

Episode 29

Stories from General Conference

PERSEVERANCE

NARRATOR: President James E. Faust once stated “perseverance is demonstrated by those who keep going when the going gets tough, who don’t give up even when others say it can’t be done.”

This is “Stories from General Conference”. The topic of focus for this episode is Perseverance.

In order to endure to the end, perseverance is a requirement.

Life is full of trials which may become difficult to push through, but as we step outside of our comfort zone, with the help of God, we will succeed. In the October 2007 General Conference, Elder L. Tom Perry shared a story about his son who learned to stretch himself to in order to surpass a goal.

(Elder L. Tom Perry, Priesthood Session, October 2007)

I was privileged last month to be assigned to attend a seminar with the mission presidents from the North America West Area. Among the mission presidents in attendance was my son, Lee. He had been called to serve before I had completed my yearlong assignment in the Europe Central Area Presidency. It had been three years since I had spent any time with my son, other than a few short visits while passing through his area on other assignments.

After a get-acquainted dinner with all of the mission presidents and their wives, Lee and I, with our wives, went to my hotel room for a visit. Our conversation, of course, centered on missionary work. Lee explained what had happened to his missionaries since President Hinckley asked us to raise the bar on qualifications for missionary service. He reported a decided improvement in the preparation of the missionaries arriving in the mission field. The conversation led us to recall an experience Lee and I had while he was attending high school.

Lee was a member of his high school track team—he both sprinted and high-jumped. During the 1968 Summer Olympic Games held in Mexico City, the world became enamored with a little-known high jumper named Dick Fosbury. He had experimented with a new high-jumping technique that involved sprinting diagonally toward the bar, then curving and leaping backward over the bar. It came to be called the Fosbury flop.

Like many others, Lee was intrigued by this new technique, but until the new school year started, he didn't have a place to practice it. I came home one evening to find him practicing the Fosbury flop in our basement. He had set up two makeshift standards by stacking chairs, and he was jumping over a broomstick set on the chairs, using a sofa to cushion his landing. It was very clear to me that the sofa would not hold up under such treatment, so I called a halt to his indoor high-jumping. Instead, I invited him to go with me to a sporting-goods store, where we purchased some foam padding to use for landing and high-jumping standards so he could move the activity out of doors.

After experimenting with the Fosbury flop, Lee decided to return to the western roll technique that he had used previously. Still, through the end of the summer into the fall, he practiced high-jumping for many hours in our backyard.

One evening as I returned home from work, I found Lee practicing his jumping. I asked, "How high is the bar?"

He said, "Five feet, eight inches."

"Why that height?"

He answered, "You must clear that height to qualify for the state track meet."

"How are you doing?" I asked.

"I can clear it every time. I haven't missed."

My reply: "Let's raise the bar and see how well you do then."

He replied, "Then I might miss."

I queried, "If you don't raise the bar, how will you ever know your potential?"

So we started moving the bar up to five feet, ten inches; then to six feet; and so on, as he sought to improve. Lee became a better high jumper because he was not content with just clearing the minimum standard. He learned that even if it meant missing, he wanted to keep raising the bar to become the best high jumper he was capable of becoming.

NARRATOR:

Perseverance includes going beyond what we think we are capable of. In the October 2007 General Conference, President Monson illustrated this point by the following story about an Olympic runner who pushed beyond an obstacle that may have caused most others to quit.

(President Thomas S. Monson, Priesthood Session, October 2007)

In July of 1976, runner Garry Bjorklund was determined to qualify for the U.S. Olympic team's 10,000-meter race which would be run at the Montreal Olympics. Halfway through the grinding qualifying race, however, he lost his left shoe. What would you and

I do if that were our experience? I suppose he could have given up and stopped. He could have blamed his bad luck and lost the opportunity of participating in the greatest race of his life, but this champion athlete did not do that. He ran on without his shoe. He knew that he would have to run faster than he had ever run in his life. He knew that his competitors now had an advantage that they did not have at the beginning of the race. Over that cinder track he ran, with one shoe on and one shoe off, finishing third and qualifying for the opportunity to participate in the race for the gold medal. His own running time was the best he had ever recorded. He put forth the effort necessary to achieve his goal.

NARRATOR: Nothing was going to get in Garry’s way of reaching his ultimate goal. Sometimes we too have to be willing to do whatever it takes. Elder Coleman shared a story illustrating this principle in the April 2000 General Conference:

(Elder Gary A. Coleman, Saturday Afternoon Session, April 2000)

Nearly 28 years ago I desired to attend a general conference of the Church and drove 14 hours to be in Salt Lake City for the conference. I entered Temple Square at 8:00 a.m., where the line outside door number 10 was all the way across Temple Square and halfway down the south side of the Assembly Hall. I was nearly 300 feet from my goal. The usher called out that the Tabernacle was full. People dropped out of line, and I inched forward.

At five minutes before 10:00 I was the only person standing in front of my chosen door. The door opened, and the usher said, "Are you still here?" He closed the door, and my heart sank. As the choir began to sing the opening hymn at 10:00 sharp, the door opened one more time, and the usher beckoned me inside. He placed me on half a seat and behind a post, but a welcome seat it was! I was able to sustain the Lord's chosen leaders and hear their counsel that special day.

NARRATOR: You are listening to the Mormon Channel. This is “Stories from General Conference” on the topic of “Perseverance”.

In the previous story, Elder Coleman explained how his perseverance allowed him to untimately sustain the General Authorities in person, which strengthened his testimony. He didn’t let discouragement prevent him from pursuing his goal.

Throughout life we may be given hard tasks that are tough to finish, but as we work through them a sense of accomplishment and joy will follow. In the April 2004 General Conference, Sister Gayle M. Clegg, Second Counselor in the Primary General Presidency, spoke of one of her students who persevered to the end of a difficult assignment.

(Sister Gayle M. Clegg, Saturday Morning Session, April 2004)

Some time ago I found a large white envelope in my mailbox. Inside was a story written by a boy I had taught years before when he was in sixth grade. I remembered the student and the assignment his class had worked on for months. I also remembered that he loved to write and would sit and think and think. Sometimes only a word or two found their way to the page. At times he worked during recess, but when the due date arrived, his story still had a chapter to go. I told him just to turn it in as it was, but Jimmy had a different vision and wanted to turn in a finished story. The last day of class he asked if he could finish during the summer break. Again I told him just to turn it in. He pleaded for more time, and finally I sent him on his way with a stack of wrinkled and smudged papers, complimenting him on his determination and assuring him of my confidence in his ability to complete a great story.

I thought about him that summer, but the assignment left my mind until years later when I found his completed project in the mailbox. I was amazed and wondered what made Jimmy finish his story. What kind of vision, determination, and effort had been required in this task? Why do any of us finish a hard task, especially if no one demands its completion?

NARRATOR:

There is a sense of peace and accomplishment that brings us great satisfaction when we reach a high goal or finish a difficult task. In another example by Sister Gayle M. Clegg shared in the April 2002 General Conference, we have another example of someone who pressed forward to the end.

(Sister Gayle M. Clegg, Sunday Morning Session, April 2002)

Susan Madsen tells the story of Agnes Caldwell in the Willie Handcart Company. They were caught in heavy storms and suffered terrible hunger and cold. Relief wagons came to deliver food and blankets, but there were not enough wagons to carry all the people. Even after rescue, the majority of the people still had to trudge on many more miles to the safety of the valley.

Little nine-year-old Agnes was too weary to walk any farther. The driver took notice of her determination to keep up with the wagon and asked if she would like a ride. She tells in her own words what happened next:

"At this he reached over, taking my hand, clucking to his horses to make me run, with legs that . . . could run no farther. On we went, to what to me seemed miles. What went through my head at that time was that he was the meanest man that ever lived or that I had ever heard of. . . . Just at what seemed the breaking point, he stopped [and pulled me into the wagon]. Taking a blanket, he wrapped me up . . . warm and comfortable. Here I had time to change my mind, as I surely did, knowing full well by doing this he saved me from freezing when taken into the wagon" (in *I Walked to Zion* [1994], 59).

The driver of that relief wagon made the little girl run as far and as fast as she could to push blood back into her frozen feet and legs. He saved her legs, possibly her life, by letting her help herself.

