

Episode 9

Stories from General Conference

PRAYER

NARRATOR: The topic of this collection of stories from General Conference is prayer. When we realize we are children of a loving Father in Heaven, the desire to pray becomes instinctive. Prayer is used in many situations, and is a means to bring our will in harmony with the will of God. In the April 2000 General Conference, Elder Henry B. Eyring related a story about some good advice regarding prayer given to a new stake president.

(Elder Henry B. Eyring, Sunday Morning Session, April 2000)

I saw a young man nearly overwhelmed by a new call not long ago. The Lord had inspired His servant to call him to be the president of a stake. The young man had never been a bishop. He had never served in a stake presidency. The stake had in it many men of greater maturity and experience.

He was humbled when he heard the call. His wife through tears said to the servant of the Lord who called him, "Are you sure?" Her husband said quietly that he would serve. His wife nodded her support, tears streaming down her face. As you might have done at such a time, he wanted to talk with his father, who was far away. He called him that afternoon on the telephone. His father has been a dairy farmer all his life. He raised the boy into a man through milking cows and letting his son observe him stop to talk with neighbors to see how they were doing. The next morning, in his first talk as a stake president, this is how he recounted the conversation with his father:

"Many of you that know me know I am a man of few words. I must have gotten that from my father. As I called him yesterday to let him know that I was being called as a stake president, his one response to me was, 'Well, you better do a lot of praying.' That was his counsel to me. What better counsel could he give?"

His father couldn't have done much better. And you can see why. The Lord is his only hope for success. Most of the help will come through the ministrations of the Holy Ghost. The Lord's servants cannot succeed without it. We can only have the Holy Ghost as a companion if we plead for it and if we qualify for it. And both require a lot of praying, praying with real faith in our Heavenly Father and in His Beloved Son and in the Holy Ghost (see D&C 90:24; A of F 1:1).

NARRATOR: Prayers can be answered in ways that are not apparent until later. An example of this was related by Elder Ronald A. Rasband in the October 2000 General Conference.

(Elder Ronald A. Rasband, Saturday Afternoon Session, October 2000)

During the final months of our mission last year, we experienced an event that taught once again this profound principle that each of us is known and loved by God.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell was coming to New York City for some Church business, and we were informed that he would also like to have a mission conference. We were so pleased to have this opportunity to hear from one of the Lord's chosen servants. I was asked to select one of our missionaries to provide the opening prayer for the meeting. I might have randomly picked one of the missionaries to pray, but felt to ponder and prayerfully select one whom the Lord would have me ask. In going through the missionary roster, a name boldly stood out to me: Elder Joseph Appiah of Accra, Ghana. He was the one I felt the Lord wanted to pray at the meeting.

Prior to the mission conference, I was having a regularly scheduled interview with Elder Appiah and told him of the prompting that I had received for him to pray. With amazement and humility in his eyes, he began to weep deeply. Somewhat surprised by his reaction, I started to tell him that it was all right and he wouldn't have to pray, when he informed me he would love to offer the prayer, that his emotion was caused by the love he has for Elder Maxwell. He told me that this Apostle is very special to the Saints in Ghana and to his own family. Elder Maxwell had called his father to be the district president in Accra and had sealed his mother and father in the Salt Lake Temple.

Now, I didn't know any of what I just related about this missionary or his family, but the Lord did and inspired a mission president on behalf of *one* missionary to provide a lifelong memory and testimony-building experience.

NARRATOR: Prayer can provide comfort in tense situations. In the April 2002 General Conference, President James E. Faust provided an example of how a family prayer provided both immediate comfort and an additional dramatic answer later.

(President James E. Faust, Sunday Morning, April 2002)

Family prayer is a powerful and sustaining influence. During the dark days of World War II, a 500-pound bomb fell outside the little home of Brother Patey, a young father in Liverpool, England, but the bomb did not go off. His wife had died, so he was rearing his five children alone. He gathered them together at this very anxious time for family prayer. They "all prayed . . . earnestly and when they had finished praying, the children said: 'Daddy, we will be all right. We will be all right in our home tonight.'

