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Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve



The Miracle of It All

My dear brethren, what a pleasure and an honor and an opportunity to say a few wrap-up words. This has been a great session, and I hope that after this meeting is over, all of us who will have opportunity to have it in printed form or otherwise might take occasion to review it again and again and again. It will be profitable to do so.

While the Brethren have been speaking I have been thinking of you, my dear associates in this great work. In my mind's eye I have seen you across the world—in all the nations of Europe and to the east across

Russia and to her neighbors; in Mexico, Central America, and in all the lands of South America; in Asia, in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, India, and on down to Singapore and Indonesia; in Australia and New Zealand, and the isles of the Pacific; in Africa with all its many nations; across Canada and the United States.

I think of the miracle of it all. I think first of the miracle of the growth of the Church. The little stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands is rolling forth to fill the earth (see Daniel 2:34–35). I think also of the miracle of speaking to you in these circumstances. We are men of different nations and different languages, but we are all servants of the living God, leaders in His Church and kingdom. It is a glorious miracle that we are thus able to join together.

It is important that we do so. The Lord has provided the way.

We now have some 350 or 400 new stake presidents every year. We have some 4,500 new bishops each year. Other officers are constantly rotating. New leaders must be trained, and some of the mature leaders may be inclined to say, "I've heard it all before."

Well, repetition is a law of learning. No matter how long we have served, we need constant refreshing and exposure to new ideas and different faces, all designed to bring about a strengthening of the work.

As I have been listening with you, a question has arisen in my mind as I believe it has in each of yours. That question is this: "How can I find the time to do it all?"

Let me say that there is never enough time to do it all. There is so much more than any of us can single-handedly give attention to.

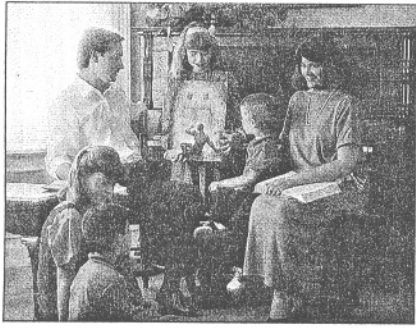
I think I know something of this. I have been where many of you are today. There is only one way you can get it done. That is to follow the direction which the Lord gave Joseph Smith. To him He said, "Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing" (D&C 88:119).

A Fourfold Responsibility

Each of us has a fourfold responsibility. First, we have a responsibility to our families. Second, we have a responsibility to our employers. Third, we have a responsibility to the Lord's work. Fourth, we have a responsibility to ourselves.

First, it is imperative that you not neglect your families. Nothing you have is more precious. Your wives and your children are deserving of the attention of their husbands and fathers. When all is said and done, it is this family relationship which we will take with us into the life beyond. To paraphrase the words of scripture, "What shall it profit a man though he serve the Church faithfully and lose his own family?" (see Mark 8:36).

Together with them, determine how much time you will spend with them and when. And then stick to it. Try not to let anything interfere. Consider it sacred. Consider it binding. Consider it an earned time of enjoyment.



Keep Monday night sacred for family home evening. Have an evening alone with your wife. Arrange some vacation time with the entire family.

Two, to your business or your employer. You have an obligation. Be honest with your employer. Do not do Church work on his time. Be loyal to him. He compensates you and expects results from you. You need employment to care for your family. Without it you cannot be an effective Church worker.

Three, to the Lord and His work. Budget your time to take care of your Church responsibilities. Recognize first that every officer has many helpers, as we have been reminded today. The stake president has two able counselors. The presidency has a high council of dedicated and able men. They have clerks as they need them. Every bishop has counselors. They are there to lift the burdens of his office from his shoulders. He has a ward council, together with others to whom he may and must delegate responsibility. He has the members of his ward, and the more he can delegate to them, the lighter will be his burden and the stronger will grow their faith.

Every priesthood quorum president has counselors, as well as the membership of the quorum. It is so with the Relief Society. No bishop can expect to fill the shoes of his Relief Society president in minister-

ing to the needs of the members of his ward.

Four, every Church leader has an obligation to himself. He must get needed rest and exercise. He needs a little recreation. He must have time to study. Every Church officer needs to read the scriptures. He needs time to ponder and meditate and think by himself. Wherever possible he needs to go with his wife to the temple as opportunity permits.

These four obligations rest upon each of us. With thoughtful consideration and careful planning, we can so budget our time as to accommodate them. We cannot, brethren, we must not neglect any one of them. The Lord does not expect us to be supermen. But if we will place ourselves in His hands, if we will plead with Him in prayer, He will inspire us and help us. He will magnify us and make us equal to the responsibility.

