

Episode 25

Stories from General Conference

KINDNESS, VOL. 2

NARRATOR: This is collection number two on the topic of kindness in this series of “Stories from General Conference.”

Elder Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated that kindness is the essence of a celestial life. It’s how a Christlike person treats others. The adversary works constantly to create conflict, bitterness and hatred, but imagine what the world would be like if everyone regularly reached out to one another with a kind word or deed? In the April 1998 General Conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke of the unity and kindness he felt as he visited the Church throughout the world

(President Gordon B. Hinckley, Sunday Morning Session, April 1998)

I have been among the affluent but more so among the poor--the poor of the earth and the poor of the Church. Some of their eyes are of a slightly different tilt than mine and their skin of a different color, but all of this disappears and becomes meaningless when I am among them. They all become our Father's sons and daughters, children with a divine birthright. We speak various languages, but we all understand the common tongue of brotherhood.

It is wearisome to travel far to reach them. But it is difficult to leave them after being with them. Everyplace we go is only for a brief visit, a meeting scheduled to fit with other meetings. I wish we could stay longer. At the conclusion of the meeting we spontaneously sing "God Be with You Till We Meet Again" (*Hymns*, no. 152). Handkerchiefs come out to dry tears and then are waved in affectionate farewell. Most recently we held 11 large meetings in different cities in Mexico in just seven days.

It is the presence of wonderful people which stimulates the adrenaline. It is the look of love in their eyes which gives me energy.

NARRATOR: The gospel of Jesus Christ is an influence that promotes unity, love and kindness. In the April 1998 General Conference, President Boyd K. Packer related a personal experience with a group of Relief Society sisters in Czechoslovakia illustrating how kind feelings can be felt worldwide.

(President Boyd K. Packer, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 1998)

Some years ago Sister Packer and I were in Czechoslovakia, then behind the Iron Curtain. It was not easy to obtain visas, and we used great care so as not to jeopardize the safety and well-being of our members, who for generations had struggled to keep their faith alive under conditions of unspeakable oppression.

The most memorable meeting was held in an upper room. The blinds were drawn. Even at night, those attending came at different times, one from one direction and one from another, so as to not call attention to themselves.

There were in attendance 12 sisters. We sang the hymns of Zion from songbooks--words without music--printed more than 50 years before. The Spiritual Living lesson was reverently given from the pages of a handmade manual. The few pages of Church literature we could get to them were typed at night, 12 carbon copies at a time, so as to share a few precious pages as widely as possible among the members.

I told those sisters that they belonged to the largest and by all measure the greatest women's organization on earth. I quoted the Prophet Joseph Smith when he and the Brethren organized the Relief Society: "I now turn the key in [behalf of all women]."

This society is organized "according to your natures. . . . You are now placed in a situation in which you can act according to those sympathies [within you]. . . .

"If you live up to [these] privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates. . . .

"If this Society listen[s] to the counsel of the Almighty, through the heads of the Church, they shall have power to command queens in their midst."

The Spirit was there. The lovely sister who had conducted with gentility and reverence wept openly.

I told them that upon our return I was assigned to speak at a Relief Society conference; could I deliver a message from them? Several of them made notes; each expression, every one, was in the spirit of giving--not of asking for anything. I shall never forget what one sister wrote: "A small circle of sisters send their own hearts and thoughts to all the sisters and begs the Lord to help us go forward."

Those words, *circle of sisters*, inspired me. I could see them standing in a circle that reached beyond that room and circled the world. I caught the same vision the apostles and prophets before us have had. The Relief Society is more than a circle now; it is more like a fabric of lace spread across the continents.

NARRATOR: **Being kind one to another creates a positive atmosphere where the Spirit of our Heavenly Father can be present. In the April 1999 General Conference, President Thomas S. Monson shared a personal experience about a man whose kindness was a guiding light for him:**

(President Thomas S. Monson, Sunday Morning Session, April 1999)

Many years ago, while attending a stake conference, I noticed that a counselor in the stake presidency was blind. He functioned beautifully, performing his duties as though he had sight. It was a stormy night as we met in the stake office situated on the second floor of the building. Suddenly there was a loud clap of thunder. The lights in the building almost immediately went out. Instinctively I reached out for our sightless leader, and I said, "Here, take my arm and I will help you down the stairway."

I'm certain he must have had a smile on his face as he responded, "No, Brother Monson, give me *your* arm, that I might help *you*." And he added, "You are now in *my* territory."

The storm abated, the lights returned, but I shall never forget the trek down those stairs, guided by the man who was sightless yet filled with light.

NARRATOR: **You are listening to "Stories from General Conference" on the topic of kindness here on the Mormon Channel.**

In the October 2001 General Conference, Elder David B. Haight illustrated how modern technology transmitted a simple act of kindness to a very appreciative audience of one.

