

## Episode 5

### Stories from General Conference

#### WORTHINESS

**NARRATOR:** This episode's topic of "Stories from General Conference" is worthiness. It is clear the Lord has instructed us to live to be worthy of His spirit. Personal worthiness allows God to bless us, and provides us with peace of mind. In the April 2007 Priesthood Session of General Conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley shared some events from the life of Joseph F. Smith to illustrate how being worthy can affect us.

(President Gordon B. Hinckley, Priesthood Session, April 2007)

Joseph F. Smith was the son of Hyrum Smith, who was the brother of the Prophet Joseph and was martyred with him in Carthage. Joseph F. was born at Far West, Missouri, on November 13, 1838. He came out of Missouri as an infant. As a lad not yet six years of age, he heard a knock on the window of his mother's home in Nauvoo. It was a man who had hurriedly ridden from Carthage and who told Sister Smith that her husband had been killed that afternoon.

When he was 9, he drove an ox team with his mother across the plains to this valley. At the age of 15 he was called on a mission to Hawaii. He made his way to San Francisco and there worked in a shingle mill to earn enough money to buy passage to the islands.

Hawaii was not a tourist center then. It was populated by the native Hawaiians, who were, for the most part, poor but generous with what they had. He learned to speak their language and to love them. While serving there he experienced a remarkable dream. I quote from his narrative concerning this. Said he:

"I was very much oppressed [when I was] on a mission. I was almost naked and entirely friendless, except [for] the friendship of a poor, benighted . . . people. I felt as if I was so debased in my condition of poverty, lack of intelligence and knowledge, just a boy, that I hardly dared look a . . . man in the face.

"While in that condition I dreamed [one night] that I was on a journey, and I was impressed that I ought to hurry—hurry with all my might, for fear I might be too late. I rushed on my way as fast as I possibly could, and I was only conscious of having just a little bundle, a handkerchief with a small bundle wrapped in it. I did not realize . . . what it was, when I was hurrying as fast as I could; but finally I came to a wonderful mansion. . . . I thought I knew that was my destination.

As I passed towards it, as fast as I could, I saw a notice [which read *B-A-T-H*], 'Bath.' I turned aside quickly and went into the bath and washed myself clean. I opened up this little bundle that I had, and there was [some] white, clean [clothing], a thing I had not seen for a long time, because the people I was with did not think very much of making things exceedingly clean. But my [clothing was] clean, and I put [it] on. Then I rushed to what appeared to be a great opening, or door. I knocked and the door opened, and the man who stood there was the Prophet Joseph Smith. He looked at me a little reprovngly, and the first words he said: 'Joseph, you are late.' Yet I took confidence and [replied]:

" 'Yes, but I am clean—I am clean!'

"He clasped my hand and drew me in, then closed the great door. I felt his hand just as tangible as I ever felt the hand of man. I knew him, and when I entered I saw my father, and Brigham [Young] and Heber [C. Kimball], and Willard [Richards], and other good men that I had known, standing in a row. I looked as if it were across this valley, and it seemed to be filled with a vast multitude of people, but on the stage were all the people that I had known. My mother was there, and she sat with a child in her lap; and I could name over as many as I remember of their names, who sat there, who seemed to be among the chosen, among the exalted. . . .

"[When I had this dream,] I was alone on a mat, away up in the mountains of Hawaii—no one was with me. But in this vision I pressed my hand up against the Prophet, and I saw a smile cross his countenance. . . .

"When I awoke that morning I was a man, although only [still] a boy. There was not anything in the world that I feared [after that]. I could meet any man or woman or child and look them in the face, feeling in my soul that I was a man every whit. That vision, that manifestation and witness that I enjoyed at that time has made me what I am, if I am anything that is good, or clean, or upright before the Lord, if there is anything good in me. That has helped me out in every trial and through every difficulty" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 542–43).

The core of that meaningful dream is found in the reproof given by Joseph Smith to young Joseph F. Said the Prophet, "Joseph, you are late."

Replied Joseph F., "Yes, but I am clean—I am clean!"

The result of that dream was that a boy was changed into a man. His declaration "I am clean" gave him self-assurance and courage in facing anyone or any situation. He received the strength that comes from a clear conscience fortified by the approbation of the Prophet Joseph.

