

## Episode 33

# Stories from General Conference

## TEACHING, VOL. 2

**NARRATOR:** The collection of stories for this episode of Stories from General Conference is the second volume on the importance of teaching. This is the Mormon Channel.

In the first collection in this series, we learned from stories told in various general conferences that we are all both teachers and students, and that teaching others is an essential principle that blesses lives. This collection continues this theme.

The following story shares something Elder F. Burton Howard learned about eternal marriage. He used an analogy from his married life a teaching process he was not even aware of until later. We can be taught and learn in many ways. This story is from the April 2003 General Conference.

(Elder F. Burton Howard, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 2003)

Most of all, I think eternal marriage cannot be achieved without a commitment to make it work. Most of what I know about this I have learned from my companion. We have been married for almost 47 years now. From the beginning she knew what kind of marriage she wanted.

We started as poor college students, but her vision for our marriage was exemplified by a set of silverware. As is common today, when we married she registered with a local department store. Instead of listing all the pots and pans and appliances we needed and hoped to receive, she chose another course. She asked for silverware. She chose a pattern and the number of place settings and listed knives, forks, and spoons on the wedding registry and nothing else. No towels, no toasters, no television—just knives, forks, and spoons.

The wedding came and went. Our friends and our parents' friends gave gifts. We departed for a brief honeymoon and decided to open the presents when we returned. When we did so, we were shocked. There was not a single knife or fork in the lot. We joked about it and went on with our lives.

Two children came along while we were in law school. We had no money to spare. But when my wife worked as a part-time election judge or when someone gave her a few dollars for her birthday, she would quietly set it aside, and when she had enough she would go to town to buy a fork or a spoon. It took us several years to accumulate enough

pieces to use them. When we finally had service for four, we began to invite some of our friends for dinner.

Before they came, we would have a little discussion in the kitchen. Which utensils would we use, the battered and mismatched stainless or the special silverware? In those early days I would often vote for the stainless. It was easier. You could just throw it in the dishwasher after the meal, and it took care of itself. The silver, on the other hand, was a lot of work. My wife had it hidden away under the bed where it could not be found easily by a burglar. She had insisted that I buy a tarnish-free cloth to wrap it in. Each piece was in a separate pocket, and it was no easy task to assemble all the pieces. When the silver was used, it had to be hand washed and dried so that it would not spot, and put back in the pockets so it would not tarnish, and wrapped up and carefully hidden again so it would not get stolen. If any tarnish was discovered, I was sent to buy silver polish, and together we carefully rubbed the stains away.

Over the years we added to the set, and I watched with amazement how she cared for the silver. My wife was never one to get angry easily. However, I remember the day when one of our children somehow got hold of one of the silver forks and wanted to use it to dig up the backyard. That attempt was met with a fiery glare and a warning not to even think about it. Ever!

I noticed that the silverware never went to the many ward dinners she cooked, or never accompanied the many meals she made and sent to others who were sick or needy. It never went on picnics and never went camping. In fact it never went anywhere; and, as time went by, it didn't even come to the table very often. Some of our friends were weighed in the balance, found wanting, and didn't even know it. They got the stainless when they came to dinner.

The time came when we were called to go on a mission. I arrived home one day and was told that I had to rent a safe-deposit box for the silver. She didn't want to take it with us. She didn't want to leave it behind. And she didn't want to lose it.

For years I thought she was just a little bit eccentric, and then one day I realized that she had known for a long time something that I was just beginning to understand. *If you want something to last forever, you treat it differently.* You shield it and protect it. You never abuse it. You don't expose it to the elements. You don't make it common or ordinary. If it ever becomes tarnished, you lovingly polish it until it gleams like new. It becomes special because you have made it so, and it grows more beautiful and precious as time goes by.

**NARRATOR:**        **The following story was shared in the October 2005 General Conference by Sister Susan W. Tanner, Young Women General President. Sister Tanner shared an experience from her youth illustrating how sometimes *experience* can be the very best teacher.**

(Sister Susan W. Tanner, Saturday Morning Session, October 2005)

The restored gospel teaches that there is an intimate link between body, mind, and spirit. In the Word of Wisdom, for example, the spiritual and physical are intertwined. When we follow the Lord's law of health for our bodies, we are also promised wisdom to our spirits and knowledge to our minds (see D&C 89:19–21). The spiritual and physical truly are linked.

I remember an incident in my home growing up when my mother's sensitive spirit was affected by a physical indulgence. She had experimented with a new sweet roll recipe. They were big and rich and yummy—and very filling. Even my teenage brothers couldn't eat more than one. That night at family prayer my father called upon Mom to pray. She buried her head and didn't respond. He gently prodded her, "Is something wrong?" Finally she said, "I don't feel very spiritual tonight. I just ate three of those rich sweet rolls." I suppose that many of us have similarly offended our spirits at times by physical indulgences. Especially substances forbidden in the Word of Wisdom have a harmful effect on our bodies and a numbing influence on our spiritual sensitivities. None of us can ignore this connection of our spirits and bodies.