(Elder David B. Haight, Saturday Morning Session, October 2001)

I hope that you had a little burning in your heart as I did when I raised my hand in sustaining President Hinckley as President of the Church and as prophet, seer, and revelator, and the other officers that have been presented to you. What a wonderful and grand opportunity that is for all of us to be able to sustain our living prophet upon the earth today—but not just to sit there and raise your hand in a haphazard way, but to feel it in your heart and soul that you not only sustain him but you endorse what he has been doing and what he has done for us in representing us to the world. We are thankful for the marvelous and inspired way in which he has communicated and spoken to the world, particularly in these last few days and weeks.

A few years ago, when Arturo Toscanini was musical director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in New York City, he had a Saturday afternoon radio broadcast. And one day he received in his mail a crumpled little note on some brownish paper which read:

"Dear Mr. Toscanini, I am a lonely sheepherder in the mountains of Wyoming. I have two prized possessions: an old violin and a battery radio. And the batteries are getting weak and beginning to run down on my radio, and my violin is so out of tune I can't play it anymore. Would you please sound an A next Saturday on your program?"

The next week on the program, Arturo Toscanini announced: "To a newfound friend in the mountains of Wyoming, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra is now, all together

and in unison, going to sound a perfect A." And they sounded the perfect A. Then that lonely little man was able to tune the A string and then the E string and the D and the G from that perfect A.

NARRATOR: **There's little doubt that this simple act of kindness also affected others in a positive way. In the April 2005 General Conference President Thomas S. Monson explained an incident where a *lack* of understanding and kindness resulted in very unintended consequences.**

(President Thomas S. Monson, Saturday Morning Session, April 2005)

Several years ago we had a young paperboy who didn't always deliver the paper in the manner intended. Instead of getting the paper on the porch, he sometimes accidentally threw it into the bushes or even close to the street. Some on his paper route decided to start a petition of complaint. One day a delegation came to our home and asked my wife, Frances, to sign the petition. She declined, saying, "Why, he's just a little boy, and the papers are so heavy for him. I would never be critical of him, for he tries his best." The petition, however, was signed by many of the others on the paper route and sent to the boy's supervisors.

Not many days afterward, I came home from work and found Frances in tears. When she was finally able to talk, she told me that she had just learned that the body of the little paperboy had been found in his garage, where he had taken his own life. Apparently the criticism heaped upon him had been too much for him to bear. How grateful we were that we had not joined in that criticism. What a vivid lesson this has always been regarding the importance of being nonjudgmental and treating everyone with kindness.

NARRATOR: **Contrast the last story with the next one related in the April 1999 General Conference, by Elder Stephen A. West. He told a personal experience about the kindness displayed by a branch of the Church in a large eastern city.**

(Elder Stephen A. West, Saturday Afternoon Session, April 1999)

A few years ago, my wife and I served as a resource to a little inner-city branch of the Church that was composed of about 35 members. The branch president, Daniel Sawyer, a man I greatly admire, may have been the only member of that branch who had belonged to the Church for more than three or four years. Our meetings were held in a row house in one of the most troubled neighborhoods of a large eastern city. The house was located on a street where many buildings had been burned and looted during the extensive riots in 1968, and now, 25 years later, some of those damaged or destroyed buildings still had not been repaired or rebuilt. Up to the front of the row house were a few exterior stairs

leading from the sidewalk up through a door which opened to some rooms that had been modified for use as classrooms and as an office. Another door opening right from the sidewalk led down a few interior stairs to the basement, which was furnished with a sacrament table, a podium for the speaker, and folding chairs. Some of the most memorable Church experiences my wife and I have had took place in that setting.

One Sunday, right in the middle of the branch sacrament meeting, a woman walked in the door off the street. She was a homeless woman who was wearing dirty, ragged clothes, coughing, choking, and blowing her nose into a filthy handkerchief. In a loud, hoarse voice she said, "I want to sing! I want to pray!" and walked right to the front row and sat down next to a member who was wearing a white blouse, leaned against her, and laid her head on her shoulder. The member immediately put her arms around this guest and held her in her arms throughout the remainder of the meeting. It happened that the speaker had been talking about the parable of the good Samaritan as the woman had come in. As this woman coughed and choked, the speaker continued telling of the parable. As he came to the end of his talk and was quoting a relevant scripture, suddenly, in a loud voice, this homeless woman finished giving the verse that the speaker had begun. In talking of this after sacrament meeting with the speaker, we thought it had probably been a long time since someone had affectionately put an arm around our visitor. We wondered what better illustration you could have of the parable of the good Samaritan than what we had just seen, and we were reminded of the Savior's words that preceded His telling of that parable, "Thou shalt love . . . thy neighbour as thyself."

NARRATOR:

As we find ways to spread kindness we extend the Savior's admonition to "love thy neighbor". Let us be aware of the powerful and long-lasting effects resulting from simple acts of kindness. We can all try to be a little kinder every day.

This has been "Stories from General Conference" on the topic of kindness, volume two. Learn more about the Mormon Channel at radio.lds.org. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel.