

Episode 24

Stories from General Conference

THE HOLY GHOST

NARRATOR: The Holy Ghost is the topic for this collection of “Stories from General Conference” on the Mormon Channel.

As a constant companion, the Holy Ghost will bring feelings of peace, comfort and joy; giving us a glimpse of how it might feel when the Lord encircles us in the arms of his divine love.

The Holy Ghost is also referred to as the “Spirit of God”, or sometimes, merely “the Spirit”. As we allow the still small voice of the Holy Ghost guide our lives, we will be warned of danger, receive answers to life’s most difficult questions and feel guidance in making major decisions. In the April 1997 General Conference, Elder L. Tom Perry shared the following personal experience about how the Spirit helped him make an important decision:

(Elder L. Tom Perry, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 1997)

“I remember a critical time in my life and how grateful I was when a still small voice gave me direction to make an important decision. I had been with a retail firm for a number of years. We had enjoyed extraordinary success. We wanted to expand the business but needed a great deal of capital. In an attempt to raise the money, we contacted the best financial advisers we could find. They encouraged us to merge with a larger firm. The merger was successfully completed, and I was asked to sign a five-year contract to give continuity to management. Within a matter of months I found myself in a very difficult situation. The new owners wanted me to violate a trust that I felt I just could not do. After long discussions, they continued to insist and I continued to refuse. Seeing there was no way to break the deadlock, I agreed to leave the company. The timing for me was devastating. I had a wife who was seriously ill and required a lot of medical attention, a daughter away to college, and a son on a mission. I spent the next year just getting enough consulting work to pay my expenses.

After struggling for about one year, a company called me from California and invited me to come out and talk to them about working for them. I went out and negotiated a very good contract; I was delighted with the opportunity. I told them that I had to return home and discuss it with my family before I could give an answer. I returned home and after a careful discussion, I convinced my family that it was the right thing to do. In the process of calling the firm to accept the offer, a voice just as strong and powerful as I have ever

heard came to me and said, "Say no to the offer." I could not ignore the voice, so I turned the offer down, but I was distressed. I could not comprehend why I had been told to do such a thing. I went upstairs to my bedroom, sat on the bed, opened the scriptures, and they fell open to the Doctrine and Covenants, section 111. This was the only section given in the state of Massachusetts, where my home was at that particular time. These words literally jumped out of the page and met my eye:

"Concern not yourselves about your debts, . . . I will give you power to pay them. . . .

"Tarry in this place, and in the regions round about" (D&C 111:5, 7).

A great peace came to my soul. Within just a few days I was offered a fine position in Boston. A few months later I had the great privilege of hosting a conference in which President Harold B. Lee, then First Counselor in the First Presidency, was the featured speaker. The conference was a glorious success as we feasted on the words of President Lee. The following July, President Joseph Fielding Smith passed away and President Lee became the prophet. Three months later I was asked to come to Salt Lake, where I received a call to leave my profession and join the General Authorities.

I have often wondered what would have happened if I had not heeded the Holy Spirit in its counseling me not to leave Boston."

NARRATOR:

The Spirit will guide each of us to the path the Lord would have us follow, bringing us closer to Him and providing a peace that can not be described. In the October 2000 General Conference, Sister Virginia U. Jensen shared the following example.

(Sister Virginia U. Jensen, Sunday Morning Session, October 2000)

When he was just 10 years old, Joshua Dennis spent five days trapped in the pitch-black darkness of an abandoned mine. When rescuers finally heard his faint cry for help and pulled him out of the horrible darkness, he was disoriented, cold, and exhausted. Much to their surprise, he wasn't afraid. Josh spent his time sleeping, yelling for help, and praying. "Someone was protecting me," he explained. "I knew people were going to find me."

Joshua's simple but profound faith had been nurtured by his parents, who taught him that he had a Heavenly Father who knew where he was at all times. They taught him he had been born with the Light of Christ within him. Truly, Josh had been brought up in light and truth (see D&C 93:40) so that when he found himself huddled on a ledge 2,000 feet deep in a mine, he had drawn upon that light to sustain and comfort him, to give him courage and hope. Josh experienced what Abinadi taught when, speaking of Christ, he said: "He is the light and life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened" (Mosiah 16:9).

