

Little Things Count

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I deem it a privilege, brothers and sisters, to speak to this audience at this great university. Although I did not attend Brigham Young University, I am a great fan of your president, Jeffrey R. Holland; your faculty; your stakes and wards; your beautiful campus; and your athletic teams. But most of all, I honor the standards taught and lived on this campus. What a great privilege for you to learn and grow in this spiritual and academic atmosphere of truth.

I have been impressed recently with the thought that this life is made up of little things—little things that count a great deal. I believe that the little things are of great importance in our relationship with ourselves, in our relationships with others, and in our relationship with God.

The Lord has said, “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33).

Relationship with Self

Let us first consider our relationship with ourselves. Along with earning good grades, which I know all of you receive, you must take proper care in your life to see that the little

things regarding your personal life are in order. You must learn, along with geometry and English literature, to care for your health and your mental well-being. Do you maintain proper exercise that will give you the extra energy and alertness of mind to keep your spirit strong and your attitude positive? Are you wise in your diet? Do you avoid the un nourishing snacks that might keep your stomach full but your health quite empty?

Our bodies are truly the result of what we eat and the exercise we receive. If we are not wise, these little things can soon catch up with us to become major health problems that will limit our success and contribution.

President Brigham Young once said, “Let us seek to extend the present life to the uttermost, by observing every law of health, and by properly balancing labor, study, rest, and recreation” (DBY, p. 186).

Many students feel that proper rest is not an important concern at this time in life. Yet the

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Lord said, “Cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated” (D&C 88:124).

Some suffer from too little sleep, and some suffer from too much. This might seem like a little matter to you. But the wise student soon learns the value of regular hours and sufficient sleep.

I have often thought that some of the most common little things in our lives are the minutes that pass in each hour of the day. For each human being, time is indeed an indispensable resource. It can neither be ignored nor altered. We are compelled to spend it at a fixed rate of sixty minutes every hour. No spigot can be installed to regulate its flow, and no refilling device can replenish its quantity.

The question is not one of managing the clock, but one of managing ourselves with respect to the time we have. As Peter Drucker, the distinguished management consultant, has said, time is “man’s most perishable resource,” and unless it is managed, nothing else can be managed (see Peter F. Drucker, *Management* [New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1974], p. 70). Each minute is a little thing and yet, with respect to our personal productivity, to manage the minute is the secret of success.

To these suggestions regarding the little things that impact your physical self, add the encouragement to develop your thoughts along lofty paths:

The Effect of a Thought

*Whenever you cultivate a thought,
Remember it will trace
With certain touch in pictured form
A story on your face.*

*Whenever you dwell upon a thought,
Remember it will roll
Into your being and become
A fiber of your soul.*

*Whenever you send out a thought,
Remember it will be
A force throughout the universe
For all eternity.*

[Anonymous, in *A Collection of Inspirational Verse for Latter-day Saints*, comps. Bryan B. Gardner and Calvin T. Broadhead (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), p. 132]

Relationships with Others

With regard to our relationships with others, I often marvel to think of the perfect example that the Lord Jesus Christ provides in all aspects of our existence. If we were to meet him, we would find him refreshingly pleasant and perfect in all his relationships and his dealings with each individual. As we study his life and his teachings, especially those found in our modern scriptures, we learn of divine ways to relate to others and grow from our association with our fellowmen.

Have you considered his teachings in your relationship with your best friends—your parents? Do you regularly call them or write them a note to express your love and keep them informed of your progress in school and in life? Do you communicate with them simply to say, “I honor you and I value your teachings and example”? The commandment to honor father and mother does not cease when we celebrate our eighteenth, twenty-first, thirtieth, or even sixtieth birthday.

Do you take the time to remember some of the simple courtesies that are so important in your efforts to build personal regard and graciousness in relationships with others? Do you brethren hold the door for the sisters whenever you can? Do you remember the smile, the compliment, the positive note, and the word of encouragement? We should do these important little things without hesitation. They should be a part of our everyday manner as we groom ourselves socially in these critical young-adult years.

Lord Chesterfield said, “Trifles, little attentions, mere nothings, either done or neglected, will make you either liked or disliked in the general run of the world” (*Forty Thousand Quotations*, comp. Charles Noel Douglas [Oyster Bay, New York: Nelson Doubleday, 1917], p. 1822).

As an illustration of important little things, consider one of baseball’s greats as described in the *Saturday Evening Post*:

The guy stands 6’4” tall. He weighs 215 pounds. To say he’s tough would be an understatement. But he’s proved you don’t have to drink beer, spit tobacco, laugh at dirty jokes, or curse at the umpires to be a winner in baseball. He’s clean as a glass of milk and gentle as a lamb. His name is Dale Murphy.

