



THE BLESSING OF WORK

Elder David E. Sorensen

Of the Presidency of the Seventy

CES Fireside for Young Adults • March 6, 2005 • Brigham Young University

I would like to express my appreciation to all the priesthood leaders and their wives who are here with us this evening. I'm especially grateful that Elder and Sister Cecil O. Samuelson are here. It was a great privilege to labor with Elder Samuelson in the Temple Department for many years. I can assure the students at Brigham Young University, as well as the faculty, that they are blessed under the able leadership of President and Sister Samuelson.

Tonight as I've thought about what I wanted to say to you, the young people of the Church, it has occurred to me that many are students. The reality is, my dear young friends, that we are all students of the gospel, aren't we?

There was a man who worked for the United States Treasury Department. His job was investigating cases where counterfeit money was involved. He was so good at what he did that all it took was a quick look at a bill and he could tell if it was genuine or counterfeit. One evening at a press conference following his breaking up of a major counterfeit ring, one of the reporters directed this statement to him: "You must spend a lot of time studying counterfeit bills to recognize them so easily."

His reply to this was, "No, I don't ever study counterfeit bills. I spend my time studying genuine bills; then the imperfection is easy to recognize."

So it is with the gospel, dear brothers and sisters. We are here to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no need to study the counterfeit, for we have the truth. As you study the true Church and allow the Spirit to work within you, you will have the answers and come to know how to respond to the various situations you will face. Concerning the Book of Mormon, a young missionary shared this thought with me, which I have found to be true over the years: Remember that the Book of Mormon is not on trial—we are.

This evening I would like to speak with you concerning one of the most essential principles of the entire gospel. I speak of the doctrine of work. It is my hope that what I say will help guide you in the work you are now doing or may be doing in the future.

Those of you who are graduating from high school or college, or are otherwise in the work force, may be asking yourselves questions like this when you apply for employment: "What are my working hours? What are my fringe benefits? What holidays will I have off? Will I have enough time to hang out with my friends or pursue my hobbies?" With questions like these, however, when you focus on your leisure hours instead of your working hours, you may be prevented from seeing a much greater opportunity.

God's Work

Work is an eternal principle. Whom do you know who has all the riches of the earth and more and yet is continually working? Our Heavenly Father! He is a worker. Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have shown us by Their examples and teachings that work is important in heaven and on earth. Jehovah *worked* to create the heavens and the earth. He called the waters together in one place and caused the dry land to appear. He created the sun, the moon, and the stars. He created every living thing in the sea and on the land. Then the Father placed Adam and Eve on the earth to take care of it and to govern the other creatures. (See Genesis 1:1–28.)

But Their work did not end with the Creation. In the Pearl of Great Price we read, "This is my *work* and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39; italics added). This, of course, includes every man, woman, and child. Of all the things He could concern Himself with, our Heavenly Father has chosen to labor for the benefit of our eternal souls—your soul and my soul.

Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). He also said, "I must work the works of him that sent me" (John 9:4).

Work Is a Blessing

You and I also have a work to accomplish. Satan would tempt us to believe that our work is not worthwhile or that we have no need to work at all. He is wrong on both counts. We do have a need to work. We have a

responsibility to take care of our own needs and the needs of our families. This tradition of being self-sufficient has been the Lord's way since Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. The Lord said to Adam, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis 3:19). Adam and Eve worked in the fields so they could provide for their own needs and the needs of their children (see Moses 5:1).

But providing for ourselves is not the only purpose of work. Suppose you were given a great sum of money or for whatever reason became instantly financially self-sufficient. Even then the command to labor has not been lifted. The Lord said to the people of Israel, "Six days shalt thou labour" (Exodus 20:9). He did not include any exceptions in that commandment for those who had enough and to spare! As Elder Neal A. Maxwell described, "Work is always a spiritual necessity even if, for some, work is not an economic necessity" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 50; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 38).