"And so they went to bed, imagine, with that terrific bomb lying just outside the door half submerged in the ground. If it had gone off it would have destroyed probably forty or fifty houses and killed two or three hundred people. . . .

"The next morning the . . . whole neighborhood was removed for forty-eight hours and the bomb was finally taken away. . . .

"On the way back Brother Patey asked the foreman of the A.R.P. Squad: 'Well, what did you find?'

" 'Mr. Patey, we got at the bomb outside of your door and found it ready to explode at any moment. There was nothing wrong with it. We are puzzled why it did not go off.' "

Miraculous things happen when families pray together.

NARRATOR:

Children should be taught to pray at an early age. The following story illustrates how the prayer of a child provided comfort in a difficult situation. This was related by Sister Gayle M. Clegg in the April 2002 General Conference.

(Sister Gayle M. Clegg, Sunday Morning, April 2002)

When I was a young mother, my husband and I found ourselves taking our five children under the age of eight to live in South America. Although none of us spoke the language, my six-year-old had the greatest difficulty learning a new language. We decided to put her in preschool with four-year-olds, even though she should be starting first grade. Our hope was that interaction with younger children would be less intimidating to her and might facilitate her ability to communicate in Portuguese.

But the reality for my daughter was that she was as foreign to the children as they were to her. Each day was a struggle, and I anguished for her every morning as I walked her to school and then waited for her to return, dejected, at the end of the day.

One day, some children were particularly unkind to her. A few even threw rocks and bullied her, laughing rudely at recess. She was scared and hurt and decided she couldn't go back into class. Sitting alone while the playground emptied, she remembered what we had taught her about loneliness. She remembered that Heavenly Father is always close to His children and she could speak to Him at any time, not just before bedtime. He would understand the language of her heart. In a corner of the playground, she bowed her head and said a prayer. She didn't know what to pray for, so she asked that her father and mother could be with her to protect her. While returning to the classroom, a Primary song came into her mind.

I often go walking in meadows of clover,
And I gather armfuls of blossoms of blue.
I gather the blossoms the whole meadow over;

Dear mother, all flowers remind me of you.
("I Often Go Walking," *Children's Songbook*, 202)

As she opened her eyes, she noticed one little flower growing between the cracks of the cement. She picked it up and put it into her pocket. Her troubles with the other children did not disappear, but she walked back into the school feeling that her parents were with her.

NARRATOR: The answers to our prayers are sometimes revealed in an impressive and life-saving way. Elder Russell M. Nelson gave an example in the April 2003 General Conference. While working as a heart surgeon, he told about how faith and prayer worked together for the benefit of both himself and his patient.

(Elder Russell M. Nelson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2003)

Many of us have had experiences with the sweet power of prayer. One of mine was shared with a stake patriarch from southern Utah. I first met him in my medical office more than 40 years ago, during the early pioneering days of surgery of the heart. This saintly soul suffered much because of a failing heart. He pleaded for help, thinking that his condition resulted from a damaged but repairable valve in his heart.

Extensive evaluation revealed that he had *two* faulty valves. While one could be helped surgically, the other could not. Thus, an operation was *not* advised. He received this news with deep disappointment.

Subsequent visits ended with the same advice. Finally, in desperation, he spoke to me with considerable emotion: "Dr. Nelson, I have prayed for help and have been directed to you. The Lord will not reveal to me *how* to repair that second valve, but He can reveal it to you. Your mind is so prepared. If you will operate upon me, the Lord will make it known to you what to do. Please perform the operation that *I* need, and pray for the help that *you* need."

His great faith had a profound effect upon me. How could I turn him away again? Following a fervent prayer together, I agreed to try. In preparing for that fateful day, I prayed over and over again, but still did not know what to do for his leaking tricuspid valve. Even as the operation commenced, my assistant asked, "What are you going to do for that?"

