

The Importance of Balance

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It is always a very special experience to be on the campus of this great university and to feel the spirit of so many who are here for the right reason and with the right attitude. Time and time again we hear the comments of groups and individuals who have visited here as an extension of their trip to Church headquarters. It's so reassuring to hear their praise and compliments of the school and the student body and the spirit that they perceive as they walk the halls and the grounds taking careful note of what they experience.

Most every one of these visitors remark that this campus is different. There is a sense of enthusiasm and industry, a sense of respect and determination, a sense of confidence and spirituality—all of which inspires confidence by the visitors, in you the student body, the faculty, and the Church.

That should be reassurance to you of how the world needs a generation of young people who know why they are here and where they are going and the direction they need to take to get there. We commend you.

Today I would like to talk about some things that I hope will be helpful in your lives as students, as spouses, and as parents. I have titled what I'll say "The Importance of Balance."

It has been my experience that balance is sometimes very elusive as we struggle to meet the pressures and challenges that are ever present. So I hope I can share some thoughts that will be useful in the challenging experience we call life. I think of the definition someone coined: "Life is what happens while you are making other plans."

First may I congratulate you on meeting the academic, citizenship, and moral requirements to gain admission here—you have instant credibility with me. Not that you won't be required to continue to verify those requirements as you pursue your education. Of course you will, but it should make you feel good just knowing that you made the team.

I commend you for having exhibited the mental and physical discipline that brings you to this point in your life. No doubt you realize the importance by now of maintaining that discipline in both the academic and moral aspects of your lives. As you continue to make the right choices, you will have tremendous

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opportunities for continued growth and development.

It is so sad to see poor choices being made at critical times, choices that have very seriously limited the options a person has for future opportunity. No doubt you will continue to see the “poor-choices” factor operating all the days of your life. Consider it ongoing evidence for you to make good choices and to be consciously striving to improve yourself each day.

I recall a motivational speaker during my teenage years making the statement, “I know of no one to be pitied more than one whose future is in the past.” What a sobering thought—bad choices seriously compromising opportunities of the future.

So if you are tempted to take that dare or to get involved in activities that may appear exciting, give it careful thought. Don’t be swayed by the urgings of peers. Is the potential thrill worth the risks and the baggage that accompany questionable conduct? You have come so far. Don’t let bad choices put a ceiling on your upward mobility and, even more important, bring heartache and sorrow and loss of self-respect into your life.

I continue to be amazed at the frivolous way in which choices are made by some, both young and old alike—decisions that have eternal and everlasting consequences. I refer to such things as experimentation with drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. I refer to conduct that leads to loss of virtue or harm or injury to self or other people.

I recall a situation that came to my attention while I was practicing law some years ago. It involved a very well-educated and initially successful physician. He had spent years gaining the education and training required for a very coveted and much sought after specialty in medicine.

Just when it seemed that he “had everything,” he attended a party where drugs were available and tampered with by many in

attendance. With an air of abandonment—an attitude of “What will it hurt to give it a try”—he consented to an injection of a substance that his tempter said he would really enjoy.

Little did he realize that this would be the beginning of a nightmare that ultimately cost him his family, his practice, and his ability to function. He later admitted that when he took that first dare, so to speak, he knew that he was hopelessly addicted.

What a price to pay for such a moment of abandonment, a moment of thoughtlessness. Of course, not every case of addiction or promiscuity or a wasted lifestyle results from just one experiment or just one drink or just one immoral encounter, but unfortunately we are not able to determine just how strong we will be in a given situation or what effect harmful substances will have on us.

I am reminded of a wise father’s counsel: “If you never take the first one, you’ll never need to worry about the second one.”

We should all keep in mind that there is no neutral ground between where the Lord’s boundary ends and the adversary’s begins. The safe rule to remember is to stay on the Lord’s side of the line.

Well, you might keep that in mind as a motivator while you are striving for excellence in whatever pursuit you follow.

Personal

With balance comes happiness and inner peace. How unfortunate it is that some work a lifetime on a goal like making money or attaining social status, only to find that these things do not bring real happiness.

