Stories from General Conference

SACRIFICE

NARRATOR: This is “Stories From General Conference.” The words to a popular Latter-day Saint hymn, “Praise to the Man” declare…Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven. This hymn was written about the Prophet Joseph Smith who understood and lived the principle of sacrifice even to his death. This episode of “Stories from General Conference” is “sacrifice”. Through sacrifice we can come to know and emulate the Savior as well as deepen our love for Him and for others. In the April 2003 General Conference, President Thomas S. Monson illustrated the principle of sacrifice with the following story.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2003)

A story written by Karen Nolen, which appeared in the New Era in 1974, tells of a Benjamin Landart who, in 1888, was 15 years old and an accomplished violinist. Living on a farm in northern Utah with his mother and seven brothers and sisters was sometimes a challenge to Benjamin, as he had less time than he would have liked to play his violin. Occasionally his mother would lock up the violin until he had his farm chores done, so great was the temptation for Benjamin to play it.

In late 1892 Benjamin was asked to travel to Salt Lake to audition for a place with the territorial orchestra. For him, this was a dream come true. After several weeks of practicing and prayers, he went to Salt Lake in March of 1893 for the much anticipated audition. When he heard Benjamin play, the conductor, a Mr. Dean, told Benjamin he was the most accomplished violinist he had heard west of Denver. He was told to report to Denver for rehearsals in the fall and learned that he would be earning enough to keep himself, with some left over to send home.

A week after Benjamin received the good news, however, his bishop called him into his office and asked if he couldn't put off playing with the orchestra for a couple of years. He told Benjamin that before he started earning money there was something he owed the Lord. He then asked Benjamin to accept a mission call.

Benjamin felt that giving up his chance to play in the territorial orchestra would be almost more than he could bear, but he also knew what his decision should be. He promised the bishop that if there were any way to raise the money for him to serve, he would accept the call.
When Benjamin told his mother about the call, she was overjoyed. She told him that his father had always wanted to serve a mission but had been killed before that opportunity had come to him. However, when they discussed the financing of the mission, her face clouded over. Benjamin told her he would not allow her to sell any more of their land. She studied his face for a moment and then said, "Ben, there is a way we can raise the money. This family [has] one thing that is of great enough value to send you on your mission. You will have to sell your violin."

Ten days later, on March 23, 1893, Benjamin wrote in his journal: "I awoke this morning and took my violin from its case. All day long I played the music I love. In the evening when the light grew dim and I could see to play no longer, I placed the instrument in its case. It will be enough. Tomorrow I leave [for my mission]."

Forty-five years later, on June 23, 1938, Benjamin wrote in his journal: "The greatest decision I ever made in my life was to give up something I dearly loved to the God I loved even more. He has never forgotten me for it."

NARRATOR: Sacrifice is a manifestation of pure love. In John 15:13 the Savior said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” President James E. Faust told a dramatic story about such a sacrifice in the October 2002 General Conference.

On September 11, 2001, the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City were hit by terrorist-controlled airliners that caused both towers to collapse. Thousands of people were killed. Out of this tragedy have come hundreds of stories of courageous, unselfish acts. One very poignant and heroic account is the Washington Post's story of retired army Colonel Cyril "Rick" Rescorla, who was working as vice president for corporate security of Morgan Stanley Dean Witter.

Rick was a very experienced ex-military combat leader. He was in his office when "the first plane struck the north tower at 8:48 A.M. . . He took a call from the 71st floor reporting the fireball in One World Trade Center, and he immediately ordered an evacuation of all 2,700 employees in Building Two," as well as 1,000 more in Building Five. Using his bullhorn, he moved up the floors, working through a bottleneck on the 44th and going as high as the 72nd, helping to evacuate the people from each floor. One friend who saw Rick reassuring people in the 10th-floor stairwell told him, "Rick, you've got to get out, too."

"As soon as I make sure everyone else is out," he replied.

"He was not rattled at all. He was putting the lives of his colleagues ahead of his own." He called headquarters to say he was going back up to search for stragglers.
His wife had watched the United Airlines jet go through his tower. "After a while, her phone rang. It was Rick.

"'I don't want you to cry,' he said. 'I have to evacuate my people now.'

"She kept sobbing.

"'If something happens to me, I want you to know that you made my life.'

"The phone went dead." Rick did not make it out.

