

## Episode 41

### Stories from General Conference

#### OBEDIENCE

**NARRATOR:** Any child can tell you what happens if he or she is disobedient. It may mean a time-out or the loss of a privilege. But as we grow older, we sometimes forget that our actions always have consequences.

**This collection of *Stories from General Conference* is on obedience. In the April 1985 general conference, Elder Victor L. Brown shared the biblical account of Naaman. This story illustrates how some resist obedience in even the simplest things.**

(Elder Victor L. Brown, April 1985 General Conference, Saturday morning)

One of the great lessons on obedience is taught in the story of Naaman. Naaman was “captain of the host of the king of Syria, . . . and a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper” (2 Kings 5:1).

One of his wife’s maidens, an Israelite who had great faith and concern for Naaman’s condition, “said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy” (2 Kings 5:3).

When the king learned of this, he sent Naaman to the king of Israel with a letter and with gifts, requesting that the king of Israel cure Naaman of his leprosy. He had misunderstood the maiden’s comment and thought that the king of Israel was the one who could cure his ailment. The Israelite king was very upset with this request because he had no power to do such a thing. Yet, he knew if he did not do it, it could mean war with the Syrians. Elisha, the prophet, heard of the king’s distress and suggested, “Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

“So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (2 Kings 5:8–10).

Naaman being a man of high position was insulted that Elisha would send a messenger and not show him the respect of coming himself. In addition, the simple nature of the message offended him.

“Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

“And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he said to thee, Wash, and be clean?

“Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (2 Kings 5:11–14).

Naaman needed to have the faith of a child to be obedient as a child before his flesh became clean as a little child’s.

**NARRATOR: Sometimes we may not see any immediate consequences to our disobedience. In these cases, we have the opportunity to strengthen our character by being obedient anyway! Elder Adney Y. Komatsu explained this with a personal experience in the April 1987 general conference.**

(Adney Y. Komatsu, April 1987 General Conference, Sunday afternoon)

Several weeks ago I was assigned to a stake conference in Provo. The Sunday morning welfare meeting was scheduled to begin at 7:30 A.M., so it was necessary that I leave home about 6:15 A.M. Just as I came to an intersection before turning onto the on-ramp to enter the freeway, the light changed to red. As I stopped for the light at that early hour, now about 6:30 A.M., there were no cars in sight. Mine was the only car parked at the stop light.

The thought did cross my mind that if I ignored the red light, no one would be hurt or endangered, for not a car was in sight at that early hour. Nevertheless, I waited out the light change and proceeded on the green light. If I had turned left, no one would have known, but I would know that I was breaking the traffic code, and surely the Lord would know. I was reminded of the scripture which says: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

**NARRATOR: We may think that we know what’s best, but obedience to inspired counsel is always the best choice. President Ezra Taft Benson learned this principle while serving a mission. He related his story in the April 1985 priesthood session of general conference.**

(Ezra Taft Benson, April 1985 General Conference Priesthood session)

One of the great lessons I learned on my first mission was the principle of total obedience.

In 1923 I was serving a mission in Great Britain. At that time there was great opposition to the Church. It began with the ministers and then spread through the press. Many anti-Mormon articles appeared in the daily press. A number of anti-Mormon movies were shown, and derogatory plays were produced on the stage. The general theme was the same—that Mormon missionaries were in England to lure away British girls and make slaves of them on Utah farms. Today that seems fantastic, but in those days it was very real. In some places we even had to stop tracting because of such misunderstandings.

One time we received a letter from mission headquarters instructing us that we should discontinue all street meetings. At that time I was serving as the conference president, and my companion was the conference clerk. When this instruction arrived, we already had a meeting scheduled for the following Sunday night. So we reasoned that we would hold that meeting and then discontinue street meetings thereafter. That’s where we made our mistake!

The next Sunday evening we held our street meeting down near the railway station as scheduled. The crowd was large and unruly. In our efforts to preach to them, my companion and I stood back to back. He spoke in one direction, and I faced the other half of the crowd.

When the saloons closed, the rougher, coarser element came out on the streets, many under the influence of liquor. The crowd became noisy, and those on the outside were not able to hear too well.

Some yelled, "What's the excitement?"

Others yelled back, "It's those dreadful Mormons."

To this, others responded, "Let's get them and throw them in the river."

Soon an attempt was made to trample us under their feet. But since we were taller than the average man there, we put our hands on their shoulders and prevented them from getting us under their feet.

During the excitement, my companion and I became separated. They took him down the far side of the railway station and me down the near side. Things began to look pretty bad.

Then a big husky fellow came up to me as some of the others formed a circle around me about ten feet in diameter. The man looked me straight in the eye and said, "Young man, I believe every word you said tonight!"