. . . He is now Elder Dennis serving a mission far away from the dark mine which held him captive. Now Elder Dennis finds his way along the narrow, unfamiliar paths of

Honduras sharing a message of hope, salvation, and light. What he teaches every day is the paradox he experienced as a young boy lost in a mine: that amidst encircling gloom, amidst the darkest possible circumstances, it is possible to feel hope, peace, and comfort-- all because of the light which is stronger than all darkness, the light of Jesus Christ.

NARRATOR: **In the world around us there will always be darkness we have to fight through, but the Holy Ghost can be that light that will assure us of greater things to come. In the April 2005 General Conference, Elder David A. Bednar illustrated this principle, telling of a family who found hope during difficult times.**

(Elder David A. Bednar, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 2005)

In a recent stake conference, the tender mercies of the Lord were evident in the touching testimony of a young wife and mother of four whose husband was slain in Iraq in December of 2003. This stalwart sister recounted how, after being notified of her husband's death, she received his Christmas card and message. In the midst of the abrupt reality of a dramatically altered life came to this good sister a timely and tender reminder that indeed families can be together forever. With permission I quote from that Christmas card:

"To the best family in the world! Have a great time together and remember the true meaning of Christmas! The Lord has made it possible for us to be together forever. So even when we are apart, we will still be together as a family.

"God bless and keep y'all safe and grant this Christmas to be our gift of love from us to Him above!!!

"All my love, Daddy and your loving husband!"

Clearly, the husband's reference to being apart in his Christmas greeting referred to the separation caused by his military assignment. But to this sister, as a voice from the dust from a departed eternal companion and father, came a most needed spiritual reassurance and witness. As I indicated earlier, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness, obedience, and humility invite tender mercies into our lives, and it is often the Lord's timing that enables us to recognize and treasure these important blessings.

NARRATOR: **The Lord sends tender mercies through the spirit to remind us that He is there and knows our needs. Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we can allow the Spirit to help us become more like him and encourage more light to shine into our lives. In the April 2002 General Conference, Elder M. Russell Ballard shared a story about a family whose physical appearance changed as they allowed the Spirit to enter into their lives,**

(Elder M. Russell Ballard, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 2002)

It is sometimes amazing to see the difference this peace can have in the lives of those who accept it. While I was presiding over the Canada Toronto Mission many years ago, our missionaries began teaching a family that was in spiritual darkness. They were poor, uneducated, and their personal appearance reflected a lack of appreciation or concern for normal hygiene and grooming. But they were good, honorable people—among the honest in heart that we always pray for our missionaries to find—and they responded spiritually as they felt for the first time in their lives the peace the gospel offers.

When we learned that they were going to be baptized, Sister Ballard and I attended the baptismal service. I happened to be standing next to the bishop of the ward when the family arrived. In all honesty, I must tell you that they were quite a sight. They looked unkempt, unclean, and somewhat scruffy. Because he had been out of town for a period of time, the bishop had not yet met the newest members of his ward; so this first impression was, to say the least, unimpressive. As they walked away, I thought I could feel his knees begin to buckle.

I put my arm around this good bishop to give him my support—physically as well as spiritually. I felt prompted to say to him: "Bishop, isn't this wonderful? We will make good Latter-day Saints out of them!"

He looked at me, and he smiled. I just couldn't tell if he was smiling because he agreed with me, or if he thought that I might be just another overenthusiastic missionary.

The baptismal service proceeded, and the family was baptized. The next day, we decided to attend that ward to make sure the family was well received when they came to their meetings as new members of the Church.

As the family came into the chapel for sacrament meeting, I was sitting on the stand next to the bishop. The father was wearing a clean white shirt. It was not large enough for him to fasten the top button at the neck, and he was wearing a tie that I could remember seeing on one of my elders. But his face radiated with happiness and peace. The mother and daughters looked like they had been transformed from the previous day. Their dresses were not fancy, but they were clean and lovely. They, too, had that special gospel glow. The little boys wore white shirts that were several sizes too large for them, even with the sleeves rolled up. And they were wearing ties that almost extended down to their knees. It was obvious that the missionaries had put their own white shirts and ties on these little boys so they could come to sacrament meeting appropriately dressed.

They sat with their missionaries, and the light of the gospel literally shone from them. Alma describes this as "[receiving God's] image in your countenances" (Alma 5:14). I leaned over to the bishop again and said: "See, Bishop? We will make Saints out of them!"

