

### President Hinckley

Bishop Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder F. Burton Howard of the First Quorum of the Seventy, who serves as president of the South America North Area of the Church in São Paulo.

## Elder F. Burton Howard

### "Come back to the Lord"

From the beginning, prophets have called almost all men to repentance. Those who have not known about the gospel have been exhorted to abandon their sinful ways, keep the commandments, and join with the people of the Lord.

But prophets have also pled with another group — those who were once believers, but who, because of pride or sin or something else, abandoned the faith. In this group are the less active, the critics, the uncommitted, and the rebellious. These are Church members who have grown away from God as they have grown older. To these, the invitation has always been to come back to the Lord.

As we think about members of the Church repenting and returning to activity, the stories of Saul or Alma may come to mind. Some may be waiting for a similar miraculous experience before committing themselves again. However, they will probably wait in vain. For, as the Savior taught his disciples, "if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

### The way back is clearly marked

Without some such incentive to change, others may wonder if it is possible to return to faith from doubt. Can the cynic ever really become as a little child? Can the slave of habit or passion become free again? Is there a way back? If so, is it worth the effort to find and follow it? Where and when does one begin?

There is a way — for surely prophets do not teach in vain. And, just as surely, the Lord hears the prayers of teachers and leaders and parents who pray for the return of those who are lost.

Some may think the way is not clearly marked, for in all of scripture there are but a few instances recorded of former believers ever repenting. Be that as it may, the fact remains that thousands have returned from inactivity. Let me tell you about some who did.

### A couple that returned

When I was first called to be a bishop, I inherited a large ward. Many of the eight hundred or so members did not come out to church. I had never met them and resolved to do so.

One Sunday afternoon in November, I went to visit an inactive family. As I came up to the house, a woman was sweeping the porch. I introduced myself as the new bishop and asked if her husband was home.

"Yes," she said, "but he won't talk to you. We are tired of being bothered. My husband asked the other bishop to take our names off the records of the Church. We don't want home teachers. We don't want people collecting fast offerings. We just want to be left alone."

She changed her grip on the broom. "Now get out," she said. "Get off my porch, get out of my yard, and don't come back." The broom was coming at me as I backed down the steps. I stammered a few words of apology, which were ignored. "Git," she said, and I did.

I didn't sleep well that night. I had been humiliated. Worse still, it seemed, my office had been treated with disrespect. By Tuesday night, I had almost decided that the woman and her husband should be excommunicated. A wise counselor, and a careful reading of the instructions from Church headquarters, persuaded me otherwise.

I said hello to them on the street occasionally after that, but I never returned to the home. However, we did assign a relative to visit there each month to watch over them. As far as I know, no gospel message was given, and no other significant Church contact was had with that family during the years I served as bishop.

After a time the ward was divided. I was released and was called to be stake president. On another Tuesday night some years later, one of our bishops came to the stake office and asked if I would be available later in the evening to interview an older couple for a temple recommend. He had been working with them for months, and they were finally ready to go to the temple.

He said, "You may know them, President," and he mentioned the name of the woman with the broom.

I could hardly wait for that interview. About nine o'clock the bishop brought a well-dressed, elderly couple to my office and introduced them. I recognized them as the same people I had known before, but they were different somehow. I invited the good sister to come into the office first. I asked her if she knew who I was, and she replied, "Oh yes, you are the stake president."

"Do you remember a Sunday afternoon in November, thirteen years ago?" I asked. "A young bishop came to your door and wanted to know if you and your husband would like to become more active in the Church. Do you remember turning him away?"

"I don't remember anything like that," she said. "I'm sure I would never have done such a thing."

Then I said, "I have another question. Why have you waited so long to

come back to the Church?"

"Well, we always knew we would have to get active again someday," she replied. "We wanted to. We just never got around to it. My husband used to smoke a lot, and he didn't feel comfortable going to church. I prayed for years that he would quit. When he started to have health problems a couple of years ago, it just seemed like a good time to go back."

I finished the interview and talked with her husband as well. They were completely worthy. Shortly afterward, they went to the temple to be sealed.

Now, did you notice the elements of their return? It wasn't easy. They had always known. She had prayed for years. There was a lot of wasted time. Finally, before it was too late, they talked to the bishop, repentance took place, old attitudes and habits were forgotten, and they came back.

### **Aminadab's return**

Another who came back was Aminadab (see Helaman 5). He had once belonged to the church of God, but he became critical and contentious. He evidently sympathized with the opposition, because he was present when two young missionaries named Nephi and Lehi were taken captive by an army of Lamanites.

A cloud of darkness came upon him, and he heard a still, mild voice whisper, "Repent . . . and seek no more to destroy my servants" (vs. 29-30). Surprised, he turned around and looked at Nephi and Lehi. Their faces shone through the darkness, and they appeared to be lifting their voices to heaven (see v. 36).

Aminadab then recognized them for what they were. In a loud voice he told the Lamanites that the young men were servants of God. As the army turned to look, they too became aware of the darkness which surrounded them. They asked Aminadab how to dispel it, and he, drawing on truth learned, I believe, at another time, said:

"You must repent, and cry unto the [Lord], even until ye shall have faith in Christ; . . . and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you" (v. 41).