**NARRATOR:**

**Elder David R. Stone gave a tip on preparing ourselves to be taught by the Spirit by insulating ourselves from the influences of the world. He shared his experience in the April 2006 General Conference.**

(Elder David R. Stone, Sunday Afternoon Session, April 2006)

My involvement with the building of the Manhattan temple gave me the opportunity to be in the temple quite often prior to the dedication. It was wonderful to sit in the celestial room and be there in perfect silence, without a single sound to be heard coming from the busy New York streets outside. How was it possible that the temple could be so reverently silent when the hustle and bustle of the metropolis was just a few yards away?

The answer was in the construction of the temple. The temple was built within the walls of an existing building, and the inner walls of the temple were connected to the outer walls at only a very few junction points. That is how the temple (Zion) limited the effects of Babylon, or the world outside.

There may be a lesson here for us. We can create the real Zion among us by limiting the extent to which Babylon will influence our lives.

**NARRATOR:**

**Focusing on what we need to learn from competent teachers can be a matter of life or death. In the Priesthood Session of the April 2007 General Conference, Elder Robert D. Hales taught the young men of the Church the importance of being a good student with the following lesson learned as he trained to be a fighter pilot.**

(Elder Robert D. Hales, Priesthood Session, April 2007)

While training to be a jet fighter pilot, I prepared to make such vital decisions in a flight simulator. For example, I practiced deciding when to bail out of an airplane if the fire warning light came on and I began to spin out of control. I remember one dear friend who didn't make these preparations. He would find a way out of simulator training and then go to play golf or swim. He never learned his emergency procedures! A few months later, fire erupted in his plane, and it spun toward the ground in flames. Noting the fire warning light, his younger companion, having developed a preconditioned response, knew when to bail out of the plane and parachuted to safety. But my friend who had not prepared to make that decision stayed with the plane and died in the crash.

**NARRATOR: You're listening to Stories from General Conference on the topic of "teaching", volume 2.**

**The next story is by Bishop Keith B. McMullin. In the Priesthood Session of the April 2007 General Conference, he shared the following personal experience about lessons learned through the unforgiving and proverbial "School of Hard Knocks".**

(Bishop Keith B. McMullin, Priesthood Session, April 2007)

A young man, full of ambition and energy, enrolled in a fine university. At the time, he was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. His goal was lofty—he wanted to become a doctor. His aim was ambitious—he wanted to be rich. He wanted to play football, so he sought out the coaches and eventually made the team. Now he could have the recognitions and bragging rights unique in the world of university sports. Such were the notions in his head.

But he had given little thought to something that would ultimately dismantle his lofty and vain ambitions—he had failed to lay up in store. He had overlooked the importance of adequate preparation, the requirements of regular attendance and disciplined study, and the college chemistry class. The consequence was swift and merciless. It took less than 90 days. It happened this way:

The day he found his 5-foot 8-inch, 170-pound body on the line of scrimmage opposite a mammoth lineman from the varsity squad, he knew he was in the wrong sport.

Unaccustomed to rigorous study, his eyes and mind refused to function after a brief time in the books.

The capstone of defeat was the final chemistry exam. Suffice it to say that his random answers to multiple-choice questions did not even approximate the law of averages. He failed miserably.

Hard work, a mission that awakened in him a correct vision of life's purposes, and unrelenting preparation eventually overcame the consequence of this brief period of foolishness. Even today, however, I still have nightmares about that chemistry class.

**NARRATOR:**        **The effects of continued procrastination make a strict and unforgiving teacher, as illustrated by an experience told by Elder Donald L. Hallstrom during the Priesthood Session of the October 2007 General Conference.**

(Elder Donald L. Hallstrom, Priesthood Session, October 2007)

When our oldest child (who is now a father of three and sits in this priesthood congregation this evening) was 11 years of age, he was given an assignment, along with the other sixth graders of his school, to submit his favorite family recipe. As its contribution to a large spring fair, the sixth grade was producing a cookbook that would be distributed throughout the community. When the teacher announced the project and a deadline of a week from Friday, our son Brett immediately concluded there was plenty of time later to get the job done and dismissed it from his mind. Early the next week, when the teacher reminded the students of the Friday deadline, Brett decided he could easily complete the required task on Thursday night and until then he could occupy himself with other more enjoyable matters.

On the appointed Friday morning, the teacher directed the students to pass their recipes to the front of the class. Brett's procrastination had caused him to forget the assignment and be completely unprepared. Flustered, he turned to a fellow student seated nearby and confessed his problem. Trying to be helpful, the classmate said, "I brought an extra recipe. If you want, use one of mine." Brett quickly grabbed the recipe, wrote his name on it, and turned it in, feeling he had escaped any consequences related to his lack of preparation.