Of course, that overnight physical transformation was merely superficial when compared to the overwhelming, more significant spiritual transformation that took place in that family as the gospel entered their hearts and lives. Through the instruction of the missionaries and the subsequent fellowship of their good bishop and the ward

members, this entire family emerged from spiritual darkness into gospel light and truth. In that light the family was warmed, refreshed, and revitalized by the peace that comes from knowing the Lord Jesus Christ lives. The light of the gospel truths restored to earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith began to show this family the way to the temple, where one year later they received their eternal blessings.

NARRATOR: **When the Spirit touches our hearts, a great change takes place. To continue in our progress, it's important to follow gospel principles and allow the Spirit to keep us on the path that leads to Eternal life. There are many distractions in the world that compete with the Spirit's still small voice, so we must listen carefully. During the April 2009 General Conference Elder M. Russell Ballard shared a story about the consequences faced when he didn't follow the promptings of the Spirit.**

(Elder M. Russell Ballard, Saturday Afternoon Session, April 2009)

Years ago when I was in business, I learned a very expensive lesson because I did not listen carefully to the counsel of my father, nor did I heed the promptings of the Spirit giving me guidance from my Heavenly Father. My father and I were in the automobile business, and the Ford Motor Company was looking for dealers to sell their new line of cars. Ford executives invited my father and me to a preview showing of what they thought would be a spectacularly successful product. When we saw the cars, my father, who had over 35 years experience in the business, cautioned me about becoming a dealer. However, the Ford sales personnel were very persuasive, and I chose to become Salt Lake City's first—and actually last—Edsel dealer. And if you don't know what an Edsel is, ask your grandpa. He will tell you that the Edsel was a spectacular failure.

Now, there's a powerful lesson for all of you in this experience. When you are willing to listen and learn, some of life's most meaningful teachings come from those who have gone before you. They have walked where you are walking and have experienced many of the things you are experiencing. If you listen and respond to their counsel, they can help guide you toward choices that will be for your benefit and blessing and steer you away from decisions that can destroy you. As you look to your parents and others who have gone before you, you will find examples of faith, commitment, hard work, dedication, and sacrifice that you should strive to duplicate.

NARRATOR: **There are many ways the Lord reaches out to guide us in the right direction. As we keep ourselves worthy, the Holy Ghost will warn and protect us in dangerous situations. In the April 2004 General Conference, Elder D. Todd Christofferson shared an account involving two missionaries who were miraculously protected in a threatening circumstance.**

(Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2004)

In 1992 two sister missionaries in Zagreb, Croatia, were returning to their apartment one evening. Their last teaching appointment had been some distance away, and it was getting dark. Several men on the trolley made crude comments and became rather menacing. Feeling threatened, the sisters got off the trolley at the next stop just as the doors closed so no one could follow them. Having avoided that problem, they realized they were in a place unknown to either of them. As they turned to look for help, they saw a woman. The missionaries explained that they were lost and asked the woman if she could direct them. She knew where they could find another trolley to take them home and invited them to follow her. On the way they had to pass a bar with patrons sitting along the sidewalk in the gathering darkness. These men also appeared threatening. Nevertheless, the two young women had the distinct impression that the men could not see them. They walked by, apparently invisible to those who might have had a mind to harm them. When the sisters and their guide reached the stop, the trolley they needed was just arriving. They turned to thank the woman, but she was nowhere to be seen.

These missionaries were furnished a guide and other blessings to protect them physically. As you become converted, you will have comparable protections to keep you from temptation and deliver you from evil. Sometimes evil will not find you. Sometimes you will be protected when evil is made invisible to you. Even when you must confront it directly, you will do so with faith, not fear.

NARRATOR:

These sister missionaries learned the protection provided by the Spirit can come in many ways. Sometimes warnings will be given to *one* so they may help others. In the October 2005 General Conference, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin spoke of many who were saved because they listened to the voice of warning.

(Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, Saturday Morning, October 2005)

On December 26, 2004, a powerful earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia, creating a deadly tsunami that killed more than 200,000 people. It was a terrible tragedy. In one day, millions of lives were forever changed.

But there was one group of people who, although their village was destroyed, did not suffer a single casualty.

The reason?

They knew a tsunami was coming.

The Moken people live in villages on islands off the coast of Thailand and Burma (Myanmar). A society of fishermen, their lives depend on the sea. For hundreds and perhaps thousands of years, their ancestors have studied the ocean, and they have passed their knowledge down from father to son.