Too often we conjure up thoughts in our minds of things we imagine will make us happy. To some extent we may even become jealous or covetous: If only we could afford the nicer clothes that others have or a better house or new furniture or perhaps a different car. If we had just been blessed with a beautiful singing voice or smaller feet or a more perfect

profile or athletic prowess, then we could be happy.

I remember spending a troublesome quarter in college, despairing over the fact that I was not an athlete. I almost talked myself into feeling that I was a failure because I was foolishly focusing on something that was impractical for me.

I had other talents and many other opportunities. But for a period of time I almost lost my effectiveness and made myself miserable worrying about something that really was not indispensable to my progression and happiness.

Sometimes we let reverses or unpleasant experiences undermine our confidence and create more turbulence in our lives than they should. Here I don't mean to imply that all you need to do is keep a smile on your face and everything will be all right. Many have had those experiences in life when it hurts so badly inside that, for a short time at least, it may seem hard to go on.

If you ever commence feeling that way, you might try quietly humming the hymn "Count Your Blessings" and reviewing the words in your mind. Think of the pioneers and the great faith and courage they had as they pushed westward, leaving their homes, ever sacrificing, and enduring untold hardships.

Think of the problems and difficulties of others who have been required to bear so much. You might also think in terms of "What could I do to be of greater service to others?"

I believe it was the legendary jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes who said, "I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving" (*The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* [1858], ch. 4). I endorse that concept. At any given time in a person's life we may have feelings of inadequacy or ineptness or lack of confidence or ability. But that will fade as you conscientiously stretch and put forth the effort to become a better student—or better at whatever you're doing, or being a more loving husband,

wife, and parent. As we hold fast to correct principles, we will continue to move in the right direction.

I hope I go to my grave never having "peaked out," but rather striving to improve, to do better, to be better, to enhance my ability to serve, and to learn something worthwhile each day.

I recall visiting President Marion G. Romney, who was a member of our stake and who for some time prior to his death was homebound. As his stake presidency, we made periodic visits to see him. I still remember one occasion, as we were leaving, asking if President Romney had any counsel for us as his stake presidency. President Romney paused and then gave us a sermon in a sentence: "Live a little better each day."

It has always been my belief that a keen sense of personal accountability is necessary to keep a person in balance. Our moral compass needs to be operating efficiently and accurately. Often I sense an individual is tempted to make bad choices through the urging of the adversary. He quietly suggests, "No one will ever know." But we should constantly keep in mind that our Heavenly Father always knows. And he is saddened when we do not live up to what we are capable of.

We all know how important prayer is in maintaining balance. If you have trouble remembering, here's a suggestion. Years ago I read about Brigham Young following the practice of never taking any food or drink in the morning before he had his personal prayer. I have followed that practice for more than 20 years now—in fact, ever since I was called as a bishop. I commend that practice to you, and I guarantee you won't forget your prayers.

I also found that as a young father with several children at home and a busy schedule, it was very difficult to set aside a period of time in the morning for reading the scriptures. I also discovered a simple way to handle that. The purchase of a small cassette player and tapes of

the standard works plus other gospel texts and general conference tapes was the answer. As I stepped out of the shower in the morning to get ready for work, I could plan on 15 to 20 minutes of scripture every day. It's easy to do. It's uninterrupted time that would otherwise be lost.

Read your patriarchal blessing from time to time. I received mine when I was just about 12 years of age, and it has been a source of inspired direction my entire life. In fact, one of the reasons I stayed active in the army reserve for 30 years was largely because of counsel given in my patriarchal blessing.

Recognize the difference between pleasure and happiness, and then pattern your lives in such a way that you will seek happiness as opposed to mere pleasure.

If adversity strikes, don't succumb to the temptation to counsel the Lord. Pray for strength to get you through. President Harold B. Lee used to say: "Never put a question mark where the Lord has put a period."

Wise counsel is also helpful. Dear Elder Neal A. Maxwell called at our home the evening that our son was killed and gave us some very comforting counsel that really made a difference. He said: "I know this is very hard for you, but try to think of it this way. You now have a son where we all hope to be someday."

