

An Even Balance

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There are many in society who are concerned only with single interests, who judge the merits of candidates and causes on the basis of those single issues. In the Church some have been concerned with one principle or one phase of the gospel over all others. With this background, I have chosen to speak today of the need for a good balance in our lives.

The wise Job said: “Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity” (Job 31:6).

As we employ the even balance, so also we shall be judged, for the measure we judge by comes back to judge us.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. [Matthew 7: 1, 21]

Protest Off-balance

There seem to have been many in the last generation whose lives were spent protesting. Perhaps they wanted to do so because they felt repressed or wished to bring about change or perhaps had selfish reasons, thinking that if they tore the house down they might end up with a shingle. Some protesters have said that they did what they did in order to be free—

free of traditions, free of morals, free of all of the confining standards of society, unrestrained by government or law. Some have been wildly self-indulgent. Having traveled far down this road, they have found that it is not the road to freedom, but to slavery—as Harry Emerson Fosdick noted, with “habits that bind them, diseases that curse them, and blasted reputations that ruin them” (*Christianity: Repression or Liberation?*).

Fortunately, most of your generation have escaped this disaster, but there are few who have not been exposed to this philosophy. As a result, the balance in their lives has been somewhat tilted and uneven. Many in society, and even some in this university, expend far too much precious energy in protesting the rules. Since they did not make the rules, some feel that they should not be restricted by them. Others make a game of testing the fences to see what they can get away with. Some think that by breaking the rules somehow they become

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stronger or more independent. Those who fight the rules spend much time and energy trying to express independence in their attempted quest to find some identity.

Talents, gifts of expression, and precious time are exhausted in swimming against too many tides. I have no hesitancy to suggest that young men at this university can learn to express themselves better through excellence in the classroom or on the playing field than in the length of their hair. Young ladies can obtain a better identity and receive a better notice by their academic excellence and artistic expression rather than through immodesty of dress.

Importance of Self-Regulation

Recently some of us heard that when President Nathan Eldon Tanner was teaching school in Canada, a student reported that at the beginning of the year President Tanner announced to the class, "I am going to teach you only one thing this year," and then he wrote on the blackboard in large letters, "TO THINK."

Some students who are struggling financially and otherwise understandably chafe under the general education requirements necessary for their degrees and are anxious to get on with the technical education they think they really came for, such as in computer science, engineering, law, or other disciplines which will make their knowledge and skills more marketable. But computers as we know them now will become obsolete. In my life the periodic tables are no longer the same. New things will alter engineering, and the law will change somewhat.

In part, at least, general education is supposed to teach you how to think and broaden your horizons. In the Doctrine and Covenants we are reminded that we will get into the celestial kingdom through much tribulation. If you think general education has no other advantage, you may put it down to simple tribulation.

Elliott Richardson, a few weeks ago on this campus, suggested that with reference to too much government regulation, the flip side is to learn and practice more self-regulation. An important part of your education is to learn that you cannot altogether escape the law of the Medes and the Persians in the myriad regulations of the complex society in which we live. Having learned this will be good training to become submissive to the laws of God which are immutable.

The people asked the Savior, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" (Matthew 22:17). The Savior's response was:

Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. [Matthew 22:19–21]

Help from Holy Ghost

There are times, however, when each of us has to have the gumption to make a stand as to what we wish to preserve or change in order to maintain our self-respect and not "be a reed shaken with the wind" (Matthew 11:7). I would advise you to make your great stands in life on moral issues, not kicking against the rules of dress or behavior in society, appearing to be eccentric or unbalanced or immature. We lose much credibility and strength and risk being weighed in an uneven balance when, Don Quixote-like, we go around "tilting windmills." There is for all in this audience a transcending blessing available in making the right moral choices, for you can receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost. It is much easier for those who have a righteous balance to yield "to the enticings of the Holy Spirit" (Mosiah 3: 19).