Work is not a curse but a blessing; by work we not only obey the commandment of God but also enable ourselves to participate in God's saving grace. The Savior said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). So Christ made it clear that if we love Him and wish to be with Him, we must obey His commandments, including that early commandment to Adam to work.

The Lord told the Latter-day Saints at the beginning of the Restoration, "Now, I, the Lord, am not well pleased with the inhabitants of Zion, for there are idlers among them" (D&C 68:31). And still later, in the 20th century, President Heber J. Grant, a prophet of God, said, "Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1936, 3).

Have you ever thought about what would happen if people did not work? Would our schools function? Would our government run? Would our televisions have programming? Although we sometimes think it would be nice to have all the money we ever wanted and never have to work again, I can assure you that is not the path to true happiness. Some of the most miserable people I have met have been those who, for one reason or another, have not been able to work for extended periods of time.

Work is a family responsibility. I know some of you are away from home. I remind you that right now you are benefiting from the work of your family. Your parents have worked hard to provide for your physical,

spiritual, and emotional well-being. They do not expect anyone else to take over this responsibility for them. They *do* expect *you* to share some of the load.

When I attended my son's graduation from the Harvard Business School, Dean Kim Clark, who is a member of the Church, asked each of the graduating students gowned and seated in the front rows to look behind them at their loved ones. As the graduates turned around, Dean Clark paused and said, "Were it not for the support of your family members, you would not be receiving this honor today." And so it is for each of you. You have received much. In turn, you are expected—even required—to offer similar support and love to your own children and families. This does not mean (using the vernacular of the day) continually "hanging out." As you grow older, your parents expect you to provide for yourselves and become independent.

We all share in the work. Remember it is important to start early in life to teach your children that they should do their part in the work of a family. Those of you who have had the experience of growing up in a home where you were taught to work can bear testimony to its value in your life today. As a matter of fact, just last Thursday Elder Samuelson said to me how grateful he was that his father taught him to work and that his wife's mother and father taught her to work.

So far as we are able, Church members should do their best to provide the basic necessities of life—food, clothing, and shelter for their families.

We understand that in some places in the world you may encounter hardships when trying to provide for your families. These trials could include chronic illness, the loss of a spouse, the addition of an elderly parent, or providing for your children's education. Our Heavenly Father is mindful of families in these situations. It is my conviction that He will give you the strength to carry on. He will always bless us if we ask Him in faith.

Work Is a Service

Good work attitudes, habits, and skills are learned through successful work experiences. Let me illustrate. On the ranch where I grew up, the cows had to be milked before dawn every day. It didn't matter if it was Sunday or Christmas or any other holiday. It didn't matter if it was cold. It didn't matter if someone had the flu. It didn't matter whether the sun was shining or a blizzard was raging. Every morning and every evening it was the same—the cows had to be milked.

Before my brothers were called off to war, they did most of the milking. But in 1943, when I was just 10 years old, I would enter our barnyard where there were about 10 to 12 cows waiting for me to let them into the milking barn. My mother and father used to say out loud to the cows, "Good morning. It's good to see you!" I have to confess that as a young boy I didn't feel quite the same way toward the cows.

After each cow was milked, I poured the milk from the pail into a 10-gallon can. Each can weighed about 80 pounds when full. It made me stretch my young muscles as I carried them to the road for the dairy to pick up.

My father quite frequently helped me with milking the cows, and occasionally Mother helped. I remember my father and mother continued to milk until they were in their late 80s. But Father didn't milk the cows because he had to; he milked them because they needed to be milked. There is a difference. To him these animals were not just cows—they were Big Blackie and Bossie and Sally and Betsy. He wanted them to be contented. He always said that contented cows give good milk. To my father, milking cows—as unsophisticated as it may seem—was not an imposition; it was an opportunity. Milking was not a job for him; it was a service.

