

## Stories



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Devotional  
January 29, 2019

Aloha My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is great to be among you this day. It is so nice to see your smiles, your well-kept hair, your appropriate dress, your optimism, and your faith. I thank you for being here.

As we read The Book of Mormon, we read stories about people's lives. We read about Nephi and his family fleeing Jerusalem, traveling in the wilderness, and sailing to a new continent. We read about Alma and his son, also named Alma. We read about Mormon and Moroni. The scriptures are full of stories about the lives of people.

As we listen to General Conference we hear more stories. Can you recall the story of President Nelson learning Chinese? or how he touched President Kimball's heart? or how after he was called to be an apostle, he was asked to perform one last heart operation to help save the life of a famous Chinese opera singer?

Today I will share some of my special life stories. As I do so, I want you to reflect upon your own life stories. See where the Spirit leads your mind and guides your thoughts.

### Story #1. Devotionals

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”[\[i\]](#)

A little more than 30 years ago, I moved to Laie with my mother and father. I was a young happy single student living at home and couldn't figure out why anyone would come to these devotionals, especially on a bright sunny day when the beach is so close.

However, the Lord knew me. He knew I needed to be here. What better way to get me to come to these devotionals than to pay me to come. Yes, brothers and sisters, when I was a student, the University paid me to attend devotionals.

For some reason, I had a desire to work in the campus TV studio. I volunteered for several weeks before I was able to get a student job there. That meant every week I would be part of the crew videotaping the devotionals. Therefore, I was paid to be here and in a way attending devotionals is still part of my job description. But as far as I know, there is no extra benefit to my salary for being the speaker.

So why did I agree to come and speak today? That is a good question? I guess I have always wondered what it would be like to be on the other side of the camera, the person at the pulpit. Now after nearly 30 years of being at BYU-Hawaii, I have my answer. It's awesome/scary.

However, far more important than money, is the spiritual uplift and blessings I receive for attending devotionals. My life seems more centered on Christ and the purpose of why I was sent to Earth. I hope you too have a good reason for attending. And I'm not just talking about extra credit or pay.

## Story #2. Baptism

Remember the story of Nicodemus, who came to Jesus and Jesus said:

“ . . . Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”[\[ii\]](#)

We know that Jesus was talking about being baptized.

When I was 7 years old and preparing to be baptized, my family was living in Tonga. My father was the mission president. He was only 37 years old.

Being curious what it was like to be baptized, I asked my older brother Brent, who was 9, what it was like. Brent told me that it was wonderful. “When you go down in the water it is a little cold, but when you come up from being baptized, you feel warm and tingly all over.”

I wanted to feel that warm and tingly feeling, so I was super excited for my baptism.

Finally my 8th birthday arrived. My father had arranged a few missionaries to come to the mission home where we lived, which was located right on the beach.

All my friends from school were there as well. I don't remember the program with singing, prayers, and talks. I just remember my dad taking me into the ocean, out to a place where it was a little deeper. The missionaries were acting as witnesses, and my friends were aligned along the shore. I remember the wind was blowing and the waves were crashing on the shore. I was a little cold as we entered the water. But that's ok, soon I would be warm and tingly. My brother had told me so.

My father lifted his arm to the square, said the baptismal prayer, and gently lowered me into the cool water. A brief moment later I came up out of the water. I had just been baptized.

I was waiting for that warm tingly feeling to rush over me. To fill my sole with warmth. I waited. And waited. It never came. I was just cold. How could this be? Why was I still cold? Where was the warm and tingly feeling my brother Brent had told be about?

I thought about these questions for years. One theory my young mind came up with was that maybe my baptism didn't count. Had my father, the mission president, made a mistake? You see, I was born in Utah on October 29th and I was baptized in Tonga on October 29th, but since Tonga is across the International Dateline, it was really October 28th, a day before my 8th birthday, in Utah. Biologically, I was still only 7 years old when I was baptized. And maybe that is why I didn't feel warm and tingly. You actually had to be 8 years old when you are baptized for it to count. Could this be the reason?

I continued to ponder these questions for the next several years. As I grew in the gospel, I learned more about baptism. I started to understand what it meant to be baptized and that all your sins are washed away. Then I remembered what a rascal, "bad boy", my older brother Brent had been. It was him who had taught me how to smoke.

You see, one day as I was exploring the tall grass along the shoreline next to the mission home in Sopu, Tonga, I came across that older brother. He had found a stick from a fire that still had a red burning ember on it. When he blew on the stick, the ember would glow and then smoke would rise from the stick. My brother Brent and I pretended we were smoking.

It wasn't long before my oldest brother, Stephen, came wandering through the tall grass towards us. Feeling guilty that we were smoking, Brent quickly threw the stick with the burning coal down into the tall wet grass to hide it. Unbeknownst to us, Stephen had been filling up the kerosene lanterns and being only 10 years old, had spilled some kerosene on his skinny bare leg. As he bounced up to us, Stephen stepped on the live coal and his leg light up in flames.

He ran down to the beach, but the tide was out. Where we lived, when the tide went out, there was literally no water for hundreds of yards. I remember watching my two older brothers run around the beach in circles, Stephen with a burning leg, and Brent chasing him while scooping up sand and trying to throw it on his leg to put the fire out. Eventually the fire went out and my oldest brother Stephen was fine, other than having all the hair burned off his leg. But I learned a great lesson that day; something that the Apostle Paul had taught the Thessalonians years ago:

Abstain from all appearance of evil.[\[iii\]](#)

Because something bad could actually happen, even though you are just acting 'bad'.

So back to my baptism story, you know how when you are really dirty and you take a shower or a bath and become clean. You can really feel a difference. So maybe, because my older brother Brent was kind of a rascal and had so many sins that when he was baptized, all those sins were washed away and he felt tingly clean.

I on the other hand was always such an angel. I really didn't have any sins. So when I was baptized, I was already pretty much clean and so when the few sins I had were washed away, I really didn't feel a difference. Could this be why I didn't feel all warm and tingly after my baptism?

Brothers and Sisters, I have since learned that the warm tingly feeling my brother felt was the Spirit of God coming over him. I have also learned that we don't all feel the Spirit in exactly the same way, nor at the same time. My time to feel the spirit would come. And it has, many times.

### Story #3. The Comforting Hand

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” [\[iv\]](#)

Shortly after my sixteenth birthday, I was ordained a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. This meant that I would now be asked to say the sacred sacrament prayers. I remember that I was really nervous my first time.

The other priests asked if I wanted to say the sacrament prayer on the bread or on the water. I pondered for a moment. “The pray on the bread was first and I would be done sooner. However, it was longer. The prayer on the water was shorter, but I might choke on the sacrament bread I would take right before saying the prayer and that would make it hard to talk. Whatever the reason, I chose to say the prayer for the water.

As the bread was being passed, I remember the feeling of anxiety building up inside of me. I was really scared. But throughout my young life, I had learned to turn to my Father in Heaven for help and comfort. So while the deacons passed the bread, I was praying in my heart that I would be able to fulfill my assignment and say the prayer on the water well.

As I knelt down and looked at the prayer card, I felt a warm gentle hand on my shoulder. It was as real as could be. So real that I turned around to see who it was. But, no one was there. It was at this time that I felt the warm tingly feeling. I knew God had heard my prayer and was sustaining me in fulfilling my assignment. I proceeded and was able to bless the sacrament water with confidence.

### Story #4. Go Now

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” [\[v\]](#)

It was just a few years later, in the summer of 1982, when I felt the Lord's hand in my life again. It was pushing me in the right direction. I had graduated from high school and was wondering when would be the appropriate time to go on a mission. My mother, for some reason, was urging me to go to a year of university first. So being an obedient child, I listened to my mother and enrolled in summer classes at the University of Utah.

I was taking calculus, a 200 level history class, and biology 101. These classes seemed a lot harder than my high school classes. I had no idea what the teacher was talking about in calculus. And it was supposed to be a review of what I should have learned in previous math classes. History was just hard. And biology wasn't much easier.

Amidst my studies, the 4th of July came, and my rock band was scheduled to play at Lagoon, an amusement park just north of Salt Lake City, Utah. We played several shows throughout the day. Between each of our performances, I sat to the side of the stage and attempted to study while the other band members were off having fun. I was stressed and felt my life wasn't going well. All was not right. Something needed to change. What could it be?

Why was I getting nudged to change the direction my life was headed? Why? Why? What was the answer? It was clear. I needed to go on a mission and the time was now. After all, just a few months earlier the First Presidency had announced that "Single young men accepting mission calls [would] now serve eighteen months instead of two years." The timing couldn't have been more perfect.

The next day, I dropped out of the University of Utah. I completely dropped out. And I started working on my mission papers. I also started working to earn money for my mission.

Finally on a cold October day, my mission call arrived. My parents were out of town and I was alone at home. I held the envelope in my hands. I questioned if I was strong enough to accept this call. I needed some assurance. So I put on a jacket and put the letter in my pocket. I hiked up a canyon near my home in Utah. It was starting to snow. About a mile into my hike, I knew I was alone. I knelt and prayed aloud. I felt like Joseph Smith.

Every sound startled me and I kept opening my eyes to see what it was. But I kept on praying. As I prayed I said, "Lord, help me learn the language." Why did I just say that? "Help me learn the language?" At the end of my prayer I opened the letter to read:

"You are hereby called to serve as a missionary of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to labor in the Oregon Portland mission, [then in parentheses] (Russian program) for a period of 18 months."

What is this "Russian program?" I had heard of missionaries being called to California and other areas to teach the gospel in Spanish, but I had never heard of anyone being called to the "Russian program". Back then my spelling and reading skills weren't too great. I wondered, with the shortened missions, if they were also going to shorten the MTC experience and 'rush' me through. Is this what the "Rushing program" meant?

I learned soon enough that my MTC companion and I, along with the other two elders in our MTC district were the first four missionaries in the Church called to learn Russian in the MTC. It was quite an experience.

Since we were the initial Russian missionaries, we didn't really have seasoned MTC teachers. One of our teachers was Sister Victoria, a native Russian and teacher from next door BYU-Provo. She was a convert to the Church and I don't believe she had severed a mission. For the first week she gave us homework and even graded it. I earned an "A-" on one of my MTC assignments.

At the end of our prolonged 11 weeks in the MTC, we were sent to the field. As we boarded the bus to the airport, one of our teachers ran up and handed each one of us a freshly translated copy of the baptismal challenge and said, "Good luck learning this on your own." The only other Church materials we had in Russian were *The Book of Mormon*, the *Joseph Smith Pamphlet*, and the *missionary discussions*. This was before Preach my Gospel.

One day as my companion and I were laboring in the field, I felt we needed a Russian Bible to which we could refer. I didn't know where to get one. So I prayed. Wouldn't you believe it, the very next day as we were walking in the Oregon rain along the side of a busy highway, I saw a little blue book laying in the tall wet weeds. I knew it was the answer to my prayers. Sure enough it was a copy of the New Testament in Russian. I took it home and carefully dried out its pages.

I don't know why the Lord answered that prayer. We didn't really need a Russian Bible. Although we did a lot of tracting, we didn't teach any lessons in Russian, except for half of a discussion once. I guess finding this Russian New Testament in the rain was the Lord's way of letting me know that He was still there and answering my prayers.

I'm thankful that the Lord grabbed me and redirected my path towards a mission. Sometimes I feel that He made the 18 month mission just for me. Because a few months after I returned, missionary service for young elders changed back to 2 years. It was as if the Lord was saying, "Hey, I shortened the mission just for you, so you had better go before I change it back."

#### Story #5. Family Obligations

"Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." [\[vi\]](#)

I was home from my mission for exactly one month to the day before I was sent off to Israel with the BYU-Jerusalem Travel Study Program. I really didn't want to go. But my younger brother was a bit of a rascal in high school and so I was supposed to go with him to Israel so that he could get spiritual and go on a mission.

