

Episode 3

Stories from General Conference

REPENTANCE

NARRATOR:

The topic of this episode of Stories from General Conference is repentance. According to the “Guide to the Scriptures”, repentance is “a change of mind and heart that brings a fresh attitude toward God, oneself, and life in general.” The “Guide to the Scriptures” continues, “repentance implies that a person turns away from evil and turns his heart and will to God, submitting to God’s commandments and desires and forsaking sin.” This means that even though we all sin, God, in his infinite love and mercy, has prepared a way for us to overcome sin and return to him. The “Guide to the Scriptures” ends with these words, “Only through the atonement of Jesus Christ can our repentance become effective and accepted by God.”

Repentance is necessary because we all sin. *Unrepented sin can be destructive, as explained by President Thomas S. Monson during the April 2002 General Conference.*

(President Thomas S. Monson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2002)

In April 1966, at the Church's annual general conference, Elder Spencer W. Kimball gave a memorable address. He quoted an account written by Samuel T. Whitman entitled "Forgotten Wedges." Today I, too, have chosen to quote from Samuel T. Whitman, followed by examples from my own life.

Whitman wrote: "The ice storm [that winter] wasn't generally destructive. True, a few wires came down, and there was a sudden jump in accidents along the highway. . . . Normally, the big walnut tree could easily have borne the weight that formed on its spreading limbs. It was the iron wedge in its heart that caused the damage.

"The story of the iron wedge began years ago when the white-haired farmer [who now inhabited the property on which it stood] was a lad on his father's homestead. The sawmill had then only recently been moved from the valley, and the settlers were still finding tools and odd pieces of equipment scattered about. . . .

"On this particular day, it was a faller's wedge—wide, flat, and heavy, a foot or more long, and splayed from mighty poundings [—which the lad found] . . . in the south pasture. [A faller's wedge, used to help fell a tree, is inserted in a cut made by a saw and then struck with a sledge hammer to widen the cut.] . . . Because he was already late for

dinner, the lad laid the wedge . . . between the limbs of the young walnut tree his father had planted near the front gate. He would take the wedge to the shed right after dinner, or sometime when he was going that way.

"He truly meant to, but he never did. [The wedge] was there between the limbs, a little tight, when he attained his manhood. It was there, now firmly gripped, when he married and took over his father's farm. It was half grown over on the day the threshing crew ate dinner under the tree. . . . Grown in and healed over, the wedge was still in the tree the winter the ice storm came.

"In the chill silence of that wintry night . . . one of the three major limbs split away from the trunk and crashed to the ground. This so unbalanced the remainder of the top that it, too, split apart and went down. When the storm was over, not a twig of the once-proud tree remained.

"Early the next morning, the farmer went out to mourn his loss. . . .

"Then, his eyes caught sight of something in the splintered ruin. 'The wedge,' he muttered reproachfully. 'The wedge I found in the south pasture.' A glance told him why the tree had fallen. Growing, edge-up in the trunk, the wedge had prevented the limb fibers from knitting together as they should."

My dear brothers and sisters, there are hidden wedges in the lives of many whom we know—yes, perhaps in our own families.

NARRATOR: **Repentance allows us to discard the mistakes we have made and become clean. In the April 2000 General Conference, President Monson used another analogy relating to the harmful effects of sin.**

(President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, April 2000)

An inspiring lesson is learned from a "Viewpoint" article which appeared some time ago in the *Church News*. May I quote:

"To some it may seem strange to see ships of many nations loading and unloading cargo along the docks at Portland, Ore. That city is 100 miles from the ocean. Getting there involves a difficult, often turbulent passage over the bar guarding the Columbia River and a long trip up the Columbia and Willamette Rivers.

"But ship captains like to tie up at Portland. They know that as their ships travel the seas, a curious saltwater shellfish called a barnacle fastens itself to the hull and stays there for the rest of its life, surrounding itself with a rocklike shell. As more and more [of these] barnacles attach themselves, they increase the ship's drag, slow its progress, decrease its efficiency.

