

A prompting to be kind to my estranged husband was the last thing I expected to hear.

Name withheld

Many years ago I married in the temple. But 21 years later my husband left me. I was devastated. I could not understand why. I loved my husband with all my heart. It is hard to explain the deep pain I felt as I struggled with losing my hopes and dreams. I attended the temple regularly, prayed, read the scriptures, and fasted for help. Many sleepless nights I would rise and read the *Ensign* or the scriptures. I desperately pleaded with the Lord for help—help with my pain, help for my children, help for my future, help to bring peace back to my life.

The custody and visitation arrangement set up by a court mediator meant that the children would miss church every other week and every general conference to be with their father. I worried for my children's spiritual welfare.

One Sunday I was at home watching general conference by myself. It was the second general conference I had watched without my children. I was feeling especially heartbroken, missing my children and thinking of what they were missing. Each talk was so meaningful, the Spirit so strong. I started pouring out my soul, asking again in sincere prayer for *help* for my children and me.

The Answer

Then the unexpected answer came. A soft voice said, "Be kind." My mind was drawn to my estranged husband. I thought, "What do you mean be kind? *He* is the one being mean to me!" Again the prompting came, "Be kind. It will help him to stop blaming you and accept responsibility."

I was stunned at this answer. I had been asking for help for myself and my children. Now the answer came that I must help the man who had left me. I pondered the answer. I didn't understand, but I determined I would obey.



ILLUSTRATION BY TAYLOR GALLERY

The Unexpected
ANSWER



Following the Spirit

At first it was very hard. When he would call and get angry on the phone, it would take all my control to speak calmly. When he would come to my house to pick up or drop off the children, sometimes he would say hurtful things to me that would usually have started an argument. Instead I would say nothing angry but try to steer the conversation back on track, limiting our discussion to appropriate topics.

For a while it seemed to make things worse. I realized that when he hurt me and brought me to tears, I was allowing him to have control over me. I realized that by being kind I was beginning to take back control over my thoughts and feelings. Eventually, he started to calm down, and things started turning around. As I remained calm and kind, he started responding positively.

One of the first tests of my new method of kindness came on our youngest son's birthday. According to the visitation schedule, it was my turn to have him for his birthday. His father came over to give him a birthday present, and my son privately asked me if his dad could stay for dinner. I struggled inwardly with even the thought of it. But I quickly asked if he would like to stay for the birthday dinner. He said yes. Dinner was somewhat awkward, but I remained kind and polite. After he left, my son hugged me and said, "Thank you for letting him stay." His appreciation filled my soul. It

had been hard for me to share this day with his father, but I knew it was what I needed to do. I needed to think more of my children and less of myself.

This was the first of these family birthdays together. It was much easier to invite the children's dad and celebrate birthdays together than to have the children feel sad that they weren't with one parent or the other.

Recognizing Our Blessings

The unexpected answer brought the blessings I had been praying for. We were able to have calm, productive discussions that helped resolve the remaining divorce issues. My efforts to be kind softened his heart, and he began allowing the children to come home early from visitation to attend church each week and watch general conference. I learned that being kind was a much better example for my children. I needed to include praying for their father in our prayers. I had to forgive and let go of the past. This helped me heal my own sadness, and it increased my spiritual strength. My building a polite relationship with their father also allowed my children to continue a loving relationship with him, without being torn apart by choosing between their parents.

The answer was so unexpected, so opposite of what I had been asking for. I realized that Heavenly Father did indeed hear and answer my prayers. I have learned that I can go forward in faith, continuing to listen to and act upon the guidance of the Spirit, even when it's the unexpected answer. ■