

## Elder F. Melvin Hammond

### Aaronic Priesthood Duty to God program

A short while ago, Elder Pace, Elder Condie, and I met with the First Presidency. As we entered the room, President Hinckley looked carefully at us and then with a smile on his face said, "How can three white-headed old men be the Young Men presidency of this Church?" Our only response was, "Because you called us to be, President."

Young men, we hope that you are excited about the Aaronic Priesthood: Fulfilling Our Duty to God program. It has been introduced to all the Aaronic Priesthood throughout the world. It is designed to bless you spiritually, physically, socially, and mentally. The requirements are meaningful and will stretch you almost to the limits of your capability. You will be able to establish personal goals and achieve them with the help of your parents and your great leaders. There is a wonderful excitement associated with this program all over the Church. We want *every one of you* to qualify and receive the coveted Duty to God Award.

### Dad, are you awake?

Many years ago I took our only son on his first camping-fishing trip. He was just a boy. The canyon was steep, and the descent was difficult. But the fishing was good. Every time I hooked a fish, I would give the pole to the eager boy, and with shouts of joy he would reel in a beautiful trout. In the shadows and coolness of the late afternoon, we began our climb back up to the rim high above us. He scrambled rapidly up the mountain ahead of me with a challenging, "Come on, Dad. I'll bet I can beat you to the top." The challenge was heard but wisely ignored. His small frame seemed literally to fly over, under,

and around every obstacle, and when every step that I took seemed ridiculously like my last, he had reached the top and stood cheering me on.

After supper we knelt in prayer. His small voice rose sweetly heavenward in benediction to our day. Then we climbed into our large double sleeping bag, and after a bit of pushing and pulling I felt his little body snuggle and settle tightly against mine for warmth and security against the night. As I looked at my son beside me, suddenly I felt a surge of love pass through my body with such force that it pushed tears to my eyes. And, at that precise moment, he put his little arms around me and said, "Dad?"

"Yes, son."

"Are you awake?"

"Yes, my son, I am awake."

"Dad, I love you a million, trillion times!"

And immediately he was asleep. But I was awake far into the night, expressing my great thanks for such wonderful blessings clothed with a little boy's body.

Now my son is a man with a son of his own. Once in a while the three of us go fishing. I look at my little redheaded grandson beside his father, and I see in my mind's eye the image of that wonderful moment long ago. The question so innocently asked, "Dad, are you awake?" still rings in my heart.

### Determining whether fathers are awake

To every father I pose the same penetrating question, "Dad, are you awake?" Do your sons ever wonder if you are asleep when it comes to the things that are most important to them? I would suggest that there are several areas that would indicate whether we are "awake" or "asleep" in the eyes of our sons.

*Magnify your responsibility as patriarch*

First, our love for God and accepting our role as the family leader in keeping His commandments. Some years ago, following a stake conference, I felt impressed to pay a visit to a priesthood brother who had fallen away from the Church. We found him working in his garden. I approached him and said, "Dear brother, the Lord Jesus Christ has sent me to see you. I am Elder Hammond, one of His servants."

We exchanged a Latin *abrazo* and entered into his lovely little home. He called for his wife and three children to join us. Two handsome young men and a beautiful girl sat beside their father and mother. I asked the children what they would like, more than anything else in the world, right now. The oldest son spoke: "If only all of us could go back to church as a family, we would be so happy—so grateful." We told them how much they were needed by the Savior and how He loved them. We bore our testimonies to them and then knelt in prayer. The father prayed. The mother wept. They are now back in full fellowship. The children are proud of their father, and they are happy.

Every father in the Church should function as the patriarch of his home. He should take the lead in spiritually guiding the family. He ought not to delegate or abrogate his responsibilities to the mother. He should call for family prayer, family home evening, scripture reading, and occasional father's interviews. He is the protector, the defender, and the kindly source of discipline.

It is the father who should lead, unify, and solidify the family unit by accepting the priesthood of God and responding to the calls and privileges associated with priesthood authority. His relationship with God and His Son, Jesus Christ, is one of

the beacons which will lead his sons and daughters through the stormy shoals of life.

If Dad is a true disciple of Jesus Christ, then the sons will follow him as the night the day. "Dad, are you awake?"

*Honor and respect your wife*

Second, the relationship we have with our wives—their mothers. Considering everything else we do, the way we treat our wives could well have the greatest impact on the character of our sons. If a father is guilty of inflicting verbal or physical abuse in any degree on his companion, his sons will resent him for it, perhaps even despise him for it. But interestingly enough, when they are grown and marry, they are likely to follow the same pattern of abuse with their wives. There is an urgent need in our society for fathers who respect their wives and treat them with sweet, tender love.

Recently I heard of a father who foolishly called his beautiful, intelligent wife "stupid" and "dumb" in a most degrading manner for some small mistake she innocently made. The children listened, embarrassed and frightened for their mother. She was belittled in front of those that she loved most. Although an apology and forgiveness were expressed, there still remained the hurt and shame of a senseless moment.

The Spirit of the Lord cannot be expected to bless our lives if we persist in being angry, callous, and cruel to our mates. We cannot expect our sons to develop respect and gentleness toward their mothers if we do not provide them a proper example. President David O. McKay said, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother" (quoted from Theodore Hesburgh, *Reader's Digest*, Jan. 1963, 25; in *Richard Evans' Quote Book* [1971], 11).

"Dad, are you awake?"

*Discipline with love*

*Third, to provide discipline that is just and is administered with love.* Too often, out of our own frustration and weakness, we raise our hands to strike our children, usually in an attempt to protect our own selfish pride. Every child needs to be disciplined. Not only do they need it; they expect it; they want it. Discipline gives direction and teaches self-control, but in all discipline there should be a sense of righteous judgment and pure love.

When I was a little boy, my widowed mother gave me the most severe discipline possible. She said, with tears in her eyes, "My son, I am so disappointed in you." The pain in my heart was more than I could bear. A thousand lashes could not have cut me so deeply. I knew that such a rebuke could only have been made to me out of her pure love, for if there was one thing that I was certain of, it was that my mother loved me. I resolved never again to be subject to the disappointment and the broken heart of an angel mother. I believe that I have succeeded in that resolve.

When it comes to discipline, "Dad, are you awake?"

**Help sons become men of honor, respect**

Dads, it is imperative that the challenges I have mentioned be mastered in our lives if our sons are to be spiritually and emotionally mature. If we do, then they will not be ashamed of us, nor will they ever be ashamed of themselves. They will become men of honor, respect, full of love, willing to serve the Savior and submit their will to Him. Then we will rejoice

in the fact that they are ours forever. They will say, "Dad, are you awake?"

And we will respond, "Yes, my son, I am awake."

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**President Monson**

As we conclude the conference, we express appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they provided this afternoon.

Likewise we thank all who have assisted in any way: our city officials, for the cooperation given the conference; the doctors, Church Health Unit nurses, and ambulance services which have been on hand to render assistance; and the ushers and interpreters.

We also express appreciation to local and national media representatives for their coverage of the conference and to the owners and the operators of the many radio and television stations, cable systems, and Internet service providers who have given time and made facilities available to carry sessions of this conference in many countries of the world.

As you leave the conference, once again we ask you to obey traffic rules, to use caution, and to be courteous in driving.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker. Following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "We Ever Pray for Thee." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Gerald L. Taylor of the Seventy, and this conference will then be adjourned for six months.

**President Gordon B. Hinckley****Each a better person**

What a wonderful conference this has been, my brothers and sisters. As we

return to our homes and to our daily activities, each of us should be a better individual than we were when the conference opened.