

Episode 4

Stories from General Conference

SERVICE

NARRATOR: Service is the topic of this episode of “Stories from General Conference.”

During a sermon recorded in the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin said, “And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.” (Mosiah 2:17)

Service is emphasized in the Church from the time we are children. The priesthood is given to men to use in the service of others. One of the primary purposes of the women’s organization of the Church, the Relief Society, is to provide opportunities to serve others. The Church participates in humanitarian service projects throughout the world. Missionaries volunteer on their own time and expense – all to serve others.

Service benefits both the receiver and the giver. It helps develop unselfish and Christ-like attitudes toward our fellow beings.

In the April 2008 Priesthood session of General Conference, President Henry B. Eyring recounted the following story about a particular service project of the church and how it was noted.

(President Henry B. Eyring, April 2008, Priesthood Session)

One of the promises we make as we accept the priesthood is to care for others.

I have seen the miracle of that growth in charity in the hearts of priesthood holders. So have many of you. And so have many outside the Church. I was in the office of President Gordon B. Hinckley when he was asked to take a phone call. He spoke briefly on the phone and then returned to our conversation. But he took a moment to explain. He said that the call was from the president of the United States, who was flying over Utah in Air Force One on his way to Washington. The president of the United States had called to thank President Hinckley for what priesthood holders had done in the aftermath of a hurricane. The president of the United States had said that it was a miracle that we were able to get so many people, so quickly, working together so well. He praised our people by saying that we knew how to do things.

Perhaps the president of the United States was impressed with what he thought were our great organizational skills. That was part of the miracle. But the greater reason for the

miracle was that hundreds and perhaps thousands of priesthood holders had such faith in the oath and covenant of the priesthood. It was not how they were organized that made the difference: faith in the oath and covenant of the priesthood impelled them to go long distances, stay long hours, and endure hardship as representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ in caring for those in great need.

They were in that process of giving priesthood service, developing the power and the spirit of charity necessary to become great husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers in families here and in families forever.

NARRATOR: Acts of service occur frequently on a smaller scale as well. Bishop Richard C. Edgely shared the following story during the October 2007 Saturday Morning session of General Conference:

(Bishop Richard C. Edgely, October 2007, Saturday Morning)

A couple of years ago a humor columnist for a local newspaper wrote on a serious and thought-provoking subject. I quote from this article: “Being a go-to-church Mormon in Utah means living so close to fellow ward members that not much happens that the entire congregation doesn’t know about in five minutes tops.”

He continues: “This kind of cheek-to-jowl living can be intrusive. . . . It also happens to be one of our greatest strengths.”

The author goes on to say: “At work on Tuesday, I caught the noon news broadcast on television. A van had been obliterated in a traffic crash. A young mother and two small children were being rushed to emergency rooms by helicopter and ambulance. . . . Hours later I learned that the van belonged to the young couple living across the street from me in Herriman, Eric and Jeana Quigley.

“Not only do I see the Quigleys in church, . . . we ate dinner with them at a neighborhood party the night before the crash. Our grandkids played with daughters Bianca and Miranda. . . .

“Fourteen-month-old Miranda suffered serious head injuries and died three days later at Primary Children’s Hospital.

“Here’s where all that nosiness . . . pays off. Although the accident occurred several miles from home, the dust literally had not settled before someone from the ward stopped and was pulling through the wreckage. The rest of the ward knew about it before the cops and paramedics showed up.

“Ward members went to all three hospitals, contacted Eric at work, and organized into labor squads. People who didn’t get in on the immediate-need level were frantic for some way to help.

“In 48 hours, the Quigley yard was mowed, home cleaned, laundry done, refrigerator stocked, relatives fed and a trust fund set up at a local bank. We would have given their dog a bath if they had one.”

The author concludes with this insightful comment: “There is a positive side to the congregational microscope my ward lives under. . . . What happens to a few happens to all” (“Well-Being of Others Is Our Business,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 30, 2005, p. C1).

The compassion and service rendered by caring ward members as a result of this tragic accident are not unique to this particular incident. The Book of Mormon prophet Alma explained to prospective followers of Christ: “As ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort,” then, as Alma explained, they were prepared for baptism (see Mosiah 18:8-9). This scripture lays the foundation for ministering and caring in a most compassionate way.

NARRATOR: Acts of service can take many forms, such as providing relief and comfort as illustrated in the following account given by Elder D. Todd Christofferson in the October 1998 Priesthood session of conference:

(Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Priesthood Session, October 1998)

In 1918 Brother George Goates was a farmer who raised sugar beets in Lehi, Utah. Winter came early that year and froze much of his beet crop in the ground. For George and his young son Francis, the harvest was slow and difficult. Meanwhile, an influenza epidemic was raging. The dreaded disease claimed the lives of George's son Charles and three of Charles's small children--two little girls and a boy. In the course of only six days, a grieving George Goates made three separate trips to Ogden, Utah, to bring the bodies home for burial. At the end of this terrible interlude, George and Francis hitched up their wagon and headed back to the beet field.

