me to read you a few lines from a letter sent to a bishop.

“Dear Bishop:

“It has been almost two years since I desperately called you asking for help. At that time I was ready to kill myself. I had no one else to turn to—no money, no job, no friends. My house had been taken, and I had no place to live. The Church was my last hope.

“As you know, I had left the Church at the age of seventeen and had broken just about every rule and commandment that there was in my search for happiness and fulfillment. Instead of happiness, my life was filled with misery, anguish, and despair. There was no hope or future for me. I even pleaded with God to let me die, to take me out of my misery. Not even he wanted me. I felt that he had rejected me, too.

“That’s when I turned to you and the Church. . . .

“You listened with understanding, you counseled, you guided, you helped.

“I began to grow and develop in understanding and knowledge of the gospel. I found that I had to make certain basic changes in my life that were terribly difficult, but that within me I had the worth and strength to do so.

“I learned that as I lived the gospel and repented, I had no more fear. I was filled with an inner peace. The clouds of anguish and despair were gone. Because of the Atonement, my weaknesses and sins were forgiven through Jesus Christ and His love for me.

“He has blessed and strengthened me. He has opened pathways for me, given me direction, and kept me from harm. I have found that as I overcame each obstacle, my business began to grow, enabling my family to benefit and making me feel as though I had accomplished something.

“Bishop, you have given me understanding and support through these past two years. I never would have reached this point if not for your love and patience. Thank you for being what you are as the servant of the Lord to help me, his wandering child.”

**NARRATOR: When we partake of the sacrament each Sunday, we have a chance to reflect on our lives and determine where we need to improve. The Lord promises to forgive our sins when we repent. Elder John H. Groberg told us about the gratitude one woman felt after being forgiven of her sins. He shared her story in the priesthood session of the April 1989 general conference.**

(John H. Groberg, April 1989 General Conference, Priesthood session)

Some years ago, a young couple we will call the Joneses visited with their bishop about a problem the wife had. The details are not important, but through the direction of the Spirit, the bishop’s decision was that, among other things, Sister Jones would not partake of the sacrament for a period of time while she worked out some attitudes and problems.

With lots of love and support, she continued to attend meetings with her family, and few but her husband and the bishop were aware of the situation or even noticed that week after week she did not partake of the sacrament. At first she didn’t feel much difference; but as time went on, she became more and more desirous to be worthy to partake of the sacrament. She thought she had repented before, but as the real soul-searching deepened and as her desire to worthily partake of the sacrament increased, true fundamental changes began to take place in her life and in her actions and in her thinking.

More time passed. Finally, during one sacrament meeting, the Spirit bore witness to the bishop and to Brother and Sister Jones that the time had come for her to again partake of the sacrament. “Next Sunday,” the bishop said.

Next Sunday came, and Sister Jones sat again with her family, nervous, yet excited and full of anticipation. “Am I really worthy? How I want to be!” she thought. The sacrament hymn was more meaningful than ever. She sang with such feeling that it was difficult to hold back the tears. And the sacrament prayers—how profound! She listened so intently that every word sank deep into her soul—to take his name, always remember him, keep his commandments, always have his Spirit (see D&C 20:77, 79). “Oh, how I desire this,” she thought.

The deacons began to move up and down the aisles, and the trays were passed from person to person across the rows. As one young deacon got closer and closer to her row, her heart began to pound harder and harder. Then the tray was coming down her very row. Now her husband was holding the tray in front of her! Tears streamed down her face. There was a barely audible sob of joy, “Oh!” as she reached for the emblem of the Lord’s love for her. The congregation did not hear the sob, but they did notice the tears in the bishop’s eyes.

Life and hope and forgiveness and spiritual strength had been given and received. No one could be more worthy. Sister Jones truly *wanted* to have his Spirit. She *wanted* to take his name upon her. With all her heart, she *wanted* to remember him and keep his commandments. She *wanted* to repent, to improve, and to follow the guidance of his Spirit.

**NARRATOR: In the Book of Mormon, we learn of Alma’s repentance process. For three days he was racked with pain and torment as he remembered his sins. But after he had repented, he said, “I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (Alma 36:19–20).**

**Repentance can sometimes be a hard, painful process. But great joy awaits as we rely on the Atonement of the Savior.**

**This has been *Stories from General Conference* on the topic of repentance, here on the Mormon Channel. For more information visit us online at [radio.lds.org](http://radio.lds.org). Tell your friends about us! If you have a story or comment you want to share with the Mormon Channel, call our automated system at 1-877-MYLDS321. That’s 1-877-MYLDS321. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel.**