

## Episode 42

### Stories from General Conference

#### FORGIVENESS

**NARRATOR: Doctrine and Covenants 64:10 reads, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.” Nobody is perfect, so everyone needs to forgive and to be forgiven. This is *Stories from General Conference*. The topic is forgiveness.**

**We begin with President Thomas S. Monson in the April 1987 general conference. He told of a time when he made a mistake and needed to forgive himself in order to move on.**

(Thomas S. Monson, April 1987 General Conference, Sunday morning)

In our journey on earth, we discover that life is made up of challenges—they just differ from one person to another. We are success oriented, striving to become “wonder women” and “super men.” Any intimation of failure can cause panic, even despair. Who among us cannot remember moments of failure?

One such moment came to me as a young basketball player. The game was close—hotly contested—when the coach called me from the bench to run a key play. For some reason which I shall never understand, I took the pass and dribbled the ball right through the opposing team. I jumped high toward the basket; and, as the basketball left my fingertips, I came to the abrupt realization that I was shooting for the wrong basket. I offered the shortest prayer I have ever spoken: “Dear Father, don’t let that ball go in.” My prayer was answered, the ball rimmed around the hoop and fell out. And while my prayer was answered, my ordeal was just beginning. I heard a loud cheer erupt from the adoring fans in the cheering section a long and prolonged chant that everyone could hear. I can never forget it. They shouted: “We want Monson, we want Monson, we want Monson . . . OUT!” The coach obliged.

We cannot let those experiences get the best of us. All of us have had them, and will have more of them.

Not long back I was reading about an incident that occurred in the life of President Harry S. Truman after he had retired and was back in Independence, Missouri. “He was at Truman Library, talking with some elementary school students and answering their questions. Finally, a question came from an owlish little boy. ‘Mr. Truman,’ he said, ‘was you popular when you was a boy?’ The President looked at the boy and answered, ‘Why, no. I was never popular. The popular boys were the ones who were good at games and had big tight fists. I was never like that. Without my glasses, I was blind as a bat, and to tell the truth, I was kind of a sissy.’” . . . The little boy started to applaud, and then everyone else did, too” They had heard the truth. (Eugene W. Brice, “Good News about Failure,” *Vital Speeches*, 1 Feb. 1983, p. 236).

We must realize that ours is the responsibility is to rise from mediocrity to competence, from failure to achievement. Our task is to become our best selves. One of God’s greatest gifts to us is the joy of trying again, for no failure ever need be final.

**NARRATOR: Neither President Truman nor President Monson were perfect as young boys. But as they learned to forgive themselves, they were able to triumph over their faults and become great leaders. We too can help others grow as we forgive them of their weaknesses and help them learn from their mistakes.**

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks used the scriptures to show just how important it is to forgive. He made these comments in the April 1988 general conference.**

(Dallin H. Oaks, April 1988 General Conference, Saturday afternoon)

Among the things we should remember about the Savior is that there are things we should forget about our fellowmen—the wrongs they have done us. “Lord,” the Apostle Peter asked the Master, “how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” (Matt. 18:21). In response, Jesus taught the parable of the unforgiving servant. This man owed a large debt to his king. When he begged for mercy, the king was moved with compassion and forgave the debt. But when a fellow servant owed him a debt, this man took his debtor by the throat and cast him into prison until he should pay it. When the unforgiving servant was brought to judgment, the king said:

“Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

“And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you,” Jesus concluded (Matt. 18:33–35; see also Matt. 6:14–15; 3 Ne. 13:14–15).

As the Lord has told us in modern revelation, “He that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin” (D&C 64:9). If we always remember our Savior, we will forgive and forget grievances against those who have wronged us.

**NARRATOR: In addition to forgiving others, we should also *seek* forgiveness from those we have wronged. In the April 1990 general conference, Elder Oaks shared a story about President Abraham Lincoln, who sought forgiveness from an officer under his command.**

(Dallin H. Oaks, 1990 April General Conference, Sunday afternoon)

Persons who seek to reduce human suffering and persons who work to promote understanding among different peoples are also important workers for peace.

