

## Elder Sterling W. Sill

*Assistant to the Council of the Twelve*

My brothers and sisters; as a text for my remarks I would like to quote an interesting line from Ecclesiastes in which the wise man Solomon said, "My heart had great experience." (Eccles. 1:16.)

### Worthwhile experiences

Certainly the most successful lives are those that have the most worthwhile experiences. The religion of Christ itself is not so much a set of ideas as it is a set of activities. The purpose of the Church is to help us translate the principles of the gospel of Christ into constructive, meaningful human experience. And everyone should work toward this end by a daily practice of thinking some uplifting thoughts, listening to some fine music, reading some stimulating literature, doing some good deeds, and having some great experiences every day.

### DFT file

Because we draw so much from the rebellion, weakness, and evil with which we are surrounded, we tend to load ourselves up too heavily with guilt complexes, mental problems, insecurity, and mediocrity. I recently heard of a man who compounded the problem by hoarding his mistakes. He often referred to the fact that his D.F.T. drawer was the largest file in his office. Someone once asked him what these file letters stood for, and he said they identified a collection of the damn fool things that he had done. Most of us are not bad people—we just let our D.F.T. files get too large.

The scriptures themselves make almost as many references to fools as to sinners. And if we were trying to make the most effective application of Solomon's text, we might take the positive approach and make

a written collection of our experiences—not just those that we have had in the past, but those that we plan to have in the future. For whenever excellence is recounted, it is increased.

### Philosophy of excellence

Recently a group of bishops were asked for a report on their work. They were told not to discuss their problems, but to describe what they did better than anyone else. This philosophy of excellence was demonstrated by the artist Whistler, who once painted a tiny picture of a spray of roses. The artistry involved was magnificent. Never before, it seemed, had the art of man been able to execute quite so deftly a reproduction of the art of nature. The picture was the envy of the artists who saw it, the despair of the collectors who yearned to buy it for their collections, but Whistler refused steadfastly to sell it.

"For," said he, "whenever I feel that my hand has lost its cunning, whenever I doubt my ability, I look at the little picture of the spray of roses and say to myself, 'Whistler, you painted that. Your hand drew it. Your imagination conceived the colors. Your skill put the roses on the canvas.' Then," he said, "I know that what I have done I can do again."

Then he gave us a great philosophy of success. He said, "Hang on the walls of your mind the memory of your successes. Take counsel of your strength, not your weakness. Think of the good jobs you have done. Think of the times when you rose above your average level of performance and carried out an idea or a dream or a desire for which you had deeply longed. Hang these pictures on the walls of your mind and look at them as you travel the roadway of life."

### First great experience

Now I am not going to burden you this afternoon with the contents of my D.F.T. file, but I would like to tell you about some of my great experiences. Great experience number one is that I managed to get myself born, and I have been very pleased about that ever since.

Henry Thoreau, an early American philosopher, once said that we should thank God every day of our lives for the privilege of having been born. And then he went on to speculate on the rather unique supposition of what it might have been like if we had not been born. Just suppose that you had never been born or that your parents had never been born. Think of all of the excitement and opportunities you would have missed as a consequence. What Mr. Thoreau may not have known was that one-third of all of the children of God never were born and never can be born because they failed to pass the requirements of their first estate. And yet, every spirit child of God hungers for a body. We remember the unembodied spirits who appeared to Jesus in his day who preferred to have the bodies of swine rather than not to have any bodies at all.

### Good fortune of birth

In my own case, I didn't find out that I had been born until quite a long time after it happened. And I am still finding out many important things about the good fortunes of my birth. I eventually discovered that I had inherited two parents who were very interested in my welfare. And I am very glad that they were not members of this modern breed of abortionists who are followers of King Herod in his program of slaughtering the innocents. My parents were pretty poor in material things, but I have discovered that even a little adversity can have many advantages. The poet helps us with this idea when he says,

"The tree that never had to fight  
For sun and sky and air and light,  
But stood out in the open plain  
And always got its share of rain,  
Never became a forest king  
But lived and died a scrubby thing.

The man who never had to toil to live,  
Who never had to win his share  
Of sun and sky and light and air,  
Never became a manly man  
But lived and died as he began.

"Good timber does not grow at ease,  
The stronger wind, the stronger trees.  
The further sky, the greater length,  
The more the storm, the more the strength.

By sun and cold, in rain and snow,  
In trees and men good timbers grow.  
Where thickest lies the forest growth  
We find the patriarchs of both.

And they hold council with the stars  
Whose broken branches show the scars

Of many winds and much of strife.  
This is the common law of life."

—Author unknown

### Place of birth

One of my great delights in being born was to find that I had been born an American. I am very grateful that God raised up wise men to establish this nation upon Christian principles and that he provided our founding fathers to stand in the forefront of our civilization to give our nation its start toward its destiny.

One of my greatest experiences was that my parents taught me the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Someone has said:

"You may have riches and wealth untold,

Baskets of jewels and caskets of gold,  
But richer than I, you will never be  
For I had a mother who read to me."