This way we can leave behind the attributes of the natural man or woman and become

someone much more enlightened. Alma counseled his brethren to “contend no more against the Holy Ghost” (Alma 34:38). The gifts of the Holy Ghost have special strengths for those who study and learn: “He shall . . . bring all things to your remembrance.” Through this marvelous power, “the Comforter . . . shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). Another wonderful attribute is that “the Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and . . . shall flow unto thee forever and ever” (D&C 121:46).

How do these marvelous gifts function? Parley P. Pratt stated:

It quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections, and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. . . . It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. . . . It . . . invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens . . . and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being. [Key to the Science of Theology, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1891), pp. 101–2]

With persons blessed by these gifts, one enjoys “the light of their countenances,” and their presence is “a warm glow of pure gladness and sympathy . . . of spirit.”

Help of Humor

An important part of the gospel message is that we not be too rigid, that we open up our minds, that we develop some tolerance and be not too quick to render judgment. I learned when I was making my living in the arena that we do not always have all of the facts. There always seem to be at least two sides of a question. Everything is not always just black or white. The counsel of the Savior as he instructed his Twelve was, “Behold, I send you forth as

sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

It is not always easy to achieve an appropriate balance. In addition to what we read in the newspapers, we can have brought right into our homes in color most of the problems of an entire world. We also have our own personal ups and downs and challenges. The stresses of life are real and rather constant. There is, however, a defense against much of this. A thoughtful man said, “There is no defense against adverse fortune which is, on the whole, so effectual as an habitual sense of humor” (Thomas Wentworth Higginson, quoted in *Dictionary of Thoughts*, [Chicago: J. G. Ferguson, 1969], p. 372). Humor is a defense against adversity.

For many years, as I have blessed newborn children, including my own, I have blessed them with a sense of humor. I did it with the hope that it will help guard them against being too rigid, in the hope that they will have a balance in their lives, in the hope that situations and problems and difficulties will not be overdrawn.

Many years ago in one of the courtrooms of Utah a divorce case was called for a hearing. One of the participating attorneys, indignant and incensed, took the witness stand to bring forward to the court the fact that the husband and the wife the night before had reconciled and composed their differences. He urged that because of the reconciliation his adversary was unprincipled, unfair, and unethical now to come into court. The judge turned to the other attorney who had been maligned and asked him if he were going to take the witness stand to refute the allegations against his character. The defamed attorney, a wise and experienced counselor, said: “Oh, no, your honor. I’m not going to take that witness stand. He might be able to prove all those allegations against me.” The courtroom broke into laughter, the tension

was broken, and all things got put into their proper place.

A sense of humor helps to understand the counsel given by the Savior.

Good humor is a refining of the heart. Thomas Carlyle stated: "True humor springs not more from the head than from the heart. It is not contempt. Its essence is love. Its issue is not in laughter, but in still smiles which lie far deeper" (Quoted *ibid.*).

Abraham Lincoln said: "With the fearful strain that is on me night and day, if I did not laugh I should die" (Quoted *ibid.*).

Cultivating good humor may be helpful in finding your identity. Each of you young people is trying to find out who you really are. You can feel your surging powers and strengths, and yet with the many challenges that confront you now and lie ahead of you, you may have some inner concerns with respect to your ability to meet and cope with them. I wish to assure you that you will ride over the bumps and come quicker to your own identity if you cultivate the good humor which comes naturally. A thoughtful man said: "Humor is an affirmation of dignity, a declaration of man's superiority to all that befalls him" (Romain Gary, quoted *ibid.*).

It is important to learn to laugh at yourself and poke fun at yourself. One definition of humor is: "Humor is falling downstairs if you do it while in the act of warning your wife not to" (Kenneth Bird, quoted *ibid.*).