"Periodically, the ship must go into dry dock, where with great effort the barnacles are chiseled or scraped off. It's a difficult, expensive process that ties up the ship for days.

"But not if the captain can get his ship to Portland. Barnacles can't live in fresh water. There, in the sweet, fresh waters of the Willamette or Columbia, the barnacles die and some fall away, while those that remain are easily removed. Thus, the ship returns to its task lightened and renewed.

"Sins are like those barnacles. Hardly anyone goes through life without picking up some. They increase the drag, slow our progress, decrease our efficiency. Unrepented, building up one on another, they can eventually sink us.

"In His infinite love and mercy, our Lord has provided a harbor where, through repentance, our barnacles fall away and are forgotten. With our souls lightened and renewed, we can go efficiently about our work and His . . . Let us, in our own lives and in our service in the Lord's work, shed the barnacles of doubt, laziness, fear, and sin by plying the living waters of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know their names: faith, prayer, charity, obedience, and love--to identify but a few. The lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ marks the way. His beacon light will guide our course to celestial glory.

May we be wise mariners as we go forth on such a voyage. Let us be pure vessels before the Lord."

NARRATOR:

In the October 2006 General Conference, Elder Shayne M. Bowen provided another analogy about repentance and how our lives can be reclaimed from sin and made beautiful again.

(Elder Shayne M. Bowen, Saturday Afternoon Session, October 2006)

In Idaho Falls, Idaho, there is a beautiful airport. One of the largest in the region, this airport allows easy access to the Upper Snake River Valley. I remember as a young man returning from Chile to this very airport and greeting my family after two years of missionary service. Similar scenes have taken place thousands of times in this airport as the faithful Saints answer the call to serve. It is a very useful, integral part of the city and region.

Near the airport is another very useful and beautiful part of the city—Freeman Park. The Snake River runs along this park for about two miles. There is a walking path that goes through the park and follows on around the river for miles.

Freeman Park has acres and acres of green grass filled with baseball and softball diamonds, swing sets for children, picnic shelters for family reunions, beautiful lanes filled with trees and bushes for strolling sweethearts. Looking down the river from the park, one can see the majestic Idaho Falls temple, white and clean, standing on high ground. The sound of the rushing waters of the Snake River as it works its way through

natural lava outcroppings makes this park very desirable. It is one of my favorite places to walk with my sweetheart, Lynette; relax; contemplate; and meditate. It is very peaceful and inspiring.

Why do I talk about the regional airport and Freeman Park in Idaho Falls? Because they are both built on the same kind of ground; both of these beautiful, useful places used to be sanitary landfills.

A sanitary landfill is where garbage is buried between layers of earth. Webster's dictionary defines a landfill as "a system of trash and garbage disposal in which the waste is buried between layers of earth to build up low-lying land" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. [2003], 699).

Another definition of a landfill is "a place where garbage is buried and the land is reclaimed." The definition of *reclaim* is "to recall from wrong or improper conduct . . . to rescue from an undesirable state" (1039).

I have lived in Idaho Falls nearly my whole life. I have contributed a lot of garbage to those landfills over the course of more than 50 years.

What would the city fathers think if on a given day I showed up on one of the runways of the Idaho Falls airport or the middle of one of the grassy fields in Freeman Park with a backhoe and started digging large holes? When they asked me what I was doing, I would respond that I wanted to dig up the old garbage that I had made over the years.

I suspect they would tell me that there was no way to identify my personal garbage, that it had been reclaimed and buried long ago. I'm sure that they would tell me that I had no right to dig up the garbage and that I was destroying something very beautiful and useful that they had made out of my garbage. In short, I don't think they would be very pleased with me. I suppose that they would wonder why anyone would want to destroy something so beautiful and useful in an attempt to dig up old garbage.

. . . Just as the landfill requires dedicated work and attention, laboriously applying layer after layer of fill to reclaim the low-lying ground, our lives also require the same vigilance, continually applying layer after layer of the healing gift of repentance.