"[On the way] they passed wagon after wagon-load of beets being hauled to the factory and driven by neighborhood farmers. As they passed by, each driver would wave a greeting: 'Hi ya, Uncle George,' 'Sure sorry, George,' 'Tough break, George,' 'You've got a lot of friends, George.'

"On the last wagon was . . . freckled-faced Jasper Rolfe. He waved a cheery greeting and called out: 'That's all of 'em, Uncle George.'

"[Brother Goates] turned to Francis and said: 'I wish it was all of ours.'

"When they arrived at the farm gate, Francis jumped down off the big red beet wagon and opened the gate as [his father] drove onto the field. [George] pulled up, stopped the team, . . . and scanned the field There wasn't a sugar beet on the whole field. Then it

dawned upon him what Jasper Rolfe meant when he called out: 'That's all of 'em, Uncle George!'

"[George] got down off the wagon, picked up a handful of the rich, brown soil he loved so much, and then . . . a beet top, and he looked for a moment at these symbols of his labor, as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

"Then [he] sat down on a pile of beet tops--this man who brought four of his loved ones home for burial in the course of only six days; made caskets, dug graves, and even helped with the burial clothing--this amazing man who never faltered, nor flinched, nor wavered throughout this agonizing ordeal--sat down on a pile of beet tops and sobbed like a little child.

"Then he arose, wiped his eyes, . . . looked up at the sky, and said: 'Thanks, Father, for the elders of our ward.'"

NARRATOR: Service usually requires action. Elder L. Tom Perry shared an account in the October 2002 General Conference of how a priesthood quorum realized that talk was not enough, and a service project was born.

(Elder L. Tom Perry, Saturday Morning, October 2002)

I was taught how a quorum works in these three aspects many years ago when I attended a high priests group meeting in a small community in southern Wyoming. The lesson that week was on justification and sanctification. It was evident, as the lesson began, that the teacher was well prepared to instruct his brethren. Then a question prompted a response that changed the whole course of the lesson. In response to the question, one brother commented: "I have listened with great interest to the lesson material. The thought has crossed my mind that the information presented will soon be lost if we do not find application to put the material presented into practice in our daily lives." Then he went on to propose a course of action.

The night before, a citizen of the community had passed away. His wife was a member of the Church, but he had not been. This high priest had visited the widow and offered his sympathy. Leaving the home after the visit, his eyes wandered over the beautiful farm of the deceased brother. He had put so much of his life and labor into building it up. The alfalfa was ready to cut; the grain would soon be ready to harvest. How would this poor sister cope with the sudden problems now falling on her? She would need time to get herself organized for her new responsibilities.

Then he proposed to the group that they apply the principles they had just been taught—by working with the widow to keep her farm operating until the widow and her family could find a more permanent solution. The balance of the meeting was spent in organizing the project to assist her.

As we left the classroom, there was a good feeling among the brethren. I heard one of them remark as he passed through the doorway, "This project is just what we needed as a group to work together again." A lesson had been taught; a brotherhood had been strengthened; a service project had been organized to assist someone in need.

NARRATOR: Even the simplest acts of service can lift the burden of those in need. During the April 1999 General Conference Elder Robert J. Whetten told a story of a young girl willing to make a sacrifice to someone in need more than her.

(Elder Robert J. Whetten, Saturday Afternoon Session, April 1999)

Last January an earthquake in the central mountain region of Colombia left the city of Armenia devastated. Concerned stake presidents called the Area Presidency in Quito to find out what the needs of the members living in Armenia were. The district president confirmed that many Church members had lost their homes and had found shelter in the four undamaged chapels but urgently needed food and clothing. The Relief Society and priesthood leaders swung into action, and donations from members throughout Colombia poured into a designated chapel in each city. Seven-year-old Neidi had come with her parents to the chapel in the city of Cali and watched as Bishop Villareal received donations from members.

"Bishop, how can I help the children in Armenia?"

"Neidi, your parents have already helped."

She went to the other end of the chapel and observed that little clothing and no shoes for children were being packed. Neidi came back to the bishop with her shoes in her hand. "Now I know how I can help. Please give these shoes to another little girl in Armenia who has lost hers." Her bare feet made no sound as she slipped away.

NARRATOR: The little girl may never know what happened to her shoes, but her willingness to serve can teach us all a lesson.

In the April 2005 General Conference, Sister Kathleen H. Hughes told the following story about her father who taught her a lesson about service.