This prophetic dream holds something for every man and boy assembled in this vast congregation tonight. It is an old saying among us that "cleanliness is next to godliness."

**NARRATOR:**

**Worthiness comes by living the commandments, despite the evil in the world around us. In the April 2004 General Conference, President James E. Faust provided an analogy about how the world around us can detract from our goal of worthiness.**

(President James E. Faust, Sunday Morning Session, April 2004)

My first radio was a crystal set. It was hard to tune to the frequency of a particular radio station. I had to literally scratch the receiving wire whisker over the top of the rough crystal to find the right pinpoint, a little valley or peak on the crystal where the signal was received. Just a millimeter off on either side of that point and I would lose the signal and get scratchy static. Over time, with patience and perseverance, good eyesight, and a steady hand, I learned to find the signal point on the crystal without too much difficulty.

So it is with inspiration. We must attune ourselves to the inspiration from God and tune out the scratchy static. We have to work at being tuned in. Most of us need a long time to become tuned in. When I was a newly called General Authority, President Marion G. Romney, who was in his 70s at the time, told us, "I know when I am working under the Spirit and when I am not." To be able to recognize when one is being guided by the Spirit is a supernal gift.

In terms of modern communication, crystal radio sets helped us emerge from the dark ages of communication. With advanced technology, cellular phones are used for much of the communication in our time. Occasionally, however, we find dead spots where the signal coming to a cell phone fails. This can happen when the cell phone user is in a tunnel or a canyon or when there is other interference.

So it is with divine communication. The still, small voice, though still and small, is very powerful. It "whispereth through and pierceth all things." But like my old crystal set, the message may be there but we fail to pick it up. Perhaps something in our lives prevents us from hearing the message because we are "past feeling." We often put ourselves in spiritual dead spots—places and situations that block out divine messages. Some of these dead spots include anger, pornography, transgression, selfishness, and other situations that offend the Spirit.

**NARRATOR:**

**The scriptures warn us not to put off the day of our repentance by allowing “dead spots” in our lives. If we procrastinate becoming worthy, we may miss an opportunity or a blessing. In the April 1999 Priesthood Session of General Conference, Elder Russell M. Nelson shared the following story of a young man who learned this lesson in a dramatic way.**

(Elder Russell M. Nelson, Priesthood Session, April 1999)

Let us speak about our worthy and wonderful sisters, particularly our mothers, and consider our sacred duty to honor them.

When I was a young university student, one of my classmates urgently pleaded with a group of us--his Latter-day Saint friends--to donate blood for his mother, who was bleeding profusely. We went directly to the hospital to have our blood typed and tested. I'll never forget our shock when told that one of the prospective donors was unfit because of a positive blood test for a venereal disease. That infected blood was his own! Fortunately, his mother survived, but I'll never forget his lingering sorrow. He bore the burden of knowing that his personal immorality had disqualified him from giving needed aid to his mother, and he had added to her grief. I learned a great lesson: if one dishonors the commandments of God, one dishonors mother, and if one dishonors mother, one dishonors the commandments of God.

**NARRATOR: There are many stories that illustrate the importance of being worthy of divine help at unexpected times. One such story was told by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland in the Priesthood Session of the October 2000 General Conference.**

(Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, Priesthood Session, October 2000)

Let me share a story with you suggesting how soon and how unexpectedly those tomorrows can come and in some cases how little time you may have to make hasty, belated preparation.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, September 30, 1998, just two years ago last week, a Little League football team in Inkom, Idaho, was out on the field for its midweek practice. They had completed their warm-ups and were starting to run a few plays from scrimmage. Dark clouds were gathering, as they sometimes do in the fall, and it began to rain lightly, but that was of no concern to a group of boys who loved playing football.

Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, an absolutely deafening crack of thunder split the air, inseparable from the flash of lightning that illuminated, literally electrified, the entire scene.

At that very moment a young friend of mine, A. J. Edwards, then a deacon in the Portneuf Ward of the McCammon Idaho Stake, was ready for the ball on a handoff that was sure to be a touchdown in this little intersquad bit of horseplay. But the lightning that had illuminated earth and sky struck A. J. Edwards from the crown of his football helmet to the soles of his shoes.