Work at developing self-control. Here are some words from author William George Jordan:

At each moment of man's life he is either a king or a slave. As he surrenders to a wrong appetite, to any human weakness, as he falls prostrate in hopeless subjection to any condition, to any environment, to any failure, he is a slave. As he day by day crushes out human weakness, masters opposing elements within him, and day by day re-creates a new self from the sin and folly of his past—then he is a king. He is a king ruling with wisdom over himself. Alexander conquered the whole world—except Alexander. [The Kingship of Self-Control (Old

Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 9]

Family

A very important part of achieving balance is having a good family life. We all have the responsibility to be dutiful children, and as we find our life's companion, to be a good spouse and a good parent. We will never be released from these responsibilities. I doubt the Lord will want to know as much about the number of court cases I have won as about the kind of son, husband, parent, or neighbor I have been.

It is so important to realize that children need both a dad and a mom. It's pretty hard for one to do both. And we shouldn't try to justify our absence or neglect by reasoning that we're doing all this for a spouse or children. Often our time is the most precious and valuable gift we can give our children.

While trying to stay close to each of our children as they were growing up, I was busily involved in many pursuits. But I found that an opportunity would present itself from time to time to take one of them with me on a short business trip. That one-on-one experience provided some of the most productive time I had with my children.

As another means of demonstrating how important my family was, I had a private phone line installed in my law office, and family members were the only ones who had the number. They knew that whenever I was at the office, I was only a direct phone call away.

Yes, there were some interruptions even when I was involved in some fairly heavy meetings with clients, but when the phone rang, I would simply tell them, "Excuse me, but this is my wife's phone." I seldom had anyone who complained, and women clients were especially impressed.

I have one other important suggestion with respect to the family. I always tried to let the children feel their father's testimony and know how important the gospel was in my life.

Prayer was an important part of our family life. We had a rule in our home that none of our children left the house in the morning without having family prayer. We defined family prayer as a kneel-down prayer with both of the parents—depending on availability—or with at least one if the other was gone. Sometimes it was necessary to have more than one family prayer in the morning, as we would not wake up the youngest children to have prayer when others were leaving for early morning meetings, classes, or seminary activity.

We also followed the custom of giving father's blessings each year as school began and at such times during the year as there was need for comfort, direction, guidance, or healing, as the case might be.

You may also want to dedicate your home when you are fortunate enough to have one. I believe it was eight years before we were able to extricate ourselves from the rental game and purchase our first home. And remember, it's not necessary to have it all paid for before you dedicate it.

Now, an important tip: You may not want to wait until your children have finished college, the home is paid for, two late-model cars are in the garage, and you have a tidy sum for retirement in the bank account before you do a few things as husband and wife. We enjoyed traveling, and consequently we took some trips during the early years of our marriage. Not long ones. Usually less than a week. Often members of our extended family were able to help with the children.

Church

We have always accepted Church calls and assignments as they have come. It seemed we found a way to take care of those responsibilities and yet felt we were not neglecting our family or professional obligations. As you do the Lord's work, you receive blessings in so many ways—blessings that make up for the extra time and effort that go into fulfilling a

Church calling with a “well done, thou good and faithful servant” result (Matthew 25:21).

And it goes without saying, we should keep the commandments, attend our meetings, pay our tithes and offerings, read the scriptures, show respect for parents and Church leaders, and always be conscious of the importance of example.

Work

One of the greatest challenges is balancing work and family responsibilities in order that neither go wanting. Of course the family must have sufficient money to take care of needs, but, beyond that, money has very little to do with happiness. It has been my observation over the years that if you approach your work with the principal intent to gain riches, you will surely miss the mark.

Remember the counsel in Jacob 2:18–19:

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.

As we continue to lead busier lives, it seems we never have time to do all the things we would like to do or perhaps even need to do. My father gave me some helpful advice as a young man. It has application to both men and women: “Do the most important thing first.” That rule along with setting sound priorities is the best way I know of balancing work with the other aspects of living.