"Morgan Stanley lost only six of its 2,700 employees in the south tower on Sept. 11, an isolated miracle amid the carnage. And company officials say Rescorla deserves most of the credit. He drew up the evacuation plan. He hustled his colleagues to safety. And then he apparently went back into the inferno to search for stragglers. He was the last man out of the south tower after the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, and no one seems to doubt that he would've been again last month if the skyscraper hadn't collapsed on him first."

Amid the great evil and carnage of September 11, 2001, Rick was not looking for what might be in it for him; instead he was unselfishly thinking about others and the danger they were in. Rick Rescorla was the "right man in the right place at the right time." Rick, "a 62-year-old mountain of a man coolly [sacrificed] his life for others." As the Savior Himself said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

NARRATOR: President Faust shared another example of ultimate sacrifice in this story from the October 2006 General Conference.

(President James E. Faust, Saturday Morning Session, October 2006)

In the early days of the Church in Mexico, two faithful leaders who were disciples of Christ became martyrs because of their belief. The two whose lives were taken were Rafael Monroy and Vicente Morales.

During the Mexican Revolution, Rafael Monroy was the president of the small San Marcos Mexico Branch, and Vicente Morales was his first counselor. On July 17, 1915, they were apprehended by the Zapatistas. They were told they would be spared if they would give up their weapons and renounce their strange religion. Brother Monroy told his captors that he did not have any weapons and simply drew from his pocket his Bible and Book of Mormon. He said, "Gentlemen, these are the only arms I ever carry; they are the arms of truth against error."

When no arms were found, the brethren were cruelly tortured to make them divulge where arms were hidden. But there were no arms. They were then taken under guard to the outskirts of the little town, where their captors stood them up by a large ash tree in
front of a firing squad. The officer in charge offered them freedom if they would forsake their religion and join the Zapatistas, but Brother Monroy replied, "My religion is dearer to me than my life, and I cannot forsake it."

They were then told that they were to be shot and asked if they had any request to make. Brother Rafael requested that he be permitted to pray before he was executed. There, in the presence of his executioners, he knelted down and, in a voice that all could hear, prayed that God would bless and protect his loved ones and care for the little struggling branch that would be left without a leader. As he finished his prayer, he used the words of the Savior when He hung upon the cross and prayed for his executioners: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." With that the firing squad shot both Brother Monroy and Brother Morales.

Some years ago I went to Mexico to reorganize a stake presidency. As I conducted the interviews, I was privileged to become acquainted with one of the descendants of Rafael Monroy. I was very impressed with the depth of this man's testimony and his commitment to the gospel. When I asked him what had happened to the rest of Brother Monroy's descendants, he said that many of them have been on missions and continue faithful in the Church.

NARRATOR: There are examples of sacrifice all around us; individuals who give of their time and substance in order to help others. These sacrifices bring greater faith and blessings. In the April 2000 General Conference, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland told the following story about the material sacrifice of an early Utah pioneer.

(Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 2000)

As a young man of Primary and Aaronic Priesthood age, I attended church in the grand old St. George Tabernacle, construction for which had begun in 1863. During very lengthy sermons I would amuse myself by gazing about the building, admiring the marvelous pioneer craftsmanship that had built that striking facility. Did you know, by the way, that there are 184 clusters of grapes carved into the ceiling cornice of that building? (Some of those sermons were really long!) But most of all I enjoyed counting the window panes--2,244 of them--because I grew up on the story of Peter Neilson, one of those little-noted and now-forgotten Saints of whom we have been speaking.

In the course of constructing that tabernacle, the local brethren ordered the glass for the windows from New York and had it shipped around the cape to California. But a bill of $800 was due and payable before the panes could be picked up and delivered to St. George. Brother David H. Cannon, later to preside over the St. George Temple being built at the same time, was charged with the responsibility of raising the needed funds. After painstaking effort, the entire community, giving virtually everything they had to these two monumental building projects, had been able to come up with only $200 cash. On sheer faith Brother Cannon committed a team of freighters to prepare to leave for
California to get the glass. He continued to pray that the enormous balance of $600 would somehow be forthcoming before their departure.

Living in nearby Washington, Utah, was Peter Neilson, a Danish immigrant who had been saving for years to add on to his modest two-room adobe home. On the eve of the freighters’ departure for California, Peter spent a sleepless night in that tiny little house. He thought of his conversion in far-off Denmark and his subsequent gathering with the Saints in America. After coming west he had settled and struggled to make a living in Sanpete. And then, just as some prosperity seemed imminent there, he answered the call to uproot and go to the Cotton Mission, bolstering the pathetic and sagging efforts of the alkali-soiled, malaria-plagued, flood-bedeviled settlers of Dixie. As he lay in bed that night contemplating his years in the Church, he weighed the sacrifices asked of him against the wonderful blessings he had received. Somewhere in those private hours he made a decision.