I said, "I do not know."

We began the operation. After relieving the obstruction of the first valve, we exposed the second valve. We found it to be intact but so badly dilated that it could no longer function as it should. While examining this valve, a message was distinctly impressed upon my mind: *Reduce the circumference of the ring*. I announced that message to my assistant.

“The valve tissue will be sufficient *if* we can effectively reduce the ring toward its normal size.”

But how? We could not apply a belt as one would use to tighten the waist of oversized trousers. We could not squeeze with a strap as one would cinch a saddle on a horse. Then a picture came vividly to my mind, showing how stitches could be placed—to make a pleat here and a tuck there—to accomplish the desired objective. I still remember that mental image—complete with dotted lines where sutures should be placed. The repair was completed as diagrammed in my mind. We tested the valve and found the leak to be reduced remarkably. My assistant said, “It’s a miracle.”

I responded, “It’s an answer to prayer.”

The patient’s recovery was rapid and his relief gratifying. Not only was he helped in a marvelous way, but surgical help for other people with similar problems had become a possibility. I take no credit. Praise goes to this faithful patriarch and to God, who answered our prayers. This faithful man lived for many more years and has since gone to his eternal glory.

NARRATOR:

Answers to prayers come in many ways. Often, it’s a calming feeling, as experienced by Elder Henry B. Eyring and related in the April 2006 General Conference.

(Elder Henry B. Eyring, Saturday Morning, April 2006)

Like you, I have felt what King Benjamin meant when he said that we could become like a little child before God. I have prayed, as you have, to know what to do when choices that I faced would have eternal consequences. Over many years I have seen a recurring pattern in the times when the answers to such a prayer have come most clearly.

Once, for instance, I prayed through the night to know what I was to choose to do in the morning. I knew that no other choice could have had a greater effect on the lives of others and on my own. I knew what choice looked most comfortable to me. I knew what outcome I wanted. But I could not see the future. I could not see which choice would lead to which outcome. So the risk of being wrong seemed too great to me.

I prayed, but for hours there seemed to be no answer. Just before dawn, a feeling came over me. More than at any time since I had been a child, I felt like one. My heart and my mind seemed to grow very quiet. There was a peace in that inner stillness.

Somewhat to my surprise, I found myself praying, "Heavenly Father, it doesn't matter what I want. I don't care anymore what I want. I only want that Thy will be done. That is all that I want. Please tell me what to do."

In that moment I felt as quiet inside as I had ever felt. And the message came, and I was sure who it was from. It was clear what I was to do. I received no promise of the

outcome. There was only the assurance that I was a child who had been told what path led to whatever He wanted for me.

I learned from that experience and countless repetitions that the description of the Holy Ghost as a still, small voice is real. It is poetic, but it is not poetry. Only when my heart has been still and quiet, in submission like a little child, has the Spirit been clearly audible to my heart and mind.

NARRATOR: Being worthy to receive heavenly inspiration takes on added significance when we realize *we* are sometimes the means through which God answers the prayers of *others*. President Thomas S. Monson provided an example of this principle in the April 2007 Priesthood Session of General Conference.

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

Brethren, our Lord and Savior said, "Come, follow me." When we accept His invitation and walk in His footsteps, He will direct our paths.

In April of 2000, I felt such direction. I had received a phone call from Rosa Salas Gifford, whom I did not know. She explained that her parents had been visiting from Costa Rica for a few months and that just a week prior to her call, her father, Bernardo Augusto Salas, had been diagnosed with liver cancer. She indicated that the doctors had informed the family that her father would live just a few more days. Her father's great desire, she explained, was to meet me before he died. She left her address and asked if I could come to her home in Salt Lake City to visit with her father.