This philosophy is something that helped me as I grew up. It helped me to find out that all honest work is honorable. Within a few years I realized that routinely performing these chores actually began to give me a sense of confidence and empowerment. I took pride in my work. I found out that no one could make me feel inferior about the kind of work that I did. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent" ("Points to Ponder," *Reader's Digest*, Feb. 1963, 261). You control your own attitudes—especially you young people—in your attitude about work. Self-confidence and empowerment can serve you well—in the classroom, on State Street, or on Wall Street.

Instead of thinking of our daily work as an imposition, we should think of it as an opportunity. That's just the way my father taught me to feel about the cows. Those teachings have remained with me all my life, and I continue to visit the ranch and its memories as often as possible.

Think about it. If my father could find purpose in a few cows, surely each of us can find purpose in our work.

Learn to Love Work

One of the best ways I know to enjoy life is to learn to love work. My wife, Verla, is the perfect example. She began to work for her sickly Aunt Bertha at age 10 washing the dishes and cleaning her house. She has been working ever since. The type of work she has done has been different at different stages of her life. She has excelled as a student, taught first grade for a few years, reared our seven children, worked in the PTA, served on the local school board, labored in the mission field, given hundreds of Church talks, and served on many community boards and as a volunteer.

Some of her work has been what the world may consider mundane, such as keeping a large household running. Some of her work has been the more intellectual pursuit of taking graduate courses, and much of it has been the spiritual effort of teaching the gospel. But always, no matter what the task, she has given it her whole effort. She has found great joy in her work. She told me just today that she hoped to be like her Aunt Vera, who when she was 90 said that she hoped she never got too old to work. The happiest people I know are those who enjoy their work—whatever it is.

You may remember the story that shows how our attitude about work can make all the difference.

A traveler passed a stone quarry and saw three men working. He asked each man what he was doing. Each man's answer revealed a different attitude toward the same job.

"I'm cutting stone," the first man answered.

The second replied, "I'm earning three gold pieces per day."

The third man smiled and said, "I am helping to build a house of God."

Remember the old saying, "Your attitude determines your altitude."

We should be able to find ample purpose in our work, no matter what it is. In any honest work we can serve God. King Benjamin, the Nephite prophet, said, "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). Even if our work simply helps to provide for the necessities for our families, we are still helping God's children.

The Lord is not pleased with those who are lazy or idle. He said, "The idler shall not have place in the church, except he repent and mend his ways" (D&C 75:29).

He also commanded, “Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer” (D&C 42:42).

From the very earliest days of the Church prophets have taught Latter-day Saints to be independent and self-sustaining and to avoid idleness. True Latter-day Saints will not voluntarily shift the burden of their own support to someone else. You should determine, young friends, right here and now, that to the extent possible in your own situation, you will be self-reliant all of your life.

Many of you young women are now or will become mothers and may be blessed to spend many years at home raising children. Others of you sisters may not be able to become mothers or, if you are mothers, may not be able to stay at home full-time. Whatever your situation, I would encourage all of you young women to follow our prophet’s counsel and get as much education as you can. Education itself is valuable. Your education will give you a sense of security if you are home raising children. Should your future lead you into the paid workforce, generally speaking, education will allow you to have more meaningful and more rewarding employment.

Our work itself must have integrity and be for worthy purposes. Our Heavenly Father is not happy when we receive gain from evil or idle pursuits. President Spencer W. Kimball put it this way: “I feel strongly that [those] who accept wages or salary and do not give [fair] time, energy, devotion, and service are receiving money that is not clean” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1953, 52). Pretty strong words, aren’t they? He also said that money obtained by evil or idle practices such as theft; gambling, including lotteries; graft; sale of illegal drugs; oppression of the poor; and the like is unclean money.

President Kimball defined the difference between honorable work and evil work:

“Clean money is that compensation received for a full day’s honest work. It is that reasonable pay for faithful service. It is that fair profit from the sale of goods, commodities, or service. It is that income received from transactions where all parties profit.

“Filthy lucre is . . . money . . . obtained through theft and robbery . . . gambling . . . sinful operations . . . bribery, and . . . exploitation” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1953, 52).

Today there are many who offer the lure of easy money, suggesting shortcuts to quick riches and a life of ease.

