

President Benson made the following remarks at the outset of the meeting:

### **President Ezra Taft Benson**

The First Presidency has asked that I conduct this concluding session of the conference.

We extend our love and blessings to President Spencer W. Kimball, who is watching the proceedings of this session on television in his Hotel Utah apartment, and to President Marion G. Romney, who is watching at home.

We extend a sincere welcome to all assembled this afternoon in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the fifth and concluding session of the 153rd Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We also welcome those seated in the Assembly Hall where Elders James M. Paramore and F. Burton Howard preside.

We send our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, and satellite transmission.

The Tabernacle Choir, with Jerold Ottley directing and John Longhurst at the organ, is providing the music for this session.

The Choir will begin this service by singing "Awake, Ye Saints of God, Awake!" The invocation will be offered by Elder Theodore M. Burton, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

---

The Tabernacle Choir sang "Awake, Ye Saints of God, Awake!" Elder Theodore M. Burton offered the invocation.

---

### **President Benson**

The Tabernacle Choir will now sing "As the Hart Yearns." Following the singing, we shall hear from Elder Howard W. Hunter, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

---

The Choir sang "As the Hart Yearns."

---

## **Elder Howard W. Hunter**

### **To parents with feelings of guilt and unworthiness**

General Authorities have the privilege of meeting and getting acquainted with members of the Church all over the world who have consistently lived good lives and raised their families in the influence of the gospel. These Saints have enjoyed the great blessings and comfort that can come from looking back, as parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, over long and successful parenting efforts. Surely this is something each of us would like.

However, there are many in the Church and in the world who are living with feelings of guilt and unworthiness because some of their sons and daughters have wandered or strayed from the fold. My remarks today are directed primarily to those mothers and fathers.

### **Rare not to make errors**

At the outset we understand that conscientious parents try their best, yet nearly all have made mistakes. One does not launch into such a project as parenthood without soon realizing that there will be many errors along the way. Surely our Heavenly Father

knows, when he entrusts his spirit children into the care of young and inexperienced parents, that there will be mistakes and errors in judgment.

For every set of parents there are many "first-time" experiences that help to build wisdom and understanding, but each such experience results from the plowing of new ground, with the possibility that errors might be made. With the arrival of the first child the parents must make decisions about how to teach and train, how to correct and discipline. Soon there is the first day at school and the first bicycle. Then follows the first date of the first teenager, the first problem with school grades, and possibly, the first request to stay out late or the first request to buy a car.

It is a rare father or mother indeed who travels the difficult path of parenting without making errors along the way, especially at these first-time milestones when experience and understanding are somewhat lacking. Even after the parent has gained experience, the second-time and third-time occurrences of these milestones are sometimes not much easier to handle, nor do they come with much less chance of error.

### **Influences on children**

What more challenging responsibility is there than working effectively with young people? There are numerous variables that determine the character and the personality of a child. It is probably true that parents are, in many or perhaps most cases, the greatest influence in shaping the life of a child, but sometimes there are other influences that also are very significant. No one knows the degree to which heredity influences lives, but certainly brothers and sisters, friends and teachers, neighbors and Scoutmasters have significant effects.

We know, too, that the influences on a child are not restricted to heredity or to people; certainly, things in the physical surroundings will have their effect—such as the house and the play-

things, the yard and the neighborhood. Playgrounds and basketballs, dresses and cars—or the lack of these—all have their influence on the child.

One must conclude that—with the multitude of influences and the innumerable decisions, each with so many alternatives to consider and evaluate—even though parents strive to choose wisely, an unwise choice will sometimes be made. It is almost impossible to always say and do the right thing at every point along the way. I think we would agree that as parents we have made mistakes which have had a negative effect on the attitude of the child or on his progress. On the other hand, parents usually do the right thing or make the right decision under the circumstances, yet boys and girls often have negative responses to right or correct decisions.

### **Not alone**

If a parent has made what could be considered an error—or, on the other hand, has never made a mistake, but still the lamb has wandered from the fold—in either case there are several thoughts I would like to share with you.

First, such a father or mother is not alone. Our first parents knew the pain and suffering of seeing some of their children reject the teachings of eternal life. (See Moses 5:27.) Centuries later Jacob came to know of the jealousy and ill feelings of his older sons toward his beloved Joseph. (See Genesis 37:1–8.) The great prophet Alma, who had a son named Alma, prayed at length to the Lord regarding the rebellious attitude of his son and no doubt was overwhelmed with concern and worry about the dissension and the wickedness his son was causing among those who were within the Church. (See Mosiah 27:14.) Our Father in Heaven has also lost many of his spirit children to the world; he knows the feelings of your heart.