Some say it was a dream, others say an impression, still others simply a call to duty. However the direction came, Peter Neilson arose before dawn on the morning the teams were to leave for California. With only a candle and the light of the gospel to aid him, Peter brought out of a secret hiding place $600 in gold coins--half eagles, eagles, and double eagles. His wife, Karen, aroused by the predawn bustling, asked why he was up so early. He said only that he had to walk quickly the seven miles to St. George.

As the first light of morning fell on the beautiful red cliffs of southern Utah, a knock came at David H. Cannon's door. There stood Peter Neilson, holding a red bandanna which sagged under the weight it carried. "Good morning, David," said Peter. "I hope I am not too late. You will know what to do with this money."

With that he turned on his heel and retraced his steps back to Washington, back to a faithful and unquestioning wife, and back to a small two-room adobe house that remained just two rooms for the rest of his life.

NARRATOR: In the October 2006 Priesthood Session of General Conference, Elder D. Todd Christofferson told the following personal story about an example of sacrifice observed during his own boyhood.

(Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Priesthood Session, October 2006)

Years ago, when my brothers and I were boys, our mother had radical cancer surgery. She came very close to death. Much of the tissue in her neck and shoulder had to be removed, and for a long time it was very painful for her to use her right arm.

One morning about a year after the surgery, my father took Mother to an appliance store and asked the manager to show her how to use a machine he had for ironing clothes. The machine was called an Ironrite. It was operated from a chair by pressing pedals with one's knees to lower a padded roller against a heated metal surface and turn the roller, feeding
in shirts, pants, dresses, and other articles. You can see that this would make ironing (of which there was a great deal in our family of five boys) much easier, especially for a woman with limited use of her arm. Mother was shocked when Dad told the manager they would buy the machine and then paid cash for it. Despite my father's good income as a veterinarian, Mother's surgery and medications had left them in a difficult financial situation.

On the way home, my mother was upset: "How can we afford it? Where did the money come from? How will we get along now?" Finally Dad told her that he had gone without lunches for nearly a year to save enough money. "Now when you iron," he said, "you won't have to stop and go into the bedroom and cry until the pain in your arm stops." She didn't know he knew about that. I was not aware of my father's sacrifice and act of love for my mother at the time, but now that I know, I say to myself, "There is a man."

NARRATOR: Sacrifices do not have to be made on a grand scale. It is possible to make sacrifices for others even when our own circumstances are meager. In the October 2008 General Conference, Elder D. Todd Christoffersen told the following account of such a circumstance.

(Elder D. Todd Christoffersen, Saturday Morning Session, October 2008)

In much of the world, we are entering upon unsettled economic times. Let us look after one another the very best we can. I remember the story of a Vietnamese family that fled Saigon in 1975 and ended up living in a small mobile home in Provo, Utah. A young man in the refugee family became the home teaching companion to a Brother Johnson who lived nearby with his large family. The boy related the following:

"One day Brother Johnson noticed that our family had no kitchen table. He appeared the next day with an odd-looking but very functional table that fit nicely against the trailer wall across from the kitchen sink and counters. I say odd-looking because two of the table legs matched the tabletop and two did not. Also, several small wooden pegs stuck out along one edge of the worn surface.

"Soon we used this unique table daily for food preparation and for eating some quick meals. We still ate our family meals while we sat on the floor . . . in true Vietnamese fashion.

"One evening I stood inside Brother Johnson's front door as I waited for him before a home teaching appointment. There in the nearby kitchen—I was surprised to see it—was a table practically identical to the one they had given to my family. The only difference was that where our table had pegs, the Johnsons' table had holes! I then realized that, seeing our need, this charitable man had cut his kitchen table in half and had built two new legs for each half.
"It was obvious that the Johnson family could not fit around this small piece of furniture—they probably didn't fit comfortably around it when it was whole. . . .

"Throughout my life this kind act has been a powerful reminder of true giving" (Son Quang Le, as told to Beth Ellis Le, "Two-of-a-Kind Table," Ensign, July 2004, 63).