### Being born again

Eight years after I was born, I learned something about the great principle of repentance by which we

can clear out our D.F.T. files and be born again. And so, on August 27, 1911, I was born of the water and of the Spirit in the exact manner prescribed by the Savior of the world. I became a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and had the gift of the Holy Ghost officially conferred upon me.

Then I had another great experience. I discovered that I could be reborn as many times as I desired, and that each time I could be reborn better. Phillip Brooks was once asked when he was born and he said, "It was one Sunday afternoon when I was twenty-five years old, just after I had finished reading a great book." Saul of Tarsus was reborn on the Damascus road. Joseph Smith was born again after reading a great scripture.

In 1932, Walter Pitkin wrote his book *Life Begins at Forty*, but that is ridiculous. Life begins every morning. Life begins when we begin. And our real lives begin when we determine to live by every word of the Lord.

### Experience of reading Era

I had another great experience when I was nine years old. In sacrament meeting one Sunday someone mentioned an article in the *Improvement Era* that had been written by President Heber J. Grant. And while I didn't understand all about it, I was impressed that it was very important. And I thought what a great experience it would be if I could get possession of this magazine so I could go over it as many times as necessary for me to thoroughly understand it. Finally I took my small savings and subscribed to this great magazine. I don't read as many good things as I should now, but back in those cow-herding days I had a little more free time and I read every article, including every advertisement in each issue. And sometimes I went over some of them many times. And I was born again each time a new issue was published.

### Living gospel principles

Later I was married to a wonderful wife in the temple of the Lord, and our family is sealed together for time and for all eternity. I have in my possession a Holy Bible, and I have run each of its teachings through my mind many times. I also have three great volumes of new scripture, outlining in every detail the simple principles of the gospel of Christ. And each is attested by a "thus saith the Lord." And I was born again when I firmly resolved to live every one of these important precepts of salvation.

Through my occupation I have had some part in helping to carry forward the work of the world. But I have also had a part in helping to carry forward the work of the Lord, and I may have as much of a part as I desire in that great enterprise in which God himself spends his entire time.

I am presently in possession of the world's most valuable information. I know that God lives, that we were created in his image, and that by obeying the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the offspring of God may eventually hope to become like their eternal parents.

### Great experiences ahead of us

But all of my great experiences are not in the past. Branch Rickey, the great baseball manager, was once asked to describe his greatest day in baseball. He said, "I can't because I haven't had it yet." And most of our greatest experiences are yet ahead of us. One of them will be the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ, when with his mighty angels in flaming fire he will come to cleanse the earth of its sins and to inaugurate the millennial reign upon this earth. Every one of us will have a literal bodily resurrection, and what a great experience that will be! Charles F. Kettering, the mechanical wizard of General Motors, once said, "My interest is in the future, because I am

going to spend the rest of my life there."

And my wish for each one of you is that you may spend your eternal life in the celestial kingdom of God. Then you may say, "My heart hath had its greatest experience." And that it may be so, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. ■

## Elder Franklin D. Richards

*Assistant to the Council of the Twelve*

My dear brothers and sisters, I feel it both a privilege and a blessing to be present at this inspirational conference, and I know that the answers to many of today's problems are to be found in the messages being given by our leaders.

Regardless of the difficulties existing in the world today, we as a people must recognize that we have been blessed abundantly with the resources of this world; yet we know that whatever we have is the Lord's and that He has blessed us with these things to see how we will use them.

### The gift of life

I think it might be said, Life is God's greatest gift to man, and what we do with our life is our gift to God.

President Brigham Young, in referring to making our life a gift to God, had this to say: "Our religion is worth everything to us and for it we should be willing to employ our time, our talent, our means, our energies, our lives." (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, p. 119.)

And, "If we do right, there will be an eternal increase among this people in talent, strength and intellect, and earthly wealth, from this time, henceforth, and forever." (*JD*, vol. 1, p. 110.)

"No blessing that is sealed upon us will do us any good unless we live for it." (*JD*, vol. 11, p. 117.)

## President Joseph Fielding Smith

We will now hear from Elder Franklin D. Richards, Assistant to the Twelve. He will be followed by Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Council of the Twelve.

### The use of wealth

It is interesting to note that here, as elsewhere in the scriptures, promises of earthly wealth and increased talents are made to those who live the gospel principles, and counsel is given to use our talents and wealth for the building of the kingdom. Many scriptures, however, contain words of admonition regarding temptations brought about through the acquisition of wealth and its use for unrighteous purposes.

The great apostle Paul, in writing to his beloved associate Timothy, told him that "the love of money is the root of all evil," and to "charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute. . . ." (1 Tim. 6:10, 17-18.)

### Principles of industry and thrift

Throughout the history of the Church its leaders have taught the value of the principles of work, industry, and thrift; and as they have been practiced, Church members have prospered in numerous ways. Likewise, members have been counseled to establish and maintain their economic independence, and employment-creating industries have been encouraged.