Chuck Tanner, the manager of the 1986 Atlanta Braves, calls Murphy “Mr. Perfect.” In eight seasons with the Braves, the 30-year-old Murphy has compiled team career-batting figures exceeded only by the Hall of Famer Hank Aaron. [And let me add that Murphy’s career is far from finished.] Tanner and others who have watched, coached, or played with Murphy rhapsodize when asked about the likable father of four young boys who teaches religion to teen-agers in [the] Roswell, Georgia, [ward] during the off-season. “God puts somebody down here like Murphy only every 50 years,” Tanner says. “I’m not talking just about baseball, either. I’m talking about him as a person. In my opinion, there is no finer fellow on earth.”

*[And] Willie Stargell. . . praises Murphy. “He just never has a bad word for anybody.” [“Dale Murphy: Baseball’s Mr. Nice Guy,” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 1986, p. 48]*

Dale Murphy, along with many others, has learned the importance of little things in his relationships with others. Whether teaching seminary or relating to his team members, he remembers the kindnesses and compassion that endear him to his fellowmen.

Patience and long-suffering, considered by some to be little things in this life, are some of the crowning attributes in dealing with our fellowmen. Whether it be in athletics, in business, or in our Church associations, if you can acquire these two great attributes, you will find that you really can work with people and have a good influence in their lives.

Elder Richard L. Evans wrote:

There are battles within ourselves, and battles outside ourselves. The good strives with us . . . and finds itself in competition with the spirit that would tempt us to compromise, to be critical, indifferent, rebellious, to relax our standards, and do what sometime we shall surely regret.

*And since everyone has his struggles, his better days and worse ones, his good impulses and less worthy ones, his arguments inside himself; since all of us need understanding, forgiveness, encouragement, all of us would well give compassionate consideration to others. One quality of character most needed in this world is compassion for other people. One of the urgent lessons of life is to learn how to live with imperfect people—including ourselves. And if we are not altogether pleased with us, it should be easy to understand why we are not altogether pleased with others. [Richard L. Evans, *Thoughts for One Hundred Days*, vol. 4, (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1970), pp. 206–7]*

Henry Ward Beecher said that “every man should have a good-sized cemetery in which to bury the faults of his friends” (Evans, p. 207).

I am reminded of one event when compassion for others played less of a role, and the little matter of listening carefully to the coach’s direction made a great deal of difference. When I played football for the University of Utah some years ago, we faced the University of Colorado in one important game. They were a very formidable team and the team we wanted to defeat the most. This game would decide the conference championship. Our coach, Ike Armstrong, who was very similar in character

and personality to Coach LaVell Edwards, said to our large tackle, who was our kickoff specialist, “Do not kick off to Whizer White, because he has made a number of successful runbacks this season for touchdowns on the opening kickoff.”

When the high-arching kickoff football returned to the earth, it landed right in the waiting arms of Whizer White, who was three yards behind the goal line. He ran the full length of the field, 103 yards, for a touchdown. All eleven players from the University of Utah touched him, but none could stop him. A little error on the part of the kicker put us seven points behind.

The second counsel the coach had given us was not to let Whizer White get beyond the scrimmage line when he carried the ball. “If you do,” he said, “he’ll be gone for a touchdown.” That seemingly little error became a very big challenge during that football game. On one play he did pass the line of scrimmage and made another touchdown. The score at halftime was 14–0 in favor of Colorado University. We soon learned the meaning of the worn-out complaint, “That’s easy for you to say, Coach.”

Five minutes after the beginning of the second half, a heavy snowstorm blew in from the Oquirrh Mountains, and we soon had eight inches of snow on the field. We managed to score a touchdown and an extra point, making the final score 14–7. Two so-called small errors cost us the game.

Other important little things that merit our attention are the small acts of service we perform for our fellowmen. President Spencer W. Kimball said:

I have learned that it is by serving that we learn how to serve. When we are engaged in the service of our fellowmen, not only do our deeds assist them, but we put our own problems in a fresher perspective. When we concern ourselves more with others, there is less time to be concerned with ourselves. . . .

*God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom. . . . So often, our acts of service consist of simple encouragement or of giving mundane help with mundane tasks, but what glorious consequences can flow from mundane acts and from small but deliberate deeds! [Spencer W. Kimball, “Small Acts of Service,” *Ensign*, December 1974, pp. 2, 5]*

I am grateful to my parents for their careful attention to detail in teaching me to live the principles of the gospel in relation to my fellowmen. My father was totally honest and set a great example for us children. When I was about seven years old, he sent me to the hardware store on an errand. He had given me five dollars, which in those days could buy a great deal. When I returned home, he counted the change I had and discovered that the store clerk had given me one dollar too much. The store was about a mile from our home, but he insisted that I walk back and return the money. This is typical of the lessons of honesty he taught us all during our childhood and teenage years.