We hear about them all of the time. These offers are illusions, and the prophets have consistently counseled against falling prey to the temptation of “easy money.” We must not lose the ability to make sound judgments, to weigh risks and benefits, and to grasp the larger messages in life.

In the workaday world there are many who are spiritually insensitive because they are carnally minded. Try to avoid them. How tragic it would be if, because of our employment, we were put in contact with those who would destroy our spirituality. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). The Lord has told us that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Naturally we should find the proper balance between work, rest, and relaxation. Without work, rest and relaxation have no meaning. There’s an old saying: “Doing nothing is the hardest work of all.” Not only is it pleasant and necessary to rest, but we are commanded to rest on the Sabbath day (see Exodus 20:10). To those who observe the Sabbath day, the Lord promises that “the fulness of the earth is yours” (D&C 59:16).

Some of you may know that Sister Sorensen and I spent a few years in Asia. While living there we heard an old adage: “Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.” For the most part I believe that is wishful thinking. I do not want to sound dismal. But the reality is that work is not always naturally appealing. I think a more appropriate maxim might be President Thomas S. Monson’s counsel. He said, “Choose your love; love your choice” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1988, 82; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 71). He was actually speaking about marriage, but I would submit that this advice applies to your chosen vocation as well. Choose the job you love, then love your choice.

What I’m getting at here is many people get stuck in the rut of thinking their work ought to be more rewarding or more glamorous or at least less monotonous! When the going gets tough—as it inevitably will—they start thinking that perhaps their chosen work isn’t really all they thought it would be. They begin believing the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. You’ll find these folks saying, “If I only had decided to study medicine instead of the law, I could have been a great doctor.” Or perhaps, “I wish I had his high-power job. If I were the

boss like him, I'd work at it really hard and treat people well and be successful."

People who can't get out of this rut often have difficulty achieving excellence in *any* profession. They fall in love with a career but then become disenchanted with the small and simple things and end up quitting to pursue their fantasy over the next horizon. They drift from job to job, never settling long enough to truly achieve excellence. (If my remarks are bothering some of you, I invite you to repent.)

Once you have chosen your work, love it! No job is perfect. Every job has its challenges and its days of drudgery. Just like marriage, success and excellence at your work will likely require years and years of *dedicated* and *persistent* effort.

Let me give you an example. Michelangelo, the virtuoso painter and sculptor, shared this profound insight about his work. He said, "If people knew how hard I had to work to gain my mastery, it would not seem so wonderful at all." Some of you may have seen firsthand Michelangelo's brilliant work. But how many of us have stopped to think of the literally back-breaking, tedious job of chiseling the statue of David out of a single slab of solid marble! And to create a 14-foot statue of David! And certainly David was not Michelangelo's first sculpture. Undoubtedly he struggled and labored with hundreds and thousands of sculptures before achieving that masterpiece. Wouldn't it be tragic if Michelangelo had decided after his first few grueling years of sculpting marble that it was just too hard, too tedious, and too boring—that he'd much rather be a writer? The irony is, had he made that change, he would have likely discovered that writing can be tedious and boring too!

You will find more success if you enthusiastically persist in your work despite the shortcomings of your job and despite the daily small and simple things. Focus on the career at hand and resist the temptation of wandering eyes. In fact, I am so bold as to say it doesn't matter so much what job you choose. I promise you that if you stick with it and pursue excellence in your chosen career, you will indeed enjoy a large measure of success and *you will end up loving your work* more than you might have imagined.

Words of Counsel

Let me add a few additional words of counsel.

First, work hard to get along with others. Be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Indeed, be a light,

not a judge. Studies confirm over and over that people generally do not lose their jobs because they lack the technical know-how or skills. More frequently, the difficulty is that they can't get along with other people. I realize that you may not please all of the people all of the time, but you can please most of the people most of the time—especially if one of those people is your boss.