The impact of the strike stunned all the players, knocking a few to the ground, leaving one player temporarily without his sight and virtually all the rest of the players dazed and shaken. Instinctively they started running for the concrete pavilion adjacent to the park. Some of the boys began to cry. Many of them fell to their knees and began to pray. Through it all, A. J. Edwards lay motionless on the field.

Brother David Johnson of the Rapid Creek Ward, McCammon Idaho Stake, rushed to the player's side. He shouted to coach and fellow ward member Rex Shaffer, "I can't get a pulse. He's in cardiac arrest." These two men, rather miraculously both trained emergency medical technicians, started a life-against-death effort in CPR.

Cradling A. J.'s head as the men worked was the young defensive coach of the team, 18-year-old Bryce Reynolds, a member of the Mountain View Ward, McCammon Idaho Stake. As he watched Brother Johnson and Brother Shaffer urgently applying CPR, he had an impression. I am confident it was a revelation from heaven in every sense of the word. He remembered vividly a priesthood blessing that the bishop had once given his grandfather following an equally tragic and equally life-threatening accident years earlier. Now, as he held this young deacon in his arms, he realized that for the first time in his life he needed to use his newly conferred Melchizedek Priesthood in a similar way. In anticipation of his 19th birthday and forthcoming call to serve a mission, young Bryce Reynolds had been ordained an elder just 39 days earlier.

Whether he audibly spoke the words or only uttered them under his breath, Elder Reynolds said: "A. J. Edwards, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the power and authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood which I hold, I bless you that you will be OK. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen." As Bryce Reynolds closed that brief but fervent blessing offered in the language of an 18-year-old, A. J. Edwards drew his first renewed breath.

The ongoing prayers, miracles, and additional priesthood blessings of that entire experience--including a high-speed ambulance drive to Pocatello and a near-hopeless LifeFlight to the burn center at the University of Utah--all of that the Edwards family can share with us at a later time. It is sufficient to say that a very healthy and very robust A. J. Edwards is in the audience tonight with his father as my special guests. I also recently talked on the telephone with Elder Bryce Reynolds, who has been serving faithfully in the Texas Dallas Mission for the past 17 months. I love these two wonderful young men.

Now, my young friends of both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood, not every prayer is answered so immediately, and not every priesthood declaration can command the renewal or the sustaining of life. Sometimes the will of God is otherwise. But young men, you will learn, if you have not already, that in frightening, even perilous moments, your faith and your priesthood will demand the very best of you and the best you can call down from heaven. You Aaronic Priesthood boys will not use your priesthood in exactly the same way an ordained elder uses the Melchizedek, but all priesthood bearers must be instruments in the hand of God, and to be so, you must, as Joshua said, "sanctify yourselves." You must be ready and worthy to act.

**NARRATOR:** **In the April 2001 Priesthood Session of General Conference, Elder John H. Groberg shared another story of a man who was worthy to help another in need.**

(Elder John H. Groberg, Priesthood Session, April 2001)

In His love for us, God has decreed that any worthy man, regardless of wealth, education, color, cultural background, or language, may hold His priesthood. Thus, any properly ordained man who is clean in hand, heart, and mind can connect with the unlimited power of the priesthood. I learned this lesson well as young missionary years ago in the South Pacific.

My first assignment was to a small island hundreds of miles from headquarters, where no one spoke English, and I was the only white man. I was given a local companion named Feki who was then serving a building mission and was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood.

After eight seasick days and nights on a small, smelly boat, we arrived at Niuatoputapu. I struggled with the heat, the mosquitoes, the strange food, culture, and language, as well as homesickness. One afternoon we heard cries of anguish and saw a family bringing the limp, seemingly lifeless body of their eight-year-old son to us. They wailed out that he had fallen from a mango tree and would not respond to anything. The faithful father and mother put him in my arms and said, "You have the Melchizedek Priesthood; bring him back to us whole and well."

Though my knowledge of the language was still limited, I understood what they wanted, and I was scared. I wanted to run away, but the expressions of love and faith that shone from the eyes of the parents and brothers and sisters kept me glued to the spot.

I looked expectantly at my companion. He shrugged and said, "I don't have the proper authority. You and the branch president hold the Melchizedek Priesthood." Grasping at that straw, I said, "Then this is the duty of the branch president."