Just as the city fathers in Idaho Falls would feel bad about a person trying to dig up his old garbage, our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, feel sorrow when we choose to remain in sin, when the gift of repentance made possible through the Atonement can clean, reclaim, and sanctify our lives.

When we gratefully accept and use this precious gift, we can enjoy the beauty and usefulness of our lives that God has reclaimed through His infinite love and the Atonement of His Son and our brother, Jesus Christ.

I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that His Atonement is real, and that through the miracle of forgiveness, He can make each of us clean again, even you.

NARRATOR:

Repentance procrastinated can canker the soul and stand in the way of precious relationships. The sooner we take action to correct our course, the better off we are. This is illustrated in a story told by President Thomas S. Monson in the April 2001 General Conference.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2001)

Long years ago, Roy Kohler and Grant Remund served together in Church capacities. They were the best of friends. They were tillers of the soil and dairymen. Then a misunderstanding arose which became somewhat of a rift between them.

Later, when Roy Kohler became grievously ill with cancer and had but a limited time to live, my wife Frances and I visited Roy and his wife, and I gave him a blessing. As we talked afterward, Brother Kohler said, "Let me tell you about one of the sweetest experiences I have had during my life." He then recounted to me his misunderstanding with Grant Remund and the ensuing estrangement. His comment was, "We were sort of on the outs with each other."

"Then," continued Roy, "I had just put up our hay for the winter to come, when one night, as a result of spontaneous combustion, the hay caught fire, burning the hay, the barn, and everything in it right to the ground. I was devastated," said Roy. "I didn't know what in the world I would do. The night was dark, except for the dying embers of the fire. Then I saw coming toward me from the road, in the direction of Grant Remund's place, the lights of tractors and heavy equipment. As the 'rescue party' turned in our drive and met me amidst my tears, Grant said, 'Roy, you've got quite a mess to clean up. My boys and I are here. Let's get to it.' "Together they plunged to the task at hand. Gone forever was the hidden wedge which had separated them for a short time. They worked throughout the night and into the next day, with many others in the community joining in.

Roy Kohler has passed away, and Grant Remund is getting older. Their sons have served together in the same ward bishopric. I truly treasure the friendship of these two wonderful families.

NARRATOR:

Repentance can not only heal our relationship with God, but also with others. Bishop Richard C. Edgley had an unforgettable experience with repentance as a young man which he shared in the October 2006 General Conference.

(Bishop Richard C. Edgley, Sunday Morning Session, October 2006)

In front of this vast worldwide audience and with some reservation, I make a personal confession. I do this as an introduction to a subject that has weighed heavily on my mind for some time. In 1955, after my freshman year of college, I spent the summer working at the newly opened Jackson Lake Lodge, located in Moran, Wyoming. My mode of

transportation was a 14-year-old 1941 Hudson automobile that should have received its burial 10 years earlier. Among the car's other identifying traits, the floorboards had rusted so badly that, if not for a piece of plywood, I could have literally dragged my feet on the highway. The positive is that unlike most 14-year-old cars in this time period, it used no oil—lots of water in the radiator, but no oil. I could never figure out where the water went and why the oil continually got thinner and thinner and clearer and clearer.

In preparation for the 185-mile (298-km) drive home at the end of the summer, I took the car to the only mechanic in Moran. After a quick analysis, the mechanic explained that the engine block was cracked and was leaking water into the oil. That explained the water and oil mystery. I wondered if I could get the water to leak into the gas tank; I would get better gasoline mileage.

Now the confession: after the miracle of arriving home, my father came out and happily greeted me. After a hug and a few pleasantries, he looked into the backseat of the car and saw three Jackson Lake Lodge towels—the kind you cannot buy. With a disappointed look he merely said, "I expected more of you." I hadn't thought that what I had done was all that wrong. To me these towels were but a symbol of a full summer's work at a luxury hotel, a rite of passage. Nevertheless, by taking them I felt I had lost the trust and confidence of my father, and I was devastated.