### **Errors of judgment and the principle of repentance**

Second, we should remember that errors of judgment are generally less serious than errors of intent.

Third, even if there was a mistake made with full knowledge and understanding, there is the principle of repentance for release and comfort. Rather than constantly dwelling on what we perceive as a mistake or a sin or a failure to the detriment of our progress in the gospel or our association with family and friends, it would be better for us to turn away from it. As with any mistake, we may repent by being sorrowful and by attempting to correct or rectify the consequences, to whatever extent possible. We should look forward with renewed faith.

### **Don't give up hope, and know where responsibility lies**

Fourth, don't give up hope for a boy or a girl who has strayed. Many who have appeared to be completely lost have returned. We must be prayerful and, if possible, let our children know of our love and concern.

Fifth, remember that ours was not the only influence that contributed to the actions of our children, whether those actions were good or bad.

Sixth, know that our Heavenly Father will recognize the love and the sacrifice, the worry and the concern, even though our great effort has been unsuccessful. Parents' hearts are oftentimes broken, yet they must realize that the ultimate responsibility lies with the child after parents have taught correct principles.

### **Be careful in judgments**

Seventh, whatever the sorrow, whatever the concern, whatever the pain and anguish, look for a way to turn it to beneficial use—perhaps in helping others to avoid the same problems, or perhaps by developing a greater insight into the feelings of others who are struggling in a similar way. Surely we

will have a deeper understanding of the love of our Heavenly Father when, through prayer, we finally come to know that he understands and wants us to look forward.

The eighth and final point of reminder is that everyone is different. Each of us is unique. Each child is unique. Just as each of us starts at a different point in the race of life, and just as each of us has different strengths and weaknesses and talents, so each child is blessed with his own special set of characteristics. We must not assume that the Lord will judge the success of one in precisely the same way as another. As parents we often assume that, if our child doesn't become an over-achiever in every way, we have failed. We should be careful in our judgments.

### **Responsibilities of parenthood**

Let us not misunderstand. The responsibilities of parenthood are of the greatest importance. The results of our efforts will have eternal consequences for us and the boys and girls we raise. Anyone who becomes a parent is under strict obligation to protect and love his children and assist them to return to their Heavenly Father. All parents should understand that the Lord will not hold guiltless those who neglect these responsibilities.

After the Exodus and while Israel was in the wilderness, Moses, in teaching his people, instructed them that the commandments of the Lord should be taught by parents to their children in the home. He said to them:

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

## Don't ruin your life

We should never let Satan fool us into thinking that all is lost. Let us take pride in the good and right things we have done; reject and cast out of our lives those things that are wrong; look to the Lord for forgiveness, strength, and comfort; and then move onward.

A successful parent is one who has loved, one who has sacrificed, and one who has cared for, taught, and ministered to the needs of a child. If you have done all of these and your child is still wayward or troublesome or worldly, it could well be that you are, nevertheless, a successful parent. Perhaps there are children who have come into the world that would challenge any set of parents under any set of circumstances. Likewise, perhaps there are others who would bless the lives of, and be a joy to, almost any father or mother.

My concern today is that there are parents who may be pronouncing harsh judgments upon themselves and may be allowing these feelings to destroy their lives, when in fact they have done their best and should continue in faith. That all who are parents might find joy in their efforts with their children is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## President Benson

Elder Howard W. Hunter, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder Robert D. Hales, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. He will be followed by Elder William R. Bradford, also a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

## Elder Robert D. Hales

### Sorrow and suffering

There are many kinds of sorrow and suffering:

- Self-inflicted suffering
- Suffering from infirmities of our mortal bodies and sorrow from separation by death.
- Suffering that tries and tests us
- Suffering to develop our spiritual strength
- Suffering to humble us and lead us to repentance
- The Savior's suffering and atoning sacrifice, the most important event in the history of the world.

But if our sorrow and suffering strengthen our faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ, "[our] sorrow shall be turned [to] joy" (John 16:20).

### Can hurt loved ones most

Thirty years ago, as a branch president, I was interviewing a man and

his wife. The wife was tearing down her husband: he had not been the provider she had expected; he had not been the companion she had dreamed about before her marriage; they could not communicate together without arguing and attacking one another.

Her husband loved her, and yet she hurt him. There were tears in his eyes as he absorbed the verbal abuse. I couldn't take any more as a twenty-one-year-old branch president, and asked, "Why do you hurt this person who loves you the most? Why do you hurt a husband who would do anything to help you?"

Her answer startled me. "Oh, I guess we argue and injure those we love because we can hurt them the most."

I have never forgotten that incident. There is truth in that example. We can't hurt a stranger as much as we can a loved one. We know just what to do to hurt our companions, parents, or brothers and sisters. We know where