Because of meetings and obligations, it was rather late when I left my office. Instead of going straight home, however, I felt impressed that I should drive further south and visit Brother Salas that very evening. With the address in hand, I attempted to locate the residence. In rather heavy traffic and with dimming light, I drove past the location where the road to the house should have been. I could see nothing. However, I don't give up easily. I drove around the block and came back. Still nothing. One more time I tried and still no sign of the road. I began to feel that I would be justified in turning toward home. I had made a gallant effort but had been unsuccessful in finding the address. Instead, I offered a silent prayer for help. The inspiration came that I should approach the area from the opposite direction. I drove a distance and turned the car around so that I was now on the other side of the road. Going in this direction, the traffic was much lighter. As I neared the location once again, I could see, through the faint light, a street sign that had been knocked down—it was lying on its side at the edge of the road—and a nearly invisible, weed-covered track leading to a small apartment building and a single, tiny residence some distance from the main road. As I drove toward the buildings, a small girl in a white dress waved to me, and I knew that I had found the family.

I was ushered into the home and then to the room where Brother Salas lay. Surrounding the bed were three daughters and a son-in-law, as well as Sister Salas. All but the son-in-

law were from Costa Rica. Brother Salas's appearance reflected the gravity of his condition. A damp rag with frayed edges—not a towel or a washcloth but a damp rag with frayed edges—rested upon his forehead, emphasizing the humble economic circumstances of the family.

With some prompting, Brother Salas opened his eyes, and a wan smile graced his lips as I took him by the hand. I spoke the words, "I have come to meet you." Tears welled up in his eyes and in mine.

I asked if a blessing would be desired, and the unanimous answer from the family members was affirmative. Since the son-in-law did not hold the priesthood, I proceeded by myself to provide a priesthood blessing. The words seemed to flow freely under the direction of the Spirit of the Lord. I included the Savior's words found in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 84, verse 88: "I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up." Following the blessing, I offered a few words of comfort to the grieving family members. I spoke carefully so they could understand my English. And then, with my limited Spanish language ability, I let them know that I loved them and that our Heavenly Father would bless them.

I asked for the family Bible and directed their attention to 3 John, verse 4: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." I said to them, "This is what your husband and father would have you remember as he prepares to depart this earthly existence."

With tears streaming down her face, Brother Salas's sweet wife then asked if I would write down the references for the two scriptures I had shared with them so that the family might read them again. Not having anything handy on which I could write, Sister Salas reached into her purse and drew from it a slip of paper. As I took it from her, I noticed it was a tithing receipt. My heart was touched as I realized that, despite the extremely humble circumstances in which the family lived, they were faithful in paying their tithes.

After a tender farewell, I was escorted to my car. As I drove homeward, I reflected on the special spirit we had felt. I experienced, as well, as I have many times before, a sense of gratitude that my Heavenly Father had answered another person's prayer through me.

NARRATOR: Prayer must be accompanied by faith and sometimes fasting. In the April 2007 General Conference, Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi told a personal experience he had with this principle that affected an entire community.

(Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi, Sunday Afternoon, April 2007)

A few years ago I received the assignment to reorganize the Carey Idaho Stake. The plane landed at Twin Falls, and President Roy Hubert, who had served so well, met me

there and drove me to his home. While we were driving, I asked him, "Is there anything I can do for you and your Saints?"

He said: "Oh, we have had a terrible drought for the last few years. This year it is particularly severe, and many farmers have left town to find employment elsewhere."

I was so disturbed for our faithful members who love the Lord and the Church yet were losing their farms.

A young bishop, R. Spence Ellsworth, was called to serve as the new stake president. During the Sunday general session, results of the drought weighed heavily on my mind. As I was speaking, a strong prompting came. I asked them to do the following:

1. Faithfully pay an honest tithe, both young and old.
2. Humbly hold regular individual and family prayers.
3. Devotedly have daily personal and family scripture study.
4. Thankfully keep the Sabbath day holy.
5. Gratefully go to the temple often, there offering thanksgiving.
6. Willingly sustain and follow the new leaders.
7. Hold a stakewide fast, including everyone in the affected communities who would like to participate.

For the next couple of days following the stake conference, many members planted their crops with complete faith, even though there was no forecast of rain.