No sooner had I said this than the branch president walked up. He had heard the commotion and returned from his garden. He was sweaty and covered with dirt and mud. I turned and explained what had happened and tried to give the young boy to him. He stepped back and said, "I will go and wash and put on clean clothes; then we will bless him and see what God has to say."

In near panic, I cried, "Can't you see? He needs help now!"

He calmly replied: "I know he needs a blessing. When I have washed myself and put on clean clothes, I will bring consecrated oil, and we will approach God and see what His will is. I cannot—I will not—approach God with dirty hands and muddy clothes." He turned and left me holding the boy. I was speechless.

Finally he returned, clean in body and dress and, I sensed, in heart as well. "Now," he said, "I am clean, so we will approach the throne of God."

That marvelous Tongan branch president, with clean hands and a pure heart, gave a beautiful and powerful priesthood blessing. I felt more like a witness than a participant. The words of the Psalmist came to my mind: "*Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?*"

...

*"He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart."* On that tiny island a worthy priesthood holder ascended into the hill of the Lord, and the power of the priesthood came down from heaven and authorized a young boy's life to continue.

With the fire of faith glowing from his eyes, the branch president told me what to do. Much additional faith and effort was required, but on the third day that little eight-year-old boy, full of life, was reunited with his family.

I hope you understand and feel these truths. This was a tiny island in the midst of a huge ocean—with no electricity, no hospital, no doctors—but none of that mattered. For in addition to great love and faith, there was a branch president who held the Melchizedek Priesthood, who understood the importance of cleanliness of hand and heart and its outward expression in cleanliness of body and dress, who exercised the priesthood in righteousness and purity according to the will of God. That day his individual power *in* the priesthood was sufficient to connect with the unlimited power *of* the priesthood over earthly life.

**NARRATOR:**        **In the April 2007 Priesthood Session of General Conference, President Thomas S. Monson told a personal experience about how being worthy at all times brought an opportunity to help someone in need.**

(President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, April 2007)

During the final phases of World War II, I turned 18 and was ordained an elder—one week before I departed for active duty with the navy. A member of my ward bishopric was at the train station to bid me farewell. Just before train time, he placed in my hand a book which I hold before you tonight. Its title: *The Missionary Handbook*. I laughed and commented, "I'll be in the navy—not on a mission." He answered, "Take it anyway. It may come in handy."

It did. During basic training our company commander instructed us concerning how we might best pack our clothing in a large seabag. He then advised, "If you have a hard, rectangular object you can place in the bottom of the bag, your clothes will stay more firm." I thought, "Where am I going to find a hard, rectangular object?" Suddenly I remembered just the right rectangular object—*The Missionary Handbook*. And thus it served for 12 weeks at the bottom of that seabag.

The night preceding our Christmas leave, our thoughts were, as always, on home. The barracks were quiet. Suddenly I became aware that my buddy in the adjoining bunk—a member of the Church, Leland Merrill—was moaning in pain. I asked, "What's the matter, Merrill?"

He replied, "I'm sick. I'm really sick."

I advised him to go to the base dispensary, but he answered knowingly that such a course would prevent him from being home for Christmas. I then suggested he be quiet so that we didn't awaken the entire barracks.

The hours lengthened; his groans grew louder. Then, in desperation, he whispered, "Monson, aren't you an elder?" I acknowledged this to be so, whereupon he pleaded, "Give me a blessing."

I became very much aware that I had never given a blessing. I had never received such a blessing; I had never witnessed a blessing being given. My prayer to God was a plea for help. The answer came: "Look in the bottom of the seabag." Thus, at 2:00 a.m. I emptied on the deck the contents of the bag. I then took to the night-light that hard, rectangular object, *The Missionary Handbook*, and read how one blesses the sick. With about 120 curious sailors looking on, I proceeded with the blessing. Before I could stow my gear, Leland Merrill was sleeping like a child.

The next morning, Merrill smilingly turned to me and said, "Monson, I'm glad you hold the priesthood!" His gladness was only surpassed by my gratitude—gratitude not only for the priesthood but for being worthy to receive the help I required in a time of desperate need and to exercise the power of the priesthood.

**NARRATOR:**

**Being worthy at all times allows God to work through us for the blessing of others. Personal worthiness is an individual quest that each should constantly work toward.**

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