Well, 3 days before we were supposed to leave for Israel, my younger brother said that he didn't want to go to Israel and that he wanted to go on a mission instead. My parents were overjoyed and said, "Yippee".

I then said, "I don't want to go to Israel. I want to stay home and play in my band again."

That's when my dad turned to me and said, "You have got to go to Israel. We pulled so many strings to get you and your brother accepted into the program, that if at least one of you don't go, it will bring shame to the family name." My dad had even called Elder Holland, who was the President of BYU at the time to ask for his help in getting us accepted. So off to Israel I went, to save the family name and honour my father and mother.

Anyway, it all turned out well. In fact, when I returned from Israel, I reapplied to the University of Utah and for the next 4 years took mostly Russian and Hebrew classes, with a few Greek classes thrown in. I loved languages. I didn't know what I was going to be, I just thought I was following my heart. But the Lord knew what was in my future. And this was all part of His plan.

Having completed my major classes and with only a few general education classes left to go, my family moved to Hawaii. I arranged to take my last few general education classes here at BYU-Hawaii. Then I transferred them back so I could graduate from the University of Utah in Russian, with a minor in Hebrew. Now all I needed was a job, and a wife.

Getting a job was easy. I started teaching EIL part-time during the day, while in the evenings, I went to school in Honolulu to earn my Master's degree. Eventually, I was offered a full time position.

## Story #6. Finding a Wife

“In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];” [\[vii\]](#)

Finding a wife was not so easy. I was not much of a dater in my youth. Even though I was very active in my singles ward in Utah, and attended Institute classes at the University of Utah, it wasn't until I came to BYU-Hawaii that I found my first real girlfriend. We met at one of the school dances, and she was also in my campus ward. We dated for a whole year. I was so in love.

Then it happened. Without going into detail, we broke up. My little heart was broken. I cried for nearly 4 months. And to make matters worse, a month and a half after our big breakup, the Campus Stake President stood up in Stake Conference and said, “Brethren, if you are over 25 years old, you need to be married by Christmas.”

It was now the end of February. How could I be married by Christmas? That was only 10 months away. It had taken me 25 years to find my first girlfriend. Furthermore, I was now 26 years old and suffering from a broken heart. I worried that it would take me another 25 years before I found a 2nd girlfriend. How could the Stake President say such a thing? I even discussed this with my bishop. I couldn't help but wonder, “Was the Church still true?”

Don't worry my brothers and sisters. The Church is still true. I was married before Christmas. Miracles still happen. I feel the Lord was watching over me. Not that anything was wrong with my first girlfriend. She is married and from what I can tell has a lovely family. But the Lord knew what was best for me and though it caused me some pain and suffering, he grabbed me once again and said, “Not that direction; Go this way.” And in short that is how I ended up marrying my wonderful talented wife Martha. What a blessing she is in my life.

In conclusion, let me share just one more scripture with you. It is 2 Nephi 33:1:

And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; (and now the part I want to emphasize) for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.[\[viii\]](#)

Over the past several weeks as I prepared this talk, I prayed many times that I may be able to say the things which the Lord would have me say and that His Spirit would be with us here today. As you listened, did you think about your own devotional attendance? Or the time when you were baptized? Or when the Lord reached down and touched your life?

Did he guide you to go on a mission, or is he guiding you now to go on a mission, or get married? I hope that as you listened to the stories from my life and thought about the stories from your own life, the Holy Ghost has carried a personal message to you.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

[\[i\]](#) (Matthew 18: 20)

[\[ii\]](#) (John 3:3-5)

[\[iii\]](#) (1 Thessalonians 5:22)

[\[iv\]](#) (John 14:27)

[\[v\]](#) (Mark 16:15)

[\[vi\]](#) (Exodus 20: 12)

[\[vii\]](#) (D&C 131: 1-2)

[\[viii\]](#) (2 Nephi 33:1)