He has said, "Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers" (D&C 112:10).

He has further said, "God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost" (D&C 121:26). The challenge that faces every good leader is the challenge of learning to delegate. Every stake president, every bishop, every quorum president must pass responsibility to others so that he will have the time to do that which he alone must do.

Happiness in This Work

Brethren, if you are constantly complaining that you have too much to do, then you do have too much to do. You need to get rid of some of it because a disgruntled leader becomes a poor leader.

I asked a friend who had been made a bishop how he was getting along. He said, "I am having the time

of my life. I watch others work, and they tell me how happy they are. I have the best job in the Church."

Now, of course, this man had an immense amount of work to do. There were many responsibilities which he could not give to others. But the frustration was gone. The worry was gone. He had the capacity to make assignments and to make those to whom assignments were given feel that everything depended on the way they performed. As a matter of fact, it did.

Brethren, I want to plead with you that you be happy in your work. Wear a smile on your face, and have a song in your heart as you serve the Lord.

I am an old man now. I simply do not have the energy to do what I once did. But I will not permit myself to be unhappy in doing what I can.

The demands are great. I feel a constant, unrelenting concern for what is being accomplished in the Church. I want to do better; I want to improve things. But I know that I cannot do it alone. I have two wonderful counselors, able and dedicated men. I have the Council of the Twelve. There is no better body of men on the face of the earth. I have the Seventy and the Bishopric. And I have all of you working together as one great family to assist our Father in bringing to pass His incomparable work concerning the immortality and eternal life of His children. I have the great blessing of prayer. And so does each of you. I have the opportunity to get on my knees and ask the Lord to show me the way and give me the strength and the will and the wisdom to accomplish that which He would have done.

There is no other work in all the world so fraught with happiness as is this work. That happiness is peculiar. It comes of serving others. It is real. It is unique. It is wonderful.

The Privilege to Serve

In conclusion, let me tell you of an experience recounted by L. Robert Webb when he served as a bishop. Bishop Webb said:

"I learned from my counselors at one point that an elderly sister had declined a calling in the ward. Sensing that something was amiss . . . , I made an appointment to go to her home to speak with her. When I got there, she and her husband were both present.

"After a little polite conversation I said that I understood that she had not felt comfortable in accepting a ward calling and asked what I could do to help. Both of them stared at the floor a long, long time before she answered. At last she spoke to explain that 50 years earlier, before they had been married, they had been intimate with one another and had been too ashamed to clear this up with the bishop before being married in the temple. For all of these years they had lived under the guilty burden of this transgression while paying generous tithes and offerings, . . . rearing a family in the faith, and sending children on missions.

"Though they were faithful, they were not whole. They were kept from the peace and contentment that should have been theirs in golden years by clouds of self-doubt and the tarnished memory of unresolved transgression. Outwardly they seemed secure and serene. Inwardly they were carrying a kind of damage and hurt that intruded on their spiritual confidence. Together they had suffered this awful alienation from the Lord for a long time.

"I do not know *why* their ordeal lasted a lifetime. I only know *when* it ended as the Lord lifted them from their lonely lamentations. As I tearfully listened to their story, I prayed earnestly to know what I might do to relieve them. When they finished

speaking I felt impressed to say simply: 'It is over. You have suffered long enough. I am sure the Lord has forgiven you. Repentance consists of forsaking a sin and confessing. You forsook that guilty act long, long ago. Tonight you also confessed. Now you are free. I feel certain that the Lord has forgotten your transgression and is eager to dispel your guilt with redeeming grace.'

"After kneeling in prayer together we three stood encircled in one another's arms as they sobbed out the last of their pent-up suffering and anguish.

" 'Oh, Bishop, is it really over?' they asked.

"I assured them that it was.

"The loving kindness and the grace of the Savior poured into their lives in sweet forgiving. He reached past the things that separated them from him and embraced them in sweet communion."¹

Yours, my dear brethren across the world, is the privilege of standing in the shadow of the Redeemer of the world as we carry forward this work. Yours is the opportunity to speak of the beauty of the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of His sons and daughters. Could there be a greater privilege than this?

Rejoice in the privilege which is yours. Your opportunity will not last forever. Too soon there will be only the memory of the great experience you are now having.

None of us will accomplish all we might wish to. But let us do the best we can. I am satisfied that the Redeemer will then say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

God bless you, my beloved brethren. I leave you with my love for you. Each of you has a warm place in my heart. I leave my blessing upon you as my fellow servants in this great

cause and kingdom. I do it all in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Note

1. L. Robert Webb, "Vast and Intimate: The Atonement in the Heavens and in the Heart," *Brigham Young University 1998-99 Speeches* (1999), 78-79.