Now notice again, the scripture speaks of darkness overshadowing those who have abandoned the faith. The effect of darkness is to prevent one from seeing clearly. To find the way back, as Aminadab discovered, one must repent and pray until doubt and darkness disappear and important things can be seen again.

### **A young priest repents and comes back**

One final story — once again from when I was a bishop. One night, while I was in a sound sleep, the doorbell rang. I stumbled to answer it and found a young member of my priests quorum at the door. I knew him well — well enough to have gone on outings with him, to have prayed with and about him, and to have taught him. I knew him as well as a good bishop knows any active eighteen-year-old priest, which was well enough for me to ask what he was doing at my front door in the middle of the night.

He said, "I have to talk to you, bishop. I've just done something serious, and I can't go home."

He was right. It was serious. I invited him in, and we talked. He talked and I listened, then I talked and he listened, until dawn. He had many questions. He had committed a terrible sin. He wanted to know if there was hope. He wanted to know how to repent. He wanted to know if repentance included telling his parents. He wanted to know if there was any chance of his going on a mission. He wanted to know many other things.

I didn't have all of the answers, but I told him there was hope. I told him the way back would be difficult, but it was possible. I explained what I knew about the process of repentance and helped him see what he must do. I told him if he really wanted to go on a mis-

sion that that decision could only be made in the future after he had repented. Then I told him to go home, and he did.

He made his peace with his parents. He asked forgiveness from those he had wronged. He put sin and bad company behind him and did everything he could to repent.

A year or so later, five young men from that quorum went on missions. He was one of them. I was close to them all. I attended each of their farewells. They all served honorable missions. Within a brief time after returning home, they all were married in the temple. My wife and I attended each of the ceremonies. I could take a piece of paper, even today, and write their names and the names of their wives and some of their children. That is how well I knew them.

### **Sins repented of are forgotten**

But now let me tell you something — something very private and very important. I cannot remember the name of the young man who came to my home in the middle of the night. I know he was one of the five, but I don't remember which one.

There was a time I used to worry about that. I thought perhaps my memory might be failing. I consciously tried to recall who it was that had the problem, but I could not.

I was eventually released, and I put the entire incident out of my mind. On a late evening walk some years later, I found myself in the ward where I had once been bishop. The shadowy quiet brought back many memories. I was deep in thought when I realized I was walking in front of a house where one of my priests had lived years before. Suddenly, the story of the young man I have mentioned came to mind, and again I tried to remember which of the five he had been. Had he lived in that house? I wondered. Why couldn't I remember?

As I continued on my way, something happened — something difficult

to explain, but real to me. I seemed to hear a voice which said: "Don't you understand, my son? I have forgotten that. Why should you remember?"

I was chagrined. There was no satisfactory answer to the question. I have never wondered about it again. And I knew more surely than I had ever known before that the Lord is pleased when his children return to him.

All who are shepherds and all lost sheep should note this one last thing. The Lord really meant it when he said, "He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more" (D&C 58:42).

### **It is possible to come home**

Some years ago it was fashionable in certain circles to use the phrase, "You can never go home again." That is just simply not true. It is possible to return. It is possible for those who have ceased to pray, to pray again. It is possible for those who are lost to find their way through the dark and come home.

And when they do, they will know, as I know, that the Lord is more concerned with what a man is than with what he was, and with where he is than with where he has been. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Hinckley**

Thank you, Brother F. Burton Howard, for those reminders of serious things. Before hearing President Benson's concluding remarks, we should like to express appreciation and sincere gratitude to all who have provided the music for this great

conference — to the Mormon Youth Chorus, the Murray Region Family Choir, and this great Tabernacle Choir who have sung to us so powerfully today, to their conductors and organists and all who have to do with it.

We thank our city officials for the cooperation given, to the Relief Society and Church Health Unit nurses who have been on hand to render service, to the ushers and interpreters.

We express appreciation to the local and national press representatives for coverage given to the conference, and to the owners and managers of the many radio and television stations and cable systems who have given time and facilities to carry sessions of this conference in many countries.

We have had in attendance all of the General Authorities except two: Brother Richard Clarke, who presides over the mission in Cape Town, South Africa, and who has remained at his post, and President Marion G. Romney, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, who now eighty-nine years of age lingers in a weakened condition. And as I suggested that we remember Brother Tuttle in our prayers, we should also remember President Romney and do so with faith.

We shall now be pleased to listen to President Ezra Taft Benson, our beloved prophet and leader, after which the Tabernacle Choir will sing "Abide with Me."

The benediction will then be offered by Elder Helio da Rocha Camargo of the First Quorum of the Seventy, and this conference will then stand adjourned for six months.

## **President Ezra Taft Benson**

### **Thanks for latter-day scripture**

My beloved brothers and sisters, on this glorious occasion as we have gathered here together, I wish to give thanks to our Father in Heaven for the gift of modern revelation and particu-

larly for the books of latter-day scripture which He has given us.

I love the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments. It is a source of great truth. It teaches us about the life and ministry of the Master. From its