

**Elder Boyd K. Packer**  
Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

My dear brethren and sisters: We are greatly pleased to be in the mission field. In trying to convey to you that feeling, the best I can do is to tell you that when it comes to missionary work we feel just the way Elder LeGrand Richards sounds. We appreciate deeply the opportunity to serve in the New England Mission. We are amazed at the great power and strength of the missionaries. We stand in awe of the Latter-day Saint missionary.

A few days ago the general authorities assembled in the upper room of the temple to prepare for general conference.

President McKay admonished us to feel free, perfectly free, uninhibited. From this invitation I approach with reverence a subject I had theretofore not intended to pursue.

### "I'm a person"

Some years ago two of our little boys were wrestling on the rug before the fireplace. They had reached the pitch—you know the one—where laughter turns to tears and play becomes a struggle. I worked a foot gently between them and lifted the older boy (then just four years of age) to a sitting position on the rug, saying, "Hey there, you monkey, you had better settle down." He folded his little arms and looked at me with surprising seriousness. His little boy feelings had been hurt, and he protested, "I not a monkey, Daddy—I a person."

I thought how deeply I loved him, how much I wanted him to be "a person"—one of eternal worth. For "children are an heritage of the Lord. . . ." (Ps. 127:3.)

That lesson has lingered with me. Among the many things we have learned from our children, this, perhaps, has been the most tempering.

Much of what I know—of what it matters that one knows—I have learned from my children.

Parenthood is the greatest of educational experiences. Bishop Brown made

reference to a lesson taught to his 12-year-old son. Were you conscious of the lesson learned by a much older Bishop Brown?

Our children and the children and youth in the Church are great teachers. Let me relate two lessons.

In the days of the pioneer settlements, it was not uncommon to have a ward marshal whose assignment it was, under the direction of the bishop, to maintain orderly conduct among the teen-agers.

On a Sunday evening after sacrament meeting, the ward marshal at the little settlement of Corinne came upon a buggy with some teen-agers. Since it was his responsibility to check on the young people, he stealthily crept near the buggy to see just what was going on. He managed to reach a rather insufficient tree very close to the buggy just as the moon came out. He had to stand more or less at attention to keep from being seen, but he could easily hear all that was transpiring in the buggy.

Later, in reporting it to the bishop, he told of what had gone on. There had been some jokes told, much laughter, and the usual teen-age chatter. He said they sang several songs. The bishop interrupted his report with the question, "Well, was there anything out of order in that situation?" His answer, "Yes! me behind that blamed tree."

Always our youth are teaching those of us who are older, and they teach serious, sacred lessons, too.

### "When do I die?"

President Joseph T. Bentley presided over the Mexican Mission. I recall hearing him tell an incident that happened, I think, somewhere in Mexico. An 11-year-old boy had been seriously injured in an automobile accident. By the time they got him to the doctor, he was dying from loss of blood. In looking for a donor for an emergency transfusion, the doctor decided on the boy's seven-year-old sister. He explained to the little girl that her

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brother was dying and asked whether she would be willing to donate her blood in order to save his life. The little girl turned pale with fright, but in a moment she consented to do it.

The transfusion was made, and the doctor came to the little girl. "The color is coming back into his face," he said. "It looks as though he is going to be all right." She was happy her brother would be all right, but said, "But doctor, when am I going to die?" She had thought all the time that she was not just giving her blood but literally her life to save an older brother. We learn great lessons from our youth.

With parenthood such a glorious experience, how important it is that we have reverence for it.

Frequently I receive letters and not infrequently young couples come, particularly of college age, struggling to achieve advanced degrees, and they ask for counsel on the coming of children in their lives.

### Planned parenthood

*Never* has a generation been so surrounded with those who speak irreverently of life. *Never* has there been such persuasion to avoid responsibilities of parenthood. *Never* has it been so convenient to block that frail footpath of life across which new spirits enter mortality.

Several years ago, while representing the Church at the University of Montana, I found myself on a panel with representatives from several churches. The moderator asked each of us to respond to the question, "Do you believe in planned parenthood?" My answer was a resounding "yes!" with this explanation: We *plan* to have families.