Early on in the legal profession I determined if I could not practice my religion and practice law, then I would not practice law. But I found that I could do both. And I think it's possible with most occupations.

Maintaining Spirituality

Now a few words concerning spirituality. If we who have received the greater light the gospel gives are to be true to the faith and effective in our various fields of endeavor, we must be ever sensitive to our level of spirituality.

We should be constantly providing nourishment to our spiritual side. Scriptures, conference reports, counsel given by the Brethren, lesson manuals, and gospel texts provide excellent sources for “treasuring up” the word.

Fasting and prayer also provide nourishment for the soul.

In addition to seeking the positive, we should also avoid the negative. In the apostle Paul’s epistle to the Romans, you will recall he says, “I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (Romans 16:19). We don’t need to view R-rated movies to know that they are not good for us. Nor do we need to become familiar with the ways of the world in order to know that certain conduct or practices are demeaning and offensive to the Spirit.

If those who have been endowed in the temple live worthy of and have a current temple recommend in their possession, high levels of spirituality will be maintained.

In summary then, if we are to achieve balance in our lives, we must have our priorities in order.

And my priorities go something like this:

Wife

Family

Church

Work

I am so grateful for the gospel of Jesus Christ that has been restored upon the earth in these, the latter days. I’m thankful that the Lord has provided us the pattern that will see us safely home to dwell with him.

And if we will but follow the Lord’s prophets here on earth, there will be joy, happiness, and success in this life and the greatest of all the gifts of God—the gift of eternal life.

President David O. McKay, the ninth prophet and president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this dispensation, eloquently summarizes the purpose of life:

The true end of life is not mere existence, not pleasure, not fame, not wealth. [From the Latter-day Saint’s standpoint,] the true purpose of life is the perfection of humanity through individual effort, under the guidance of God’s inspiration.

Real life is response to the best within us. To be alive only to appetite, pleasure, pride, money-making, and not to goodness and kindness, purity and love, poetry, music, flowers, stars, God and eternal hopes, is to deprive one’s self of the real joy of living. [CR, October 1963, p. 7]

May you develop qualities of courage, faith, and self-control. Use your background and experience in analyzing the choices that are constantly before you. Draw on the Holy Ghost that you are privileged to have and your decisions will be much wiser.

Don’t let habits and excuses interfere with proper choices.

Those who rely on excuses at best have only the *excuse* and not the *blessing*.

Hear Elder Richard L. Evans on this subject:

No matter how good an excuse may be, no reason for failure or defection is ever so satisfying to ourselves or to anyone else as is actually doing what we should do, or delivering on the date that something is due. Excuses are at best a second-choice substitute.

*It is a surpassing quality in life to follow through, to keep commitments, to keep the commandments, and no matter how ingenious our excuses are, they don’t cancel commitments, or justify our failures, or relieve us from answering before the highest bar, unless they are founded on real, valid reasons—and not merely on our comfort or convenience. [Richard L. Evans, *From the Crossroads* [New York: Harper, 1955], p. 20]*

As we note in 2 Nephi, the Lord leaves to us the freedom of choice:

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. [2 Nephi 2:27]

In Closing

Often as I work at the table in our family room, I watch the dawn break in the east. And I know it will always keep its appointed hour of arrival, because the universe is controlled by the Almighty, who operates within laws that are eternal.

And just as that dawn breaks every morning at a precise time that is predetermined according to the season of the year, I know there are other eternal laws that pertain to this world and are not changed by the whims or fancies of those who inhabit this earth. And we are all subject to those laws.

President Spencer W. Kimball provides us with an appropriate reminder:

The Lord's program is unchangeable. His laws are immutable. They will not be modified. Your opinion or mine does not alter the laws. Many in the world, and even some in the Church, seem to think that eventually the Lord will be merciful and give them the unearned blessing. But the Lord cannot be merciful at the expense of justice. [The Miracle of Forgiveness (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), p. 249]

I'm so pleased to have my father here with us. He is in his 94th year and still farming up in East Garland, in northern Utah. It took a little talking to get him to leave the farm even for a day, but I'm so happy to have him here. He's a good dad.