On Wednesday, under the direction of President Ellsworth, the whole stake fasted. That same week many members, the leaders, and their spouses went to the Boise Idaho Temple and offered their thanksgiving. While these faithful Saints were in the temple, rain began to fall on the entire community, though the weather forecast indicated no moisture for the next few weeks. The following Saturday, good rain fell again and continued for a few days. This happened late in the month of April. Significant snow fell in the mountains, providing enough moisture. In the Dietrich and Richfield communities, their reservoir had been under 30 percent, but after the people fasted, the reservoir was nearly full. The Carey water supply increased from about 44 percent to more than 100 percent of normal. Through the rest of the growing season, as members of the Carey Stake increased their faith by fasting a few more times, paying honest tithes, and attending the temple more frequently, the Lord heard and answered their prayers. Frost came late that year, so the farmers were able to harvest grain, sugar beets, alfalfa, potatoes, and other crops. From that day, and each year since, they have offered their thanksgiving prayers, and "because of . . . his tender mercies," the Lord continues to bless them.

NARRATOR:

In the April 2008 General Conference, Elder David A. Bednar related an account of how combined faith and prayer can supplement other efforts to benefit those in need of a blessing from God.

(Elder David A. Bednar, April 2008, Sunday Afternoon Session)

A few years ago a family traveled to Europe from the United States. Shortly after arriving at their destination, a 13-year-old son became quite ill. The mother and father initially thought his upset stomach was caused by fatigue from the long flight, and the family routinely continued on its journey.

As the day continued, the son's condition became worse. Dehydration was increasing. The father gave his son a priesthood blessing, but no improvement was immediately evident.

Several hours passed by, and the mother knelt by her son's side, pleading in prayer to Heavenly Father for the boy's well-being. They were far from home in an unfamiliar country and did not know how to obtain medical assistance.

The mother asked her son if he would like to pray with her. She knew that merely waiting for the anticipated blessing would not be enough; they needed to continue to act. Explaining that the blessing he had received was still in effect, she suggested again petitioning in prayer, as did the ancient Apostles, "Lord, Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). The prayer included a profession of trust in priesthood power and a commitment to persevere in doing whatever might be required for the blessing to be honored—if that blessing at that time was in accordance with God's will. Shortly after they offered this simple prayer, the son's condition improved.

The faithful action of the mother and her son helped to invite the promised priesthood power and in part satisfied the requirement that we "dispute not because [we] see not, for [we] receive no witness until after the trial of [our] faith" (Ether 12:6). Just as the prison holding Alma and Amulek did not tumble to the earth "until after their faith," and just as Ammon and his missionary brethren did not witness mighty miracles in their ministries "until after their faith" (see Ether 12:12-15), so the healing of this 13-year-old boy did not occur *until after their faith* and was accomplished "according to their faith in their prayers" (D&C10:47).

NARRATOR: **In the same address, Elder Bednar related another account regarding prayer that ended very differently than the previous incident.**

(Elder David A. Bednar, April 2008, Sunday Afternoon Session)

Several years ago there was a young father who had been active in the Church as a boy but had chosen a different path during his teenage years. After serving in the military, he married a lovely girl, and soon children blessed their home.

One day without warning their little four-year-old daughter became critically ill and was hospitalized. In desperation and for the first time in many years, the father was found on his knees in prayer, asking that the life of his daughter be spared. Yet her condition

worsened. Gradually, this father sensed that his little girl would not live, and slowly his prayers changed; he no longer prayed for healing but rather for understanding. “Let Thy will be done” was now the manner of his pleadings.

Soon his daughter was in a coma, and the father knew her hours on earth were few. Fortified with understanding, trust, and power beyond their own, the young parents prayed again, asking for the opportunity to hold her close once more while she was awake. The daughter’s eyes opened, and her frail arms reached out to her parents for one final embrace. And then she was gone. This father knew their prayers had been answered—a kind, compassionate Father in Heaven had comforted their hearts. God’s will had been done, and they had gained understanding. (Adapted from H. Burke Peterson, “Adversity and Prayer” *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 18.)