Often when young couples come, they ask the specific question, "How many children should we plan to have?" This I cannot answer, for it is not within my province to know. With some persons there are no restrictions of health, and perhaps a number of children will be born into the family. Some good parents who would have large families are blessed

with but one or two children. And, occasionally, couples who make wonderful parents are not able to have natural offspring and enjoy the marvelous experience of fostering children born to others. Planned parenthood involves a good deal more than just the begetting of children. Nothing in our lives deserves more planning than our responsibilities in parenthood.

I am concerned because our young couples are often in a quandry, particularly when the arbitrary limiting of families is represented as an act of social good.

In this generation we find the indiscriminate marketing of products. Medical advancements with the potential to sustain life and to extend it for the infirm are advertised—even among our unmarried youth—as agents to prevent life and to extinguish it.

Young couples are continually told that parenthood means forfeiture of advanced degrees and limiting of occupational progress, a representation they will live to know is false.

### Approach parenthood with reverence

Whether you will be blessed with many children or but a few, or perhaps experience parenthood through the raising of little ones left homeless, is a matter that will be made known as your life unfolds. But I urge you, I warn you to approach parenthood with reverence. When you covenant in marriage and are free to act in the creation of life, when you stand at the threshold of parenthood, know that you stand on holy ground. Recognize also that in those areas of greatest opportunity lie the snares of persistent temptation.

We are grateful for our family, grateful for all of our children. We have learned so much from them, some of the things we weren't conscious that we wanted to know. Each of them is needed and wanted in our family; and I say again, much of what I know, of that which matters that one knows, I have learned from our children.

Young couples, draw reverently close to your Father in heaven in these monumental decisions of life. Seek

inspiration from the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grow close to him. Perhaps you, as he, will come to "suffer the little children to come unto [you], and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:14.) In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**President Joseph Fielding Smith:**

We have just listened to Elder Boyd K. Packer, Assistant to the Twelve, who is now presiding over the New England Mission.

We shall now hear from Elder Alvin R. Dyer, Assistant to the Twelve.

**Elder Alvin R. Dyer**

**Assistant to the Council of the Twelve**

One of the great scriptural accounts in the Old Testament tells of the children of Israel gathering at the gateway into the promised land at Kadesh-Barnea, where the great Moses, their lawgiver, stood up before them. He was confronted not with the ones who had left Egypt, but with their sons and their daughters, for the ones who had left Egypt had been wasted in the wilderness. According to the biblical writings, this is what he said to those who now were about to enter the promised land: "There are eleven days' journey for Horeb, or Mt. Sinai, unto Kadesh-barnea by way of Mt. Seir." (See Deut. 1:2.)

The camel trains of that time had no difficulty in traveling that distance in 11 days, and yet it had taken Israel 40 years. I have often thought that in our own way of life, in our own problems, many times we take the long way, instead of the short way, in accordance with the laws and commandments of our Heavenly Father.

**"The feast" time of gathering, renewal, gratitude**

In ancient biblical times, "the feast" was a time of gathering, a time of harvest, a time of rejoicing, and what is more particularly significant, "the feast" was designated by the Lord as a time of remembrance. These observances were established among the people for various reasons. Three times, said the Lord, thou shalt keep a feast in the year: the feast of the harvest, the feast of the weeks, the feast of tabernacles, and there were others. (See Exod. 23:14, 16; 34:22; Lev. 23:34; Deut. 16:10, 16.) But in all of these there seemed to be a central

motive, a time of the renewal of spirit, of regeneration, that the people might continue with gratitude and sacrifice to fulfill the purposes of the Lord, which were intended for their good and blessing.

There are "feasts" that we observe at which we also gather to rejoice and be renewed in spirit and in thought, and to which we too bring the harvest of our achievements to evaluate, and then, with renewed determination, go forward to do better. Here, as in all the "feasts" of ancient times, is to be found the need of the people themselves, seeking the strength and the fortitude to push on. From such occasions will come this strength, if our hearts and minds can be brought in tune with the Spirit of God.

**"Conference," feast-time, gathering, renewal**

Establishing the custom of "conferences" for his people in this day and age, the Lord said the following: "The . . . elders composing this church of Christ are to meet in conference once in three months, or from time to time as said conferences shall direct or appoint." (D&C 20:61.)

From experience in the Church we have learned that the expressed will of our Heavenly Father comes to his people at conference time. This great conference, now approaching its closing moments, has truly been and will continue to the end to be a time of the renewal of the spirit.

**Fuse inspirational experience with righteous action**

But now may I ask a question of you? What will the aftermath be?