NARRATOR: **As we press on--persevering through rough periods of our lives-- the Lord strengthens us, and will help us reach worthy goals. In the April 2004 General Conference, Sister Gayle M. Clegg shared yet another story about perseverance. This time it was a personal experience about an ancestor who taught them what it means to be a finisher.**

(Sister Gayle M. Clegg, Saturday Morning Session, April 2004)

My husband's great-grandfather Henry Clegg Jr. was a finisher. He joined the Church with his family when the first LDS missionaries went to Preston, England. Henry had a view of his destination in his mind as he and his wife, Hannah, and their two young boys immigrated to Utah. Henry left his older parents, who were too feeble to make such a long and arduous journey, knowing he would never see them again.

While crossing the plains, Hannah contracted cholera and died. She was laid to rest in an unmarked grave. The company then moved on, and at six in the evening, Henry's youngest son also died. Henry retraced his steps to Hannah's grave, placed his young son in his wife's arms, and reburied the two of them together. Henry then had to return to the wagon train, now five miles away. Suffering from cholera himself, Henry described his condition as being at death's door while realizing he still had a thousand miles to walk. Amazingly he continued forward, putting one foot in front of the other. He stopped writing in his journal for several weeks after losing his dear Hannah and little son. I was struck with the words he used when he did start writing again: "Still moving."

When he finally reached the gathering place of the Saints, he began a new family. He kept the faith. He continued his story. Most remarkably, his heartache over the burial of his sweetheart and son gave birth to our family's legacy of moving forward, of finishing.

NARRATOR: **It takes great faith and determination to press forward steadfastly like Henry Clegg Jr. He provides an example for us to follow with an attitude of never giving up. In the April 2005 General Conference, President James E. Faust spoke of several leaders who set an example of perseverance for him.**

(President James E. Faust, Priesthood Session, April 2005)

Perseverance is demonstrated by those who keep going when the going gets tough, who don't give up even when others say, "It can't be done." In 1864, the First Presidency assigned Apostles Ezra T. Benson and Lorenzo Snow, along with Elders Alma Smith and

William W. Cluff, on a mission to the Hawaiian Islands. From Honolulu they took passage on a small boat to the little harbor of Lahaina. As they approached the reef, the surf was running high and a heavy swell struck the boat, carrying it about 50 yards and leaving it in a trough between two huge waves. When the second swell struck, the boat capsized into the foaming sea.

The people on the shore manned a lifeboat and picked up three of the brethren, who were swimming near the submerged boat. But there was no sign of Brother Snow. Hawaiians accustomed to the surf swam in every direction to search for him. Eventually one of them felt something in the water, and they pulled Brother Snow to the surface. His body was stiff, and he looked like he was dead as they hauled him into the boat.

Elder Smith and Elder Cluff laid Brother Snow's body across their laps and quietly administered to him, asking the Lord to spare his life that he might return to his family and home. When they reached the shore, they carried Brother Snow to some large empty barrels lying on the beach. Laying him face downwards on one of them, they rolled him back and forth to expel the water he had swallowed.

After the elders worked over him for some time, without any indication of life, the bystanders said that nothing more could be done for him. But the determined elders would not give up. So they prayed again, with the quiet assurance that the Lord would hear and answer their prayers.

They were impressed to do something rather unusual for that day and time. One of them placed his mouth over Brother Snow's in an effort to inflate his lungs, alternately blowing in and drawing out air, imitating the natural process of breathing. Taking turns, they persevered until they succeeded in inflating his lungs. A little while later they perceived faint indications of returning life. "A slight wink of the eye, which, until then, had been open and death-like, and a very faint rattle in the throat, were the first symptoms of returning vitality. These grew more and more distinct, until consciousness was fully restored." With their perseverance and the smile of merciful Providence, all four of the Lord's servants survived and were able to complete their missions.

Elder Snow went on to become the President of the Church. While serving in that office, he stabilized the Church's funds by urging the members to pay their tithes and offerings.

You brethren will be interested to know that the Alma Smith in this story was the boy who was shot in the hip at Haun's Mill, destroying the hip joint and socket. His mother dressed the terrible wound with some balsam and then was inspired to have him lie on his face for five weeks. A flexible gristle grew in place of the missing joint and socket so that he was able not only to live a normal life, but also to serve a mission to Hawaii and give a lifetime of service to the Church.

NARRATOR: **There are many examples such as these about people who showed great faith and perseverance when asked to do difficult things. We can do the same, and inspire others as we go. May we persevere in the service of our God.**

This has been “Stories from General Conference” on the topic of “Perseverance”. Thank you for listening to the Mormon Channel. You can learn more about the Mormon Channel at radio.lds.org.