

LIVING A Balanced Life



BY ELDER ROBERT F. ORTON

Served as a member of the Seventy from 2001 to 2007

We face many challenges, but we need not abandon pursuing a higher education, marriage and family, and service in the Church.

I suspect that most everyone wants the kind of life that will bring lasting happiness. This, I believe, will come through charting a course leading to eternal life. It will be hastened and facilitated by heeding the promptings of the Spirit and by achieving proper balance.

When I speak of balance, I refer to spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, and economic factors. *Balance* is defined as mental and emotional steadiness; it is to bring into harmony or proportion.

The Challenge of Achieving Balance

As you know, coping with the challenges of everyday life can upset the balance and harmony we seek. Many of us are

overwhelmed as we seek to obtain and maintain balance in our lives. I provide the following illustrations, adapted from a talk by Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.¹

A single student said, “I know that the scriptures and today’s Church leaders say we should not unnecessarily delay marriage and family. But I’m 26. I haven’t completed my education, and I don’t have a job that will enable me to support a family. Can I be excused from marrying, at least for now?”

Another said, “I am a woman, and no one has asked me to marry him. How can I keep the commandment to marry?”

A young mother said, “I am consumed with completing my education and caring for my children. I hardly have time to think of



anything else. Sometimes I think the world and the Church expect too much of me. Regardless of how hard I work, I will never live up to everyone's expectations. I struggle between having confidence and feeling guilt, depression, and discouragement for not doing everything I am told we must do to attain the celestial kingdom."

Another single student said, "I have to work to put myself through school. I don't have enough time for homework and Church service. How can I be expected to live a balanced life?"

I've heard many say, "No one knows better than I do how important exercise is, but I have no time for it."

A sister was heard to say, "How, in today's world, can a husband and wife provide for their family if the wife doesn't work outside the home? There just isn't enough money to cover all the expenses if she doesn't work."

A young father added, "My new business requires all my time. I realize that I am neglecting my wife, children, and Church callings, but if I can just get through this year, I will make enough money, and then things will settle down."

Oh, what a dreamer he was. Life doesn't get easier; it gets more complicated. Don't dream about tomorrow bringing more time and less responsibility. Prepare to face what is coming by practicing today, under your current circumstances, what you'll need to do then.

Should we abandon pursuit of a higher education and otherwise developing and strengthening ourselves? Should we abandon pursuit of marriage and family? Should we cease preparing to provide for our families and ourselves? Should we forget Church service?

The answer to each question is, of course, no. Although it is impossible to respond here to all of the frustrations I've noted, please consider the following ideas.

A Need for Balance

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "One of the grand fundamental principles of 'Mormonism' is to receive truth,



If an airplane cabin loses pressure, passengers should put on their own oxygen masks before helping others. Service works the same way. If we don't strengthen ourselves, we will never be in a position to strengthen others.

let it come from whence it may."² He also revealed that "the glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36) and that "whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection" (D&C 130:18).

President Gordon B. Hinckley has said: "I want to plead with you to keep balance in your lives. Do not become obsessed with what may be called 'a gospel hobby.' A good meal always includes more than one course. You ought to have great strength in your chosen . . . field of expertise. But I warn you against making that your only interest. . . ."

" . . . Beware of obsession. Beware of narrowness. Let your interests range over many good fields while working with growing strength in the field of your own profession."³

President Hinckley has also taught that we have a fourfold responsibility—to our families, to our employers, to the Lord, and to ourselves. He has counseled us to "take some time to do a little meditating, to do a little exercise."⁴

As I've flown, I've noted as we commence to take off from the airport, a flight attendant will arise and among other things will say, "Now, if we lose air pressure in the cabin, an oxygen mask will descend from overhead. If you're caring for young children or someone with a disability, make sure you put on your own oxygen mask before you try to help others." Why would the flight attendant say that? Obviously, if you're unconscious, you can't help anyone else. So it is with our service to humankind and our service in the Church and in our professions. If we don't strengthen ourselves, we will never be in a position to strengthen others.

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has also remarked that "it is much easier for those who have a righteous balance to yield 'to the enticings of the Holy Spirit' (Mosiah 3:19). Then we can leave behind the attributes of the natural man or woman. . . ."