A personal act of kindness or reconciliation also has an impact for peace. Lincoln’s biographer described such an act. A Union officer applied to his commander-in-chief for permission to leave his regiment to attend to the burial of his wife. Lincoln gruffly refused. Another battle was imminent, and every officer was needed. The next morning President Lincoln reconsidered and granted the request. He went to the room of the grieving man, took his hand, and said:

“My dear Colonel, I was a brute last night. I have no excuse to offer. I was weary to the last extent; but I had no right to treat a man with rudeness who had offered his life for his country, much more a man who came to me in great affliction. I have had a regretful night, and come now to beg your forgiveness” (Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln, The War Years*, 4 vols. [New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1939], 1:514).

**NARRATOR: It takes a lot of humility to admit we’ve made a mistake.**

**Elder F. Burton Howard shared a story about a young man who admitted to making a huge mistake. He didn't think he would be able to recover from it. But you'll see that as he humbly sought forgiveness, he was able to continue to lead a fulfilling life. This is from the October 1986 general conference.**

(F. Burton Howard, October 1986 General Conference, Sunday afternoon)

One night, while I was in a sound sleep, the doorbell rang. I stumbled to answer it and found a young member of my priests quorum at the door. I knew him well—well enough to have gone on outings with him, to have prayed with and about him, and to have taught him. I knew him as well as a good bishop knows any active eighteen-year-old priest, which was well enough for me to ask what he was doing at my front door in the middle of the night.

He said, “I have to talk to you, bishop. I’ve just done something serious, and I can’t go home.”

He was right. It was serious. I invited him in, and we talked. He talked and I listened, then I talked and he listened, until dawn. He had many questions. He had committed a terrible sin. He wanted to know if there was hope. He wanted to know how to repent. He wanted to know if repentance included telling his parents. He wanted to know if there was any chance of his going on a mission. He wanted to know many other things.

I didn't have all of the answers, but I told him there was hope. I told him the way back would be difficult, but it was possible. I explained what I knew about the process of repentance and helped him see what he must do. I told him if he really wanted to go on a mission that that decision could only be made in the future after he had repented. Then I told him to go home, and he did.

He made his peace with his parents. He asked forgiveness from those he had wronged. He put sin and bad company behind him and did everything he could to repent.

A year or so later, five young men from that quorum went on missions. He was one of them. I was close to them all. I attended each of their farewells. They all served honorable missions. Within a brief time after returning home, they all were married in the temple. My wife and I attended each of the ceremonies. I could take a piece of paper, even today, and write their names and the names of their wives and some of their children. That is how well I knew them.

But now let me tell you something—something very private and very important. I cannot remember the name of the young man who came to my home in the middle of the night. I know he was one of the five, but I don't remember which one.

There was a time I used to worry about that. I thought perhaps my memory might be failing. I consciously tried to recall who it was that had the problem, but I could not.

I was eventually released, and I put the entire incident out of my mind. On a late evening walk some years later, I found myself in the ward where I had once been bishop. The shadowy quiet brought back many memories. I was deep in thought when I realized I was walking in front of a house where one of my priests had lived years before. Suddenly, the story of the young man I have mentioned came to mind, and again I tried to remember which of the five he had been. Had he lived in that house? I wondered. Why couldn't I remember?

As I continued on my way, something happened—something difficult to explain, but real to me. I seemed to hear a voice which said: “Don't you understand, my son? I have forgotten that. Why should you remember?”

I was chagrined. There was no satisfactory answer to the question. I have never wondered about it again. And I knew more surely than I had ever known before that the Lord is pleased when his children return to him.

All who are shepherds and all lost sheep should note this one last thing. The Lord really meant it when he said, “He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42).

**NARRATOR: To forgive and forget is the ultimate goal. It may be difficult to forget the pain someone has caused, but it is possible. In the October 1989 general conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks provided an example.**

(Dallin H. Oaks, October 1989 General Conference, Sunday morning)

One of the most Godlike expressions of the human soul is the act of forgiveness. Everyone is wronged at some point by someone, and many suffer serious wrongs. Christians everywhere stand in awe of those pioneers who have climbed that steep slope to the spiritual summit attained by those who have heeded the Savior’s command to forgive all men. (See Matt. 6:14–15; D&C 64:9–10.) Forgiveness is mortality’s mirror image of the mercy of God.

A sister wrote me about her feelings toward a relative who had abused her as a child, leaving her with a painful physical condition. In her words, “I have to live with the pain and try to function around it.” She wrote, “At times I [felt] angry and wonder[ed] why I had to suffer the abuse in the first place and why must I continue to pay a price now.”

One day, as she listened to a talk in church, her heart was touched. The Spirit bore witness that she should forgive the man who had wronged her and that she could do so with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ. Her letter explained: “The price for that sin has already been paid by Him in Gethsemane. I have no right to hold on to it and demand justice, so I gladly hand it back to Him and rejoice in His love and mercy.”

Her letter described the result of her decision: “My heart is so full of joy, peace, and gratitude and love! Isn’t His work glorious? How I do love Him! Words cannot express my feelings.”

Like this sister who forgave, many modern saints do their pioneering on the frontiers of their own attitudes and emotions. The proverb says, “He that ruleth his spirit [is better] than he that taketh a city” (Proverbs 16:32). Modern saints know that one who subdues his own spirit is just as much a pioneer as one who conquers a continent.

The path of modern pioneers is not easy. Burdens carried in the heart can be just as heavy as those pulled in a handcart. And just as some early pioneers struggled for the benefit of others, so some modern pioneers carry burdens imposed by the transgressions or thoughtlessness of others.

**NARRATOR: Elder Boyd K. Packer shared a heart-wrenching story about an old friend who suffered a terrible loss because of another’s mistake. He talked about how putting off forgiveness caused a lot of unnecessary pain and anguish. This is from the October 1987 general conference.**

(Boyd K. Packer, October 1987 General Conference, Saturday morning)

If you suffer from worry, from grief or shame or jealousy or disappointment or envy, from self-recrimination or self-justification, consider this lesson taught to me many years ago by a patriarch. He was as saintly a man as I have ever known. He was steady and serene, with a deep spiritual strength that many drew upon.

He knew just how to minister to others who were suffering. On a number of occasions I was present when he gave blessings to those who were sick or who were otherwise afflicted. His was a life of service, both to the Church and to his community.

He had presided over one of the missions of the Church and always looked forward to the missionary reunions. When he was older, he was not able to drive at night, and I offered to take him to the reunions. That modest gesture was repaid a thousandfold.

On one occasion, when the Spirit was right, he gave me a lesson for my life from an experience in his own. Although I thought I had known him, he told me things about his life I would not have supposed.

He grew up in a little community with a desire to make something of himself. He struggled to get an education.

He married his sweetheart, and presently everything was just right. He was well employed, with a bright future. They were deeply in love, and she was expecting their first child.

The night the baby was to be born, there were complications. The only doctor was somewhere in the countryside tending to the sick.

After many hours of labor, the condition of the mother-to-be became desperate.

Finally the doctor was located. In the emergency, he acted quickly and soon had things in order. The baby was born and the crisis, it appeared, was over.

Some days later, the young mother died from the very infection that the doctor had been treating at another home that night.

John's world was shattered. Everything was not right now; everything was all wrong. He had lost his wife. He had no way to tend both the baby and his work.

As the weeks wore on, his grief festered. "That doctor should not be allowed to practice," he would say. "He brought that infection to my wife. If he had been careful, she would be alive today."

He thought of little else, and in his bitterness, he became threatening. Today, no doubt, he would have been pressed by many others to file a malpractice suit. And there are lawyers who would see in his pitiable condition only one ingredient—money!

But that was another day, and one night a knock came at his door. A little girl said simply, "Daddy wants you to come over. He wants to talk to you."

"Daddy" was the stake president. A grieving, heartbroken young man went to see his spiritual leader.

This spiritual shepherd had been watching his flock and had something to say to him.

The counsel from that wise servant was simply, "John, leave it alone. Nothing you do about it will bring her back. Anything you do will make it worse. John, leave it alone."