NARRATOR: Prayers limited to expressions of gratitude and appreciation for our blessings are also appropriate at times. Elder David A. Bednar illustrated this by a personal experience told in the October 2008 General Conference.

(Elder David A. Bednar, October 2008, Saturday Afternoon Session)

During our service at Brigham Young University–Idaho, Sister Bednar and I frequently hosted General Authorities in our home. Our family learned an important lesson about meaningful prayer as we knelt to pray one evening with a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Earlier in the day Sister Bednar and I had been informed about the unexpected death of a dear friend, and our immediate desire was to pray for the surviving spouse and children. As I invited my wife to offer the prayer, the member of the Twelve, unaware of the tragedy, graciously suggested that in the prayer Sister Bednar express only appreciation for blessings received and ask for nothing. His counsel was similar to Alma’s instruction to the members of the ancient Church “to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all things” (Mosiah 26:39). Given the unexpected tragedy, requesting blessings for our friends initially seemed to us more urgent than expressing thanks.

Sister Bednar responded in faith to the direction she received. She thanked Heavenly Father for meaningful and memorable experiences with this dear friend. She communicated sincere gratitude for the Holy Ghost as the Comforter and for the gifts of the Spirit that enable us to face adversity and to serve others. Most importantly, she expressed appreciation for the plan of salvation, for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for His Resurrection, and for the ordinances and covenants of the restored gospel which make it possible for families to be together forever.

Our family learned from that experience a great lesson about the power of thankfulness in meaningful prayer. Because of and through that prayer, our family was blessed with inspiration about a number of issues that were pressing upon our minds and stirring in our hearts. We learned that our gratefulness for the plan of happiness and for the Savior’s

mission of salvation provided needed reassurance and strengthened our confidence that all would be well with our dear friends. We also received insights concerning the things about which we should pray and appropriately ask in faith.

NARRATOR: The last story of this series was provided by Elder Quentin L. Cook in the October 2008 General Conference. Elder Cook’s story illustrates how prayers can provide comfort and reassurance when troubling situations occur in our lives.

(Elder Quentin L. Cook, October 2008, Sunday Afternoon Session)

Last winter my daughter had a white-knuckle experience driving in a severe snowstorm. She reminded me of a similar situation I had with my two sons many years ago. My youngest son, Joe, was three years old, and my son Larry was six. We were traveling by car from San Francisco to Utah in June. The weather had been very good.

As we started our ascent to the Donner Pass summit in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, suddenly and without warning an enormous snowstorm hit us. None of the drivers was prepared. A semitruck in front of us had jackknifed and was spread across two lanes. Other trucks and cars had slid off the freeway. One lane was open, and many vehicles, including ours, were desperately trying to gain traction to avoid the other vehicles. All traffic then came to a halt.

We were not prepared for this blizzard in June. We had no warm clothing, and our fuel was relatively low. I huddled with the two boys in an effort to keep us warm. After many hours, safety vehicles, snowplows, and tow trucks began to clear up the massive logjam of vehicles.

Eventually, a tow truck hauled us to a service station on the other side of the pass. I called my wife, knowing she would be worried because she had expected a call the prior evening. She asked if she could speak to the two boys. When it was the three-year-old’s turn, with a quivering voice, he said, “Hope ya know, we had a hard time!”

I could tell, as our three-year-old talked to his mother and told her of the hard time, he gained comfort and then reassurance. Our prayers are that way when we go to our Father in Heaven. We know He cares for us in our time of need. ...

At times when we may feel to say, “Hope you know, I had a hard time,” we can be assured that He is there and we are safe in His loving arms.

NARRATOR: Prayer can be a powerful and personal influence in our lives. It should be used sincerely and frequently. It allows us to draw upon the powers of heaven to bless our lives. This has been “Stories from General Conference”. The topic was “Prayer”. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel.