

Great Experiences

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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.”

[\(Eccl. 1:16.\)](#)

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.

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.

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.”

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.

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

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.”

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.

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.

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.

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.