(Sister Kathleen H. Hughes, Sunday Morning, April 2005)

Thirty-eight years ago this month, Dean and I, then newlyweds, traveled to New Mexico to visit my parents. While there, my father took us on a day trip into the mountains in the northern part of the state. In the afternoon, we encountered a car stranded on the roadside with a flat tire. The driver told my father that his spare was also flat and he needed a ride

to the nearest town to get the tire fixed. My father, seeing the man's family inside the car, said to him, "You'll never be able to get to town and back before dark. But listen, you have the same size wheel as mine. Take my spare, and the next time you come to Albuquerque, bring it back to me."

The stranger, shocked by the offer, said, "But you don't even know me."

Daddy's response, typical for him, was, "You're an honest man, aren't you? You'll bring the tire back."

A few weeks later I asked my dad about the spare tire. He told me that it had been returned.

My father, now in his 90th year, still goes about his life the same way. Most people his age *receive* meals-on-wheels, but my dad *delivers* food to the "aged." He's often at the bedside of friends who are ill or dying. He goes out with his chain saw helping the Rotary club with their annual cleanup efforts. As I think of Daddy's life and actions, I'm reminded of President Boyd K. Packer's thought: he's "active in the gospel" ("The Golden Years," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2003, 82). His life, as the hymn suggests, touches lives for good, and in the touching, all are enriched (see "Each Life That Touches Ours for Good," *Hymns*, no. 293). My father understands friendship.

NARRATOR: Individuals combined into large groups can also provide meaningful service. In the April 2005 Priesthood Session of General Conference President Thomas S. Monson shared the following story of a community unified to serve.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, April 2005)

This past January, I had the privilege of witnessing a profound act of service in the life of a woman who had lived in my ward when I served as bishop many years ago. Her name is Adele, and she and her two grown daughters—one of whom is handicapped—have lived for many years in the Rose Park area of the Salt Lake Valley. Adele, who is a widow, has struggled financially, and her life has often been difficult.

I had received a telephone call from an individual involved with the Gingerbread House Project inviting me to the unveiling of Adele's home, the renovation of which had been undertaken during a period of just over three days and nights by many kind and generous individuals, all working voluntarily with materials donated by numerous local businesses. During the time the makeover of her home had been accomplished, Adele and her two daughters had been hosted in a city a number of miles away where they themselves had received some pampering.

I was present when the limousine bearing Adele and her daughters arrived on the scene. The group which had been waiting for them included not only family and friends but also many of the craftsmen who had worked night and day on the project. It was obvious they

were pleased with the result and were anxious to see the reaction of Adele and her daughters.

The women stepped from the car, blindfolds in place. What a thrilling moment it was when the blindfolds were removed and Adele and her daughters turned around and saw their new home. They were absolutely stunned by the magnificent project which had been completed, including a redesign of the front, an extension of the home itself, and a new roof. The outside looked new and immaculate. They could not help but cry.

I accompanied Adele and others as we entered the home and were amazed at what had been accomplished to beautify and enhance the surroundings. The walls had been painted, the floor coverings changed. There were new furnishings, new curtains, new drapes. The cupboards in the kitchen had been replaced; there were new countertops and new appliances. The entire house had been done over from top to bottom, each room spotless and beautiful. Adele and her daughters were literally overcome. However, just as poignant and touching were the expressions on the faces of those who had worked feverishly to make the house new. Tears welled in their eyes as they witnessed the joy they had brought into the lives of Adele and her daughters. Not only had a widow's burden been made lighter, but countless other lives were touched in the process. All were better people for having participated in this effort.

NARRATOR: Sometimes faith is necessary to accompany our acts of service. In the October 2003 General Conference, Elder W. Craig Zwick shared the story of a blessing he gave to his newborn son many years ago.

(Elder W. Craig Zwick, Saturday Afternoon, October 2003)

Twenty-four years ago, our tiny newborn son struggled for his life in the intensive care unit of a hospital. His lungs were not fully developed because of his premature birth, and he desperately fought for each breath of air. He was so small but with so much will to live. As young and inexperienced parents, my courageous and ever faithful wife, Jan, and I prayed that the Lord's hand would reach out and somehow help our baby boy continue to breathe. As I put my trembling hand through the small opening into the isolette, I felt so inadequate and powerless. I took hold of the tiny but perfect hand of our newborn son, and there was a powerful spiritual connection never to be forgotten. Two fingers from each of my hands covered his tiny head as I administered to him.

Our desire for him was pure, but we knew that his earthly experience rested in the Lord's hands and not in ours or in the medical team who cared for him. I then humbly realized that my quivering hands held power and authority well beyond my own. My fingers on his head symbolized the placing of God's hands and power upon our son. Following that blessing, in a moment of emotional peace, my eternal companion and I looked at each other across the isolette, feeling the spirit of renewed hope and comfort born of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the personal effect of His Atonement. It was a powerful witness of His love for an infant son who had just left His presence. We were then better

prepared to accept His will for our son. We truly felt we had placed our hands in the hands of the Savior. It was as if the Savior's own hands provided the critical respiratory aid, allowing our son to breathe and gain sustenance. With each breath and with each incremental bit of progress, we expressed prayerful thanks. Today, our healthy son and his indebted parents continue to be so grateful for the Savior's willing hands.