My friend told me then that this had been his trial—his Gethsemane. How could he leave it alone? Right was right! A terrible wrong had been committed and somebody must pay for it. It was a clear case.

But he struggled in agony to get hold of himself. And finally, he determined that whatever else the issues were, he should be obedient.

Obedience is powerful spiritual medicine. It comes close to being a cure-all.

He determined to follow the counsel of that wise spiritual leader. He would leave it alone.

Then he told me, “I was an old man before I understood! It was not until I was an old man that I could finally see a poor country doctor—overworked, underpaid, run ragged from patient to patient, with little medicine, no hospital, few instruments, struggling to save lives, and succeeding for the most part.

“He had come in a moment of crisis, when two lives hung in the balance, and had acted without delay.

“I was an old man,” he repeated, “before I finally understood! I would have ruined my life,” he said, “and the lives of others.”

Many times he had thanked the Lord on his knees for a wise spiritual leader who counseled simply, “John, leave it alone.”

**NARRATOR: John harbored deep feelings of resentment toward the doctor for many years. Only through forgiveness was he able to feel peace again. We can all learn from this advice before we let anger and revenge take over.**

**At the April 1988 general conference, Elder Marvin J. Ashton gave excellent advice about how we can show our support to someone trying to change.**

(Marvin J. Ashton, April 1988 General Conference, Sunday morning)

A few days ago a new friend, not now a member of the Church because of recent discipline, asked, “What can I do while I am waiting? Over the past period of time it has been made very evident what I cannot do. Tell me and others in my situation what we can do.”

As I try to respond to this sincere plea from a good person, perhaps I am directing my suggestions only to a few, but they are a precious few. I would endeavor to instill hope instead of despair in those who temporarily have lost certain powers and privileges. Some of these people in this category dare not hope anymore for fear of being disappointed. May they and their families be helped with thoughts that will bring action, comfort, and a new sense of self-worth.

I recall vividly and with feeling this friend’s additional request, “Please don’t tell me to be patient, loving, sweet, and understanding. I need more than that. I need solid direction. I have an urgent need to get over my frustrated feelings and get on with life. Please help me.”

How can we as Church members best help these good people?

I suggest a quotation from the Book of Mormon as a foundation for our actions: “Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name; and if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood” (3 Ne. 18:30).

Often in the scriptures we are reminded that we should minister to all of God's children, that we should do so with the pure love of God in our hearts. George Bernard Shaw once wrote, "The greatest sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them" (*The Devil's Disciple*, act 2). Indifference can be one of the most hurtful ways of behavior. Never should we in life allow ourselves to turn away, walk on the other side of the street, and pretend we didn't see, or prohibit involvement in accepted ways. We need to learn to love everyone, even those who are difficult.

A warm handshake and a friendly smile can be wonderfully healing medicine. Conversely, how unwise we are when we declare, "I'll never speak to him again." Never is a long time, and even those who have caused heartache or shame are not beyond ultimate repentance. Sometimes hurts to the heart are more damaging than physical blows. Yes, they may take longer to heal, but they will heal more quickly if we avoid bitterness and anger and practice forgiveness.

As we support the efforts of those who are trying to work through their challenges, we should be helpful, and will be if we can extend, compassion, patience, and love. It is a sad day when any one of us surrenders to sin or circumstances.

Many of those "waiting" have often been hurt by thoughtless words and deeds of those around them. Blessed is he or she who avoids being offended. There are appropriate and acceptable assignments which can and should be given to those who are in this waiting period.

Now as to the request of my friend, "What can I do while I'm waiting?" Also from 3 Nephi we are given this warm invitation:

"Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me" (3 Ne. 9:14).

This scripture indicates that in life there is no waiting period before we can come unto God. In our weakness we know where we can turn for strength. What good advice and wise direction for our lives can be gleaned through study of the scriptures! Self-esteem can be renewed and strength to do His will can be revived. People must always count more than programs.

**NARRATOR: This has been *Stories from General Conference*. This collection was on the topic of forgiveness. For more information go to [www.radio.lds.org](http://www.radio.lds.org). And tell your friends about us!**

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