The following weekend I adjusted the plywood floorboard in my car, filled the radiator with water, and began the 370-mile (595-km) round trip back to Jackson Lake Lodge to return three towels. My father never asked why I was returning to the lodge, and I never explained. It just didn't need to be said. This was an expensive and painful lesson on honesty that has stayed with me throughout my life.

NARRATOR:

We may not be able to reverse the result of wrongdoings, but we should look forward with hope and faith in the future. Sometimes repentance is difficult, but it's never too late. The atoning sacrifice of the Savior is available to everyone, and at all times. Elder Henry B. Eyring, in the October 1999 General Conference, told the following story, which reminds us to resist the thought that it is too hard and too late to repent.

(Elder Henry B. Eyring, Saturday Afternoon Session, October 1999)

There is another temptation to be resisted. It is to yield to the despairing thought that it is too hard and too late to repent. I knew a man once who could have thought that and given up. When he was 12 he was ordained a deacon. Some of his friends tempted him to begin to smoke. He began to feel uncomfortable in church. He left his little town, not finishing high school, to begin a life following construction jobs across the United States. He was a heavy-equipment operator. He married. They had children. The marriage ended in a bitter divorce. He lost his children. He lost an eye in an accident. He lived alone in boardinghouses. He lost everything he owned except what he could carry in a trunk.

One night, as he prepared to move yet again, he decided to lighten the load of that trunk. Beneath the junk of years, he found a book. He never knew how it got there. It was the Book of Mormon. He read it through, and the Spirit told him it was true. He knew then that all those years ago he had walked away from the true Church of Jesus Christ and from the happiness which could have been his.

Later, he was my more-than-70-year-old district missionary companion. I asked the people we were teaching, as I testified of the power of the Savior's Atonement, to look at him. He had been washed clean and given a new heart, and I knew they would see that in his face. I told the people that what they saw was evidence that the Atonement of Jesus Christ could wash away *all* the corrosive effects of sin.

That was the only time he ever rebuked me. He told me in the darkness outside the trailer where we had been teaching that I should have told the people that while God was able to give him a new heart, He had not been able to give him back his wife and his children and what he might have done for them. But he had not looked back in sorrow and regret for what might have been. He moved forward, lifted by faith, to what yet might be.

One day he told me that in a dream the night before, the sight in his blind eye was restored. He realized that the dream was a glimpse of a future day, walking among loving people in the light of a glorious resurrection. Tears of joy ran down the deeply lined face of that towering, raw-boned man. He spoke to me quietly, with a radiant smile. I don't remember what he said he saw, but I remember that his face shone with happy anticipation as he described the view. With the Lord's help and the miracle of that book in the bottom of a trunk, it had not for him been too late nor the way too hard.

NARRATOR:

And finally, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf conveyed an experience from his professional career that also illustrates that it's never too late to repent.

(Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 2007)

During my training to become an airline captain, I had to learn how to navigate an airplane over long distances. Flights over huge oceans, crossing extensive deserts, and connecting continents need careful planning to ensure a safe arrival at the planned destination. Some of these nonstop flights can last up to 14 hours and cover almost 9,000 miles.

There is an important decision point during such long flights commonly known as the *point of safe return*. Up to this point the aircraft has enough fuel to turn around and return safely to the airport of departure. Having passed the point of safe return, the captain has lost this option and has to continue on. That is why this point is often referred to as the *point of no return*.

My dear brothers and sisters, my dear young friends, when the captain of a long-range jet passes the point of safe return, and the headwinds are too strong or the cruising altitudes

too low, he might be forced to divert to an airport other than his planned destination. This is not so in our journey through life back to our heavenly home. Wherever you find yourselves on this journey through life, whatever trials you may face, there is *always* a point of safe return; there is always hope. You are the captain of your life, and God has prepared a plan to bring you safely back to Him, to your divine destination.

NARRATOR: **May we use these illustrations as we resolve to improve our lives through constant repentance. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel.**