NARRATOR: Service not only benefits the receiver, but also the giver. This principle was illustrated by an address in the April 2002 Priesthood Session of General Conference by President Thomas S. Monson.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, April 2002)

Inspiring is the missionary service rendered by Walter Krause, who lives in Prenzlau, Germany. Brother Krause, whose dedication to the Lord is legendary, is now 92 years of age. As a patriarch, he has given more than a thousand patriarchal blessings to members living throughout many parts of Europe.

Homeless following World War II, like so many others at that time, Brother Krause and his family lived in a refugee camp in Cottbus and began to attend church there. He was immediately called to lead the Cottbus branch. Four months later, in November of 1945, the country still in ruins, district president Richard Ranglack came to Brother Krause and asked him what he would think about going on a mission. Brother Krause's answer reflects his commitment to the Church. Said he: "I don't have to think about it at all. If the Lord needs me, I'll go."

He set out on December 1, 1945, with 20 German marks in his pocket and a piece of dry bread. One of the branch members had given him a winter coat left over from a son who had fallen in the war. Another member, who was a shoemaker, gave him a pair of shoes. With these and with two shirts, two handkerchiefs, and two pairs of stockings, he left on his mission.

Once, in the middle of winter, he walked from Prenzlau to Kammin, a little village in Mecklenburg, where 46 attended the meetings which were held. He arrived long after dark that night after a six-hour march over roads, paths, and finally across plowed fields. Just before he reached the village, he came to a large, white, flat area which made for easy walking, and he soon arrived at a member's home to stay the night.

The next morning the game warden knocked on the door of the member's house, asking, "Do you have a guest?"

"Yes," came the reply.

The game warden continued, "Then come and take a look at his tracks." The large, flat area on which Brother Krause had walked was actually a frozen lake, and some time earlier the warden had chopped a large hole in the middle of the lake for fishing. The

wind had driven snow over the hole and covered it so that Brother Krause could not have seen his danger. His tracks went right next to the edge of the hole and straight to the house of the member, without his knowing anything about it. Weighed down by his backpack and his rubber boots, he would certainly have drowned had he gone one step further toward the hole he couldn't see. He commented later that this event caused quite a stir in the village at the time.

NARRATOR: During the October 2002 General Conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks shared a story of another man who was blessed by service.

(Elder Dallin H. Oaks, Sunday Morning, October 2002)

Almost a decade ago, I read a letter from a returned missionary who described this process in his life. He had written to thank those who direct missionary work "for daring to send me where the Lord required rather than where I had deemed appropriate." He had come, he said, "from a background of proud, competitive intellectualism." Before his mission he was a student at a prestigious university in the eastern United States. Quote:

"I guess out of a sense of obligation and inertia, I filled out my [missionary] papers and sent them in, extremely careful to mark the column indicating greatest desire to serve abroad and in a foreign language. I was careful to make it apparent that I was an accomplished student of Russian and fully capable of spending two years among the Russian people. Confident that no committee could resist such qualifications, I rested confident that I would enjoy a wonderfully mind-expanding cultural adventure."

He was shocked to receive a call to serve in a mission in the United States. He didn't know anything about the state where he would serve, except that it was in his own country speaking English rather than abroad speaking the language he had learned, and, as he said, "The people I would work with would likely be academic incompetents." He continued, "I almost refused to accept the call, feeling that I would be more fulfilled by enlisting in the Peace Corps or something else."

Fortunately, this proud young man found the courage and faith to accept the call and to follow the direction and counsel of his fine mission president. Then the miracle of spiritual growth began. He described it thus:

"As I began to serve among the uneducated people of [this state], I struggled mightily for several months, but gradually the sweet workings of the Spirit began to tear down the walls of pride and disbelief that had wrapped themselves so tightly around my soul. The miracle of a conversion to Christ began. The sense of the reality of God and the eternal brotherhood of all men came more and more powerfully to my troubled mind."

It was not easy, he admitted, but with the influence of his great mission president and with his growing love for the people he served, it was possible, and it occurred.

"My desire to love and serve these people who in the ultimate scale were at least my peers, almost definitely my superiors, waxed stronger and stronger. I learned humility for the first time in my life; I learned what it means to make our valuations of others [without relying on the] irrelevant details of life. I began to feel swelling within my heart a love of the spirits that came here to earth with me" (letter to General Authorities, Feb. 1994).

Such is the miracle of service.

NARRATOR:

Service changes hearts in both giver and receiver. Service is motivated by love and charity – Christ like attributes we should all seek to develop.

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