NARRATOR: In the October 2006 General Conference, Elder Don R. Clark told the following story of sacrifice about something that happened to his grandfather. He learned that a person does not need to have a Church calling, an invitation to help someone, or even good health to become an instrument in God's hands.

(Elder Don R. Clarke, Sunday Afternoon Session, October 2006)

My maternal grandfather, Alma Benjamin Larsen, was only 34 years old when he woke up one morning and noticed that he had problems seeing. Shortly thereafter, he lost his sight entirely. Grandfather had served a mission and been a faithful member of the Church. He was a farmer with a wife and three children, and he could not imagine life without sight. Grandfather's wife and small children now had to bear the extra burdens of helping on the farm, and money became tight.

During this time of physical darkness, many people became instruments in God's hands to help my blind grandfather. One experience that had a powerful impact on his family happened in 1919. It was a year of great financial difficulty for all the people in Grandfather's town. Farms were being foreclosed, and businesses were going broke. There was a sizable mortgage on his farm, and Grandfather received a statement saying he would have to pay $195 in order to carry the mortgage over for another year. For him, paying this bill was like demanding a pound of flesh. Nearly everyone was in the same condition, and it seemed impossible to obtain that much money. If he had gathered everything that the farm produced—the horses, cows, and machinery—he could not have sold them for $195. Grandfather asked a neighbor to butcher two or three of his cows, and he sold them and some other products. He had extended credit to his neighbors with the understanding that they would pay at the end of the year, but none of his debtors was able to pay him. The economic situation for his family was bleak.

In his journal, Grandfather recounts: "I shall never forget that cold evening, just before Christmas of 1919. It looked as though we would lose the farm. My daughter, Gladys, laid a slip of paper in my hand and said, 'This came in the mail today.' I took it to her mother and asked her what it was. This is what my wife read to me, 'Dear Brother Larsen, I've had you on my mind all day today. I am wondering if you are in financial trouble. If you are, I have $200 you may have.' The letter was signed 'Jim Drinkwater.' Jim was a small, crippled man, and he would have been the last man on earth that anyone would have thought had that much money on hand. I went to his house that night and he said, 'Brother Larsen, I received a wireless message from heaven this morning, and I could not get you off my mind all day. I was sure you were in financial trouble.' Brother
Drinkwater gave me $200 and we sent the $195 to the mortgage company, and with the extra $5 we bought boots and clothes for the children. Santa Claus did come that year."

My grandfather then goes on to bear his testimony: "The Lord has never let me down. He has touched the hearts of others as He touched the heart of Brother Drinkwater. I bear witness that the only safety and security that I have ever found has come through trying to keep the commandments of the Lord and upholding and sustaining the authorities of this Church."

I have thought about Jim Drinkwater many times and wondered how he came to be one that the Lord could trust. Jim was a little, crippled man that God trusted to help a blind farmer with a heavy mortgage and three children. I have learned a great deal from my grandfather's experience with Jim Drinkwater. I have learned that a person does not need to have a Church calling, an invitation to help someone, or even good health to become an instrument in God's hands. How then do you and I become instruments in God's hands? The prophets and the scriptures teach us how.

NARRATOR: We can be powerful instruments in the hands of God if we are willing to sacrifice and put others first, even above our own needs and wants. The Lord will not abandon us if we trust in Him. The final story of this series was related by Elder Neil L. Andersen in the April 2007 General Conference.

(Elder Neil L. Andersen, Sunday Morning Session, April 2007)

I take as my subject today something President Hinckley said in general conference in April of 1973.

I had just returned home from my mission. So much seemed ahead of me. Would I be able to consistently make the right choices throughout my life?

Then-Elder Gordon B. Hinckley spoke of meeting a young naval officer from Asia. The officer had not been a Christian, but during training in the United States, he had learned about the Church and was baptized. He was now preparing to return to his native land.

President Hinckley asked the officer: "Your people are not Christians. What will happen when you return home a Christian, and, more particularly, a Mormon Christian?"

The officer's face clouded, and he replied: "My family will be disappointed. . . . As for my future and my career, all opportunity may be foreclosed against me."

President Hinckley asked, "Are you willing to pay so great a price for the gospel?"

With his dark eyes moistened by tears, he answered with a question: "It's true, isn't it?"

President Hinckley responded, "Yes, it is true."

To which the officer replied, "Then what else matters?
NARRATOR: In the Lectures on Faith, we are taught: “...A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things, never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.” May we all develop our faith through sacrifice for the right causes.

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