

I am grateful that I have had this time to sit in council with those who have responsibility for the kingdom of our Father here on the earth. They are great men, dedicated men, men who have unconditional love for one another and for their God.

How blessed I am for the privilege of associating with the Saints throughout the world! This has brought joy and satisfaction, even a strengthening of my testimony as to how the Lord works.

Receive all things with thankfulness

Truly I have been blessed far beyond that which I merit. And in the coming days, I pray only that I might always be found as Abraham Lincoln said: "Die when I may, I would like it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle, and planted a rose where I thought a rose would grow." I have learned in my life that trials are blessings in disguise if we accept them

with humility, faith, and fortitude. All that we suffer and endure with patience will build within us a more charitable and tender person, having acquired the education we came on earth to receive.

God help us to be grateful for our blessings, never to be guilty of the sin of ingratitude, and to instill this same gratitude into the lives of our children. The Lord has said, "And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more" (D&C 78:19).

This great principle of gratitude, made a daily part of our lives and our prayers, can lift and bless us as individuals, as members of the Church, and as parents and families.

This testimony, and with a love unfeigned to all the special children of our Heavenly Father, I bear humbly and in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Kenneth Johnson

Dad's coming home!

At the time of my birth, the clouds of war had overshadowed Europe and were sweeping across the English Channel to the British coastline. My father, like thousands of other men of his generation, was required to report for active military service. My elder brother and I were shielded from the turmoil and fear that surrounded us by a mother who compensated for the absence of our father, involving us in a variety of activities. From this I learned that when fathers are absent, mothers can be the recipients of compensatory blessings. I have fond memories of those days and recall her speaking of her beloved companion as she received letters from him, without my fully understanding who he was or what he was doing.

My first recollection of meeting my father occurred when I was five years old. A telegram was delivered to our home. My mother stood with the gold-colored envelope in her hand, making no attempt to open it. I did not realize then as I do now the reason why, and the message it could have contained. Eventually, and with great difficulty, she fumbled with the flap of the envelope. This seemed to take a long time. Even when the telegram was opened and mother read its contents, there was no immediate response. Finally, raising the telegram high above her head, my mother joyfully exclaimed, "Dad's coming home! Dad's coming home!"

My father's parents lived in the adjoining house. Mother, holding the telegram high in the air and with a skipping step, set out in the direction of my grand-

parents' home, shouting, "Dad's coming home! Dad's coming home!" My brother, following close behind, shouted, "Dad's coming home! Dad's coming home!" I brought up the rear, also shouting, "Dad's coming home! Dad's coming home! Who's Dad?"

The next morning when I awoke, there was a man sitting on the edge of my bed holding a leather soccer ball from Italy. He asked if my brother and I would like to play soccer with him. Cautiously I agreed, and we went to an area of grassland near our home, where we played together. This was the beginning of my father's continuing influence in my life. I wanted to spend every moment that I could in his company.

Helping Dad in the shop

We lived, like many others in those war-torn years, in humble circumstances. Our home was modestly furnished. Dad had many skills and used them to beautify the home. He raised the Anderson air-raid shelter located in our garden to ground level and made it his workshop. He spent many hours there repairing shoes and making items of furniture for the home. I would wander into this workshop and watch him. Just to be in his presence was a thrill for me. He invited me to help him by passing a hammer, a screwdriver, or some other tool. I was convinced that my help was necessary and that without me he would not be able to complete his task.

He used a variety of pieces of wood, obtained from different sources and considered by others to be unsuitable for any practical use, and from them created items of great beauty and worth for our family. As he worked he played a game with me, inviting me to determine what he was making. I was seldom able to do so until the components were completed and the object assembled. Then I would declare with great excitement, "It's a bookcase!" or "A table!" and wonder at his ability to create so much from so little.

Service draws us closer to God

As I look back and reflect upon those wonderful memories, I realize that my contribution was not necessary for my father to complete the work he was engaged in. I was the beneficiary, as through these experiences I came to know him and to love him.

How like the association we have with our Heavenly Father, believing at times that the service we engage in is for his benefit, when in reality it is comparable with my handing tools to my father. It is the relationship that develops that is of greater significance than the contribution we make. As expressed by King Benjamin, "For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?" (Mosiah 5:13).

Just as I was not able to fully comprehend what my earthly father was building until he completed his work, so it is with our Heavenly Father. When his kingdom is established and the work is complete, we will recognize our home and shout for joy.

Service is essential for a happy life

Selfless service is an essential ingredient for a full and happy life. The enlightening words of President Marion G. Romney enhance our understanding in this regard: "Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom. Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1982, p. 135; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, p. 93).

It is not necessary for us to know the answer to every question or comprehend the reason for every challenge we face to feel secure in the knowledge of our divine Creator. In the words of Nephi, "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Nephi 11:17).

Kevin helps paint

Twenty-six years after the experience with my father, I continued to learn important lessons through a father-and-son relationship. The exterior woodwork of our home was in need of redecoration. I cleaned and prepared the surface and applied an undercoat. In my mind I could visualize the flawless gloss finish that would be the product of my labors. Our five-year-old son, Kevin, watched as I prepared to apply the final gloss covering. He asked if he could help me. I hesitated before responding, considering what effect this would have on the fulfillment of my dream, or alternatively how he would feel if I declined his offer. It was almost as if I heard someone else say, "That would be a great help. Thank you."

After I provided him with an old shirt of mine that covered him completely, almost touching the floor and with sleeves rolled back several times, we went to work on the door that secured the main entrance to our home. He was applying paint to the bottom panel as I worked on the top section. I noticed that because of his age and physical stature, he wasn't able to spread the paint evenly and that beads of paint were resulting. Each time he bent down to recharge his brush, I would hastily smooth out the paint on the bottom panel, returning to my assigned area so that he would not realize what I was doing. After a while I decided that more important than a first-class paint job was the opportunity to work with my son. On reflection I realized how well he was doing. Thereafter, every time I approached the door and saw the distinctive style of decoration, I was reminded of what is really important in our lives.

The learning experiences we shared were not restricted to a temporal plane. As we participated together in ordinances and made covenants, the power of godliness was manifest.

Service strengthens families

My wife, Pamela, had been raised and nurtured with the principles of the restored gospel and was able to help me appreciate the value of family prayer, family home evening, and family council.

We determined early in our marriage that it was our responsibility to teach the gospel to our son and that Church programs would reinforce the teaching in the home. Kevin often accompanied his mother as she visited the sick and the elderly to administer compassionate service.

These experiences have contributed to a close family relationship that has flourished through the years, giving us an insight into the potential that exists in the eternities, as described in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 130, verse 2: "And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy."

Knowing the Father and the Son

We should always remember that regardless of our circumstances, we all have a Father in whom we can trust and to whom we can turn for comfort and counsel. He is our Heavenly Father.

What a thrill it is to hear children singing with conviction, "I am a child of God." We are in truth his offspring, and he is "not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27).

Each day I enjoy an increasing appreciation for the words of the Savior expressed in his great intercessory prayer: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

I know that he lives; I know that he loves us, for we are his children. His son Jesus Christ is our Advocate with the Father and leads his church today through living prophets. I testify that their words will guide us safely home. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

We have just listened to Elder Lloyd P. George, who comes from Kanosh, and Elder Kenneth Johnson, who comes from England.

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "Put Your Shoulder to

the Wheel." And then Elder Merlin R. Lybbert, who originated in Canada, will address us.

The choir and congregation sang "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel."

Elder Merlin R. Lybbert

The special status of children

In a day when one of "the greatest problem[s] in our society is the abandonment of children through the abandonment of parental leadership" (Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983], p. 354), the First Presidency has asked that "we reemphasize the need for all adult members to focus on our children in an ongoing effort to help them learn to follow the teachings of the Savior." Also they have asked each of us to "rededicate ourselves to nourish and bless them temporally and spiritually" (First Presidency Letter, 1 Aug. 1993; see *Ensign*, Jan. 1994, p. 80).

It may be helpful to review some of the doctrines as contained in the scriptures pertaining to the special status of children. These doctrines provide direction for those who are raising children and comfort to those of us who have lost a child in death at an early age.

Parents protect and guide

Heavenly Father intended that each child should have the combined loving protection and guidance of caring parents. The pattern was established by Adam and Eve, our first parents. Joseph, the descendant of David, agreed to become the surrogate father of Jesus, the Son of God, when he accepted Mary as his wife, following a visitation of the

angel Gabriel. In Nazareth, Joseph was regarded as the father of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55).

The Christ child grew and developed in a modest home, where Joseph earned a humble living as a carpenter and where Jesus also learned this craft (see Mark 6:3). There were other members of the family. Mary and Joseph had four other sons and at least two daughters, all of whom were referred to in the community as the brothers and sisters of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3). The example of Joseph and Mary in providing a suitable home for their large family was such that Luke recorded that Jesus "grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40).

Not accountable until age eight

The Lord extends special protection to children and shares jurisdiction with earthly parents, even as we enjoy their presence. They cannot sin until they reach the age of accountability, which the Lord has declared to be eight years (see D&C 18:42; 29:47). In fact, the power to even tempt them to commit sin has been taken from Satan. The prophet Mormon taught that "little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin. . . . Little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a