One evening several weeks later, I arrived home from work to freshen up before going to my evening Church meetings. A few days prior, I had been called as a stake president after serving several years as a bishop. We were somewhat known in our community as members of the Church who tried to live the tenets of our religion. "There's something you need to see," my wife, Diane, said as I walked through the door. She handed me a bound book with a page marked. Glancing at the cover, titled *Noelani School's Favorites—1985*, I turned to the identified page and read, "Hallstrom Family, Favorite Recipe—Bacardi Rum Cake."

Many of us place ourselves in circumstances far more consequential than embarrassment because of our procrastination to become fully converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know what is right, but we delay full spiritual involvement because of laziness, fear, rationalization, or lack of faith. We convince ourselves that "someday I'm going to do it." However, for many "someday" never comes, and even for others who eventually do make a change, there is an irretrievable loss of progress and surely regression.

**NARRATOR:**

**The last story in this collection is from the April 2007 Priesthood Session of General Conference. Sport analogies can be great examples of applying what one learns on the field to what we should know in life. In his endearing and amusing way of teaching the young men of the Church, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin shared the following lessons taught him by a respected coach and some experiences on the football field.**

(Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, Priesthood Session, April 2007)

Many of the most important and life-changing moments of my life occurred when I was a young man. The lessons I learned then formed my character and shaped my destiny. Without them, I would be a very different man and in a very different place than I am today. This evening, I would like to talk for a few minutes about some of these experiences and what I learned from them.

I'll never forget one high school football game against a rival school. I played the wingback position, and my assignment was to either block the linebacker or try to get open so the quarterback could throw me the ball. The reason I remember this particular game so well is because the fellow on the other side of the line—the man I was supposed to block—was a giant.

I wasn't exactly the tallest athlete in the world. But I think this other guy may have been. I remember looking up at him, thinking he probably weighed as much as two of me. Keep in mind, when I played we didn't have the protective gear that players have today. My helmet was made of leather, and it didn't have a face guard.

The more I thought about it, the more I came to a sobering realization: if I ever let him catch me, I could be cheering for my team the rest of the season from a hospital bed.

Lucky for me, I was fast. And for the better part of the first half, I managed to avoid him.

Except for one play.

Our quarterback dropped back to pass. I was open. He threw the ball, and it sailed towards me.

The only problem was that I could hear a lumbering gallop behind me. In a moment of clarity, I thought that if I caught the ball there was a distinct possibility I could be eating my meals through a tube. But the ball was heading for me, and my team was depending on me. So I reached out, and—at the last instant—I looked up.

And there he was.

I remember the ball hitting my hands. I remember struggling to hang on to it. I remember the sound of the ball falling to the turf. After that, I'm not exactly sure what happened, because the giant hit me so hard I wasn't sure what planet I was on. One thing I did

remember was a deep voice coming from behind a dark haze: "Serves you right for being on the wrong team."

William McKinley Oswald was my high school football coach. He was a great coach and had a profound influence on my life. But I think he could have learned his method of motivating players from an army drill sergeant.

That day, during his half-time speech, Coach Oswald reminded the whole team about the pass I had dropped. Then he pointed right at me and said, "How could you do that?"

He wasn't speaking with his inside voice.

"I want to know what made you drop that pass."

I stammered for a moment and then finally decided to tell the truth. "I took my eye off the ball," I said.

The coach looked at me and said, "That's right; you took your eye off the ball. Don't ever do that again. That kind of mistake loses ball games."

I respected Coach Oswald, and in spite of how terrible I felt, I made up my mind to do what Coach said. I vowed to never take my eye off the ball again, even if it meant getting pounded to Mongolia by the giant on the other side of the line.

We headed back onto the field and started the second half. It was a close game, and even though my team had played well, we were behind by four points late in the fourth quarter.

The quarterback called my number on the next play. I went out again, and again I was open. The ball headed towards me. But this time, the giant was in front of me and in perfect position to intercept the pass.

He reached up, but the ball sailed through his hands. I jumped high, never taking my eye off the ball; stabbed at it; and pulled it down for the game-winning touchdown.

I don't remember much about the celebration after, but I do remember the look on Coach Oswald's face.

"Way to keep your eye on the ball," he said.

I think I smiled for a week.

I have known many great men and women. Although they have different backgrounds, talents, and perspectives, they all have this in common: they work diligently and persistently towards achieving their goals. It's easy to get distracted and lose focus on the things that are most important in life. I've tried to remember the lessons I learned from Coach Oswald and prioritize values that are important to me so that I can keep my eye focused on things that really matter.

**NARRATOR:**

**In summary, we are all both teachers and students. Learning can come through life's experience, or we can be taught by others. The most important lessons come from the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ. May we redouble our efforts as students of His teachings.**

**This episode of Stories from General Conference has been the second volume of the topic of teaching. Thank you for listening. Learn more about the Mormon Channel at [radio.lds.org](http://radio.lds.org).**