By this time a British policeman had worked his way through the crowd. He took me by the arm and said, "Young man, you come with me. You're lucky to be alive in this crowd." He led me several blocks and then ordered, "Now you get to your lodge and don't come out anymore tonight."

When I arrived at the lodge, I found that my companion was not yet there. I worried and then prayed and waited. I became so concerned about him that I decided to disguise my appearance by putting on an old American cap and taking off my topcoat. Then I went out to try to find him.

As I neared the place of the meeting, a man recognized me and asked, "Have you seen your companion?"

I said, "No. Where is he?"

He responded, "He's down on the other side of the railway station with one side of his head mashed in."

This frightened me greatly, and I sprinted to the site as fast as I could. Before I reached the railway station, however, I met the same policeman again. He said, "I thought I told you to stay in and not come out on the street again tonight."

I replied, "You did, officer. But I'm concerned about my companion. Do you know where he is?"

He replied, "Yes, he got a nasty blow on the side of his head, but he's gone to the lodge now. I walked partway with him as I did earlier with you. Now you get back there and don't come out anymore tonight."

So I went back to the lodge and found my companion disguising himself in order to go out and look for me. We threw our arms around each other and knelt together in prayer. From that experience I learned always to follow counsel, and that lesson has followed me all the days of my life.

**NARRATOR: The Old Testament story of Daniel is a well-known example that shows the blessings of obedience. Elder L. Tom Perry discussed his story in the April 1988 general conference.**

(L. Tom Perry, April 1988 General Conference, Saturday morning)

Sometimes I think we fear participation because of the opposition we may face. We find again in the example of Daniel someone who met the opposition of being “in the world” head-on and was able to influence those around him for good. As Daniel’s talents were recognized by the king, he became a trusted counselor. Many were jealous of the position this outsider had obtained, and they sought to do away with him. They devised a new law that would prevent Daniel from praying to God, the Eternal Father. The penalty for breaking the law was to be cast into the lion’s den. Daniel was discovered praying, and the penalty was executed. But because of Daniel’s faith in God, the lions inflicted no harm on him.

Even with the challenges that were continually before Daniel to live his religion, he rose above the conflicts that came before him. The Lord blessed and protected him in his service.

Not only did Daniel’s service benefit the king, but because of the faith that Daniel had in the Lord, it affected an entire land. The king sent forth a proclamation that all the people of the kingdom should worship the true and living God, the God that Daniel worshiped. How mighty was the power of the service of one righteous man, affecting so many, as he served “in the world” in which he lived! How effective will be the results of our service if we will continue to serve in our own personal way “in the world” in which *we* live!

**NARRATOR: Doctrine and Covenants, section 130, verse 21, says that “when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” For example, we are blessed for obeying the Word of Wisdom, a health code God revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. In the October 1990 general conference, Elder Eduardo Ayala gave an example of one man who received the blessings for obedience to the Word of Wisdom.**

(Eduardo Ayala, 1990 October General Conference, Saturday morning)

Allow me to share the experience of a faithful member of the Church who occupies a prominent position among the world’s microneurosurgeons. This is a position he has obtained, according to his own testimony, with the help of the Lord and through obedience to the Word of Wisdom. He joined the Church at an early age and promised himself to faithfully live the commandments. As the years went by, he had the opportunity of fulfilling two of his great goals—the opportunity to pursue a university education and to marry the woman of his dreams.

During this period of time something happened that totally changed the course of his life. One of his daughters became seriously ill with a brain disease, which ultimately took her life. None of the efforts made in her behalf was sufficient to save her. During this frustrating and painful experience, which happened while he was a medical student at the university, he set a new and challenging goal, that of becoming a neurosurgeon. The fact that his daughter had suffered and died through a brain disease awakened in him the desire to study microneurosurgery, schooling that would be long and difficult.

Microneurosurgery requires, among other things, a great deal of physical discipline and dexterity. At this point in his life, while he was pursuing his studies, he discovered the blessings that come through obedience to the Word of Wisdom. He asked the Lord in humility and love that the promises contained in section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants would be made manifest in him so he could bless the lives of those who would depend on his skill.

During those difficult learning years, he worked untiringly to become the best in his area of specialization. As the years went by, he gained great dexterity in his hands and mastered the art and the skill necessary to work on the human brain. As we can imagine, any physical slip or unsteadiness in his hands could cause damage to his patients, perhaps injuring them for life.

As he studied section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants, he obtained a strong testimony that when we refrain from taking into our bodies substances that are harmful to it, we are blessed with intelligence and a healthy and strong body. As a doctor, he knew that these promises were there, within his reach, and he had earnestly sought them in his own behalf.

As the time arrived for his proficiency exam, the final exam in his chosen career, he prepared himself with great care in order to perform to his very best and to demonstrate to the examining doctors the skills he had acquired. The day prior to the examination, he noticed some heavy trembling in his normally skillful hands, and in humility he prayed to the Lord, asking Him to make his hands firm and sure as they had always been to this point. The following day, he discovered with great alarm that there were unsure movements in his hands. He went off to a solitary spot, and, in deep meditation, he mentally searched for any sin he may have committed that would cause him to experience this problem. But in his search, he found nothing that might be contrary to the Word of Wisdom. Then he thought: "I need these promises to come to me now," and he prayed to our Father in Heaven with all his heart that His guidance and protection would be with him.

The time came to perform brain surgery on his patient, and when the doctor saw his hands through the microscope, he noted with great emotion that his prayer had been heard and that his hands were steadier than they had ever been.

He felt a great surge of gratitude, and his sure and skillful hands flew in their activity, healing the damaged brain of his patient. The blessings and the promises of the Word of Wisdom were with him, and he was able to carry out this difficult surgery in an hour less than the normal expectation. It was a complete success, and he humbly accepted congratulations from the examining physicians. With gratitude in his heart for the success he had achieved, he returned to his home, and there, with his family, he reviewed the promises of the Lord that "all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;

"And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;

"And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint" (D&C 89:18–20).

Today as he visits some of the famous clinics and hospitals, and his colleagues have the opportunity of listening to him, he expresses to them and to members of the press, " , I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and then I am a microneurosurgeon." Not all prominent men achieve the humility to be able to recognize the blessings of the Lord in their lives, which are the result of obedience to the commandments, as this good member of the Church has done.

**NARRATOR: One of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." In the October 1987 priesthood session of general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley told us how a bar of soap helped him learn this commandment as a young boy.**

(Gordon B. Hinckley, October 1987 General Conference, Priesthood session)

When I was a small boy in the first grade, I experienced what I thought was a rather tough day at school. I came home, walked in the house, threw my book on the kitchen table, and let forth an expletive that included the name of the Lord.

My mother was shocked. She told me quietly, but firmly, how wrong I was. She told me that I could not have words of that kind coming out of my mouth. She led me by the hand into the bathroom, where she took from the

shelf a clean washcloth, put it under the faucet, and then generously coated it with soap. She said, “We’ll have to wash out your mouth.” She told me to open it, and I did so reluctantly. Then she rubbed the soapy washcloth around my tongue and teeth. I sputtered and fumed and felt like swearing again, but I didn’t. I rinsed and rinsed my mouth, but it was a long while before the soapy taste was gone. In fact, whenever I think of that experience, I can still taste the soap. The lesson was worthwhile. I think I can say that I have tried to avoid using the name of the Lord in vain since that day. I am grateful for that lesson.

**NARRATOR 7: President Hinckley said he learned at a young age not to take the name of God in vain. In the same address, President Hinckley told us how he saw a grown man who didn’t learn that lesson.**

(Gordon B. Hinckley, October 1987 General Conference, Priesthood session)

In a general epistle to the entire Church issued by the First Presidency on April 8, 1887, a hundred years ago, they said concerning this problem, which evidently was serious then as it is now, “The habit . . . , which some young people fall into, of using vulgarity and profanity . . . is not only offensive to well-bred persons, but it is a gross sin in the sight of God, and should not exist among the children of the Latter-day Saints” (in *Messages of the First Presidency*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75, 3:112–13).

I once worked with a group of railroad men who seemed to pride themselves on the use of profanity. They tried to make an art of it. I recall handing a written instruction to a switchman. It was his job to take care of the matter as instructed, but he thought it inconvenient that he should have to do so at that time. On reading the order, he flew into a tantrum. He was a fifty-year-old man, but he acted like a spoiled child. He threw his cap on the ground and jumped on it and let forth such a string of expletives as to seem to cause the air to turn blue around him. Every third or fourth word was the name of Deity spoken in vain.

I thought, how childish can a grown man be? The very idea of a man acting and speaking like that was totally repugnant. I could never again give him my full respect.

**NARRATOR: In the end of his talk President Hinckley said that “the man or the boy who must resort to such language immediately says that he is poverty-ridden in his vocabulary.”**

**This has been *Stories from General Conference* on the topic of obedience on the Mormon Channel. An old saying goes, “When you make a choice, you also choose the consequence of that choice.” Let us choose to obey God’s laws so we can enjoy the fullness of His promised blessings.**

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