Second, remember that people seldom improve when they have only their own yardstick to measure themselves by. I can assure you that I have made more improvements in my life and in my business as a result of others' criticism than from their praise. Learn to measure yourself with someone else's yardstick occasionally. If your boss comments that you lose your temper too easily, take it seriously. If your spouse comments that you lose your temper too easily, and your friends comment that you lose your temper too easily, it is likely that you lose your temper too easily. When you hear such feedback, listen before you deny it. Evaluate it. Weigh it. Do you think changes are in order? Regardless of criticism, learn to get along with other people. If you want to get along with them, you can.

Third, be an optimist. Do not accept pessimism, especially when it is directed at you personally. Do not accept pessimistic statements about your Heavenly Father. Consider their source—they come from Satan. Do not accept pessimistic statements about the leaders of this Church or the Church as an institution. It takes work to reject Satan's messages, but such work will lead to happiness.

A word to the returned missionaries: do not abandon the principles or the habits or the great experiences that you learned in the mission field. Do not abandon your appearance. The Brethren do not expect you to wear a white shirt and tie and a dark blue suit now that you are back in school, but you should maintain the good grooming you learned in the mission field. Dress for success! When your personal habits reflect the cleanliness, dignity, and the principles of the gospel you taught as a young missionary, they will serve you well in the workplace.

Summary

My message this evening could be summed up in two statements. The first is from President David O. McKay. He said, "Let us realize that the privilege to work is a gift, that power to work is a blessing, that love of work is success" (*Pathways to Happiness* [1957], 381).

The second is from our own dearly beloved living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. He said: “The major work of the world is not done by geniuses. It is done by ordinary people, with balance in their lives, who have learned to work in an extraordinary manner” (“Our Fading Civility,” Brigham Young University inauguration and spring commencement exercises, Apr. 25, 1996, 15). It is a given that there will be disappointment and discouragement along the way, brothers and sisters.

Orson F. Whitney comforts us:

“No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven” (quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* [1972], 98).

As a humble servant of the Lord, I promise you and bless you that as you work at keeping the standards the Lord has set through the scriptures and His prophets, as you study, as you pray, as you pay your tithes and offerings from the money you earn from your work, you will be more successful in all of your life as well as in your daily work. You will become a better worker. You will be a more productive worker. You will be a more effective worker. All because the Spirit of the Lord will be with you and aid and strengthen you.

I bring to you a special greeting from our beloved prophet, President Hinckley. Not long ago, in a speech to the members of his home stake, President Hinckley said: “Things are not as bad as we sometimes think. . . . I have great optimism concerning this Church. I have tremendous optimism concerning the youth of this Church. We do not need to fear. We have nothing to fear if we will live the gospel, if we will make our

decisions in the light of the gospel. If we will get on our knees and pray to the Lord for His enlightenment, understanding, direction, and courage, we do not need to fear.”

So tonight, my dear young friends, I would like to bear my testimony to you today. I believe in this Church. I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe in what He said. I believe what He said when He told the Nephites, “I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning” (3 Nephi 9:15). I know that He is the Son of Elohim, the Father who created Adam and Eve. I know, my dear young friends, that He, the Son, was born of Mary in Bethlehem of Judea. I know His birth to be as Matthew said in the days of Herod the King. Jesus Christ said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). I believe in Jesus Christ wherein He said, “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death” (John 8:51). I know that He and His Father appeared to the boy prophet Joseph Smith.

I know Jesus Christ can help each of us in our work if we will help Him in His work. “For the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. And now, my brethren, what have ye to say against this? I say unto you, if ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled” (Alma 5:58). I know and testify that we have a living prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, who can help us in our work if we heed his counsel.

You, my dear young friends, are the hope of this Church. You are the hope of the communities where you live. You will become the future leaders of this Church, the future leaders of the communities, of the world. I bear you my humble testimony that if you will work for our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, that He will bless you and watch over and keep you all the days of your life. And I bear you this testimony in His holy name, even our Lord, our Redeemer, our Savior, even the Holy One of Israel, Jesus Christ, amen.