In closing I'd like to share a missionary story that took place in the 1920s, while my father was serving his mission.

Two young missionaries traveling without purse or scrip walked down a dry and dusty country road in the back country of Ohio.

They were in their third day of a trek to an isolated branch some 80 miles east of Columbus, Ohio. The first night they had a bed in a farmhouse and a 4:00 a.m. breakfast the next morning. That next night they were not as fortunate. The best offer they were able to get was a farmer's haystack that came without breakfast. They were now into their third day, and it had been a long time since breakfast the day before.

It was August. The humidity was high. The weather was hot. As the sun bore down on these two young elders, they began to become weary. They had been sent out earlier that week to tract without funds, as was the custom in those times. It was now late afternoon, and they were feeling the pangs of hunger. Their efforts for breakfast or lunch had been unsuccessful.

As they rounded a bend in the road, they saw what they thought must be a mirage—a huge sign that read: The Biggest Little Country Store in the World. They thought they needed a store about that size to match their hunger. But they had no money. They talked briefly and decided it would be appropriate to step inside the store and ask if there was any stale bread or broken sacks of crackers or cookies or something they might get to ease their hunger pangs.

As they entered the store, they were immediately met by a clerk, who scrutinized them suspiciously. As they explained their plight and asked about stale food or damaged merchandise, they observed a man on a balcony at the rear of the store stand up and peer over the rail. He left his desk, came down a short flight of stairs, and walked toward the elders.

They were uneasy as he approached them. They explained that they were elders in The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, fulfilling missions and traveling without funds. The man listened intently. Then, to their surprise, he excused himself and picked up the telephone behind the counter. They thought he was going to call the sheriff. Instead, the call was to his wife. He indicated he was bringing two young men home. He asked her to put a roast of beef in the oven and prepare a nice meal for them and then see to it that they had hot baths and a place to stay for the night.

Well, after hearing that, you couldn't tell these young elders that prayers aren't answered. They had a prayer in their hearts all afternoon that the Lord might provide for them.

As the elders completed a wonderful meal that evening, they heard the story explaining why the store owner was almost expecting and waiting for them. A few years earlier he and his wife had traveled to Salt Lake City to attend a grocers convention. He told how he had made reservations at the Hotel Utah, but as they arrived at the hotel, they were surprised and disappointed when the desk clerk indicated they had no record of any reservation. Since the hotel was filled to capacity, there was simply nothing the clerk could do. He also advised them that with the national convention in town, all of the other hotels were also full.

The couple stepped away from the desk. As they stood in the lobby pondering their predicament, a tall, slender, stately man approached. He asked if he could be of assistance. They indicated they were in Salt Lake City from Ohio to attend a grocers convention, and they had been told their reservations were lost, and they were without a place to stay. The gentleman warmly indicated that they had no problem. He invited them to use his home as

their headquarters and stay as long as they needed.

At the conclusion of the convention, they attempted to pay their gracious hosts, but, of course, their offers were refused. Instead, then Elder George Albert Smith, later to be President George Albert Smith, indicated to his guests that he certainly would not want to take any money, but he did say, "We have missionaries serving in many parts of the world. They are young people who serve at their own expense and who many times must rely on the goodness of the people they labor among to provide them with food and shelter." Elder Smith went on, "If you ever have an opportunity to assist any of our missionaries, that will be payment enough for what we have provided here."

The next morning the missionaries arose early to a wonderful country breakfast and then bade good-bye to their hosts. They were given a supply of roast beef sandwiches to take with them on their trek. They, of course, had an opportunity to bear their testimonies before moving down that country road.

I know that is a true story because my father was one of those young missionaries.

May we be wise enough and valiant enough to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ; may we cleanse the inner vessel; may we come unto Christ and be perfected in him and deny ourselves of all ungodliness. And may we strive to achieve the balance that will bring everlasting peace and happiness into our lives.

This is his work, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This is the true Church. It is guided and directed by prophets, seers, and revelators. Of these things I bear solemn witness in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.