How careful are you in your dealings with your fellowmen? Are you completely honest in your schoolwork? Do you abide by the rules when you have a take-home exam or a closed-book assignment? Do you carelessly allow group work to be evaluated as your personal work when such is not allowed? Is another’s computer program represented as your own creation? Such temptations are common. Likewise, the infractions are too common. But any true Latter-day Saint knows the attitude of the Lord toward such behavior. No man is worthy of his priesthood calling and no woman is without blame who consciously cheats or deals in dishonest ways.

My father also taught me the value of balance in my life. Before my senior year of football and academic pursuits, he encouraged me

to go on a mission. He said, "If you don't go now, you'll probably never go." A little over two-and-a-half years later, I found myself newly released from my mission and standing on the streets of Berlin watching the German soldiers board the train to travel to Poland for the Nazi invasion. I was barely able to accomplish my travel home to Salt Lake City because of the immediate eruption of World War II. Had I not followed the advice of my father, I probably would not have had the opportunity to serve a mission.

Relationship with God

And now the little things in our relationship with God. In the fashioning of our spiritual bodies, our Heavenly Father took great care to place in each of us every little potential of character, of compassion, of joy, and of knowledge that we would need in our quest for personal growth. The seeds for each godly character trait are in each of us. With that assurance, we are truly able to grow toward godhood as he has commanded us. Do you recall the Savior's words to the Nephites: "What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

What if your Creator had neglected some little things—had neglected to place within your spiritual makeup some of the necessary traits to obtain the godly nature you strive for? Suppose he had made some minor mistakes and had overlooked placing within you the ability to be honest, compassionate, or loyal. To you, such a matter would seem like an immense disservice. Yet for God it might have been an inconsequential oversight in the creation of so many millions of spirits. But he did not overlook such things. He showed perfect care in the creation of each and every spirit—each unique in specifics but common in potential.

So it must also be in our early lives. We must give attention to the detail that will help us to grow and develop in our relationship

with God. We should heed the words of the prophet Alma to his son Helaman, "But behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass" (Alma 37:6).

President David O. McKay focused our thinking on the purpose of our earthly existence in 1969 when he said:

Keep in mind that man's earthly existence is but a test as to whether he will concentrate his efforts, his mind, his soul upon things which contribute to the comfort and gratification of his physical nature, or whether he will make as his life's purpose the acquisition of spiritual qualities. [David O. McKay, CR, October 1969, p. 8]

The desire to acquire spiritual qualities will lead us to be cautious about the little lies that make us dishonest, or about the small infractions of the Word of Wisdom that turn our bodies and spirits away from that which is sacred and worthwhile.

The same desire will cause us to pray a little longer and to be a little more forgiving of our neighbor's faults. We will love more and criticize less. If we seek personal growth in a Christ-like direction, we must make as our life's purpose the acquisition of these spiritual qualities.

Certainly one of Satan's prime messages in today's world is that we really do not need to worry about the small matters. Nephi warned us against this attitude when he said:

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish

doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark. . . .

For the kingdom of the devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance, or the devil will grasp them with his everlasting chains, and they be stirred up to anger, and perish;

For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good. [2 Nephi 28:8–9, 19–20]

So-called little transgressions are especially serious in our effort to live a life of moral purity. Satan would have us believe that the minor infractions do not need to concern us. Why worry if we do not control our thoughts or if we allow pornographic or immoral entertainment to be part of our lives? Does attending just a few R-rated movies or immoral PG movies really damage us? Are we so unworthy when we watch just two or three questionable programs on the cable television channels? Are the lewd novels of the day really so bad?

These little rationalizations prompted by Satan will become great detriments to our spiritual growth. Pornography in all its forms—found at the movie theater, on television, and in printed form—constitutes a spiritual poison that is addictive and destructive. Every ounce of pornography and immoral entertainment will cause you to lose a pound of spirituality. And it will only take a few ounces of immorality to cause you to lose all of your spiritual strength, for the Lord’s Spirit will not dwell in an unclean temple.

Our prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, gave us excellent counsel just a month ago. He said:

We counsel you. . . not to pollute your minds with such degrading matter, for the mind through which this filth passes is never the same afterward. Don’t see R-rated movies or vulgar videos or

participate in any entertainment that is immoral, suggestive, or pornographic. . . .

*. . . Watch those shows and entertainment that lift the spirit and promote clean thoughts and actions. Read books and magazines that do the same. [Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Young Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, November 1986, p. 84]*

Perhaps Satan would tempt us further by suggesting that going a little too far in our physical affection with a boyfriend or girlfriend is not so serious. After all, we are aware of the main commandments and have no intention of violating them. But what we must remember is that our procreative powers are sacred, beautiful gifts from God and are to be used *only in marriage*. All sexual activity outside of marriage is forbidden. Our physical affection as we date, and even when we are engaged, must be limited to that which is conservative and wholesome—behavior far different than that which is commonly portrayed in the media of our day.