"Balance in large measure is knowing the things that can be changed, putting them in proper perspective,



and recognizing the things that will not change.”⁵

Three Personal Experiences

I grew up in Panguitch, Utah, a small town of 1,500 people. I was a big fish in a little pond. When I graduated from high school, I received a scholarship to attend Brigham Young University. When I got there, I quickly discovered that I was a little fish in a huge pond, and I became discouraged. I thought, “I want to get out of here.” I started to go home on weekends. I attended church at home—not on campus. I didn’t keep my grades at a level at which I ought to have kept them. I didn’t get acquainted with people. By the end of the year, I said, “I’m not going to return. This is not for me.”

I went home that summer. About mid-August I discovered that I wanted to return to school. So I did. This time I immediately joined a social fraternity and a service organization. I moved into the dormitory. I started attending church on campus rather than going home on weekends. My grades improved. I began to realize that life on campus was a

good life and that I was happy to be there.

Later I attended law school. My first year was difficult because I was studying a different discipline than what I had studied as an undergraduate, and my grades, again, were not as good as they should have been. The second year, I got a part-time job in a law firm while I was going to school. My grades went up. At the end of my second year, I married my wife, Joy. Even with my additional responsibilities, everything was going well. My grades became better than they had ever been.

The last experience I’d like to share came when I passed the bar exam. A salty old trial lawyer approached me and said, “Bob, you can’t be a successful, effective trial lawyer and an active member of the LDS Church at the same time.” I considered others who were successful in their law practices and active in the Church, and I determined to be active in the Church. My decision didn’t affect my success as a trial lawyer. In fact, it enhanced it because I had balance in my life. I was trying to do what the Lord had asked me to do, and He gave me additional strength, understanding, and help.

Balance among the spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, and economic factors in our lives will help chart a course leading to eternal life and lasting happiness.



As we attend sacrament every week and partake of the sacrament, we can always have the Spirit with us. The Holy Ghost will help us answer the vital questions we face.

Guidance of the Spirit

Answers to our major life decisions will be more likely to produce balance and happiness if they come through the promptings of the Spirit. How do we obtain the Spirit and the answers we seek?

First, let me suggest that we need to attend sacrament meeting every week, and we

need to partake of the sacrament. As we do so, we remember Christ and His suffering for us. We covenant, as we did at baptism, that we will take upon us His name. And we renew our covenant to keep the commandments. Why do we do all this? The last clause in the sacrament prayer answers that question: “That they may always have his Spirit to be with them” (D&C 20:77).

Therein lies the key to having the companionship of the Holy Ghost, which will help us answer the vital questions we face. In addition, we should kneel and pray regularly. We should be willing to serve our fellowmen. We should reach out in love, and fear not (see 1 John 4:18).

If we ask the Lord for the Spirit and do what is necessary to have His influence with us, the Spirit will teach us all things. He will help us in our studies. He will help us make decisions about life pursuits. And He will give us peace and a feeling of calmness.

A Parable about Prayer

I conclude with a passage from Luke 18:1–8: “And [the Lord] spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

“Saying, There was in a city a judge, which

feared not God, neither regarded man:

“And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

“And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

“Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

“And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

“And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

“I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.”

The Lord hears and answers prayers. Sometimes we tend to give up too soon when we pray to Him. We need to persist.

As an especial witness of Jesus Christ, called to bear testimony to the nations of the world (see D&C 107:25), I testify that He lives. He is our Savior. He knows you, and He knows me. He knows what is on our minds and in our hearts. He will be our advocate with the Father if we keep the covenants we make as we partake of the sacrament each week.

We can overcome the world if we aim to have balance in our lives. If we seek to have the Spirit with us at all times and be faithful in responding to His promptings, we will be blessed. ■

From a devotional address given at LDS Business College on March 1, 2006.

NOTES

1. See “Keeping Life’s Demands in Balance,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 13.
2. *History of the Church*, 5:499.
3. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 31–32.
4. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 33.
5. “The Need for Balance in Our Lives,” *Liabona*, Mar. 2000, 4, 7; *Ensign*, Mar. 2000, 2, 4, 5.