There is another important dimension of learning to laugh at yourself. It lies in not being afraid to make a mistake. When I was a young bishop, we sought to have a ward choir. We had a good choir because our leader, Brother Alex Anderson, was a good leader. He, however, encouraged the bishop to sing in the choir, at some risk. I felt that as a measure of support for Brother Anderson and the others that I would try to sing with them. Things went from bad to worse. Brother Anderson liked to invite the choir members to improve

their talents by singing solos. One Sunday during choir practice he asked that the bishop sing a small solo. I found it very difficult to turn Brother Anderson down in front of the whole choir, when the others who were not very good singers had made a 100 percent effort, so during sacrament meeting the choir sang and I tried. I was literally so frightened and upset that the paper trembled in my hands. I could hardly hold it. I felt embarrassed and I felt humiliated. All of my mask of dignity was gone. After the meeting, as I walked down the aisle, I was met with warm smiles and expressions of understanding and support. Someone said, "Bishop, it surely makes us feel good to see you scared." That day the bishop became more human.

May we consider for a moment the role of humor and faith. George Barrell Cheever said: "For health and the constant enjoyment of life, give me a keen and ever-present sense of humor. It is the next best thing to an abiding faith in providence" (Quoted *ibid.*).

Our leaders have demonstrated that one can enjoy both faith and humor. It is said of Heber C. Kimball that he prayed and conversed with the Lord "as one man talketh to another."

*However, on one occasion while offering an earnest appeal on behalf of certain of his fellow creatures he startled the kneeling circle by bursting into a loud laugh in the very midst of his prayer. Quickly regaining his composure and solemn address, he remarked apologetically, "Lord, it makes me laugh to pray about some people." [O. F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), p. 427]*

This sense of humor is retained by his grandson, President Spencer W. Kimball. When Jeffrey Holland was invited into the great room in the north end of the first floor of the Church Office Building, he met there with the First Presidency and was asked to become the president of Brigham Young University. President

Holland, in one of the few times I have known it to happen, was somewhat without appropriate words and simply said, "You've got to be kidding." President Kimball responded, "Brother Holland, we don't kid very often in this room."

A good sense of humor will help us hone our talents. One of the talents which needs to be greatly magnified is a sensitivity to others, and this sensitivity involves reaching out and touching another heart. By learning not to be afraid to laugh at oneself, one is able to stir up the kindred feelings of others. Under the cultivation of the Holy Ghost the talents will be greatly magnified.

Importance of Enthusiasm

Elder LeGrand Richards, the great advocate of enthusiasm, would want me to mention the importance of embracing life rather than shrinking from it. A few weeks ago a stake president came in to see me. On the way out he stopped in to see Brother Richards, who was coming to his stake conference in a week or two. He asked, "Brother Richards, how are you?"

That great apostle said, "Well, president, I will tell you. My body, the house I live in, is getting old and creaky;" and then he added, with all ninety-five years of his life testifying, "but the real LeGrand Richards is on fire."

It is now time to conclude lest I fall into the error of the speaker referred to by President

Bryant S. Hinckley, the father of Elder Gordon B. Hinckley. President Hinckley related:

A garrulous speaker at a banquet had talked on and on until the guests could not suppress their yawns. The irritated toastmaster raised his gavel, intending to rap for order. He brought it down and in place of hitting the table he struck a man next to him, who had stooped to pick up his napkin, right on top of his bald pate and knocked him unconscious. They administered restoratives and when he began to revive they asked him how he felt. He said, "I hear him still talking, hit me again." (Improvement Era, November 1929, p. 16.)

Many, I expect all, within the sound of my voice have many talents, and are great, but you don't know yet how great you will be. This greatness will come in the achieving of balance and wisdom and understanding. Balance in a large measure is knowing of the things that can be changed and prioritized, and recognizing and accepting the things that will not change. Much of the rest in obtaining sound balance lies in attitude.

I leave with you my blessings. I want you to know that I know that God lives, that the Lord Jesus guides President Kimball and the leaders of this Church, which is the restoration of all things through Joseph Smith and his successors, and I leave you this witness in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.