Lucifer is a master at step-by-step deception. He can make little things seem so harmless when, in reality, they will quickly bind the soul and destroy the spirit. He can make immodest dress and suggestive behavior seem very acceptable. He can cause us to think that a little indiscretion in speech and manner is still quite wholesome. But soon those little steps repeat themselves in an ever-descending pattern until one is at a far-lower level than ever imagined.

I suggest on the positive side that we watch for all possible little opportunities to overcome evil and increase our spiritual strength. We must let virtue garnish our thoughts unceasingly, that our confidence will wax strong in the presence of God (see D&C 121:45).

Remember that prayer is really one of the major factors in our lives. President Ezra Taft Benson relates a special experience with prayer:

Rearing 11 vigorous children to honorable manhood and womanhood on a small farm is no easy accomplishment. Yet, as my father and mother devoted themselves to this task, they never seemed to have any fear of the future. The reason was their faith—their confidence that they could always go to the Lord and He would see them through.

“Remember that whatever you do or wherever you are, you are never alone,” was my father’s familiar counsel. “Our Heavenly Father is always near. You can reach out and receive His aid through prayer.”

All through my life the counsel to depend on prayer has been prized above any other advice I have ever received. It has become an integral part of me, an anchor, a constant source of strength.

Prayer came to my aid during a most terrifying experience of my early life. I was a missionary in (Sunderland) England. . . . My companion, William Harris, and I were standing back to back, facing a hostile crowd that was swelled by a rowdy element from the pubs, men who were always eager for excitement and not averse to violence.

What had started out to be a customary street meeting soon took on the proportions of an angry, unmanageable mob. Many false malicious rumors had been spread about our church activities.

The crowd started swaying. Someone in the rear called out, “What’s the excitement?” Several voices shouted, “It’s them bloody Mormons!” This touched off a clamorous demonstration: “Let’s get ‘em under our feet!” “Throw ‘em in the river!”

The mob surged forward and tried to force us to the ground so they might trample us.

In my anxiety, I silently prayed for the Lord’s guidance and protection. When it seemed that I could hold out no longer, a husky young stranger pushed through to my side and said in a strong, clear voice: “I believe every word you said tonight. I’m your friend.”

As he spoke, a little circle cleared around me. This, to me, was a direct answer to my fervent prayer. The next thing I knew, a sturdy English bobby was convoying us safely through the crowd and back to our lodgings. [Frederick W. Babbel,

On Wings of Faith (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1972), pp. 85–86]

Using that great principle of prayer taught by his parents saved the life of President Benson and his companion.

Consider President McKay’s comments once again regarding the many little things that build our spirituality:

*Every noble impulse, every unselfish expression of love, every brave suffering for the right; every surrender of self to something higher than self; every loyalty to an ideal; every unselfish devotion to principle; every helpfulness to humanity; every act of self control; every fine courage of the soul, undefeated by pretence or policy, but by being, doing, and living of good for the very good’s sake—that is spirituality. [David O. McKay, “Something Higher Than Self,” *Speeches of the Year*, October 12, 1965, pp. 4–5]*

President McKay also taught us that “spirituality is the consciousness of victory over self, and of communion with the Infinite. Spirituality impels one to conquer difficulties and acquire more and more strength. To feel one’s faculties unfolding and truth expanding the soul is one of life’s sublimest experiences” (David O. McKay, CR, April 1949, p. 17).

These little things, which, in reality, become such big things, bring perspective to our lives as we learn to conquer them one by one in our effort to gain more and more strength. And this we do in a spirit of humility and gratitude to our Heavenly Father. Alma expressed it best when he said:

And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and

temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive. [Alma 7:23]

Our living prophet today, President Ezra Taft Benson, observes in a positive way that all these things are possible. He said, “Our Father’s children are essentially good. I think they have, all of them, a spark of divinity in them . . . and they want to do what is right” (Ezra Taft Benson, Regional Representatives’ seminar, 4 October 1973).

This is our religion. We should try to live every day with absolute faith, for we have learned in life that the Lord keeps his promises and watches over those who trust him in spite of their many faults. He has been so good to all

of us that we should have a profound conviction that he must really love us in spite of our faults.

I testify to you that these so-called little things that I have mentioned tonight really do count in the eternal perspective of what it is all about, and that is to gain eternal life in the presence of our Heavenly Father.

I testify that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that President Ezra Taft Benson is a true and living prophet, who works under the direction of our Lord and Savior. I pray that we may have the knowledge in our hearts and minds that little things do count as we prepare in this life to meet our Lord and Savior. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.