One thing in particular they were careful to teach was what to do when the ocean receded. According to their traditions, when that happened, the "Laboon"—a wave that eats people—would arrive soon after.

When the elders of the village saw the dreaded signs, they shouted to everyone to run to high ground.

Not everyone listened.

One elderly fisherman said, "None of the kids believed me." In fact, his own daughter called him a liar. But the old fisherman would not relent until all had left the village and climbed to higher ground.

The Moken people were fortunate in that they had someone with conviction who warned them of what would follow. The villagers were fortunate because they listened. Had they not, they may have perished.

NARRATOR:

The elders of the island were able to alert and save others since they paid close attention to the warning signs and followed the Spirit. Those who were willing to listen reached higher ground and were saved. Warnings from the Holy Ghost can work in a similar manner. In the Priesthood session of the April 2005 General Conference, Elder Neil A. Andersen shared an example of the Spirit prompting a friend at just the right moment.

(Elder Neil A. Andersen, Priesthood Session, April 2005)

I'd like to tell you of an experience of a faithful Latter-day Saint who is a good friend of mine. I'll refer to him only as "my friend" for reasons you will understand.

Working as a special agent for the FBI, my friend investigated organized crime groups transporting illegal drugs into the United States.

On one occasion, he and another agent approached an apartment where they believed a known drug dealer was distributing cocaine. My friend describes what happened:

"We knocked on the door of the drug dealer. The suspect opened the door, and upon seeing us, tried to block our view. But it was too late; we could see the cocaine on his table.

"A man and a woman who were at the table immediately began removing the cocaine. We had to prevent them from destroying the evidence, so I quickly pushed the drug suspect who was blocking the door to the side. As I pushed him, my eyes met his. Strangely, he did not appear angry or afraid. He was smiling at me.

"His eyes and disarming smile gave me the impression that he was harmless, so I quickly left him and started to move toward the table. The suspect was now behind me. At that

instant, I had the distinct, powerful impression come into my mind: 'Beware of the evil behind the smiling eyes.'

"I immediately turned back toward the suspect. His hand was in his large front pocket. Instinctively I grabbed his hand and pulled it from his pocket. Only then did I see, clutched in his hand, the semiautomatic pistol ready to fire. A flurry of activity followed, and I disarmed the man."

Later, in another case, the drug dealer was convicted of murder and boasted that he would have also killed my friend had he not turned around at that very moment.

I have often thought of the communication that came into his mind: "Beware of the evil behind the smiling eyes."

NARRATOR:

Satan's influence can also hide behind "smiling eyes". In many circumstances it is vital for us to listen to the Spirit and act promptly. Heavenly Father knows what will keep us safe.

As we are obedient to the principles of the Gospel we can remain close to the Spirit and even be guided to help answer someone else's prayer. President Thomas S. Monson shared a story in the April 2007 General Conference where a prompting he received did just that.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2007)

During the message I delivered at general conference in October 1975, I felt prompted to direct my remarks to a little girl with long, blonde hair, who was seated in the balcony of this building. I called the attention of the audience to her and felt a freedom of expression which testified to me that this small girl needed the message I had in mind concerning the faith of another young lady.

At the conclusion of the session, I returned to my office and found waiting for me a young child by the name of Misti White, together with her grandparents and an aunt. As I greeted them, I recognized Misti as the one in the balcony to whom I had directed my remarks. I learned that as her eighth birthday approached, she was in a quandary concerning whether or not to be baptized. She felt she would like to be baptized, and her grandparents, with whom she lived, wanted her to be baptized, but her less-active mother suggested she wait until she was 18 years of age to make the decision. Misti had told her grandparents, "If we go to conference in Salt Lake City, maybe Heavenly Father will let me know what I should do."

Misti and her grandparents and her aunt had traveled from California to Salt Lake City for conference and were able to obtain seats in the Tabernacle for the Saturday afternoon session. This was where they were seated when my attention was drawn to Misti and my decision made to speak to her.

As we continued our visit after the session, Misti's grandmother said to me, "I think Misti has something she would like to tell you." This sweet young girl said, "Brother Monson, while you were speaking in conference, you answered my question. I want to be baptized!"

The family returned to California, and Misti was baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

NARRATOR:

As we learn to recognize and follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost we can assist the Lord in His important work. This will bring true joy into our lives that will remain constant, as we continue to let the spirit guide us.

This has been "Stories from General Conference" on the topic of the Holy Ghost. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel.

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